

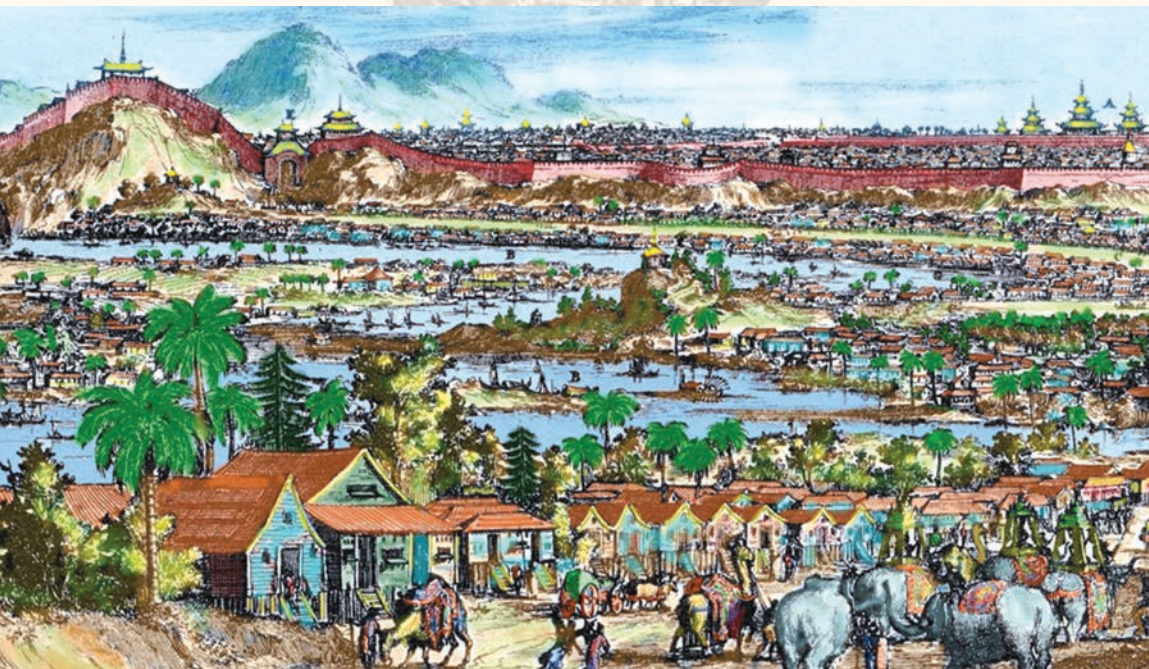
BETWEEN  
THE

# Bay of Bengal

AND THE

# Java Sea

**Maganjeet Kaur**  
**Mariana Isa**



BETWEEN THE

BAY OF BENGAL

AND THE

JAVA SEA

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*Trade routes, ancient ports & cultural  
commonalities in Southeast Asia*

**MAGANJEET KAUR · MARIANA ISA**



**Marshall Cavendish**  
Editions

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Published in 2020 by Marshall Cavendish Editions  
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International



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#### **National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

Name: Kaur, Maganjeet, 1963– | Isa, Mariana, 1980–

Title: Between the Bay of Bengal and the Java Sea: Trade routes, ancient ports & cultural commonalities in Southeast Asia / Maganjeet Kaur, Mariana Isa.

Description: Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2020. |

Includes bibliographic references.

Identifier(s): OCN 1134403725 | ISBN 978-981-4779-27-2 (paperback)

Subject(s): LCSH: Southeast Asia—Civilization—History. | Southeast Asia—

Commerce—History. | Trade routes—Southeast Asia—History.

Classification: DDC 959—dc23

Printed in Singapore

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A gateway in the Kaibon Kraton palace in Old Banten, at the western tip of Java. Banten was once the pepper capital of the world.

## PREFACE

ANCIENT PORT-CITIES ARE wonderful to visit. Remnants of their thriving past in the form of architectural relics and artefacts echo the lives and events that took place in these historic centres of activity. However, centuries of natural sedimentation and land reclamation have pushed many of these settlements inland, away from their original coastal locations, so much so that their early origins as maritime trading hubs are now lost on us.

This book offers an insight to the historical backdrop framing the rise and decline of 10 significant Southeast Asian ports, in the hope that these individual stories illuminate the larger tapestry of maritime trade and cultural exchange. We have zoomed in on the region between the Bay of Bengal and the Java Sea as a particularly fertile area of study. The port-cities we have selected are Mrauk-U, Bago, southern Kedah, Kuala Selinsing, Melaka, Palembang, Singapore, Banten, Semarang and northern Bali. Our focus is on the formation of the early settlements, the commodities exchanged, and the commercial networks that made them prosperous, from the beginning of the Common Era up to the coming of the Europeans.

Among our readings, we referred to travellers' accounts, historical writings by the Arabs, Chinese, Portuguese and Dutch, Tamil epics, Malay chronicles, old maps and lithographs. As written records for these cities prior to the Europeans' arrival are limited and to a great degree intertwined with folklore, we turned to academic papers and journals to establish reliable facts, noting that debates on certain aspects have been going

on for ages. The latest archaeological discoveries have enriched our knowledge and understanding of places, and we keep an open mind to future discoveries that will augment or possibly upend the narratives that we are accustomed to. On the whole, we have chosen to stay close to the essence of these cities' fortunes, namely maritime trade and commerce, without disregarding the romance, power struggles, feuds and betrayals that attended the complex history of the region.

Today, almost nothing from their earliest history can be traced on the ground. Fortunately, the remaining elements in one way or other have been well preserved, although the less popular historical sites are not easily located. Many of the artefacts and relics are also no longer in situ but distributed throughout museums and galleries. We enjoyed tracking down these places and items, finding ourselves in awe of the grand architecture and majestic ruins that have stood the test of time.

A note on terminology: We have used the name “India” interchangeably with “South Asia” to refer to the Indian subcontinent, comprising modern-day Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

We are indebted to our editors at Marshall Cavendish, Justin Lau and Melvin Neo, for supporting our ideas and guiding this book to fruition, as well as Sophia Susanto, for helping us shape the initial manuscript. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to the following people who have contributed towards this book in one way or other: Ar. Adrianta Aziz, Anthony C. Louis,

Dayan De Silva, Denny Setiawan, Donovan Louis, Fazreen Farouk, Hans-Peter Holst, Jasdeen Singh, Inderjeet Kaur, Inge-Marie Holst, June Tan, Karen Loh, Lee Ching Ching, Lim Chen Sian, Maria Isa, Dr. Nasha Rodziadi Khaw, Novie Rurianingsih, Raynier Sanders De Silva, LAr. Dr. Rohayah Che Amat, Rose Gan, Roshaan Singh, Rosli Haji Nor, Shaiful Idzwan Shahidan, Prof. Dr. Ir. Sugiono Soetomo, Ar. Steven Thang Boon Ann, Sudha Nair, Ar. Tiong Kian Boon, V. Jegatheesan and Prof. Xavier Benedict.

We hope that this book will set you on a stimulating journey through Southeast Asia, including many less well-known places that have played a more important role in the region's history than their current state might suggest. Our belief is that this zone lying between the Bay of Bengal and the Java Sea tells one of the most fascinating stories of disparate polities knit together by cultural diffusion borne on the back of trade and commerce.

Maganjeet Kaur  
Mariana Isa

January 2020





Stilt house on Inle Lake, Myanmar. Throughout history, houses across Southeast Asia have been built on stilts, raising the living area high above ground level. This protects the occupants from wild animals as well as from floods, while air circulation under the floor helps keep the interior cool. Those dwelling over the water could moor their boats in the space under the house.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE & PORTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

ONE OF THE MOST remarkable features of Southeast Asia is its diversity. This geographical region, which encompasses 11 modern nation states, is home to more than 1,000 distinct languages; its ethnic groups are equally diverse and belief systems multifarious. A closer look, however, reveals many cultural similarities. From Myanmar to Papua, people built wooden houses on poles, whether they lived in flooded coastal plains or in the highlands. The practice of chewing betel, an intoxicant made of areca nut, betel leaf and lime, became entrenched in traditions of hospitality and

▼ The *tongkonan* is the traditional house of the Toraja people of South Sulawesi. These houses are built high on stilts and have boat-shaped roofs. The form of these houses is said to be reflected in the motifs on Vietnamese Dong Son drums.





► A lion head made of sandstone, dated to the 10th century, found at Tra Kieu, Quang Nam province, Vietnam. Tra Kieu was a Cham royal city and it was previously known as Simhapura, making it the first “lion city” of Southeast Asia.

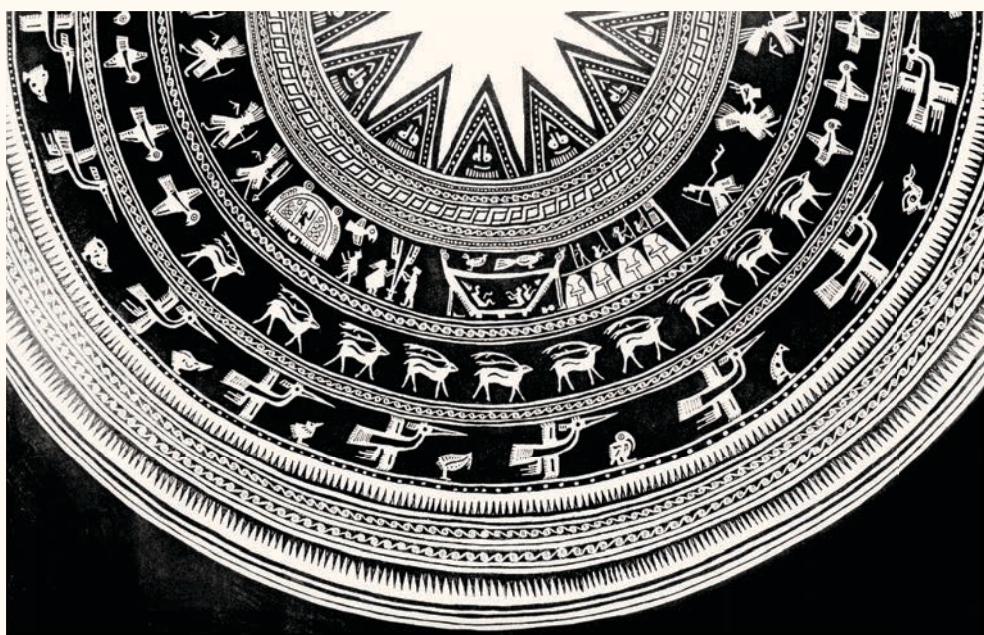
► A partial Dong Son drum from Sangeang Island, Indonesia. These large mushroom-shaped bronze drums take their name from Dong Son, a village in northern Vietnam. Four frogs are embedded on the drum’s tympanum – croaking frogs herald rain, important in an agricultural society.

► The Ngoc Lu drum, unearthed in 1893 in Vietnam, features intriguing motifs on its tympanum. Notice the house on stilts with a saddle roof at the centre of the drawing – these types of houses were common throughout Southeast Asia, e.g. the *tongkonan* houses of South Sulawesi. Observe also the procession of men carrying instruments and wearing feathered headdresses, which were also worn in parts of the southern islands.

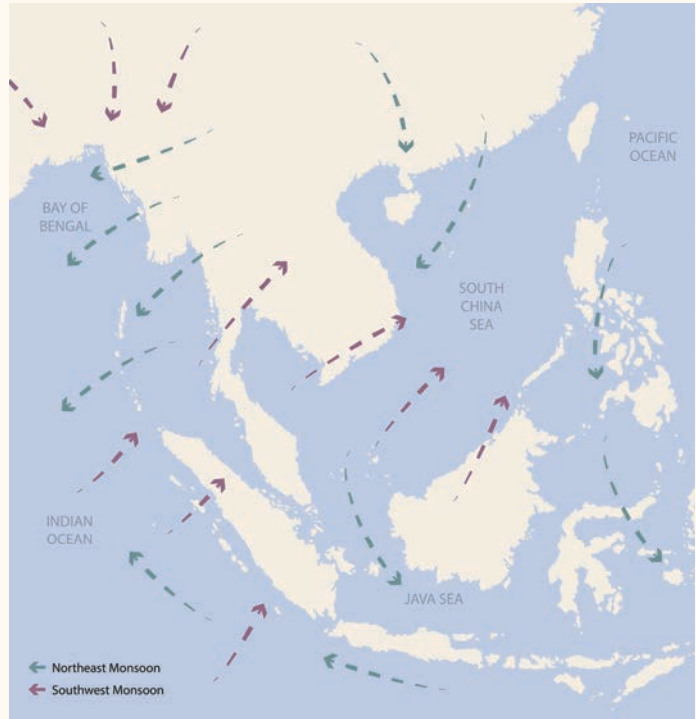
wedding ceremonies. Founding stories based on the courage of weaker animals in the face of stronger ones, like Melaka’s mousedeer kicking a dog, echo across the region. The name “Singapura” (lion city) is not unique to Singapore but has been used for a number of cities across Southeast Asia.

This transmission of culture, beliefs and stories across the region took advantage of the numerous trade routes that criss-crossed Southeast Asia. Multiple trading networks, comprising both land and sea routes, intersected with one another, providing the opportunity for products and culture to be widely dispersed. Thus, two ancient prestige products from Vietnam – Dong Son drums and Sa Huynh pottery – have been found as far afield as Sumatra in the west and Bird’s Head Peninsula, West Papua, in the east. A carbonised nutmeg from the eastern Indonesian islands dating to 400–300 BCE found in northern India points not only to the antiquity of these networks but also to the participation of local products in international markets.

The wide dispersal of products and culture was no mean feat, considering that a large part of Southeast Asia is insular – that is, made up of islands. The key nodes in the trading networks were seaports and river



► Two monsoon seasons hold sway in Southeast Asia. Boats travelled to Southeast Asia on one monsoon and returned on the other. The north-east monsoon builds up in November with strong winds blowing in November and December across the South China Sea. The winds gradually weaken from February and start withdrawing at the end of March. There is a transition period in April when the winds bring boats towards eastern Indonesia. The southwest monsoon builds up in May and is in full force between June and August. The winds weaken gradually and disappear in November. The cycle then starts again.



► Sea routes from India to Southeast Asia. Boats from Tamralipti in Bengal tended to hug the coastline, taking advantage of the coastal ports like Bago. If crossing the Bay of Bengal directly from the northern coastline of India, boats would sail straight for Dawei on the Tanintharyi Peninsula. From South India, there were two options. Boats could either take the route between the Andaman and Nicobar islands to reach Takuapa, or the route between the Nicobar Islands and the Aceh headland to reach Kedah.





ports, which consolidated products from their hinterlands. Riding the monsoons to India and China, the boat-dwelling sea nomads then distributed these goods to markets outside the region, where Southeast Asian jungle and sea produce, such as tortoise shells, pearls, aloes-wood, sandalwood, camphor and spices, were considered exotic. The sea nomads were expert navigators, looking to the skies and the seas for guidance. The stars, winds, clouds, birds, sea animals and wave patterns allowed them to navigate safely the waters between Madagascar in the Indian Ocean and Easter Island in the Pacific. Their grit and pluck drew admiration from the Greek philosopher Pliny the Elder, who wrote that they were driven by “the spirit of man and human courage”. Their navigational skills would later be sought by the Chinese and Portuguese.

The 1st century CE saw increased trade in the region, stimulated by Indian traders turning their attention eastwards. India’s main trading partner had hitherto been Rome, but declining trade saw them look

▲ Bas-relief of a ship carved on a panel at Borobudur, the monumental 9th-century Buddhist temple in central Java. This ship is said to be a typical Southeast Asian vessel of the time. A Chinese document from the 3rd century describes the ships as 50 metres long and rising 4–5 metres above sea level, and able to hold up to 1,000 tons of cargo and 700 passengers. In 2003, the *Samudra Raksa*, a life-size replica of the Borobudur ship, was sailed from Jakarta to Ghana to demonstrate that these ships were capable of making open sea journeys.



▲ A Roman gold medallion dating to 152 CE excavated at Óc-Eo. It depicts Emperor Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161 CE).

to China. They took the maritime route across the Bay of Bengal to Funan, a Southeast Asian polity centred at the lower Mekong delta, where Chinese diplomats and trade emissaries also congregated. Funan was the gatekeeper to China, and its main port Óc-Eo became a vibrant centre of trade. Products from around Southeast Asia, China and India were traded here.

Even Roman coins have been excavated at Óc-Eo. A luxury trade in horses strengthened Funan's ties with China and increased the importance of Óc-Eo as an entrepôt. The horses came from Central Asia, brought by Indian traders via Bengal to Óc-Eo. They were then transshipped to China. Funan could also have been the distribution centre for these horses to destinations as far as Bali and Java.

Rather than sail around the Malay Peninsula to reach Funan, Indian traders disembarked on the west coast and cut across the peninsula, before taking another boat on to Óc-Eo. At the beginning of the first millennium, there would have been little activity down the peninsula to sustain merchants' interest, and adding an extra 2,500 kilometres to the journey would not have been profitable. In addition, the piratical activities of the sea nomads at the southern end of the Melaka Straits made this journey fraught with danger. Importantly, Funan had agricultural surpluses that could support traders from afar, who had to wait 3–5 months for the change in monsoon winds in order to return home.

The Malay Peninsula stretches around 1,700 kilometres, starting from Dawei in southern Myanmar to Johor Bahru in the south. On the other hand, it is only



◀ Transpeninsular routes linked the western coast of the Malay Peninsula with the eastern coast. Among the main connections in the middle section were: (1) Phu Khae Thong with Khao Sam Kaeo; (2) Takuapa/Ko Kho Khao with Chaiya/Laem Pho; (3) Khuan Lukpad and Trang with Ligor; and (4) Kedah with Pattani, Singgora (Songkla) and Satingphra.

▼ Ruins of Wat Kaew, an 8th-century Buddhist temple in Chaiya, Thailand.







300 kilometres at its broadest and 40 kilometres at the Isthmus of Kra in southern Thailand. Thus, transpeninsular routes, utilising mainly rivers, provided a quicker alternative to sailing down the coast.

The first record of such a transpeninsular route comes from an account in the *Han Shu* (History of the Han), which details a trade mission sent by Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) to South Asia. Their objective was to source for products precious to the Chinese court, including gemstones, glass items and pearls. The Chinese officials boarded a Southeast Asian merchant ship that took them round the Indochinese peninsula and across the Gulf of Thailand. They landed on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula at a place called Shenli, believed to be Khao Sam Kaeo in Thailand. From here, they travelled for ten days across the peninsula and, on reaching the west coast, took a commercial ship to India. The overland route saved them nearly four months on the overall journey.

Around the 2nd to 3rd century, port-polities started arising along the Java Sea and the southeast coast of Sumatra. These ports consolidated and traded local products such as camphor, gharuwood, sandalwood, nutmeg and cloves. Traders also brought these products to Funan, where they entered the international market. A 3rd-century Chinese text, quoted in the 10th-century *Taiping Yulan*, specifies that Chū-li (Juli), believed to be located at the mouth of Kuantan River, was linked by a sea-route to Ko-ying (Geying), either Karawang

▲► Replica of a 6th-century painting, *Portraits of Periodical Offering of Liang*. It depicts ambassadors from various countries sending tribute to China. The 6th figure from the right (see detail) is the envoy from Langkasuka, a Malay kingdom that was established near Yarang, south of Pattani in Thailand. Langkasuka was known to the Chinese as a rich kingdom whose citizens wore gold jewellery. The kingdom survived into the 15th century, as attested in Arab and Siamese texts.



in west Java or at the southeast coast of Sumatra. These ports bridged the divide between the mainland and the islands. To be closer to the main trading hub at Funan, traders from other parts of the archipelago started congregating on the southern coast of east Thailand and in southern Vietnam, giving rise eventually to the Langkasuka kingdom at Pattani and Champa in southern Vietnam.

Traders from the archipelago also started sailing to China. Hitherto, the Chinese had been getting their supplies mainly through Funan; in fact, they thought cloves were a Funanese product. Chinese traders themselves only started sailing to the archipelago, or Nanyang (Southern Seas), in large number during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). Direct foreign trade was forbidden, so trade was conducted through tribute missions in which foreign traders presented their goods at the imperial court. These traders thus gained access to the huge Chinese market without having to compete with local Chinese traders. The tributes were also a form of advertisement – they showed the type of products available, and in this way maritime Southeast Asians were able to introduce new products into the Chinese market.

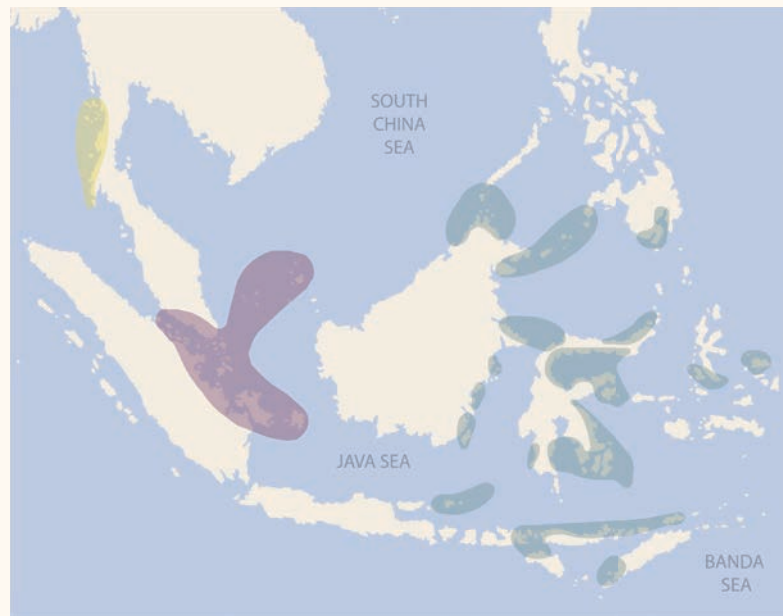
Two products from West Asia popular in China were frankincense and myrrh; these products used to reach China via the overland routes. However, Nanyang traders managed to convince the Chinese to replace frankincense, an aromatic resin from which incense



is produced, with the Sumatran pine resin, *Pinus merkusii*. Similarly, myrrh, a fumigant, was replaced with Sumatran benzoin, commonly known as gum benjamin. Camphor found its way into the Chinese pharmacopoeia in the early 6th century and became so highly valued in China that its price was on par with gold. As more products of Southeast Asian origin were introduced to the Chinese markets, the maritime Southeast Asians soon came to be in control of the trade routes.

By the 5th century, kingdoms such as Tarumanagara and Kantoli arose in the archipelago. They co-opted the services of the sea nomads, especially

► The sea nomads of Southeast Asia can be broadly classified into three groups. (1) The Moken inhabit the north-west corner of the Malay Peninsula, from the Mergui Archipelago in Myanmar to the northern border of Malaysia. (2) The Orang Suku Laut consist of a number of sub-groups, such as the Orang Seletar, residing chiefly at the southern end of the Straits of Melaka, the Riau-Lingga Archipelago and the estuaries in southeast Sumatra. (3) The Bajau Laut inhabit the most widespread area, from northeast Sabah and the Sulu Archipelago to Sulawesi and the Maluku and Lesser Sunda islands.





the Orang Suku Laut, thus bringing piracy along the Straits of Melaka under control. This, coupled with exotic products obtainable at Sumatra and Java, enticed Indian traders to sail down the Malay Peninsula instead of cutting across it. Camphor, for example, was traded with India from at least 400 CE and Sumatra became known to Indian traders as Karpuradvipa (Camphor Island). One of Southeast Asia's attractions for Indian traders was its large deposits of gold, a product India had previously obtained from Siberia. Southeast Asia became known to the Indians as Suvarnabhumi (Land of Gold), a name likely first applied to Thaton, on the Gulf of Martaban. The name parallels that of Ptolemy's Golden Chersonese (Golden Peninsula) as well as Laem Thong, an early name for Thailand, which also means Golden Peninsula.

A direct maritime route between India and China was now open, which increased trade traffic in the Straits of Melaka and the Java Sea. Buddhist monks, too, started going by sea instead of overland. For example, the Buddhist priest Gunavarman, on invitation from Emperor Wen (r. 424–453), sailed on a merchant ship from India to Java and, from Java direct to Canton

▲ A four-lobed oval gold bowl depicting the story of Ramayana in relief on its sides, with a gold water dipper behind it. These were among a collection of 9th-century gold and silver objects discovered at Wonoboyo, on the slopes of Mount Merapi in central Java. Java does not have gold deposits and the gold in this hoard would have come from other parts of Southeast Asia. However, Java was well-known for its skilled goldsmiths.



▲ A medallion carved on a railing post of the Bharhut stupa at Madhya Pradesh, India, dating to c. 125–100 BCE. The carving shows two sea vessels, one of which is being swallowed by a sea monster. It was common to depict huge waves as ferocious sea monsters. One example is contained in the *Kathasaritsagara*, an 11th-century collection of Indian folktales. King Gunasagara of Kataka (Kedah) sent his daughter, Gunavati, to India to marry King Vikramaditya. En route, the ship was swallowed whole by a large fish off the coast of Suvarnavdipa (Sumatra). Fortunately, onlookers killed the fish and, cutting its belly, rescued the passengers. Both the story and the medallion highlight the dangers faced by mariners.

(Guangzhou). The Chinese pilgrim Faxian returned to China in 413 via the maritime route. His journey was not smooth sailing, though, as his ship encountered two major storms – first in the Indian Ocean and then in the South China Sea – highlighting that seafarers were very much at the mercy of the elements. Unsurprisingly, from around the 5th century, the worship of Dipankara Buddha, protector of seafarers, started becoming prominent.

As trade became more dynamic, Southeast Asian polities adopted Indian cultural elements, including its script, language and religions. A common cultural framework with shared values made for better communication and cooperation, laying the foundation for increased trading activities. The three major Indic doctrines – Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism – were practised in Southeast Asia alongside indigenous religions. The use of Sanskrit spread with Buddhism. It allowed the learned communities across India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan to communicate with each other.

During the first 600 years or so, Indian cultural symbols, including writing and statuary, were adopted in whole with little to no modifications. However,



◀ This 8th-century stone sculpture of Lord Siva riding Nandi was discovered in Central Java, near Borobudur. This depiction of Siva and Nandi is unique to Java and shows the creativity of Javanese artisans in adapting Indian forms. In Indian sculpture, Nandi is typically shown as a reclining bull seated in front of Siva. The Javanese adaptation shows Siva riding Nandi, which is portrayed as having the head of a bull and the body of a human.

▶ A Ganesha statue from Candi Banon, an 8th- to 9th-century temple in Magelang district, Central Java. Ganesha is seated with his heels touching, a representation unique to Java.





▲ A tri-coloured (*sancai*) amphora from the Tang Dynasty. Tri-coloured ceramics were decorated with brown, green and off-white glazes, which were allowed to drip naturally so that they mingled. This tradition flourished in the Tang period during the 8th century but was only in vogue for a short period. The pottery pieces were mainly used by aristocrats as funerary objects.

the 7th century onwards saw the creative adaptation of Indic culture by the Southeast Asians, resulting in interesting local variations. As an example, the Javanese portrayed Ganesha with his heels touching each other, a depiction not seen in India or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Inscriptions were initially written in Sanskrit using the Pallava script but local languages and scripts started being used from the 7th century, for instance the Kawi script, which developed in Java in the 8th century.

Khmer incursions into its northern border considerably weakened Funan in the second half of the 6th century, leading to its complete dissolution the following century. Coupled with the growing importance of the maritime route, this saw Srivijaya rise to become a major maritime power during the later part of the 7th century. Srivijaya was strategically located at the bottom of the Straits of Melaka, giving it control of the sailing routes between east and west. The kingdom was able to exert dominance over neighbouring states partly because it received preferred trade status from the Chinese, making it lucrative for its vassal states to do business under the Srivijayan banner.

Increased trade in the archipelago can be traced through the increase in Chinese ceramics in the archaeological record starting from the Tang Dynasty (618–907). For example, on the island of Borneo, Chinese ceramics only started appearing in the archaeological record from the Tang Dynasty onwards. A 9th-century Arab dhow found wrecked in the Java Sea off Belitung Island, laden with some 60,000 pieces of



Chinese ceramics, shows the burgeoning trade between the Middle East and China during the Tang period. The earliest records by Arabian geographers that mention Southeast Asia date to the 9th century, although Arab traders could have been visiting the region prior to that.

In 1025, the Chola Kingdom of South India launched raids against Srivijaya, weakening the kingdom and loosening its hold on its vassal states. This raid could have been partly instigated by Tamil merchant guilds who felt hampered by Srivijayan control of the trade lanes to China. In South India, merchant associations such as Manigramam and Ainnurruvar had developed product-based monopolies and become powerful through their large networks and private armies. The first evidence that these Tamil merchant guilds had expanded their activities to Southeast Asia comes from a 9th-century inscription found at Takuapa, a port on the west coast of southern Thailand. Seven other Tamil inscriptions – six in Southeast Asia and one in China – date to after the Chola attacks, pointing to expanded Tamil presence and influence in the region.

The last days of Srivijaya were marked by the liberalisation of Chinese markets during the Southern

▲ An artist's impression of a shipwreck carrying Chinese ceramics. Timber ships disintegrate over time, leaving behind their ceramic cargo, which defy time. As the styles of Chinese ceramics have changed over time, they can be dated to specific time periods, making them important time markers.





▲ Birds-of-paradise are found on the Papuan and Aru islands of Indonesia. They were hunted for their beautiful plumage and brought to the island of Seram in eastern Indonesia, where they were prepared for export. The plumes were traded in ports along the Java Sea as far back as the 1st millennium and exported to China, India and the Middle East.

Song, which saw the Chinese getting directly involved in maritime trade and Chinese traders coming to Southeast Asia in large numbers. This direct Chinese involvement possibly contributed to Srivijaya's demise. By the 13th century, which coincided with the demise of the Chola Kingdom, Chinese traders had become more numerous than their Indian counterparts in Southeast Asian ports.

New Chinese trade products started making their way into Southeast Asia. Chinese coil glass beads, for example, only entered the Southeast Asian bead market during the Southern Song period. They replaced the Indo-Pacific bead industry, which had collapsed with the demise of Srivijaya. In appearance, size and colours, the Chinese monochrome coil beads are similar to the Indo-Pacific beads, but compositionally, Chinese beads are high in lead and barium, which makes them heavier.

The demise of Srivijaya saw the rise of Java. Srivijaya had tightly controlled the ports through which foreigners could trade, but now foreign merchants – Indian, Chinese and Middle Eastern – started to travel directly to the Java Sea region, stimulating the growth of ports on the northern and eastern coasts of Java. These ports controlled the flow of spices from the eastern Indonesian islands. Spices had become among the most important trade items exported from the archipelago to international markets. Foreign goods including ceramics, textiles and iron arriving at the Javanese ports were taken to the hinterland and traded for local produce, especially rice. Javanese traders then took

the rice together with Indian textiles and exchanged these for spices at the eastern islands. The spices were brought back to the ports and exchanged for foreign goods, restarting the cycle.

The importance of eastern Java in the trading network gave rise to Majapahit. This kingdom was established in 1293 by Raden Vijaya (Kertarajasa) after he succeeded in warding off an attack by the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. In contrast to polities in maritime Southeast Asia, which were established at ports, Majapahit was centred at the inland town of Trowulan. It was serviced by two ports – Surabaya, a seaport, and Canggu, a river port – which were 42 kilometres apart and connected by the Brantas River. Canggu, located close to Trowulan, became Majapahit’s primary gateway to the coast. Rice was the main product from Java’s hinterland and it was brought to Trowulan to be exported via Canggu. Roads were built connecting Trowulan to regions not connected by river, giving rise to a well-developed road system throughout the kingdom. However, Majapahit was not very effective in controlling the waters of the Straits region, resulting in the rise of piracy.

Meanwhile, in Sumatra, although the centre of Malay power had shifted from Palembang to Jambi after the Chola attacks, southeast Sumatra ceased to be an important player in the regional trade after the 13th century. The island’s northern coast, however, became active thanks to the increased demand for Sumatran pepper. An important polity there between the 13th and 16th centuries was Samudra-Pasai, comprising the twin



▲ Statue of Gajah Mada at Tasik Warna on the Dieng Plateau, Java. Gajah Mada was the colourful Prime Minister of Majapahit between 1330 and 1364. He famously took an oath, known as *Sumpah Amukti Palapa*, to abstain from the pleasure of eating any spiced food until he succeeded in unifying *Nusantara*, a word that loosely denotes the Southeast Asian archipelago.

► Candi Tikus was a bathing place located in Trowulan, once the centre of the Majapahit kingdom. The miniature *candi* built at the centre of the structure represents the Mahameru mountain, home of the gods. It is also the source of life, and this is symbolised by water flowing from the 46 *jaladwara* (water spouts) along the base. Its name translates to “Rat Temple” – it was given this name in modern times when farmers, plagued by rat infestations, drew water from the tank believing it would repel the rats.





cities of Samudra and Pasai. The 15th-century *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* records that Pasai was founded by Merah Silu and named after his hunting dog after the dog was scared off by a deer. Merah Silu later converted to Islam, adopting the name Malik al-Salih.

Assuming control of the northern Sumatran pepper supply, Samudra-Pasai became the most important centre of commerce in the Straits of Melaka until the founding of Melaka at the start of the 15th century. The *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* claims that Merah Silu was able to turn worms into gold. This could have been allegorical, pointing to a local silk industry where silk cloth was exchanged for gold, pepper, camphor and benzoin with its hinterland. The polity was commercially linked to Bago and the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Peninsula; these regions had seen tremendous growth during the 13th and 14th centuries. Samudra-Pasai was also linked directly to Bengal, Gujarat and China. Ibn Battuta, a traveller from northern Africa, noted the presence of ships from Pasai in China during the mid-14th century.

An important milestone in the trade history of Southeast Asia was the ban on private overseas trading issued in 1371 by the Hongwu Emperor, founder of the Ming Dynasty. This has come to be known as the Ming ban and it saw China retreat from direct trade in the region. During this time, many merchants and craftsmen, with their livelihoods under threat, left China to settle in Southeast Asia and Japan. They brought their technical know-how with them to their new homelands, where they established industries based on Chinese manufacturing methods. One example is



▲ A ceramic bowl for magic-medicinal uses dating to the 18th century. Such bowls were made in China for export mainly to Southeast Asia and India. In the centre of the bowl is a 4 x 4 magic square encircled with the phrase “There is no hero except ‘Ali and there is no sword except Dhul-Faqar”. The ‘Ali referred to here is Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, and the “Father of Sufism”. The bowls were used in the Islamic world as a talisman to ward off bad luck and cure illnesses.

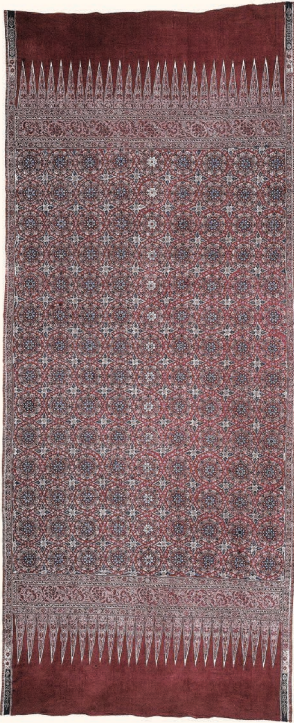


◀ A Sukhothai dish recovered from the *Longquan*, a Chinese vessel that sank off the coast of Terengganu c. 1400. The dish is decorated with an underglazed black floral motif, the black colour coming from iron. The Sukhothai kingdom, located in north-central Thailand, became active in producing ceramics for export in the 14th and 15th centuries.

