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decolonisation and the partition of South Asia,
and Singapore history.

"A state-of-the-art history of the island nation...
the authors have produced a brilliant yet accessible synthesis of
Singapore's complex history from the 14th century to the present day.
A must-read for scholars and general audiences alike."

Peter A. Coclanis
Albert R. Newsome Distinguished Professor of History
and Director of the Global Research Institute,
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, USA

"A comprehensive study... this work encourages
the reader to see Singapore's history as a linear-cyclical
construction, moving away from the typical
event-oriented history."

Goh Geok Yian
Associate Chair (Research) and Associate Professor,
School of Humanities, Nanyang Technological
University, Singapore

"Looks set to become the definitive history of
Singapore... marries fresh scholarship and rich visuals
in a narrative of Singapore as an evolving port-city
that is sweeping and comprehensive."

Kennie Ting
Director, Asian Civilisations Museum and Peranakan Museum,
Author of *Singapore 1819: A Living Legacy*

"An accessible, well-documented and definitive
multi-disciplinary study of Singapore's history."

Kenneth Hall
Professor of History,
Ball State University, USA

"The contest between a regional-local perspective
and an emphasis on external agency is felt throughout
the narrative of this book. This reflects Singapore's
struggle to understand itself from a regional and
international perspective, as well as to view its past
within the *longue durée*. There are inherent tensions of
such approaches with the national framing of history."

Imran bin Tajudeen
Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture,
National University of Singapore

SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS
A HISTORY OF SINGAPORE

KWA CHONG GUAN
DEREK HENG
PETER BORSCHBERG
TAN TAI YONG

SEVEN
HUNDRED
YEARS

A HISTORY OF
SINGAPORE

Assessments of Singapore's history invariably revolve
around Sir Stamford Raffles' arrival in 1819. Before this
date – we've been told – "nothing very much appears
to have happened in Singapore". Pre-1819 Singapore
was a sleepy, historically insignificant fishing village,
little more than the "occasional resort of pirates".

This ambitious book, co-written by four of Singapore's
foremost historians, offers an assertive re-evaluation
of that view. Drawing on a multi-disciplinary range of
archival, textual and cartographical records, as well as
the latest archaeological discoveries, the authors cast a
singular historical trajectory for Singapore over the past
seven centuries, animating its history like never before.

Written in a compelling and accessible manner,
and richly illustrated with more than 200 artefacts,
photographs, maps, art works and ephemera, this
volume builds upon the foundations of an earlier book,
Singapore: A 700-Year History. Extensively rewritten to
incorporate ground-breaking research findings, *Seven
Hundred Years: A History of Singapore* widens the
historical lens and offers a vital new perspective on
the story of Singapore.

SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS

A HISTORY OF SINGAPORE

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

This book offers a complete rewrite of *Singapore: A 700-Year History – From Early Emporium to World City*, published exactly ten years ago. The original authors, now joined by Peter Borschberg, felt that the occasion of the Bicentennial Commemoration warranted a reminder that Singapore has a history pre-dating the arrival of Stamford Raffles by some five centuries. This volume presents a possible approach to rethinking the significance of Raffles' establishment of a British station on Singapore.

We thank the Singapore Bicentennial Office for supporting our effort in bringing out this new volume. Without the encouragement and unstinting support of its Executive Director, Gene Tan, and his staff, the gestation of this book would have been prolonged. In particular, we single out the editorial skills of Yap Koon Hong in weaving the disparate styles of the four co-authors into a cogent and readable narrative. Additional writing of box stories was contributed by staff of the Bicentennial Office's Content team, including Koon Hong, Joshua Sim and Syafiqah Jaffar. We also appreciate Chang Yueh Siang's efforts in coordinating the final stages of the book's production. We thank the National Library Board, who led the project management, for their support and supervision of the publication process. We are grateful to Lee Geok Boi and Tan Li Jen for their editorial assistance in working on the many drafts that eventually led to the final version. Finally, Glenn Wray efficiently and sympathetically coordinated Marshall Cavendish's production of our book, for which we are grateful.

This book sums up the evidence we have been collecting on the long history of Singapore, our reflections, and writing on that material. We are now in a position to propose a more defined linear-cyclical time frame and more in-depth historical information for narrating this 700-year history of Singapore than ten years ago. We hope this book provides a more convincing response to K.G. Tregonning's and C.M. Turnbull's challenge to connect Singapore's historical development before 1800 to its development after 1800.

We have also sought to rise to Tregonning's other challenge of writing our history from an Asian perspective, rather than a European one that makes Singapore's past a part of British colonial history. Our close reading of the evidence suggests that the underlying plot or theme of an autonomous history of Singapore may lie in the shifting and evolving harbours or ports around which a settlement or city developed. Writing Singapore's history has focused largely on the city that emerged to service the growing port Raffles established. Our reconstruction shows, however, that at least twice in Singapore's long history there were thriving ports or harbours with their supporting settlements on this island. What connected these harbour-settlements and port-cities, or aspiring global city today, are the long cycles of the maritime history of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. This history of Singapore therefore attempts to look at Singapore from the sea.

For the images illustrating this volume, we have attempted to draw the majority of them from the collections of the National Archives, the National Library and the museums of the National Heritage Board. These illustrations demonstrate the extent and depth of our national collections on our history. The images, especially the maps, are not supplements or illustrations adorning the text, but critical evidence for our reconstruction of Singapore's history. Contained in these maps and images are a history of Singapore.

Kwa Chong Guan
Derek Heng
Peter Borschberg
Tan Tai Yong

27 April 2019

S. Rajaratnam addressing the University of Singapore History Society in 1964. Rajaratnam wrote history as he witnessed it and was participant to its making. His writing the history of the People's Action Party's role in the struggle for Singapore's independence became the beginnings of today's "Singapore story". Raffles Professor of History K.G. Tregonning is seated on the extreme right of the front row.

Writing Singapore's History

> **M**odern Singapore began in 1819. Nothing that occurred on the island prior to this has particular relevance to an understanding of the contemporary scene; it is of antiquarian interest only.

In 1969, K.G. Tregonning, who was Raffles Professor of History at the University of Singapore, made the above declaration in his contribution to a volume commemorating the 150th anniversary of Sir Stamford Raffles' arrival and the establishment of a British trading station in Singapore.

Professor Tregonning's remarks reflected the prevailing perception held by historians of Singapore's past as recently as 50 years ago. They echoed the British template of Singapore's history, which had been articulated by, among others, Straits Settlements Governor Sir Frank Swettenham, who in 1906 pronounced that without Raffles, Singapore could not have become the crowning port jewel of the "Eastern Seas".

The view that Singapore was historically unsubstantial prior to 1819 was not confined to colonial luminaries or their comparatively more arcane counterparts in academia. In fact, it gained popular currency after it was reaffirmed as late as some 20 years after independence. In 1987, S. Rajaratnam, a founding member of the People's Action Party (PAP), attributed Singapore's beginnings entirely to Raffles' arrival: "Nothing very much appears to have happened in Singapore… before Raffles landed in this unpromising island".

Is this still our understanding of Singapore's history as we commemorate the bicentennial of Raffles' arrival in Singapore? This Introduction reviews

the background to Tregonning's declaration and explores where we are today in our understanding and writing of Singapore's history.

Colonial Beginnings

For colonial administrator Sir Richard Winstedt, the foremost scholar of the time on Malay history, language and literature, Singapore had no local history until the end of World War II, when Britain returned to Malaya to reorganise the Malayan states constitutionally as the Malayan Union. Singapore was excluded from the proposed Malayan Union, and became a separate Crown Colony. It was only then that Singapore had, for Malayan Civil Service officers such as Winstedt and later, C.M. Turnbull, its own administration, and with that, its own history separate from that of the Federation of Malaya, which they could write about.

As a historian, Winstedt was well aware that Singapore had a past before Raffles. In 1928, he published the first description of 14th-century gold ornaments found at Fort Canning, which have since become a national treasure. Four years later, his groundbreaking history of Malaya articulated Singapore as a part of Johor. His 1938 transcription of a seminal Melaka court chronicle, the *Sejarah Melayu*, or *Malay Annals*, acknowledged Singapore even earlier, as a 15th-century Melaka fiefdom.

Why were Winstedt and his Malayan Civil Service colleagues unable to connect the history they read in the *Malay Annals* and the Fort Canning Hill ornaments with the 20th-century British Malaya they were administering? The issue can be traced back to the time of Raffles. In several letters, Raffles attributed his journey towards Singapore to his study of Malay history. He saw Singapore as the "ancient Maritime Capital of the Malays", which had apparently been abandoned for 600 years before he arrived. John Crawfurd, Singapore's second Resident, agreed. In his 1856 *Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands & Adjacent Countries*, he stated:

> Singapore is the name of an island, which with the exception of a single village of poor and predatory Malay fishermen, and that only formed in 1811, was covered with a primeval forest down to the 6th day of February 1819…. [F]or a period of about five centuries and a half, there is no record of Singapore having been occupied, and it was only the occasional resort of pirates.

This became the template of Singapore's history – that it began on 6 February 1819, when Raffles established a British station on a desolate, depopulated island. Crawfurd's citation that British governance propelled Singapore's rapid rise – to fourth place among "the European emporia of India" – reflects this historical mantra.

Writing Singapore's Colonial History

Singapore's template as a British Empire port-city that grew into the capital of British Malaya by 1919 came to be detailed by a generation of students trained by the History Department of the University of Malaya, established in 1949. These students learnt that the histories of Malaya and Singapore that they were researching and writing had to be underpinned by the archived records of the British East India Company (EIC) and the Colonial Office. These records were the multigenerational product of colonial servants like Winstedt who hewed largely to their view of British rule. Inevitably, these students described a Singapore that was incorporated within the EIC and the British Empire, and not as part of an Asian world.

Tregonning and his colleagues, including the notable historian of Singapore, C.M. Turnbull, articulated Singapore's – and Malaya's – place in a waning empire after World War II. Their histories examined Britain's preparation for Malaya and Singapore's independence and the respective local responses to this impending power transfer. In 1975, Turnbull published her pioneering *History of Singapore: 1819–1975*, framing Singapore's history, which she had observed for 20 years as a Malayan Civil Service officer and subsequently as a university lecturer, as a positive outcome of British colonialism.

Indeed, Britain's place in modern Singapore's origins was acknowledged by its founding leaders, including Rajaratnam, who served as Singapore's first Foreign Minister. In 1984, he declared:

> After attaining independence in 1965 there was a debate as to who should be declared the founding fathers of Singapore. The debate was brought to an abrupt end when the government fixed responsibility for this on Sir Stamford Raffles and officially declared him the founder of Singapore…. [I]n nominating Raffles as the founder of modern Singapore we are accepting a fact of history. To pretend otherwise is to falsify history – about as honest as claiming descent from the sun or the moon or the wolves or licentious Greek gods.

In other words, independent Singapore existed because of one EIC officer's initiative.

Gold armlet and earrings recovered on Fort Canning Hill in 1926. They were found at a depth of 3 metres near the summit of the hill, west of the Keramat Iskandar Shah. The moulded face on the armlet is the demoniac Kala, the "All-Destroyer", an epithet of Siva and, more often, Yama, the god of death. The decorative style is reminiscent of Majapahit craftsmanship of the 14th century. These ornaments may have been lost or left behind by a resident of 14th-century Fort Canning. They give an insight into the religious beliefs and aesthetic tastes of the time.

CHAPTER ONE

The 14th Century
Advent of a "Great City"

*T*he location of the place: it is connected to Longyamen. The hill in the rear is like a coiled headdress [i.e., a turban], truncated [i.e., terraced], rising to a concaved [i.e., two peaks] and plateaued peak. Hence, the people live around it. The fields are poor, and the cereals are sparse. The weather is not consistent. In summer, due to a lot of rain, it is a little cold. The customs and nature [of the people]: Their hair is short and worn down [i.e., not tied up]. Satin and brocade [are used] to wrap their heads, and red oil cloth to wrap their bodies. Sea water is boiled to produce salt. Rice is fermented to produce wine, which is called "mingjia". There is a tribal chief. The place produces top-quality hornbill casques, middle-quality lakawood and cotton. Goods used for trade are silk cloth, iron bars, local printed cloth, chi jin [lit., "red gold"], porcelain wares, iron cauldrons and the like.

Wang Dayuan, *Daoyi Zhilue*, c. 1349

In the Beginning: The Kingdom on the Hill
Singapore's earliest history can be traced to the end of the 13th century, when a settlement emerged on the north bank of the Singapore River basin. Known in Chinese historical texts as Danmaxi (Temasek) and in indigenous Malay texts as Singapura, this settlement was a port-polity in that it possessed a port, was engaged in regional and international trade, and was administered by its own ruler.

To date, there is little evidence of settlement activities in Singapore prior to the late 13th century. Scholars such as Paul Wheatley, Roland Braddell and Hsu Yun-ts'iao have found some 24 possible references to Singapore in Chinese, Middle Eastern, South Asian and Southeast Asian texts. However, none of these references is definitive, even as they variously refer to the likelihood of a settlement located at the southern end of the Malay Peninsula, and to places sharing similar toponyms as the later settlement in Singapore.

