The Tin Trade in the Malay Peninsula during the Eighteenth Century

The history of the Malay peninsula in the eighteenth century is a sadly neglected topic, despite the many interesting lights it throws on the relations between Asian and European powers, before the industrial revolution provided the latter with an incontestable technical superiority. Since the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511, Europeans had always been established in the region. After the forces of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had replaced the Portuguese, the local Malayan powers ceased all attempts to drive the Europeans from Malacca, and seemed resigned to its loss. They lived in relative peace with the VOC. For despite their long history of contact with European powers, and in contrast to the native states of the Moluccas and Java, the Malay states bordering Malacca appear to have retained their independence and territorial integrity. But the question remains whether the local rulers really had any freedom of action, where their interests came into conflict with those of the Dutch Company.

The following study of the tin trade of this region provides a partial answer to this question. Tin was the most important product of the area, and its presence had for centuries drawn merchants to the Malayan ports. The mineral was a very useful article in the cycle of intra-Asian trade, and as such was eagerly sought after by the agents of the VOC. Their interests in this region remained predominantly commercial, and they aimed to engross the output of tin. But they were not alone in this desire. The local rulers were very much alive to the value of the tin trade, as they relied heavily for

Much of the material incorporated in this article was drawn from the records of the VOC governments at Malacca and Batavia, now held at the Rijksarchief, The Hague. Where possible the archival numbers of the original despatches at the Hague have been cited. Most of the letters were read in the form of microfilm copies held at the Department of Pacific History, A.N.U., Canberra, which were in turn copied from selections of VOC correspondence held on microfilm at the University of Singapore. Archival numbers were not available for the latter, so reference has been made to the name of the series and date of the letter. The series are: Generale Missiven (Extracten) (GM); Batavia’s Uitgaande Briefboeken (Batavia to Malacca); and Ontfangen en ingezonden papieren van Malaka (Malacca to Batavia).
revenue on the volume of trade passing through the river-mouth ports around which these Malay states were built. Control of this trade would not have been lightly surrendered, and the extent to which the Dutch officials were able to manipulate this traffic reflects reasonably accurately the amount of influence the Company possessed in the area. And the Malay rulers were not the only group with which the VOC had to compete. In the course of the eighteenth century a number of Bugis immigrants from Celebes came to Malaya, and they also hoped to win a predominant place in the valuable trade carried on in and around the Straits of Malacca. Control of the trade in tin became a vitally important issue in the struggle which developed in following years between the VOC, the Bugis and the native Malay rulers.

When the great expansion of the tin market in the nineteenth century brought a flood of migrants from China to the Malay states, the rich tinfields of the peninsula already had a long history of influence on the development of that area. Prior to the technical advances of recent times the great proportion of tin produced in the peninsula came from the extensive alluvial deposits of the west coast. This field begins in Kedah in the North and stretches southwards through the Taiping and Kinta valleys, and then across the Bidor fields in the centre of Perak, and further south again through Ulu Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and western Negri Sembilan, terminating near Port Dickson near Negri Sembilan, and Kuala Linggi on the Malacca coast.\(^1\)

The states of the peninsula were the chief tin producers in the archipelago until the discovery of the rich deposits at Bangka in 1710. Early in the eighteenth century the west coast state of Perak is reputed to have produced ‘more than anywhere else in India’.\(^2\) Sixty years later the output of Perak does not seem to have declined, though the mines at Bangka were by then producing great quantities of tin annually. On the contrary, the output of the mainland states seems to have increased as the century progressed, and the market for tin, especially in China, expanded.

At this time the Malays and the immigrant Bugis controlled the production of tin. In 1777 the first mention appears of the Chinese tin miners who were in the next century to gain complete control of the industry.\(^3\) But for most of the period to be dealt with, the mineral was collected by the native people, and most of the profits from its sale were reaped by the chiefs or rulers who controlled the ports and river systems, the highroads of commerce. The methods employed by the Malays in the production of tin must have been

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\(^3\) GM, 31 December 1777.
simple. The most common practice would have been that of washing the deposits from areas around the many streams. There are also many references to the practice of 'digging' for tin, implying that some form of mining existed. These mines may have been similar to those which John Crawfurd saw being worked by the Malays on Bangka in the following century. He describes these as small open cut mines, from which the mineral was obtained by clearing away the shallow layers of topsoil covering the deposit. But perhaps this method was copied from the much more efficient open-cut mining of the Chinese. The latter employed machinery to clear water from the pits, and were thus able to work much larger mines than the Malays, who did not use this water-clearing device. A more correct idea of the type of mining carried out in eighteenth century Malaya is perhaps to be found in Crawfurd's description of the primitive efforts of the aboriginals of the interior of Bangka, who

mine in the form of a narrow cylindrical shaft, capable of admitting one person only, and, if the bed of ore be found productive, follow it at the risk of their lives under the alluvial strata, which often falls in upon them. They have no water-wheel, no aqueduct. To avoid the accumulation of water, they must always mine on the acclivities of elevated tracts, and, for washing the mineral, it must be conveyed, as it is extracted, to the nearest rivulet. In smelting they use small furnaces... and the common Malay bellows...