▶ A porcelain plate commissioned by the Sultan of Aceh and believed to have been made in Swatow (Shantou), China, in the 16th–17th century. The nine circles in the design represent the Aceh royal seal, *Cap Sikureung* (Ninefold Seal). The large circle in the centre contains the name of the reigning sultan while the eight smaller circles surrounding it contain the names of his predecessors. These plates were also talismanic, containing verses from the Quran and the names of caliphs.



bead manufacturing, which was established by Chinese craftsmen at Banten in West Java. Similarly, Chinese potters set up kilns in Thailand and Vietnam, giving rise to the Thai and Vietnamese pottery traditions. Settled Chinese communities, cut off from China, assimilated with the local populace. Thus, when the Portuguese first arrived in Southeast Asia in 1509, the only Chinese community they noticed was at Ayutthaya in Thailand.



▲ Patterned cotton cloth made in India for export to the Dutch East Indies. Indian cloth was in demand from the Mediterranean to China for its fine weave, vivid colours and fade-resistance. The main production centres were at Bengal, the Coromandel Coast and Gujarat. Indian cloth played an important role in Southeast Asian trade. The *Sejarah Melayu* recounts a mission by the Melaka ruler to South India to procure 40 types of rare cloth.

The Yongle Emperor (r. 1403–24) temporarily lifted the Ming ban. He sent envoys to India, Japan and Southeast Asia in a bid to re-establish diplomatic and trade relations. He still forbade private overseas commerce but encouraged state-run trading. He ordered sea-going ships to be constructed – 361 ships were built in 1403, with another 1,180 ordered in 1405. These were used in the famed voyages of Admiral Zheng He between 1405 and 1433. Melaka's rise to become the most important kingdom in the Straits of Melaka was linked to the support given by the Ming emperors. Similar to Srivijaya, Melaka was able to exert its influence over the Straits and bring piracy back under control.

However, the cost of the imperial voyages together with the lavish treatment given to foreign envoys bearing tribute put a serious strain on China's economy and the country retreated into isolation.

By this time, spices (cloves, mace and nutmeg) from the eastern Indonesian islands had become the most important products exported from Melaka. Java- and Melaka-based traders travelled to Banda, where they obtained spices from the Banda and Maluku islands. They took with them for exchange rice from Java, cotton and silk cloth from India, Chinese silk, and ceramics (Chinese and Thai). The spices made their way to Europe but the exorbitant prices charged by Arab and Venetian intermediaries prompted the European powers to seek out the source of these spices, leading to the annexation of Melaka by the Portuguese in 1511 and subsequently the colonisation of other parts of Southeast Asia by the various European powers.



The maritime and trade history of early Southeast Asia is explored in the following chapters through 10 Southeast Asian ports that lie between the Bay of Bengal and the Java Sea. In addition, brief descriptions of 32 other ports have been included in the Appendix. Some of the ports, such as Kuala Selinsing, may have been small, but they were still important nodes in the regional trading networks. Port-cities such as Melaka became entrepôts, one-stop centres that consolidated products from not only within Southeast Asia but also from other regions. Regardless of size, the ports were vibrant centres of commerce where a multitude of cultural influences intermingled. These ports operated during different time periods, but they show the pivotal role of trade in shaping maritime Southeast Asia. ♦

▲ The motifs on this piece of *songket* shoulder cloth were inspired by those on the stone statue of Durga at Candi Singhasari, a 13th-century Hindu-Buddhist temple in east Java.







CHAPTER **1**

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# M R A U K - U

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*Ancient Capital of Rakhine*



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THE TOWN OF MRAUK-U, in the northwest of present-day Myanmar, was once a thriving river port, catering to both the mundane, such as rice and spices, as well as the exotic, such as ivory, horses and slaves. Although it lies some 60 kilometres from the coast, this did not deter ships from snaking up the Kaladan River to partake of its vibrant trade. Its location between India and Southeast Asia ensured its status as an important node in the regional trade network. By the early 16th century, Mrauk-U had become a major power flexing its muscle in the Bay of Bengal. Its wealth



The mid-17th century Zina Man Aung Pagoda on Lat Say Kan Lake. Ruins of Mrauk-U's city gate and city walls are visible in the foreground.

► Site of Mrauk-U, vis-a-vis its neighbours. It was the capital of Rakhine (Arakan), which is backed by the Arakan Mountains on its east and the Bay of Bengal on its west.



and splendour spread its name as far as Europe. Its criss-crossing canals and streams drew comparisons with Venice, while a skyline dotted with gilded pagodas earned it the epithet “Golden City”.

Mrauk-U was the last in a line of royal capitals of the Rakhine Kingdom, standing tall for 355 years as the abode of 48 kings. Its story starts in 1403, when Min Saw Mun was installed King of Rakhine. His rule was unfortunately cut short in 1406 when the Inwa Kingdom from central Myanmar attacked and captured his capital, Launggret. Rakhine was a prize long desired by the Burmese kingdoms and as they occupied Launggret, King Min Saw Mun fled to Bengal, taking refuge at its royal court.

During his exile, he developed a close relationship with Bengal’s rulers, especially Sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah. His prowess in battle proved particularly helpful. Serving as commander in the Sultan’s army, he helped repel numerous attacks against the Sultanate. In 1429, the Sultan repaid this service by



sending a large army that helped restore Min Saw Mun to the throne at Launggret. But this came with a price. Rakhine was now a vassal of the Bengal Sultanate and would remain so for about a hundred years.

King Min Saw Mun desired to make Rakhine prosperous again. For that, he needed a strong capital and Launggret was not up to the mark. It was located on a plain, making it difficult to defend against enemy attacks. The recent invasions had also left it in bad shape, and a series of bad omens, including lightning striking the palace, signalled that it was time to move. Mrauk-U, which stood in a valley surrounded by mountains, was ideally located. Tipping the scales in its favour were the many strange phenomena that the king and his entourage witnessed there, in particular a series of three events: a mouse that was being chased by a cat turned around to chase the cat instead; a deer turned the tables on a tiger; and a frog, chased by a snake, turned around and bit the snake, eating part of it. These events showed that the weak could defeat their enemies.

▲ Mrauk-U is said to have got its name from the words *myauk* (monkey) and *u* (egg). Popular lore has it that a monkey-queen and a peacock-king ruled the city. Their union resulted in two eggs that hatched into two beautiful girls. This painting, installed at the Shitthaung Pagoda, shows Buddha predicting Mrauk-U's rise into a great city. The royal couple is shown in the foreground with the queen holding her two eggs. An ogre kneels behind the couple. Alternatively, some scholars claim that Mrauk-U means "first accomplishment" in old Arakanese.





◀ Capitals of the Rakhine Kingdom (in sequence): Dhanyawadi, Vesali, Sambawak and Pyinsa, Parein, Hkrit, Sambawak (reoccupied), Nareinzara Toungoo, Launggret, and Mrauk-U.

They portended well for Mrauk-U, as its enemies – Inwa and Bago – were stronger.

Thus, in 1430, Mrauk-U became the capital of the Rakhine Kingdom. Rakhine (Arakan) is a narrow strip of land stretching along the eastern arc of the Bay of Bengal. The Arakan Yoma mountain range backs it on its east while the Naf River acts as its northern border. Today, it is a state in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. It was independent, though, for most of its history, with its authority at times extending to east Bengal (now Bangladesh). Its capitals were located to the northeast, within the flood plains of the Kaladan and Lay Myo river valleys.

Rakhine was wealthy, making it a target for attacks. Its kings thus ruled from within fortified cities. Brick walls surrounded the cities, while moats, beyond the walls, provided an extra layer of protection. These cities were self-sustaining, with an economy based on wet

◀ Laymyathnar Pagoda, built by King Min Saw Mun. It is square in plan, with four entrances, corresponding to the cardinal points. Its design is similar to the Laymyathnar Pagoda in Bagan. Eight Buddha statues sit in an octagonal formation at the centre of the pagoda.





▲ View of Kaladan River, Mrauk-U's chief waterway, seen from Uritetaung Pagoda. The pagoda houses a skull relic of Gautama Buddha and hence holds a special place in the hearts of the Rakhine people. It is located opposite Ponnagyun, a naval base during the Mrauk-U period.

rice cultivation and *taungya* (slash-and-burn) agriculture. The first urban site was Dhanyawadi, which means “grain-blessed”, an apt description for a territory with high yields of paddy. Dhanyawadi was also the original site of the Mahamuni Buddha, a statue said to bear an exact resemblance to Gautama Buddha. Vesali replaced Dhanyawadi in the 6th century and, in 1018, Sambawak became the first of five capitals on the banks of the Lay Myo River. Launggret, the last, was replaced by Mrauk-U.

Mrauk-U's picturesque aspect belied its strong security. Walls and moats filled the gaps between the natural barriers provided by mountains and tidal rivers. Forts, built on mountains, supplemented the city's defences. From the eastern border, roads led across the mountains into Myanmar. All traffic coming into the city, brought by these mountain roads, was monitored via sentried gates.

The king's power rested on his ability to ensure the material well-being of his subjects. This was tied to good harvests, which, in turn, required good water



management. Large water tanks captured and stored rainwater, sustaining the city during dry spells. A network of streams and canals provided irrigation. The streams also served as watered highways on which boats large and small peddled foodstuffs, provisions and sundry commodities. These floating markets lent charm to the city, as did artificial lakes that supplied the general populace with fresh water. Beautiful as they were, the lakes served a darker purpose. In the event of an enemy attack, the sluice gates could be opened, releasing the waters to drown the invaders, while the people of Mrauk-U kept safe in citadels and inner hillocks.

Lying between the Kaladan and Lay Myo rivers, Mrauk-U was in a position to control movement on both waterways. Two separate ports handled the traffic on these rivers: Aungdat on the Kaladan, and Paungdok on the Lay Myo. It was the Kaladan, though, that was the main transportation highway bringing foreign ships from the Bay of Bengal. A customs checkpoint was located near the mouth of this river, and a naval base, at

▲ Sakya Man Aung Pagoda. Engraved on the front entrance are replicas of silver coins used in Rakhine from the 5th century. The obverse side of the coin is on the right-hand side of the entrance. It depicts a recumbent bull beneath the king's name. The reverse side of the coin has a *Srivatsa*, symbol of wealth. In order to attract traders of different cultures and religions to Mrauk-U, the kings borrowed symbols from their powerful neighbours. During the time when the Bengal Sultanate was powerful, the kings of Rakhine started using Islamic titles. Coins, which had hitherto borne their names, started including the Kalima, the Muslim declaration of faith, in Persian script.

Ponnagyun, was established about 30 kilometres from the river mouth. A visitor going to Mrauk-U today can take a boat from Sittwe and follow this same route. Depending on weather conditions, the journey takes between 5 and 8 hours.

When Min Bin became king in 1531, he not only shored up the defences of Mrauk-U but also that of Rakhine as a whole. Coastal areas received special attention. He then turned his sights on Bengal, which was weak after numerous wars with the Delhi Sultanate. Min Bin's success in occupying Bengal in 1532 saw the erstwhile power becoming a vassal of Rakhine. The tables thus turned and Bengal remained a vassal until 1666. Min Bin's rule heralded the golden age of Mrauk-U. Subsequent kings continued to strengthen the kingdom, and in the late 16th century, King Min Razagri even occupied Bago and its port-city, Thanlyin.

However, Portuguese mercenaries tested Rakhine's security to its limits. These mercenaries had been raiding Rakhine's coast ever since the Portuguese occupation of Goa in 1510 and Melaka in 1511. In 1535, they succeeded in evading Rakhine's defences and attacked Mrauk-U itself. The city's defences held and the Portuguese were driven back to sea. To obviate the problem of them returning, King Min Bin employed them as mercenaries in his navy and thus took advantage of their maritime prowess and modern weaponry. His navy became the most powerful in the Bay of Bengal. He also had other foreigners in his security forces, including Bengali, Burmese and Dutch.

► The Koethaung Pagoda, built by King Dikka, son of Min Bin. The king's astrologers forecast that he had six months to live and the king decided to leave his legacy in the form of a large pagoda. He succeeded in mobilising a workforce to complete the construction in six months, and lived for another three years. The Koethaung Pagoda, with 90,000 Buddha images, remains the largest in Rakhine.



In addition, Min Bin hired Japanese samurai as his bodyguards.

Rakhine derived its wealth from rice production. Heavy rainfall coupled with good water management practices ensured it always had a surplus of the staple crop. This attracted traders, especially from drought-prone states in India, who sailed up the Kaladan. Mrauk-U was established at a time when maritime trade in Southeast Asia as a whole was seeing unprecedented growth. With rice as the backbone of the kingdom's economy and a strong navy protecting its waters, Rakhine's rulers were able to develop Mrauk-U into a key node in the trading network that came to encompass the whole of Southeast Asia.

By the 15th century, it had become an important entrepôt. At Mrauk-U was found pepper, camphor, nutmeg and cloves from the Indonesian islands, as well as cotton, muslin and copper from the Indian subcontinent. From nearer home came lac, teak and horses. From Ava came gemstones, which were then polished by skilled artisans available at Mrauk-U. With all these products obtainable at one location, many traders from the Middle East and India opted not to travel to Melaka for spices or to Bago for gemstones, horses and teak. Instead, they congregated at Mrauk-U, attracted by its duty-free status. Docking at Mrauk-U were ships from Jakarta, Melaka, Aceh, Martaban, Bago, Bengal, Kalinga, the Coromandel Coast, Sri Lanka and the Middle East.

With so many foreign ships docking at Mrauk-U, it took on a cosmopolitan flavour. Foreigners, however,



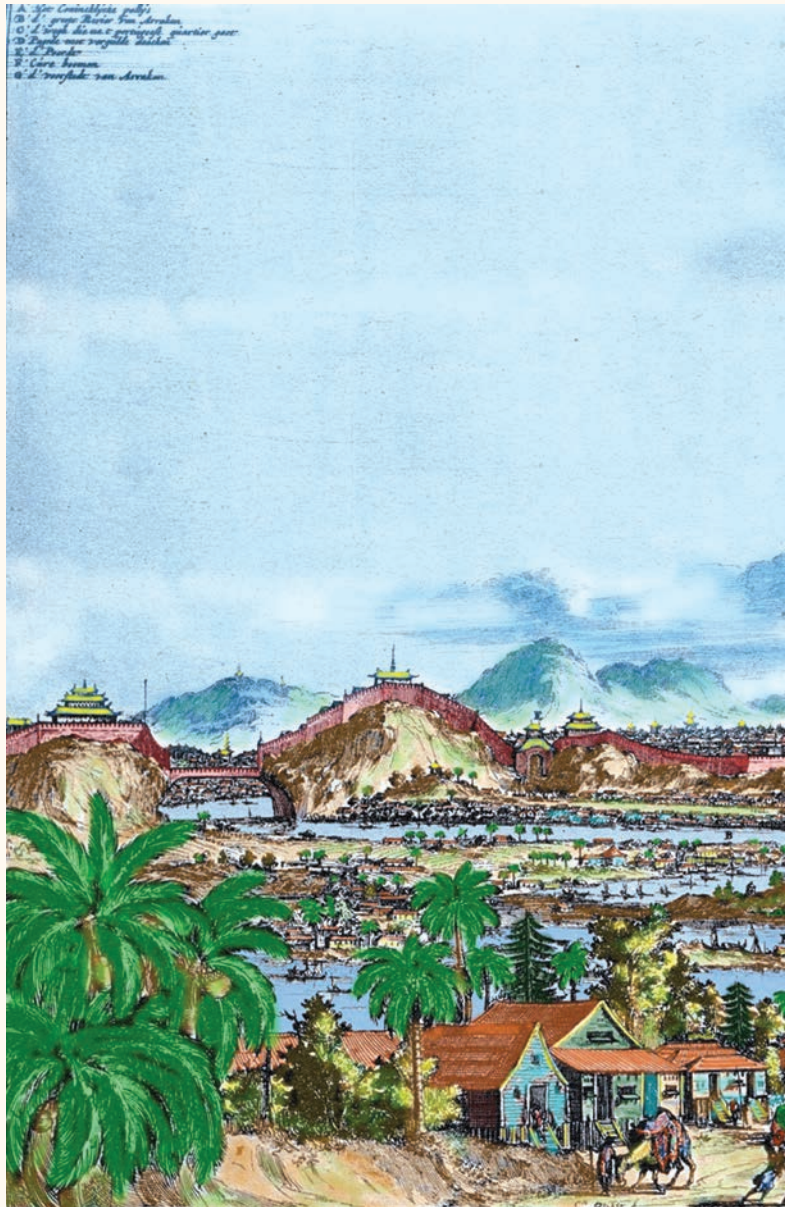
were not permitted to live in the city. Instead, a special area was allocated for them. This was at Daingripet, located 1 kilometre west of the palace. Archaeological remains found here show the existence of Hindu, Muslim and Portuguese houses of worship. Remains of a Dutch factory have also been found. This factory was set up by the Dutch East India Company, which came to Mrauk-U mainly to purchase rice and slaves.

Slave trading was prevalent throughout Southeast Asia as labour was a scarce commodity. Europeans quickly learnt the difficulty of hiring labour at ports and the high costs involved in doing so. Slave labour was the alternative. Rakhine and Portuguese mercenaries took advantage of the fact that Bengal was a vassal of Rakhine and mounted regular slave raids there, especially around the Chittagong area. The captives were brought to Mrauk-U, where a quarter of them would be gifted to the palace. The rest were sold to foreign markets. The Dutch, for example, bought the slaves for their plantations and shipyards in the Indonesian islands.

Sebastien Manrique, a Portuguese missionary who was in Rakhine between 1629 and 1635, estimated

▲ Two statues flank a Buddha image in Htaukkhan-thein, a temple built in 1571 with donations from governors, officials and common folk. There are around 140 Buddha images housed within arched recesses lining the corridors of this temple; each is flanked by the image of a donor and that of his wife. The varied costumes, ornaments, headdresses and hairstyles carved on these images have led to the temple being dubbed a "museum of traditional costumes".

▲ Stone relief of a Portuguese soldier in Htaukkhan-thein, one of a pair flanking a Buddha image. It is uncertain if the soldiers were also donors.



► An artist's impression of Mrauk-U as seen from the Portuguese settlement at Daingripet. It was painted in Amsterdam based on sketches made by Gautier Schouten in his book, *Voyages* (1676). Schouten was a Dutch traveller who visited Mrauk-U in 1660. He was enchanted by the city and opined that "it would be difficult to imagine a more entrancing landscape".





► A *pitakataik* is a library specially constructed to house Buddhist texts. This *pitakataik* in Mrauk-U was built towards the end of the 16th century to house newly acquired Buddhist texts from Sri Lanka.



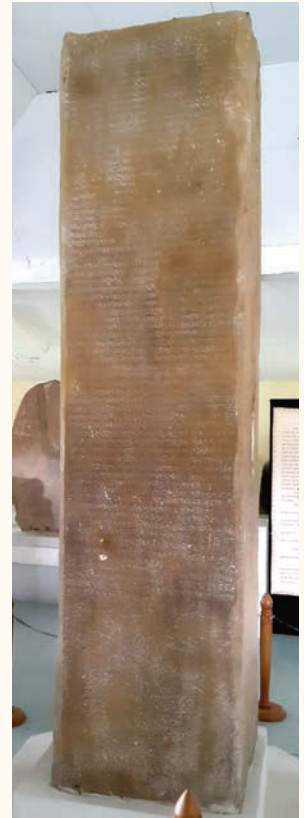
Mrauk-U's local population at 16,000. They lived mainly in stilt houses made of bamboo and palm leaves. The palace was located at the centre of the city, contained within its own walls. It loomed high over the surrounding areas and, with its golden roof, lent elegance to the city. It was three storeys high and constructed completely of teak. Unfortunately, the use of perishable materials did not allow the palace to survive the passage of time. However, travellers' accounts provide clues to its architecture, as do stone-relief depictions in royal temples such as the Shitthaung. Manrique wrote that the palace buildings "have great wooden pillars of such length and symmetry that one is astonished that trees so lofty and straight can exist."

Myanmar's proximity to India meant that it was on the travel route of Indian merchants, and with trade

came religious influences, especially from northeast India. Indian religions came to be practised alongside the worship of indigenous spirits known as *nat*. Theravada Buddhism prevailed during the Mrauk-U period and, consequently, Mrauk-U forged a closer relationship with Sri Lanka. In fact, the newly founded Mrauk-U Kingdom was legitimised as a Buddhist kingdom after Min Khari, the second king of the Mrauk-U dynasty, sent a mission to Sri Lanka in 1439. Henceforth, Mrauk-U started looking towards Sri Lanka as the source of its religious practices and texts. The exchange of priests and ideas further strengthened ties between the two countries.

Evidence that Mrauk-U once harboured a flourishing entrepôt is barely discernible today. The canals that earned it the label “Venice of the East” are also long gone. However, glimpses into its ancient past can still be caught in the numerous pagodas glimmering in its skyline. The kings of Rakhine built many religious structures to obtain merit. Consequently, Mrauk-U abounds in pagodas, stupas and temples. Made of sturdy stone, these structures have survived the centuries, their carvings and statues providing invaluable insights into Mrauk-U’s history. Among the earliest of these edifices is the Laymyathnar Pagoda, built by King Min Saw Mun. It is square in plan, with four entrances, each corresponding to a cardinal point.

Perhaps the most important pagoda in Mrauk-U is the Shitthaung, built by King Min Bin in 1536 to commemorate his conquest of Bengal. It houses 84,000 images of Buddha and depictions of his previous lives.



▲ The Anandacandra Stone Inscription provides the genealogy of 22 kings who ruled Rakhine from the late 4th century. Three of the pillar’s four faces are inscribed in Sanskrit using a script resembling 6th-century Gupta. Originally erected at Vesali, the pillar was taken to Mrauk-U in 1536 and installed at the Shitthaung Pagoda, where it remains today. (The photograph shows a replica at the Mrauk-U Archaeological Museum.)



▲ Shitthaung Pagoda, the most important of Mrauk-U's numerous pagodas, with stupas lining its northern end. Built by King Min Bin in 1536, it houses 84,000 Buddha images. It was located northeast of the palace, which is the traditional location for royal shrines.

▶ A six-tiered stone relief in the outer corridor of Shitthaung Pagoda. At the centre is Indra (king of the gods, also known as Sakra in Myanmar), holding his Vajra (thunderbolt), while seated on Airavata, his three-headed white elephant. Indra is the god of rain, thunder, and storms. In an agricultural country dependent on the rains, Indra is an important deity as he has the power to control rainfall. Consequently, the kings of Rakhine were consecrated with Indra's power.

▶ New Buddha statues, donated by pilgrims and devotees, line the left side of a passageway in Shitthaung Pagoda, while original statues line the right side.



Some historians are of the view that the reliefs portray Min Bin's perception of himself as a *cakravartin*, a virtuous king ruling across continents. The pagoda is also important as the location of the Anandacandra Stone Inscription, a pillar inscribed with the early history of Rakhine. The Shitthaung continues to be an active place of worship today and is one of the most well-maintained pagodas in Mrauk-U. In terms of size, however, it is exceeded by the Koethaung Pagoda, built by Min Bin's son, Dikka, in the mid-16th century. Home to 90,000 statues of Buddha, it is the largest pagoda not only in Mrauk-U but also in the whole of Rakhine.

An army made up of mercenaries is not easy to keep loyal and Rakhine's power started waning in the mid-17th century. Bengal took the opportunity to break away. The kingdom was also beset by civil wars and natural disasters, and hence was not well prepared to defend itself when King Bodawpaya of the Burmese Konbaung dynasty attacked in 1784. Not only did the Burmese occupy Rakhine, they removed Mahamuni, the Buddha image that was the very symbol of Rakhine, to their capital at Amarapura.

In 1826, the British annexed Rakhine, and in 1886, they incorporated it together with the rest of Myanmar as a province of British India. The capital of Rakhine was moved to Sittwe (Aykab), a small fishing village at the time. Mrauk-U was renamed Mrohaung (Old City), but it reverted to its original name in 1979. Rakhine became a state in independent Myanmar in 1948.

## MAHAMUNI: A RAKHINE LEGACY

RAKHINE OCCUPIES an important place in Myanmar's religious history as the progenitor of the enduring Mahamuni tradition. Mahamuni is a bronze image of Buddha that is said to bear an exact resemblance to Gautama Buddha.

A Rakhine manuscript relates that Buddha wished to meet with King Candasuriya of Rakhine. Thus, in the company of 500 disciples, he flew from his home in Shravasti (India) to Selagiri Hill at Kyauktaw (Rakhine). There, he awaited the king. Upon hearing of Buddha's arrival, the king hastened to Selagiri with a large retinue. Buddha tutored him on Buddhist

▼ Sculptures representing Buddha and his 500 disciples on Selagiri Hill, installed on the grounds of the Mahamuni shrine.



► Selagiri Hill (Thay-lar-giri) at Kyauktaw. The pagoda at the top of the hill marks the spot where Buddha purportedly held the initial discourse with King Candasuriya.



principles and the king invited Buddha back to Dhanyawadi, his capital. During Buddha's stay with the king, the whole Rakhine court converted to Buddhism.

While in Rakhine, Buddha was persuaded to have some of his hair enshrined and his likeness cast. The Rakhine manuscript specifies that Indra (King of Heaven) and Visvakarman (Architect of the Universe) duly constructed a statue of Buddha that rose close to 40 metres. This statue came to be known as "Mahamuni". Buddha breathed on this statue and it came to life, rising to greet his "elder brother", Gautama. Addressing the statue as "younger brother", Buddha motioned it to remain seated. Buddha then predicted that while he himself would achieve nirvana in his 80th year, the image would continue to be venerated for the next 5,000 years. It is said that after Buddha left the palace, the statue would only communicate with the king.

The bronze statue was enshrined on Srigutta Hill, northeast of the palace. The shrine is rectangular, with openings at the four cardinal points. *Dvarapala* (door guardians) protect the main entrance while *lokapala/dikpala* (guardians of direction) stand guard at each



cardinal point, symbolically also standing guard at the four corners of the kingdom. The ground-floor plan of the Mrauk-U palace is similar to that of the Mahamuni shrine and was probably modelled after it.

Rakhine's capital was moved from Dhanyawadi to Vesali, then to the banks of the Lay Myo, and finally to Mrauk-U. Mahamuni was left behind but was not neglected. The kings undertook repairs, even rebuilding the shrine when occasioned. The statue was at one point lost but was recovered and repaired by a Lay Myo king. This king also built a road from Parein, his capital, to the shrine. Similarly, King Min Saw Mun built a road from Mrauk-U to the Mahamuni shrine, initiating a tradition of regular royal pilgrimages to the shrine. King Min Khari, brother and successor of Min Saw Mun, built a library at the shrine and lodged in it the *Tipitaka* (Buddhist texts) that he had obtained from Sri Lanka. The Mahamuni shrine became a centre for Buddhist teachings. It also became the focal point of

▲ Replica of the Yattara bell at Mahamuni shrine; the original was moved to Sittwe after the First Anglo-Burmese war (1824–26) but has since disappeared. Inscribed on the bell are instructions for using it to ward off attacks. Today, devotees sound the bell to have their prayers heard.



Rakhine faith, attracting pilgrims from afar, including Sri Lanka and Indochina.

Seeing it as a source of power, kings from Myanmar mounted raids to steal the statue and possess it for themselves. Their efforts failed (purportedly the power of the statue was too strong and it could not be moved), and in a surprising twist, they showed their dedication to the statue by repairing and maintaining the shrine.

In 1784, King Bodawpaya of the Burmese Konbaung dynasty invaded and occupied Rakhine. During this period, he moved the Mahamuni statue to Amarapura, his capital. It remains to this day in Amarapura, which is now part of Mandalay. However, a replica of the statue has been erected at its old shrine in Dhanyawadi.

The removal of Mahamuni from its original location was – and continues to be – a painful loss for the Rakhine people, who have nevertheless explained it away as expiation for the two sins Buddha committed in a previous life when he was a king: breaking a gardener's thigh bone, and slicing a piece of flesh from a prince's back. Others believe that the statue in Mandalay is a copy and the real Mahamuni is safe somewhere in the jungle.

The antiquity of Mahamuni is uncertain, although Rakhine chronicles place it at the time of Buddha (c. 480–400 BCE). However, the face of the statue is in Mrauk-U style. A possible explanation is that the statue, having deteriorated over time, was repaired in that style.

Although the statue is currently located at Mandalay, the Mahamuni shrine remains the most sacred religious site in Rakhine. ♦

► The Mahamuni shrine has a large Mahamuni Buddha statue flanked by two smaller Buddha images. This photograph shows the smaller Buddha image on the right of the large one. Today, this image is the more revered. Devotees believe that this image was cast immediately before the Mahamuni image to serve as its model.





## B A G O

*Splendour of a Mon Kingdom*

A GIN-BASED COCKTAIL concocted over a hundred years ago in an exclusive British colonial club has immortalised the name “Pegu”, a port-city on the Gulf of Martaban in Myanmar. Pegu is actually the anglicised form of Bago, which is Mon for “beautiful”, and the city has reverted to this spelling today. With a multitude of pagodas shimmering in its skyline, it is indeed a charming city, albeit no longer the busy cosmopolitan port of its heyday.

A number of founding stories recount Bago’s beginnings. In the most popular of these, a crew of sailors from Vijayanagara, in South India, espied two *hamsa* (the ruddy shelduck, a species of migratory goose) on a small island. On returning home, they reported the sighting to their king, who had heard of Buddha’s prophecy that the island would one day become a great city. The king instructed the sailors to return and lay claim to the island, which they did by erecting an inscribed stone pillar. The Burmese, coming later, buried nine baskets of beans underneath the pillar and thus claimed precedence over the island. Finally, the Mons arrived and buried a golden pillar underneath

◀ View from the uppermost walkway of the Mahazedi Pagoda in Bago, towards a small temple set amidst lush greenery. The Mahazedi itself was built in 1559 to house a tooth relic of Gautama Buddha, which King Bayint Naung received from Sri Lanka.



▲ Location of Bago and other key ports in southern Myanmar.

both the Indian and Burmese items, staking their claim as the original people of the land. This island is said to be the peak of Hintha Gon, a hill located to the north-east of Bago; today, a pagoda on the hill marks the location where the *hamsa* are said to have landed.

The Bago settlement has existed since the first millennium CE but the Kingdom of Bago (also variously known as Hamsavati, Hanthawaddy and Pegu) was only established towards the end of the 13th century. Its founding heralded the golden age of Mon civilisation. The Mon are an ethnic group that occupied the southern regions of Myanmar, from Thayet in the north to the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) basin and to the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Peninsula. The Bago Kingdom was divided into three districts, each centred on a port-city: Pathein (Bassein), Bago and Mottama (Martaban). Bago, after which the kingdom was named, was the capital and the residence of the king.

### The City of Bago

Today, Bago lies astride the Bago River, around 80 kilometres northeast of Yangon. The oldest part of the city lies to the east of Hintha Gon, but very little remains of it. Instead, Bago has come to be associated with the walled city built by King Bayint Naung (r. 1551–81) of the Toungoo Dynasty. This was a Burmese dynasty



▲ The Hintha Gon pagoda is said to be built on the spot where the *hamsa* landed. *Hintha* is the Mon transliteration of *hamsa*. Bago's origin story is depicted through painted murals installed on the walls of the pagoda. In this version of the story, the Indians buried nine gold trays, the Burmese nine sacks of beans, and the Mon nine sickles.

◀ A *nat* shrine dedicated to Bago Medaw. The *nat* are indigenous spirits that continue to be worshipped alongside Buddhism. Bago Medaw, who was a cow-buffalo, is linked to one of the founding stories of Bago in which the cow-buffalo nurtured Asah, a future king of Bago. She is depicted wearing a buffalo headdress and holding a fish in each hand.



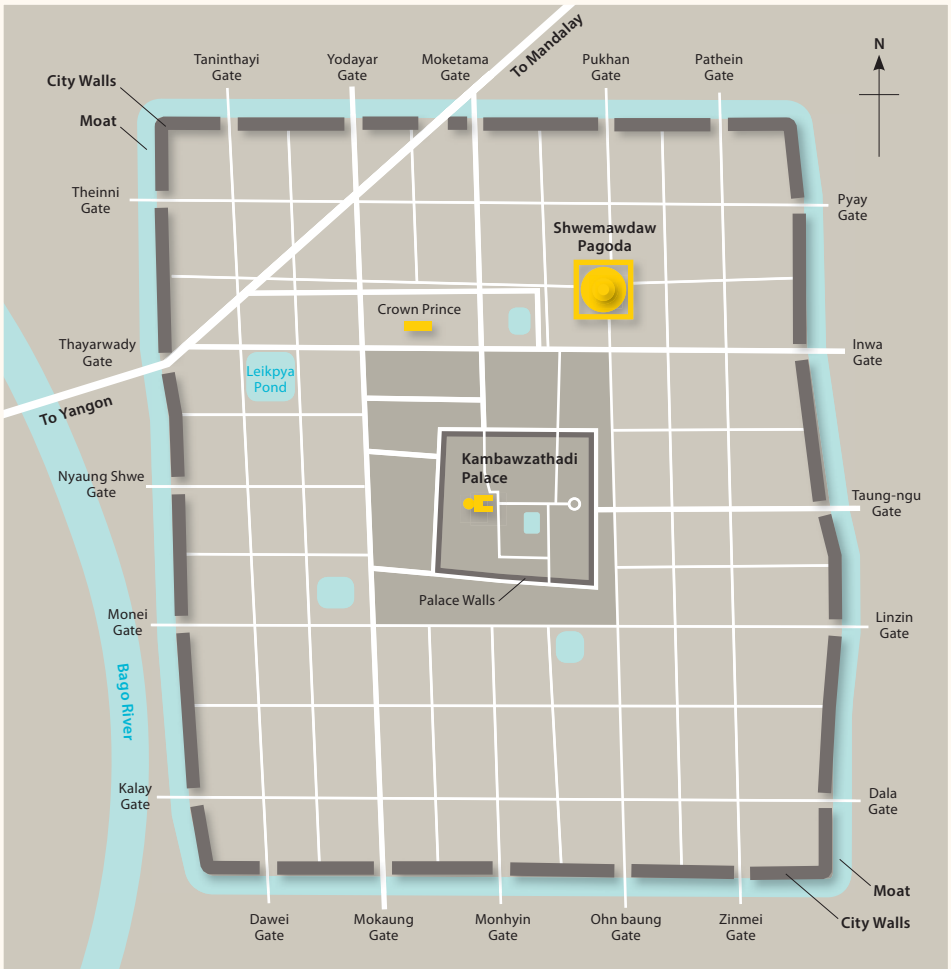
▲ King Bayint Naung  
(r. 1551–81)

from the north, which seized Bago in 1538, bringing an end to Mon control.

This city, on the right bank of the Bago River when going upstream, was laid out on a square plan measuring 2.4 kilometres on each side. A wall encircled the city, affording protection against attacks. A moat filled with crocodiles ran along the outside of the wall. Twenty gates provided access in and out of the city, five on each side of the wall. The watchtowers, built of wood, were gilded in a show of grandeur. The streets, lined with trees to provide shade, were said to be so broad that 10–12 men could ride abreast. The people lived in wooden houses covered in tiles.