19

Archaeologically, a very small body of material recovered from the islands near Singapore suggests that human habitation likely took place very early on. Lithic finds, including several stone tools, were found on Pulau Ubin and in the vicinity of Keppel Straits in the early 20th century, but apart from those, no finds have been recovered at any other site in Singapore. Habitation in Singapore, if it occurred, was likely to have been very sparse.

The absence of traces of settlement activities may be tied to the geography of maritime Southeast Asia and the resulting societies. Whereas land-based agrarian societies are typically identifiable through such physical remains as agricultural lands, hydrological works, and monumental, political and domestic architecture, sea-based societies on the other hand are much more elusive.

Societies that occupied the coastlines of such places as Singapore – with life taking place on vessels that were highly mobile, moving as the seasons changed, constantly in search of marine food supplies – would have left very little in the way of material deposits. With such a light footprint on the natural environment, such societies would be impossible to detect through scientific methods currently available. Mobility would also explain the absence of a human footprint, apart from the occasional ethnographic mention, in historical texts.

It was only when the coastal and land-based societies came together that a more "detectable" settlement pattern emerged. These riparian societies typically engaged in a combination of land-based activities – including port trade, domestic market trade, small-scale material processing, agriculture and architectural building – and sea-based activities, such as marine resource harvesting and shipping activities. Such settlements are therefore identifiable archaeologically.

That said, riparian settlements are still harder to detect than purely land-based settlements. Because of the absence of large-scale manipulation of the natural landscape, most of their physical remains are small finds, comprising material cultural deposits like ceramic sherds and metal items, and organic remains. Nevertheless, riparian settlements, being more permanent in their location, and situated at strategic points along the coastline of Southeast Asia, would have been more visible to – and hence noted and documented by – those traversing the region.

Such a riparian society emerged on the southern coast of Singapore, in the vicinity of the Singapore River basin, at the end of the 13th century. At the time, the Straits of Melaka – along with the Singapore Straits and the waters around the southeastern tip of the Malay Peninsula and the Riau Archipelago – constituted an important maritime highway for ships from the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and China. The numerous coastal societies that inhabited the coasts of these waterways would likely have been known to sailors and traders. However, it was only when a port-settlement appeared on the coastline that these navigators and traders began to take note of Singapore.

Singapore's First Land-based Settlement Emerges

Why did a port-settlement emerge in Singapore at the end of the 13th century? In the part of Southeast Asia where Singapore is located, the international economy that held sway involved primarily the Chinese landmass, Java, Sumatra and the Indian subcontinent.

Substantial economic, diplomatic and sociocultural interactions between the countries in these three areas took place throughout

Map of port-settlements that existed in the Melaka Straits region during the 7th to 14th centuries. The locations of the port-settlements caused them to be oriented towards different major economic zones. Ports in the northern Straits region interacted primarily with the Indian Ocean market, while those in the southern Straits region interacted with the South China Sea and Java Sea markets.

Singapore 700 Years Ago: A Reconstruction

In the 14th century, a thriving port-settlement was located in the area comprising the north bank of the Singapore River and present-day Fort Canning Hill. Historical accounts and important archaeological discoveries have shed light on the physical features, economic activities and social nature of this settlement, enabling us to visualise what life in Singapore might have been like seven centuries ago.

Artisans' Quarter

Archaeological discoveries on the lower east slope of the hill include a high concentration of glass fragments, beads, ceramic moulds and resins, indicating that glass-related activities probably took place here. The location of the artisans' quarter here makes topographical sense, as the east slope presented the easiest way for the inhabitants of the plain to approach and ascend the hill.

Earth Embankment

The largest man-made structure of the settlement was an earth embankment that began at the coastline, followed the course of present-day Stamford Road, and as it reached Fort Canning Hill, circumvented the base of the hill, eventually ending at the salt marshes along the Singapore River. Approximately 5 metres wide at its base and 3 metres high, the embankment was likely a hydrological feature. It enabled fresh water from the catchment areas comprising present-day Orchard Road and Selegie Hill to be collected into a moat or freshwater stream (present-day Stamford Canal). It also served as a soil retention feature, minimising soil erosion on the east slope of Fort Canning Hill. A possible secondary function of the embankment was as a defensive wall to protect the settlement from external threats.

Agriculture

The freshwater stream or moat would have served as a source of irrigation. This makes it plausible that land to the northeast of the settlement (present-day Bras Basah) was used for intensive agriculture, especially as the soil here would have been suitable for rice cultivation. The stream would have also served as a defensive feature.

The Settlement on the Plain

There would have been a substantial settlement population of 500–2000 people living on the plain on the north bank of the Singapore River and on the river basin. Their houses would have been elevated pole structures typical of dwellings in maritime Southeast Asia. Streets would have been no more than dirt tracks crisscrossing the habitation area, and it is likely that some domestic cultivation of plants for food was carried out in the spaces between buildings.

Present-day view of the location of the 14th-century settlement

Temple

According to Crawfurd, the north and east slopes of the hill were littered with a number of brick building platforms. On the north plateau stood the most impressive of these, a square platform measuring 12 metres on each side, with post-holes along its perimeter and a circular enclosure at its centre. The uniqueness of this building and its prominent location suggest that it was likely of politico-religious significance to the settlement's inhabitants.

Perimeter Fence

The palace precinct was likely surrounded by a perimeter defence structure, much like the royal residences of Melaka, Aceh and Jogjakarta. Not only did such a structure demarcate the space occupied by the settlement's sociopolitical elite, it would also have offered them protection.

Metal-working Site

Archaeological evidence suggests that different activities were likely concentrated at specific areas of the settlement. The recovery of copper items and iron slag at the New Parliament House site – and nowhere else – suggests that metal-working activities were concentrated here.

Market

The range and volume of excavation finds on the north bank of the Singapore River – including thousands of Chinese coins, stoneware jars used for transporting foodstuffs, and fine ceramics from China – provide compelling evidence that this was the site of a thriving marketplace for international and domestic trade.

Royal Bath

A royal bath is believed to have been located on the western foot of the hill. An untitled map of Singapore Town from 1825 shows a freshwater spring in the northern part of the west slope; the bottom end of the spring would have been the probable location of the royal bath. It is likely that the bath was formed by a natural embankment helping to pool the water, and features such as trees or artificial structures might have helped conceal the bathing activities from unwelcome eyes.

Royal Residence

A royal precinct was most likely located on the upper south and west slopes of Fort Canning Hill. A large number of fruit trees were noted on the lower reaches of the south slope of Fort Canning Hill in the early 1820s. Munshi Abdullah recorded that there were such trees as the durian, duku, lime, langsat, petai, jering and pomelo. Crawfurd also noted that this slope was forested with fruit trees of great size, albeit degenerated because of their old age. The residences of the ruler's ministers would also have been found in this area.

Royal Garden

A garden was an integral feature of Malay palace precincts. A large number of fruit trees were noted on the lower reaches of the south slope of Fort Canning Hill in the early 1820s. Munshi Abdullah recorded that there were such trees as the durian, duku, lime, langsat, petai, jering and pomelo. Crawfurd also noted that this slope was forested with fruit trees of great size, albeit degenerated because of their old age.

Singapore Stone

A 3-metre-tall sandstone boulder, bearing a lengthy inscription that has hitherto not been translated, stood at the eastern tip of the mouth of the Singapore River. It would have been visible from the sea, greeting all ships passing through Temasek.

Chain Boom

A boom stretched across the entrance of the Singapore River served as a toll gate and defensive feature. Chinese and Malay sources indicate that such booms were made of iron chains.

Servants' quarter

Artisans quarter

Temple

Dry moat

Earth embankment

Royal residence

Freshwater stream

Earth embankment

Perimeter Fence

Metal-working site

Royal garden

Royal bath

Market square

Singapore River

Market square

Chain boom

Singapore Stone

The Kingdom on the Hill

There are several accounts of Singapore's first settlement on Fort Canning Hill from as early as the 1300s. But the most detailed account is found in John Crawfurd's travelogue published in 1828, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China*. Crawfurd, who would later serve as the second Resident of Singapore, was on his way to Siam on a diplomatic mission in 1822 when he stopped over in Singapore for several days. He toured the newly founded English East India Company factory, and recorded all that he saw there. What Crawfurd observed has come to form one of the most crucial sources upon which all subsequent research and scholarship on Singapore, both historical and archaeological, have been based. (Note: Based on the known locations of the features on Fort Canning Hill, there is reason to believe that Crawfurd got some of his compass directions mixed up. The corrected directions are provided below where relevant.)

3 February 1822

I walked this morning round the walls and limits of the ancient town of Singapore, for such in reality had been the site of our modern settlement. It was bounded to the east by the sea, to the north by a wall, and to the west by a salt creek or inlet of the sea. The inclosed space is a plain, ending in a hill of considerable extent, and a hundred and fifty feet in height. The whole is a kind of triangle, of which the base is the sea-side, about a mile in length. The wall, which is about sixteen feet in breadth at its base, and at present about eight or nine in height, runs very near a mile from the sea-coast to the base of the hill, until it meets a salt marsh. As long as it continues in the plain, it is skirted by a little rivulet running at the foot of it, and forming a kind of moat; and where it attains the elevated side of the hill, there are apparent the remains of a dry ditch. On the western side, which extends from the termination of the wall to the sea, the distance, like that of the northern side, is very near a mile. This last has the natural and strong defence of a salt marsh, overflown at high-water, and of a deep and broad creek. In the wall there are no traces of embrasures or loop-holes; and neither on the sea-side, nor on that skirted by the creek and marsh, is there any appearance whatever of artificial defences. We may conclude from these circumstances, that the works of Singapore were not intended against fire-arms, or an attack by sea; or that if the latter, the inhabitants considered themselves strong in their naval force, and therefore thought any other defences in that quarter superfluous.

4 February 1822

On the stony point which forms the western side of the entrance on the salt creek, on which the modern town of Singapore is building, there was discovered, two years ago, a tolerably hard block of sand-stone, with an inscription upon it. This I examined early this morning. The stone, in shape, is a rude mass, and formed of the one-half of a great nodule broken into two nearly equal parts by artificial means; for the two portions now face each other, separated at the base by a distance of not more than two feet and a half, and reclining opposite to each other at an angle of about forty degrees. It is upon the inner surface of the stone that the inscription is engraved. The workmanship is far ruder than any thing of the kind that I have seen in Java or India; and the writing, perhaps from time, in some degree, but more from the natural decomposition of the rock, so much obliterated as to be quite illegible as a composition. Here and there, however, a few letters seem distinct enough. The character is rather round than square. It is probably the Pali, or religious character used by the followers of Buddha, and of which abundant examples are found in Java and Sumatra; while no monuments exist in these countries in their respective vernacular alphabets. The only remains of antiquity at Singapore, besides this stone, and the wall and moat before mentioned, are contained on the hill before alluded to. After being cleared by us of the extensive forest which covered it, it is now clothed with a fine grassy sward, and forms the principal beauty of the new settlement. The greater part of the west and northern [read: north and eastern] side of the mountain is covered with the remains of the foundations of buildings, some composed of baked brick of good quality.

Among these ruins, the most distinguished are those seated on a square terrace, of about forty feet to a side, near the summit of the hill. On the edge of this terrace, we find fourteen large blocks of sand-stone; which from the hole in each, had probably been the pedestals of as many wooden-posts which supported the building. This shows us, at once, that the upper part of the structure was of perishable materials; an observation which, no doubt, applies to the rest of the building as well as to this. Within the square terrace is a circular inclosure, formed of rough sand-stone, in the centre of which is a well, or hollow, which very possibly contained an image; for I look upon the building to have been a place of worship, and from its appearance in all likelihood, a temple of Buddha. I venture further to conjecture, that the other relics of antiquity on the hill, are the remains of monasteries of the priests of this religion. Another terrace, on the north [read: east] declivity of the hill, nearly of the same size, is said to have been the burial place of Iskandar Shah, King of Singapore. This is the prince whom tradition describes as having been driven from his throne by the Javanese, in the year 1252 of the Christian era, and who died at Melaka, not converted to the Mohammedan religion, in 1274; so that the story is probably apocryphal. Over the supposed tomb of Iskandar, a rude structure has been raised, since the formation of the new settlement, to which Mohammedans, Hindus, and Chinese, equally resort to do homage. It is remarkable, that many of the fruit-trees cultivated by the ancient inhabitants of Singapore are still existing, on the eastern [read: southern] side of the hill, after a supposed lapse of near six hundred years. Here we find the durian, the rambutan, the duku, the shaddock, and other fruit-trees of great size; and all so degenerated, except the two first, that the fruit is scarcely to be recognised.

Among the ruins are found various descriptions of pottery, some of which is Chinese and native. Fragments of this are of great abundance. In the same situation have been found Chinese brass coins of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The earliest is of the Emperor of Ching-chung, of the dynasty of Sung-chao, who died in the year 967. Another is of the reign of Jin-chung, of the same dynasty, who died in 1067; and a third, of that of Shin-chung, his successor, who died in 1085. The discovery of these coins affords some confirmation of the relations which fix the establishment of the Malays at Singapore, in the twelfth century.