Tin mining would appear to have been an unprofitable business, for the most part, for the common people. It was the practice of Malay rulers often to grant the privilege of trading in a certain article to one man, generally an important chief or court favourite, to whom all produce of this article had to be delivered at his own price. Alexander Hamilton believed that the people of Junk Ceylon (Ujong Salang, a dependency of Siam, now known as Phuket) produced less tin than was possible, because they received a very poor return for their labours. Half a century later Thomas Forrest reported that the tin miners of Junk Ceylon were still being exploited, now by Chinese smelters who had 'farmed' their privileges from the government.

The tin produced in the Malay states had for centuries found a ready market in India and China, as well as in the archipelago. It

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4 One observer notes the collection of alluvial tin in the mountainous areas after heavy rain had fallen, washing it clear of the soil. J. C. Koenig, 'Journal of a voyage from India to Siam and Malacca', Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, XXVI & XXVII (1894), 80.
7 Hamilton, p. 85.
was exported to India as early as the fifth century,\textsuperscript{9} and twelve centuries later, William Dampier noted that it was ‘a very important article in the trade of the Bay of Bengal’.\textsuperscript{10} Even before the VOC captured Malacca in 1641 it had become deeply involved in this trade. The Company carried on a very important business with the Coromandel Coast of India, where cotton cloth and piece goods were bought. These items were highly important in the trade of Southeast Asia, and were greatly in demand in all parts of the Archipelago, especially among the spice growing islands of the Moluccas. But it was difficult for the rulers of the VOC to supply their agents in India with any goods which were acceptable for ready sale, except bullion, in exchange for the large quantities of cloth they bought. The export of bullion was at that time most distasteful to European governments. The VOC was forced to look to intra-Asian trade for articles which could be profitably disposed of in India.\textsuperscript{11} Tin was found to be one of the items suited to this purpose. Therefore, though tin was not in such great demand in India as spices or bullion, the fact that it enjoyed a steady market there made the Dutch anxious to obtain sizeable amounts of the mineral.\textsuperscript{12}

Exports of tin to China appeared to be expanding during this century. By the end of the period it was calculated that some 1,800 tons of the mineral annually arrived at Canton.\textsuperscript{13} It was widely used there in religious ceremonies in which sacred papers attached to thinly beaten tinfoil were burnt. But the increase in Chinese tin consumption was probably due rather to the growing practice of lining tea-chests with tinfoil than to a sudden resurgence of religious zeal.\textsuperscript{14} As tea drinking grew fashionable in Europe, more tea was exported from China, and an increasing number of European traders ventured to Canton. They encountered a problem similar to that which the Dutch and other European merchants had already met with in India, namely, how to find alternative goods to bullion which could be readily and profitably sold in China. Once again tin was found to be an acceptable item, more especially as it could be obtained \textit{en route} from India to China, in the Straits of Malacca. The trade between Malacca and China consequently grew in importance during the eighteenth century; indeed in the seventeen-seventies a French naval captain remarked that this was the only traffic that

still brought the Dutch Company any profit.\textsuperscript{15}

Malayan tin had also found markets outside Asia by this time. During the seventeenth century the Dutch had begun to export the mineral to Europe. A large amount was used in the production of alloyed metals, brass and pewter, from which a variety of goods, not least household items, was manufactured. The VOC's directors found tin a very suitable ballast for their homeward-bound vessels, many of which carried light cargoes of spices and cloth, and the mineral could be sold profitably in Europe. Malaccan tin first appeared on the list of sales at the VOC's auctions in Amsterdam in 1667-8,\textsuperscript{16} and regularly thereafter. The directors of the English East India Company complained that the Dutch were trying to glut Europe with tin,\textsuperscript{17} and in 1687 the London Pewterers' Guild expressed their fear that the Dutch would capture the important export trade in pewter entirely, with the aid of cheap tin from the Indies.\textsuperscript{18} Though such fears proved groundless, the directors of the VOC continued to sell large quantities of Malaccan tin in Europe, and their agents at Malacca were especially charged to collect between 100,000 and 400,000 lbs. of tin annually for the European market.

Changes were also taking place in the makeup of the body of merchants employed in the tin trade in Asia during this period. Formerly the bulk of these had been natives of China or India. The proportion of Europeans taking part in this trade grew as the century progressed. They were not only servants in the employ of one of the great trading companies; many were drawn from the ranks of the 'country traders', engaged in piecemeal intra-Asian trade, and increasingly plying the route between India and China.

The Dutch appeared in the best position to profit from the Malayan tin trade. In 1641 they had captured the fortress of Malacca from the Portuguese, a stronghold from which, if it were properly manned and equipped, a strong power could command the passage of the Straits of Malacca, and interfere decisively in the commercial life of the surrounding states. Malacca, 'the port at the end of the monsoons',\textsuperscript{19} had many natural advantages as an entrepot. The rulers of the VOC had hoped from this strategic point to monopolise the output of tin in the peninsula to the exclusion of other purchasers. In pursuit of this aim the authorities at Malacca were instructed to secure treaties with the rulers of the neighbouring states, which were to grant to the VOC, among other commercial advantages, exclusive rights to all the tin produced in the area. Even at the height of the Dutch Company's power in the late seventeenth century, this policy was not carried out with much success. Half of the produce of Perak

\textsuperscript{15} Pierre Sonnerat, \textit{Voyages aux Indes Oriental et à la Chine}, Calcutta, 1788, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Bowrey, \textit{A Geographical Account of the Countries around the Bay of Bengal}, Cambridge, 1903, p. 280, footnote 1.
\textsuperscript{18} Hedges, p. 85.
was sent to Acheh, where it was bought by foreign merchants, and many Chinese junks still visited Johore. In 1678, Perak and Kedah had merely contracted to deliver a half of their tin to the Company, and only Bengirij, a small dependency of Siam in the north-west of the peninsula, had promised its entire output.  

