

## **Divide et Impera in the Banten Sultanate: The Political Succession of Sultan Haji and VOC's Pepper Monopoly in the 17th and 18th Centuries**

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### **Abstract**

*Nusantara's spice commodities became one of the determining factors of the global spice trade in the 17th and 18th centuries. There were three types of superior spices produced by the Nusantara such as cloves, nutmeg, and pepper. In the 17th century AD, Banten Sultanate was known as a pepper producer, and its pepper trade significantly influenced the economic and political development of the region. Apart from improving the economy, this commodity was also used to establish diplomatic relations between foreign nations. However, the pepper trade also became one of the factors that caused conflict in the Banten Sultanate. The implementation of the divide et impera strategy by the VOC caused an internal conflict between Sultan Haji and Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. The conflict occurred when Sultan Haji allied with the VOC to succeed his father, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. Sultan Haji made an agreement with the VOC in 1684, allowing the company to monopolize the pepper trade. This research examines this issue by looking at the overall condition of*

*the pepper trade before and after the VOC's presence in the Banten Sultanate and the succession of Sultan Haji through the 1684 pepper trade agreement. This qualitative research uses historical research methods with a political approach. The theory used in this research is political economy theory, which includes understanding power, economic system, and public policy. The historical research method comprises heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography stages. The analysis using a political approach reveals the extent to which the Banten Sultanate's pepper trade policy influenced the succession of Sultan Haji and the monopolization of the pepper trade by the VOC.*

**Keywords:** Divide et Impera, Pepper; Monopoly; Sultan Haji; VOC.

## **Introduction**

The *divide et impera* strategy has been an integral part of the history of the relationship between the Dutch and the kingdoms of Nusantara. In their efforts to expand their influence and power in Nusantara, the Dutch cleverly applied the political strategy of 'divide and rule' to break down the political, economic, and social ties between the kingdoms and create tension between them. This strategy allowed the Dutch to capitalize on the regional divisions and political instability to strengthen their dominance. History records show that several Islamic kingdoms in Nusantara were targeted by the Dutch *divide et impera* tactics, including the Sultanate of Aceh, the Sultanate of Mataram, and the Sultanate of Banten. Banten Sultanate, one of the leading maritime kingdoms in Nusantara during its heyday in the 17th century, was also affected by the pressure of the *divide et impera* tactics.

The Dutch *divide et impera* strategy occurred during the peak

of the Banten Sultanate's glory during the reign of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, who was known as a persistent and courageous figure against Dutch domination. During the period, the Sultanate of Banten had an essential role as one of the leading trading centers in Nusantara due to its strategic location in Sunda Strait, which became an alternative gateway for shipping routes from the West. Nusantara's spices became a determining factor in global trade. Hence, the world increasingly recognized superior commodities in Nusantara, such as cloves, nutmeg, and pepper, which were in demand by many traders. Banten Port became increasingly crowded with traders from various parts of the world, both from the West and the East, because it became the largest pepper-exporting and producing port.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Sultanate of Banten became the second-largest exporter of pepper after Aceh. It was known to have the best quality to attract foreign nations such as the Portuguese, Dutch, Arabs, Chinese, Indians, and Malays to seek pepper.<sup>1</sup> VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*), a trading company that, since its establishment on March 20, 1602, aimed to coordinate and consolidate the spice trade, mainly pepper, cloves, and nutmeg. The VOC was increasingly active in finding ways to control trade routes in Southeast Asia, especially to control spices in Banten. The VOC saw the Sultanate of Banten as a competitor that needed to be controlled. However, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa refused to bow to VOC pressure because he wanted to protect the Sultanate's sovereignty and freedom of trade in the Banten Sultanate. The VOC's attempt to monopolize pepper and control the Sultanate of Banten led to the *divide et impera* strategy to

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Reid, *Dari Ekspansi Hingga Krisi: Jaringan Perdagangan Global Asia Tenggara 1450-1680* (Bogor: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1999), p. 120.

achieve their goals.