It should be remarked, in reference to this subject, that the coins of China were in circulation among all the nations of the Indian islands before they adopted the Mohammedan religion, or had any intercourse with Europeans. They were dug up in numbers in Java, and are still the only money used by the unconverted natives of Bali.

The 15th Century
Feeder Port and Homeland
of Melaka's Naval Forces

A *nd as the king, who was hunting, stood under a tree, one of his hounds was kicked by a white mouse-deer. And Sultan Iskandar Shah said, "This is a good place, when even its mouse-deer are full of fight! We shall do well to make a city here." And the chiefs replied, "It is indeed as your Highness says." Thereupon Sultan Iskandar Shah ordered that a city be made, and he asked, "What is the name of the tree under which I am standing?" And they all answered, "It is called Malaka, your Highness," to which he rejoined, "Then Malaka shall be the name of this city."*

The *Malay Annals*

Outpost of Melaka

Melaka, according to its court chronicle, the *Sulalat'us-Salatin*, the "Genealogy of the Kings", was founded by the last ruler of 14th-century Singapura, Iskandar Shah, when he was forced to abandon the city to invading Majapahit forces. He fled by way of Seletar to Muar, on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, before moving again to a river called Bertam. The chronicle continues with a series of loosely linked episodes and anecdotes about the Melaka court and its continuation in the Johor court. Singapura is recalled in the first six episodes as the beginnings of Melaka.

The *Sulalat'us-Salatin*, better known as the *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals*, is known to us today through some 30 variant texts. The earliest, which carries an Islamic year of 1021 (1612 AD), was copied for Stamford Raffles on paper with an 1816 watermark. Central to all these versions is the assertion that Singapura was founded by a Palembang prince named Sang Nila Utama or Sri Tri Buana. With his two brothers, he descended from heaven onto the sacred hill of Bukit Seguntang Mahameru in Palembang, the spiritual centre of

Most of the statues recovered or found at the pre-15th-century port-cities of the Melaka Straits are Buddhist. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, in his Amoghapasa form, distinguished by the tiger skin he wears, was a popular figure. Amoghapasa was also the central deity in the Majapahit temple of Candi Jago. This silver gilded figure of Amoghapasa is reported to have come out of Palembang and, as such, reflects the religious beliefs of Sriwijaya, which found their way into the mythology of the early chapters of the *Malay Annals*.

Sriwijaya, which was the dominant trading power in the Straits of Melaka from the 7th to the 11th centuries.

Making sense of these first six chapters of the *Malay Annals* has been problematic. Most historians have tried to read the *Malay Annals* as a historical text in which they search for nuggets of "factual" information that can be corroborated by other evidence, and on finding no such information, have dismissed the entire text as folklore and myth.

A more useful exercise is to examine the *Malay Annals* through the lens of literature – an imaginative composition that can be subjected to literary criticism – and to consider how it creatively represents the world of Melaka and also Johor. This chapter attempts a literary reading of the *Malay Annals* and examines how Malay social memories of their past were deeply influenced by their reading of their origins recollected in the *Sulalat'us-Salatin*, which shaped their perceptions of their present and future. The chapter reconstructs Melaka's rise as the pre-eminent emporium in 15th-century Southeast Asia and Singapura's role within Melaka's world.

Singapura in the *Malay Annals*: Sri Tri Buana and a Sacred Pact

The *Malay Annals* relates how Sang Nila Utama and his two brothers transformed the rice fields on Bukit Seguntang into gold and silver as they descended the hill on their white elephants, claiming to be descendants of Alexander the Great. The eldest brother was invited to become the ruler of Minangkabau in western Sumatra, and the second to rule Tanjong Pura in western Kalimantan. The youngest, Sang Nila Utama, was invited by the ruler of Palembang, Demang Lebar Daun, to take his place. Underpinning Demang Lebar Daun's abdication of rulership to the young prince – who was consecrated on his ascension to the throne as Sri Tri Buana – was a sacred social contract. The *Malay Annals* records it thus:

Both of them took a solemn oath to the effect that whoever should depart from the terms of the pact, then let his house be overturned by Almighty God so that its roof be laid on the ground and its pillars be inverted. And that is why it has been granted by Almighty God to Malay rulers that they shall never put their subjects to shame, and that those subjects however gravely they offend shall never be bound or hanged or disgraced with evil word. If any ruler should put a single one of

his subjects to shame, that would be a sign that his kingdom would be destroyed by Almighty God. Similarly, it has been granted by Almighty God to their Malay subject that they should never be disloyal or treacherous to their rulers, even if their rulers behaved evilly or unjustly towards them.

Be that as it may, Sri Tri Buana eventually decided to seek his fortune away from his adopted city. He sailed first to Bentan (Bintan) in the Riaus, where he was adopted by the local queen, Wan Sri Benian. He then set out again from Bentan:

And Sri Tri Buana came to a very large, high rock. He climbed on to the top of this rock and looking across the water he saw that the land on the other side had sand so white that it looked like a sheet of cloth. And he asked Indra Bopal, "What is that stretch of sand that we see yonder? What land is that?" And Indra Bopal replied, "That, Your Highness, is the land called Temasek." And Sri Tri Buana said, "Let us go thither." And Indra Bopal replied, "I will do whatever Your Highness commands."

Pages from Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir's c. 1840 publication of the *Sulalat'us-Salatin* under the title *Sejarah Melayu*. As one of Stamford Raffles' Malay-language scribes, Abdullah was aware that Raffles' close friend John Leyden had translated this "Genealogy of Kings" as the "Malay Annals". In following Leyden, Abdullah helped to consolidate and popularise *Sejarah Melayu*/*Malay Annals* as the preferred title for the *Sulalat'us-Salatin*.
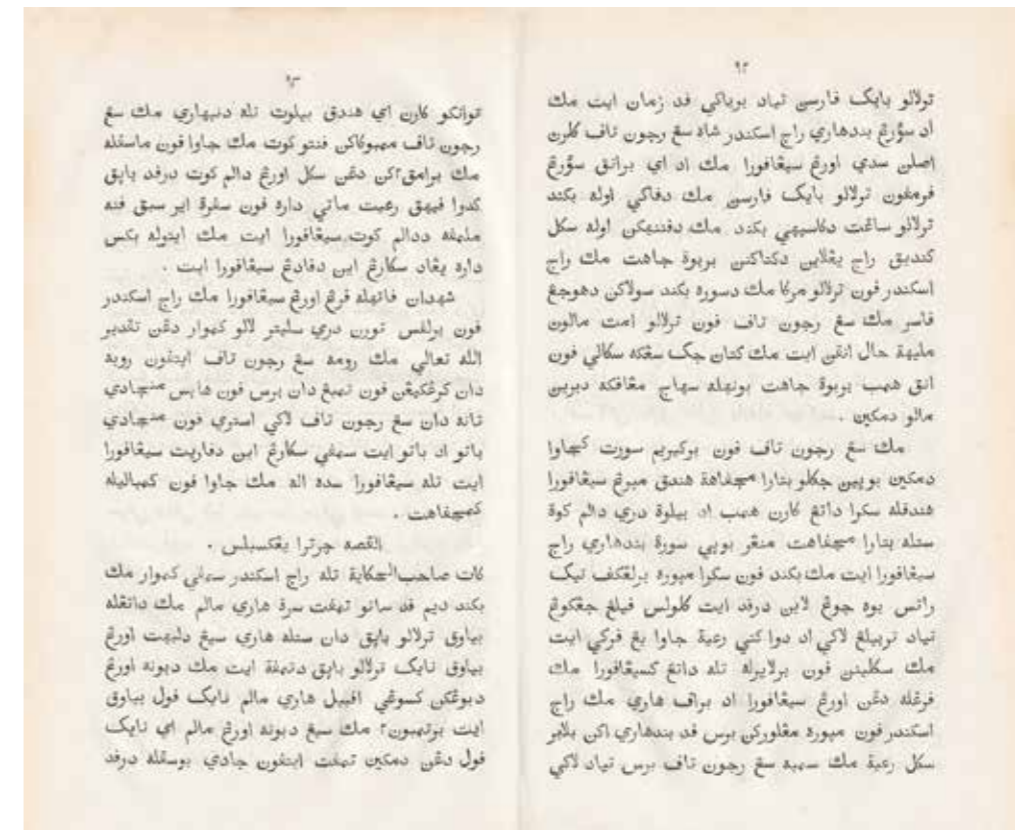
So Sri Tri Buana embarked and started on the crossing…. And when they reached the shore, the ship was brought close in and Sri Tri Buana went ashore with all the ship's company and they amused themselves with collecting shell-fish. The king then went inland for sport on the open ground at Kuala Temasek.

And they all beheld a strange animal. It seemed to move with great speed; it had a red body and a black head; its breast was white; it was strong and active in build, and in size was rather bigger than a he-goat. When it saw the party, it moved away and then disappeared. And Sri Tri Buana inquired of all those who were with him, "What beast is that?" But no one knew. Then said Demang Lebar Daun, "Your Highness, I have heard it said that in ancient times it was a lion that had that appearance." And Sri Tri Buana said to Indra Bopal, "Go back to Bentan and tell the queen that now we shall not be return-ing, but that if she wishes to shew her affection for us, will she furnish us with men, elephants and horses, as we propose to establish a city here at Temasek." And Indra Bopal set forth to return to Bentan: and when he arrived there, he presented himself before Wan Sri Benian to whom he related what Sri Tri Buana had said. "Very well," said Wan Sri Benian, "we will never oppose any wish of our son." And she sent men, elephants and horses without number. Sri Tri Buana then established a city at Temasek, giving it the name Singapura.

The image of Singapura that emerges from the first six chapters of the *Malay Annals* is of "a great city, to which foreigners resorted in great numbers so that the fame of the city and its greatness spread throughout the world". Under its second ruler, Sri Pikrama Wira, the son of Sri Tri Buana, Singapura was evidently strong enough to challenge Majapahit Java, the major power in the archipelago, in a display of diplomatic theatrics. This escalated into a major Majapahit invasion of Singapura, which was successfully repulsed.

The ensuing story of Sri Pikrama Wira's marriage to the daugh-ter of the Tamil ruler of Kalinga is essentially an illustration of Singapura's wealth and stature among Indian kingdoms. The story of the Raja of Kalinga pitting his strongman against Singapura's reigning champion, Badang, can be interpreted as an unstated competition for power between the two states. The Raja's des-patch of a gravestone for Badang upon his death can, arguably, be read as a show of respect for, if not deference to, Sri Pikrama

An artistic rendition of the story of Badang the strongman, as described in the *Malay Annals*. This scene – a detail from Jimmy Ong's drawing, "Offering at Temasek Stone" (2011) – shows Badang surrounded by an audience of characters from different eras of history.

Wira. Likewise, in another story, the Raja of Perlak's desire to pit his Goliath against Badang can also be seen as an unstated contest of power, in which Sri Pikrama Wira emerged the victor.

Singapura could presumably have gone on to greater achieve-ments if it had not been betrayed by one of its officials. According to the *Malay Annals*, the fourth-generation descendant of Sri Tri Buana, who had the Muslim name Sultan Iskandar Shah, alienated one of his officials, Sang Ranjuna Tapa, when he executed, on a false accusation, one of his concubines, who happened to be Sang Ranjuna Tapa's daughter. Sang Ranjuna Tapa decided to betray his sultan by "opening the gate of the fort" to invading Javanese forces. For his crime of treason, Sang Ranjuna Tapa and his wife were transformed into rocks. According to the author of the *Malay Annals*, the two rocks could still be seen in his day, that is, in the 17th century.

Sri Tri Buana's dreams of establishing a "great city" were critical to the Melaka and Johor sultans' visions of their future. What hap-pened in Singapura between Sri Tri Buana's arrival and Iskandar Shah's flight prefigured the island's present and shaped its future. The underlying mythology of this period of history was that Singapura was emerging as a great city on its way to re-establishing the glory of Sriwijaya. But its historical destiny was undermined by Iskandar Shah's wrongful execution of Sang Ranjuna Tapa's daugh-ter, and Sang Ranjuna Tapa's subsequent betrayal. What happened in Singapura was in effect the consequence of this breach of the

Map of Singapore and the Johor River up to Batu Sawar by Manuel Godinho de Erédia, c. 1613. Singapore is disproportionately reduced in size in relation to the Johor coastline, but the map gives an insight into Erédia's sensing of Singapore as the gateway to the Kingdom of Johor, marked "Jor Regno" on the map.