Malacca officials soon learnt, moreover, that though they regarded such treaties as binding indefinitely, the Malay rulers seldom looked on them as more than a temporary expedient. Contracts for the delivery of a season’s produce at an agreed price were commonly drawn up between the prince of a port, who was often also the chief merchant, and visiting traders, but the annual delivery of their tin at a fixed price, to the exclusion of all other purchasers, was another matter. The Malaccan authorities attempted to enforce these contracts by sending ‘guardships’ to patrol the Straits, and cruise about the ports of offending rulers. These ships confiscated ‘contraband’ tin from the outcoming vessels and interfered with trade to a varying degree. In 1647 the VOC tried to prevent Indian merchants from visiting the ‘tin places’ by refusing them any passes for the journey. (The Dutch had taken over from the Portuguese a system of trying to control the flow of trade by issuing safeguards or ‘passes’ to vessels whose journeys they approved, which removed them from the hazard of molestation by Dutch ships.) Efforts were also made to stop Chinese junks from visiting the area. Denial of European ships was often a more delicate operation, as the Company had to tailor its policies at any given time to affairs in Europe. It was hoped that these difficulties could be overcome by binding native rulers not to allow any foreign merchants to enter their ports. None of these attempts had met with any notable success at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

By this time, on the contrary, the VOC had perforce altered its ambitions with respect to the tin trade, and Malaccan governments were struggling to collect the amounts of tin required for Batavia, the Coromandel Coast and Europe. When in 1678 Governor Balthasar Bort had written from Malacca that the Dutch had ‘no one to fear in the Straits’ among the native principalities, the amount of tin received from Perak alone had annually totalled 450,000 lbs. By 1700 the total annual collection was scarcely a ninth of this. In the

20 I have found no modern Malay or Thai equivalent to the place the Dutch called Bengirij. Blagden notes: ’Bangarj: a place on the mainland not far from Ujong Salang (Junk Ceylon) island. Presumably it is the Bangri (properly Bang Khli) which some maps place some distance N. of Papra (properly Pak Phrah) Strait.’ Balthasar Bort, ’Report on Malacca’, Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, V (1927), 134.

21 Bort, 134. ’The contracts made by kings, regents and princes of the places named here have seldom been carried out by them . . . .’

22 Dampier, p. 113.

23 Raychaudhuri, p. 123.

24 Bort, 187.

25 ibid., 149.

26 ibid., 134.
three years and two months during which Bernard Phoonsen governed Malacca only 190,899 lbs. were received in all.\textsuperscript{27} His successors did little better. Governor Bolnar received only 282,716 lbs. between January 1704 and March 1707.\textsuperscript{28} Governor Pieter Rosselaar only 221,134 lbs. from then until October 1709.\textsuperscript{29} At this time Malacca was practically the only source of tin available to the VOC. The tin discovered on Bangka was not made available to the Dutch Company until 1722, when a treaty was concluded with the Sultan of Palembang. The increased amount of tin brought to Malacca in the years 1710 and 1711, a total of 353,566 lbs., may have reflected increased quantities of the mineral available after the mines on Bangka had opened.\textsuperscript{30} But after a sojourn of six years as Governor of Malacca, William Moerman wrote in 1717 that although

the collection of a great quantity of tin was yearly charged by the High Government, 100,000 to 150,000 lbs of that mineral being required by the Fatherland [Holland] alone, still to my regret it has never been possible to satisfy that demand . . . much less to be able to obtain any amount over for the Indian trade . . . ,\textsuperscript{31} despite an increase in the price paid for tin after 1714. A new price of 38 rijksdaalders (rds) — instead of the previous 36 rds — was now paid for each bahar of 375 Dutch lbs. of tin delivered to the Company.

Thus throughout the first two decades of the century the Malaccan officials found it impossible to compete successfully with their Asian and European rivals for Malayan tin though they required it for several branches of their trade. When there were Chinese junks in the native ports the Dutch could get no tin.\textsuperscript{32} In 1711 Chinese merchants, who paid 50 to 55 rds for a bahar of tin, bought between three and nine thousand bahar, 'and shipped it to their homeland'.\textsuperscript{33} The VOC had already learnt in the previous century the difficulty, if not impossibility, of competing with Indian merchants,\textsuperscript{34} who brought with them cloth which they sold at a price far below that charged by the Dutch. Some of the larger Indian traders even set up agents in Kedah and Perak, who bought up tin for their masters,

