

## The Discovery of Deli Sultanate Currency in Batubara, North Sumatra

Saparudin Barus, Singgih Tri Sulistiyono, Yety Rochwulaningsih

Doctoral Program of History, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Diponegoro  
Semarang, Central Java - Indonesia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14710/jmsni.v5i1.11384>

### Abstract

This paper aims to explain the finding of the Deli Sultanate Currency that shows the Deli Sultanate existence and heyday of trade in 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the used of historical method, this paper emphasized the finding of the Deli Sultanate coins in Batubara which was a form of power contestation in the trading system. Deli Sultanate coins found in the Batubara trading port area cannot be separated from the involvement of international trade activities. The contestation in the trading space in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by the British and the Dutch. Meanwhile, the finding of Deli Sultanate coins proves that the contestation space was also enriched by a local kingdom.

Received:  
June 10, 2021

Revised:  
August 28, 2021

Accepted:  
August 28, 2021

Corresponding author:  
saparudinbarusstmm@students.undip.ac.id

**Keywords:** Currency Circulation; Colonial Penetration; Deli Sultanate.

### Introduction

Study on the finding of currency in the Malaka Strait had been done by Heng (2006). Chinese copper coins had been found archaeologically in several settlements. Heng focused on the role and function of currencies in the context of regional trade which had not received much attention. The currency was dated between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since the Song and Yuan periods (960-1368), Chinese copper coins have played an important role as an instrument in maritime trade as a medium of transactions between Chinese and foreign traders. Chinese copper coins have been found in several ports and shipwrecks in the Straits of Malaka. Therefore, Heng reconstructed the role of Chinese copper coins in the Straits of Malaka between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the international trade context, the Malaka Strait had become the major basis of trade routes in The Malay World. Geographically, the Malay World consists Malay-Indonesian archipelago that covered a very wide area. As an archipelago, it is not surprise that the Malay World has port cities. Ports that have strategic positions and local strengths have transformed into important ports, both on a regional, interregional, and international scale, such as Aceh, Malaka, Jambi, Palembang, Makassar, Ambon, and Brunei. Meanwhile, the main trade routes in the Southeast Asian region were the Malaka Strait, the Sunda Strait, the Java Sea and the South China Sea. This route connecting China and India has given rise to port cities on the coast that are traversed, including Deli (Hussin 2012).

Deli is located in an administrative area that is currently part of the North Sumatra Province located at 4°39' North Latitude, and 98°25' to 98°47' East Longitude, which covers the area between the Labuhan Dalam River in the north of the Langkat border and on the Pematang Oni River in the South of the border Serdang. Deli is an area ruled by the Deli Sultanate, which is located in East Sumatra, between the mouth of the Labu Dalam River and the Pematang Oni River. Based on Staatsblad no. 17 dated April 13, 1911, the boundaries of the Deli Kingdom were determined as follows: in the north, it is bordered by the Malaka Strait; in the South, it is bordered by Tanah Karo; to the east of Deli is the Serdang Kingdom; to the west is the Langkat Kingdom. In 1854, when Deli still recognized Aceh's sovereignty, the extent of Deli's power was determined by Aceh's agreement, namely the areas of Sunggal, Ten Dua Kuta, Bedagai and Padang. Since 1876, areas belonging to the

Deli Kingdom have been defined, namely: Sunggal/Serbanyaman, Ten Dua Kuta/Overlay Perak, Sukapiring, Percut, Padang, Bedagai, Senembah, and Denai (Ratna, 1992, 3). In 1907, the Dutch participated in the determination of the Deli Kingdoms territory, where these areas consisted of Sunggal (Serbanyaman), Ten Dua Kuta (Silver Overlay), Sukapiring, Senembah Deli (Patumbak), Percut, Bedagai, Padang, and Sungai Tuan (Husny, 1975, 60).

The changes in the area have proven that the expansion of the Deli Kingdoms territory was closely related to the political system in East Sumatra. The disappearance and emergence of the Deli Kingdoms territory were closely related to the territory struggle which was considered as economic resources. In addition, the determination of the regions' boundaries was very unilateral. It was causing conflicts with other powers (kingdoms bordering the Deli Kingdom such as Serdang), which also claimed to have rights over that area (Pelly 1985, 20).