Banten's position as a producer and monopoly holder of the pepper trade declined due to internal political conflicts in the Sultanate, which involved competition between Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa and Sultan Haji for the throne. Unlike Sultan Ageng, Sultan Haji applied a diplomatic approach by entering into agreements and cooperation with the VOC, which aimed to help Sultan Haji overthrow his father, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa from the Sultanate's throne. The VOC took advantage of this situation by applying *divide et impera* politics so that on April 17, 1684, an agreement was reached between the VOC and Sultan Haji, one of which regulated the pepper trade. As a result, the VOC regained control of the pepper trade monopoly in Banten, and non-Dutch traders trading in Banten harbor were expelled from the region.<sup>2</sup>

The fierce competition for the pepper commodity is understandable, considering that in the 17th century, Banten became Asia's most crucial pepper market. During the reign of Sultan Haji, the VOC had a monopoly on the pepper trade throughout the Banten Sultanate. Not only that, but the Dutch trading company also controlled all trade relations and diplomacy of the Sultanate with the outside world, including controlling all trading ports owned by Banten.<sup>3</sup>

The focus of this research is to analyze the *divide et impera* strategy applied by the VOC against the Sultanate of Banten in the 17th century and its implications for Banten's position as a producer and monopoly holder of the pepper trade. The research

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<sup>2</sup> Fadly Rahman, "Negeri Rempah-Rempah" Dari Masa Bersemi Hingga Gugurnya Kejayaan Rempah-Rempah," *Patanjala* 11, no. 3 (2019), p. 354.

<sup>3</sup> Ariwibowo, "Sungai Tulang Bawang Dalam Perdagangan Lada Di Lampung Pada Periode 1684 Hingga 1914," p. 256.

will look at the impact of the internal political conflict between Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa and Sultan Haji over the Sultanate's throne, as well as how the VOC's 'divide and conquer' political strategy managed to influence the pepper trade in the region. The research also focuses on the political, economic, and social implications of the VOC's monopolization of the pepper trade in Nusantara in the 17th and 18th centuries.

This research covers several aspects, the first of which is an exploration of the pepper trade in the Sultanate of Banten before the arrival of the VOC. Furthermore, this research explores the succession process of Sultan Haji in seizing the throne of the Sultanate of Banten from Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa as a result of the implementation of the VOC's *divide et impera* strategy. In this case, Sultan Haji's attempt to seize the throne received support from the VOC through the signing of an agreement regulating the pepper trade. The agreement was also part of the VOC's agenda to restore the monopoly of the pepper trade in the Banten Sultanate area.

The main objective of this research is to analyze the impact of the VOC's "divide et impera" political strategy on the decline of the Banten Sultanate's position as a strategic pepper trade center in Asia. In addition, this research also aims to reveal the implications of the internal political rivalry in the Banten Sultanate between Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa and Sultan Haji, as well as how the VOC managed to take advantage of the situation of internal political conflict to achieve a monopoly of the pepper trade in Banten and actively intervene in the trade relations and governance of the Banten Sultanate. In addition, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the political and economic dynamics in Nusantara during colonialism and the role of the *divide et impera* strategy in transforming the position of local kingdoms into tools of the Dutch trading partnership's interests.