\textsuperscript{27} Governor Phoonsen’s Report on Malacca, 1704. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Col. Arch. 1569.
\textsuperscript{28} Governor Bolnar’s Report on Malacca, 1707. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Col. Arch. 1636.
\textsuperscript{29} Governor Rooselaar’s Report on Malacca, 1709. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Col. Arch. 1668.
\textsuperscript{30} Governor Six’s Report on Malacca, 1711. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Col. Arch. 1702.
\textsuperscript{31} Governor Moerman’s Report on Malacca, 1717. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Col. Arch. 1787.
\textsuperscript{32} Bolnar, as footnote 28.
\textsuperscript{33} Six, as footnote 30.
\textsuperscript{34} W. Ph. Coolhaas, Generale Missiven van Gouverneur-Generale en Raaden aan Heeren XVII der VOC, The Hague, 1964, II, 314.
leaving little to anyone else but the Johorese.\textsuperscript{35}

The Johore Sultanate, heir to the conquered Malaccan empire, was at that time the most influential Malay power in the area. Its territories stretched from the Selangor and Linggi river basins north of Malacca to the southern tip of the peninsula, excluding about nine miles of coast surrounding the Dutch stronghold. Pahang on the western coast, the many islands of the Riau-Lingga archipelago, and the basin of the Siak river in Sumatra, were also included in the kingdom of Johore.

These territories covered most of the important tin places, and the notables of Johore were very much involved in the trade, to the dissatisfaction of the Dutch. In 1678 the shahbandar of that state had attempted to divert into his own hands deliveries of tin from the Siak river, which had been destined for Malacca.\textsuperscript{36} The Malaccan government thought the solution to this competition had been found when Johore, weakened by wars with Jambi and suffering from internal weakness, finally concluded a commercial treaty with the VOC in 1689. Among other trading privileges in the territories of Johore, the Dutch gained a ‘duty-free monopoly trade in cloth, cash, tin and gold on the River of Siak’.\textsuperscript{37} But on the eve of the next century a new sultan came to power, and repudiated the treaty. By 1700 the Johorese were again very active in the tin trade, and their competition was irksome to the Malaccan government. For

the tin places of Siak, Bengkalis, Selangor and Klang are all the territories of Johore, so that the subjects hold that mineral to deliver it to their overlords, especially the Dato Bendahara, the Laxamana, and the Raja Indra Bongsu, who are the greatest participants in this [trade], who dispose of it with good profit to the Chinese merchants who come yearly to Johore, and to the English.\textsuperscript{38}

Strong competition was also provided by the English, Portuguese and Danish merchants.\textsuperscript{39} The Dutch were unable to contend with this competition. In 1704 the governor of Malacca advocated that the price of tin be increased, and that the town be supplied with more well-equipped guardships, to patrol the Straits ‘as of old’.\textsuperscript{40} These proposals were both rejected. A price rise did not occur until 1714; an attempt to outbid other purchasers for tin was not considered a feasible policy by the government of the VOC, as the Company worked with large overheads and expected to make profits by cheap buying. More ships could not be sent to Malacca at this time as the Company was at war in Java and India. No other measures were undertaken to increase the amount of tin brought to Malacca. In 1713, however, Johore was forced into a new treaty with the VOC,

\textsuperscript{35} Rooselaar, as footnote 29.
\textsuperscript{36} Bort, 133.
\textsuperscript{37} E. Netscher, \textit{De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak}, Batavia, 1870, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{38} Bolnar, as footnote 28.
\textsuperscript{39} ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Phoonsen, as footnote 27, and Moerman, as footnote 31.
and though the Dutch had not sought this primarily in order to remedy the harm that was being done to their tin trade, still they stipulated in the new agreement that ‘Johore shall not prevent the sale of tin to Malacca for 36 rds the bahar’.\textsuperscript{41} This was an attempt to stop the ruler of Johore forcing his subjects to bring the tin they mined to his capital for sale, rather than to Malacca. That ruler, however, avoided ratifying this treaty until 1715, and in effect never complied with it. The Dutch considered using force to put an end to this defiance, but Malacca was not strong enough to move against Johore on its own, and again the central government could not spare the necessary forces.\textsuperscript{42}

Johore was ruled at that time by the Raja Muda, brother of the Sultan, Abdul Jalil. He was a strong, opportunistic prince whose policies of centralising Johorese trade in his own hands were at last to cause a rebellion among his Menangkabau subjects at Siak. But the rebellion and his consequent downfall did not occur until 1717; he had by then ruled about ten years, and had succeeded in attracting a flourishing trade to Johore’s port, Riau. The court had moved to this town on the isle of Bintang at the Raja Muda’s command in 1709. Part of the trade drawn to Riau had been bound for Malacca, and the Johore ruler did not hesitate to use forceful means to attract those traders who would not come by choice to his port. In 1716 the Malaccan customs officer, Anthony van Aldorp, who had been sent to Riau to investigate the sale of spices there, noted that the Johorese were buying tin for from 47 to 49 rds, and re-selling it to the Chinese for 60 to 65 rds the bahar.\textsuperscript{43}

When the Raja Muda was overthrown in 1717, the resulting disruption of Johore’s trade would seem to have benefited the VOC. For over a decade the annual tin collection of Malacca had not risen much above the total of 53,210 lbs. received in 1716.\textsuperscript{44} But the next year the amount almost tripled, totalling in all 149,086 lbs.\textsuperscript{45} In 1719 this figure had risen to 383,300 lbs.,\textsuperscript{46} and during the next five years Malacca commonly sent between 200,000 and 400,000 lbs. of tin to Batavia annually.\textsuperscript{47} It was the first time that century that Malacca had received even enough tin to satisfy the requirements of the European market.