The splendour of Bago was reflected in the king's palace. Kambawzathadi Palace was located in the centre of the city, protected by its own set of walls and moat. Built in 1556, it had 76 apartments and halls. Gilded wooden walls and tiles of silver never failed to awe visitors. The Italian merchant and traveller Cesar Federici, who visited Bago some time between the 1560s and 1580s, noted that the palace housed four white elephants. In 1599, the palace was razed in a fire. The Great Audience Hall and the Bhammayarthana Throne Hall (or Bee Throne Hall) have since been reconstructed, the latter based on designs found on ancient palm leaf manuscripts and other documentation.

As with other cities in Myanmar, Bago is dotted with pagodas. The most revered is the Shwemawdaw followed by the Mahazedi. The king donated gold amounting to four times his own weight to gild these two pagodas. Both were built to house relics



of Gautama Buddha: Shwemawdaw Pagoda has two hair relics, while Mahazedi Pagoda has a tooth relic. In addition, King Bayint Naung donated a scripture library and 52 small stupas to the Shwemawdaw, one for each year of his age.

Myanmar has an enduring relic tradition. It is said that the Golden Rock is able to balance on Kyaiktiyo Hill (near Kyaikto, 50 kilometres east of Bago) because a strand of Buddha's hair is enshrined in the rock. The Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon is revered not only for

▲ A plan of Bago city as built by King Bayint Naung. The location and names of the 20 gates that provided access into the city are shown on the map.





the eight hair relics belonging to Gautama Buddha, but also for the relics left behind by three of his predecessors (Kakusandha, Konagamana and Kassapa). A king's ability to hold sway over his people was in some ways dependent on having stupas enshrining important relics in his realm; stupas that inspired confidence reflected well on the king.

A separate enclosure within the city walls was reserved for foreign traders. All foreigners entering Bago had to be registered and were considered slaves of the king. They were only allowed to leave with the king's permission. Foreign ships entering the port had to surrender their rudders and guns, and these were only returned after permission to leave was granted by the king.

A harbour-master had jurisdiction over all matters related to the port. All goods, both imports and

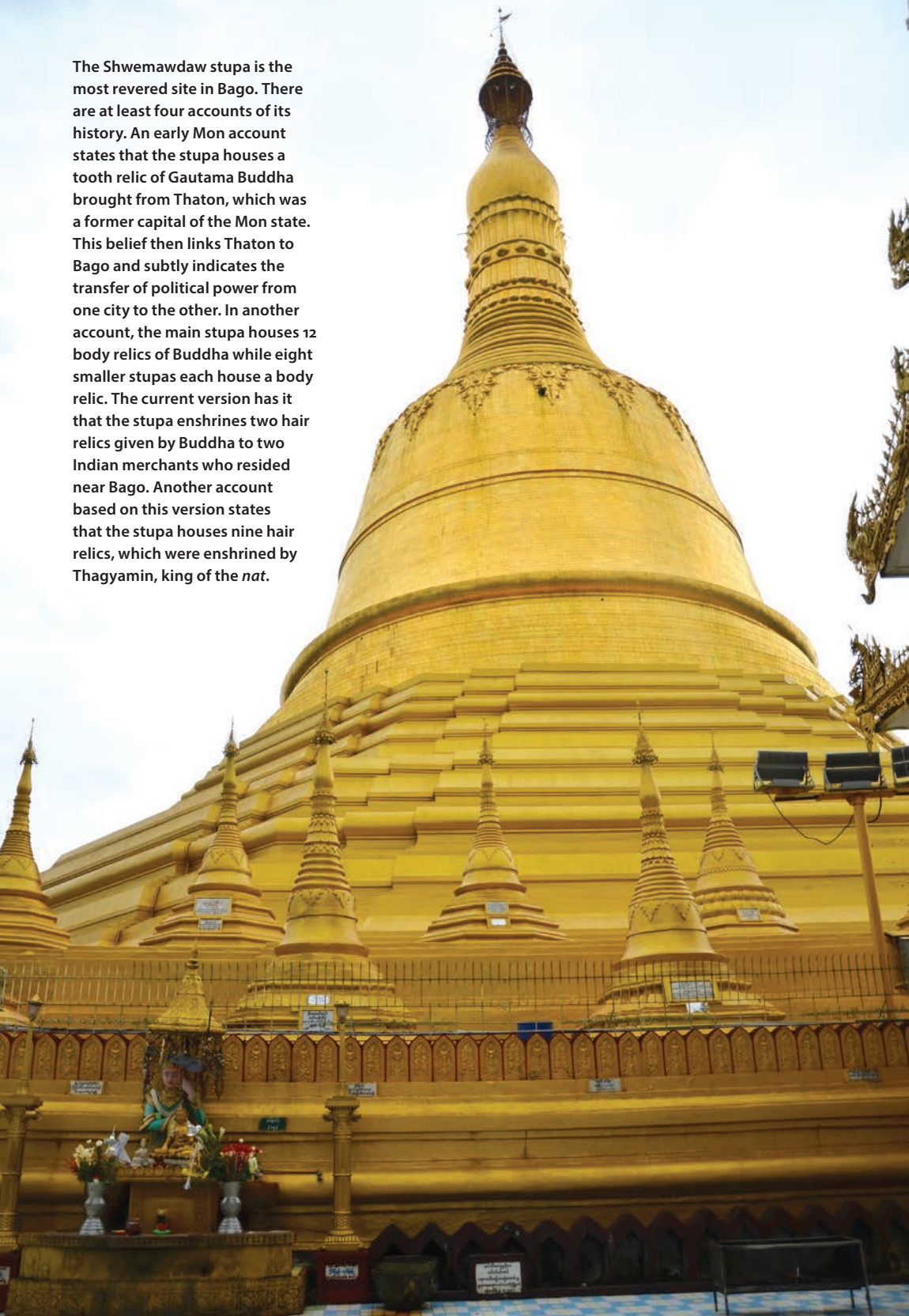


◀ The Great Audience Hall of Kambawzathadi Palace. The palace was built by King Bayint Naung but was razed by a fire in 1599. The Great Audience Hall was reconstructed in the 1990s.

◀ Remnants of 222 teak pillars that once supported the Great Audience Hall were recovered during excavations in the 1990s. These pillars show evidence of the devastating 1599 fire. When the palace was to be constructed, these pillars were donated from all over Myanmar. Many of the pillars are inscribed with the names of the governors and officers who sent them as well as the names of the towns they were from.

◀ Close-up of one of the teak pillars, inscribed with the name of a counsellor to the king. Based on the writing style, the pillar is dated to the 16th century.

The Shwemawdaw stupa is the most revered site in Bago. There are at least four accounts of its history. An early Mon account states that the stupa houses a tooth relic of Gautama Buddha brought from Thaton, which was a former capital of the Mon state. This belief then links Thaton to Bago and subtly indicates the transfer of political power from one city to the other. In another account, the main stupa houses 12 body relics of Buddha while eight smaller stupas each house a body relic. The current version has it that the stupa enshrines two hair relics given by Buddha to two Indian merchants who resided near Bago. Another account based on this version states that the stupa houses nine hair relics, which were enshrined by Thagyamin, king of the *nat*.





▲ A temple in the Shwemawdaw.

◀ Burmese astrology recognises an eight-day week (in which Wednesday is divided into two – morning and night). An animal is assigned to each day of the week. Shrines representing each animal can be found surrounding the Shwemawdaw. This photo shows the shrine for the guinea pig, which represents Friday. A Buddha image is installed behind the animal and a nat guardian spirit sits behind Buddha. Devotees offer flowers and make a wish while pouring water over the image of the animal that represents the day of the week they were born.



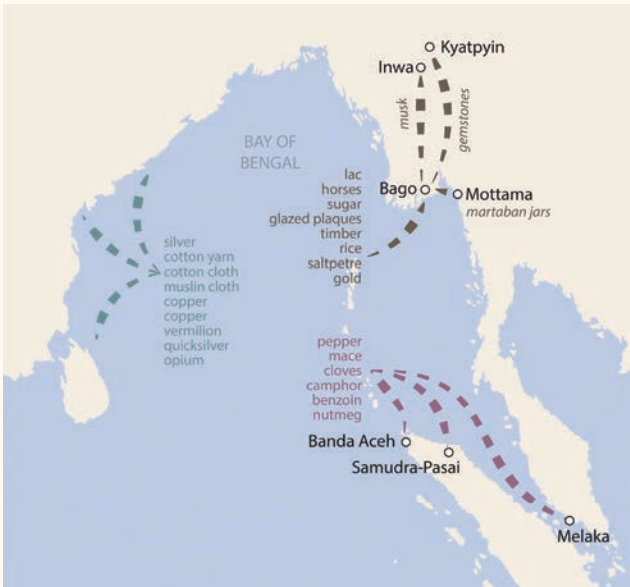
▲ In Southeast Asia, elephants were much in demand. They were identified with kingship – the kings of Pegu demanded white elephants from its vassals – and were also beasts of burden and used in warfare. At Pegu, elephant hunters developed a unique way of catching and taming male elephants. Female elephants were used as bait to lure the males into a stockade and, from there, into a long narrow hall; its narrowness prevented the elephant from turning back. Its feet were then bound and the elephant was left alone. Food and water were only provided after 4 to 5 days, after which the elephant was untied and a female companion provided. The elephants became tame after 8 days.

exports, were subject to customs duties. A ship arriving at the port was required to put in a request for a pilot to bring the ship in. A manifest of the ship's cargo was also submitted at this time, and an officer would come onboard to check the cargo against the list. This was to prevent trade in contraband, the carrying of which was a serious offence.

### **Entrepôt Trade**

Bago developed into a major entrepôt as products from neighbouring regions were channelled to the city, making it unnecessary for traders from the West to travel all the way to other parts of maritime Southeast Asia or China, and vice versa. Common goods exported through Bago included rice, sugar, tin, copper, beeswax and musk. However, Bago was famous predominantly for lac, horses, gemstones, ceramics and teakwood.

Lac is a dark-red resin secreted by a few species of insects. After it has been refined and cleansed, colour is added, making a range of colour options available. The lac from Myanmar had a reputation for being of very high quality. A key use for lac during the second half



◀ Bago was an entrepôt where products from different places could be found.

of the second millennium was in the manufacture of sealing wax. Persia was a large market. The Mons also took lac to Sumatra and Java and bartered it for pepper. The pepper was then traded in Arabia and Persia, as well as in the ports on the Red Sea, for high profits. In the Indonesian islands, lac was used mainly as a dye, particularly in the making of red silk.

Gold was one of the products from Myanmar that attracted foreign traders from the earliest times. The main gold belt lies in Myanmar's north, in the regions of Kachin, Sagaing and Mandalay. In the south, deposits have been found in the lower reaches of the Sittaung River. Kyaikkatha, a gold-producing region at the mouth of the Sittaung, has yielded ancient gold coins. Indians referred to this region as *Suvarnabhumi* (Land of Gold), a name that later encompassed other parts of Southeast Asia. In Myanmar, gold was not used as currency, and it also saw limited usage as adornment for the ruling classes. Instead, it was reserved for the decoration of stupas and pagodas. This would have contributed to the prohibition on the export of gold in the 18th century.

Saltpetre (potassium nitrate) was another product prohibited for export in the 18th century. It had found use in the manufacture of fireworks as well as gunpowder, and exporting it was a criminal offence punishable by death. A black market flourished, and traders obtained saltpetre from the ports of Myanmar at considerable risk and, consequently, high prices.

Myanmar is almost synonymous with gemstones. In Kyatpyin were mined rubies, spinels, yellow topazes, blue and white sapphires, and amethysts. Chinese and Tartar merchants came annually to Kyatpyin, trading carpets, cloths, cloves and nutmegs for the precious stones; it is interesting to note that spices from the eastern Indonesian islands were among the items traded. The Burmese themselves took the uncut stones to the royal city of Ava, from where they were sent to Siam and Bago. A key export market from Bago was India – the uncut gems arrived via Pulicat, where skilled artisans cut and polished the stones. Today, Kyatpin is part of Mogok city and continues to be famous for its gemstones.

The ceramic tradition in Myanmar was unique in that tin was added to whiten the colour of the flux. Glazed-ware trade products were produced in all three districts of the Bago kingdom – centred at Pathein, Bago and Mottama. Celadon wares were produced across the kingdom, while the black and blackish-brown Martaban jars were only produced in the Martaban district. Bago was known for its glazed plaques, such as those recovered from the Shwegugyi Pagoda. These plaques were much in demand between



◀ Green-glazed plaques found at the Shwegugyi temple complex in Bago, showing two demons trying to distract Siddhartha Gautama from his path to enlightenment. They were not successful and the following day, Siddhartha achieved enlightenment and became Buddha. The plaques demonstrate the high quality of ceramic production and glazing achieved at Bago.



▶ A glazed Martaban jar on display at the Great Audience Hall of Kambawzathadi Palace. These large jars were made at Mottama (Martaban). They served as storage containers for water as well as other liquids and dried food on ships.



▼ The Kyaik Pun Pagoda is a brick monument with four Buddhas seated back-to-back. These are dedicated to Gautama Buddha and his three predecessors – Kakusandha, Konagamana and Kassapa. A Mon legend connects the four statues to four sisters. The sisters had taken a vow not to marry and if any of them broke the vow, the pagoda would collapse.

the 15th and mid-18th centuries, both locally as well as abroad.

Bago silted up in the 16th century. Unlike port-polities in maritime Southeast Asia, which relocated their capitals when a location became unsuitable as a port, Bago remained as the capital of the kingdom and the residence of the king. Bago's role as the main port was taken over by Thanlyin (Syriam), located at the confluence of the Bago and Yangon rivers. Goods were unloaded at Thanlyin and taken on smaller riverboats to Bago. Many merchants came to Thanlyin seeking





◀ This bronze bell, cast in 1755, used to hang at the Shwemawdaw Pagoda. Two stylised lions on the bell sit facing opposite directions. There are 14 lines of inscription on the bell, mostly in Mon but with a few Pali phrases. The bell was taken by the British during the Second Anglo-Myanmar War (1852) to India but was returned by the Indian government in 1957. It is now housed at the National Museum in Yangon.

teak wood. Teak resists water better than other woods and hence it found application in shipbuilding, making Thanlyin a shipbuilding centre for the region.

In 1599, a Portuguese mercenary, Filipe de Brito, led Rakhine forces to capture Thanlyin. He was rewarded by being made governor of the city. As governor, he sought to direct maritime trade to Thanlyin. Ships from Bengal used to make landfall at Pathein. De Brito used his ships to blockade the coast, forcing the traders to dock at Thanlyin instead. Consequently, Pathein was bypassed. Coupled with erosion at its delta, Pathein became insignificant by the start of the 17th century. Thanlyin, by contrast, prospered.

In 1757, Alaungpaya (r. 1752–60), founder of the Konbaung dynasty, sacked Bago and moved the Mon capital to Yangon, which he had captured in 1755. Yangon soon surpassed Bago and Thanlyin in population and growth. No longer the abode of kings, Bago languished, but its gilded pagodas and rich history still draw their fair share of tourists. ♦

CHAPTER **3**

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# SOUTHERN KEDAH

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*From Iron Smelting to Entrepôt*



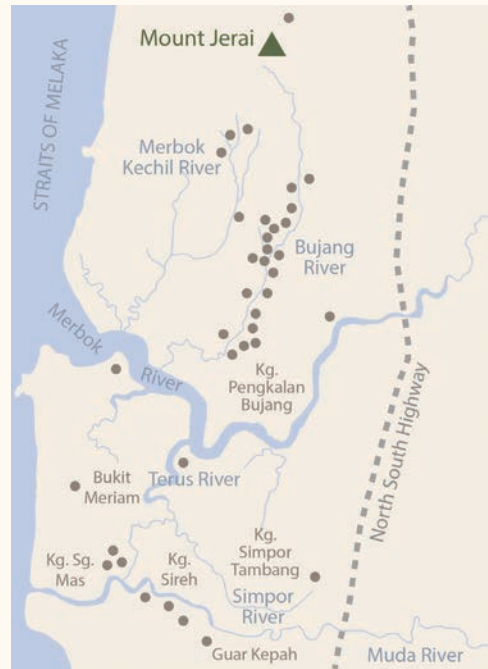
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KEDAH'S COASTLINE has changed considerably over the centuries. Up until around the 3rd century, most of southern Kedah was either underwater or an uninhabitable swamp. Merbok River was a large bay, reaching its current form only about 600 years ago. The future entrepôts – Kampung Sungai Mas and Pengkalan Bujang – did not exist at this time. Instead, the main port was at Sungai Batu, which is more than 10 kilometres inland today. Mount Jerai, the tallest mountain in Kedah, was an island, with only its peak visible above the water.

The soil here, made up of marine sediments and clay deposits, was especially fertile. However, the



Mount Jerai, a solitary mountain looming 1,217 metres over the surrounding flatlands. This mountain is part of the Kedah-Singgora range, which is highly fragmented, leaving Mount Jerai isolated in south Kedah. It was thus an effective navigational beacon. An 8th-century Hindu *candi* found at its peak attests to the importance of this mountain.

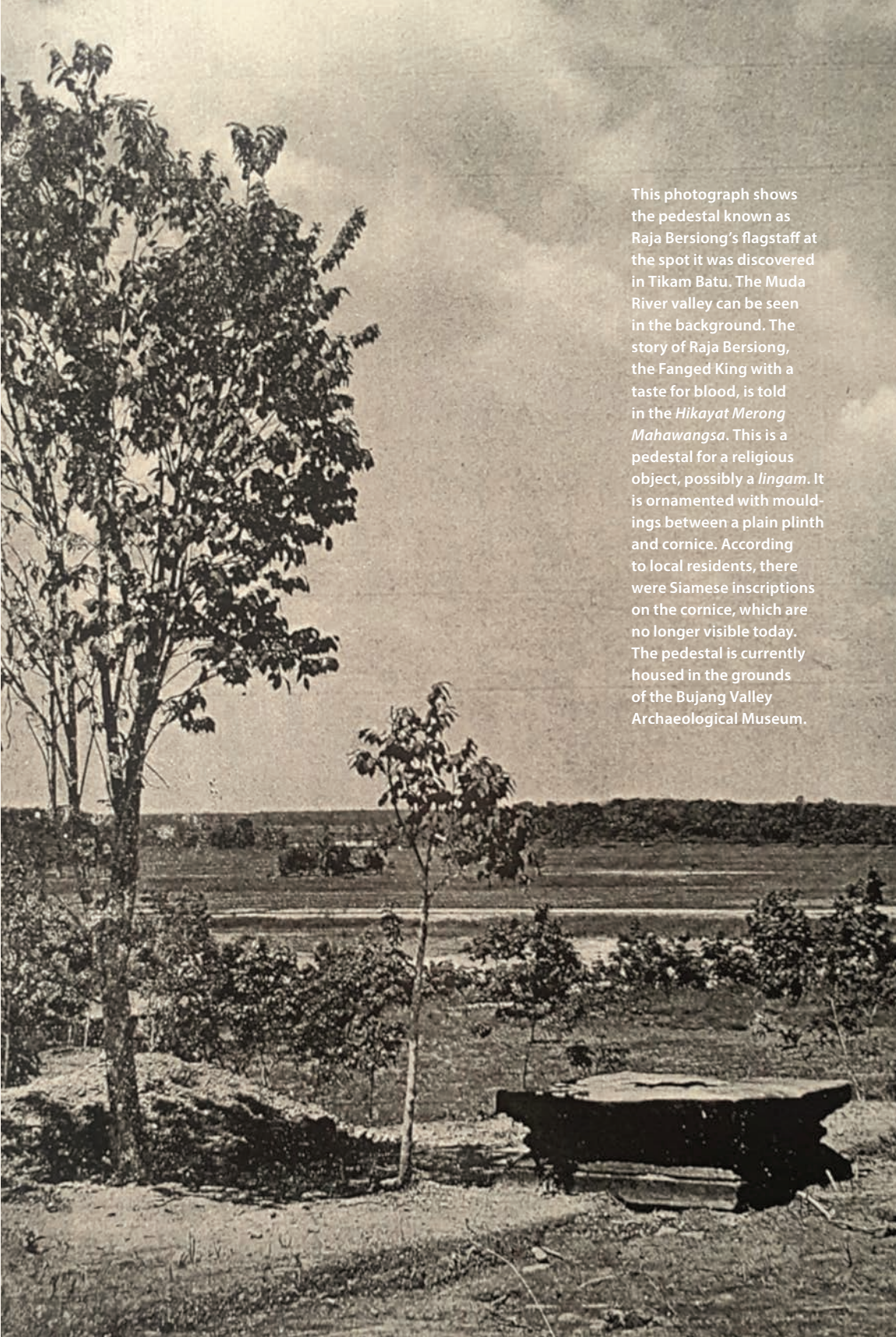


▲ This map, showing southern Kedah in the 1st to 3rd centuries, is based on paleo sea-level studies conducted by the Centre for Global Archaeological Research (CGAR), University of Science, Malaysia. Merbok River, at the time, was a wide bay. Sungai Batu was the only area around this bay suitable for habitation and it would have been a port of call.

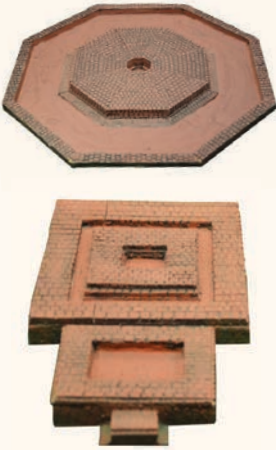
▲ Ancient southern Kedah occupied an area that is bounded today by the Sala River (north of Mount Jerai), the Muda River, the Melaka Straits, and the North-South Highway. This area is also popularly known as Bujang Valley. The map shows key archaeological sites.

narrow strips of land were covered with mangrove swamps, not leaving much room for agriculture. Up until at least the 16th century, the settlers practised dry cultivation, burning the jungles to clear the land and moving to different locales as the soil grew barren. With this limited form of agriculture, researchers estimate that the total population of southern Kedah did not exceed 20,000.

Over time, sedimentation and falling sea levels pushed the shoreline outwards, and settlers moved in to the newly formed land, possibly from the 4th century onwards. Settlements were located along the rivers, especially the Bujang, Muda and Terus, but kept shifting due to changing river flows, loss of access to the sea or the need to seek new land for cultivation. The settlements may even have been formed by migrants from Sumatra and Java attracted by new trade opportunities. Some of these settlements were able to attract South Asian merchants who previously frequented ports further north in southern Thailand. These settlements rose



This photograph shows the pedestal known as Raja Bersiong's flagstaff at the spot it was discovered in Tikam Batu. The Muda River valley can be seen in the background. The story of Raja Bersiong, the Fanged King with a taste for blood, is told in the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. This is a pedestal for a religious object, possibly a *lingam*. It is ornamented with mouldings between a plain plinth and cornice. According to local residents, there were Siamese inscriptions on the cornice, which are no longer visible today. The pedestal is currently housed in the grounds of the Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum.



▲ Models of *candi* at Bukit Pendiat: Buddhist (above) and Hindu (below). Buddhist *candi* in southern Kedah had varied floor plans; the one at Bukit Pendiat was octagonal. Hindu *candi* were distinguished by their *vimana-mandapa* design. Direction was not important in a Buddhist *candi* but the deity in a Hindu *candi* faced east, towards the rising sun. Incidentally, Abu Dulaf, writing circa 940 CE, assumed that Hindu *candi* faced east towards China, in honour of the Chinese emperor. Although this assumption is incorrect, it highlights that foreign travellers recognised the importance of China to trade-based Southeast Asian polities.

to become important ports and some even entrepôts. Mount Jerai, now looming 1,200 metres over the surrounding flatlands, became a beacon for sailors, assisting them to navigate the treacherous waters and find safe anchorage.

In addition, the Muda River, which originates near the border with Thailand, acted as a key component of the transpeninsular highway that took merchants from southern Kedah across to Pattani (Thailand) – a “shortcut” that saved them having to sail round the peninsula. This further attracted merchants to land at southern Kedah, and it grew in importance. Foreign visitors described Kedah as a prosperous land made famous by its gaiety and many pleasures. Southern Kedah became the *Kataha* found in Sanskrit texts, the *Kataram* of the Tamils and the *Jiecha* of the Chinese. The Arabs knew it as *Kalah*, although this name could have been applied to a number of ports as far north as *Ko Kho Khao* and *Takuapa* in Thailand.

The area in which ancient southern Kedah flourished is also known today as *Bujang Valley*, which takes its name from the *Bujang River*. This name is believed to come from the Sanskrit *bhujangga*, meaning “serpent”. In Malay folklore, landslides and floods were attributed to serpents or dragons making their way to the sea via rivers after *bertapa* (religious solitude) in the mountains.

Southern Kedah is dotted with the remains of *candi*, both Hindu and Buddhist. These were active in different time periods, providing clues to how the settlements shifted over time. The *candi* were small,



satisfying the needs of a small population. In contrast, the *candi* in places like Cambodia and Java, where large fertile plains supported wet-rice cultivation and correspondingly much larger populations, were comparatively larger too. Although small, the *candi* of southern Kedah were not necessarily simple. Finds such as a terracotta elephant at Pengkalan Bujang and a *makara* (a legendary half-aquatic, half-terrestrial animal) at Kampung Sungai Mas indicate that some of the *candi* were richly ornamented. Additionally, the *candi* may have been decorated with woodcarvings, which have not survived the passage of time.

The *candi* were the focal points of the settlements. Trade goods recovered at some of the *candi* sites indicate that trade was also carried out in the vicinity. Presumably the availability of these places of worship made southern Kedah attractive to South Asian

▲ Candi Bendang Dalam, active during the 12th century, was originally located on the banks of Bujang River but was relocated in 1983 to the grounds of the Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum. It was a Hindu *candi*, consisting of a *vimana* and a *mandapa*. The *mandapa* is a hall where devotees gather, while the *vimana* houses the *garbhagriha* (embryo chamber), the sanctum sanctorum where the deity resides. Archaeological finds of Song Dynasty ceramics and Middle Eastern glass indicate that this site participated in foreign trade.



► This Ganesha image, found in southern Kedah, is made from granite and exhibits very fine workmanship. Ganesha is portrayed seated in the *maharajalisana* pose, with the right leg bent and left leg folded flat. His trunk is positioned to the left and ends in a bowl held by his left hand. His right hand is holding his broken tusk. Carved at the base is his vehicle, the mouse Akhu.



◄ This bronze artefact was found in the Bujang River, near Candi Tupah. There are similarities between this object and a house-shaped bronze incense burner found in Sambas, west Borneo (8th–10th century). The Sambas burner is believed to have originated in Java and, thus, a Javanese provenance for this artefact is also speculated. Near the *vimana* of Candi Tupah, a Ganesha image with heels touching in the Javanese fashion was seen carved on a river boulder, solidifying the Javanese connection.

traders. In addition, the Buddhist culture made southern Kedah a desirable place for Chinese monks to wait out the change in monsoon winds on their voyages to and from India.

While archaeology has provided good insights into the culture of the settlements and their trading activities, the political structure of ancient Kedah remains uncertain. Kingdoms are mentioned in ancient texts, especially Arab ones, but these have yet to be verified by archaeological evidence. Chinese and Arabic writings indicate southern Kedah was under Srivijaya's suzerainty and that it was an important port within the Srivijayan *mandala*. This is corroborated by the fact that Kedah did not send any missions to China, with the possible exception in 638 CE, implying that it was not an independent polity. The 1025 Chola attack on Srivijayan ports reshaped the culture of southern Kedah to a more Hindu-dominant one.

Subsequently, with the conversion to Islam and the decline in maritime activity, the ancient culture of southern Kedah lay forgotten. However, its ruins inspired an unknown author in the 18th or 19th century to pen the epic, *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Merong Mahawangsa was an emissary sent by the Sultanate of Rum (1077–1308, in present-day Turkey) to negotiate a marriage between the Raja's son and a daughter of the Emperor of China. He was accompanying the prince to China when their ship was beset by a storm and wrecked on the western coast of the Malay Peninsula. Merong Mahawangsa, who was separated from the prince during the storm, made himself Raja of the land



▲ Sculpture of a Buddha head found at Kampung Sungai Mas, made of green schist. The workmanship is of good quality, but, unfortunately, the face has been badly damaged. The hair is curled in large flat ringlets. The *usnisa* (topknot) is small and not clearly differentiated, reminiscent of the Sri Lankan style.



▲ The graves of Sultan Mudzaffar Shah and the royal family at Kampung Langgar in southern Kedah. Reigning between 1136 and 1179 CE, Mudzaffar Shah is said to be the first ruler of Kedah to convert to Islam. According to the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, his name was Phra Ong Mahawangsa before conversion and he resided at Bukit Meriam.

he found himself in, building a fort and a palace, and naming the country Kedah.

The *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* purports to document the genealogy of Kedah's rulers. However, it is not a historical treatise. Rather, the unknown author has spun an imaginative narrative blending historical events with folklore, using the ruins of ancient structures as focal points of the narrative. For example, he is clearly aware of the geography of the area more than 1,000 years before his time. In the *Hikayat*, he mentions that a large island by the name of Pulo Srai (Mount Jerai) was becoming attached to the mainland, and the recession of the sea was causing new land to form.

In the 1860s, Captain James Low of the East India Company was inspired by the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* to seek out the locations mentioned in it. He became the first person to archaeologically research southern Kedah. Since then, close to 90 sites have been identified as archaeologically important and

many of these have been excavated. The Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum, opened in 1980, was built next to Candi Bukit Batu Pahat and houses artefacts found in southern Kedah. Three *candi* from other sites have been relocated and reconstructed on its grounds – Candi Pendiati, Candi Pengkalan Bujang and Candi Bendang Dalam.

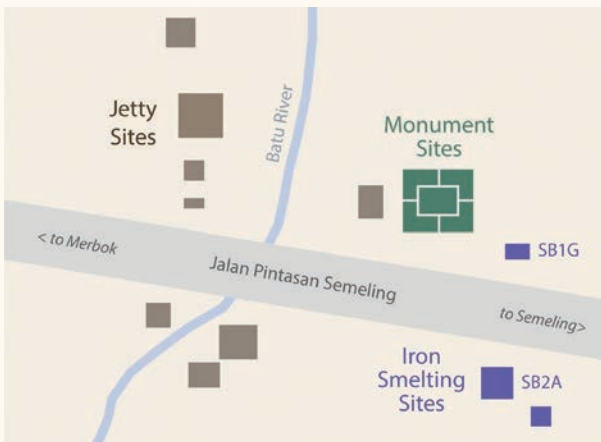
### Sungai Batu: Iron Accumulation Port

Of particular historical interest in southern Kedah is the former port of Sungai Batu. The discovery of ancient iron smelting sites here suggests that it was iron ingots that initially drew traders to southern Kedah.

Sungai Batu takes its name from the Batu River, a tributary of the Merbok. This river is barely a stream today but paleo-environmental studies show that it was at one time at least 100 metres wide. Considering the Merbok River was a bay prior to the 3rd century CE,

▼ Sketch map showing the location of the Sungai Batu Archaeological Complex along Jalan Pintasan Semeling. The sites marked on the map were among the earliest to be excavated.

▼ Tunku Abdul Rahman, then Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya, being briefed on the excavation and reconstruction of Candi Bukit Batu Pahat by Alastair Lamb, archaeologist from the University of Malaya, in 1957. The Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum was subsequently built next to it. This museum houses artefacts found at other sites in southern Kedah.



the earliest traders to southern Kedah probably sailed up directly to Sungai Batu to get their precious cargo of iron ingots.

The conditions at Sungai Batu were ideal for iron smelting. Laterite, the source of raw iron ore (magnetite and haematite) was readily available, and the nearby mangrove forests provided plentiful wood for charcoal to heat the furnaces. Although no complete furnaces have so far turned up at Sungai Batu, some intact specimens have been discovered at Kampung Gading in Jeniang, about 40 kilometres to the east. These furnaces, made of clay, are likely to be what the Sungai Batu furnaces would have looked like as well. The relationship between the Kampung Gading and Sungai Batu smelting sites, however, remains uncertain.

The iron ingots were exported. They were of high quality, and their use in the making of swords was mentioned in a number of Arabic texts, such as those by Al-Kindi (9th century) and the Persian scholar Al-Biruni (10th century). The 10th-century Tamil epic, *Parunkhatai*, mentions that *kataraththu irumpu* (iron from Kataram) was one of the materials used in the making of a royal chariot.

Eventually, sedimentation deprived Sungai Batu of its access to the sea. The entrepôts Sungai Mas and Pengkalan Bujang took over its export function, but the iron smelting industry continued to thrive inland. The Chinese monk Yijing, who spent time in Jiecha (speculated to be at Kampung Sungai Mas) during the 7th century, mentioned that on the journey from Jiecha to India, the ship stopped at one of the Nicobar Islands,



where they were able to procure 5–10 coconuts for an iron ingot as large as two fingers. These iron ingots, much desired by the Nicobar islanders, must have been a trade item carried onboard ships headed to South Asia.

Within the Sungai Batu Archaeological Complex, at least 17 iron smelting sites have so far been identified. Smelting was carried out at these various sites at different time periods, some as early as before the Common Era. One site (known as SB1G) was active between the 11th and 13th centuries, while another site (SB2A) was in continuous use for at least 400 years, from the 3rd to 6th centuries. Interestingly, operations resumed at SB2A between the 17th and 18th centuries. In addition, the discovery of sites that functioned as jetties on the Batu River show that the iron ingots were exported via the river system – initially, ships may have sailed directly to Sungai Batu and, later, smaller boats may have transported the cargo downstream to the new entrepôts.

▲ Furnaces at Kampung Gading, Jeniang. This site was active between the 4th and 12th centuries, contemporaneous with some of the Sungai Batu sites. The site is located at the Chepir River, close to where the river branches off from the Muda River. The Muda, which flows to the Straits of Melaka, may have been the transportation highway for the iron ingots produced here, while the Merbok provided this function for Sungai Batu.

► This structure, found within Sungai Batu Archaeological Complex, is believed to be a religious monument. It is rather unusual in form – a circular base is surmounted by a square structure, which is in turn surmounted by a circular structure. Inscribed finds, including six gold fragments and one stone, identify the structure with Buddhism.









▲ This stone, found in the top layers of the Sungai Batu monument, has eight sentences inscribed on it. The inscriptions are in the Pallava Grantha script and are dated to the 6th–7th centuries based on their similarity with inscriptions found near the Bujang River and at Kampung Sungai Mas. The inscriptions at the latter two locations have been identified as stanzas from the “Questions of Sagaramati”, a Mahayana Buddhist sutra.

A unique structure in the northern sector of the complex has drawn a lot of speculation. Postulated to be a religious edifice, this clay-brick structure is made up of three components: a circular base with a square structure on top of it, which in turn is surmounted by another circular structure. The circular base suggests it could have been a Buddhist stupa. Inscribed finds consisting of one stone and six gold fragments recovered from the top layers lend credence to this view.

The six gold inscribed fragments are reminiscent of those found at Bukit Tupah Estate, the inscriptions on which are believed to be names of bodhisattvas. The stone piece has eight inscribed sentences, bearing similarities with the inscribed stone found at Kampung Bendang Dalam. Due to the similarities between the two inscriptions, the Sungai Batu inscribed stone has also been dated to between the 6th and 7th centuries. Chronometric dating of bricks taken from the bottom-most layer of the structure gives a date of 110 CE, indicating the structure was in use from the 2nd century onwards.