Deli was one of the early port cities controlled by the Dutch, from port cities in East Sumatra such as Tanjung Pura in the Langkat Sultanate, Rantau Panjang in the Serdang Sultanate, Tanjung Beringin in the Bedagai Kingdom, Bandar Khalifah in the Padang Kingdom, Tanjung Balai in the Sultanate Asahan, and Siak Sri Indrapura in the Siak Sultanate. Located in Labuan, the Deli Sultanate stood as a Malay Kingdom with economic, social, cultural, and political power. Deli has become a center for trade activities, both export and import (Perret 2010). Meanwhile, Labuan was a strategic Bandar area that supported the kingdoms economy. It was marked by the presence of the Syahbandar. Syahbandar handled the kingdoms finances, especially collecting excise duty of goods and barges that leave and enter the port. According to Anderson, Labuhan Deli has exported 3,500 tons of pepper to Malaka, Penang, and Singapore (Anderson 1971). Other export goods from Labuhan Deli include rice, tobacco, dried fish, gambier, camphor, black, and gold. Meanwhile, imported goods were textiles, opium, ceramics, silk, coffee, gold, tin, and other consumer goods. These goods were shipped from Penang, Malaka, and Singapore. It shows that in 1823, as a local kingdom, Deli had built an economic power through international trade activities with a superior commodity, namely pepper.

In the 17th to 19th centuries, neighbouring kingdoms such as Siak, Johor, and Aceh had been ruled in Deli. In the 17th century, Aceh controlled Deli and then moved to Siak in the late 18th century (Pelzer 1985, 27). Deli obtained attention not only from local kingdom rulers but also the international community, mainly the British. The British had controlled Penang in the 19th century. As an international trading port for the pepper market, Penang had become an import and export area for neighboring traders, including traders from Deli. As a potential area in trade, Deli was related to the fall of Malaka to the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which increased trading activities in Sumatra. The impact of the emergence of new trade routes was the increase and development of new ports that became centers of trading.

Geographically, Deli's position was strategic. Deli had a trade route that directly facing the Malaka Strait. International trade traffic made coastal areas or ports in the Deli became very important. Meanwhile, the residence of Deli Sultanate located in the entrance of the river traffic lane, namely the shores of Labuan Belawan. Therefore, the Sultan of Deli controlled the traffic easily. He had the authority to excise duties on commodities that were traded to the Malaka Strait. Agricultural products both exports and imports commodities became a source of economic income that provided benefits for the kingdom. It was written in Anderson's report on his visit to East Sumatra. The crops in the East Sumatra kingdom illustrated prosperity. Pepper products were exported to Penang and Malaka, consists 26,000 *pikul* from Deli, 8000 *pikul* from Serdang, and 20,000 *pikul* from Langkat. Other goods that exported include cloves, elephant ivory tobacco, gambier, rattan, rice, and candles. Meanwhile, imported goods include salt, opium, European Cita cloth, rugs, and Batubara *songket*. The Syahbandar taxed export and import goods. Tax and trade proceeds were the primary sources of income for Deli, Serdang, and Langkat Sultanate (Pelly 1985, 42).

The source of economic income of Deli came from the export and import tax. Export and import activities were the primary sources for financing activities. Therefore, the Deli Kingdom strived defend the power (Pelly 1985, 39; Ratna1992, 13). Deli was a contestation space. Before the heyday of the Deli trade to Penang and Malaka, the Labuan area, especially China Town and Rentang

City had a role in the development of trade routes through ports in East Sumatra. The Chinese Town emerged in the 9th century and grew until reached heyday in the 13th-14th centuries.

In the next period, it declined and was replaced by the City of Range and Kampai Island that existed in the 15th to 16th centuries. The City of Range and Kampai Island had connected the traders both locally and internationally. The result of contact between traders were the movement and exchange of goods. They used currency as a medium of exchange. It also be used as a form of representation of legitimation. Currency findings in the ports of East Sumatra such as in Kota China, Kota Rentang and Pulau Kampai, showing the involvement of traders and political interests. Before the Dutch arrived, during the heyday of trading in China Town and other ports, Chinese coins made of copper were discovered. It is also found in the Straits of Malaka during the 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The use of Chinese currency in the center of international trade port was a form of government policy. It related to the regulation of copper and coin export activities aimed at maintaining stability (Heng 2006).

Furthermore, after the heyday of Chinese copper coins ended, British and Dutch power also gave colour and political dynamics to the trading system and use of currency. However, it should be noted that before the entry of British and Dutch rule in East Sumatra, Deli became one of the port centres which was ruled and controlled directly by the kingdom and the syahbandar. Besides Deli, Batubara was also a port that controlled the trading system and economic management in its territory. Both ports were connected to Penang and Malaka, which had wider networks within the rest of the Malay region and Europe, India, and China (Hussin 2012). By the used of historical method, this paper analyzed the role of the currency issued by the Deli Sultanate that indicated not only as a medium of exchange but also politically shows the existence of its power.