The Batavian government recognised that this improvement was not due to any effort on their part. Though they had authorised another increase in the price to be paid for tin in 1718, they felt that ‘the disturbances in Johore account for most contributions’.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} GM, 26 November 1713 and Netscher, 46.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Malacca to Batavia, 12 August 1714.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Malacca to Batavia, 20 January 1716.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Malacca to Batavia, 5 August 1716.
\item \textsuperscript{45} GM, 30 November 1717.
\item \textsuperscript{46} GM, 5 January 1720.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Governor Van Suchleten’s Report on Malacca, 1727. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Col. Arch. 1966.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Batavia to Malacca, 22 July 1718.
\end{itemize}
the capital of Johore, now returned to the mainland, had been attacked and plundered by the rebellious Menangkabaus from Siak, led by an adventurer called Raja Kechil. The Raja Muda had been slain, and the Sultan fled to Pahang, where he was later murdered. But even before this crisis had arisen, the Raja Muda had encountered a serious check, all the more damaging because it struck at his control of the tin trade. For many years Bugis from Celebes had been coming to the peninsula and settling in the territories of Johore. In 1715 a new group under the leadership of five princes from Boni joined the settlers on the rivers of Linggi and Selangor, north of Malacca. Whereas the earlier Bugis settlers seem to have been content to subject themselves to the rule of Johore, the newcomers aimed to exploit the rich tinfields on their own behalf. The Raja Muda made several unsuccessful attempts to dislodge these Bugis, and Governor Moerman noted with satisfaction that they were damaging the trade of Johore even before the rebellion in Siak occurred.49

Soon after the Bugis had arrived in the Straits, they had begun carrying tin to Malacca, in the hope of exchanging it for powder and shot. They were interlopers in the established cycle of the tin trade, with no sure access to ports and markets. Having defied the power which controlled a large proportion of the traffic, Johore, they had to fight both physically and commercially to establish themselves. The Dutch represented both a ready and convenient market, and a prospective ally. In 1718 the Bugis brought a total of 143,338 lbs. of tin to Malacca.50 Their leader Daing Marewa promised to deliver all the tin of Selangor to the VOC. He requested the Company to accept himself and his people as subjects.51 But the Dutch refused to grant this, nor would they supply the Bugis with any ammunition. They feared the rapid growth of the power of this group more than the rivalry of the Malays, and refused to be drawn into the local struggles on their behalf; but they remained very willing to receive tin from the Bugis. The Malaccan governor believed that although Daing Marewa "at present delivers most of Selangor's tin to the Company, as he has no better market . . . [he] will fulfil his promise . . . only until he can get a better profit somewhere else . . . "52

His opinion was soon borne out by events. Taking advantage of the continuing quarrel between Raja Kechil and the party of the exiled Sultan Abdul Jalil, the Bugis gave their support to Suleiman, the latter's son. In 1722 they installed him as Sultan of Johore, and re-captured Riau from Raja Kechil, along with the royal insignia. In return they gained a predominant rôle in the government of Johore. Daing Marewa became Raja Muda, and other important offices went to Bugis captains. The Bugis were now absorbed into the old order,
and their deliveries of tin to the VOC rapidly dwindled. During the whole year 1726-7, the Malacca customs books have no record of any tin delivered by Bugis.53 Certainly the latter had no need to rely on the Malaccan market in the following decade, for trade at Riau flourished once more.54 The Malaccan government renewed their complaints that the frequent visits of foreign European merchants, especially English, to Riau, damaged their efforts to collect tin.55 By the end of the seventeen-thirties they regarded Riau as a nest of pirates, and a bane to their trade with Java.56

Largely as a result of these developments the authorities of the VOC at Malacca were again finding it difficult to collect the amounts of tin required for the Netherlands and markets in India by 1727. An additional handicap to the efforts of the Malaccan government lay in the orders issues by the Governor-General in 1723 that in future no more than 36 rds the bahar was to be given for tin.57 The deliveries, which had amounted to 300,000 and 400,000 lbs. a year in the early seventeen-twenties, soon fell off. The decision of the central government of the VOC to reduce the price of tin in the midst of such success would be difficult to explain, if Malacca’s trade alone were involved. But that town was a mere link in the complicated chain of the VOC’s trade, and its interests must be subordinated to what was felt to be the good of the whole. In 1722 the Company had concluded a treaty with the sultan of Palembang which gave it a monopoly of the tin produced on Bangka. This was to be delivered at a cheaper rate than Malaccan tin.58 This new arrangement, coinciding as it did with the large annual deliveries at Malacca, must have tempted the Batavian government to try lessening costs at Malacca.