### **The Entrepôts**

The earliest entrepôt in Kedah is believed to have been located at Kampung Sungai Mas, which is situated on a *permatang* (beach ridge) on the west bank of the Terus River. Although it lies over 4 kilometres from the coast today, it would have been a coastal settlement at one time and, in its early days, probably functioned as a seaport rather than a river port. Dated between the 5th and the 10th centuries, its entrepôt status has

Two stone tablets from the 5th–7th century, engraved with the image of a stupa, found in southern Kedah. The inscriptions around the stupa contain a Buddhist verse associated with karma. Both tablets are believed to have been votive offerings by pilgrims at their respective *candi*.

► The Kampung Sungai Mas Inscribed Stone. In addition to the karma verse, it also has a “Ye dharma” credo. The tablet is housed at the Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum.



◀ The Buddhagupta Inscribed Stone, found near Guar Kepah. Apart from the karma verse, the inscriptions mention a sea captain named Buddhagupta from Raktamrttika. Translated as “Red Earth”, Raktamrttika was originally thought to be Chitu, located on the east coast of the Peninsula. It can also be identified with an ancient monastery at Rajbadidanga in West Bengal based on its mention in an obscure Chinese manuscript by the Buddhist monk Xuanzang, who travelled to India in the 7th century. The original tablet is housed at the Indian Museum, Kolkata.





▲ A container for storing mercury, discovered at Kampung Sungai Mas. Another such container was found at Pengkalan Bujang. The mercury could have come from Sarawak, which was known for exporting it. Mercury is used in gold mines. It is also believed to be the “seed” of Lord Siva; traces of mercury were found on images made of metal foils at Candi Bukit Batu Pahat.

been confirmed by the numerous finds of trade items of various origins.

Beads and coloured glass shards constitute the largest portion of these finds. Kampung Sungai Mas is believed to have been a bead manufacturing site, as indicated by finds of beads with collapsed holes, unpolished beads and beads fused together. Imported glass shards from the Middle East may have been melted down to produce these glass beads. Kampung Sungai Mas could also have acted as the export port for Kuala Selinsing, a bead manufacturing site in Perak.

Chinese ceramics have also been recovered, mainly from the Tang and Song periods, including Ding and Yue ware. The Middle Eastern ceramic finds include Sasanian-Islamic ware and the three-coloured “splashed sgraffiate” ware. All four ceramic types have also been found at Ko Kho Khao in southern Thailand.

As mentioned, Kampung Sungai Mas is postulated to have been the Jiecha where Yijing spent a few months while en route to the Nalanda monastery in India and again on his way back to China. Yijing wrote of 56 Chinese monks who visited India, many of whom transited at Jiecha; one of the monks, Fashen, even died there. Considering that it was a favoured stopover for Buddhist monks, there must have been a well-established support system for them at Kampung Sungai Mas. Two stones inscribed with Buddhist phrases, dating between the 5th and 7th centuries, have been found at Kampung Sungai Mas, and two others at nearby sites – Bukit Meriam and Guar Kepah. These



finds indicate that Buddhism was widely practised during this time.

Kampung Sungai Mas declined around the 10th century as siltation pushed it inland, cutting off its access to the ocean. However, its position on the bank of the Terus River provided it with indirect access to the sea and it continued to function as a port until the 14th century, albeit in a reduced way.

Contemporaneous with Kampung Sungai Mas were sites on the banks of the Bujang River, dating from at least the 7th century. Subsequently, Kampung Pengkalan Bujang, lying about 7 kilometres upstream of the river's confluence with the Merbok, emerged as the major entrepôt on the Bujang River.

Among the items recovered from these sites were ceramic fragments from the Southern Song and Yuan dynasties. The Song ceramics include a large number of high-quality Longquan celadon ware. In addition, a large number of Chinese and Vietnamese blue-and-white ceramics dating to the 17th century have been found, but significantly, there have been no finds of earlier Ming blue-and-whites (e.g. from the 15th century). This suggests that Pengkalan Bujang may have declined as a port in the 14th century but was revived in the 17th century, perhaps prompted by the iron

▲ A selection of Song Dynasty ceramics dating to the 9th–13th centuries found at Kampung Sungai Mas.



▲ This “mosque lamp” was partially restored from fragments found at Pengkalan Bujang. Its glass has a greenish tinge and the lamp has a black rim around the top. It was an oil-lamp; attached to the base was a glass tube, which was designed to hold the wick. Chains would have been passed through the six handles on the body, allowing the lamp to be suspended. Modern researchers have labelled these mosque lamps because of the abundant finds at ancient mosque sites in the Middle East. However, the lamps have also been discovered in churches and other public buildings. Four were found in Kedah – three in Pengkalan Bujang and one in the upper reaches of the Bujang River.

smelting at Sungai Batu Site SB2A, which restarted at this time.

Meanwhile, the Muda River valley did not disappear into obscurity. The Terus River, which links the Merbok and Muda rivers, provided inland settlements with access to the trade routes. Two settlements have been identified as important ports: Kampung Tambang Simpor and Kampung Sireh. The former lies on Simpor River, a tributary of the Terus River. It has yielded beads, glass and ceramics. The ceramics, which include Chinese, Vietnamese and Middle Eastern wares, indicate that this port thrived between the 10th and 13th centuries. It served as a subsidiary port to the main entrepôt at Pengkalan Bujang, consolidating local produce from the interior and distributing imported goods to the interior.

Kampung Sireh, on the Muda River, has yielded, among other finds, ceramics of Chinese and Middle Eastern origin from between the 11th and 14th centuries, Vietnamese (13th–16th) and Thai Sawankhalok (14th–15th). Interestingly, Ming Dynasty ceramics, dating between the 15th and 17th centuries, have also been found, indicating that export trade continued even after the founding of Melaka; the focus was on pepper trade with the Kingdom of Ayutthaya.

## GARBHANYASA

### AT CANDI BUKIT BATU PAHAT

DATING TO THE 11th century, Candi Bukit Batu Pahat overlooked a picturesque waterfall formed by the Merbok Kechil River, the pleasing scene no doubt contributing to the selection of its location. Its architectural structure included a *vimana* and a *mandapa*, identifying it as a Hindu *candi*. It was larger than other *candi* in southern Kedah and better built, using cut granite stone. Unlike other Hindu *candi*, which faced east towards the rising sun, Candi Bukit Batu Pahat faced southeast. Thus, each corner of its square sanctum sanctorum aligned to a cardinal direction.

The *garbhanyasa* ceremony that preceded its construction must have been among the most complex in ancient Southeast Asia.

▼ Candi Bukit Batu Pahat amidst a lush green setting, photographed from behind the *vimana*. The granite pillar bases are visible. The *vimana* housed the *garbhagriha* or embryo chamber, known as such because of the “embryo” deposited in it.





▲ One of the eight depository boxes excavated at Candi Bukit Batu Pahat. With the lid on, the box measures 7 x 7 x 7 inches. The box has nine internal depressions, with a copper pot resting in the large middle one. The lid has a hole in the centre; during the *candi* consecration ceremony, water poured over the box would have trickled inside, activating the objects.

▼ A piece of gold foil inscribed with the word “Om” was folded and inserted into the copper pot.



*Garbhanyasa* is an important ritual in the construction of a Hindu temple. The word translates to “depositing the embryo”. The embryo takes the form of a compartmented box in which objects of symbolic significance – mostly products of the earth such as minerals, metals, stones, grains, plants and sand – have been placed. The box is then ceremonially placed within the temple’s foundations. According to the *Kasyapasilpa*, a South Indian treatise dealing with rituals, if the *garbhanyasa* ritual has not been performed, the deity will not enter the sanctuary.

Uniquely, Candi Bukit Batu Pahat yielded 8 such depository boxes, buried within the sanctuary wall at floor level, at locations corresponding to the four cardinal and four intercardinal directions. Researchers speculate that there would have been a ninth box at the centre of the sanctuary, possibly similar to the large depository excavated at Pengkalan Bujang. The central depository would have played the role of activating the main deity while the positions of the eight smaller depositories bring to mind *lokapala*, guardians of direction, which guard the main deity.

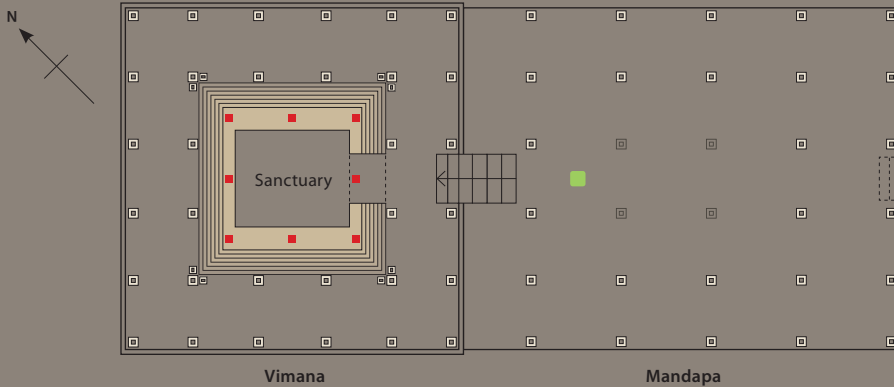


▲ Seven objects shaped from foils (copper, silver and gold) were placed under the copper pot in the depository box.

The depository boxes at Candi Bukit Batu Pahat are cubic in form, with four feet, and a lid with a small hole at the centre. Each box has nine depressions. The centre depression is the largest, and in this rested a copper pot. The pot contained a piece of gold foil inscribed with the word “Om”. Other contents included precious as well as semi-precious stones, metals and seeds. The items in the eight smaller depressions were of a similar nature.

Underneath the pot were objects cut out of silver, copper and gold foil. With slight variations, the objects, from top to bottom, were a silver bull (possibly Nandi, the mount of Lord Siva), a silver square with inscribed stars, a copper turtle, a copper lotus flower, a gold *linga*, a gold semicircle, and a gold seated female figure (possibly the Goddess Sakti). Chemical analysis has shown that the *linga*, in particular, had large amounts of mercury on it. Mercury is the “seed” of Lord Siva, the Supreme Deity, and an important element in Indian Tantric practices. The residing deity in Candi Bukit Batu Pahat is believed to have been Lord Siva, worshipped in Tantric form. A fragment of a bronze statue base as well as a bronze trident excavated at the





▲ Plan of Candi Bukit Batu Pahat. This *candi* faced southeast. Eight depository boxes were located within the walls of the sanctuary (marked in red). It is speculated that a larger depository was located at the centre of the sanctuary, at the base of the main deity. On the *mandapa*, the pillar bases drawn in grey were not found during the excavations but are assumed to have existed. A stone block (marked in green) at the foot of the steps leading up to the *vimana* was most likely the base of a religious object, possibly representing Nandi, vehicle of Siva.

site suggest that a bronze image of Siva may have been installed in the sanctum sanctorum.

Such compartmented depositories were not unique to Kedah. Similar ones have been found in Bali, Java, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, while depositories made of four bricks, but holding similar items, have been recovered in Cambodia and Vietnam. The boxes have been mistaken at times for reliquaries but they are actually a part of temple construction rituals. A number of South Indian texts and manuals describe these rituals.

Candi Bukit Batu Pahat was reconstructed onsite in 1959–60 by the Federation Museums Department with help from the University of Malaya and the Angkor Wat Conservation Centre in Cambodia. The Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum was subsequently built next to it. The temple's architecture is based on a *mandapa-vimana* plan, with seven steps leading from the *mandapa* to the *vimana*, and overlaid with a grid of 66 or 70 granite pillar bases. An architectural feature unique to Southeast Asia, these pillar bases are a kind of plinth built to support the wooden pillars that held up the roof. Researchers opine that the *mandapa* was covered by a double roof, while the *vimana* had a multi-tiered roof structure of the Balinese *meru* type, which was made of perishable materials such as thatch or attap. ♦



Twelve pillar bases run alongside the walls of the sanctuary. All 12 bases have a circular depression at the centre of its square mortise and in each of these was placed a small silver capsule containing gemstones. The four corner pillar bases were flanked by two smaller pillar bases making a group of three. The flanking pillar bases have mortises that would have held an angled strut.



## KUALA SELINSING

*Bead-Makers Par Excellence*

THE STORY OF THE BEAD TRADE in Southeast Asia starts with a small drawn bead, inconspicuous in design but found distributed from Ghana to China. Its narrative spans over 2,000 years and begins at Arikamedu in Puducherry, India, where it was first manufactured. Maritime trade took the beads afar and the bead-makers themselves took their trade to Southeast Asia, where they set up satellite manufacturing sites at locations where their skills were in demand. The beads were luxury trade items, exchanged for jungle products from the interiors. They were also incorporated into local belief systems and became heirloom pieces known as *mutisalah* (from *mutiara salah*, “false pearls”).

Peter Francis, a pioneer in the study of beads, gave the label “Indo-Pacific” to glass beads manufactured in the Arikamedu tradition. Based on similarities in manufacturing technique, he speculates that bead-makers from Arikamedu moved to Southeast Asia to open up bead-making sites. They would have co-opted the local population into the manufacturing process, which, over time, became a local one. In the first few centuries CE, bead manufacturing



▲◀ Strands of beads excavated at Kuala Selinsing (above); and at Óc-Eo (left), an Indo-Pacific bead manufacturing site in the Mekong delta that had trade connections with Kuala Selinsing.



▲ Fishing remains the mainstay of the villages in the greater Selinsing area.

▼ Kuala Selinsing lies on the western coast of Peninsula Malaysia, in the northern state of Perak.

spread from Arikamedu to Mantai (Sri Lanka), Óc-Eo (Vietnam), Khlong Thom (Thailand) and Kuala Selinsing (Malaysia). Together, these centres not only met the demand of Southeast Asian markets but also those further afield to the east. The discovery of Indo-Pacific beads in royal tombs and graves of the nobility in China, Japan and Korea attests to these beads being regarded as status symbols.

Kuala Selinsing is located northwest of Taiping, on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Today, it is a mangrove swamp, visited mainly by fishermen and charcoal woodcutters. However, from at least the early 1st millennium CE to around the 8th–10th century CE, it was home to a settlement of seafarers. It was a minor port, not charted by ancient mariners. Nevertheless, sometime in the first few centuries of the first millennium, it managed to attract bead manufacturing to its shores and to become an important collection centre in the regional trade network, assuring it a place in the annals of history.

Archaeological excavations at Kuala Selinsing have uncovered hundreds of beads fashioned out of stone, glass and shells. Beads made of carnelian (a

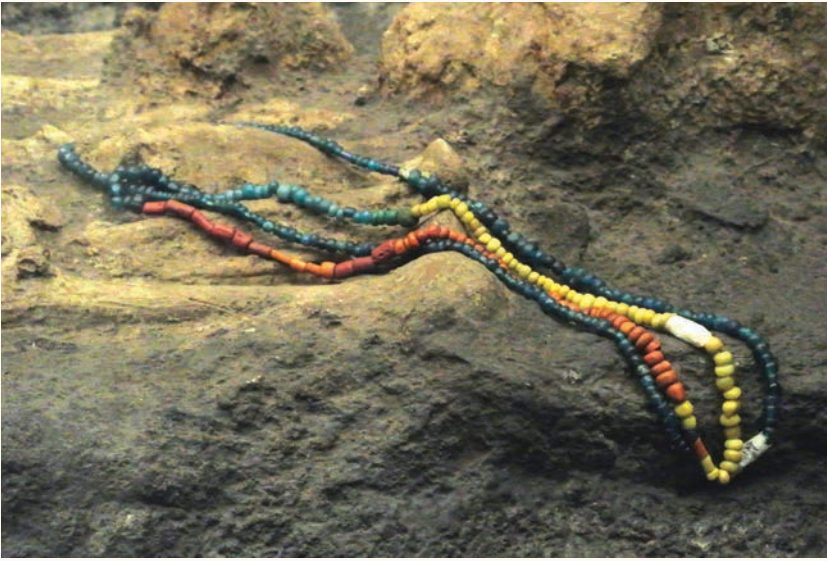




brownish-red semi-precious gemstone) were the most common stone beads, while beads made of banded agate, rock crystal and amethyst were also found in appreciable quantities. Beads from gemstones included spinel, ruby, garnet and sapphire. The glass beads came in many different colours, both translucent and opaque. However, what was more interesting were finds of undrilled as well as partially drilled carnelian beads, chipped pieces of rock crystal, a square block of agate and pieces of rough glass in various colours. It was these finds that identified Kuala Selinsing as a bead manufacturing site. That the manufacturing technology originated from Arikamedu was identified by the type of glass wasters (discards) found and by the beads themselves, which were bored from both ends.

Although the beads were made at Kuala Selinsing, most of the raw materials are not found locally – these would have been imported. One example is the unshaped piece of lapis lazuli found; the primary source of this stone is in northeast Afghanistan. The glass

▲ A charcoal factory at Kuala Sepetang, near Kuala Selinsing. The mangrove forest covering Kuala Selinsing is exploited for its wood, which yields high energy, making it suitable for use as charcoal. In ancient times, wood from mangrove forests was also used to fire iron-smelting furnaces.



▲► Kuala Selinsing manufactured beads made of shells, stones (precious and semi-precious), glass and even fishbones. The raw materials for making stone beads were mostly imported, while the glass for the glass beads was possibly manufactured in Kuala Selinsing itself.



beads, however, tell a different story. Chemical analysis has shown that the glass used to make the beads was possibly manufactured at Kuala Selinsing itself.

Among the beads found were two that had been etched with an alkali to create patterns. Alkali-etched agate and carnelian beads have been manufactured widely in India from 600 BCE, the technique having first originated around 4,500 years ago in the Indus

Valley. Another surprising find was a bead made of a yellowish non-translucent core coated with gold leaf and covered with clear yellow glass – an Egyptian technology. This bead was not made in Kuala Selinsing but imported. These gold-leaf beads grew so popular that imitations made using amber started being manufactured at Takuapa, Thailand. This was done under the auspices of Srivijaya, which traded beads with its hinterland to obtain, at low cost, products such as pepper and camphor, much desired by international markets. Srivijaya’s vast trading network also contributed to the Indo-Pacific beads becoming widespread.

The Kuala Selinsing settlement practised boat burials, indicating an indigenous culture. However, a few finds are at odds with this and deserve mention. The first is a small red carnelian seal. Engraved on it is the Sanskrit name Sri Visnuvarman, which means “the most excellent armour of Vishnu”. The practice of concatenating a name with “varman” was adopted by many Southeast Asian rulers and nobles. The Pallava characters used in the inscription date the seal epigraphically to the 6th–7th century. The second find, now lost, was a gold earring with an engraving that seems to be a rudimentary depiction of Lord Vishnu riding on his vehicle, the mythical bird Garuda. Objects sporting similar iconography have also been found in Java and the Philippines.

Yet another interesting find is a gold split ring – either an earring or a nose-ring – in the shape of a two-headed *makara* (a half-aquatic and half-terrestrial animal), another symbol associated with Hinduism.



▲ The engraving on this gold earring is purportedly Vishnu riding on Garuda, whose talons rest on the bezel seen at the bottom centre. The bezel would have originally held a jewel. The main image is flanked by two smaller figures, each sitting on an animal that could be a lion. Two long forms resembling cobras with their hoods up can be seen rising from the bottom of the ring to the top.



▲ Red carnelian seal with the engraving “Visnuvarman”, dated epigraphically to the 6th century.





▲ This pear-shaped stone, found at Kuala Selinsing, has a few objects engraved on it, including possibly a tapir. The purpose of the stone is unknown.

The decorations are similar to those found at Óc-Eo (Vietnam), a port during the Funan period. In addition, pottery shards discovered at both Óc-Eo and Kuala Selinsing have similar patterns. Taken together, these finds have led researchers to argue that Kuala Selinsing was a minor port within the Funanese network. Funan was a Hindu kingdom based in present-day Cambodia. The demise of Funan and the subsequent rise of Srivijaya in the 7th century would have seen Kuala Selinsing forging new ties, and indeed a relationship developed with Sungai Mas in southern Kedah, which was under Srivijayan suzerainty. Beads from Kuala Selinsing would then have been shipped from Sungai Mas.

As a minor port, Kuala Selinsing was not on the main trade routes. Instead, it was serviced by small boats, which plied the waters picking up cargo from minor ports and consolidating these at the larger ports such as Óc-Eo and Sungai Mas. An example of such a boat can be seen in the Pontian shipwreck. This wreck was found on the right bank of the Pontian River (in Pahang), about 1.6 kilometres from the river mouth. The wood from the boat has been carbon-dated to between 260 and 430 CE, making it the oldest shipwreck uncovered to date in Southeast Asia.

The wood used in the keel of the Pontian boat measured 6 metres when discovered, suggesting an original length of around 10 metres. This would make it considerably smaller than the Malay boats that used to ply the routes between India and China, which reached up to 50 metres in length. Based on comparisons with



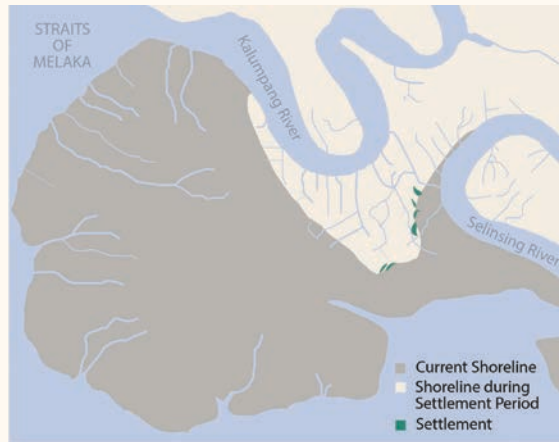
other traditional boats, it has been suggested that the Pontian boat was built either at the Mekong delta or around the Gulf of Siam. The modern equivalent of the Pontian boat is the Thai *rua chalom*, an ancestor of which is carved onto an outer gallery at the Bayon temple in Angkor.

Most of the Pontian boat's cargo of pottery was in shards when discovered, although there were some complete rims and two pots in near-perfect condition. Some of the pottery were described as being large, around 1 metre high, ovoid in shape, with a wide neck. This description fits that of a Martaban jar, which derives its name from the port of Martaban (Mottama) in Myanmar. These jars carried liquids, rice and other edibles; a few grains of rice were found on the boat. A substantial proportion of the pottery was cord-marked; some had patterns similar to pottery found at Kuala Selinsing. The Pontian boat may have called at Kuala Selinsing, bringing it its food supplies and household needs while shipping out its beads.

Evaluating Kuala Selinsing's stratigraphy and determining the time periods of the different habitation

▲ This is no ordinary piece of wood but the remains of the Pontian wreck, dated to 260–430 CE. This boat was a typical Southeast Asian boat – no metal was used in its construction but the different parts of the boat were held together by *ijok* (sugar palm) fibre. The wood used in making the boat has been identified as *merawan* (several species of hardwoods of the *Hopea* and *Shorea* genera), while the dowels are *medang* (Lauraceae family).

► Sedimentation caused changes to the shoreline, slowly pushing it further out into the sea. This cut off Kuala Selinsing's access to the sea and may have contributed to the settlement eventually being abandoned.



layers has been difficult. This is because the layers have become mixed: the uppermost layer, especially, contains both ancient and modern artefacts, as the sea has cut away most of the settlement site and redeposited the artefacts onto the surface. Material remains from the early time periods may have been churned by the waves and brought to the top of the stratigraphy, thus potentially providing erroneous dating of the material remains.

Bead manufacturing propelled Kuala Selinsing into a minor but important port within the regional trade network, which was dominated first by Funan and then by Srivijaya. Over time, sedimentation caused the shoreline to be pushed outwards, cutting off the settlement's access to the sea and to the trade routes. This may have contributed to Kuala Selinsing's eventual demise; its bead manufacturing could have been taken over by Kampung Sungai Mas in southern Kedah.

Subsequently, a settlement of Malay pirates occupied the area, followed by a settlement of Chinese pirates. Later, a Chinese fishing village on stilts emerged. Part of the Chinese village encroached on a forest reserve and this part of the village was destroyed by the Forestry Department in 1909. While previously there was only one island at the mouth of the river, the effects of erosion give us 11 islands today.

## INDIGENOUS CULTURE AT KUALA SELINSING

THE KUALA SELINSING SETTLERS lived in houses made of wood and thatch, built over water, and they discarded their household refuse below their dwellings. The accumulation of this refuse, over time, caused mounds of dry land to appear around the houses. The existence of Kuala Selinsing may have faded from memory but excavation of these mounds has exposed this ancient culture and brought its lifestyle into sharp focus.

A picture is gleaned of a community whose diet included bivalves, coconut and bottle gourds. They hunted animals for meat and found sustenance from the ocean in the form of giant clams and sea snails. Mortars made out of hollowing a tree trunk were used to pound paddy. Bark-cloth beaters were used to soften

▼ Bark-cloth beaters, identified by a cross-hatched pattern incised on one face, were used to pound tree barks in order to soften them for fashioning into clothing. Two such beaters were found at Kuala Selinsing, while one was found in the burial site at Changkat Menter, pointing to a possible cultural connection between the two settlements. However, the Kuala Selinsing specimens were made of hard pottery while the one at Changkat Menter was of stone.





▲ Tympanum of a Dong Son drum found at Kampung Sungai Lang, Selangor. This was a canoe burial where two drums were placed face-down in a dugout canoe. Opaque dark-red beads and pottery shards were also found with the drums. The beads are believed to have originated at Kuala Selinsing, pointing to a trade relationship between the two settlements. They are of the type that came to be treated as *mutisalah*.

tree bark for clothing. They used iron, lead and tin to fashion tools and weapons. Similar to the rest of Southeast Asia, they chewed betel at leisure and navigated the waters using dugout canoes.

The culture of the Kuala Selinsing society can be further gleaned from its burial practices, which took two forms. In the first type, the body was placed inside a dugout canoe, while in the second type, the body was buried in the ground (although in some cases, the canoe may have disintegrated). The dead could have been interred beneath the houses as pieces of wood, speculated to be house posts, were found in proximity to the burials. The bodies in both burial types were placed on their back with the arms and legs straightened out. A pot containing potsherds was placed near the head and more potsherds were strewn all over the body. Beads were also found near the bodies. One of the skeletons from a canoe burial had a short steering paddle under its left arm, a strand of orange-red glass



beads, and a stingray above the head. Analysis of skull and skeletal remains from the canoe burials seems to show similarities with two different present-day groups in Peninsula Malaysia: the Semang, an Austroasiatic aboriginal group, and the Aboriginal Malay, an Austronesian aboriginal group. However, no firm conclusions were offered.

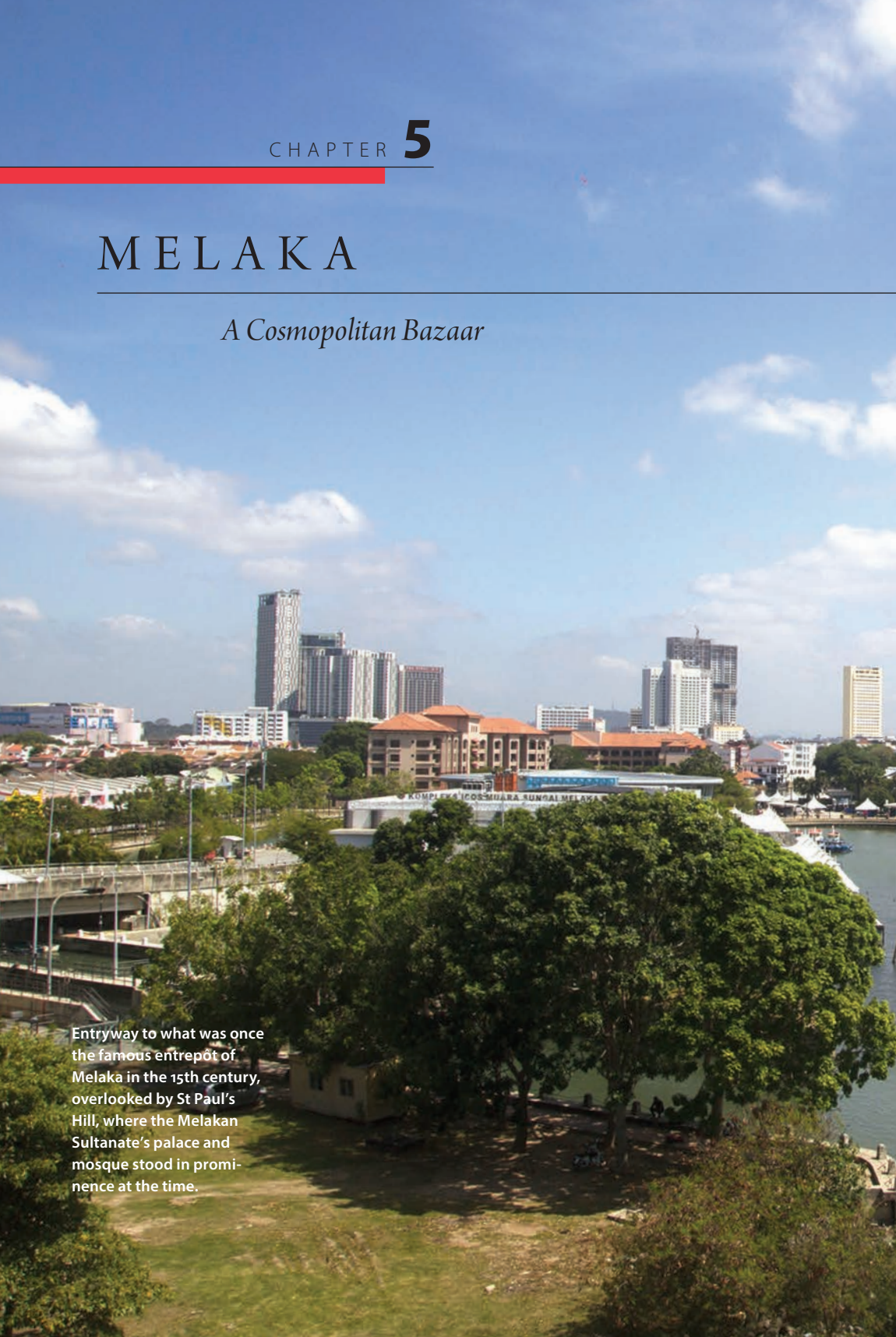
Kuala Selinsing's burial practices were similar to those of two of its southern neighbours – the cist grave burial culture at Changkat Menteri in Bernam Valley, Perak, and the Dongsonian culture at Kampung Sungai Lang in Selangor. Both cultures also buried their dead together with potsherds and beads. The beads most likely came from Kuala Selinsing, indicating that there were, at the very least, trade links between these communities, if not cultural ties. For example, the tin used in the implements and earrings found at Kuala Selinsing would have come via Kampung Sungai Lang, which was backed by rich tin-fields.

▲ Replica of a cist grave at the National Museum, Malaysia. Cist or slab graves were so-named as their walls were made of large granite slabs with a stone covering at the top. Found in southern Perak and northern Selangor, these graves have been carbon-dated to the 1st–7th centuries. Beads were found in the cist grave at Changkat Menteri (Bernam Valley, Perak). These beads were possibly obtained from Kuala Selinsing.

CHAPTER **5**

# MELAKA

## *A Cosmopolitan Bazaar*



Entryway to what was once the famous entrepôt of Melaka in the 15th century, overlooked by St Paul's Hill, where the Melakan Sultanate's palace and mosque stood in prominence at the time.

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“MEN CANNOT ESTIMATE the worth of Melaka, on account of its greatness and profit, Melaka is a city that was made for merchandise, fitter than any other in the world; the end of monsoons and the beginning of others. Melaka is surrounded and lies in the middle, and the trade and commerce between the different nations for a thousand leagues on every hand must come to Melaka.... Whoever is lord of Melaka has his hand on the throat of Venice.”

— Tomé Pires, *Suma Oriental*







▲ The extent of the Melaka Sultanate's influence at its greatest.

▼ Expelled from Palembang, Parameswara fled to Temasek and Muar, establishing a short-term presence in both settlements before setting up his court in Bertam (Melaka).



THE BIRTH OF MELAKA as an entrepôt in the early 15th century can be attributed to a large extent to its geographical location, nestled halfway between two major civilisations – Ming China to the east, and the Indian kingdoms to the west. But when it was founded circa 1402 by Parameswara, a renegade prince from Palembang, trade was not the main thing on his mind.

Parameswara was on the run from the Siamese, who had laid a bounty on his head for killing the ruler of their vassal state, Temasek. Fleeing up the western coast of the Malay Peninsula, Parameswara found a hideout with numerous corridors and pathways via sea and land that would be strategic for warding off attacks from the Siamese. Here he established a new settlement, which came to be known as Melaka. His son fortified an abode on the crest of the hill near the mouth of Bertam River (today Melaka River), from where their men kept constant vigilance over the ships that plied the Straits of Melaka.

Melaka's original inhabitants were mostly sea gypsies or fishing folk commonly referred to as Orang Seletar. Parameswara built an alliance with them to

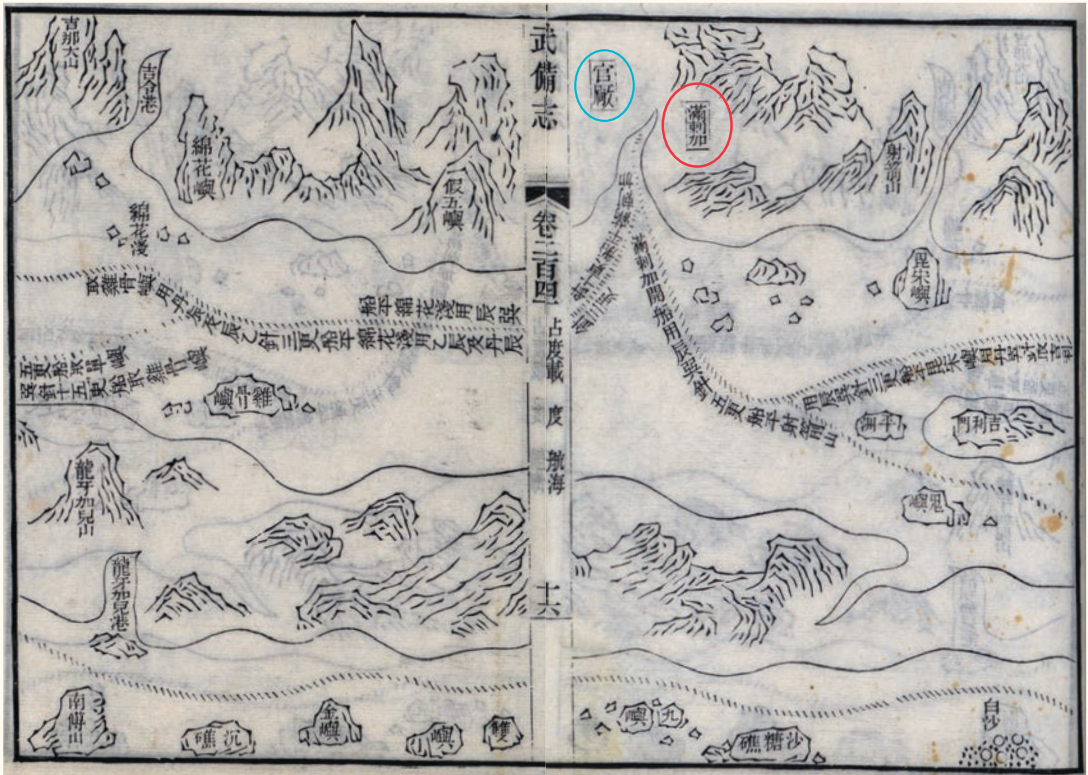


establish the new city as a viable port-of-call, seeing that its location made it accessible in all seasons. Piracy was reduced with the assistance of these faithful Orang Seletar noblemen, whose followers patrolled the sea in light boats.