Previous studies relevant to the Banten Sultanate and VOC spice trade politics have been collected as comparative literature in this research. The purpose of collecting previous studies is to assist the researcher in clarifying the research problem and determining whether this research has innovative aspects or is merely complementary. The previous research articles referenced are as follows: Siti Maria Ulfah's article entitled "Banten's Resistance to the Dutch" discusses the outline of the Banten Sultanate's resistance. The article includes information about the figures involved and the economic, social, and cultural situation in the Banten Sultanate. The discussion then covers the period of destruction of the Banten Sultanate. The main difference with this research lies in its focus, which only presents an overview of the Banten Sultanate's resistance and needs to provide an in-depth review of the background of the Banten Sultanate's conflict with the VOC. Eri Soedewo's article titled "Hot Gold Pepper: Its Impact on the Sultanate of Aceh and the Sultanate of Banten" comprehensively discusses the impact of the pepper trade on the islands of Sumatra and Java. A topic in line with this research is the politics of the pepper trade by the VOC in Java with the center in Banten. However, the difference lies in the broader focus of this research, which discusses the impact of the pepper trade throughout Nusantara. The article by Gregorius Andika entitled "The Kingdom of Banten Girang and the Formation of the Spice Trade in the Sunda Strait in the XVI Century" discusses the influence of the pepper trade in the Sriwijaya region on the Banten Girang kingdom. The main difference lies in the orientation of the focus of the discussion, which emphasizes the influence of the pepper trade from the Sriwijaya period to the Banten Girang kingdom. In contrast, this research focuses more on the political aspects of the pepper trade.

## Method

The research method is a scientific writing procedure that aims to obtain results by academic criteria. This research uses a qualitative research method. Regarding the method used in this research, namely using historical research methods. The historical research method is a research method that collects, analyzes, and processes data that has occurred in past events. The historical research method consists of four stages: heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. Researchers use written sources or library research in data collection. The sources came from books, journals, theses, and the internet. Some books were obtained from UIN Sunan Kalijaga Library, Grahatama Pustaka Library, ANRI, and personal book collections. The use of interview sources was not used because the events of Sultan Haji's succession and the VOC's pepper monopoly occurred in the very past, namely in the 17th and 18th centuries AD.

The author looks for primary sources from various institutions at the heuristic stage.<sup>4</sup> The intended institutions are, among others, Grahatama Pustaka Archives and ANRI. These institutions provide primary sources in the form of archives to support data related to the succession of Sultan Haji in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and the archive of the 1684 pepper trade agreement. Secondary sources about the War of Java Succession III can be obtained from written sources such as books and articles and the internet from libraries and private collections.

After collecting primary and secondary sources, the next stage is verification, which means checking the sources that have been collected.<sup>5</sup> Primary and secondary sources must be verified to

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<sup>4</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2013), p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Dudung Abdurahman, "Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah Islam,"

determine whether the source is authentic. At the verification stage, there are internal and external criticisms. Internal criticism aims to test the credibility and reliability of sources. External criticism aims to test the authenticity of a source.<sup>6</sup> Internal criticism lies in the content of primary sources, such as the text of the agreement between the VOC and the Banten Sultanate, whether by context or not. External criticism lies in the physical form of primary sources, such as the paper and ink used to write historical texts.

The next stage is the interpretation of a historical event.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation stage can also provide a theoretical view of the chronology of historical events. At this stage, the author adjusts the sources about the pepper trade between the VOC and the Sultanate of Banten that have been verified with other historical studies. The aim is to adjust the theme of historical research and focus the study to fit the topic.

The last stage is historiography or historical writing. At this stage, the author compiles chronologically based on the sources found.<sup>8</sup> The writing must also be in chronological order for each year. Using other auxiliary sciences, such as political science and economics, is essential to discuss the pepper trade policy between the VOC and the Sultanate of Banten.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **The Pepper Spice Trade in Banten Sultanate Before the VOC**

The glory of the Banten Sultanate in pepper trading made the

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*Penerbit Ombak* (2011), p. 105.

<sup>6</sup> Sumargono, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah* (Klaten: Lakeisha, 2021), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah*, p. 10.



Banten Sultanate one of the most crowded trading locations in the 17th century. In the early 17th century, Banten Harbor functioned as an international market with trading posts and merchant complexes from various countries inhabited by walled houses. The market was active daily and sold various food and commodities from other countries, such as silk cloth, cotton cloth, gold, porcelain, and Kasturi oil.<sup>9</sup> Pepper is sold by locals in Karangantu Market, where most traders are women and sell fruits, cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, spices, and hot cakes. Karangantu Market became the main center of import and export trade in Banten.<sup>10</sup>