It was soon apparent that Malacca was not able to attract adequate supplies of tin at this reduced price, and attempts to cut costs were abandoned. By 1733 the Malacca price had returned to 40 rds the bahar, and in the following years it climbed steadily higher. By 1745 the VOC was paying up to 48 rds the bahar for Malayan tin. The China market was expanding, and the central government was more anxious than ever to obtain large supplies of tin, which was ‘a highly regarded ballast for all Europeans to Europe and China . . . [and] gives a profit of 30-35% despite the heightening of prices’.59 New attempts were made to stimulate deliveries. The old policy of paying for tin with cloth (which the Malays could obtain more cheaply from Indian and country merchants) was completely abandoned, and

53 Malacca to Batavia, 31 January 1727, and 10 November 1727.
56 GM, 5 April 1739.
57 Van Suchtelen, as footnote 47.
59 GM, 31 December 1745.
instead the Malaccan officials were authorised to pay in the currency requested by the seller, rather than in that which was most advantageous to the Company. The most popular coin in the Straits at that time was the silver Spanish Dollar or Reaal of Eight, worth about 4/6d sterling. It was used throughout Asia, and supplies were needed for all branches of the VOC's trade. For this reason the Company's rulers had been unwilling to allow payment in this coin, if it could be avoided. They had attempted to use a form of copper 'paijment' for this purpose, but the Asian traders were not eager to accept this. But these concessions failed to attract more tin to Malacca, and supplies there declined steadily during the thirties and early forties.

In 1743 Baron Gustave van Imhoff became Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company. He proceeded to initiate a number of policies which were intended to re-invigorate the Company's flagging trade. Either directly or indirectly his rule stimulated the efforts of the Malaccan government to capture a larger rôle in the tin trade for the VOC. The Malaccan authorities proposed 'to get a contract with Linggi, which has often been plundered by pirates . . . to deliver all their tin to the Company at a fixed price . . .', presumably in return for protection from the pirates. The people of Linggi appear to have considered the cure worse than the disease, and turned down the offer. The new governor, W. B. Albinus, was more successful in his efforts, however, and in 1746 he concluded a treaty with the Malay state of Perak. The Raja of Perak agreed that all the country's tin was to be delivered to the Dutch at the fixed price of 34 Spanish Reaals (about 42 rds per bahar). The Governor-General ordered the reoccupation of the old VOC fort on the Dindings islands, near the mouth of the Perak river, but soon re-directed the garrison upstream to a position on the river, where a stone fort was built.

The conclusion of this treaty marked a turning point in the VOC's attempts to secure a significant proportion of the tin produced in Malaya. Its results were soon visible in the greatly increased amounts of tin which Malacca received. Governor Albinus described this improvement as he prepared to leave Malacca in 1750.

As a result of these arrangements I had the satisfaction last year of not only completely fulfilling the requirements of the home country and the Indies to the amount of 420,250 lbs (that is, 200,250 lbs for the Netherlands, 200,000 lbs for China and 20,000 lbs for Surat) but also of being able to send 100,125 lbs to Batavia, thus making a total of 520,375 lbs. Furthermore, out of the residue at present available in the go-downs here and in Perak, together with that which has been contracted for in the hinterlands, it will be easy to find the required amount for China, which has been fixed at an amount equal to the annual shipment to Batavia.  

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60 Glamann, p. 50.
61 GM, 31 December 1743.
62 Heeres and Stapel, V, 430.
63 Brian Harrison, 'Malacca in the 18th Century', JMBRAS, VII (1954), 26-27.
The governor believed that Malacca's tin trade now depended mainly upon Perak, and that success or failure in this sphere hung on the Company's continued good relations with that state.

The VOC had had earlier treaties with Perak, and had learnt to be wary in their dealings with that state. In the seventeenth century the state had been the major supplier of tin to Malacca, but the arrangement had been forced on the people of Perak, and they complied with it reluctantly. Twice in forty years, in 1651 and again in 1690, Dutch garrisons stationed near the mouth of the Perak river had been massacred by the Malays of Perak. The post had been abandoned after the second of these onslaughts, and Malacca had made no effort to renew contact with this troublesome state until the 1746 treaty was negotiated. The willingness of the Raja of Perak at this time, not only to renew the old commercial privileges of the VOC, but even to allow the Dutch to build and occupy a stone fort within his territory, reflect the desire to win an ally against a more feared enemy. The growing power of the Bugis in the Straits area was cause enough for the Perak ruler to feel insecure. The immigrants were now firmly in control of Riau, Selangor and Linggi, and were as eager as the Dutch to control the tin mining areas on the Peninsula. Soon after their triumph in Johore they had interfered in the affairs of Kedah, and in 1743 they had attacked Perak. The Malay factions of the peninsula were beginning to regard the Malaccan government as an ally in the struggle against Bugis domination, and it was in this spirit that the Raja of Perak promised that the tin of his country should be delivered to the Dutch.

This idea proved constant enough in the policies of Perak to ensure Malacca an ample supply of tin during the next forty years. But within the state there were still powerful critics of this conciliatory attitude to the VOC. When the ruler who first concluded the new agreement died, his successor seemed for a time very much inclined to throw in his lot with the Bugis. The Resident in Perak had truly to be a 'man of understanding', if he was to serve his Company well in that post. The new ruler was persuaded not to repudiate the treaty, and later princes seemed more inclined to maintain the alliance with Malacca, but there always remained dissident elements in the court and discontented chiefs who would have preferred to ship their tin to Kedah or Selangor and sell it to the numerous English and other foreign merchants who called at those ports. Nevertheless the Dutch retained their advantage, and renewed their treaty with Perak in 1753, 1766 and again in 1774. On the last occasion they even induced the Raja to accept a reduction of 2 Spanish Reaals per bahar on the price of tin. The factory on the Perak river was maintained,

65 Netscher, 62, and passim.
67 Governor Crans' Report on Malacca, 1777.
despite the complaints of the Batavian government about the heavy costs it incurred, until it was captured by the English during the fourth Anglo-Dutch war in 1781. It was re-established after the peace.