As the seaport rose in prominence, Melaka began to attract traders near and far, leading Arab and Indian merchants to its shores. It was apparently these Muslim merchants who informed the Chinese court of Parameswara's new port, citing Melaka's potential as a commercial hub. China's maritime explorations in search of trade proved to be timely for this erstwhile fishing hamlet. By order of the Ming Emperor, Yongle, a delegation led by Admiral Yin Qing set sail for Melaka, arriving in 1403, and reporting a population of about 2,000.

Parameswara seized the opportunity and pledged his loyalty to the emperor to gain China's support against his rivals, mainly Siam. In 1405, he sent an envoy to pay homage to the emperor and received recognition as the independent ruler of Melaka. From then on, regular tributes that included pepper, timber and

▲ A group of Orang Seletar in the 19th century. It was from this group of seafaring people that Parameswara was said to have chosen his ministers. From their base on Bintan Island they also served as rowers for the rulers of Melaka when required.



▲ A Chinese navigational map showing Melaka's importance in the early 15th century, with sailing directions to and from its estuary. The name Melaka (circled in red) is annotated above a stylised hill. Across the estuary is an official depot and ship repair yard (circled in blue). This map first appeared in the *Wu Bei Zhi* (Records of Military Affairs) compiled by Mao Yuanyi in 1621, and is believed to have been based on Admiral Zheng He's expeditions.

jewels were sent to China in exchange for protection against Siamese and Majapahit invaders. Parameswara's successors would visit the Ming emperor personally to seek blessings and reaffirm the close ties between the two kingdoms. This tradition continued until the reign of the last Sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mahmud (d. 1528).

Admiral Zheng He, the Muslim Chinese eunuch and diplomat, arrived in Melaka with his "treasure fleet" for the first time in 1409. On behalf of the Ming emperor, he raised the territory to the rank of a Chinese vassal state. He proceeded to establish a regional headquarters near Melaka's harbour, and with that, a sizeable Chinese trading community began to settle in town. According to the voyager Ma Huan, Zheng He's depot was a timber palisade-like castle with four towered gates. Within the enclosure were protected warehouses and granaries that stored money, food and other



provisions. Melaka became the terminus for Zheng He's voyages to the West, a storage centre for goods en route to China. Chinese travellers described Melaka's public buildings, especially the royal palace, to be similar to Chinese imperial halls. Zheng He and his men are believed to be the ones who introduced the construction of permanent buildings to the town, replacing the local timber, bamboo and *nipah* structures. The palace was reported to have featured roof tiles that Zheng He brought from China.

China's presence at Melaka boosted the port's status. The Ming court, the biggest purchaser of pepper at the time, was Melaka's principal trading partner, bringing in among other goods, porcelain, musk, silk, mercury, copper and vermilion. Melaka remained under China's influence up to 1436, after which the Ming Dynasty began to decline. The Melakan rulers sought new markets to replace China when the treasure fleets stopped arriving, though tributes and private trading continued.

At the time of Melaka's establishment, the pepper-rich kingdom of Samudra-Pasai in northern Sumatra was the major business centre along the Melaka Straits. It was the first Islamic kingdom in the Far East, conducting trade with Muslim merchants from South

▲ Shards of ceramics have been discovered in Melaka of the Ming, Qing, Swatow, Swankhalok, Sukhothai, Annamese, Japanese and Persian varieties – a reflection of the bustling cosmopolitan trade that took place in the city.

▼ An acute shortage of copper cash in Melaka led the Chinese to make alternative copies out of local tin, using the titles of emperors from dynasties past. These tin coins were used in Melaka and are not found in China.





Asia, especially the Gujaratis from Cambay, since the late 13th century. Samudra-Pasai had a guaranteed supply of rice and spices from the Javanese, and it was essentially the latter commodity, on top of its own pepper and gold, that attracted international merchants to its harbour. Parameswara's son offered advantageous terms to draw some of Pasai's international spice and rice trade to Melaka. It is said that Pasai's ruler was amenable, on the condition that the Hindu ruler convert to Islam. Parameswara's son eventually embraced the religion towards the end of his long reign, taking the name Iskandar Shah. He married a Samudra-Pasai princess and forged an alliance with the kingdom, especially in their struggle against Majapahit. His Malay subjects converted, following his example.

To avoid the pirate lair between Banten and Gresik, the Muslim Gujarati merchants would travel to Java along Sumatra's west coast and arrive via the Sunda Strait. With the opening of Melaka's much more sheltered port, they unlocked an alternative route through the Straits of Melaka, ending direct shipping to north Java ports as they no longer needed to sail further than Melaka to gain access to products from the Moluccas and China. Preference for Melaka led to the eventual decline of Samudra-Pasai, and Melaka took on its baton as the region's pre-eminent international port and centre of Islamic propagation.

By the middle of the 15th century, Melaka was almost entirely Islamised. The town grew to become a destination for religious education, attracting scholars,

◀ According to the Ming imperial annals, in 1405 the Emperor conferred the title "Mountain Protecting the Country" upon Melaka. Some scholars say that the name Bukit Cina may have been derived from this event. Bukit Cina came to be used as a Chinese cemetery in 1685 and is today understood to be the oldest remaining traditional Chinese cemetery outside China.

◀ This mausoleum at Jalan Kampung Kuli is said to be that of Laksamana Hang Jebat, an admiral from the Melaka Sultanate era who according to the *Sejarah Melayu* had rebelled against an unjust act by Sultan Mansur Shah.

princes and rulers to study Muslim culture, literature, calligraphy, law and Sufism. The seventh Sultan of Melaka, Sultan Alaudin Riayat Shah (r. 1477–88), funded the sultans of Kampar and Indragiri to study in his kingdom. Sunan Bonang and Sunan Kalijaga, two of Java's Wali Songo (Nine Saints of Islam), also pursued their Islamic studies there. With Melaka's encouragement, Muslim missionaries preached openly within the Nusantara region. It was under Melaka's influence that the majority of the people living on the Spice Islands embraced Islam. The religious network proved to be a commercial advantage, with the rulers of Aden, Hormuz, Bengal and Cambay issuing letters and gifts to encourage merchants to set up commerce in Melaka. With direct diplomatic ties with the Ottoman centres of power, the Sultanate also secured military advisers and weapons that strengthened its power.

The Straits of Melaka was part of the spice route, but it was textiles that were central to Melaka's status as an emporium, linking it to the Coromandel, Malabar, Gujarat and Arabian ports of the Indian Ocean. Indian textiles were the single most important commodity traded for spices. This was an advantage for Gujarat, which was the centre of cotton manufacturing and textile design. In Cambay, merchants from the Malabar, Arab and Coromandel coasts would converge and form companies to hire Gujarati ships for journeys to Melaka. They flooded Melaka with a variety of cotton fabrics and dyes in exchange for pepper, jungle products, camphor and benzoin. Raw silk from China, Bengal and Sumatra was also highly prized by the



▲ Tombstone of a Gujarati ship captain who died in 1459, discovered by British engineers within the walls of the fort in Melaka. It is now part of Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum collection.



Gujaratis as they did not breed silkworms despite having expertise in silk weaving.

Melaka thus served as a clearing-house for Cambay's textile trade. Every year, five ships would sail from Cambay to Melaka alone. The Gujaratis formed the largest merchant community in town during Melaka's golden age. According to the Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires, who lived in Melaka between 1512 and 1515:

*The Cambay merchants make Melaka their chief trading centre. There used to be a thousand Gujarat merchants in Melaka, besides four or five thousand Gujarat seamen, who came and went. Melaka cannot live without Cambay, nor Cambay without Melaka, if they are to be very rich and very prosperous. All the clothes and things from Gujarat have trading value in Melaka and in the kingdoms that trade with Melaka.*

▲ The headstone for the tomb of Sultan Mansur Shah of Melaka (d. 1477). Its sides are inscribed with verses commonly found on gravestones in northern Sumatra: "The world is but transitory; the world has no permanence; the world is but as a web made by a spider".





▲ A piece of *cindai* cloth, a local version of the Indian *patola*. This was traditionally used as a *selendang* (shawl) by Malay women and as a *bengkung* (cummerband) by the men. Its high-quality double ikat weave gave it great strength (virtually stab-proof if worn in layers), leading people to associate it with mystical powers and immortality.

Clothes had important symbolic and ceremonial functions in the Malay Archipelago. Many believed that as gifts they bestowed well-being and fertility, and were a medium between the living and ancestral spirits. Wooden, metal or stone figures, for example, were powerless until ritually bestowed with clothes and perfumes. Silk was prized for royal clothing, and silk robes were often awarded to those favoured by the Sultan. Members of the Melakan royal court wore silk to distinguish themselves from commoners, who wore cotton. On the whole, however, cotton was the preferred material in the region and in some places fetched higher prices than silk. It was also used in the ship-building industry to make sailcloth.

Both raw and manufactured textiles that arrived in Melaka were sought after by Sumatran, Javanese and Banda Island traders, who took them to coastal weaving centres such as Palembang and Champa. There, the local weavers adopted the style and patterns of Indian fabrics, which are still apparent today in several traditional Malay handloom fabrics such as *cindai* cloth, an imitation of the brightly coloured Indian *patola*. Some Indian fabrics were even designed to meet the ritual requirements of the Southeast Asian market.

Another major source of textiles was the Coromandel Coast. Textile and yarn exports for Melaka



were shipped out from the port of Anandarayan Pattinam in Pulicat, the region's richest and most active cotton producer. The hand-woven chequered or striped cotton *lungi* produced in Pulicat was so popular that it became a common attire in the Malay Archipelago, Ceylon and the Arabian Sea. Till today, this cloth is known as *pelikat* in the Malay region.

The extent of the Melaka kingdom grew under Sultan Muzaffar Shah (r. 1445–56), stretching from the Muslim Malay settlements of Bukit (Phuket), Setol (Satun) and Pattani bordering the Ayutthaya Kingdom in the north to Sumatra in the southwest.

The port-city itself was divided into two sections by the Melaka River and connected by a timber bridge that housed 20 shop-pavilions. To the east of the river, the Sultan and his men resided within the *kota raja* (royal fort). The palace, administration offices, a mosque and residential quarters for royal courtiers were built within a palisade, around the hill where Parameswara's son first established his throne. To the west of the river, the merchants took up residence in communal settlements – the northern quarter, Upeh, was populated by north-western Asians, Chinese, groups from Palembang, and Javanese from Tuban, Jepara and West Java, while in Ili, the southern quarter, lived the Javanese from Gresik and northern Java. House fronts doubled as shops, creating



▲ Melaka tin cash issued during the reign of Sultan Muzaffar Shah. One side bears the inscription “Muzaffar Shah Al Sultan” (The Supreme Ruler, Muzaffar Shah); the other side reads “Nasir Dunia Wal Al Din” (Helper of the World and the Religion).





a bazaar-like atmosphere. Local fishermen lived in attap houses in the marshy lands of Sabak along the river.

Depending on the monsoon, Melaka's residency was between 50,000 and 100,000 people, the largest population in Southeast Asia in the 15th century. Some 84 languages were reportedly spoken by the cosmopolitan mix of traders, international merchants, priests, soldiers, administrators.

Melaka, essentially a market town, was the only port along the Straits without agrarian hinterland produce. Its fields infertile and crops poor, focus was on the fishing industry instead. From the accounts of the Melaka-born Makassarese-Portuguese writer Manuel Godinho de Erédia, Melaka was well known as a shad-fishery and as a source of an array of dried and salted sea produce. These would have included dried fish roes and *ikan terubuk* (a highly prized species of shad) pickled in brine. The town relied heavily on Java for regular food supply – especially rice, as the supply from Siam supply was unreliable – hence the strong presence of Javanese, who had their own bazaar at the south end of the Melaka River.

The only other primary local export recorded was tin, obtained from the interior, which was fired into ingots, each weighing about one pound. These were unique to Melaka as a trading currency. Also accepted were gold dust, silver bars, gold dinars, Pasai's tin coinage, cowrie shells and Chinese copper cash, though in general items were bartered.

Large ships and vessels berthed on Melaka's sea-coast, while the river was plied by boats to bring the



▲ Tin ingots, a trading currency unique to Melaka. Ten blocks made up one unit called a “small bundle”, while 40 blocks made up one “large bundle”. Tin tributes received via treaties with Perak, Selangor, Manjung and Beruas were also sold.



incoming cargoes to the town bridge, the central meeting place for merchants. Here one could find a variety of essential and luxury goods such as cloth from Gujarat and the Coromandel Coast; pepper and Middle Eastern goods from Malabar; rice, sugar cane, dried and salted meat and fish, preserved vegetables, candied fruits and white cloth from Bengal; rice, sugar and ships from Pegu; tea and porcelain from China; camphor from Barus; arrack from Tenasserim; and pottery from Siam.

Melaka was one of the best-developed trading ports in the region. Customs duties, limited interest rates, fixed weights and units of coinage provided trade stability. A *bendahara* (prime minister), *temenggung* (police commissioner) and *shahbandar* (harbour-master) governed the town according to the *Undang-Undang Melaka* (Laws of Melaka), the first law digest in the Malay world. A *laksamana* (admiral) led oar-powered ships to patrol the Melaka Straits against piracy. The most influential and renowned personality was Bendahara Tun Perak, who served three Sultans from

▲ The Malay and Javanese traders remained in Melaka after the Portuguese captured the city in 1511. This coloured copper engraving was published in 1596 by Jan van Linschoten, a Dutch merchant who served as the Portuguese Viceroy's secretary in Goa. His publication describes inhabitants of Melaka as the best speakers, the most polite and the most amorous of the East Indies, and the inhabitants of Java as hardheaded and obstinate.



▲ An early 19th-century manuscript containing the Undang-Undang Melaka (in an Acehnesse variant).

1456 to 1498. Merchants also abided by the *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* (Maritime Laws of Melaka), a legal code governing maritime regulations, nautical procedures, seafaring matters, slavery, adultery, murder, debt-service, theft, negligence, taxes, weight and measures.

News of Melaka’s wealth reached King Emmanuel I of Portugal after Vasco Da Gama’s expedition to India in 1497–99. After conquering Goa and Hormuz, he dispatched four ships in April 1508 under Diogo Lopes de Sequeira, who was initially granted permission to open a trading post in Melaka when he arrived in September 1509. The Gujarati and Javanese merchants, wary of Portugal’s intentions to penetrate the spice trade, instigated Bendahara Tun Mutahir to betray their agreement. Sequeira was ambushed, his men slaughtered in the streets, and 20 of them captured. This move had catastrophic repercussions.

Melaka’s trade was at its peak by the time Sequeira arrived, yet its administration grew weak and oppressive, riddled with corruption, treachery and

internal power struggles, especially after the death of Bendahara Tun Perak in 1498. In 1510, despite the lack of evidence, Sultan Mahmud (r. 1488–1511) executed members of his court for treason and slander.

In June 1511, a Portuguese armada of 17 ships and 1,200 men, led by Alfonso de Albuquerque, arrived off Melaka, seeking to avenge their slain countrymen and to rescue the 20 prisoners. Sultan Mahmud was in the midst of planning to attack Aru and Pasai, the only two remaining independent kingdoms along the Straits. Distracted and without experienced advisers, he negotiated rather poorly, at first refusing to release the Portuguese men without a peace treaty. He eventually

▼ An illustration of the Portuguese arriving in Melaka in 1509. Sequeira's representative, Teixeira, was led to the palace on an elephant, where he presented the Sultan with gifts and a letter in Arabic from King Emmanuel I.



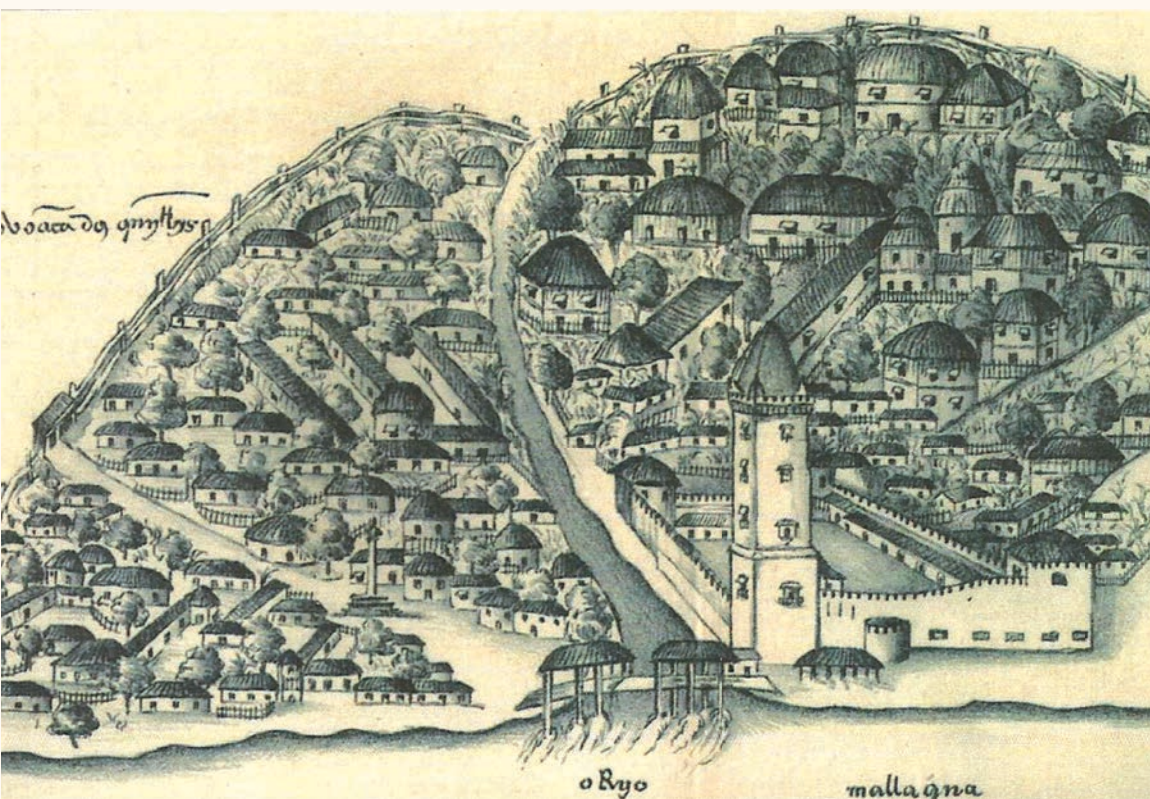


set the prisoners free. But he had underestimated Albuquerque, who now demanded a heavy compensation of 300,000 *cruzados* and authorisation to build a fortress in Melaka. Sultan Mahmud refused, and a battle broke out.

The entire might of the Melakan Empire was summoned. Armed forces were dispatched from Melaka's dependencies – Pahang, Indragiri, Palembang and Siak/Minangkabau – while mercenaries were recruited from Java. The Portuguese were up against a total of 20,000 men, Turkish and Persian bowmen, thousands of artillery pieces and 20 war elephants.

Unfortunately, Melaka's artillery was crude and lacked gunners. On the 40th day of fighting, Albuquerque seized the town bridge and captured the city. With no reinforcements forthcoming, Sultan Mahmud was forced to retreat to Bertam. Albuquerque remained in Melaka until November 1511, setting the town ablaze after ransacking the treasury. The Muslim merchants were massacred or sold into slavery.


The Portuguese dispatched an envoy to China to seek recognition as Melaka's new rulers, but their request was rejected. The Chinese emperor cut all ties with the Portuguese, issuing a decree ordering other countries to assist Melaka – but none obeyed. Despite losing his capital, Mahmud still wielded power over the rest of his empire and established a new capital in Bintan, which the Portuguese razed to the ground in 1526. His counter-attacks failed to capture Melaka. However, his descendant, Muzaffar, became the ruler of Perak, while another son, Alauddin, established the Johor Sultanate.



The Portuguese demolished Melaka's entire royal quarter, recycling building materials from the mosque and palace for a new church and buildings. A fort, which they dubbed "A Famosa" (The Famous), was built on the site of the Sultan's fort.

The capture of Melaka disrupted the trade network. Merchants took their business to neighbouring market ports such as Aceh, Johor, Java and Banten. Eight years after the Portuguese took over, annual ship movements dropped from 100 to 10. Melaka was later conquered by the Dutch in 1641. They rebuilt and strengthened the old Portuguese fort, but their regulations required all Chinese junks to trade at Batavia rather than Melaka, reducing the town to a romantic ruin. In 1807, the British demolished Melaka's fort, leaving only a small gatehouse standing. ♦

▲ A sketch of Melaka shortly after its conquest by the Portuguese. Albuquerque's fort, A Famosa, completed in January 1512, was square in plan with a 120-foot-high donjon (keep). The original fort was heavily renovated and expanded by the Dutch after they took over Melaka in 1641.



The Portuguese erased all physical evidence of the Melaka Sultanate era. Most scholars believe that the royal palace was located on the summit of St Paul's Hill. What is visible there today are the ruins of a Portuguese church, its structure dating back to 1556–67, representing the initial entry of European colonialism into the region.





902 - Gezicht op de Rivier, Palembang

# PALEMBANG

*Seat of Srivijaya*



The Musi River at Palembang, in southern Sumatra, c. 1900. This 750-kilometre-long river was the lifeblood of the Srivijayan Empire of the 7th to 13th centuries.

SRIVIJAYA, TRANSLATING TO “auspicious victory” in Sanskrit, was a port-city situated in present-day Palembang, capital of Indonesia’s South Sumatra province. Its location at the bottom of the Straits of Melaka allowed it to control the traffic flowing through the Straits between India and China, and to serve as a key transit port. Srivijaya developed strong connections with both Tamralipti (Tamluk) and Canton (Guangzhou), the start and end points of these trade routes. Its ambitions led it to achieve hegemony over its neighbours and become a powerful maritime kingdom between the 7th and 11th centuries.

The Chinese knew Srivijaya as Shih-li-fo-shih during the Tang Dynasty and subsequently as San-fo-ch’i (Sanfoqi). In fact, most of what is known of Srivijaya comes from Chinese writings. Its earliest-known mention appears in the work of Yijing, a Chinese Buddhist

► Maritime traffic between India and China had to pass through the Straits of Melaka. Srivijaya’s location at the bottom of the Straits allowed it to monitor this traffic while Srivijayan ships plied between Tamralipti (Tamluk) and Canton (Guangzhou) on well-established routes.



monk who visited the city in 671 CE en route to India. By this time, Srivijaya must have been well established not only as a trading port but also as a centre for Buddhist learning. From Guangzhou, Yijing boarded a ship belonging to the Srivijayan ruler and sailed direct to Srivijaya, indicating that the trade link between the two cities must have already been in common use. He spent six months in Srivijaya waiting for the change of monsoon to continue his journey to India and put this time to good use by studying *sabdavidya* (Sanskrit grammar) at a large monastery outside the port area.

### Early Beginnings

Although history is silent on Srivijaya's early beginnings, its success must have been built on the successes of earlier polities. Trade-based polities had arisen in the archipelago from as early as the 2nd century CE, as local merchants cognizant of the increased trading activities in the region started taking advantage of these opportunities.

The polities initially acted as brokers for products from South Asia and the Middle East to China. In time, however, they were able to create a demand for local products. For example, frankincense and myrrh, two products from the West much in demand in China, were replaced with pine resin and benzoin respectively. Pepper and camphor were introduced by Southeast Asian traders into the Chinese market in the early 6th century. Camphor became so highly valued in China (principally for its medical properties) that its price was on par with gold. A lot of the produce from Southeast



▲ Chinese ceramic jar dated to the Sui Dynasty (581–618) recovered from Air Sugihan, located north-east of Palembang. The banks of the Sugihan River have yielded artefacts that point to a trade-based settlement preceding Srivijaya.





▲ Benzoin (*Styrax benzoin*), also known as gum benjamin. This Sumatran product substituted for West Asian myrrh in the Chinese market.

▲ A small sack of pepper (*Piper nigrum*).

Asia was new to China – rhinoceros horns, kingfisher feathers, dragon’s blood (a red resin obtained from various species of climbing rattan) – and were eagerly embraced by the Chinese as “precious things”.

Among the more important of the early polities was Kantoli, believed to have been located somewhere between Jambi and Palembang. It first appears in Chinese records in 441 CE. The *Liang Shu* (Book of Liang) recounts a dream that the ruler of Kantoli had in 502 CE. In this dream, the ruler was told by a Buddhist monk that if he sent tribute to China, it would bring prosperity to Kantoli. This highlights the importance of Chinese trade to the Southeast Asian maritime-based polities as their fortunes were tied to the demand in Chinese markets. The last mention of Kantoli in Chinese records is in 563 CE. Its demise can be linked to a weak dynasty in China, the Southern Chen Dynasty between 557 and 589.

Srivijaya, building on the trade links and alliances established by these earlier kingdoms, emerged in the 7th century as the leading kingdom in Sumatra. Its location on the 750-kilometre-long Musi River allowed it to become the collection centre for products such as ivory, pepper, rattan, aromatics and benzoin, which were transported down the river from its hinterland. Products came from as far as Mount Dempo and the Pasemah Plateau, near the Musi headwaters. A network of rivers also provided transportation for the gold mined in Lebong (Bengkulu) province. Srivijaya, in turn, supplied its hinterland with products such as iron, salt, cloth and beads.



◀ This map shows the extent of Srivijaya's influence during the first millennium. It should be noted that Srivijaya did not have control over contiguous areas; rather, its dominance was over the main port polities in the shaded area.

### Expanding Beyond its Borders

A number of inscribed stones found around Palembang trace Srivijaya's expansion beyond its borders. The inscriptions are in Old Malay, written in Pallava script, and they provide the earliest examples of the Malay language.

The first of these stone inscriptions is the Kedukan Bukit inscription. Dated to 682 CE, it records a pilgrimage undertaken by the king prior to leading a 20,000-strong army to victory and bringing prosperity to Srivijaya. Although the king is not identified by name, he is likely to have been Sri Jayanasa, who endowed a public park at Talang Tuo in 684 CE, as evidenced by another inscription found nearby, about 5 kilometres northwest of Bukit Seguntang.

A particularly significant inscription related to Srivijaya's formative years is the Sabukingking or Telaga Batu inscription. Discovered at Sabukingking, located south of a pond known as Telaga Batu, the stone inscription administers a *makan sumpah* ("eat

► Inscribed stones found around Palembang relating to Srivijaya.

The earliest of these is the **Kedukan Bukit** inscription, dated to 682 CE and found in 1920. The 10-line inscription alludes to the start of Srivijaya's expansion.

The **Talang Tuo** stone, also found in 1920, commemorates the king's endowing a public park named Sri Ksetra (Field of Fortune) and proclaims him as a bodhisattva. This inscription is the earliest known record of Vajrayana Buddhism in the archipelago.

Found at **Sabukingking** (Telaga Batu) was an oath stone which was used to administer allegiance to the king. This oath stone has a seven-headed *naga* overlooking the inscription.

The **Bukit Seguntang** stone describes wars and curses those who commit wrongdoings.

Inscribed in andesite, the **Boom Baru** oath stone was not originally installed at Boom Baru but it had been washed away and was brought down by the river from an unknown location.



an oath”), a pledge of allegiance to the king. Carved at the top of the stone are seven *naga* (serpent) heads, over which water would have been poured as part of the ritual. The water would run down the inscription – which specifies that curses will befall those who betray the king while blessings will be received by those who remain loyal – and collect in a waterspout at the base of the stone. The person taking the oath would drink this water, expecting to be poisoned if he ever broke the oath. The oath was administered to a large segment of the populace, suggesting that the stone was erected during a period of unrest, possibly a war brought about by the military expedition mentioned in the Kedukan Bukit inscription.

Abbreviated forms of the Sabukingking oaths have been found elsewhere in South Sumatra, at Karang Brahi (upper Jambi), Bukit Seguntang (Palembang), Boom Baru (Palembang), Kota Kapur (Bangka),



► Four oath stones found in southern Sumatra.

Srivijaya's control of **Karang Berahi** in upper Jambi ensured it had access to the gold-producing regions of Batang Merangin and Kerinci.

The **Kota Kapur** inscription, in addition to bearing an oath, has two extra lines stating that the king had dispatched a military expedition to subdue Java. It also includes a Tantric rite on defeating enemies. This inscription shows that Srivijaya had control of **Bangka**, a gold and tin-producing island on the travel path of Indian merchants. With this, Srivijaya was in control of the traffic to and from Java through the **Bangka Strait**.

Srivijaya's control of **Palas Pasemah** was strategic as this was the collecting centre for central and south Lampung as well as west Java.

Control of **Palas Pasemah** and **Bungkuk** also gave Srivijaya access to the **Sunda Strait**, which separates Sumatra from Java, and with this, Srivijaya had control of the traffic coming to Java from west and south Sumatra.



Bungkuk (Lampung), and Palas Pasemah (Lampung). The **Kota Kapur** inscription dates to 686 CE, the only oath stone that is dated. However, all the other inscriptions are believed to have been from around the same time period. These were the formative years of Srivijaya, when the king was consolidating control. The *makan sumpah* would have been an effective way of keeping his new and potentially unruly subjects in line.

Chinese writings show that Srivijaya also had control of **Barus**, on the west coast of North Sumatra, and of **Lamuri** (or **Lambri**), at the northern-most tip of the island. **Zhao Rukuo**, a Song Dynasty official, wrote in 1225 that Srivijaya had suzerainty over 15 states. Those on the Malay Peninsula included **Kedah** on the west coast, and **Ligor** (**Nakhon Si Thammarat**) on the east coast. This meant that Srivijaya effectively controlled the land route that some Indian traders used to cut across to the South China Sea, instead of sailing down the Straits of Melaka.

Srivijaya subdued the **Mataram** kingdom in 1006 and thus achieved dominance over large parts of Java. A 12th-century Chinese account relates that Srivijaya's monopoly of sandalwood was achieved by the **Maharaja**

of Srivijaya ordering merchants in eastern Java and the Lesser Sunda Islands to sell their entire output to him. This allowed him to resell the sandalwood to merchants bound for Guangzhou at a huge profit.

Srivijaya's expansionist agenda was not to control territory but to control the trade lanes. The focus was on exerting its power over important ports where international trade was carried out as well as of the shipping lanes leading to these ports. The 15 states mentioned by Zhao Rukuo would not have constituted a contiguous area; rather, they were a loose coalition of individual port-cities. Thus Srivijaya was not an empire in the traditional sense of the word.

The Arabs, writing from the 9th century onwards, distinguished the Srivijayan "empire", which they referred to as Zabag, from the port-city, which they called Sriboza. The ruler of Zabag, who by now was using the title Sri Maharaja, was said to need more than two years to visit all the islands in his territory – even on a fast ship.

It would not have been practical for the Maharaja to maintain his authority over this vast area through military force. Instead, it was probably ties of kinship, achieved through intermarriages, which bound these dependencies to the Maharaja. Srivijaya's dependencies did not compete with it by sending trade missions directly to China. Instead, they traded under the banner of Srivijaya. This benefited the vassal states as well because they were able to obtain better privileges by conducting their business with China under the aegis of a strong empire. Very likely, as a small state,

they may even have been denied entry into China's ports. The mutual benefits obtainable through trade were what bound Srivijaya to its vassals in a loose coalition.

The Maharaja of Srivijaya grew rich with this arrangement. In 903 CE, the Persian explorer Ibn Rosteh wrote that there was no king richer or stronger, while in 995 the Arab geographer Masudi noted that the Maharaja had more precious goods than any other ruler. The Maharaja was also generous. An inscription at Guangzhou dated 1079 states that the Srivijayan ruler donated 600,000 pieces of gold to repair a Taoist temple in that city. The Srivijayan rulers were always keen to preserve a friendly relationship with the Chinese emperor, but did not shy away from standing up for their own interests. For example, in 722 the Srivijayan ruler sent in a complaint on the poor behaviour of Chinese port officials.

### **Relationship with the Orang Laut**

Srivijaya's control of the Orang Laut (sea people) was a decisive factor in its success. The Orang Laut occupied the islands of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago and collected sea products such as tortoise shells, pearls and edible seaweeds. They also developed a relationship with people in the interior from whom they obtained products such as gaharuwood and rattan, which they then traded as far afield as India and China. However, the Orang Laut also engaged in piracy, making the surrounding waters a dangerous zone for shippers to traverse.

In order to ensure safe passage for its ships through the Straits of Melaka, Srivijaya co-opted the Orang Laut into their service. These freelance traders were encouraged to act as shippers in the name of Srivijaya rulers. The rulers had a relationship through trade missions with the Chinese emperor and this made it easier for the Orang Laut to be granted entry into Chinese ports. It was a win-win arrangement, as it meant that Srivijaya did not need to maintain a large navy or a large fleet of trading ships.

Srivijaya also used the Orang Laut to force non-Srivijayan ships to dock at Srivijayan ports, where high taxes were levied. If these ships refused, they risked being destroyed. A Chinese text noted that Srivijaya would make an all-out effort to force a merchant ship to their harbours, preparing to die in the effort, and this, the Chinese asserted, was the reason

▼ This rudder was found at Sungai Buah in east Palembang in the 1960s. Measuring 8.2 metres, its length is an indication of the size of the ships during the Srivijayan era. Chinese records describe Malay vessels as over 50 metres long and rising 4–5 metres above sea level. Other Srivijayan boats have been discovered around Palembang, at Kolam Penisi and Sambirejo. These boats were constructed using the sewn-plank and lashed-lug method, an ancient Southeast Asian boat-building technique. The Sambirejo boat has been carbon-dated to between 610 and 775 CE.





for Srivijaya's success. The Srivijayan model of working closely with the Orang Laut was likely copied from Kantoli and was later followed by Melaka.

### **Buddhist Centre of Learning**

Srivijaya was a renowned centre for Buddhist education, and this played an equally important role as trade in contributing to its success. Srivijaya had a special relationship with Nalanda, the Buddhist education centre in Bihar, northeast India. Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism flourished at Nalanda from the time of the Pala Empire, which gained ascendancy in the region during the 8th century. Srivijaya's relationship with Nalanda may help explain why Mahayana Tantrism was prevalent in maritime Southeast Asia, especially in polities affiliated with Srivijaya. In contrast, Theravada Buddhism prevailed in polities on mainland Southeast Asia, which had developed relationships with Sri Lanka.

► About 30 stones were discovered around Telaga Batu, bearing one of the following inscriptions: *sid-dhayatra*, *jayasiddhayatra*, or *jayasiddhayatra sarwwa-satwa*. The inscriptions are said to be prayers seeking salvation and could have been placed by pilgrims visiting the area.



The port-city became the centre from which Buddhism was disseminated to other parts of the archipelago. Srivijaya became known as a place of culture and learning, thus increasing its stature. Yijing, who spent close to ten years at Srivijaya over several visits, noted that there were more than a thousand Buddhist priests in the city, practising Buddhism in exactly the same manner as done in India. He noted that the Buddhism practised in Srivijaya was of the Sarvastivada-nikaya school, to which he himself belonged, and he advised Chinese priests to spend a year or two learning in Srivijaya before proceeding to India for further studies.