Banten Harbor became a place for traders from England, France, Denmark, and China to obtain pepper. They established factories or warehouses in Banten Harbor. Two travel reports by Sir James Lancaster (1600) and Sir Henry Middleton (1604) can be evidence of the excellent trade relations between Banten and England. In a warrant issued by the English East India Company Committee, it can be seen that in 1604, Sir James Lancaster left Banten with 1500 sacks of pepper.<sup>11</sup> Good diplomacy between Banten and England was also marked by exchanging commodities from both sides. Banten pepper became a medium of exchange for buying cannons and rifles. In an Arabic letter written by Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa to the English King Charles II, it can be seen that England was willing to sell cannons and rifles to Banten in 1664; as a means of exchange, Banten sent 100 bahar of black pepper and

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<sup>9</sup> Lombard, *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya Kajian Sejarah Terpadu Bagian III: Warisan Kerajaan-Kerajaan Konsentris*, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Halwany Michrob, "A Hypothetical Reconstruction of the Islamic City of Banten, Indonesia" (1987), p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Middleton, *The Voyage of Sir Henry Middleton to Bantam and the Maluco Islands: Being the Second Voyage Set Forth by the Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading Into the East-Indies* (Hakluyt Society, 1855).

100 pikuls of ginger.<sup>12</sup>

However, Banten was prone to conflict as a business meeting place for various nations. In a competition for the pepper commodity, traders from China, the Netherlands, and Banten often caused disputes and violence, such as ship attacks and street battles.<sup>13</sup> Conflicts and tensions between these merchant groups became common in Banten from 1596 to 1619. The Chinese, English, and Dutch merchant groups became dominant in trying to control the pepper trade in Banten.

Banten Sultanate became one of the best pepper producers and one of the main suppliers of pepper in Southeast Asia in the 16th century.<sup>14</sup> This condition could occur due to trade dynamics in Europe during this period experiencing the pepper-boom phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Banten Sultanate fulfilled the demand for 1,000,000 tons of pepper in the 16th century. Banten Sultanate was able to meet the demand for 1000 tons of pepper per year for Portuguese traders and 3000 tons per year for Chinese traders.<sup>16</sup> Not only that, but Banten pepper contributed to the availability of pepper commodities in Europe, whose demand reached 3.2 to 3.6 million kilograms per year.<sup>17</sup> It can be said that Banten pepper became one of the essential commodities in global trade dynamics.

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<sup>12</sup> Titik Pudjiastuti, *Perang, Dagang, Persahabatan: Surat-Surat Sultan Banten* (Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2007), p. 30-32.

<sup>13</sup> Freek Colombijn, "Foreign Influence on the State of Banten, 1596–1682," *Indonesia Circle* 18, no. 50 (1989), p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ju-kua Chau, *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Entitled Chu-Fan-Chi*, vol. 2 (Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1912).

<sup>15</sup> Swantoro, *Perdagangan Lada Abad XVII: Perebutan "Emas" Putih Dan Hitam di Nusantara*, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Ariwibowo, "Sungai Tulang Bawang Dalam Perdagangan Lada Di Lampung Pada Periode 1684 Hingga 1914." P. 255-256.

<sup>17</sup> Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620–1740*, p. 74.

Likewise, the Banten port area became one of the busiest international ports that brought together various races of people from various parts of the world and various professions: traders, aristocrats, military circles, enslaved people, ethnographers, and botanists.<sup>18</sup>

The pepper planting and cultivation process was mentioned in earlier sources when Banten was already a sultanate, including through a page (a regulation written on a copper plate) that mentions the mandatory pepper planting for local Lampung rulers to be deposited with the Sultan of Banten.<sup>19</sup> In the 16th century, Sumatran pepper produced in several areas in Lampung, such as Tulang Bawang, Sekampung, Semangka, Silebar, and Seputeh, became one of the pepper suppliers for the Sultanate of Banten.<sup>20</sup>