### **The Heyday of Deli Sultanate**

Based on the historical records, the Malay reached their heyday under the rule of the Deli Sultanate that had a story in the international trade. Meanwhile, Malay trade period was started in the Haru Kingdom (Milner 1978; Soedewo 2020). Regionally, the power of the Haru Kingdom was extensive, stretching from the Tamiang River, Aceh, to the Rokan River (current Riau). The Haru Kingdom covered the coast of East Sumatra and directly face the Strait of Malaka. Therefore, it played an essential role in the Southeast Asia maritime activities. The Malaka Strait was a very active maritime trade route for a long period, from the early centuries to the 19th century.

According to McKinnon and Luckman Sinar (1974), until the Sriwijaya attack in 1275, the Chinese city located between the Deli River and the Chinese Reed River was the commercial city of the Haru Kingdom. During the reign of the Southern Sung Dynasty in Mainland China, between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Chinese traded with the conquered countries of Sriwijaya. They also seek the historical evidence by excavating artefacts in the City of China. In the early 1600s, the term Haru or Aru was replaced by the name Deli. The Haru region then gained its independence from Aceh in 1669, under the Deli Sultanate (Takari, Zaidan, and Dja'far 2010). Regionally, Aru was connected in the maritime trade system between Aceh, Pasai, Asahan, Batubara, Kampar, Indragiri, Siak, Jambi, and Palembang. Therefore, it could regulate trade both locally and in remote areas that were still under its control.

Deli territory became important for both the British and the Dutch as plantation district in East Sumatra. The Dutch developed Deli as a fine quality of tobacco-growing area which had been shown by the Dutch planter Nienhuys and became the main magnet for colonial influences. According to Deli's plantation development according to Ghani (2021) is considered to be phenomenal by various considerations. In regards, the tradition of farming which has led to commercial crops and the involvement of the large number of migrant workers changing the demographic profile in Deli. Not only British and the Dutch, colonial influence in Deli was also come from France which had formed an expedition group with the following members including an engineer, agriculturalist, doctor, and some non-specialists (Reid and Al-Mansur 1973, 225-226).

Information about Deli's economy, commodities, and export values show the dynamics of trade in this region. It developed before the arrival of plantation capitalism which was managed by foreign plantations. The arrival of plantation capitalism then changed the order and power structure of the Deli Sultanate, including the international trade system. It could be identified through the traces of artifacts and cultural traditions that emerged and developed as a result of the social relations and interactions that existed between them. Anderson recorded that indigenous people have been trading internationally to Penang since 1823. The exported commodities include pepper, areca nut, *glugur* acid, ivory, and gold (McKinnon 1977, 23).

### The Used of Currency

In trade relations, the currency used as a medium of exchange and payment in the trading system appeared in various forms. Previous studies emphasized that the findings of the currency in the trading system used by the Deli sultanate were the prevailing international money, such as Spanish, Portuguese, English, and Dutch. The economic power in the Malaka Strait through the British had created a Malay script currency as a medium of exchange throughout Sumatra, including East Sumatra. Meanwhile, the local kingdoms such as Pasai and Aceh applied their local currencies. One of the local currencies was the dirham which was composed by gold. It was also found in East Sumatra. Sriwijaya also issued a currency and circulated it in a wider area.

The findings of currencies are not only spread in one place. The currencies which had found are divided into two types. First, the type of currency does not have a specific shape and weight. It is called *ingot*, composed by gold or silver. Second, the type of currency has a certain's shape and weight. It also consists of gold and silver. The form of gold currency are round resembled corn kernels. Some of the forms are round and curved like a plate. These are often referred to as "coins". Meanwhile, Pasai also used gold and tin coins since the early days of its heyday. Gold coins are known as dinars, and lead coins are known as *keh*. Some of the coins have a value according to the standard that have been agreed. Currency that made by gold was called *mas* and *kupang*. *Mas* and *kupang* currencies have been used and standardized in Malay society. However, not all sultanates or kingdoms created gold currency. It only printed in certain regions, namely: Kedah, Pasai and Aceh, Johor-Riau-Lingga-Pahang, Patani-Kelantan, Trengganu, and Makassar-Bugis. They printed currency in certain style, shape, and name. Though the regional currency has different styles, shape, and name, its gold content remained according to the standard. It can be seen in the Dirham in which became the Aceh coins. The Port cities issued their own currency and circulated it through trading activities in East Sumatra, including Siak, Deli, Aceh, and Batubara. As a Malay Sultanate territory, Deli also has local currency issued in 1849. It was written on the side of the coin (Langkawi 2015).