Renowned Buddhist scholars from India were attracted to teach at Srivijaya. Among these were Dipamkara, Acharya Chandrakirti, Vajrabodhi and Dharmapala. Yijing was in Srivijaya at the time when Sakyakirti, a famous monk, was staying there. Dharmakirti, a Srivijayan, was famous as far as Tibet for having penned the *Durbodhaloka*, a commentary on an Indian text, the *Abhisamayalamkara*. Statuary from Srivijaya was featured in South Asian documents and this spread its fame further afield. A Buddha statue from Srivijaya was mentioned in a Nepalese manuscript of the late 10th century, and an Avalokitesvara statue from Srivijaya was featured in a version of the *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* copied in 1015.

### **Decline**

Srivijaya was not without enemies. Its closest rival was the Mataram kingdom (732–1006), which was initially



▲ An Avalokitesvara statue made of andesite stone. It was found in Bingin Jungut village, Muara Kelingi District, Musi Rawas Regency, in the western part of South Sumatra. The statue dates to the 9th century based on stylistic similarities with the art of the Sailendra Dynasty.

► This four-armed Ganesha statue was found 500 metres from Candi Angsoka. It is dated to the 9th century based on its design. Ganesha is seated in the South Indian style, where the left leg is crossed and the right leg folded up. His trunk is positioned towards the left and ends in a bowl held in his left hand. Apart from this statue, there are a number of other finds that indicate Hinduism was practised alongside Buddhism. These finds include Candi Angsoka (a temple dedicated to Siva) as well as bronze statues of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva found at Boom Baru.



◀ This Chinese lion statue was found at Candi Angsoka. Such lions were placed at sacred sites, normally in front of a temple complex, to ward off evil. A shard of 10th-century Chinese Yue ware (green-glazed stoneware) was also found at this *candi*. Candi Angsoka no longer exists but it is commemorated in the name of a road, Jalan Candi Angsoko, which passes along its former location.

established in central Java, near Yogyakarta, but shifted its capital to near Surabaya, in east Java, in the early 10th century. Mataram attacked Srivijaya in the last decade of the 10th century. The war concluded with Srivijaya subduing Mataram in 1006. The reason for the animosity is unclear, but it was likely due to rivalry over the spice trade.

The biggest challenge to Srivijaya's sovereignty, however, came from the Chola kingdom of South India. A minor invasion in 1017 was followed by a major one in 1025, which saw the Chola navy attacking 14 port-cities in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, all of which were under Srivijayan suzerainty. An inscription commemorating these attacks – the Tanjore Inscription – was erected in Nagapattinam, a port of the Chola kingdom.

The reason for the Chola attacks is unknown but likely related to trade. The early 11th century saw increased trade activity in China brought about by liberalisation of its markets. In addition, the Song court, recognising that international trade contributed greatly to its coffers, actively lobbied foreign merchants to bring forth tribute. Maritime trade became especially important to the Chinese after the overland trade routes became dominated by the Khitan, Tangut and Jurchen tribes. The Song court's success in attracting foreign merchants and the booming maritime trade in China was good news for Srivijaya as it controlled the waterways that merchants from the West took to China.

The Chola kingdom was keen on expanding its trade with China and had sent a diplomatic mission to the Song court in 1015. The mission would have found

► Glass beads of Indo-Pacific type found at Kambang Unglen, Palembang, dating to between the 9th and 12th centuries.



out about Srivijaya's claim to the Chinese that the Chola kingdom was a dependency of Srivijaya, and this news would not have sat well with Rajendrachola I, ruler of the Chola kingdom. In addition, Tamil merchant guilds, such as Manigramam and Ainurruvar, which had established a strong presence in Southeast Asia, were impacted by Srivijaya's aggressive use of the Orang Laut, and they appealed to Rajendrachola I for help. Hence, the Chola attacks on Srivijaya were likely in retribution for Srivijaya's attempts to obstruct the trade between the Chola kingdom and China.

The attacks did not destroy Srivijaya but weakened it, causing the kingdom to move its capital from Palembang to Jambi. What ultimately sounded the death knell for Srivijaya was the direct involvement of Chinese traders in overseas trade. Where previously trade with China was limited to tributary trade, the Southern Song (1127–1279), having become dependent on maritime trade for its revenue, set in motion practices that saw the Chinese getting involved directly in this trade. Chinese traders started coming to Southeast Asia in large numbers. The Chinese also started building ocean-going boats at the start of the second



◀ Celadon plate from the Song Dynasty (960–1279). A dragon motif, an auspicious symbol for the Chinese, decorates the centre of the plate.

millennium. As Chinese merchants were travelling to Southeast Asian ports and buying products on their own, Srivijaya's services as an intermediary were no longer relevant. The kingdom declined, and its dependencies started breaking away as they could now get better trading terms working on their own than through Srivijaya.

The name "Srivijaya" transferred to Jambi in the second half of the 11th century and Palembang became known as the "Old Harbour". The 15 dependencies mentioned by Zhao Rukuo in 1225 answered to Jambi. However, these dependencies eventually broke away and Jambi had to pressure ships to its harbour with armed force. Even the Orang Laut, long-term allies, were no longer submitting to Srivijaya. Piracy started gaining ground, as noted by Arab writers such as Al-Idrisi in the 12th century and Ibn Said in the 13th century. Srivijaya's success had stemmed from the monopoly it enjoyed; the disappearance of this monopoly marked the end of Srivijaya as an empire.

In 1275, Kertanagara, the ruler of the Singhzaffar kingdom of Java, attacked Jambi as part of his Pamalayu campaign, and Jambi became a vassal of

Java. By the end of the 14th century, Jambi was subsumed by the kingdom of Minangkabau and ceased to exist as the capital of an independent maritime empire. At around the same time, Palembang was annexed by the Javanese Majapahit kingdom. The Malay nobles dispersed. Palembang, by this time, had a large Chinese population made up predominantly of merchants who had left China at the time of the Ming ban on private foreign trade, first issued in 1371. They elected Liang Tao-ming as their leader, who was protected by the Ming emperor.

▼ The Musi River near Palembang, painted during the Dutch period.



## FINDING SRIVIJAYA

PALEMBANG CAN BOAST a history of around 400 years as the capital of the Srivijaya kingdom. The port-city of Srivijaya is believed to have been located where the Musi River meets the Komering and Ogan rivers, about 5 kilometres west of the modern city. This area shows evidence of habitation, trading, manufacturing and religious activities from before the 10th century.

The religious centre of the city was at Bukit Seguntang, the holy mountain of the *Sejarah Melayu* and the location where the founders of both Singapore and Melaka are said to have originated. Numerous Buddhist remains have been discovered here, including an Avalokitesvara statue, a bronze Vairocana Buddha statue, a Kubera statue, a 3-metre-high Buddha statue, and the remains of a *candi* with a circular base.

One interesting find from west Palembang is a bronze mould used for casting *stupika* (votive stupa). Votive tablets and *stupika* have been found in large quantities in Southeast Asia, but only one other *stupika*

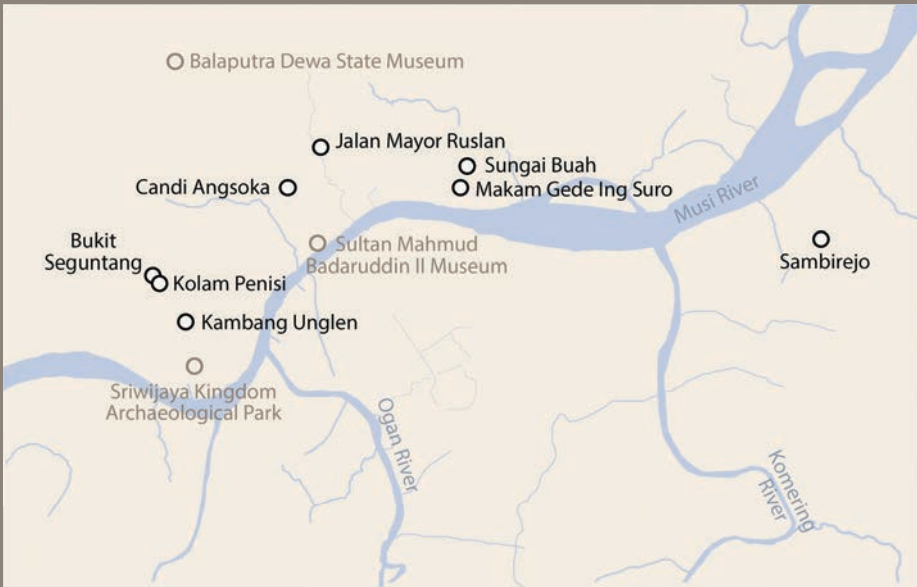


▲ This Buddha statue, having a height of 2.27 metres, was found at Bukit Seguntang. It is made of granite, which is not locally found. The Buddha wears a robe that covers both his shoulders, and his hair is curly and tied into an *usnisa* (topknot). The statue is dated to the 7th–8th century based on its artistic style.



◀ The Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum was originally the home of the Dutch Resident. It was built on top of an 18th-century *kraton* (palace). Artefacts from the Srivijayan period have been found in the yard of the museum.





▲ This map shows sites where Srivijayan remains have been found, as well as museums housing Srivijayan artefacts.

mould has been found, at Semarang in Java. Hence, the find at Palembang underscores the importance of Srivijaya as a Buddhist site.

Candi Angsoka, in east Palembang, is presumed to be a Shaivaite site. It is dated to the 9th–10th century based on the style of the artefacts uncovered, which include terracotta antefixes and a Kala head. The *candi* itself no longer exists but a *yoni* structure can still be seen. In the 18th century, an Islamic burial complex was built atop the *candi* – similar to the *candi* of Gedingsuro (today Makam Gede Ing Suro).

Evidence of bead manufacturing has been found at Kambang Unglen and Karanganyar, while timber remains from a boat, carbon-dated between the 5th and 7th centuries, have been found at Kolam Penisi, at the foot of Bukit Seguntang. Shards of 10th-century Chinese green-glazed stoneware, known as Yue ware, have been found on the northeast slope of Bukit Seguntang as well as at Candi Angsoka. Hundreds of Chinese ceramic shards dated to the 9th and 10th centuries have been found at a number of sites in Palembang, attesting to vibrant Chinese trade with



Srivijaya. Evidence of a dense population during Srivijayan times was unearthed in the yard of the Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Museum. Out of the 55,000 artefacts recovered here, 40 percent were dated to the 9th and 10th centuries, and 18 percent were imported ceramics.

Apart from the above, however, there is little archaeological evidence of a large population, which one might expect in a royal city. In ancient Southeast Asia, while structures associated with gods (temples, stupas, *candi*) were built of brick, those for human habitation were of impermanent material. The palace of the Sultan of Melaka, for example, is described in the *Sejarah Melayu* as made of timber. The bulk of the population at Srivijaya probably lived in houseboats that lined the banks of the Musi River and its tributaries. This allowed them to disperse easily, if needed. Those who lived on land would have had houses that could be dismantled easily and moved on boats. ♦

▲ A *candi* within Geding-suro, a Hindu temple complex originally comprising seven buildings. Ceramic fragments, pottery, beads, resins and currency were found during an archaeological dig. These findings together with the structure of the buildings indicate that the complex was built during the Majapahit period (14th–16th century). It was converted into a graveyard in the 16th century and is now known as Makam Gede Ing Suro. Ki Gede Ing Suro, originally from Demak in Java, founded the Sultanate of Palembang in 1552.



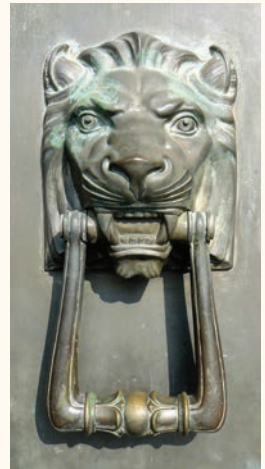
Keramat Iskandar Shah on Fort Canning Hill. This hill was previously the abode of the kings of Singapore.

## SINGAPORE

*Two Foundings of the City*

STANDING ON A HIGH ROCK on the island of Bintan, Sri Tri Buana espied a beach across the sea with sand so white that it looked like a piece of cloth. This was the island of Temasek. Its beauty lured the Srivijayan prince to establish a city on its shores, a city he gave the name Singapura – “Lion City” in Sanskrit – after spotting a lion on the island.

Sri Tri Buana’s founding of Singapore occurred in the last decade of the 13th century. This was a period of tumult in the region. Srivijaya, the bastion of Malay power, was disintegrating and the Javanese were muscling for power in southwest Sumatra. The Siamese were expanding down the Malay Peninsula, into territory considered by Majapahit as theirs. Malay hegemony was under threat. But with the founding of Singapore, the seat of Malay power expanded from the west coast of the Straits of Melaka to its east coast. The *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) purports that Singapore, under the rule of Sri Tri Buana and his four successors, rose to become a great city, attracting foreign traders who spread its fame throughout the world.



▲ A door knocker with a lion’s head at Singapore’s City Hall. The lion has become a symbol of the nation. The story of Sri Tri Buana spotting a lion has been called into question, however, as lions are not endemic east of India. More likely, Sri Tri Buana’s selection of the name “Singapura” was to identify his new city with the Buddhist world, in which the lion has long been an important symbol.



### Early Days

The conditions that had made Srivijaya successful were also enjoyed by Singapore (Temasek). It, too, is located to the northwest of the Java Sea, the convergence point of the northeast and southwest monsoons. This meeting of monsoons made it the logical place for the coming together of traders plying the sea route between China and the West.

During the Srivijaya era, Singapore was likely already linked into the regional trading networks, and its mangrove swamps inhabited by the Orang Laut, who played an important role in assisting Srivijaya. With Srivijaya no longer a factor, Singapore could now develop into a trading centre in its own right. In fact, it became of sufficient importance to warrant the attention of the Chinese. In 1320, the Mongol Yuan court sent a mission to Longyamen (the entrance to Keppel Harbour) requesting for elephants; this visit was reciprocated in 1325.

Temasek was one of the 99 locations in Southeast Asia visited by the Chinese traveller Wang Dayuan

▲ Archaeological research on Fort Canning Hill began in 1984 and has yielded 30,000 artefacts, all belonging to the 14th-century settlement. This specific site, near the Keramat Iskandar Shah, likely housed royal workshops producing items made from glass and gold.

in the 1330s, and described by him in a 1349 publication. Interestingly, he mentions Temasek as one of two locations having a Chinese population. The other was an island located off the southwest coast of Borneo. This was possibly Pulau Gelam, where the Chinese population were descended from sick men left behind by the Mongol Yuan fleet sent by Kublai Khan in 1292 in retaliation against the Singhasari kingdom in Java. This island was not a trading post, and hence Singapore has the distinction of hosting the earliest known Chinese trading settlement in maritime Southeast Asia. When and why the Chinese settled here, however, remains unclear.

Wang Dayuan noted two settlements on Temasek: Banzu and Longyamem. Banzu is a transliteration of the Malay word *pancur* (freshwater spring). Within

▼ The entrance to the strait separating Singapore from Sentosa was known to the Chinese as Longyamem (Dragon's Teeth Gate), possibly because of the granite outcrops that resembled dragon's teeth. One of these was known by the locals as Batu Berlayar (Sailing Rock) as it was a navigational landmark; the British called it Lot's Wife. This drawing of the rock outcrop was done by J.T. Thomson in 1848 just before it was destroyed by the British to widen the entrance to the strait for larger vessels to pass through.





▲ An 1825 map of Singapore. The “Old Lines of Singapore” (top centre of map) mark the remains of an earthen wall, about 5 metres wide and 3 metres high, that formed the northern boundary of the 14th-century Malay port-settlement. This wall originally ran from the sea, along Bras Basah stream and around Fort Canning Hill, its perimeter approximately paralleling present-day Stamford Road.

Banzu, the hill known today as Fort Canning Hill was the seat of royalty, while traders resided at the mouth of the Singapore River. Banzu would have been the location of Sri Tri Buana’s Singapura. However, interestingly, Wang Dayuan makes no mention of the name “Singapura”, raising the question when exactly this name became associated with the island. A pirate settlement, likely the Orang Laut, resided at Longyamen (“Dragon’s Teeth Gate” in Chinese), with the Chinese population living alongside. The king possibly drew his naval power from this settlement, which protected Banzu from attacks.

Archaeological excavations corroborate the textual accounts. The outline of terraces and remains of brick building foundations have been found on the northern and western slopes of Fort Canning Hill, implying it was an important area within Banzu. In addition, gold



▲ Solid gold ornaments of Javanese design dated to the mid-14th century were found as a hoard on Fort Canning Hill in 1928. From left to right: One of six similar rings, possibly three pairs of earrings, each set with eleven diamonds; a joint or a clasp of uncertain use, set with 15 diamonds and 2 rubies; a ring with its bezel incised with a goose flapping its wings (a goose is part of the Surakarta regalia); and an elliptical ring of uncertain use, set with 8 diamonds and 2 rubies.



◀ A flexible gold armlet dated to the mid-14th century. The armlet was one of a pair and they were part of a hoard of eleven gold ornaments found at Fort Canning Hill in July 1928 during excavation works to build a reservoir. The Kala head at the centre is of Hindu-Javanese design and can be ascribed to the Majapahit period. It bears similarities with Kala sculptures installed at temple entrances in Java and to ornaments on statues of Javanese workmanship. One of the pieces is on display at the National Museum of Singapore.





▲ Singapore River, with Fort Canning Hill (or Government Hill) in the background. The local Malays of the 19th century called the hill Bukit Larangan (Forbidden Hill). They stayed away as they considered the hill sacred. Sri Tri Buana, the first king of Singapore; Demang Lebar Daun, his Chief Minister; and Queen Sakidar Shah, ruler of Bintan and Sri Tri Buana's adoptive mother, were believed to be buried on the hill.

ornaments have been found only on Fort Canning Hill, indicating that the community there was more affluent than the community living on the plains. An abundance of 14th-century artefacts – including Chinese pottery, local earthenware, coins, glass beads and glass shards – have been recovered at Fort Canning Hill as well as near the mouth of the Singapore River (Empress Place, Old Parliament House, Parliament House Complex). These finds highlight that the settlement was involved in trade, metalworking, and the manufacture of glass objects.

Singapore's prosperity attracted the attention of its neighbours, making it a target for attacks. Wang Dayuan mentioned that Temasek had warded off an attack by the Siamese a few years prior to his visit. The Javanese poem *Nagarakrtagama*, composed in 1365, states that Temasek was a vassal of Java, while the Siamese *Kot Monthieraban*, also composed in the 14th century, claims that Temasek was under the suzerainty



of Siam. An Arab text mentions that Singapore was Siam's southern-most possession. Portuguese sources note that towards the end of the 14th century, an interloper from Palembang with the title of Parameswara murdered the ruler of Singapore and assumed power. As the murdered king was a vassal of Siam, the Siamese launched a retaliatory attack. Parameswara fled the island, working his way up the Malay Peninsula and eventually founding a new settlement, Melaka. As Melaka grew in importance, becoming the preeminent trade emporium of the 15th century, Singapore's role diminished.

Though Singapore had been deprived of a ruler, small trade-based settlements continued to flourish, as evidenced by ceramic finds at the Singapore River dating up to the 19th century. In contrast, the ceramics found at Fort Canning Hill only date up to the 14th century, indicating that the royal residents had moved out.

Singapore's fortunes revived after the Portuguese captured Melaka in 1511. During this time, Singapore served as a port for the Johor Sultanate, which was established by the son of Melaka's last sultan. The

▲ This *keramat*, at Fort Canning Hill, is said to be the tomb of Sultan Iskandar Shah, purportedly the fifth and last ruler of Singapore. According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, Iskandar Shah, believing malicious rumours about his favourite concubine, had her publicly shamed. Her incensed father invited Majapahit to attack Singapore, opening the door of the fort at the opportune moment. The Sultan fled the city and eventually founded Melaka. This version of the founding of Melaka differs from Portuguese writings, which attribute the founding to Parameswara, a renegade prince from Palembang who murdered the ruler of Singapore.

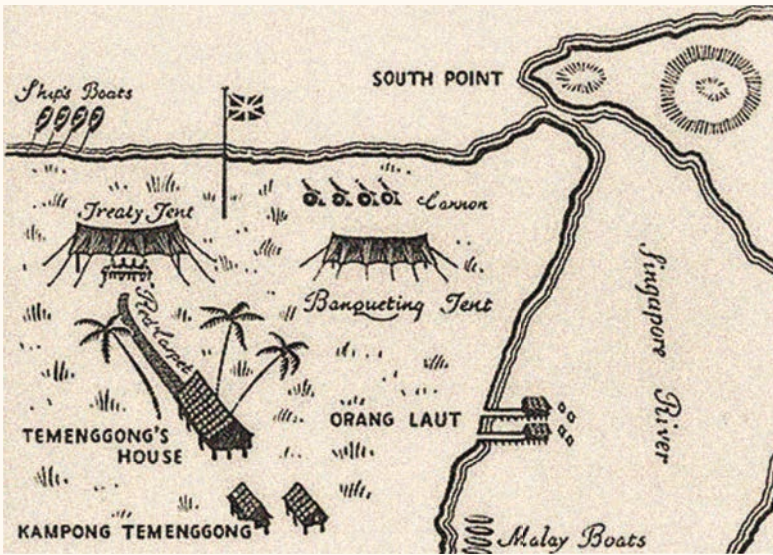


▲ Underglazed blue porcelain shard recovered at the Kallang River estuary. The fragment comes from a dish with a flattened rim bordered by water lilies. The foreground shows mountains with two men walking over a bridge. These landscape-motif ceramics date to the 16th century and were produced at the Jingdezhen facility in Jiangxi province, China, during the Wanli era (1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty. Similar pieces have been found in Johor Lama, Malaysia.

*shahbandar* (harbour-master) of the sultanate was stationed at Singapore, earning it the alternate name of Shahbandaria. The Kallang River estuary became more prominent during this period. Blue-glazed landscape-motif porcelain shards dating to the 16th century found at this estuary are similar to those found at Johor Lama, suggesting that the trade at the estuary was within the domain of the sultanate. In the 18th century, when the sultanate's capital moved out of the Johor River to the Riau Islands, ports developed on Bintan and Lingga, diminishing Singapore's importance once again.

### **Colonial Singapore**

The history of modern Singapore and its rapid rise to become one of the top ports in the world picks up again in January 1819, when Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar appeared on the scene. An employee of the British East India Company (EIC), Raffles was in search of a suitable port to function as a British trading base. Singapore was not on his list of choices; rather, he came across it by chance. He had to reject the Karimun Islands as setting up a port there would have been expensive and its location made it difficult to defend in the event of an attack. Moreover, the Dutch



had staked a claim on all the Riau islands in November 1818. Raffles was on his way to survey the Johor River estuary when he stopped at Singapore. The advantages of the island quickly became apparent. There was a good harbour at the Singapore River estuary and, more importantly, a succession dispute over the Johor-Riau-Lingga Sultanate enabled Raffles to craft an agreement beneficial to the EIC.

Raffles' search was tied to the EIC's need for a base at the southern end of the Straits of Melaka to break the monopoly of the Dutch in the region and to develop the China segment of their business. The EIC's revenues had been heavily dependent on importing Indian textiles into Britain. However, this revenue stream was jeopardised by the passage of parliamentary acts in Britain that protected British textile manufacturers. In order to stay profitable, the EIC had to look for new products that did not compete with British manufacturers.

Chinese tea became a viable alternative after the Commutation Act of 1784 slashed taxes on tea from 119 percent to a mere 12.5 percent, thus increasing the demand for Chinese tea. Tea had hitherto been paid for in silver but in order to protect the country's silver

▲ Sketch map showing the tent in which the Singapore Treaty was signed on 6 February 1819 between Stamford Raffles and Temenggung Abdul Rahman. Prior to the ceremony, Tengku Long, eldest son of the late Sultan Mahmud of Johor-Riau-Lingga was installed as Sultan Hussein of Johor and Singapore. The Treaty allowed the EIC to set up a trading post stretching from Tanjong Malang (around Palmer Road) to Tanjong Katong and inland as far as a cannon shot. Subsequently, on 2 August 1824, by the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, Singapore and all islands within a 10-mile radius were ceded to the EIC in perpetuity, in exchange for cash payments and increased pensions for the Sultan and Temenggung.

bullion reserves, the increased demand for tea necessitated other means of payment. The demand in China for opium and Indian cotton was seen as the solution – these could be bartered for tea.

As a port, Singapore was ideally situated, being equidistant between Calcutta (Kolkata) and Canton (Guangzhou), the most important ports in the West and East, respectively. Furthermore, products from other parts of the archipelago such as tin, spices, rattan, jungle produce and birds' nests could be consolidated at Singapore for transshipment to China. It also served as a distribution centre for products from India, West Asia and Europe to the archipelago. In addition, it was envisaged that Chinese traders would buy their opium in Singapore for sale in China. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 removed Dutch opposition to British occupation of Singapore, and it rapidly developed as a free-trade port providing excellent facilities to ships either trading at its port or simply picking up supplies.

### **Developing a Settlement**

Major William Farquhar was named the first British Resident and Commandant of Singapore answering to Bencoolen (Bengkulu), the British port on the west coast of Sumatra where Raffles was the Lieutenant Governor. Farquhar had the onerous task of populating the settlement, promoting trade, providing the necessary facilities for the functioning of the settlement and establishing its defences. As a start, he established a cantonment and a marketplace northeast of the Singapore River. Supplies came mostly from traders

in Melaka, who were happy to supply food and other essentials at exorbitant prices.

The decision by Raffles to make Singapore a duty-free port saw around 100 Indonesian boats anchored at the port within six weeks. However, this decision also meant that no revenue could be derived from duties levied on trade and, hence, funds to develop the fledgling settlement and provide for its security came from gambling, opium and liquor licences, which Farquhar farmed out to the highest bidders.

Settlers surged to Singapore. By 1821, it had achieved a distinctly cosmopolitan flavour, with Arabs, Armenians, Bugis, Chinese, Eurasians, Europeans, Indians and Malays relocating to its shores. With a population of 3,000, the Malays were the largest group,

▼ This building, occupied today by the Malay Heritage Centre, was originally built as an Istana, the seat of Malay royalty. Completed in 1843, it was commissioned by Sultan Ali Iskandar Shah, the heir of Sultan Hussein.





▲ Thian Hock Keng on Telok Ayer Street, circa 1890. This Chinese temple is dedicated to Mazu, Goddess of the Sea, who is worshipped to give thanks for a safe sea passage. The temple was built around 1822 with funds donated by the local Hokkien community; the largest donor was businessman Tan Tock Seng. Originally located close to the shoreline, land reclamations have since pushed it way inland.

followed by the Chinese at over 1,000. Temenggung Abdul Rahman and Sultan Hussein, the two Malay rulers of Singapore who had signed the treaty with Raffles in 1819, continued to live on the island with their entourage of followers. Sultan Hussein settled at Kampong Glam, where he built himself a palace. Malays from Bencoolen took up residence along the Bras Basah River (now Stamford Canal), and the settlement came to be known as Kampong Bencoolen.

The Chinese who moved to Singapore were merchants who had previously settled in other parts of Southeast Asia, many having taken local wives. These Nanyang Chinese were attracted to Singapore because of its free port status and minimal government interference in trade; in other parts of Southeast Asia, heavy taxes and restrictions were imposed on foreign merchants. Subsequently, migrations from mainland China resulted in the Chinese exceeding Malays in numbers.

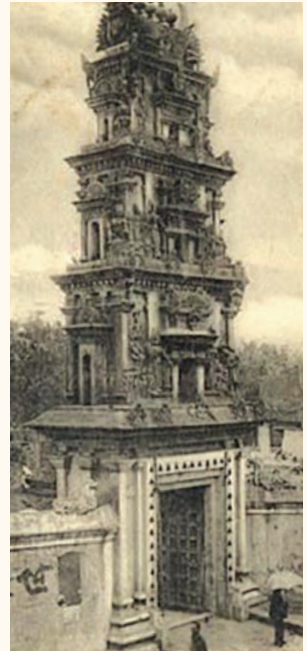
In February 1820, a fleet of Bugis ships from Dutch-controlled Riau brought some 500 people as settlers. The Bugis had overtaken the Malays and Arabs as the

principal traders in the archipelago, and the new settlers were warmly welcomed by Farquhar.

Indians were one of the minority groups, arriving in Singapore mainly as soldiers. Some Indian merchants came from Penang and Melaka. Among the earliest was Naraina Pillai from Penang, who accompanied Raffles in May 1819. He started a brick kiln and became Singapore's first building contractor. For a time, during the 19th century, Indians would become the second-largest community after the Chinese.

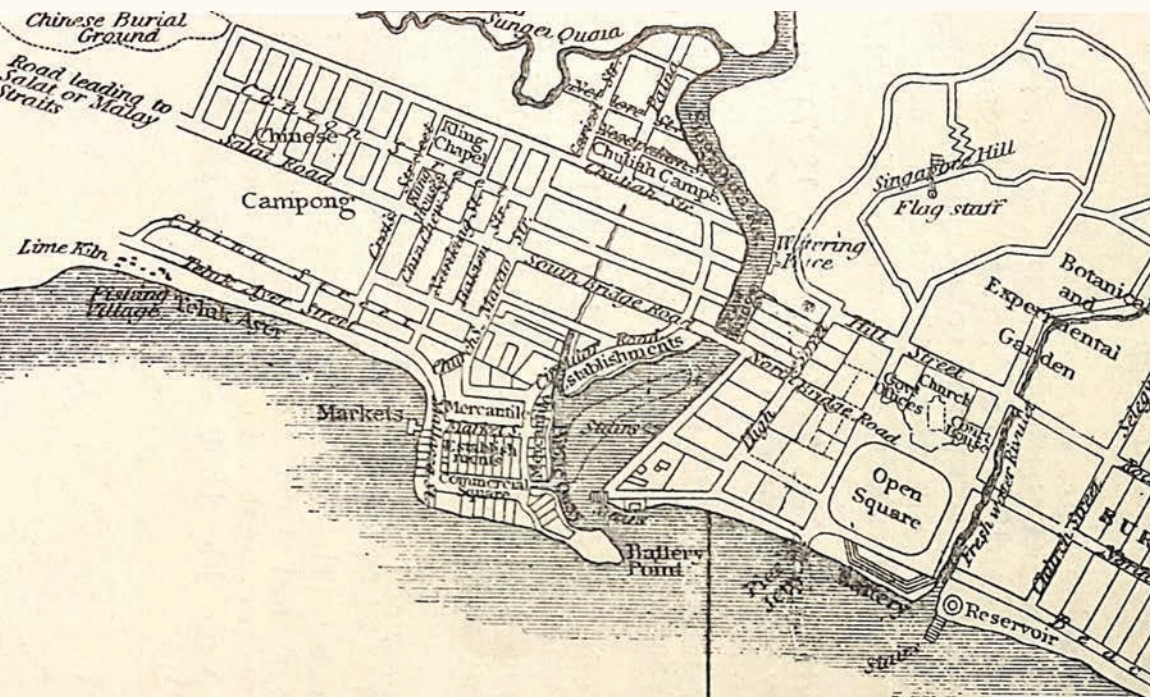
Melaka and Riau were the biggest source of settlers. Farquhar had previously served as British Resident of Melaka, and his easy-going nature had endeared the locals to him and earned him the title "Raja of Melaka". Hence, it was easy to induce Melaka's Eurasians, Indians, Malays and, especially, Chinese Peranakans to move to Singapore and be part of the new colony. Further contributing to the exodus from Melaka was a cholera epidemic in 1819 and the reintroduction by the Dutch of a poll tax on the Chinese. By 1823, around 5,000 Melakans from all walks of life had moved to Singapore, including Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, the Malay scribe who would become famously known as Munshi Abdullah, and Tan Tock Seng, a vegetable hawker who rose to become one of Singapore's leading merchants.

With such rapid growth, the town developed haphazardly, displeasing Raffles when he made a visit in October 1822. He had envisaged a well-ordered town with clearly demarcated areas for government administration buildings, commercial activity and living quarters for the different communities. He hired Lieutenant



▲ Sri Mariamman Temple, the first Hindu temple in Singapore, was established in 1827 by Naraina Pillai. The original 3-tiered *gopuram* (entrance tower), was replaced by a 5-tiered structure in 1925.





*Plan of the Town*  
 OF  
**SINGAPORE.**  
 by  
*Lieut. Jackson.*

500                      1000 Yards

*Roads*



◀ Plan of the Town of Singapore, drawn up by Lieutenant Philip Jackson and published in 1829. This plan is believed to represent Raffles' vision for the town rather than an actual survey plan. The town's layout received direct input from Raffles. He established the commercial centre at present-day Raffles Place and Boat Quay. The Temenggung's village was moved to the coast between Tanjong Pagar and Telok Blangah; the space vacated was then allocated for the Padang and government buildings. Rocher was reserved as a residential area for affluent Europeans and Asians. Arabs were allocated space beyond Rocher, adjoining Kampong Glam, while the Bugis were moved beyond Kampong Glam. The Chinese were allocated a large area west of the river, at Chinatown, while Indians were allocated an area upriver.

Philip Jackson, Executive Engineer and Surveyor, and seconded him to the newly formed Town Committee, which was charged with laying out the town. Raffles provided explicit instructions and the layout of the city centre today still largely retains his design.

### **Entrepôt Trade**

Singapore's high labour costs and poor soil conditions made it uncondusive to large-scale plantations. The exceptions were gambier and pepper plantations, which thrived for a few decades. Neither did Singapore produce much goods for export. One of the few such products was sago flour. The Peranakan Chinese who migrated to Singapore from Melaka brought with them a technology invented in Melaka for producing pearl sago. This became popular, as sago was a staple in the archipelago, especially in the eastern islands. It was also exported to India and Europe.

What really sustained Singapore, however, was entrepôt trade. Ships from all parts of the world arrived in port daily. European square-rigged vessels, Chinese junks, Malay and Bugis *perahu* and *sampan-pukat* mingled with one another, painting a lively scene. These ships brought to Singapore the varied produce of the archipelago and beyond, including Australia, Britain, China, Europe, India, North America and West Asia. At the port were found rice, gambier, sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton, woollens, raw silk, coarse chinaware, porcelain, firearms, steel, copper sheathing, alum, ironware, tin, gutta-percha, timber, coal, antimony, tortoise shells, mother-of-pearl shells, birds' nests, wax, sharks'



fins, seaweed, aloes-wood, camphor, betel-nut, rattan, gemstones and gold.

Central to Singapore's success was its free-port status, which allowed it to steal trade away from nearby ports, especially Riau and Penang. It was the only free port in the region when it was established in 1819. Although other free ports were eventually established, they did not give Singapore much competition, as merchants had already invested capital to set up their businesses in Singapore. Both Penang and Melaka were made free ports in 1826, but they served more as feeder ports to Singapore. Kuching in Sarawak, a British port, was a minor competitor as it shipped the in-demand gutta-percha and antimony directly to Britain. Dutch-controlled Makassar in southwest Sulawesi was declared a free port in 1847, but instead of drawing business away from Singapore, it stimulated trade between Singapore and Sulawesi.

▲ A gambier and pepper plantation, c. 1900. The Chinese were already planting these two cash crops in Singapore when the British arrived in 1819. Gambier was initially exported to China but its use in the dyeing and tanning industries saw Britain become the biggest market. The number of plantations increased rapidly. Unfortunately, the planters used slash-and-burn cultivation methods, moving on to another tract of land once they had exhausted the soil. By the late 1860s, much of the interior had been laid waste and the planters moved on to Johor.



▲ Chinese junks arrived in Singapore in January–March with the northeast monsoon; the appearance of the first junk of the season would be cause for much excitement in Singapore.