During the reign of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, the VOC often asked the Sultanate of Banten to hand over the pepper monopoly rights to them. However, Sultan Ageng rejected this request, which resulted in tensions between the two parties.<sup>21</sup> Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa was known as a strategist; in dealing with the VOC, he responded by conducting small raids and capturing Dutch ships. In 1656 AD, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa also launched a massive guerrilla in the Angke region, where Banten Sultanate soldiers sabotaged and damaged Dutch sugarcane mills and crops. In

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<sup>18</sup> Claude Guillot, Hendra Setiawan, and Daniel Perret, *Banten: Sejarah Dan Peradaban Abad X-XVII* (Jakarta: KPG, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Hary Ganjar Budiman and G Andika Ariwibowo, "LADA BANTEN; DARI NIAGA HINGGA WARISAN BUDAYA," *PROSIDING* (2022): 79. P. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Nanang Saptono et al., "Perkebunan Lada Dan Masyarakat Di Kawasan Lampung Timur Pada Masa Kesultanan Banten," *PURBAWIDYA: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengembangan Arkeologi* 10, no. 2 (2021), p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> Heru Erwanto, *Kota Dan Kabupaten Dalam Lintasan: Banten, Lebak, Subang, Kuningan* (Bandung: Balai kajian sejarah dan nilai tradisonal, 2006), p. 42-43.

addition, they burned villages used as VOC defense posts and intercepted Dutch army patrols. A letter from the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies to Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa carried by a Dutch escort was ambushed, seized, and torn up by Bantenese soldiers. Land and sea battles using guerrilla tactics and sabotage lasted for a year. Around November 1657 AD, both sides agreed to a peace treaty, although skirmishes continued and a peace agreement was not fully reached between them.

During the reign of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Banten had become an international trade center. Banten has spice resources such as cloves, nutmeg, and pepper. Banten also had a beautiful and safe harbor. Banten experienced its heyday when Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa implemented a free trade system where all parties could transact in the Banten Sultanate area. No wonder many foreigners from Asia to Europe came to the Banten region to trade. The arrival of the VOC in Banten initially had the sole purpose of trading. However, the VOC wanted to colonize and monopolize by building a trade and supply headquarters in Banten. Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, who embraced the free trade system, strongly disagreed with the VOC's monopoly idea. The presence of the VOC in 1659 AD triggered an ongoing conflict with the Sultanate of Banten. The VOC initiated the conflict who always urged Banten to grant monopoly trading rights in Banten. Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa rejected VOC's monopoly system because it contradicted the free trade system adopted by the Sultanate of Banten. Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa felt that the VOC monopoly system would harm the Sultanate in the future.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Herni Indriani, "Strategi Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa Dalam Mempertahankan Kesultanan Banten" (2020), p. 8.

## **The Succession of Sultan Haji and the Pepper Monopoly Agreement by the VOC**

One of the VOC's interventions in controlling the regions in Nusantara was the *divide et impera* strategy or the politics of divide and conquer. *Divide et impera* was introduced by Julius Caesar in building the Roman Empire. Many Western nations adopted this strategy to expand power in various countries. This strategy was considered very effective for the VOC to divide power in Nusantara. The success of *divide et impera* can make it easier for the VOC to control the internal kingdom, such as making policies and building fortresses near the palace area. The VOC could also easily control strategic areas, such as profitable ports for VOC trade.<sup>23</sup>

The Banten Sultanate had a monarchical system of government, which meant that the king's power was absolute.<sup>24</sup> The selection of power in the Banten Sultanate adhered to the succession system. Succession, in its definition, embraces the transfer of political power from one individual, government, or regime to another.<sup>25</sup> The succession system made power in the Banten Sultanate have no legal force, so there was the potential for power struggles. There were three requirements to become a ruler in the Sultanate of Banten. First, the ruler candidate had to be a descendant of the empress's wife. Second, the ruler candidate must have the approval of government institutions and religious leaders. Third, the prospective ruler must have a firm policy.<sup>26</sup> These three

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<sup>23</sup> Agustinus Supriyono, "Tinjauan Historis Benteng VOC Di Jepara," *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal* 25, no. 1 (2015), p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Denys Lombard, *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya Kajian Sejarah Terpadu Bagian III: Warisan Kerajaan-Kerajaan Konsentris*, (PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama. Jakarta, 2005), p. 100.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Calvert, *Proses Suksesi Politik* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1987).