Throughout this period only one setback of any significance occurred in the delivery of tin to Malacca. In the late seventeen-seventies a drought reduced the flow of the Malayan rivers, and consequently the amount of tin produced declined.\textsuperscript{68} Large English exports of the mineral from the Malay ports at that time aggravated the scarcity. But in 1766 the annual delivery of tin had become so large that the Malaccan government was ordered not to accept more than 500,000 lbs.\textsuperscript{69} In the second half of the century, in contrast to the previous fifty years, it seemed that large supplies of tin were easily obtained at Malacca.

One result of this great improvement was that after 1760 permission was granted to sell tin at Malacca.\textsuperscript{70} Previously all supplies had been reserved for shipment to Batavia, China or India. Merchants passing the Straits who sought a cargo of tin to take to China had had to obtain it at one of the Malay ports, or detour to Batavia.\textsuperscript{71} As the trade with China grew in the second half of the century, these became much more numerous, and provided a large market for Malaccan tin. This traffic proved to be very lucrative, and Malaccan revenues benefited not only from the actual profits of the sale of tin, but also from the increase in customs and harbour dues which occurred. The Batavian government encouraged this profitable traffic.\textsuperscript{72} When tin supplies fell off because of the drought in the late seventeen-seventies, however, they did not hesitate to renew the prohibition of the sale of tin at Malacca, to save it for more important markets.\textsuperscript{73}

The Malaccan officers had not been content to rely on Perak for their tin supplies, promising as this arrangement appeared to be. Governor Albinus had also spoken of the importance of obtaining supplies from the Malaccan hinterland, from the Malays of Naning and Rembau, judging this source to be second only to Perak.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, in 1759 a Malaccan governor argued that the tin of those areas was finer and less mixed with dirt and other impurities than that of Perak. Trade with these states, he maintained, was much more convenient and advantageous to Malacca than the trade with Perak, as the inhabitants of these neighbouring places could bring their tin down river to the fortress, and this new traffic would also be profitable to the small traders of Malacca. This trade could be secured if permission was granted to pay the people of Naning and

\textsuperscript{68} ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Batavia to Malacca, 3 August, 1764.
\textsuperscript{70} Realia. Register op de Generale Resolutions van het Kasteel Batavia, 1632-1805, Leiden, 1882, II, 197.
\textsuperscript{71} A Voyage to the East Indies in 1747-8, London, 1762, p. 318.
\textsuperscript{72} GM, 31 December 1782.
\textsuperscript{73} Batavia to Malacca, 24 June 1777.
\textsuperscript{74} Harrison, 27.
Rembau an extra 4 rds per bahar for their tin. Then they would no longer smuggle it to Selangor for sale to the English. But the central government declined to allow this, and the tin of the hinterland continued to elude the Malaccan authorities, along with that of Selangor and Linggi.

For Malacca was not the only port to benefit from the increase in the traffic through the Straits, and large quantities of tin were being shipped from the native states, despite the improved supplies of the Dutch. Though treaties had been made by the VOC with Selangor and Linggi, the trade of the English and other foreign merchants who brought opium and Indian cloth to these ports to exchange for tin continually increased. Kedah and Riau were also flourishing. It was not a decrease in the amount of tin being carried away from the Straits by the English, as the VOC's directors in the Netherlands had rather hopefully suggested, that had made it possible for the Malaccan government to collect large supplies of tin at this time. The Batavian government pointed out that the amount of tin sold by the English in China was evidence that they continued to buy large quantities of the mineral. In 1777 English traders exported 501,250 lbs. from Riau alone, and in the following year carried another 237,500 lbs. from that port. The amounts bought by the English were so large that the Malaccan authorities complained that their own supplies were shrinking again. English merchants paid around 44 Spanish Reaals, or 55 rds, for a bahar of tin, and were now loading more tin, the Malaccans believed, than the Chinese junks. Though the latter and the Indians still carried large amounts of tin from the peninsula each year, the English had by 1780 taken the foremost place in this traffic.

The Bugis, also, had greatly enlarged their own role in it. During the last four decades of the century they became the major collectors and distributors of tin in the archipelago. They controlled the tin places of Linggi and Selangor, and their influence extended to many other areas. Before Junk Ceylon became involved in the wars of Siam and Burma, and its trade consequently dwindled, the Bugis had carried on a very important trade on the island. They exchanged opium and cloth, brought to Riau by English and Indian traders, for tin, often waiting many weeks to receive a full cargo, and giving payment on credit while the mineral was collected. Then they returned to Riau with their cargo of tin, and sold it to the English for yet more cloth and opium. In 1756-8 they had successfully withstood the combined efforts of the Dutch and the Malays to break their power in the region. Soon after this confrontation, Sultan Sulei-
man of Johore, leader of the hostile Malay faction, died. The new sultan was a babe in arms, and the leader of the Bugis, a nephew of the first Bugis Raja Muda of Johore, returned to Riau from Selangor in 1761 to become regent of Johore. The power of the Bugis grew accordingly. The new regent, Daing Kemboja, had been named Raja Muda several years before, but had preferred to live in Selangor away from the hostile Malay court. Having narrowly survived one attack on his power, Daing Kemboja did his best in future to conciliate the Dutch, without actually damaging his own interests. He did not scruple, however, to continue to welcome foreign traders to Riau, which prospered under his rule, and became an important entrepôt for the goods of the archipelago. The VOC did not feel equal to another contest with this prince. More and more traders called there seeking a cargo of tin, pepper and jungle goods to sell in China. Tin was now being imported to Riau from Bangka, though according to Dutch sources only the regent was permitted to trade in the mineral. He bought it for 36 Spanish Reaals from Banka and sold it again at Riau for 40 Spanish Reaals or more.

