



Baluara Port in Maritime Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines Baluara Port, located in Baluara Village, Batukara Subdistrict, Muna Regency. The port functions as a docking and operational site for wooden motor vessels and speedboats, facilitating passenger transport and the loading and unloading of goods along the Baluara–Raha and Raha–Baluara routes. This study employs a maritime historical approach, applying the historical method as formulated by Gottschalk (1975: 18–32), which consists of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. In addition, field observations and interviews were conducted at the research site to complement documentary sources. The findings indicate that Baluara Port was officially inaugurated in 1996. Since then, wooden motor vessels have operated regularly, transporting both passengers and agricultural produce. These vessels have a passenger capacity of approximately 35–40 persons and can carry cargo loads of 2–3 tons, primarily consisting of bananas, coconuts, copra, and other agricultural products cultivated by the local community. In the early 2000s, speedboats were introduced at Baluara Port. These vessels serve functions similar to wooden motor vessels, accommodating commercial goods, 20–25 passengers, and motorcycles. Both speedboats and wooden motor vessels operate on the Baluara–Raha and Raha–Baluara routes, with an average travel time of approximately one hour. From a social perspective, Baluara Port serves as a meeting point and a space of interaction for communities traveling between Baluara and Raha. Economically, the port facilitates and streamlines the transportation of agricultural commodities from Baluara and its surrounding areas to Raha. Thus, both socially and economically, Baluara Port plays a significant role in supporting the livelihood and mobility of the Baluara community and its neighboring regions.

Keywords: Port Functions, Maritime Transport, Baluara, Muna, Maritime History.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic state composed of more than 17,000 islands, both large and small, stretching across the equator from approximately 95° East to 141° East longitude and from 6° North to 11° South latitude. Its coastline extends approximately 81,000 kilometers, while nearly two-thirds of its total territory consists of seas, straits, and rivers. Given this highly strategic geographical position, it is unsurprising that Indonesia is widely recognized as an archipelagic nation (Wahyono, 2007). Indonesia's status as an archipelagic state has been formally acknowledged by the international community through the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). As a consequence of this recognition, Indonesia possesses extensive maritime territory, encompassing waters surrounding all of its islands up to 12 nautical miles from their coastlines. Based on the 1982 UNCLOS provisions, Indonesia's total maritime area covers approximately 5.9 million square kilometers, consisting of 3.2 million square kilometers of territorial waters and 2.7 million square kilometers of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters (Anshoriy Ch & Arbaningsih, 2008).

In light of this vast maritime expanse, the development of ports and maritime transportation infrastructure becomes essential to connect the numerous islands, whether large or small, separated by open seas. Such development plays a crucial role in facilitating inter-island mobility and supporting the socio-economic activities of coastal and island communities (Herman et al., 2022). The presence of a port on an island plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth mobility of people and goods transported by sea. As a settlement located across maritime waters, Baluara Village is equipped with a local port that has served as a vital transportation hub since its operation began in 1996. Classified as a local port, it facilitates maritime routes connecting Baluara and Raha the capital of Muna Regency and vice versa. Locally referred to as Baluara Port, this facility continues to function, as of 2025, as a docking site for wooden motor vessels and speedboats, as well as a point for passenger embarkation and disembarkation and the loading and unloading

of goods, including plantation products and basic commodities (Interview with La Muru, 11 September 2025).

The principal plantation commodities produced by the Baluara community include coconuts, copra, cashew nuts, bananas, and other agricultural products. These commodities are transported by wooden motor vessels via Baluara Port and marketed in Raha. The income generated from these sales is used not only to purchase essential household necessities but also to provide long-term financial security, particularly as savings for old age. Basic commodities procured from Raha include rice, kerosene, cooking spices, cooking oil, flour, and other daily household necessities (Baluara Village Profile, 2024).

The transportation of these goods is carried out by both wooden motor vessels and speedboats, each playing a significant role in facilitating the movement of merchandise, passengers, and motorcycles. Given its strategic function in sustaining local mobility and economic exchange, Baluara Port presents a compelling subject for maritime historical inquiry. In particular, this study seeks to examine the historical background of the port's establishment, its functional roles within local maritime networks, and its social and economic impacts on the Baluara community and surrounding areas.

METHOD

This study constitutes a maritime historical inquiry employing the historical method as formulated by Gottschalk (1975), which comprises four principal stages: heuristics (source collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. In addition to archival and documentary research, the study is complemented by fieldwork, including interviews and direct observation at the research site, in order to enrich and corroborate the available sources. The research is structured around three analytical scopes: spatial, temporal, and disciplinary. The spatial scope refers to the primary object of study, namely Baluara Port in Muna Regency.