<sup>26</sup> Claude Guillot, *Banten : Sejarah Dan Peradaban Abad V-XVII*

requirements made the Sultanate of Banten a strong foundation of power.

Banten's power system, which embraced the concept of succession, made the Sultanate vulnerable to power struggles. This is the background of Sultan Haji's succession to the government of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. At first, Sultan Haji or Pangeran Haji held the position of Sultan Anom, who was only in charge of the administration of the Palace and the court system. In 1671 Sultan Haji was dispatched to Mecca to establish relations with the Ottoman Turks.<sup>27</sup> The event also signaled a peace agreement between the Banten Sultanate and the VOC for over ten years. After Sultan Ageng moved to Tirtayasa, Sultan Haji declared himself the primary administrator of the Palace, which included diplomatic affairs and entering into treaties.<sup>28</sup> The VOC, knowing this, immediately instigated Sultan Haji to carry out a succession against Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa.

Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa considered the VOC a threat to the Sultanate of Banten. Sultan Ageng tried various ways to overcome the threat from the VOC, starting with peaceful means and war. Sultan Ageng also did everything he could to prevent Sultan Haji from being incited by the VOC. One of these methods was to send Sultan Haji or Pangeran Haji to Mecca for the second time in 1674. Sultan Ageng also negotiated with the VOC in 1680. Even so, Sultan Ageng's efforts could not prevent the relationship between Sultan Haji and the VOC. Sultan Haji became more pro-VOC when he learned that Pangeran Purbaya, Sultan Haji's brother, was

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(Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2009), p. 214.

<sup>27</sup> Jacobus Anne van der Chijs, H T Colenbrander, and J de Hullu, *Dagh-Register Gehouden Int Casteel Batavia Vant Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als over Geheel Nederlandts-India* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1889), p. 250.

<sup>28</sup> Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200–2008* (Penerbit Serambi, 2008), p. 119.

appointed Sultan Anom.<sup>29</sup> The conspiracy was caused by the influence given by the VOC to Sultan Haji, namely by stating that Sultan Haji could not replace his father's position because there was still Pangeran Arya Purbaya, who was Sultan Haji's sibling. This then led to an alliance between Sultan Haji and the VOC.<sup>30</sup>

The VOC was willing to help Sultan Haji to overthrow Sultan Ageng's power on the condition that he became the VOC's puppet king. The succession conflict began in 1680 when Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa declared open war on the VOC and Sultan Haji. Sultan Haji cooperated with the VOC to quell Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa's rebellion. Sultan Haji also asked for help from the British for weapons support in 1681, represented by Kyai Ngabehi Naya Wipraya and Kyai Ngabehi Jaya Sedana. Sultan Haji's military assistance was able to conquer Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa's invasion of Surosowan Palace. Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa's attacks continued in 1682 until Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa declared surrender, marked by defeat in the Angke and Sajira areas in 1683.<sup>31</sup>

The defeat of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa paved the way for the VOC to monopolize pepper in the Sultanate of Banten. Therefore, in 1684 Sultan Haji signed a VOC trade agreement. The trade agreement contained: 1) Banten surrendered Cirebon to the VOC, 2) The pepper monopoly in Banten was held by the VOC to get rid of Persia, India, and China, 3) Banten must pay 600,000 ringgit if it breaks its promise, 4) Banten troops who controlled the coastal and inland areas of Priangan were immediately withdrawn.<sup>32</sup>