CHAPTER THREE

The 16th Century
Shahbandaria of the Johor Sultanate

And the Franks [Portuguese] engaged the men of Malaka in battle, and they fired their cannons from the ships so that the cannon balls came like rain. And the noise of the cannon was as the noise of thunder in the heavens and the flashes of the fire of their guns were like flashes of lightning in the sky; and the noise of their matchlocks was like that of ground-nuts popping in the frying pan. So heavy was the gun-fire that the men of Malaka could no longer maintain their position on the shore. The Franks then bore down upon the bridge with their galleys and foysts. Thereupon Sultan Ahmad came forth, mounted on his elephant Jituji. The Sri Awadana was on the elephant's head, and to balance him on the packsaddle Sultan Ahmad took with him Makhdum Sadar Jahan because he was studying the doctrine of the Unity of God with him. On the elephant's croup was Tun Ali Hati. And the King went forth on to the bridge and stood there amid a hail of bullets… the King fought with the Franks pike to pike, and he was wounded in the palm of the hand…. [But] Malaka fell. The Franks advanced on the King's audience hall, and the men of Malaka fled. Sultan Ahmad then withdrew to Hulu Muar and thence to Pagoh. Sultan Mahmud Shah had taken up his abode at Batu Hampar… the Franks occupied Malaka where they turned the royal palace into a fort; which fort is there to this day [1621, when this version of the Malay Annals was written].

Account in the *Malay Annals* of Melaka's fall to the Portuguese in 1511

Port-city Singapore Rises Once More
The military campaign that dislodged Sultan Mahmud from Melaka was a hard-won victory for the Portuguese. While Portuguese chronicles celebrate the glory and heroism, Italian John of Empoli, who worked in the entourage of the Melaka conqueror Alfonso de Albuquerque, offered a more critical view – and arguably a more accurate one, coming as it did from first-hand experience of the campaign and its immediate aftermath.

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Alfonso de Albuquerque, the Governor of Portuguese India and conqueror of Melaka in 1511.

In a letter to his father, Empoli explained that Sultan Mahmud fled to a "neighbouring town to seek help to attack our ships because few were left to man them". The desperate Portuguese raced against time to construct a fortification – A Famosa or "The Famous" – with "great haste by day and the use of torches by night", using timber and stone wrenched from private homes and public buildings. "We erected it with great hardship bearing the stones on our backs; and each of us was a day labourer, mason and stone-cutter."

The fortress was built with "weapons about us", for the Sultan and his forces harried them relentlessly: "And while about this work, we heard a great din from the enemy: almost every day they attacked, now from one side and now from another, now by sea and now by land." After the fall, food was scarce, and "we had nothing to eat save rice, so that all our people began to fall sick," Empoli reported. Provisions were strictly rationed and within a month, 700 people – both Portuguese and prisoners – died of malnutrition and starvation. The bodies piled up faster than they could be buried and "there was not a man who did not fall sick of a devilish fever, wherefore the dead lay in the captain's quarters two or three days, for no one to bury them could be found". Empoli himself, "half-dead as… [he] was" after almost two months of illness, barely survived.

The six chapters of the *Malay Annals* following the fall of Melaka record the trials and tribulations of Mahmud Shah in his efforts to regain the city after deposing his son and successor, Sultan Ahmad, to resume the throne. These chapters relate how the Portuguese harried Mahmud and finally drove him from Bintan, where he had based himself, and he was dragged by the Sri Nara di Raja to re-establish the sultanate elsewhere. Ultimately, though, Sultan Mahmud was denied the chance to reclaim Melaka's glory. That opportunity fell to his successor and son, Alauddin Shah, who founded a new *negara* (kingdom) on the upper reaches of the Johor River in 1528.

The Portuguese captured only the empty shell of the great emporium that was Melaka. The networks of loyalties, alliances and trade that had underpinned Melaka's prosperity did not pass to the Portuguese, but were carried by Sultan Mahmud wherever he went. The loyalty of the Orang Laut warriors who were based in Singapore waters was especially important to Mahmud and

Alauddin Shah and their successors as they established themselves up the Johor River. Singapore almost certainly acquired additional significance as the gateway to the Johor River realm of its sultans. The Orang Laut warriors would have served as sentries guarding the entrance to the river, providing early warning of approaching hostile Portuguese or Acehnese forces.

After Melaka's fall to the Portuguese in 1511, the Laksamana (admiral and commander) of the Orang Laut forces returned to his base on the island of Singapore. Portuguese chronicles describe him as a man of about 80 years old at the time. His return to Singapore (where he was at one point briefly joined by the fugitive Sultan Mahmud) gave Singapore a new significance. When the Portuguese apothecary and chronicler Tomé Pires wrote his *Suma Oriental* around 1513–15, he dismissed the commercial importance of Singapore and the surrounding villages. But after 1511, and especially following 1528, Singapore experienced a revitalisation. By the end of the 16th century, the Melaka-based merchant Jacques de Coutre recorded that Singapore was one of the "best ports" in the East Indies.

Sightings and Testimonials

Several written European and West Asian testimonies mention a port on Singapore in the 16th century. John of Empoli recorded his last will and testament while his ship was anchored at Singapore en route to China, but, understandably, given the document's legal nature, offered no description of Singapore. The Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, who travelled to and from Japan between 1546 and 1552, offered another testimony. Five of his letters were despatched from the "Strait of Symquapura" or "Cincapura". His first letter, written in Singapore, albeit without places and dates, offers reasonable clues:

> Thirty-nine days ago I sailed from Japan, where the faith of Jesus our Lord is in very great increase…. If there is [in Malacca] a ship ready to sail [for Goa] speak to the senior captain and ask him to wait for one more day, since I hope that I shall arrive in Malacca some time Sunday….

The letter suggests the existence of a postal or express courier service between Singapore and Melaka. Could this also be evidence of Singapore's port facilities? A few years later, the Ottoman admiral and navigator Seydi Ali Reis, alias Sidi Ali ben Hossein,

Reconstructed map of the Malay Peninsula based on the information contained in the 16th-century Ottoman-Turkish rutter *Muhit*. The map is taken from the 1897 edition of *Die Topographischen Capitel des Indischen Seespiegels Mohit*. Note that the coastal areas around the South China Sea littoral on the Malay Peninsula and along the present-day coast of Vietnam are marked as "Barr-Čin", the "coast of China".

provided the latitude of "Bandar Singafûr" in his *Muhit*, a rutter, or mariner's handbook, featuring navigational instructions and information on ports around the Indian Ocean rim and the western Pacific. Again, there are no further details.
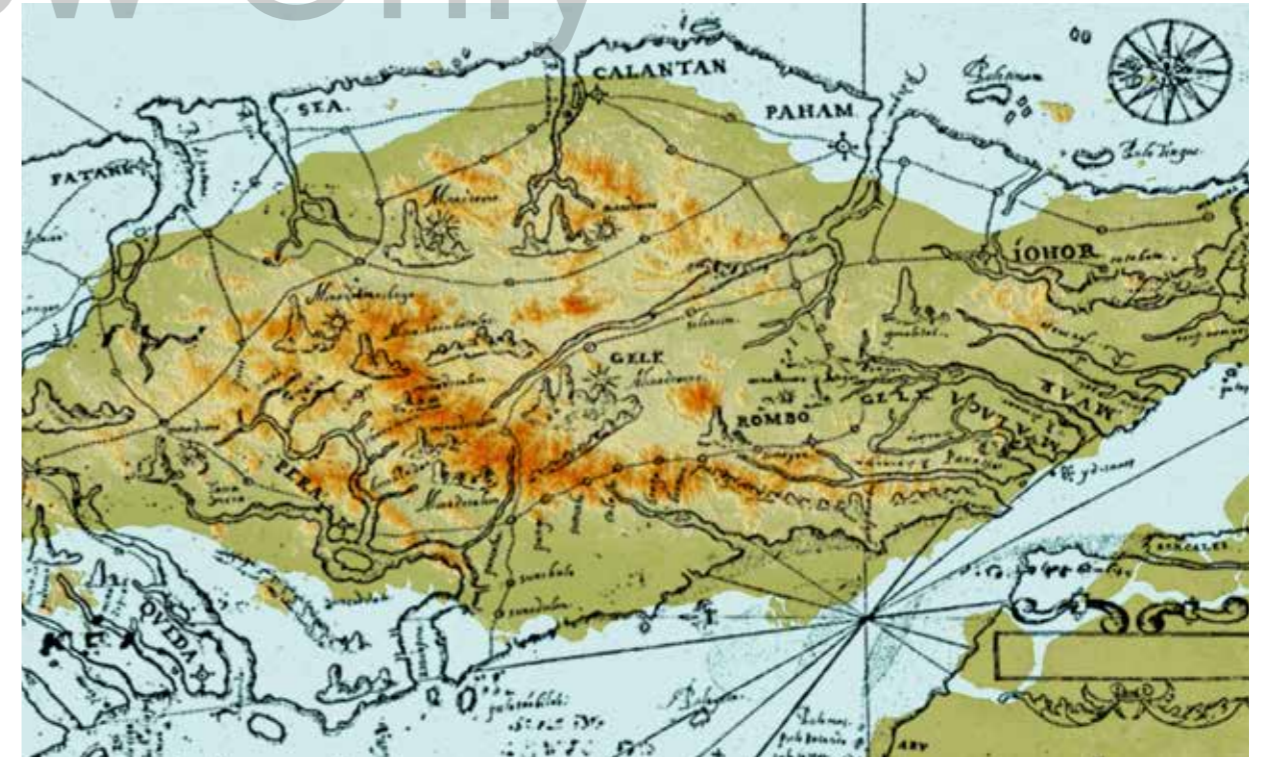
The important contextual point is that there are several sources attesting to the presence of a settlement and port on Singapore, though they furnish no specifics on how large this settlement or how busy this port was. But Singapore must have been significant enough to attract the attention of the Portuguese in their continuing war against their neighbours, including Johor. The naval forces based at Melaka, and later Johor, would doubtlessly also have been seen as a threat. So, it should come as no surprise that the Portuguese decided to despatch an expeditionary force against Singapore in the first quarter of the 16th century to take out the port and the Orang Laut armada.

Portuguese information on this campaign is fragmentary at best. We are informed only cursorily about the Portuguese strike and the destruction of the Singapore settlement. This is confirmed by the rutter ascribed to John of Lisbon dating from the early 16th century, as well as by another very similar document (c. mid-1500s) by André Pires. The episode is also mentioned by Luís de Matos in a 2015 dissertation in which he concedes that the circumstances leading to Singapore's destruction are uncertain. He suggests that the blow inflicted on the settlement might have happened during Pero de Mascarenhas' campaign against Bintan (1526) or during Francisco da Gama's attack against Johor in 1535. Singapore arguably became a "strategic location" in the continuing Portuguese-Melaka/Johor conflict.

The Johor Sultanate and Its Riverine Economy

When Sultan Mahmud died, the task and challenge of reclaiming Melaka's glory devolved to two of his sons. Sultan Alauddin, the eldest, established a new *istana* at Sayong Pinang in 1528, which would serve as the first of at least five Johor capitals over the next 200 years. Over time, Acehnese and Portuguese attacks would force the Johor sultans to move their court to different locations along the Johor River.

In selecting Sayong Pinang, Alauddin was not retreating to a backwater divorced from the thriving trade of the Singapore and Melaka straits. A map by Portuguese explorer and cartographer

Portrait of Portuguese mathematician and explorer Manuel Godinho de Erédia. The original is found in the manuscript of his *Description of Melaka*, c. 1613.

Manuel Godinho de Erédia (*Atlas Miscelânea*, c. 1616–22) depicts a series of trails running largely along the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, stretching from the Kra Isthmus near southern Thailand to Johor.

At several junctions, the trails branch out into the highlands of the peninsula or connect with riverine networks and other trails. The annotations around these junctions suggest that these were locations where specific commodities, such as gold, copper, tin, and perhaps also tree resins and fragrant woods were sourced. In seeking to control the southern terminals of these inland trails and trade routes, the Johor sultans may have been no different from their Sriwijayan forebears, who had located themselves up the Musi River to control the sourcing and export of aromatics and other valued forest products from the Sumatran highlands to regional markets.

Archaeological evidence further establishes the Johor River as a trade node in the Singapore and Melaka straits well before the Johor sultans established their capitals there. Surface archaeological surveys of the sites of former Johor capitals were conducted

Copy of a map of the Malay Peninsula ascribed to Erédia in his *Atlas Miscelânea* (now lost), showing a series of overland trails running the length of the peninsula. Erédia's map broadly matches with a modern topographic map, as this overlay shows. Patani, Kelantan and the Johor River were major nodes in this network of trails.

Etching depicting the arrival of Raja Bongsu of Johor in his galley at the flagship of Jacob Pietersz van Enkhuysen after the battles against the Portuguese in the Johor River and Singapore Straits in October 1603. The sketch has been taken from the illustrations supporting the journal of the eighth Dutch voyage to the East Indies, published by Johann Theodor and Johann Israel de Bry in Frankfurt am Main, 1607.

CHAPTER FOUR

The 17th Century
Contested Waterways

B y his second wife, the king of Johor had Raja Bongsu who is now called Raja Seberang, meaning "king of the other side" because he lives on the opposite side of the [Johor] River from the city of Batu Sawar where he has a fortress as well, and part of his subjects; but he is a vassal of the Yang di Pertuan. He is about 35 years old, almost white, not very tall, but wise, forgiving, not choleric, and very prudent; an enemy of the Portuguese, industrious in his business, which he would also conduct diligently if he held power. In short, worthy of being king of Johor and Melaka.