In contrast, Dutch-controlled ports levied both import and exports taxes; higher taxes were levied on foreign ships than Dutch ships, resulting in foreign ships opting to stop in Singapore. In addition, due to these taxes, contraband traffic flourished in Singapore. Malay and Bugis *perahu* smuggled goods between Singapore and Dutch ports. Javanese coffee, a monopoly of the Dutch, was smuggled out of eastern Java and found its way to Singapore via Bali. Likewise, opium from Singapore was smuggled into Java.

The Chinese junks arrived between January and March with the northeast monsoon. There was a palpable air of excitement at the start of the season as the Chinese community eagerly awaited the arrival of the junks, which brought news of their relatives through letters and personal communications. The junks also brought products needed by the Chinese population, including earthenware, paper umbrellas, silk, tea and medicine. Hence, when the first junks arrived, local

Chinese boats raced to greet the junks and escort them into harbour. Much of the trade was conducted on the junks themselves, with their wares spread out on deck and local Chinese competing with one another to purchase the wares.

Interestingly, the biggest cargo arriving from China was people, brought in as labour for mining settlements. Annually, around 6,000–8,000 Chinese immigrants arrived in Singapore. Around one-eighth of these remained on Singapore while the rest dispersed mostly to the tin mines of Bangka and the Malay Peninsula, the gold mines of Pahang and the west coast of Borneo. By July 1845, the Chinese made up 56 percent of the total population of Singapore and, by 1867, this figure had grown to 75 percent.

▼ The British used the Singapore Strait, located south of Pulau Blakang Mati (Sentosa island), when they first sailed to Singapore. The strait between the mainland and Sentosa/Pulau Brani was not known to them. Farquhar noticed it in August 1819, but it was not until almost 30 years later that it was properly surveyed and developed. With deep waters close to shore, it was suitable for large ships. New Harbour was completed in 1886 and renamed Keppel Harbour in 1900.



▼ Johnston's Pier, along Collyer Quay. Located opposite Fullerton Square, this pier was built in 1855 and it was the main landing point in the city until its demolition in 1933. Its role was replaced by Clifford Pier, located further down Collyer Quay.

An important service provided by the junks was allowing the Chinese residents in Singapore to remit money to their families in China through the captains of these junks, who took a cut of the remittances.

Smaller fast-sailing junks arrived towards the end of the northeast monsoon in April with the sole purpose of procuring opium. They brought no cargo and paid for the opium in bullion. They then smuggled the





opium into China at Canton by bribing port officials. But Singapore never did become the opium hub envisaged by EIC as most opium was shipped directly from India to China. In 1835–36, for example, 418 chests of opium were imported into China from Singapore, while 30,202 chests were imported directly from India. The imports from Singapore made up only 1.4 percent of China’s total imports. However, Singapore did become a hub distributing opium to the tin-mining settlements and plantations in the region.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 accelerated the switch from sail to steamships. A steamer could now make three voyages a year between Europe and the Far East as compared to a single trip previously. It marked the end of the fast clippers, which tended to zoom between India and China, bypassing Singapore unless they had to pick up supplies such as fresh water. The opening of the Suez Canal thus conferred renewed importance on Singapore’s strategic position. Its safe anchorage and good berthing facilities ensured it was the preferred port of call. Today, it counts among the largest and busiest ports in the world.

▲ A 3-metre-tall boulder split into two once stood at the current location of Fullerton Hotel. On the split surfaces, around 50 lines of text were inscribed. These inscriptions could have provided valuable information on the early history of Singapore but they remained undeciphered when the boulder was blown to pieces in 1843 during works to widen the mouth of the Singapore River. Only three fragments were rescued. The bottom piece in the image shown, known as the Singapore Stone, is housed at the National Museum of Singapore.



## REVENUE FARMING

A REVENUE FARM was a licence granted by the government for the right to distribute – and to collect taxes on – a specific item or activity. The most common ones in Singapore were for liquor, opium, gambling, prostitution and pawnshops. A public auction was held to farm out the rights to distribute these items. The successful bidder, usually a *kongsi* (business syndicate), was charged a fixed amount by the government and he was then free to charge his customers any amount he felt reasonable. For a government on a tight budget, this system effectively did away with the need to maintain labour and infrastructure for revenue collection.

The most lucrative and hotly fought over of these farms were the opium farms. Many of the secret society wars in Singapore were over control of these farms. Opium was imported raw and converted into consumable forms – known as *chandu* in Malay – by local opium farm holders. The largest consumers were the migrant Chinese labourers working in tin mines and plantations, which were ultimately controlled by the *kongsi*. The *kongsi* required their workers to buy consumables (food, liquor, *chandu*) through them, thus allowing the *kongsi* to get back a large share of the workers' wages. The majority of the labourers were indentured, and as they got addicted, they became trapped in a vicious cycle of debt, having to buy *chandu* from the *kongsi* at inflated prices. Some historians opine that if it had not been for opium, the Chinese capitalists would have been hard-pressed to remain in business during the 19th century.



Revenue farming was already in place before colonisation. Rulers across Southeast Asia had long outsourced the collection of taxes along rivers and at ports. In the 17th and 18th centuries, they had also given to the Chinese businessmen the exclusive rights to run opium, gambling and pawnshop businesses. Colonial governments simply expanded on this existing business model.

For Singapore, Raffles had stipulated that no revenue was to be derived from “vices” (gambling, liquor and opium), which were to be banned. However, Farquhar, pressed for funds to develop the town, tendered out the rights to collect excise taxes, displeasing Raffles when he visited in 1822. Subsequently, in May 1823, Raffles shut down all gambling and cockfight establishments. He also imposed higher taxes on liquor and opium and prohibited slave trading. Dr John Crawfurd, who replaced Farquhar as Resident in 1823, reintroduced gambling licences on the premise that gambling, being endemic among the Chinese, was being conducted illegally and the government might as well profit from it. However, it was permanently made illegal in 1829 after it led to high rates of crime. Opium farms took over as the highest revenue generators.

▲ Raw opium was boiled and filtered into *chandu*, which was then packed in individual doses using bamboo leaves. A long needle was used to pick up the *chandu* and hold it over a lamp that produced heat rather than light. As the *chandu* melted, the smoker shaped it into a ball and placed it on the pinhole of the opium pipe. The opium was then consumed by smoking.

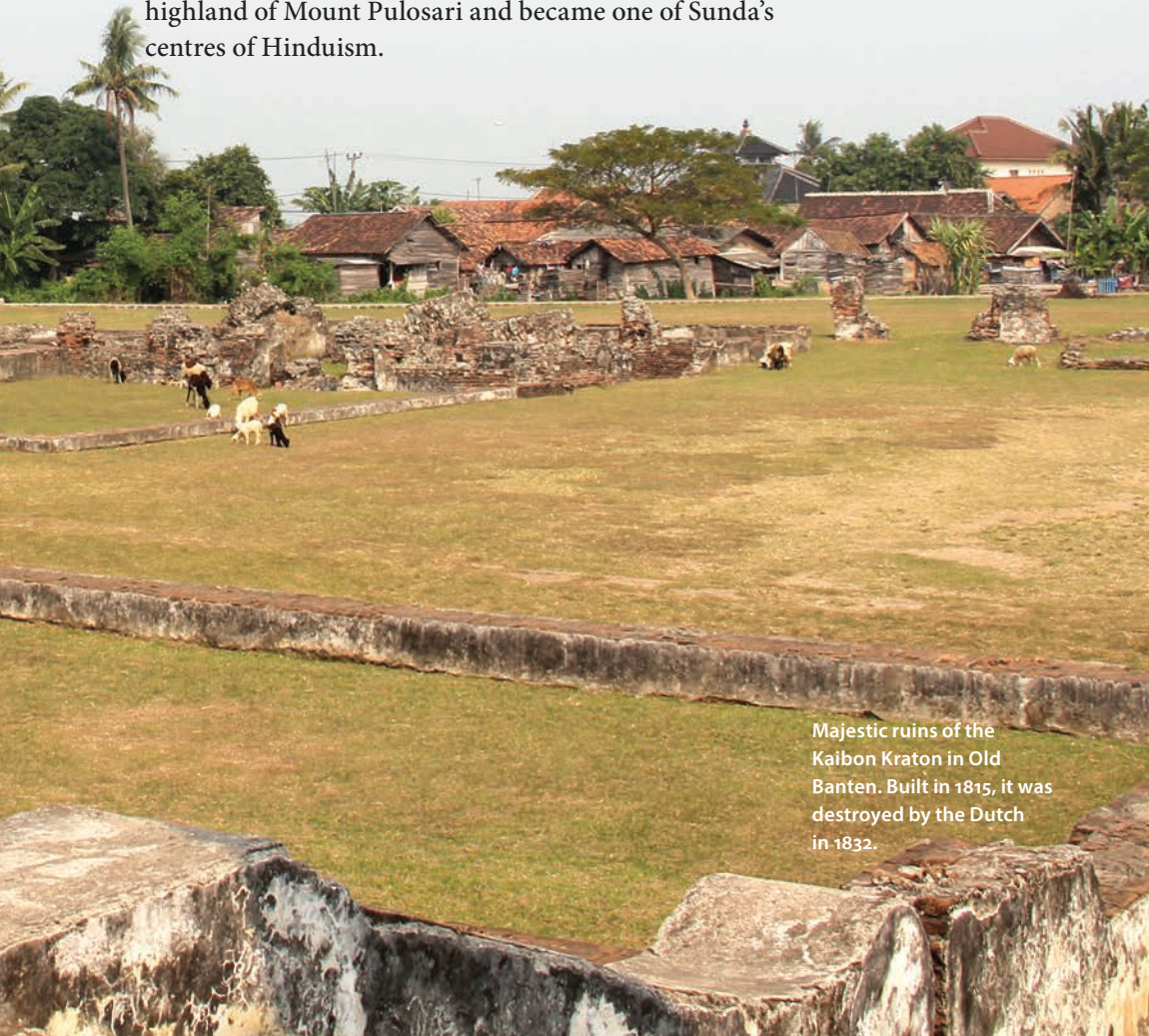
# BANTEN

*The Pepper Kingdom*



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IN THE 10TH CENTURY, under the protection of Srivijaya, the Kingdom of Sunda established a settlement at Banten Girang, 10 kilometres upstream of the Cibanten River, at the western tip of Java. Literally “Upper Banten”, Banten Girang sat between Mount Pulosari and Banten, the harbour at the river mouth. A temple dedicated to Siva was built on the sacred highland of Mount Pulosari and became one of Sunda’s centres of Hinduism.



Majestic ruins of the Kaibon Kraton in Old Banten. Built in 1815, it was destroyed by the Dutch in 1832.

▼ **Banten and its surroundings.** Tasikardi is an artificial lake that functioned as a water reservoir for the royal palace in the city.

Up to the 13th century, both the Malay Srivijaya and Javanese Majapahit kingdoms had influence over the governance of Banten Girang. They fought frequently over the settlement in order to profit from the pepper-rich district and to gain control of the strategic Sunda Strait, which connects the Java Sea to the Indian Ocean. Between the 13th and 14th centuries, the Kingdom of Sunda was an independent state, and Banten Girang prospered as a pepper producer and exporter, only to be completely destroyed in an attack by the Pajajaran Kingdom around 1400. Nevertheless, the region slowly regained its significance in the 1500s as its harbour rose as an entrepôt after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511.

The backbone of Banten's economy since the days of Banten Girang in the 12th century was pepper, which was in high demand in the international trade. In Europe, pepper was the solution to meat preservation during winter, as meat from cattle stocks that were slaughtered in autumn would otherwise become contaminated towards spring. Prior to the 15th century, pepper was such a prized commodity in Europe that it was used as currency to pay rent, dowries, fines and taxes, and even to purchase land. The cities of Alexandria, Genoa and Venice prospered on the trade in pepper, which was supplied by Middle Eastern merchants who tightly guarded any information about their sources in Malabar. It was pepper that ultimately drove Vasco Da Gama to venture east in 1498, eventually securing the Portuguese a key position in the Indian Ocean's spice trade in 16th century.





◀ The pepper plant (*Piper nigrum*), native to India. The fortunes of Banten were built on this highly sought-after spice.

Black and white peppers are both produced from the same species, *Piper nigrum*. Black pepper is made from unripe pepper berries that blacken after being dried. The production of white pepper is more tedious – gunny sacks of fully ripe pepper berries were traditionally fermented in water for about two weeks before their pericarps were scrubbed off. White pepper, used as seasoning in light-coloured dishes and to flavour wine, was more expensive. This was what China, the biggest market for pepper in the East, was sourcing for in Banten at the beginning of the 15th century.

In 1379, the Ming court, which had sole monopoly over China's foreign pepper trade, began to reward its subjects with the spice. Admiral Zheng He, during his sea voyages between 1405 and 1433, became the sole importer of pepper from the Afro-Asia region. In 1424,

the pepper and sappan wood that he brought back was used to pay the salary of imperial officers. When Zheng He's voyages ended, foreign envoys brought in pepper as tributes to the imperial court. By 1532, one catty of pepper was worth 5.5 taels of silver.

The average annual amount of pepper purchased by China in the 15th and 16th centuries was 50,000 bags, or 2 million catties, equivalent to the total amount of pepper imported by Europe from the East in the first half of the 16th century. Demand increased yet further at the end of the Wanli Emperor's reign (1572–1620), as direct access to the commodity became available to commoners. Pepper was no longer an exclusive commodity for China's wealthy. This in turn stimulated pepper cultivation in the Malay Archipelago.

Banten Girang was reputed to yield top-quality pepper. Its harbour, Banten, sheltered by several islands from the open sea, was a strategic assembly point for traders coming from the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Malay Archipelago. Taking over Melaka's role as the primary entrepôt for the export of pepper to China, Banten Girang sustained a relationship with the Portuguese, who sold them gunpowder for Melaka-made cannons that were supported by carriages produced by Banten's Chinese carpenters. Banten's ships would often sail to Macao, which was also under Portuguese rule.

An agreement signed in 1522 granted the Portuguese unlimited access to Banten's pepper and permission to build a fort at the mouth of the Java Ontong River (present-day Cisadane River), which



One of the *gapura* gateways of the Kaibon Kraton. This Bantenese palace was built by Sultan Syafuiddin (r. 1809–13) for his mother, Ratu Aisyah. Kaibon means “love of a mother”.





▲ The Great Mosque of Banten, constructed during the reign of Sultan Maulana Yusuf, the third Sultan of Banten and son of Maulana Hasanuddin. It features a traditional tiered roof and a 24-metre-tall octagonal minaret.

would be financed by the kingdom in the form of an annual pepper subsidy of 1,000 gunnies (30 tons). The fort was intended to block attacks coming from the east, but before it could be built, an invasion force of 2,000 men from the Muslim Kingdom of Demak attacked and captured Banten Girang in 1527. With the cooperation of the local elites, the populace embraced Islam, and a Muslim state was established, led by the brother-in-law of Demak's Sultan Trangana, Sunan Gunungjati, and his son, Maulana Hasanuddin.

Sunan Gunungjati (also known as Syarif Hidayatullah) is revered today as one of the Wali Songo, the nine saints of Islam in Indonesia. He moved the administration centre from Banten Girang to Banten on the coast and instructed his son to build a brick-walled city over the existing harbour, complete with artificial reservoir drainage and aqueducts via underground pipes. Only Muslim locals were allowed to reside within the fortified city, which was divided

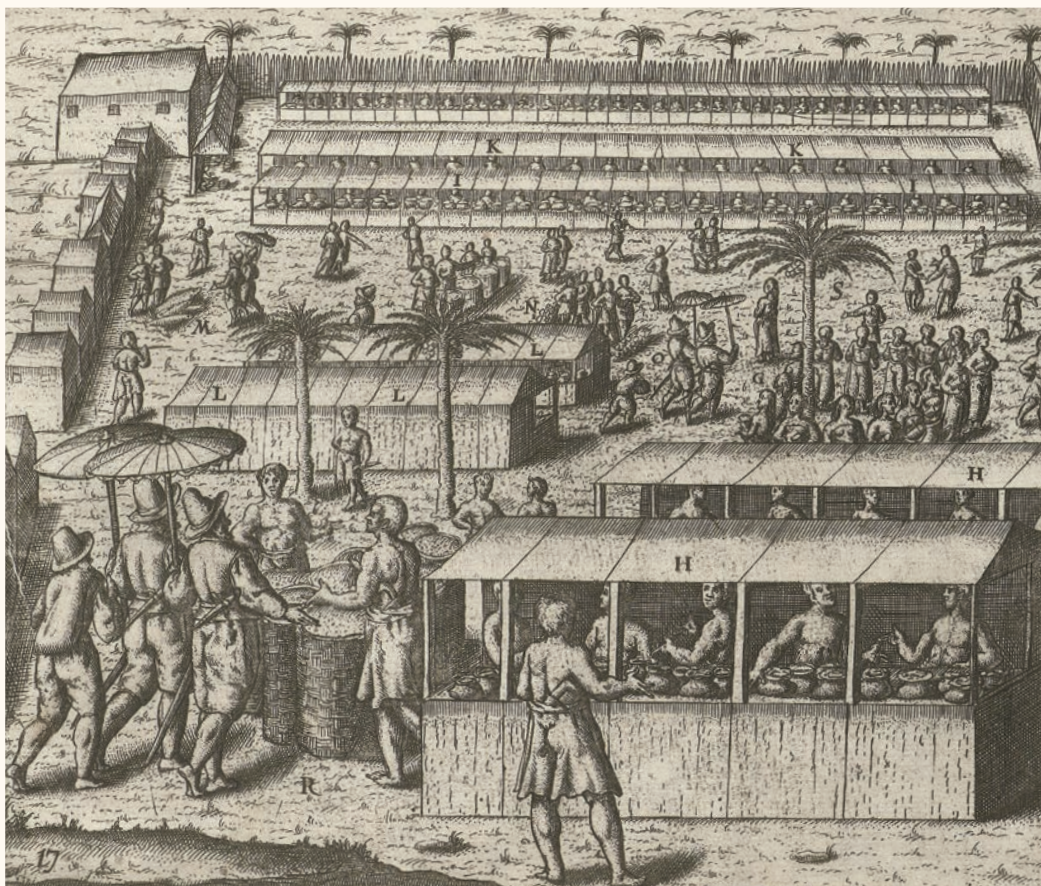
into several strictly guarded villages led by noblemen whose power depended on the number of slaves they owned. Each village housed 200–2,000 people, who lived in dwellings made of bamboo or coconut lumber. Foreigners settled outside the walls, along the shore – Muslims on the northeast, non-Muslims on the west. They were largely of the merchant community, each headed by their own representatives.

Maulana Hasanuddin, who married the Princess of Demak, was installed as the first independent sovereign of the Banten Sultanate in 1552, ruling as Panembahan Surosowan from his palace, Kraton Surosowan. A rectangular rock known as Watu Gigilang, sacred to Banten Girang, served as his throne. This was placed under the shade of a banyan tree in an open-air hall (*lapangan*) situated north of the palace. The *lapangan* held the royal court of Banten. Here, Maulana Hasanuddin would hear advice from his ministers and officials, among them the *laksamana* (admiral) and *shahbandar* (harbour-master), who were in charge of Banten's maritime affairs. When court decisions were to be announced, gongs would be hammered and cannons fired to summon the public. To the west of the *lapangan* was a mosque and a graveyard where Maulana Hasanuddin was later buried. The main market (*pasar*), referred to as the Kapalembangan, sat between the mosque and the river for a period of time before it was moved outside the fortified city to accommodate the growing population.

By the 1570s, through military campaigns, the Sultanate of Banten had extended its kingship to

▼ Watu Gigilang, Banten's investiture stone, was an important symbol in public ceremonies. Today it is placed at the *alun-alun* (public square) in front of the ruins of Kraton Surosowan.





Lampung, Sunda Kelapa, Cirebon, Pajajaran and Pakuwan. Male inhabitants were ordered to maintain 500 pepper plants and sell their produce to the state at a fixed price. By the 1590s, following the implementation of friendly and well-strategised trading policies, Banten became the principal port of western Java and southern Sumatra.

Traders brought in a wide variety of goods, for both local consumption and redistribution to other destinations. Spices, sandalwood, camphor, ivory and tortoise shells arrived en route to market in China. Silks, porcelains, needles and combs were traded with the Gujaratis from Cambay for cloth, sandalwood and spices. Among other items highly sought-after in



Banten were salt, local textiles, coconut oil from East Java, rice from Makassar and Sumbawa, honey, beeswax, resins from Borneo and Sumatra, sugar from Jepara, iron from Kalimantan, and lead and tin from the Malay Peninsula. Banten was also one of the major slave markets in the archipelago. However, pepper remained the prime commodity. Towards the end of the 16th century, Banten was responsible for nearly half of the annual pepper production of West Java, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula combined.

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) first anchored at Banten's harbour in 1596, noting a population of 100,000 people and 55 kinds of spices and herbs being sold at the market. The Portuguese, who were

▲ The marketplace at Banten, 1596, as described by Dutch explorer Cornelis de Hautman. Goods sold included: (A) melons, cucumbers and coconuts, (B) sugar and honey, (C) beans, (D) bamboo or sugarcane, (E) krisses and other weapons, (F,G) cloth, (H) spices, (I) goods from Bengal and Gujarat, including ironwork, (K) Chinese goods, (L) meat, (M) fish, (N) fruit, (O) vegetables, (P) pepper, (Q) onions, (R) rice, (T) gemstones and jewellery, and (X) poultry.

then battling the Dutch Revolt in Europe, managed to persuade the Bantenese to increase prices for the Dutch and deny them access to water. The Dutch crew who went on to Sumatra to obtain water were captured and held at ransom. This was the catalyst for several battles involving the VOC, the locals and other trading ships that took place in the following years. The Portuguese eventually fled Banten after the Dutch succeeded in destroying their fleet in 1601.

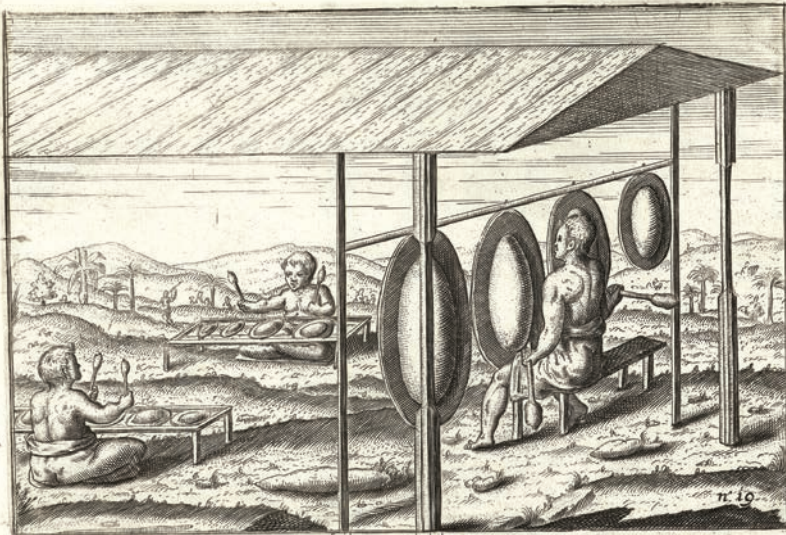
Pangeran Ranamangala ascended Banten's throne in 1608. In an effort to thwart pressure from the Dutch and British for commercial pepper concessions and to eliminate the merchants' monopoly over the trade, he made a major change to Banten's trading policies. Direct purchase of pepper was banned, and high tolls and import/export duties were imposed. Those who disobeyed were executed. As a result of the new policies, a war between the merchants and noblemen erupted in 1609, ending with 7,000 merchants being chased out of the city.

In 1619 the Dutch left to build a colony at Jayakarta, which they had wrested from Banten and renamed Batavia, from where they imposed a sea blockade for several years. In search of peace, Pangeran Ranamangala's court decided to destroy what they perceived to be the root of all the chaos – pepper. Pepper vines were chopped off and pepper sales of any kind were banned. However, the move was economically disastrous, forcing Pangeran Ranamangala to step down from power in 1624. The city went into further decline after an epidemic that killed one-third of the



Illustrations of people encountered in Banten (or Bantam, to the Dutch) by Cornelis de Houtman on his voyage to the East Indies, 1595–97:

- ▲ A Malay merchant and a Keling with his wife
- ◀ Chinese merchants
- ▼ A Javanese gamelan orchestra with three musicians





▲ The ruins of a minaret of the Masjid Pacinan Tinggi (Upper Chinese Quarter Mosque) in Dermayon village today, said to be built by Sunan Gunungjati and extended by Maulana Hasanuddin. In the foreground is a Chinese tomb dated 1843.

population in 1625 and an attack by Mataram in 1626. Banten's pepper trade with China began to decrease after the Manchus who founded the Qing Dynasty in 1645 launched a maritime trade ban that prohibited private ships from sailing overseas and the export of valuable commodities.

Fortunately, Banten was able to recover its vigour under the reign of Sultan Ageng (Abulfatah Agung) from 1651 to 1684, who successfully developed Banten on its agricultural, trading and maritime strengths. Sultan Ageng's conciliatory and open territory policies attracted merchants from all over the world, transforming Banten into a cosmopolitan city. Banten's port was enlarged, encompassing an international port on the west side of the Cibanten River delta and a local one, called Karangantu, on the east side.

Streets and canals were built to facilitate transport throughout Banten, connecting the bay to the city and the interior. In 1661, two sea walls were constructed to

prevent the buildup of silt. Irrigation canals were dug to supply Banten's coconut and sugar plantations.

Settlements of the English, Dutch, French, Danish, Chinese, Bugis, Makassarese, Javanese, Sumatran and Balinese communities appeared outside the city's fortress. Sultan Ageng, a just and fair ruler, was tolerant of other religions, allowing churches and temples to be built within these settlements. Several of his ministers were foreigners, though all were Muslims. The three outstanding ones were Prime Minister Kyai Arya Mangunjaya, economic adviser Kyai Ngabehi Kaytsu and architect Kyai Ngabehi Cakradana (Tantseko), all of them of Chinese origin. Cakradana, in particular, was highly involved in the masterplanning and construction of Banten city.

Taking his cue from the European fleets, Sultan Ageng built a strong armada and traded long-distance with Persia, Siam, India, Vietnam, China and the Philippines. In partnership with other parties such as the British, Portuguese and Malays, Banten's fleet delivered goods directly to customers.

At the same time, the Sultanate of Banten continued to extend its rule, acquiring Landak in 1661 and Cirebon from Mataram in 1677, successfully opposing the VOC's expansion into those areas. Truce treaties were signed with the Dutch in 1636 and 1645, but conflict with Batavia continued notwithstanding. To defend Banten, each inhabitant was ordered to plant 1,000 coconut trees along the Java Ontong River – the border between Banten and Batavia – and the fortress was equipped with European artillery.



A war between the two parties erupted in 1656 and only ended with a temporary peace treaty in 1659. Wary of Dutch spies, Sultan Ageng and his entourage of ministers withdrew from the city fortress to his private palace in Tirtayasa in 1671, 15 kilometres northeast of the city, where he also developed a village with permanent brick structures, considered rare in Java at the time. The governance of Banten was assigned to his son, Crown Prince Haji (Abu Nasr Abdul Kahhar).

Haji harboured a resentment towards the Chinese in Banten, whom he felt were receiving excessive special privileges from his father. Inclined to cultivating a closer relationship with Batavia and wanting more control of the administration, he stripped Cakradana of his position and banished former Prime Minister Kyai Arya Mangunjaya to Semangka in Lampung before having him killed. Furious when the news reached him, Sultan Ageng banished Haji by force and installed his youngest son as successor.

Sultan Ageng declared war against the Dutch in 1680, using an incident involving the VOC's mistreatment of Bantenese merchants as an excuse. Just as he had Batavia surrounded, Haji led a coup against him and confined the old Sultan to his Tirtayasa palace. However, finding himself besieged by his father's followers and lacking support from the Muslim elite, Haji resorted to allying with the VOC, signing a contract that would subjugate Banten to the VOC should he win. The long list of terms included a payment of 600,000 reals to the VOC, the surrender of Cirebon to the Company, exclusion of other Europeans from trading

► Ruins of Kraton Surosowan. Sultan Haji built his new residence on the site of Kraton Surosowan and in 1680 had a fortress constructed around the palace. In the centre of the palace was a square building, with two roofs rising above each other, to such a height that it was visible three leagues off the sea – as described by a Dutch Admiral, John Splinter Stavorinus, in 1798.



with Banten, non-interference in Batavia's relations with Mataram and permission for the VOC to build a fort in Banten. The VOC's forces drove Sultan Ageng into the highlands, and he finally surrendered in 1683. Sultan Haji ruled Banten for four years – under the sovereignty of the VOC – until his death in 1687.

Banten was the last independent pepper exporter to fall to the Dutch. The VOC destroyed Banten's fortified city in 1685, then used the debris and stones from the old fortress to construct Fort Speelwijk on the same site. This became an office and residence for the Company's officials as well as a garrison for the VOC's trading hub in Batavia. The Sultanate of Banten

▼ Fort Speelwijk was built by the Dutch to demonstrate their military power. Its name commemorates Cornelis Speelman, the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies (1681–84).





continued to rule in name until 1808, when it was abolished by decree of Governor-General Herman Willem Daendels, who also ordered the demolition of Kraton Surosowan. Sultan Aliyuddin II's refusal to leave his palace led to the accidental murder of Daendels' messenger. The Sultan and his family were then held as prisoners in Fort Speelwijk before they were sent into exile in Ambon. A royal relative was installed to the throne.

In 1813, the British East India Company, which had captured Dutch Java, forced Banten's last sultan, Sultan Muhammad, to surrender his throne, ending the autonomy of the 300-year-old sultanate. With that, the city of Banten, which had dominated the international spice trade for 150 years, was reduced to a small village. Today, the ancient harbour town is referred to as Old Banten. ♦

▲ Map of Banten, 1724, by Francois Valentijn. Banten was the largest port in western Java between the 16th and 18th centuries.



Candi Ngempon, a remnant of the Ancient Mataram Kingdom, located in Ungaran, about 25 kilometres from Semarang. Research suggests that Candi Ngempon functioned as a centre for literature and spiritual studies. Statues of Ganesha, Durga and Nandi were among the artefacts discovered during archaeological excavations.

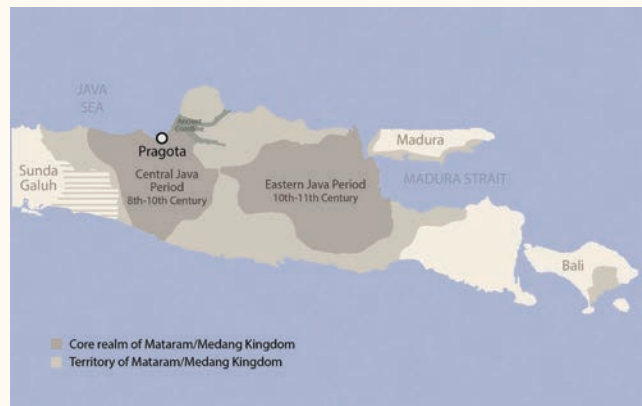
# SEMARANG

*From the Time of Mataram*



IT IS SAID THAT in the 15th century, when a prince from the Mataram Kingdom by the name of Pangeran Made Pandan Arang arrived at a small village on the north coast of central Java, he sighted many *asam* (tamarind) trees scattered throughout the plantation fields. He described the place as “*asam arang*”, meaning “scattered tamarinds”. The combination of these two words gave the town of Semarang its name.

But Semarang was not an unknown town by any means. Originally known as Pragota, it had come into existence around the 8th century, when it was established at the estuary of Kali Garang (present-day Semarang River) as a port-settlement. Entry to its port from the Java Sea was initially sheltered by a series of small islands, making it an ideal harbour. But beginning from the 10th century, heavy sedimentation pushed the coastline further out into the sea. Over time, the old harbour found itself some 5 kilometres inland, around where present-day Simongan/Pasar



► The extent of the Ancient Mataram Kingdom over four centuries.



◀ The Canggal Inscription, written in Sanskrit using the Pallava script, bears witness that a Shaivite Hindu regime had been established in Central Java by the 8th century.

Bulu is located. During this earlier period, Pragota serviced the Mataram Kingdom – but not the same one that Pangeran Made Pandan Arang later came from.

“Mataram” refers to two different kingdoms: the Ancient Mataram Kingdom, a Hindu-Buddhist polity (732–938/1006), and the Islamic Mataram Kingdom, which first emerged in Demak (1475–1755).

Ancient Mataram, also known as the Medang Kingdom, was founded in Central Java by King Sanjaya, the nephew of King Sanna (Bratasenawa) of the Galuh Kingdom in West Java. The Canggal Inscription, dated 732 CE, records King Sanjaya declaring himself the universal ruler of Medang. The inscription, discovered in the Wukir Mountain temple complex on the Kedu Plain (near Magelang), marks the beginning of Sanjaya’s



dynasty in the region, which lasted until 770, before it was taken over by the Mahayana Buddhist Sailendra Dynasty.

King Sanjaya, a just ruler, was well-versed in holy scriptures, martial arts and military strategy. His kingdom, Mdang ing Bhumi Mataram (Medang in the Land of Mataram), was an agrarian state that relied heavily on rice farming. The volcanic soils of the Kedu Plain were fertile ground for agriculture. Rivers and canals were integrated into a sophisticated system to irrigate the rice fields. Paddy storage facilities and warehouses increased Mataram's handling capacity for trade. In the meantime, many neighbouring trading ports were outgrowing their food production capabilities and increasingly dependent on imported rice. These factors secured Mataram's role as the ricebowl for the region between the 8th and 10th centuries.

As part of the Ancient Mataram Empire, the village of Pragota strengthened itself as one of the many harbours consolidating the rice supply from the hinterland, although it remained overshadowed by prominent neighbours such as Jepara and Tegal.

From the 9th century onwards, safflower and pepper from India were also planted in the kingdom as cash crops. Together with rice, these agricultural commodities were traded for gold, silver, ceramics, iron goods, lacquerware, cotton, silks, damasks and cinnabar, as well as raw materials to supply its domestic ceramic, textile and metal industries.

Politically stable and extremely wealthy from its rice trade, the Ancient Mataram Kingdom was able to



channel its resources towards the construction of monuments – some as symbols of its rulers’ divine powers and some as spiritual focal points. The Borobudur, Prambanan, Rorojonggrang, Mendut, Kalasan, Pawon and Sewu temples are among the structures built by the Mataram kings. Mataram grew to become a centre for Buddhist studies, led by Sanskrit-literate priests.

Continuous sedimentation along Pragota and the volcanic eruption of Mount Merapi around 1000 CE forced Mataram’s ruler, King Sindok, to move the centre of his government to East Java, at the estuary of the Brantas River, after which the kingdom slowly disappeared.

It wasn’t until the arrival of Admiral Zheng He with his treasure fleet of 62 ships, 225 vessels and 27,550 sailors in 1406 that detailed descriptions of the area reappear in the records. Tasked with expanding China’s trading network on behalf of the Ming court, Zheng He carried out seven expeditions between 1405 and 1433, visiting more than 37 kingdoms, including Palembang,

▲ A giant statue of a *dvarapala* guarding Candi Sewu, with Mount Merapi in the background. Candi Sewu is an 8th-century Mahayana Buddhist temple located in Yogyakarta. It is believed to have been built under the rule of Rakai Panangaran, who reigned over the Ancient Mataram Kingdom between 746 and 784 CE.

Banten, Cirebon and Gresik. Six of his expeditions stopped at Java, bringing in a varied crew of astronomers, officials, map-makers, traditional healers, preachers and ethnographers, among others.