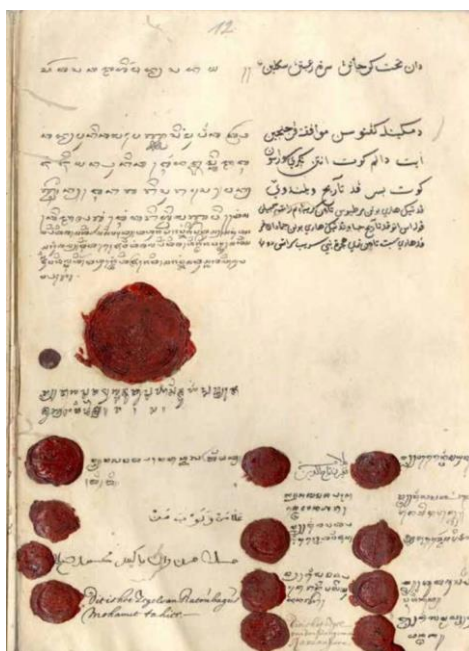
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<sup>29</sup> Nina H Lubis and Taufik Abdullah, *Banten Dalam Pergumulan Sejarah: Sultan, Ulama, Jawara*, (Depok: LP3ES, 2004), p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> Herni Indriani, "Strategi Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa Dalam Mempertahankan Kesultanan Banten" (2020), p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Tim Penyusun ANRI, *Naskah Sumber Arsip Rempah Nusantara*



**Figure 1.** Pepper trade agreement between the VOC and Sultan Haji (1684). (Source: Arsip Negara Republik Indonesia)

### **Monopolization of Pepper in the Sultanate of Banten by the VOC**

In 1603, under the VOC's auspices, Dutch traders established the first trading post and warehouse in Banten, dubbed "a famous pepper trading empire in West Java" by Ricklefs.<sup>33</sup> Although pepper played a role in strengthening diplomatic relations between Banten and England, Banten's relationship with Dutch traders was tense. Conflicts and disputes often arose between the Banten and the Dutch trading partnership over pepper. On April 17, 1684, an agreement was reached between the VOC and Sultan Haji, in

*Abad 17-18* (Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2021), p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Merle C Ricklefs, "Bantěn and the Dutch in 1619: Six Early 'Pasar Malay' Letters 1," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39, no. 1 (1976), p. 130.



which the latter granted the VOC monopoly rights over pepper originating from the Sultanate's territory, including Lampung,<sup>34</sup> including the English traders who had been the VOC's main competitors since 1602.<sup>35</sup>

The conflict between Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa and Sultan Haji ended in 1684, which was marked by the VOC pepper trade agreement. The pepper trade agreement allowed the VOC to regulate the pepper trade in Banten. The VOC could quickly get rid of its competitors, who needed the political support of the Banten Sultanate. The Banten Sultanate was also not allowed to send envoys abroad, nor were foreigners only allowed in Banten with VOC approval. On the other hand, the VOC also provided military assistance to help Sultan Haji's political succession in the Banten Sultanate.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the Sultanate of Banten officially became a puppet state that the VOC entirely governed.

In 1682, the VOC sent an expedition under the leadership of Koopman Everhard van der Schuur to Lampung to achieve their ambition to monopolize pepper there and block British influence.<sup>37</sup> This made it difficult for the British to obtain pepper supplies from Lampung and Banten.<sup>38</sup> From the reign of Sultan Haji (1683 - 1687) to Sultan Zainal Arifin (1750-1752), after the enactment of the VOC's pepper monopoly rights, all traders were prohibited

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<sup>34</sup> Fadly Rahman, "Negeri Rempah-Rempah" Dari Masa Bersemi Hingga Gugurnya Kejayaan Rempah-Rempah," *Patanjala* 11, no. 3 (2019), p. 354.

<sup>35</sup> Marjorie Shaffer, *Pepper: A History of the World's Most Influential Spice* (Macmillan, 2013), p. 58.

<sup>36</sup> Reid, *Dari Ekspansi Hingga Krisi: Jaringan Perdagangan Global Asia Tenggara 1450-1680*.

<sup>37</sup> Budiman and Ariwibowo, "LADA BANTEN; DARI NIAGA HINGGA WARISAN BUDAYA." p. 92.