Records of Dutch Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge, assessing Johor's most promising princeling

Legitimising Royalty Through Singapore: The *Malay Annals*

It is to Stamford Raffles that we owe our acquaintance with the earliest verifiable dated copy of the *Malay Annals*, which he studied in Penang with the poet and brilliant linguist John Leyden, whose translation of the work Raffles published in 1821. The circum-stances leading to the writing of the *Malay Annals* are stated fairly clearly in the preface, translated by C.C. Brown thus:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of both worlds and peace be on the Apostle of Allah and his four companions: Allah have compassion on them, Be it known. In AH 1021, a dal awal year, on the 12th of the month Rabi-al-awwal [13 May 1612] on a Sunday, at the hour of the morning prayer, in the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riyat Shah, shadow of Allah upon earth, while he had a settlement at Pasir Raja, came Sri Narawangsa, whose name was Tun Bambang, a son of Sri Akar, a Patani raja, bearing a command from His Highness Downstream…. The command of His Highness was: "I ask for a history to be compiled on all the Malay Rajas and

their customs, for the information of my descendants who come after me, that they may be conversant with the history and derive profit therefrom."

The recipient of this instruction from this "Downstream Highness" was the Bendahara (prime minister) of the Johor Sultanate, Tun Sri Lanang. He wrote that his head and his limbs were bowed beneath the weight of this command as he was conscious of his weakness and ignorance. Who was this "Downstream Highness" with the power and authority to command the Bendahara to compile this genealogy of the Malay rajas? Also known as Raja Seberang ("prince of the other side"), this Raja di Ilir ("prince from downstream") is perhaps better known as Raja Bongsu ("youngest prince").

Raja Bongsu was a dynamic and proactive ruler who very early on tried to capitalise on the presence of the Dutch to drive the

A Renaissance Raja in a New Malay World

He was, observed Johannes Verken, a German-born member of the Dutch East India Company fleet, immaculately dressed, fair, handsome and articulate. His bejewelled accoutrements included a hat trick of gem-studded gold chains draped around his neck, and by his side hung a custom-crafted kris, or Malay dagger, worth some 50,000 Dutch guilders (S$1 million by today's reckoning). The personage in question was Raja Bongsu, a princeling of the region's pre-eminent native power, the Johor Sultanate.

Raja Bongsu defined and personified the cosmopolitan, informed Malay aristocrat-ruler-politician of the 17th century in a new Southeast Asian age of acute global contestation for power and wealth. Politically astute, he nimbly navigated the crowded, complicated web of regional and European interests to advance Johor's – and his own – position by luring the Dutch into their first regional alliance. He capped his career by being crowned Sultan (1615–23), not a minor feat in a faction-riddled court for a princely runt of the royal litter in a succession scheme predicated on primogeniture. Like a Renaissance politician, he was a canny public relations and

literary strategist, under whom the most important Malay treatise, the *Sulalat'us-Salatin* (Genealogy of Kings), was commissioned in 1612. Better known as the *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals*, its first half-a-dozen chapters remain the sole recorded source of Singapore's royal founding by the Sriwijayan prince Sang Nila Utama (Sri Tri Buana).

The book resonates today as a collective social memory of the Malays. Its literary heft is admired for imaginatively wrapping actual events around fables and tales of the fantastical. But its heart was – as Raja Bongsu and his "editor" Bendahara Tun Sri Lanang intended – political, and politically two-fold: an affirmation of Johor's link to its royal predecessors Melaka and Sriwijaya through Sang Nila Utama's Singapura; and a manual for ruling justly. The lasting impact of Raja Bongsu's statecraft remains relevant today through the treatise's iteration of the sacred compact between righteous rulership and the subjects' absolute loyalty to it. Perhaps the clearest homage to Raja Bongsu's recrafting of Malay royalty and loyalty is that both ideals have become accepted, for better or not, as traditional Malay political and cultural benchmarks today.

Portuguese out of Melaka. A shrewd diplomat, he was greatly admired by the Europeans. Dutch Admiral Matelieff de Jonge perceived him as "wise, forgiving, not choleric, and very prudent; an enemy of the Portuguese". Raja Bongsu was well aware of his status as a descendant of a long line of rulers and he was conscious of the mandate to revive the Melaka Sultanate – in communications with the Dutch, he referred to himself as the legitimate successor of Melaka's prestige and its "lands".

Given Raja Bongsu's shifting fortunes among Johor's high-ranking courtiers and the deepening divisions among his siblings and their respective followers, his motives for commissioning the revision of the *Malay Annals* become clearer. The rewriting yielded a legitimising text that situated Singapore not only at the centre of Malay myths and social memories, but also ensured its importance in the Melaka-Johor legacy and argued for the continuity of Malay rule in an increasingly uncertain world following the arrival of the Dutch.

Arrival of the Dutch and Its Impact on Singapore

The Dutch arrived in Southeast Asia in 1596. Their first trading expedition called at Banten in northwestern Java to buy spices. Massive profits arising from imported spices spurred the start of a series of highly leveraged trading ventures in Europe focused on East Indies trade. Within years, however, the Dutch ventures began withering and in March 1602 they were merged at the behest of the Dutch government into the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC (United Netherlands East India Company).

From the start, the VOC was designed as a joint-stock company which included international shareholders beyond Dutch borders. In terms of paid-up capital it dwarfed its English counterpart, the English East India Company (EIC), founded in 1600 and known then as "The Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies". The EIC only became a temporary joint-stock company in 1612 and a permanent joint-stock company in 1657.

While the two companies represented integrated trading enterprises, there were vital differences. The VOC's charter endowed the firm with substantial quasi-state powers, including the right to sign international agreements and treaties, appoint and dismiss officials, levy troops, wage war, conclude peace, mint coins, acquire colonies and adjudicate crimes. Importantly, neither firm was allowed to pass legislation, and for the period under review

(*Top*) Corporate logo of the VOC, the Dutch East India Company.

(*Above*) The English East India Company's original coat of arms, granted in 1600, featuring a pair of "sea-lions".
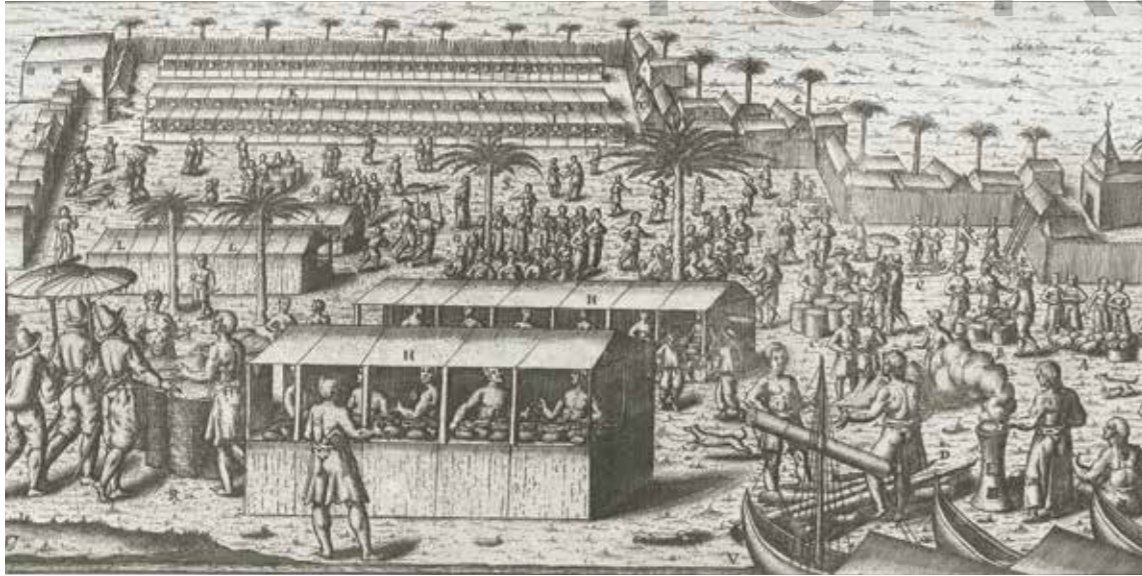
Printed engraving of the market at Banten in 1596, taken from the travelogue of Cornelis de Houtman's voyage to the East Indies.

in this chapter, the VOC acted as the private arm in an ongoing global war against Spain, whose king was also the crowned head of Portugal.

Both companies focused on trade with Asia, but the differences in their charter territories were also important. The VOC was restricted to activities in the Indian and Pacific oceans, between the Cape of Good Hope at the tip of Africa and Cape Horn at the tip of South America. By contrast, the EIC could develop the Americas, specifically the British colonies in North America, as a key market for its colonial produce and wares. A revolt against the English and the EIC at the infamous Boston Tea Party triggered American independence and the birth of the United States of America in 1776.

The drive for profits and market share in Europe would pit the Portuguese, Dutch and English in a deadly contest in lands and waters far away and take European rivalry to Southeast Asia. Sometimes described as the Century of Conflict, the 17th century saw European kingdoms, both substantial as well as small, fighting for political eminence, religious ascendancy and territory in Europe as well as globally. This competition created a patchwork of colonies in an increasingly Europeanising, polyglot world. One long-running conflict was between the Dutch and the Portuguese, the Luso-Dutch conflict ("Luso" refers to the old Roman province of Lusitania, which approximates today's Portugal).

By the late 16th century, Singapore had turned from being a feeder port in the Melakan empire into the gatekeeper of the Johor River. With the royal court located just up the Johor River, Singapore acted as a natural gateway to the Sultanate's riverine economy. Cartographic evidence suggests that for at least the first half of the 17th century, Singapore played a role in this riverine trade as the base of the Johor navy and the gatekeeper of the upstream towns. It continued, as before, to be administered by a Shahbandar appointed by the Johor sultan. Being part of this riverine economy, it was natural that the waters around Singapore would become a zone of contestation. Regional powers, including Aceh and Patani, were hovering for a bigger slice of the commercial pie. An equally muscular Johor made strategic alliances with the Europeans in its wars against these regional rivals.

Plunder of the *Santa Catarina*

While the Portuguese tried to maintain their European monopoly of the East-West trade, the Dutch wanted to end the Portuguese-Spanish colonial trade monopolies globally. They were prepared to use any means necessary, including violence, to achieve their aim in the Straits of Melaka and the waters around Singapore. Thus in 1603, they resorted to plundering the Portuguese merchant ship, the *Santa Catarina*, off the eastern coast of Singapore, near present-day Changi Point – an act that had far-reaching consequences.

Dutch activities in Southeast Asia were not limited to trade. There was also piracy and privateering. Privateering was simply a legalised form of piracy that required a commission and licence known as a letter of marque issued by a sovereign lord or state. Privateers had to abide by the laws of war, bring seized cargo to the home port, and pay taxes on its value. Privateering began in the 16th century as a way to lure private agents into aiding war efforts. To the victims, it was piracy all the same. Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake, who plundered the Spanish during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, were technically privateers but were – and still are – decried as pirates in Spanish accounts. Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and the Azores in the North Atlantic were notorious hunting grounds for privateers, corsairs, buccaneers and pirates, whose heyday lasted until around the middle of the 1700s.

In February 1603, the Dutch seized the Melaka-bound *Santa Catarina*, brimming with goods from Japan and China, as the 1,400-ton carrack entered Singapore waters. Admiral Jacob van

Detail from a 1755 navigation chart by French hydrographer Jacques Nicolas Bellin of the Singapore and Melaka straits that clearly marks out the different passages for sailing past Singapore. The chart warns mariners of the numerous unknown small islands south of Singapore, which is marked as "Pulo ou Isle Panjang", or "Long Island".

The 18th Century
From Malay Entrepôt to Colonial Port-City

*A*nd the time for Friday prayers arrived. And the Royal Sedan chair was ready. Then His Highness mounted the chair and was carried to Friday prayers. At the gate to the mosque the Bendahara and the noblemen were waiting. Then Megat Seri Rama arrived, bowed and said, "Your slave is committing treason, My Lord," and with his parang [cleaver] hit the head of His Highness. White blood flowed, like the cream of coconut milk….

Hikayat Siak (Chronicle of the Kingdom of Siak)

A Royal Assassination

News reached the Dutch in Melaka in October 1699 that Sultan Mahmud II of Johor had been assassinated by his noblemen, the *orang kaya*. The Sultan's naked corpse was apparently dragged around the town and left exposed until the afternoon when the conspirators would proclaim the Bendahara (prime minister) as the new Sultan; only then could Mahmud be buried.

The *orang kaya* were driven to dispose of Mahmud because of his increasingly erratic and intolerable behaviour, culminating in his order to disembowel the pregnant wife of an *orang kaya*, Megat Sri Rama, after she partook of a slice of jackfruit stolen from the royal compound. The *Hikayat Siak* – the court chronicle of the Kingdom of Siak on the east coast of Sumatra – claims that Mahmud had her belly carved open, wanting to see her unborn child sucking on the jackfruit.

A distraught Megat Sri Rama led the regicide and struck when Mahmud was being carried to the mosque for Friday prayers. In the popular history of Johor, Mahmud is referred to as the "Sultan who passed away on the royal sedan chair" (Marhum Mangkat di

The mausoleum in Kota Tinggi where the grave of Sultan Mahmud Shah is today housed with other royal graves.