Previous studies emhpazises that the British coions dominated the coin circulation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Sumatra. The British currency was the main medium of exchange used in East Sumatra's trading system. It was proven by the finding of currencies composed by tin or copper that was known as *cash*, *caxa*, and *kasya*. The British coins were disappeared when the Dutch currency called *doit* emerged. The emergence of the Ducth currency triggered British traders to an issued new currency, namely the *Singapore Merchant Token*. It has a similar in size to *doit*. In the Singapore Merchant Token currency, the names of certain countries were included. It aimed for easy acceptance by the people. Therefore, the coins issued by the British were more widely used by local people. It is because the name of their regions listed in the coins. It proves that the British and the Dutch have different characteristics of the expansion system. Dutch were considered purely associated as traders. Meanwhile, the British expanded and maintained its power through political power, including issuing currency, by entering the names of the regions. The currency that applied in an area has shown who became ruler. The East Coast of Sumatra which is directly opposite to Selat Malaka adhered to the *peninsula dollar* or *strait dollar* currency system. The West Coast of Sumatra which faces the Indian Ocean, used the guilder as a medium of exchange, regulated by the Dutch East Indies government (Darsono 2017, 124).

In East Sumatra, such as Bogak and Batubara, European coins were also found as legitimacy that this area was a trade route. It was traversed by international traders (Setianingsih, Hati, Harahap, and Suri 2019). The relationship between Deli Sultanate and Batubara in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be traced from the fulfillment of the trading commodities needs. They met the Honorable East India Company demands in Penang which provided goods for inland traders. Several commodities imported to Deli Sultanate such as glassware, consisting of plates, glasses and basins, *seree* holders, kincoob (a type of Indian cloth embroidered with gold or silver, Urdu, Persian: *kamkab*), gold thread, madat, white cloth cotton, coarse country cloth, broadcloth, salt, ironware, tin, swords, blunderbusses, *Kili-kili*, gunpowder, glasses, brass plates, silk and gilded cloth from Trengganu, Palembang, Siak and Batubara.

With the interaction in the fulfillment of trade commodities between regions or kingdoms, it was possible for the circulation of currency. The coin was discovered by the Sumatra Money Museum. They found the coins that were thought of as Deli and Batubara Sultanate coins in the Batubara Regency, precisely at 3°12'25'.2"N and 99°32'01.4"E. It is a coastal area that used to be an international port. The coins that are similar to the Deli and Batubara Sultanate, both with holes and no holes also found in Malaysia, such as in Malaka and Pahang. The area where the coin was found currently use as a palm oil plantation.

On the front side of the coin is written an inscription of Arabic, namely *بيلي لانجا*. It can be read Deli State Shopping. Meanwhile, on the backside is written an inscription that can be read Darul Aman which means a safe country, namely *امان ارول*. The inscriptions were written in 1269 Hijriyah or 1849 under the Sultan Amaludin Mangendar Alam rule (ruled from 1805 to 1850). These have a diameter of 2.1 to 2.3 cm and weight about 2 to 2.3 grams. Sultan Amaludin Mangendar Alam was the third son of Tuanku Panglima Gandar Wahid, the fifth Sultan of Deli who ruled from 1761-1805. During the Sultan Amaludin Mangendar Alam rule, the relationship and influence of the Siak Kingdom were stronger than the Aceh Kingdom. It was marked by granting a sultanate title to the Deli Kingdom by the Malay Sultanate of Siak Sri Indra Pura. Sultan Amaludin Mangendar Alam continued his father's system of government. Meanwhile, in the effort to preserved his position, he maintained the relation to Siak and Aceh (Takari, Zaidan, and Dja'far 2010).

Currency is not only interpreted as a medium of exchange but also as a weapon of power and sovereignty defense. In the local power system, the circulation of self-produced currency was an effort to realize the sovereignty of the controlled area. According to Lombard (1986), it represented by the several kingdoms in East Sumatra, such as Kingdom of Pasai.

The findings of the Deli sultanate coins show that the trading system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not only dominated by British power but also by the local kingdoms. Both the British and Dutch contested for hegemony of power in East Sumatra. Nevertheless, the hegemony of British economic power in East Sumatra could not be removed by the Dutch through the circulation of the currency. The dominance of the dollar's circulation is strong evidence that the British has succeeded became the main controller of economic activity in East Sumatra, while the Netherlands only obtained political symbol (Darsono 2017). Meanwhile, the use and circulation of local kingdom currency represent the existence of authority and contestation in maintaining its sovereignty and power.