<sup>38</sup> Ariwibowo, "Sungai Tulang Bawang Dalam Perdagangan Lada Di Lampung Pada Periode 1684 Hingga 1914," p. 256.

from selling pepper to Palembang residents. In addition, traders who traded pepper at sea risked having their cargo and boats confiscated and handed over to the sultan.<sup>39</sup> During Sultan Haji's leadership, a policy of "forced planting" of pepper was implemented to increase the supply of pepper in favor of the VOC.

In 1723, pepper production in Banten reached 1.5 to 2.5 million kilograms, increasing to 3.5 million kilograms in 1724.<sup>40</sup> The VOC's monopolized pepper was sold in Asian (Taiwan, Japan, Persia) and European markets and to Surat and Bengal in India. In the 18th century, the VOC began to expand its pepper sales market to China using VOC ships and Chinese ships.<sup>41</sup> However, the pepper trade declined after the 1770s as pirate activity from China, Sulu, and Irnaun (southern Philippines) disrupted pepper supplies from Silebar, Semangka, and the Tulang Bawang River. From 1791 to 1792, pirate activities in Lampung waters seized around 6000 pikuls of pepper, equivalent to 36 percent of the VOC's pepper supply from the Lampung area in the same period.<sup>42</sup>

The VOC, later succeeded by the Dutch East Indies Government, slowly established its power in several spice-producing areas in Nusantara, including Aceh, Jambi, Lampung, Malacca, Banjarmasin, and Banten. Banten became one of the best pepper producers and one of the leading suppliers of pepper in Southeast Asia in the 16th century.<sup>43</sup> The supply of pepper from

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<sup>39</sup> Saptono et al., "Perkebunan Lada Dan Masyarakat Di Kawasan Lampung Timur Pada Masa Kesultanan Banten."

<sup>40</sup> Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620–1740*, p. 88-91.

<sup>41</sup> Ariwibowo, "Sungai Tulang Bawang Dalam Perdagangan Lada Di Lampung Pada Periode 1684 Hingga 1914."

<sup>42</sup> Atsushi Ota, *Changes of Regime and Social Dynamics in West Java: Society, State and the Outer World of Banten, 1750-1830*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 125-126.

<sup>43</sup> Chau, *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Entitled Chu-Fan-Chi*, vol. 2.

Banten was considered essential to the VOC because this commodity was in high demand in Europe.<sup>44</sup> The fierce battle for pepper is understandable, given that Banten was Asia's largest pepper market in the 16th and 17th centuries.

### **Conclusion**

The explanation of the study that has been discussed above can be concluded as follows: Banten was the best pepper-producing region, enabling the formation of a world trade network. Many foreign traders from the Netherlands, China, England, and Portugal came to Banten to trade. The bustling trade in the Sultanate of Banten was also supported by its strategic location in the Sunda Strait, a connecting route to the eastern region of Nusantara. Banten's lucrative pepper resources resulted in competition to control the entire Banten trade system. One of the parties that wanted to control Banten's trade was the VOC.

The VOC used the *divide et impera* strategy to control the Banten Sultanate. The *divide et impera* strategy could weaken the Banten Sultanate government and create internal conflicts. The VOC's first step in controlling the Banten Sultanate began with inciting Sultan Haji to overthrow the throne of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. The VOC then utilized the defeat of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa to make a pepper trade agreement in 1684. The trade agreement was the VOC's strategy to monopolize pepper in Banten.

The monopolization of pepper by the VOC succeeded in creating a trade route that the VOC fully controlled. The VOC succeeded in building a pepper trade market from Asia to Europe. Pepper exports also fully used VOC-owned ships. The VOC,

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<sup>44</sup> Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620–1740*, p. 87.

which the Dutch East Indies Government later continued, continued its expansion in several areas in Nusantara, such as Aceh, Jambi, Lampung, Malacca, Banjarmasin, and Banten. The VOC's pepper monopoly in Banten indicates that Banten was one of the best pepper producers and became one of the leading suppliers of pepper in Southeast Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries.

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