Julang). His grave – with a mausoleum erected over it – as well as that of Megat Sri Rama are venerated sites in Kota Tinggi, Johor, today. The death of Mahmud would lead to a profound and unfortunate turn of history for Johor and Singapore as well as a shift in regional and global trade patterns.

The British country trader Alexander Hamilton, who visited Johor and may have witnessed these events, provided a different account from that conveyed to the Dutch at Melaka or documented in the later Malay histories. It would appear that Mahmud, who had been installed in 1685 as the 10th Sultan of Johor at the age of 10, apart from his youth and incompetence as a ruler, favoured the intimate company of men. Hamilton's account of the regicide is a riveting story of a brutal tyrant, a concerned mother, a rejected beauty, and a father seeking revenge:

> *Their King was a Youth of twenty Years of Age, and being vitiously inclined, was so corrupted by Adulation and Flagitious Company, that he became intolerable. I went to Johore Lami at that Time, to traffick with his Subjects, and some China Men…. He continued his insupportable Tyranny and Brutality for a Year or two after I was gone, and his Mother, to try if he could be broke off that unnatural Custom of Converse with Males, perswaded a beautiful young Woman to visit him, when he was a Bed, which she did, and allured him with her Embraces, but he was so far from being pleased with her Conversation, that he called his black Guard, and made them break both her Arms, for offering to embrace his royal Person. She cried, and said it was by his Mother's Order she came, but that was no Excuse. Next Morning he sent a Guard to bring her Father's Head, but he being an Orankay did not care to part with it, so the Tyrant*

> *took a Lance in his Hand, and sware he would have it; but, as he was entring at the Door, the Orankay past a long Lance through his Heart, and so made an End of the Beast.*

The killing of Mahmud plunged Johor into a succession crisis. The Bendahara Paduka Raja, who was elevated to succeed as Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah IV, inherited a fragmented kingdom, of which the Shahbandaria of Singapura was a part. Malay histories claim that the new Bendahara-Sultan did not have in his veins the supposedly "white blood" that Sultan Mahmud Shah II had as a direct descendant of Sri Tri Buana, and was thus unable to command the same loyalty from the Orang Laut and the Malay populace.

Without the moral authority of sacred lineage, Abdul Jalil could only rule Johor with the continued support of the *orang kaya*. However, Hamilton believed that while Abdul Jalil was a sincere ruler accepted by his subjects and trade flourished during his reign, he was also manipulated by his younger brother, Tun Mahmud, who exercised the real political power.

Hand-drawn and coloured chart of the southern portion of the Malay Peninsula and the Singapore Straits together with part of the Riau Archipelago by Thomas Bowrey, c. 1690.

Printed map found in Alexander Hamilton's *A New Account of the East Indies*, published in 1727. The Singapore Strait is marked here as "Straits of Governdore", a variant of Governor's Strait, named after the Spanish Governor of the Philippines, Juan de Silva, who had arrived with his armada off Singapore in 1616.

By 1716, Tun Mahmud was facing serious challenges, and two years later, he would face an adversary in the form of Raja Kecik. Raja Kecik (sometimes Raja Kecil) appeared off the coast of Sumatra near Bengkalis in 1718, claiming to be the posthumous son of Sultan Mahmud Shah II – with the "white blood" of Mahmud and his Melaka ancestors coursing through his veins – and hence the bearer of the mystical right to rule Johor-Riau.

According to the *Hikayat Siak*, Raja Kecik was born to a slave woman attending to the Sultan on the eve of the regicide. The text recounts that Mahmud was dallying with a young man, whom he preferred to his concubines. When Mahmud spilt his royal seed, he ordered the slave woman to swallow it; which she did, and thereby became impregnated. Thus did Raja Kecik issue forth into the world, infused with the royal "white blood" of Sri Tri Buana in his veins. Raja Kecik succeeded in convincing the people who mattered – the Orang Laut warriors – as well as other groups disenchanted with the new dynasty, of this fantastical tale of his bloodline.

In 1719, Raja Kecik attacked the Johor capital, and in another act of regicide, the Bendahara-Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah was assassinated while fleeing to Pahang. His son and heir, Raja Sulaiman, recruited Bugis settlers in Selangor and Linggi to help repel Raja Kecik. The war-like Bugis were part of a diaspora who had fled Sulawesi in the wake of the Makassar War of 1666–69. In return for successfully battling Raja Kecik, the Bugis demanded and received a permanent position at the Johor-Riau court through the office of the Raja Muda and through marriage into the royal family. The new Bugis Raja Muda, Daeng Merewah, came to wield most of the political – and arguably economic – power.

The enmity between Raja Kecik's kingdom of Siak in eastern Sumatra, which he established in 1723, and the Bugis at Riau continued for much of the 18th century, during which time, according to the *Hikayat Siak*, sporadic naval battles took place between them in and around Singapore waters. One naval battle in 1767 reportedly took place at the entrance to the Singapore River.

Underlying these conflicts was a deeper ideological battle for hearts and minds in the Malay world. The *Hikayat Siak* contends that Raja Kecik was the rightful heir to Singapura's legacy established by Sri Tri Buana. Like the latter, Raja Kecik crossed the seas to Sumatra to establish a new kingdom at Siak, which was Singapura's true successor, not the Bugis at Bintan.

Both men were "strangers" who appeared among a host society claiming to be an immigrant warrior prince whose father was a god or former king of the land, and further claiming the political legitimacy to rulership. Singapura was then the spiritual base of Raja Kecik's claim to his right to rule. What is important to understand here is that the succession crisis caused by the regicide of 1699 resulted in a rift between the Johor-Riau Sultanate and the Kingdom of Siak, one that would eventually have consequences on the fate of Singapore in 1819.

With the benefit of hindsight, and given the ascendancy of the Bugis in the Melaka Straits in the first half of the 18th century, the major losers of the regicide were the Orang Laut communities. As the Bugis appropriated concessions and leading positions, the Orang Laut, who had occupied key economic, political and military roles since the Melaka Sultanate, became increasingly marginalised.

For Review Only

Map of Singapore around 1819–20, from the Bute Collection. This is one of the earliest maps of Singapore after the establishment of the British station on the island. The ancient embankment is clearly marked, running alongside what is today Stamford Canal and then around the north side of Bukit Larangan, the "Forbidden Hill", as Fort Canning Hill was known then. The map also marks a proposed bridge across the river, as well as a gun battery on the hill, which was never constructed. Raffles on his last visit in January 1823 built himself a bungalow on the hill.

The 19th Century
Port-City of the British Empire

I have now the satisfaction to report, for the information of the Most Noble the Governor General in Council… that a British Station commanding the Southern entrance of the straits of Malacca, and combining extraordinary local advantage with a peculiarly admirable Geographical position, has been established at Singapore the ancient Capital of the Kings of Johor, on terms and conditions, which I trust will meet the approbation and confirmation of His Lordship in Council.

Formal report by Stamford Raffles to the office of the Marquess of Hastings, Governor-General of India, on 13 February 1819

Hunt for a British Foothold

The search by the British East India Company (EIC) for a station at the southern entrance of the Straits of Melaka arose from several factors, one of which was the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, in which the Netherlands allied with Britain in the latter's war against France. During the war, Dutch colonies in the East Indies came under EIC administration (1811–16). Thomas Stamford Raffles was appointed Governor-General of Java, and Major William Farquhar the Resident of Melaka.

With the region under EIC administration, the private trade conducted by British country traders grew. For 200 years, these traders had been privately financed individuals, but by the 19th century, they comprised mainly retired Company officials trading outside the EIC's trade monopoly. These traders had long challenged the regional monopoly by the Dutch and, despite being unwelcome, they continued to trade at ports in the Malay Peninsula and in the

Dutch heartland of eastern Indonesia. They were always on the lookout for a Dutch-free trading base. Bugis-controlled Riau had been a welcome trading base until 1784, when the Dutch defeated both the Bugis and Johor-Riau and as part of the peace agreement made the latter a hereditary fief of the Netherlands.

In 1786, persuaded by the concerns of country traders, the EIC accepted the Sultan of Kedah's offer of Penang to country trader Francis Light. It was not a Malay ruler's first bid to seek an alternative to the Dutch. As seen in the preceding chapter, the Johor Sultan had offered Singapore to another country trader, Alexander Hamilton, in 1703. When the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1814, the Dutch were promised the return of their former colonies (with certain exceptions) with the ratification of the so-called London Convention (1814). Calcutta, the EIC's Asian headquarters, began considering the interests of the country traders only belatedly in 1818 as the Dutch were reasserting control over the ports that had been returned to them.

Raffles joined the EIC as a 14-year-old clerk in 1795. Within a decade, he was appointed Assistant Secretary to the newly formed Penang Presidency. Southeast Asia gave Raffles a different perspective from his India colleagues. For him, the main challenge for the EIC was Dutch competition in the Eastern Seas. Raffles' five-year stint as Governor-General of Java gave him the opportunity to develop plans to counter the Dutch. Recalled from this post, in part because of maladministration, Raffles returned to London, wrote *The History of Java* to substantiate his case for the British retention of Java, and earned a knighthood in 1817. The following year, he returned to the East as Lieutenant-Governor of Bengkulu in Sumatra and discovered that the Dutch had tightened their grip on the East Indies and were expanding farther into Sumatra. Alarmed, he alerted London:

> *The Dutch possess the only passes through which ships must sail into the Archipelago, the Straits of Sunda and Malacca; and the British have now not an inch of ground to stand upon between the Cape of Good Hope and China, nor a single friendly port at which they can water and obtain refreshment.*

Penang, in Raffles' view, was an isolated British outpost surrounded by Dutch-controlled territory – although this was not actually the case. He wanted to counter Dutch influence and make

Britain the leading trading nation, but his superiors dismissed his attempts after the Dutch protested. Holland, after all, was Britain's European ally in spite of their rivalry in Asia. In September 1818, Raffles visited Calcutta to lobby the Governor-General of India, Lord Hastings. The latter proved receptive and authorised him to reach an agreement with Aceh in northern Sumatra. The Aceh plan, aimed at protecting the British trade route through the Straits of Melaka, also allowed Raffles to establish an EIC trading post at the southern end of the Melaka Straits – provided he did not antagonise the Dutch.

Raffles arrived in Penang in January 1819, where he met Farquhar, who was preparing to return to England. The two men had met earlier in Melaka and shared a distrust of the Dutch. Like Raffles, Farquhar had urged the EIC to set up a British post at a similar location. Before ending his Melaka Residency, Farquhar had negotiated a treaty with the Riau court to secure the southern end of the Melaka Straits against a Dutch monopoly. In Penang, Raffles learnt that the Dutch had returned to Riau, reinstalled a Dutch Resident, and strong-armed the Riau Sultan into voiding his treaty with Farquhar. The Dutch also aimed to lay claim to the territory

A portion of James Horsburgh's chart of the Melaka Straits, capturing the southern end of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Batam and Bintan. Raffles would have used an earlier edition of this chart to navigate around the Straits of Singapore.
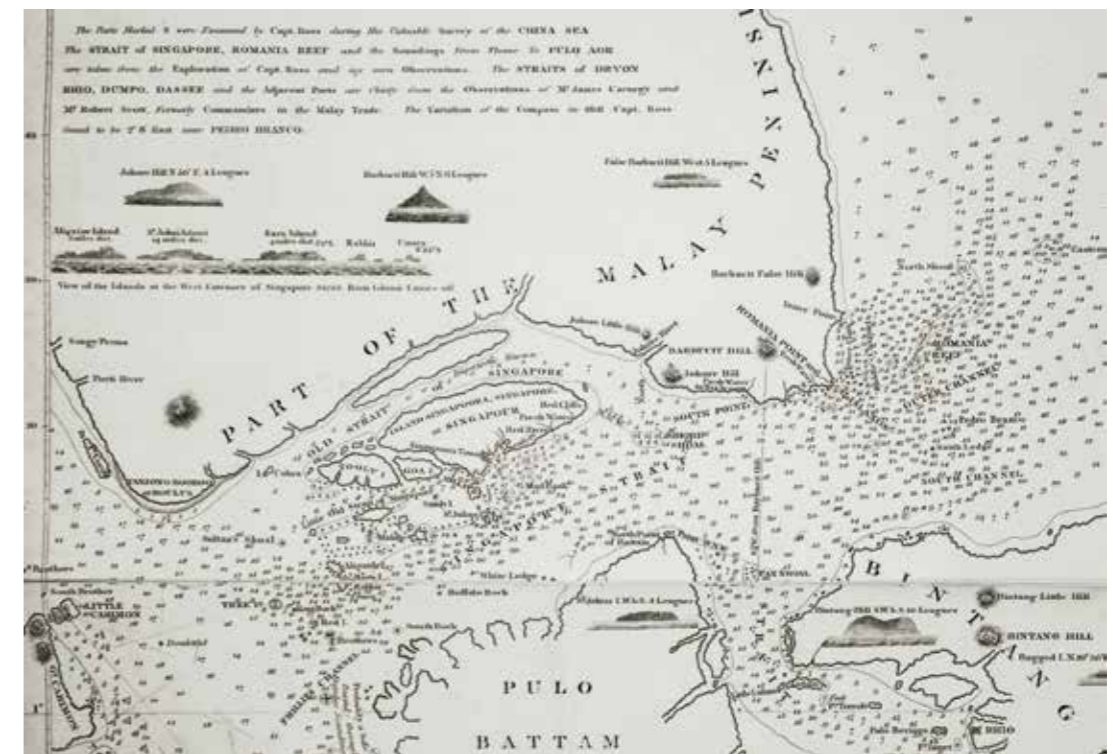
belonging to the Johor-Riau Sultanate, including Johor and the islands south of it.