## Conclusions

Deli was a contestation area in trade and the expansion of power both regionally (between local kingdoms) and internationally. The glorious era of the Deli Sultanate in trading activities was shown through the export commodities of people's plantations to Penang. Meanwhile, the Deli Sultanate was also a kingdom that had the authority and power in regulating the flow of export-import trade both upstream and downstream. Although British rule in the economic system in Deli had created a Malay scripted currency according to its territory, regionally local kingdoms such as Siak, Batubara, and Deli also had success in managing the trading economy. It was represented by the power to produce currency. They produced the currency composed by gold, silver, and tin during the heyday of Sriwijaya, Pasai, and Aceh. Batubara as one of the local kingdoms in the East Sumatra was a supplier

of silk and gold-plated cloth. It established an intensive trade relationship to the Deli Sultanate. It was possible that currency emerged as a medium of exchange. The findings of the Deli Sultanate coins not only show evidence of heyday and power in the international trading system but also increase the space for contestation and the creation of power claims between the British, Dutch and local kingdoms in the international monetary and trade system.

### Acknowledgement

This publication is funded by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture under Research for Doctoral Dissertation Program 2021.

### References

- Anderson, J. "Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra in 1823." London: WMH Allen & Co, 1962
- Darsono dkk. "Berjuang Dengan Uang Mempertahankan dan Memajukan Republik Indonesia: Semangat Juang Otoritas dan Masyarakat Sumatera Utara." Bank Indonesia: Jakarta, 2017
- Ghani, M. A. 2021. *Jejak Planters di Tanah Deli Dinamika Perkebunan di Sumatera Timur 1863–1996*. Bogor: IPB University Press.
- Husny, T. H. M, Lah. 1975. *Lintasan Sejarah Peradaban dan Budaya Penduduk Melayu Pesisir Deli Sumatera Timur 1612-1950*. Medan: BP Husny.
- Hussin, Nordin. 2012. "Trading Networks of Malay Merchants and Traders in the Straits of Melaka from 1780 to 1830." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 40: 51–82.
- Ikhsan, Edi. 2013. "Antan Patah Lesungpun Hilang: Pergeseran Hak Tanah Komunal dan Pluralisme Hukum dalam Perspektif Sosio-Legal (Studi pada Etnis Melayu Deli Sumatera Utara)." Dissertation, Universitas Sumatera Utara.
- Langkawi, Ibrahim Bakar. 2015. *Pengenalan Matawang Alam melayu Zaman Tradisional*. Malaysia: Masdinar.
- Lombard, D. 1986. *Kerajaan Aceh Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.
- McKinnon, E. Edwards and Tengku Luckman Sinar. 1981. "A Note on Pulau Kompei in Aru Bay, Northeastern Sumatra." *Indonesia*, 32: 48-73.
- McKinnon, E. Edwards. 1977. "Research at Kota Cina, a Sung-Yüan period trading site in east Sumatra." *Archipel* 14(1): 19-32.
- Milner, A.C. 1978. "A Note on Aru dan Kota Cina." *Indonesia* 26: 1-42.
- Pelly, Usman. 1986. *Sejarah pertumbuhan pemerintahan kesultanan Langkat, Deli dan Serdang*. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional.
- Pelzer, Karl. 1985. *Toean Keboen dan Petani*. Jakarta: Sinar Harapan.
- Perret, Daniel. 2010. *Kolonialisme dan Etnisitas Batak dan Melayu di Sumatra Timur Laut*. Jakarta: KPG.
- Ratna. 1992. "Orang Karo di Kerajaan Deli." *Jurnal Masyarakat Indonesia Majalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Indonesia* XIX (1).
- Reid, Anthony and Al-Sultan Mansur. 1973. "The French in Sumatra and the Malay World, 1760-1890." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Deel 129, 2/3de Afl: 195-238. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27861334>
- Setianingsih, Rita M., Lila Pelita Hati, Fitriaty Harahap, and Nur Sukma Suri. "An Overview of the Maritime History of the 18 th Century to the 20 th Coastal Ports of Bogak, Tanjung Tiram Districts, Asahan Regency, North Sumatera Province." *Safeguarding Cultural Heritage: Challenges and Approaches*: 78.
- Soedewo. "Pulau Kampai: Pelabuhan di Selat Malaka dalam Pelayaran dan Perniagaan pada Abad XI-XVI M." Dissertation, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

- Soon Heng, Derek Thiam. 2006. "Export Commodity and Regional Currency: The Role of Chinese Copper Coins in the Melaka Straits, Tenth to Fourteenth Centuries." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37(02): 179 – 203.
- Takari, Muhammad, A. Zaidan BS, and Muhammad Dja'far. 2010. "Sejarah Kesultanan Deli dan Peradaban Masyarakatnya. Medan: USU Press.