The temporal scope covers the period from 1996 to 2025. The year 1996 marks the official inauguration of Baluara Port as a local port connecting Baluara and Raha, thereby representing a significant turning point in the development of maritime transportation in the area. The year 2025 is designated as the endpoint of the study due to recent developments in maritime transport services, including the addition of speedboats with a passenger capacity of up to 35 persons. The introduction of this vessel type has further facilitated maritime mobility for the local community and surrounding regions. From a disciplinary perspective, this research is situated within the field of maritime history, with particular attention to local maritime infrastructure, transportation networks, and their socio-economic implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Overview of the Research Area

This research was conducted at Baluara Port, located in Baluara Village, Batukara Subdistrict, Muna Regency. Geographically, the village is situated in the eastern part of Muna and remains part of the mainland of Buton Island. Administratively, however, Baluara is incorporated into Muna Regency (Baluara Village Profile, 2025).

The regency capital, Raha, is separated from Baluara by maritime waters. Consequently, residents of Baluara who require administrative services such as the issuance of Family Cards, Identity Cards, and other official documents must travel by sea to the regency capital. Likewise, agricultural products cultivated by the local community are transported via Baluara Port to Raha for commercial distribution. The primary vessels used for the transportation of goods and passengers are wooden motor vessels and speedboats. These two types of vessels play a crucial role in maintaining connectivity between Baluara and the administrative center of Muna Regency. In this context, Baluara Port functions not only as a transportation facility but also as an essential maritime link sustaining administrative access and economic exchange between peripheral island communities and the regional center.

a. Background of the Establishment of Baluara Port

The establishment of Baluara Port as a local or community-based port was driven by several interrelated factors. First, maritime transportation facilities in Baluara were highly limited at the time, particularly with regard to the availability and operational capacity of wooden motor vessels. This limitation was paradoxical given Baluara's close geographical proximity to Raha, the capital of Muna Regency and the center of regional administration. Second, the loading and unloading of goods along the open shoreline of Baluara posed significant practical difficulties for the local community. Third, an increasing number of passengers expressed dissatisfaction and discomfort with the existing travel conditions between Baluara and Raha. These factors collectively prompted wooden motor vessel owners and the village government to initiate the construction of Baluara Port as a community port (Interview with Karania, 9 September 2025).

Prior to the establishment of Baluara Port, cargo handling and passenger embarkation and disembarkation were conducted without any formal port infrastructure. This condition persisted for many years. The process of loading and unloading commercial goods onto wooden motor vessels lacked a fixed

location, as goods were not centralized in a designated area. Consequently, vessels were required to move from one point of the shoreline to another to complete cargo operations.

In response to the increasing volume of cargo and passenger traffic, construction of Baluara Port began in early 1996 through a collaborative initiative between the village government and wooden motor vessel owners (Baluara Village Profile, 2024). The port was initially built using modest and locally available materials, consisting of wooden beam pilings and a plank deck. At the time of its inauguration, the port measured approximately 50 meters in length and 2 meters in width, with a water depth of 4–5 meters. It was capable of accommodating wooden motor vessels with cargo capacities of 2–3 tons, as well as small *katinting* boats owned by local fishermen. From the early 2000s to 2025, Baluara Port has continued to develop, both in terms of its physical infrastructure and the types of maritime transportation serving the area (Interview with La Ode Gane, 10 September 2025). This evolution reflects the growing significance of the port within local maritime networks and its expanding role in supporting regional mobility and economic exchange.



Picture 1. The Physical Infrastructure of Baluara Port.

The figure above illustrates the transformation of Baluara Port from a modest wooden structure originally constructed with timber pilings and plank flooring into a permanent port facility. The supporting pillars and deck have since been rebuilt using reinforced concrete construction, indicating a significant improvement in infrastructural durability and capacity. In addition, the installation of port lighting has enhanced operational safety and enabled community activities to continue during nighttime hours.

In terms of maritime transportation, the development of Baluara Port has also been marked by the introduction of speedboats, complementing the previously dominant wooden motor vessels. Both types of vessels perform similar functions, serving as primary means of transporting goods, passengers, and motorcycles.

At present, the physical condition of Baluara Port is considered safe and conducive for docking wooden motor vessels and speedboats operating along the Baluara–Raha and Raha–Baluara routes. This infrastructural transformation reflects not only material modernization but also the strengthening of local maritime connectivity and the consolidation of the port's role within the regional transportation network.

b. The Functions of Baluara Port and Its Impact on the Local Community and Surrounding Areas

A port is generally defined as a place where vessels dock and anchor, where cargo is loaded and unloaded, and where passengers embark and disembark through facilities protected from strong waves, winds, and currents (Lapian, 2008). This conceptualization is highly relevant to the condition of Baluara Port. Economically and functionally, the port serves not only as a docking site for wooden motor vessels and speedboats, but also as a center for cargo handling and passenger mobility. Wooden motor vessels operating on the Baluara–Raha and Raha–Baluara routes have a cargo capacity of approximately 2–3 tons, can accommodate 35–40 passengers, and transport around 20–25 motorcycles. In comparison, speedboats have relatively lower capacity. They typically carry 20–25 passengers and approximately 10 motorcycles (Baluara Port Profile, 2025).