To quickly stake a claim ahead of the Dutch, Raffles despatched Farquhar south on the brig *Ganges* to link up with hydrographer Captain Daniel Ross, whose *Discovery* was moored at the Karimun islands. Raffles himself would sail to Aceh to negotiate a treaty with the Sultan there. However, Colonel John Bannerman, the Penang Governor, stymied Raffles' plan, insisting that Aceh was under Penang's – and therefore his – purview. He ordered Raffles to remain in Penang until Calcutta issued a clarification, but Raffles ignored the injunction and slipped away to join Farquhar.

Raffles was interested in the Karimun islands because they were situated in such a way that ships could not bypass the key islands – Greater and Lesser Karimun – when they sailed through the Melaka Straits and turned east for the South China Sea past Pulau Satumu, where Raffles Lighthouse stands today. The Karimuns could also control access into the Kampar River, which led to the Minangkabau highlands of central Sumatra. However, after several days of surveying, Raffles and his expedition found no suitable anchorage.

Nine Days That Changed Singapore's World

Persuaded by Captain Ross, Raffles then stopped at Singapore en route to the Johor River. On the morning of 28 January 1819, he brought his fleet of eight ships to anchor off St John's Island. At 4 pm, he landed at the Singapore River mouth. He was greeted by the Orang Laut, who told him that the Temenggong of Johor lived on the island and – even better news – that there was no Dutch presence.

It would appear that Raffles was aware of Singapore but thought that the Dutch might object, so his first choice was the more strategically positioned Karimun islands. The stopover at Singapore was purely incidental as he was travelling en route to the estuary of the Johor River, capital of the former Johor Sultans. However, once in Singapore, Raffles realised that there were several factors which made the island attractive. Apart from the absence of the Dutch, he was encouraged by the presence of Temenggong Abdur Rahman, who knew Farquhar from Melaka. It was not difficult to convince the Temenggong of the material advantages of setting up a British factory in Singapore, and he soon signed a provisional
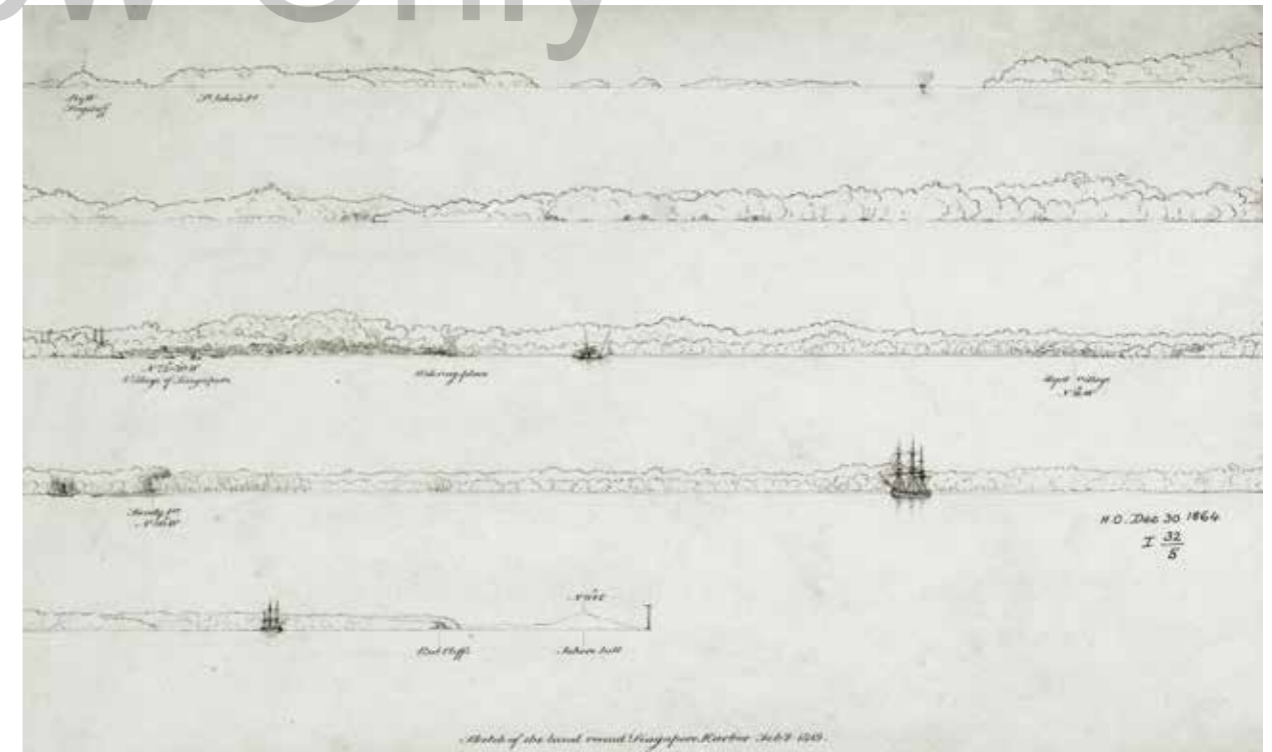
agreement with Raffles, pending the arrival of Tengku Husain (also known as Tengku Long) from Riau. A third factor Raffles considered was the split in the Riau-Lingga court that made it possible for him to legitimise Singapore as a British settlement in the Malay world.

According to Wak Hakim, an Orang Laut who witnessed Raffles' arrival, the Orang Laut chief Batin Sapi was sent to Riau to fetch Tengku Husain to Singapore to be recognised as the Sultan by Raffles. Batin Sapi's role continued the Orang Laut's long tradition of escorting the 15th-century prince Parameswara and successive Melaka and Johor sultans on their expeditions to establish new realms.

Tengku Husain and the Temenggong became the central rationale for Raffles' choice of Singapore. In a letter to his former secretary Charles Assey in England, Raffles argued:

> *Mynheer [i.e., the Dutch] will probably enter into a paper war on the subject; but we may, I think, combat their arguments without any difficulty. They had established themselves at Rhio*

Drawings of the coastline at Singapore harbour, dated 7 February 1819. The date suggests that the sketch was made by a member of one of the Bombay Marine's survey ships – the *Discovery*, under the command of Captain Daniel Ross, or the *Investigator*, under Captain John Garritt Fisher Crawford. These two survey ships were accompanying the armed ship *Indiana*, with Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles onboard.

Chang Chin Fai's 1992 watercolour captures the "Changing Cityscape" of Singapore with the iconic Sultan Mosque in the centre of the painting, surrounded by the conserved architecture of Kampong Glam, and high-rise office blocks in the background.

The 20th Century
Becoming a Global City-State

It is the role of the cities in Asian countries, established and developed as beach-heads of Western Imperialism, to transform themselves under their independent national governments into beach-heads of a dynamic modernisation process to transform the countryside.

Singapore's economic architect Goh Keng Swee,
in an article written in 1967 when he was
Singapore's first Finance Minister

Conflict and Nationhood

If the 19th century experienced technological disruption and economic ferment, the 20th was riven by conflict. The global forces that had turned an island at the southern end of the Malay Peninsula into the focus of British imperial power now swept Singapore into war, occupation and political change.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Singapore was integrated economically, financially and politically into the Malay Peninsula. Legally, British Malaya was a combination of the Federated and Unfederated Malay States along with the Straits Settlements of Penang and Melaka. Singapore was technically part of the Straits Settlements but in practice functioned as the administrative centre of this colonial world that also included the British Borneo territories. In many ways, Singapore was its cultural capital as well. The latest ideas and trends flowed into the port and spread through a thriving publishing industry churning out newspapers and magazines in multiple languages.

After the Causeway opened in 1923 – initially as a railway connection to transport primary commodities to the port-city – Singapore

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Singapore-Johore Railway Ferryboat Johore Jetty.

Love from Mother 10-9-06.
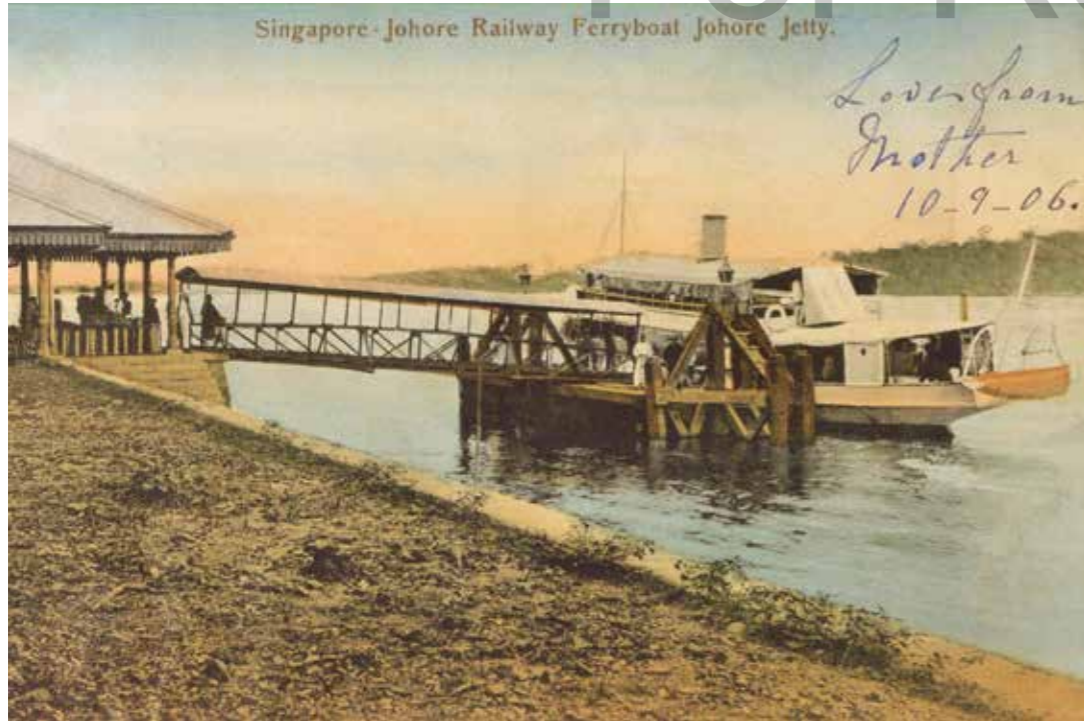
Prior to the construction of the Causeway, Singapore was linked to the Malay Peninsula by a ferry service that plied between Woodlands and Johor Bahru.

became physically linked with Malaya. The railway terminus in Singapore was located at Tanjong Pagar, in front of Keppel Harbour. While the Malayan hinterland supported Singapore as a port, it was, in turn, sustained by the port's trade activities. Singapore was Malaya's primary port and the conduit through which supplies from Thailand, Burma and Indochina were channelled to Malaya. As the British Empire attained global-power status at the end of the 19th century, Singapore gained symbolic and strategic significance, backed by its standing as the leading entrepôt in Southeast Asia.

Just as Singapore's economy was bound up with that of British Malaya, so too was its defence, going back to the very foundation of colonial Singapore. London's initial indifference to Raffles' acquisition turned to official interest only when the War Office began hunting for an alternative base to Hong Kong after the First Opium War ended in 1842. However, the cost of maintaining a defence base in Singapore turned the proposal into a political football that was kicked back and forth between governments – right up to Britain's 1967 announcement of its troop withdrawal from Singapore, a whole century after Singapore became a Crown Colony.

After World War I, a more coherent Far East defence plan was mooted. Although Japan was still a British ally then, Lord Jellicoe, the British First Sea Lord, saw it as a potential threat and recommended the creation of a powerful Singapore-based Far East fleet to match the growing Japanese naval might. But the war had gutted British appetite for a military build-up; London's focus was on economic recovery and disarmament. At the 1921 Imperial Conference, when representatives from Britain and its colonies met to discuss the empire's defence, it was decided that the "Singapore Strategy" would entail constructing a naval base in Singapore but not a Far East fleet. Instead, the British navy would be despatched to Asia if the Japanese attacked. The colonies would have to hold out on their own for the six weeks the naval forces took to arrive.

The initial blueprint for Sembawang Naval Base was an impressive affair, with 10 docks, a floating dock, an inner basin, over 3 kilometres of wharves, and housing for 2,000 personnel. Cost considerations swiftly shredded the plan, which was redrawn at a far more modest scale. Building it was a ponderous 15-year affair. Construction only began five years after its 1923 announcement, prodded by rising Japanese militarism. The project was delayed

The increasing integration between the economies of Singapore and the Malay Peninsula necessitated the building of a land crossing over the Straits of Johor. When the British eventually completed the construction of the Johor Causeway, rail and road transport links extended directly from the Malay Peninsula to Singapore.

again following the 1929 Wall Street collapse and the Great Depression of the 1930s, which crippled not only the American economy but the world economy too. Singapore suffered because demand for primary commodities like rubber and tin stalled. In addition, the US had supplanted Britain as Singapore's top market by then.