The Dutch were finally moved to make another attempt to curtail this trade after the death of Daing Kemboja in 1777. By this time the English trade at Riau had grown to such an extent that the VOC feared that its own supplies of tin would suffer again. Its treaties with both Palembang and Johore were being disregarded. First it was hoped that, with the co-operation of the Sultan of Palembang, Riau’s supplies of tin from Bangka could be cut off. But this tactic failed, and in 1783, on the pretext of a quarrel over the capture of an English trading vessel at Riau, Malacca sent a force to blockade the Bugis headquarters. This course also seems likely to have failed, with perhaps severe results for Malacca, but for the opportune arrival of reinforcements. A state naval force, sent to the Indies to aid the weakened forces of the Company, was diverted to Malacca. Riau and Selangor were captured, and a Bugis force besieging Malacca was defeated and scattered. A Dutch residency was established at Riau, and the Bugis left the port. The Dutch appeared to have destroyed their greatest rival in the tin trade. In effect, they only hastened the establishment of an English settlement in the Straits. The trade to China had become far too important to the English to allow themselves to be dependent on Malacca for tin and the other products of the area, even if they had not felt the strategic necessity to have a port of call in the Straits. In 1786 such a port was set up at Pulau Penang opposite Kedah, and soon developed into a very important market for the tin of the peninsula. The Dutch also unwittingly struck a blow at their own trade with Perak, for after the power of the Bugis had been broken in 1784, the ruler of that state no longer felt

82 Netscher, 109.
83 GM, 31 December 1779.
84 GM, 31 December 1777.
the need of Malacca's support, and refused to renew the agreement
to deliver tin to the VOC.

This drew from the government of Malacca one more effort, an
attempt to break with the old policy of striving to monopolise, if not
all, then sections of the tin output. Governor Pieter de Bruijn urged
after the capture of Riau that Malacca be allowed to adopt freer
trading practices. If tin, cloth and opium were available to all comers
at Malacca as they had been at Riau, the latter port's trade would
be attracted to the Dutch town; if not, another Riau would soon
spring up somewhere outside the VOC's jurisdiction. But the weight
of the Company's trading practices were against such a change in
Malacca's role, and within a year Penang was established. Even in
the face of this new competition de Bruijn believed that Malacca
had many advantages. If only the price was made competitive, and
other unpopular features of Dutch policy (such as the occasional
refusal to accept the full quota of tin delivered from Palembang,
despite the fact that the entire output of that state had been con-
tracted for and all possible means had been taken by the Dutch to
discourage other buyers), were discontinued, Malacca could still
outstrip Penang as a market for tin. But these reforms were not
carried out, and by 1795 Malacca's complement of men had been
reduced, a sure sign of its declining commercial importance.

Tomé Pires once exclaimed that 'a Solomon was needed to govern
Malacca, and it deserves one'. But instead of a Solomon, the Dutch
East India Company ruled the town, a large, somewhat unwieldy
organisation which was at this time fast losing ground to its com-
petitors in Asia. As the events of this period show, the Company's
agents at Malacca had little or no control of trade in the area, and
far from enjoying a monopoly of tin, were often unable to obtain
the supplies they needed. Their success in this depended wholly upon
such factors as the need of one or other of the local states for sup-
port. If the Bugis may be classed as natives of the area (as opposed
to the Chinese or the Dutch), the native princes obviously still sub-
stantially controlled the trade in this product, and enjoyed real
independence of action. One might, therefore, agree with the Dutch
sociologist, J. C. van Leur, that Europeans had no real advantages
in their dealings with the princes of this area before 1800. That is
not to say that Europeans did not have an important influence on
the development of the tin trade at this time. The increasing number
of English merchants passing through the Straits, for instance, pro-
vided the markets and exchange goods which made the trade of the
Bugis possible, and probably stimulated a larger production of tin.

85 Brian Harrison, 'Trade in the Straits of Malacca in 1785', JMBRAS, XXVI
(1953), 57.
86 J. de Hullu, 'De Engelsen op Pulu Pinang', BKI, LXXVII (1921), 605-14.
87 ibid.
88 Pires, 283.
This in turn drew Chinese miners to the peninsula by the seventies. Dutch support of the Malay states against the Bugis may have prevented the latter from gaining an even more absolute control of the region.

In the struggle which centred on the Straits of Malacca at this time, no one power, European or native, emerged as a dominant force, but together they interacted to shape the development of the peninsula. And in this interaction their mutual desire to profit from the tin trade played no small part.

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