In terms of goods transport from Baluara to Raha, particularly plantation commodities, speedboats are limited to lighter cargo such as bananas, chilies, and vegetables. Likewise, basic necessities transported from Raha to Baluara such as cooking oil, rice (in quantities of 5–25 kilograms), and other household goods must remain within manageable weight limits. Speedboats are constructed from fiberglass, a material that is lightweight, durable, and corrosion-resistant. However, despite their structural strength, their operational function is restricted to lighter cargo loads. Transporting heavy goods would compromise vessel stability, reduce passenger comfort, and pose significant safety risks. The coexistence of wooden motor vessels and speedboats at Baluara Port thus reflects a functional differentiation within the local maritime transport

system. Wooden motor vessels remain essential for bulk cargo transport, while speedboats provide faster mobility for passengers and lighter goods. Together, these vessels sustain the maritime connectivity between Baluara and the regency capital of Raha, reinforcing the port's strategic role in supporting regional socio-economic activities. The following figure illustrates the wooden motor vessels and speedboats predominantly used by the people of Baluara and surrounding areas for travel to the city of Raha.



Picture 2. Wooden Motor Vessels and Speedboats.

In comparison to speedboats, wooden motor vessels remain superior in terms of cargo capacity. Constructed primarily from durable timber resistant to prolonged exposure to seawater, these vessels are specifically designed to transport relatively heavy goods, including plantation commodities such as copra and coconuts, in addition to passengers and motorcycles. They are also capable of carrying essential goods required by the local community, including rice (in quantities ranging from 5 to 50 kilograms), flour, household equipment, and other daily necessities. Despite their differences in cargo capacity, both wooden motor vessels and speedboats require approximately one hour to complete the Baluara–Raha or Raha–Baluara route (Baluara Port Profile, 2024).

The cost of transporting goods from Baluara Port to Raha, particularly plantation commodities, is generally calculated based on volume or unit. For instance, copra is charged at approximately IDR 200,000 per ton, while bananas are charged per basket at IDR 5,000 each. The transportation fee for motorcycles is IDR 10,000 per unit, and passenger fares are set at IDR 25,000 per person (Interview with La Anyang, 11 September 2025). Revenue obtained from the sale of plantation products in Raha is typically used to purchase daily necessities not locally available in Baluara, such as rice, flour, cooking oil, salt, and other household supplies.

Thus, both economically and socially, Baluara Port exerts a considerable impact on the local community and surrounding areas. Economically, it facilitates the circulation of agricultural commodities and ensures access to essential goods. Socially, it enhances mobility and strengthens interaction between peripheral communities in eastern Muna and the regency capital. In this regard, Baluara Port functions not merely as a physical infrastructure facility, but as a vital maritime nexus that sustains regional connectivity and supports the livelihood strategies of island-based communities.

CONCLUSION

Baluara Port is located in the eastern part of Muna Island and geographically remains within the mainland of Buton Island. Historically, its establishment as a local port was shaped by several interrelated factors: (1) the limited availability of maritime transportation facilities, particularly wooden motor vessels; (2) the practical difficulties experienced by the community in conducting loading and unloading activities along the open shoreline; and (3) the increasing number of complaints from passengers regarding discomfort and inefficiency in traveling between Baluara and Raha. These conditions collectively motivated wooden motor vessel owners and the Baluara village government to initiate the construction of Baluara Port.

Initially built in early 1996 using modest and locally available materials wooden beam pilings and plank flooring the port measured approximately 50 meters in length and 2 meters in width, accommodating wooden motor vessels with cargo capacities of 2–3 tons. From the early 2000s through 2025, Baluara Port underwent continuous development, both in terms of physical infrastructure and maritime transportation services. The former wooden structure has since been transformed into a permanent facility constructed

with reinforced concrete pilings and decking. The addition of port lighting has further enhanced safety and enabled nighttime activities, reflecting the port's growing operational capacity and institutional consolidation.

Economically, Baluara Port functions as a docking site for wooden motor vessels and speedboats, as well as a hub for cargo handling and passenger mobility along the Baluara–Raha and Raha–Baluara routes. Wooden motor vessels possess cargo capacities of 2–3 tons, can accommodate 35–40 passengers, and transport approximately 20–25 motorcycles. In contrast, speedboats have lower capacity, carrying 20–25 passengers and around 10 motorcycles. Both types of vessels complete the maritime crossing within approximately one hour. Passenger fares are set at IDR 25,000 per adult, motorcycle transport at IDR 15,000 per unit, while commercial goods are charged per ton or per basket, depending on the commodity. Socially and economically, the existence of Baluara Port has exerted a significant impact on the local community and surrounding areas. It has facilitated the circulation of agricultural commodities, improved access to essential goods, and enhanced mobility between eastern Muna and the regency capital. More broadly, Baluara Port exemplifies how small-scale, community-initiated maritime infrastructure can strengthen regional connectivity and sustain the livelihood strategies of island-based societies within Indonesia's broader archipelagic context.

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