Construction was finally completed in 1938 but the base was little more than an empty shell without a fleet to defend it. Still, the reality did not stop the British from proclaiming Singapore an "impregnable fortress". The propaganda was aimed at deterring the Japanese, but ironically resulted in lulling the Singapore population into a false sense of security.

Japan and the Events Leading to World War II

Prior to World War I, the cornerstone of British imperial defence in Asia was the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, forged in 1902 and renewed in 1905 and 1911, which saw Russia as the common enemy. Britain's preoccupation with containing the German naval threat in Europe also prompted them to rely on this alliance to safeguard their Asian interests. It became increasingly apparent after 1919 that the balance of power in the East was shifting steadily in Japan's favour.

During the 19th century, Japan had embarked on the Meiji Restoration, a dramatic modernisation programme that by the end of the century had turned her into an Asian power with expansionist ambitions. In 1895, Japan acquired Taiwan (then known as Formosa) as part of the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95). The Japanese then trounced Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), becoming the first Asian nation to defeat a major Western one, gaining the Liaodong Peninsula, where Port Arthur was located, the South Manchuria Railway and half of Sakhalin island. In 1910, Japan annexed Korea – the final step in a long process of creeping control that had begun in the late 19th century. Five years later, Japan presented China with "21 Demands" that sought to open the China market to Japanese goods and which clearly made Japan a competitor for European economic interests in China.

The 1919 Treaty of Versailles gave Japan a League of Nations mandate over the Mariana, Caroline and Marshall islands in the Pacific. By this time, the Japanese navy was the world's third-strongest maritime power. The West sought to limit Japan's naval build-up and ease the arms race with the 1921 Washington Naval Agreement. The pact, which limited Britain's naval size, sounded the death knell of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Britain could no longer undertake simultaneous naval engagements in the European and Asian maritime theatres and had no Asian ally to serve as a custodian of her colonies. Worse, a war with Japan meant confrontations with the Imperial Japanese Navy, which would require the deployment of the Royal Navy from the British Isles.

In 1937, Japan invaded China following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, triggering the Second Sino-Japanese War. But China was too big for Japan to swallow. Despite being embroiled in a civil war between the People's Liberation Army led by Mao Zedong and the Kuomintang, or Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, as well as experiencing the horrors of the December 1937 Nanjing Massacre, China held out. Japan was now in a no-win situation. In a bid to end the war in China, in 1938 the US imposed an embargo on the export of manufactured goods to Japan; by 1940 the embargo extended to the export of oil. Japan could withdraw from China and end the embargo, or continue the war to a face-saving negotiated settlement. Once the debate among the Japanese hawks began to focus on the essentials for continuing the war in China, the "Southern Road" strategy, which involved taking the oil fields of the Dutch East Indies and British Borneo, became Tokyo's only option in 1941.

The British anticipated a Japanese attack on Singapore and in the mid-1930s reinforced its coastal defence with machine-gun pillboxes similar to this at Labrador, along the island's southern coast.

General Archibald Wavell (*third from right*), Commander-in-Chief India, inspecting Singapore's fortification and Indian troops in November 1941. Wavell was to return to Singapore in January 1942 as Commander-in-Chief Far East with command over General Percival. It is doubtful that Wavell could have done much to prevent the fall of Singapore in the final five weeks of the battle. But questions remain whether the decisions he took, or did not take, accelerated the surrender of Singapore.

Staff photograph of the University of Singapore History Department, 1966. (*Front row, from left*) Sharom Ahmat, Jenny Chong (department secretary), C.M. Turnbull, K.G. Tregonning, Eunice Thio, Irene Ee (administrative staff), Wong Lin Ken. (*Back row, from left*) Yeo Kim Wah, Edwin Lee, R. Sunthralingam, Chiang Hai Ding, Yong Chin Fatt, Png Poh Seng, Mat (Mohd. Ibrahim bin Baba, administrative staff).

CONCLUSION

Singapore's Challenge

W*hat does the future have in store for Singapore? City-states do not have good survival records. The Greek city-states no longer exist as states. Most have not vanished physically, but have been absorbed by the hinterland in a larger entity.*

Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew
in the concluding passages of his memoirs

Framing Singapore's History

This history of Singapore – within a lengthy time span of seven centuries beginning with the first material evidence of settlement on the island in the 14th century – is an attempt to contextualise today's dilemmas as recurrences in the long cycles of time. It is a history in which the trajectories of time are disrupted by the turbulence of conflict and wars as well as the competition for trade and commerce. The challenge for Singapore today is to find a way to connect its national narrative of a tangible history of economic progress to the intangible cycles of globalisation.

This volume argues for a linear-cyclical construction of Singapore's history as a harbour settlement or port-city in the past 700 years. The continuity of Singapore's history as a harbour or port may lie less in the presence or absence of settlement on the island, but more in the waters around Singapore, which mariners and traders had to pass en route from the South China Sea to the Bay of Bengal and vice-versa.

As such, a major focus of this long-cycle history of Singapore has been on documenting our knowledge of the waters around Singapore. It is in the archived maps, charts and rutters giving sailing directions for safe passage through the four routes around Singapore – the Tebrau Strait between Singapore and Johor, the Keppel Harbour waterway between Singapore

and present-day Sentosa, the fairway south of Sentosa, and the main Singapore Straits (which was earlier known as Governor's Strait) – that a continuous history of Singapore may be found.

What were the critical events that led to the alternating use of these sea lanes? What were the events that led the Portuguese and Dutch to propose constructing forts on Sentosa and at Changi in the 17th century? The history of settlement on Singapore would have pivoted very differently if these proposals had materialised. This history has reviewed the use of the sea lanes around Singapore in the context of the long cycles of European power politics from the 17th century as they played out between the respective East India Companies in the region.

In this respect, Raffles' objective in establishing a "British station" on Singapore was to ensure that the Dutch in Bintan would not be able to block British shippers and merchants from using the sea lanes around Singapore on their way to or from China. He believed the Dutch were evil and threatening, and concluded along with the country traders that they were aiming to close the sea lanes to the British. But Raffles appears to have been unaware or to have forgotten that such a move would have been in violation of the 1784 Treaty of Paris, which assured freedom of passage to all through the waters of the Riaus.

Raffles' station took on a life of its own, transforming into a thriving port-city on the back of Britain's rise to dominance in the long cycle of European power politics in the late 18th century following the French Revolution.

As such, Singapore's history as a port-city, like that of other port-cities, details how the city and land behind the port have been linked and united with the maritime world in front of it. It is also a history of the interaction between Asian and European trading communities that created a viable waterfront to attract and service maritime trade.

The Long Tail of Pre-colonialism

Within these long cycles of time, 14th-century Temasek rose to eminence at the tail end of what has been termed an "Asian sea trade boom" or an "Asian commercial ecumene" between the 10th and 13th centuries. This upturn in Asian maritime trade was driven by an economic revolution in Song China which continued into the Yuan dynasty. But a series of environmental crises and cycles of climate change in the 14th century forced China and West Asia to turn inwards.

Episodes of climate change wrought drought and famine as well as plagues of locusts on Yuan China from 1324 to 1330 and again from 1339. According to Chinese records, a series of "dragons" brought floods, followed by drought and famine, accompanied by extremely cold winters. A plague pandemic finally ended the Yuan dynasty in 1368. Concurrently, the Black Death decimated an estimated 30 percent of Europe's population and spread to West Asia, which would have depressed trade in the Indian Ocean.

This loss of the China market and the waning of trade in the Bay of Bengal may have led to Temasek's decline at the end of the 14th century. As Chapter Two has demonstrated, Temasek – or Singapura – as an autonomous trading settlement was eclipsed during Melaka's century, when it became a key outpost of the Melaka Sultanate and a base of the sultans' sea nomad warriors.

Singapore's chance for a second rise emerged towards the end of the 16th century, when the island became the gatekeeping port to the riverine economy of the Johor sultans at their peripatetic capitals up the Johor River (Chapter Three). This trading settlement on Singapore – administered by a Shahbandar acting as a proxy for the Johor sultans – thrived on Johor's trade with Ming and Qing China and other Melaka Straits ports.

Singapore was abandoned when a new line of Johor sultans shifted their capital to Bintan island at the beginning of the 18th century. Once again, Singapore was eclipsed, and this time round depopulated by Iranun raiders (Chapter 5).

Europe's Age of Empire

The Portuguese in the 1500s, and later the Dutch and English in the 1600s, entered an Asian trading world dominated by a series of great Asian empires: the Ming in China, the Mughals in India, the Safavids in Persia and the Ottomans in West Asia. For much of the 16th and 17th centuries, divergent preferences – terrestrial versus maritime conquest, strategies for the localisation of economic competition, and imperatives for war – enabled the Portuguese as well as the Dutch and English East India Companies to compete against each other and co-exist with the Asian empires. But this state of affairs was about to be reconfigured in a new age of empire in the latter half of the 18th century. By then, Dutch domination of European cycles of global power, inherited from the Portuguese cycle in the 16th century, was waning. At the same time, Britain emerged as the rising European

power, driving a new cycle of greater technology, connectivity and interdependence in global trade and politics, and thus, creating a "modern" world.

Raffles arrived on a depopulated island and accelerated Singapore's third cycle of settlement. A century later, the island's residents hailed him as the hero to whom they owed everything. Raffles was the archetype of the mythical champion who envisioned turning the East Indies British, and he battled the odds to realise that dream by taking a calculated risk to establish a British station on the island. Sadly, Singapore, as Raffles' "child", was unappreciated, if not unwanted; it might not have survived had it not been for the "trader-statesmen" and "trader-fighters" to whom the Singapore residents of 1919 were the heirs.

Raffles, in chess-speak, would be more of a knight, effective in close encounters because of his exceptional ability to hurdle past obstacles – human, natural or contrived. It was the shifts in global power in the late 18th century that provided him with the opportunities to manoeuvre and succeed in his efforts (Chapter Five). The cycles of trade and commerce underpinning the structure of power in the Indian Ocean were on the cusp of major shifts.

The British station that Raffles established survived and thrived because of the shift in trade dominance from the merchant empires of Portugal's Estado da India, Holland's VOC and the British EIC to the private or country traders. Singapore rose to pre-eminence within 30 years of its establishment in spite of the lack of support from the EIC, which provided minimal administrative help and funds. But unlike the earlier two cycles of settlement, it not only survived its centenary and a further 50 years, it also survived a turbulent crisis to transition into a fourth cycle of settlement as a modern Asian city-state.

The Arrows and Cycles of British Rule

On a unilineal timescale, only the third settlement of Singapore as a British colonial port-city connects to its fourth settlement as a modern city-state. The absence of any micro-changes that can be linked as events to connect the third and fourth settlements of Singapore to the earlier pair of settlements does not lead to the conclusion of a discontinuous history. Rather it points to the limitations of viewing Singapore's history within the linear trajectory of "time's arrow".

Time's arrow does not solely arc upwards towards progress, but can also curve downwards into decline and decadence, as happened with

14th-century Temasek and the 16th- and 17th-century Shahbandaria. The idea that societal cohesion can disintegrate because of the loss of economic "fortune" or the breakdown of political order is widespread among many societies. It pre-dates European Enlightenment ideals of progress. Arguably, it was these concerns about the possible decay of the *polis* or city-state, and how to arrest it, that preoccupied Plato in his best-known work, the *Republic*. Decline was established as a recurring theme in European history from early modern times in the works of Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) and Edward Gibbon (1737–94). In contrast to the optimism of the British in 1919 (albeit short-lived), the Germans appeared more pessimistic of their future, as reflected in the work of the philosopher Oswald Spengler on the decline of the West.

Time's arrow, as analysed by Isaac Newton at the start of his *Principia,* is "absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equably without relation to anything external". The issue with this understanding is that if time flows without relation to anything external, how is it to be sensed and measured? This was an issue Newton recognised, and he expended the last 30 years of his life trying to anchor the flow of time to specific events in space. Restated, the flow of time as an arrow has to be fixed to a point in space if it is to be sensed. Newton tried to link the abstract physical world of his *Principia* to the world of men in his posthumously published *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms* and *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John.*

The implication of this physical conception of time on our understanding of Singapore's past is that unless there is an action or activity that can be fixed in the space associated with Singapore, then time and history flow equably past a depopulated island until Raffles arrives to start a chronology.

But there is an alternative experience of time underlying the history of Singapore – one that starts in 1819 and moves through a series of connected events to today. Time, as we experience it, also moves in cycles, when events from our past are perceived to recur, and the rhythms of intangible forces from the past continue into the present.

The events of the past seven centuries do not link up to form a continuous causal sequence leading to our present. Instead, these events oscillate in cycles of episodic settlement, alternating uses of the sea lanes to sail past Singapore, and recurring cycles of trade and commerce. Framing Singapore's past this way may facilitate a keener understanding of how the periods when events were taking place on the island can be connected