Though intertwined with myths and legends, it is believed that while sailing along the north coast of Java, Zheng He's fleet anchored at Pragota after several of the crew fell ill. Among them was the Admiral's deputy, Wang Jing Hong. While at Pragota, Zheng He, a Muslim, performed his prayers in a small cave on a rocky hillside. After 10 days, the fleet resumed its journey, leaving behind Wang and ten servants to recover. These Chinese Muslims decided to settle in the area, farming, trading and preaching Islam to the locals.

In 1411 the Admiral's fleet stopped by Pragota for repairs. This time, Zheng He established a mosque near the cave where he had prayed. An image of him was placed in the mosque much later, incidentally turning it into a temple-like centre for the local Buddhists, Taoists and Confucianists. Known today as Sam Po Kong (Sanbao Dong) or the Gedung Batu Temple, it remains a popular worship destination for Javanese Muslims and Chinese Buddhists alike. Zheng He's visit is also memorialised in the Chinese name for Semarang, Sanbao Long, which comes from his informal name, Sanbao.

In the 15th century, the group of Chinese Muslims that had settled in Java emerged as the driving force in the Islamisation of Javanese society at large. Jin Bun (also known as Raden Patah/Sunan Kota) – a Sino-Javanese said to be the son of King Kertabhumi,



▲◀ Sam Po Kong Temple, originally built as a mosque, commemorates Admiral Zheng He's voyage to Java. A large *bedug* drum suspended at the side of the temple was used in the past to summon Muslims to prayer. The shrine was renovated in 1879 by the Chinese-born tycoon Oei Tjie Sien.

Majapahit's last ruler, and his Peranakan Chinese concubine – was instructed by his mentor and father-in-law, Bong Swi Hoo (Raden Rahmat/Sunan Ngampel), to build a Javanese Muslim community to replace the declining Chinese Muslim group. Jin Bun founded the Kingdom of Demak in 1475, and in 1477 he captured Pragota. He waged a war against his father's kingdom, attacking its centre in Mojokerto in 1478 and 1517. As described in Javanese chronicles, the Sudarma Wisuta War ("war between father and son") ended with the collapse of Majapahit, marking a large social

transition from Hinduism-Buddhism to Islam among the Javanese.

The Kingdom of Demak was the most powerful early Muslim kingdom in Java, profiting from Mataram's strategic harbours and agricultural richness. The Demak rulers adopted "Sultan" as their titles in the 1520s.

Pragota became the kingdom's main harbor town. A new mosque was built in 1478 in gratitude for Jin Bun's victory and to substitute the one that had been converted as the Sam Po Kong Temple earlier. The abandoned dockyard was redeveloped. Adopting the construction of Acehnese ships, large, high-speed *jong* were built, and Demak was able to expand its maritime influence, even launching expeditions in 1546 to gain direct control of the Moluccas spice trade. The ship-builders of Pragota, comprising mostly non-Muslim Chinese, were known for their quality work.

There isn't a specific date when Pragota's name was changed, but it is noted that by the time the Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires visited between 1512 and 1515, the area was already known as Semarang, which he referred to as "Camaram".

The rice trade remained the Demak Mataram's primary source of income, mainly conducted through the port of Jepara. Its biggest customer was Melaka, a highly populated entrepôt on the Malay Peninsula. However, the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511 was a turning point for all its trade partners and allies. In 1512, the Demak Sultan sent naval forces to capture Melaka. Of the 100 vessels sent, only seven or

eight returned. Another attempt, in 1521, was equally unsuccessful.

By the middle of the century, a civil war had broken out among the grandchildren of Jin Bun. Semarang was burnt to the ground, except for its Sam Po Kong Temple and mosque. Jin Bun's Demak dynasty ended when the Mataram region was taken over by the Kingdom of Pajang, led by Sultan Hadiwijaya (Jaya Tingkir), who established his government at Kotagede.

Sultan Hadiwijaya noticed the growth and potential of Semarang under the leadership of the town's chief, Pandan Arang II, son of Pangeran Made Pandan Arang. The sultan announced the town as an official

▼ The ships built in Pragota may have been similar to this *jong* (sailing ship) drawn by J.H. van Linschoten in 1596. The blue flag featuring crescent moons suggests that the vessel hailed from an Islamic sultanate in Indonesia.





district (*kabupaten*) on 2 May 1547. Until today, this is celebrated as the day of Semarang's founding.

The town of Semarang was laid out according to spatial principles similar to other Javanese towns – addressing the sea through a north-south axis. The two principal areas were the seaport, located at the mouth of Semarang River, and an administration area known as the Kanjengan. At the Kanjengan were the government offices, palace and mosque, centred around the *alun-alun*, a traditional public square. Shophouses sprang up along the road that connected these two hubs. Jalan Layur, as it is known today, was at one time dominated by Arab and Chinese traders. Behind this thoroughfare were settlements established by merchant communities from India, the Malay Peninsula, Cirebon and Banjar.

By the end of the 16th century, Dutch interest in direct trade with the Far East had increased. Expanding their maritime explorations, they launched their first voyage to Asia in 1595, led by Cornelis de Houtman. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; VOC) received its charter and sought to establish its own commercial monopoly over indigenous Asian traders in the region, gaining control of Batavia in 1619. The VOC depended on Mataram to supply food and timber to construct their new city.

Mataram's territory was greatly expanded under the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo (1613–46) through extensive military conquest in most of central and eastern Java, as well as Madura, southern Sumatra and Borneo. But Melaka continued to elude Mataram's

◀ Semarang's *alun-alun*, before 1880s. In 1860, a portion of the *alun-alun* was marked by rows of johar trees, forming a traditional marketplace, which was dubbed Pasar Johar (Johar Market).

◀ Arab and Chinese shophouses along Pekodjan Street, circa 1915.





▲ In this Javanese painting by Tirta of Gresik, Sultan Amangkurat II of Mataram (in the upper right) watches as his warlord Untung Surapati fights Captain Francois Tack of the VOC, circa 1684.

grasp. The old entrepôt instead came under Dutch control in 1641, and the VOC would later obstruct Java's rice export traffic to Melaka. Mataram's other major export destination was the Moluccas, but here, too, their supply chain had to go through the Dutch.

In the face of financial woes, Sultan Amangkurat I (r. 1646–77) was challenged by a rebellion in 1674 led by a Madurese prince, Trunajaya, and his Makassar ally. They were initially successful, taking over Surabaya and capturing the north coast of Java. In search of support, Mataram formed an alliance with the VOC in March 1677. His successor, Amangkurat II, renewed this alliance, promising the VOC \$310,000 Spanish Reals and about 5,000 metric tons of rice to compensate their campaigns on Mataram's behalf. Although Amangkurat II was able to defeat Trunajaya, his kingdom was left with a heavy debt as their treasury, which the Sultan had hoped to recover from Trunajaya, was looted by the VOC and Mataram's soldiers. Unable to pay up, Amangkurat II ceded Semarang to the Dutch in 1682. On top of this, he awarded the VOC a monopoly on the import of textiles and opium into Mataram and the purchase of sugar



from the Sultan. On 5 October 1705, Semarang was signed off officially as the VOC's territory in exchange for erasing the kingdom's entire debt.

The VOC turned Semarang into one of the most important trading centres in Java, moving the port to a more strategic and profitable area in Tanjung Mas. To defend against attacks, they built a fort along the riverbank known as De Vijfhoek (five-cornered

▲ Map of Semarang, showing the pentagonal Dutch fortress known as De Vijfhoek, which controlled Semarang's access to the sea.



▲ Blenduk Church, first established in 1753 and rebuilt in 1787. *Blenduk* means “dome” in Javanese.

bastion). Within the town was a segregated Dutch quarter, which was planned around Blenduk Church, the oldest Protestant church in Central Java. Similar to European towns, Semarang had a square, a town hall, wide boulevards and villas. Intermarriages between the Dutch and locals produced a large Eurasian community.

The 1,000-kilometre-long Great Post Road was built in 1808 to connect all the towns on the northern coast of Central and East Java, positioning Semarang as Java’s trade centre for agricultural production. Semarang’s fort was torn down in 1824 to accommodate steam locomotive railways, transforming the area into a modern commercial quarter. It was the first town in Asia to apply its own steam locomotive technology. The Java War (1825–30) temporarily halted the development of modern Semarang. A new harbour canal (Kali Baroe) was built in 1872–75, enabling boats to sail into the city centre. Semarang flourished as an entrepôt, becoming the third-largest harbour in Java. Under the Dutch its boundaries were expanded three times – in 1886, 1894 and 1902. ♦



◀ Semarang's Kampung Melayu in 1915. The Masjid Layur Mosque was built in the 1800s; its minaret served as a lighthouse to guide seafarers.

▼ Semarang's Kali Baroe canal, also known as Nieuwe Havenkanaal, c. 1900. Built between 1870 and 1872, the harbour canal allowed ships and boats to sail into the city centre.





# NORTHERN BALI

*Innovative Islanders*



Pura Ulun Danu Beratan, a water temple on the island of Bali, with its 11-tiered Meru tower, is dedicated to the Hindu god Siva and local goddess Dewi Danu. It was constructed in 1634 by the Mengwi royal dynasty. A prince of this dynasty still makes an annual pilgrimage to the temple.

© Cephoto, Uwe Aranas



▲ A paper boat floated in Odisha during Kartik Purnima. Today the Bali Yatra festival has become associated with the week-long trade fair in Cuttack, Odisha. However, the full moon is still celebrated by floating lighted miniature boats. While this festival supplicated the merchants' safe journey to Southeast Asia at the onset of the northeast monsoon, the Khudurukuni Osha festival celebrated their return with the southwest monsoon around September, and it too continues to be practised.

THE ANNUAL BALI YATRA (“Voyage to Bali”) festival in Odisha, India, sees gaily painted miniature boats, made of paper or dried banana tree bark and carrying oil lamps or candles, floating on the rivers, lakes and seashores. This unique festival, with roots that go back more than 2,000 years, is celebrated on Kartik Purnima, the day of the full moon in the month of Kartik (October/November). It marks the onset of the northeast monsoon, when merchants would leave Kalinga (as Odisha was formerly known) to make the voyage across the Bay of Bengal to Bali and other islands of the Indonesian archipelago. In those days, the festival supplicated the merchants' safe journey; today it continues to be celebrated in commemoration of Kalinga's maritime heyday.

The intrepid mariners of Kalinga, on arriving at the island of Bali, would have docked at one of its two major ports, Sembiran and Pacung. Here, they would

have loaded their ships with cloves and nutmeg. These two coveted spices grew exclusively on the islands east of Bali – cloves on the Maluku islands, especially on Ternate and Tidore, and nutmeg on a small group of volcanic islands in the Banda Sea. The spices came to be in such great demand that in the 17th century, in an attempt to control the trade, the Dutch took control of these islands, massacring the Bandanese in the process.

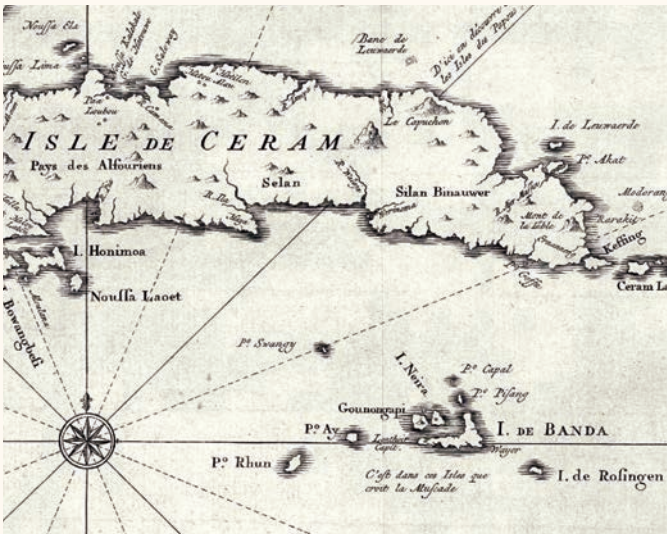
That these spices made their way to South Asia in early times is evidenced by the remains of a carbonised nutmeg dating to around 400–300 BCE found in eastern Uttar Pradesh and another piece dating to around 100–300 CE found at Sanghol in Punjab. As for cloves, the earliest known specimen, found at Mantai in Sri Lanka, has been dated to around 900–1100 CE; however, its earliest mention goes much further back, to

▼ Map of Bali, with relevant sites marked.





► Nutmeg picking on Banda Naira, an island of the Banda archipelago. Nutmeg only grew on ten small volcanic islands in this archipelago. In 1621, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Director-General of the Dutch East Indies, with the objective of turning the nutmeg trade into a Dutch monopoly, unleashed an operation against the Bandanese that saw 15,000 islanders either killed or enslaved. This has become known as the Banda Massacre. Many of the survivors took refuge on the nearby islands of Ai and Run, which were under British protection.



◄ This map shows the Banda archipelago, located south of Seram Island. The island of Run was under British control. They subsequently exchanged this island with the Dutch for Manhattan under the 1667 Treaty of Breda, signed after the Second Anglo-Dutch War. The Dutch now had full monopoly of the nutmeg trade, which only ended in 1769 when Pierre Poivre, a French horticulturist, managed to smuggle out some seedlings and replant them on Mauritius.

the 3rd century BCE, when the Han emperor required anyone addressing him to hold a clove in his mouth.

Surprisingly, in spite of the close trade relationship between Bali and South Asia, the only known mention of Bali in any Indian text is in the *Manjusrimulakalpa* (c. 800 CE), which discusses the languages of Bali and other islands of the Eastern seas.

### **Foreign Trade**

The sea off Bali's northern coast is deep, with sheltered bays, which allowed port-settlements such as Sembiran and Pacung to develop. Sembiran stretches from the coast up to the mountains, while Pacung lies on a narrow strip of land between the sea and the mountains. Archaeological excavations at both locations have yielded many foreign products, indicating that northern Bali was an important stopover within the maritime trading network that linked India with China. Traders from the region, especially Java and Sumatra, brought products such as tin and copper to Bali to be exchanged for spices. The Balinese ports were also able to entice traders from South Asia from as early as the first few centuries BCE.

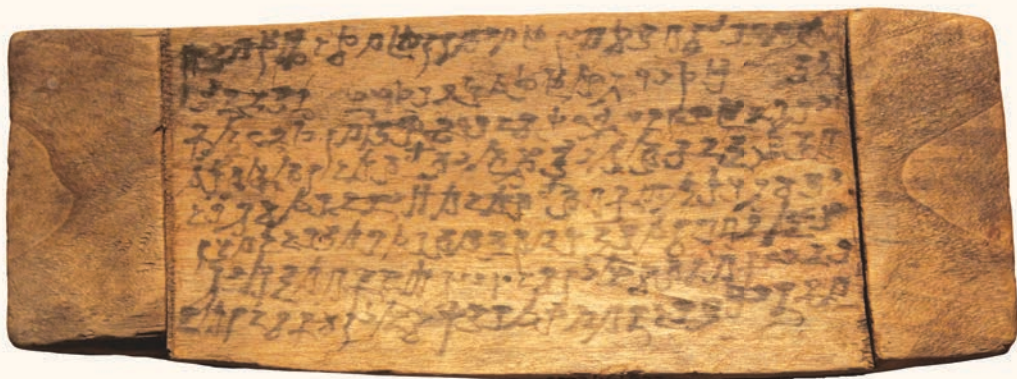
A human tooth found at Pacung, dated to between 340 BCE and 20 BCE, has been very revealing. The owner of the tooth consumed a terrestrial diet, in contrast with the typical Balinese diet of predominantly seafood. The hypothesis that the tooth belonged to a foreigner is supported by mitochondrial DNA analysis, which has revealed a northeast Indian ancestry. Indeed, a follow-up study on modern Balinese men suggests

genetic intermingling between South Asians and indigenous Balinese.

Along with the tooth, a large number of shards of Indian rouletted ware were found at the Pacung site. These distinctively decorated ceramics were possibly the earliest goods exchanged between South Asia and Southeast Asia. They have been found in many Southeast Asian sites – including Sumatra, Java, Bukit Tengku Lembu in Malaysia, and Vietnam – all dating to between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. The finds at Sembiran and Pacung, comprising mostly objects for daily use, constitute the largest collection of these ceramics found in Southeast Asia.

One of the shards bears an inscription of three characters in the Kharosthi script. This script was used in northwest India and Central Asia between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. The users of Kharosthi were horse and corn traders from northwest India. They exported horses from Central Asia

▼ An example of Kharosthi script, inscribed on a piece of wood (c. 3rd century), housed at the National Museum of India. This script developed in what is today northern Pakistan. Many of the artefacts bearing this script found in Southeast Asia can be linked to the horse trade – horses from Central Asia were shipped to Southeast Asia by Indian merchants via Bengal.





to Southeast Asia via Bengal. The discovery of this script in Bali suggests that these horses were imported into Bali. It is known that by the 10th century CE, the Balinese were breeding their own horses.

Contemporaneous with its contacts with South Asia, Bali was also in contact with mainland Southeast Asia, in particular Vietnam, and China. Vietnam's biggest influence on Bali was in bronze casting technology. This technology was adopted by the Balinese to produce their own bronze goods. Direct contact with China started in the 5th century. According to Chinese records, a polity named Poli, believed to be Bali, sent five trade missions to China between 473 and 630 CE. That Bali was sending trade missions on its own showed that it was an independent polity. Its exports to China during this period were mainly sea products such as tortoise shells, purple cowries and coral.

▲ Rice terraces in Bali. Rice produced in Bali's fertile hinterland was traded for spices in the Banda and Maluku islands. Bali's rice terraces are irrigated by *subak*, a traditional co-operative water management system that developed in the 9th century, essentially an association of farmers. The *subak* system is tied to Bali's Tri Hita Karana philosophy, which promotes harmony between the environment, the heavens and humans. Central to the system are water temples, which conduct the rituals carried out during irrigation and planting.

► A piece of cloth from Bali (c. 19th century). The earliest known mention of cotton weaving on Bali comes from an entry in the *Annals of the Tang Dynasty*. Sembiran is still known today for its cotton weaving. The *kain sembiran* (Sembiran cloth) is worn around the hips during festivals and ceremonial occasions. It has narrow stripes with a decorative panel in the centre. This panel would have either geometrical or floral motifs woven using coarse gold thread.



## Local Innovation

The enterprising Balinese started manufacturing their own products in imitation of the foreign goods they imported. These included imitations of Indian pottery and Han-style paddle-impressed pottery. These locally manufactured goods – generally of lower quality but less expensive than the originals – would have been traded by the Balinese for spices, rice and other agricultural produce.

The main Balinese-made product exchanged for spices was cotton cloth. Cotton cloth was initially imported from India, but Bali soon developed its own weaving industry. The Dutch recorded in the 17th century that merchants from Tuban in East Java took pepper to Bali and exchanged this for cotton cloth. Balinese cloth even found its way to China, as recorded in the Tang Dynasty annals. Sir Stamford Raffles, in his *History of Java*, praised Bali for producing “cotton of the most excellent quality and in great abundance”.

The cotton cloth industry was highly regulated, with villages assigned specific roles in the production process. For instance, while some villages could only trade in raw cotton, others were given the right to spin and weave.

The Balinese also adapted Vietnamese bronze casting technology to produce their own bronze drums. Two moulds discovered at Sembiran – one for casting bronze drums and the other for socketed bronze axes – indicate that the bronze products were cast using the same lost-wax technique as in the Vietnamese Dong Son tradition. However, the Pejeng drums were cast

▼ A Neolithic stone sarcophagus unearthed in Bali, displayed at the Bali Museum, Denpasar. Two large stone sarcophagi were found at Manuaba village in central Bali (east of Tegalalang), where four stone moulds for casting Pejeng-type bronze drums were also found. The megalithic culture in the Indonesian islands had assimilated Dong Son traditions into their culture – the sarcophagi and moulds offer evidence of this connection. Manuaba village is one of two locations where moulds for Pejeng drums have been found; the other is Sembiran.



► Drawing of a face on the mantle of the drum known as the Moon of Pejeng. A pair of face motifs is a common decoration on the upper mantles of Pejeng drums.



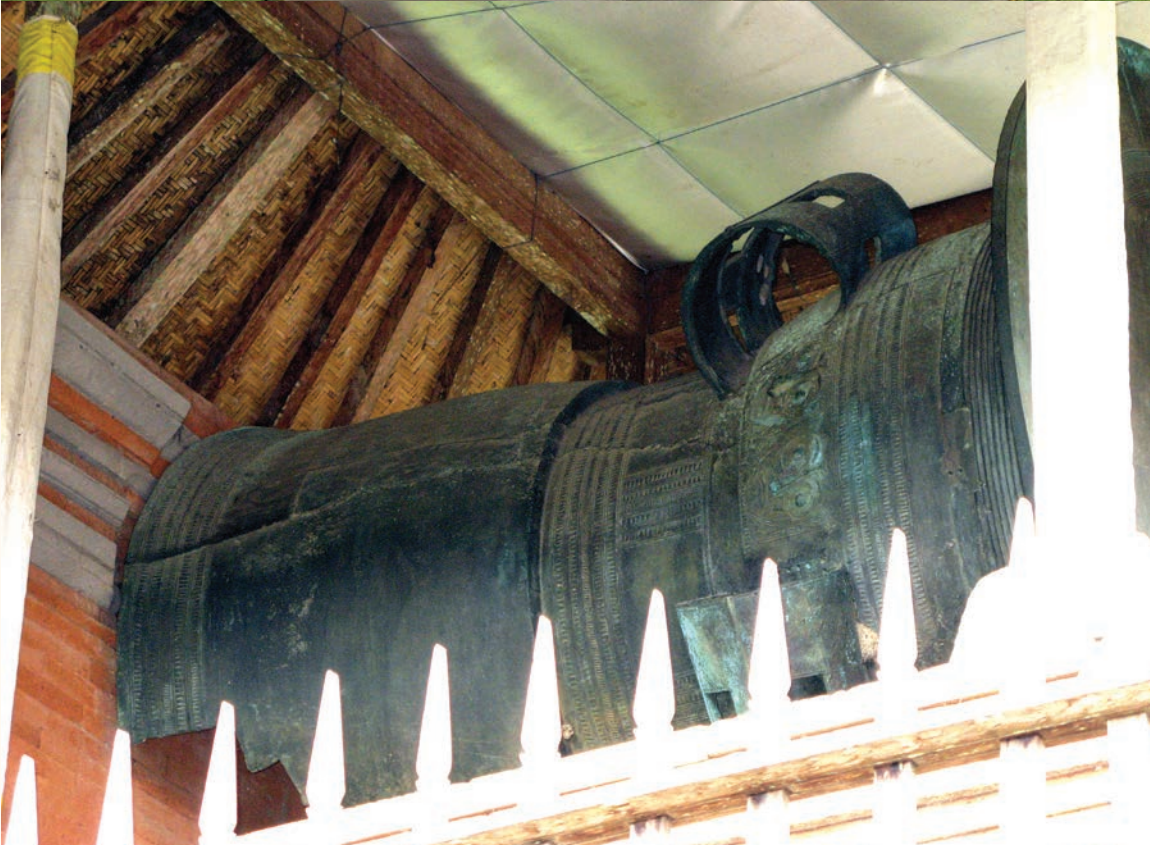
► Pura Penataran Sasih, a Hindu temple founded in 1266, has become home to the Moon of Pejeng. The entrance to the temple complex is through a split gate (*candi bentar*), a common architectural feature in Bali, east Java and Lombok.

► The Moon of Pejeng. Measuring 186.5 cm in height, this is the largest Pejeng drum found to date. A pair of face motifs decorate its upper mantle; on the tympanum, interlocked spiral motifs circle the central star. Legend has it that the drum is the wheel and axle of the moon's carriage; it fell to earth after breaking off and hence the name "Moon of Pejeng".

in separate sections and then joined, unlike Dong Son drums, which were cast in one piece. As the Sembiran moulds were found in association with Indian rouletted ware, it can be assumed that bronze casting in Sembiran started as early as in the 1st century CE, if not earlier.

The locally cast drums are today known as Pejeng drums, after the name of the village where the first (and largest) of these drums came to the notice of Europeans in the 17th century. This particular drum, the "Moon of Pejeng", is currently kept at Pura Penataran Sasih, a Balinese-Hindu temple established in the 13th century, in Pejeng. Although Pejeng drums derive from the Dong Son bronze casting tradition, their shape departs from the typical mushroom-shaped Dong Son drums, adopting instead a more elongated hourglass form. Unique to Pejeng drums are the face motifs on the upper mantle.

Apart from the Sembiran finds, stone moulds for casting bronze drums have also been found in Manuaba, in central Bali, indicating a widespread industry.







▲ Spear dancers during a *baris* dance performance at the temple complex of Pura Ulun Danu Batur, (c. 1910–20). This temple is located close to the Mount Batur caldera and participates in *subak* ritual ceremonies. During the last ceremony of the year, all the villages and cooperatives associated with the temple offer a portion of their harvest or products to the temple, e.g. Sembiran brings unprocessed raw cotton. This is a continuation of an ancient relationship between Sembiran and the mountainous Batur region.

Tin and copper needed for bronze casting are not found in Bali and would have been imported via Java.

### **A Trade-Based Polity**

East of Sembiran lies the village of Julah, another of Bali's ancient settlements. A lot of what is known about Julah's history comes from the discovery of 20 inscribed copper plates in Sembiran in the second half of the 19th century. Dating back more than a thousand years, the Sembiran Inscriptions are regarded by the locals as *pratima* – sacred icons with spiritual functions. Ten of the plates are kept at Sembiran, the other ten at Julah.

The copper plates, each measuring generally 30 cm by 11 cm, contain inscriptions of six royal edicts issued to the villagers of Julah, written in Old Balinese and Old Javanese, with a smattering of Sanskrit words. The



edicts were issued by various kings between the 10th and 12th centuries, the earliest being Sri Ugrasena, who ruled between 915 and 942 CE. The inscriptions point to Julah being part of a *mandala* comprising seven states, which possibly encompassed Sembiran and Pacung as well. The king did not reside at these coastal ports, however, but further inland, likely near the Batur caldera.

Julah, according to the inscriptions, was a prosperous port with a complex, stratified society. Foreign traders converged on Julah's thriving marketplace, giving the port-settlement a cosmopolitan flavour, but were housed within a specific area. There were port officials responsible for inspecting cargo on ships and ensuring that the needs of the foreign *banigrama* (merchant guilds) were taken care of. Julah's residents were well-supplied with rice and other agricultural produce from the surrounding areas. Among its residents were priests and hermits from various faiths, including Shaivites and Buddhists. The king controlled the activities that could be performed in each village. Apart from trading, Julah was allowed to manufacture certain products, including crowbars and small weapons.

Julah was a fortified village (*kuta*) as its prosperity invited attacks from pirates. During these attacks,

▲ The Ramayana epic is popular throughout Southeast Asia and recounted especially in *wayang kulit* performances. This drawing is one of a series depicting the epic in Balinese style. In the drawing, Jatayu, a divine bird, is seen kneeling in front of Rama and Lakshmana to convey the bad news of Sita's abduction.



▲ A statue of Vishnu, seated on Garuda, installed at Candi Belahan in east Java in the 11th century. This statue is said to be a posthumous image of King Airlangga, who viewed himself as the reincarnation of Vishnu. Airlangga was a Balinese prince who became a ruler in east Java in the 11th century; his capital was at Kahuripan, on the banks of the Brantas River. His name translates to "jumping water", alluding to his crossing the strait from Bali to Java.



Julah's inhabitants retreated to Upit (present-day Batu Gamber), located inland and on higher ground. Due to the importance of Julah, and the need to maintain its reputation as an international port, one inscription specifies that the king ordered the residents to return to Julah and safeguard its port, exempting them from taxes in return. However, pirate attacks must have gotten worse, for in the second half of the 12th century the king began stationing troops in Julah.

In the 13th century, the royal seat moved south, but international trading at the northern ports continued until the 16th century, as evidenced by the discovery of Chinese ceramics from the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties. In the 17th century, Bali was taken over by the Dutch. They developed Singaraja, located west of Julah, into a port for steamships, diminishing the importance of the ancient northern settlements. ♦

▲ Goa Gajah, located near Ubud, is dated to the late 11th century based on writings on the entrance of the artificial cave. The face over the entrance is believed to be that of Rangda, a witch seen variously as fearsome and protective. She is said to be the reincarnation of Calon Arang, a witch who caused a lot of damage in Java during the reign of Airlangga. Discovery of a Pejeng-type drum at nearby Manikliyu highlights the significance of this area.





Mount Batur and Lake Batur, a crater lake. This is an active volcano in north Bali. The kings mentioned in the Julah inscriptions are believed to have resided in this area.

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## APPENDIX: OTHER SIGNIFICANT PORTS

THIS SECTION DESCRIBES a further 32 ports that are significant in the trade history of maritime Southeast Asia, selected for their varied products and history.

### **Pathein/Bassein (Myanmar)**

Lying on the Pathein River, this was an important port of call in the Indian Ocean trade during the 2nd millennium. It was one of the

three administrative centres of the Hamsavati Kingdom (the other two were Bago and Mottama). In the 15th century, it became associated with the production of high-quality ceramics. Ships coming from Bengal made landfall here, leading Filipe de Brito, governor of Bago from 1599, to blockade the coast and force ships to dock at Thanlyin instead. Coupled with erosion at its delta, trade at Pathein



Pathein, with Shwemokhtaw Pagoda in the background

languished. In 1826, the British built a fort and stationed a garrison; they called the city “Bassein”.

### **Yangon/Rangoon/Dagon (Myanmar)**

Dagon was a Mon village famous for the Shwedagon Pagoda, which houses hair relics of Gautama Buddha. In 1755, Alaungpaya (r. 1752–60), founder of the Konbaung dynasty, captured Dagon and made it the capital of Lower Myanmar, replacing Bago. He changed Dagon’s name to Yangon, “End of Strife”. He constructed a stockade from which a road led to the Shwedagon. City officials and people of importance lived in this stockade while the rest lived outside. The British captured the city (which they called Rangoon) in 1852 and made it the capital of their newly annexed territory of Lower Myanmar. It remained the capital of independent Myanmar until 2005, when Nay Pyi Taw, a newly created city located 300 kilometres to the north of Yangon, became the nation’s new capital.

### **Thaton (Myanmar)**

Thaton developed during the middle of the first millennium and was one



◀ Martaban jar

of the earliest urban centres in Lower Myanmar. Mon chronicles point to Thaton as the initial location of Suvarnabhumi, the legendary “Land of Gold”. Thaton was a large walled city, rectangular in plan. The palace and the main stupa, Shwe Sar Yan Pagoda, were at the southern end, surrounded by Buddhist monasteries. Thaton used to be known as Sudhammavati, City of Good Law. A Mon tradition relates that in the 5th century, Buddhaghosa, a Theravada Buddhist scholar, brought from Sri Lanka the Pali canon on Theravada Buddhism, known as *Tipitaka*. It was purportedly to steal this canon that King Anawrahta from Bagan conquered Thaton in 1057.

### **Mottama/Martaban (Myanmar)**

Mottama developed in the second millennium and was known for its large storage jars known as Martaban jars. Being poor conductors of heat,





The Three Pagoda Pass, on the transpeninsular route across the Malay Peninsula

these jars were ideal for carrying fresh water, wine, oil, preserved vegetables and grains onboard ships. Although a sandbar and violent tides made it difficult to navigate to this port, pilots could be hired at the bar to take a boat in safely. These experienced pilots knew exactly when to make the approach, avoiding both high tide and low tide. There was a strong trade relationship between Mottama and Melaka as well as with Pasai. Tomé Pires, writing between 1512 and 1515, noted that merchants from this region were a great favourite of the Malay ladies in Melaka. Traders from Martaban took lac, musk, precious

stones, silver, onions, garlic and butter to Melaka, where they traded these for ornaments, tin, cloves, mace and nutmeg; with Pasai, they traded these for pepper.

#### **Dawei/Tavoy (Myanmar)**

While Dawei's chronicles date the royal lineage back to 754 CE, the city developed as an important port in the 2nd millennium. Dawei – or Tavoy, under the British – lies on the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Peninsula, an important location for making landfall from the Bay of Bengal. It was furthermore the starting point of a transpeninsular route across to

the Gulf of Thailand. This route took travellers through the Three Pagoda Pass (a pass in the Tenasserim Hills marked by three small pagodas) and by a network of rivers to Ratchaburi in Thailand. Its strategic location invited conquests from both northern Myanmar and Thailand and it changed hands between the two powers a number of times.



▲ Glazed terracotta plaque depicting the daughters of the demon Mara (c. 1460), southern Myanmar

### **Myeik/Mergui (Myanmar)**

Lying on the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Peninsula, this 2nd-millennium port had the advantage of a harbour that ships could approach with relative ease compared to the trickier harbours offered by other port-settlements along the Malay Peninsula. Additionally, peaks over 400 metres helped navigators approach the port more safely. Local products from Mergui entering the trade markets included pearls, birds' nests and ambergris (a substance obtained from sperm whales and used in perfumery).

### **Phu Khao Thong (Ranong Province, Thailand)**

Phu Khao Thong shows evidence of a transpeninsular route to Khao Sam Kaeo from as early as the 3rd century BCE, based on similarities in their imported products (Indian rouletted wares, knobbed wares and fine wares). Fragments of a Chinese mirror dated to the Eastern Han (25–220 CE) in nearby Bang Kluai Nok support this link. A pottery shard inscribed in Tamil-Brahmi dated to the 2nd century CE is the oldest Tamil inscription in Southeast Asia.



► Beads from Java found in a royal tomb in Korea. Engraved human faces can be seen on the central bead (see enlarged detail), reminiscent of the mosaic glass beads found at Khuan Lukpad, Thailand.

There is also evidence of a local glass and stone-working industry. Indirect trading links to the Western world are shown through intaglios and pendants reminiscent of those from Rome as well as Middle Eastern turquoise-glazed ware.

### **Takuapa (Phang-nga Province, Thailand)**

Takuapa lies close to the Ten Degree Channel between the Andaman and Nicobar islands, a direct sea route between southern India and the northern Malay Peninsula. Landing at Takuapa, traders could take a transpeninsular route to Chaiya and Laem Pho on the east coast of the peninsula. This link is strengthened by similar finds of Middle Eastern glass cups and bowls, Tang-period ceramics and Indian glass and stone beads.

Finds similar to those at Takuapa were also made at Ko Kho Khao, an island near the mouth of the Takuapa River. Both locations were part of a busy cosmopolitan entrepôt. A 9th-century Tamil inscription found at Takuapa is the first known indication of the presence of Tamil merchant guilds (Manigramam) in Southeast Asia.

### **Khuan Lukpad/Khlong Thom (Krabi Province, Thailand)**

An Indo-Pacific bead-making site between the 1st and 6th centuries CE. An interesting discovery here consisted of 1st- and 2nd-century glass mosaic beads with human faces. Also found here were carnelian beads shaped into crouching tigers similar to Chinese miniature figurines. A Tamil-Brahmi inscription of the 3rd century CE on a touchstone (used

for testing gold) is the second-oldest Tamil inscription in SEA. A number of seals were also found, one bearing an inscription in Sanskrit, *data vayam* (“this item is on offer”). A large number of Mediterranean items, especially carnelian seals with Greek and Roman motifs, were excavated; a stone mould for making bronze pendants indicates that some of these may have been produced locally.

### **Langkawi/Lancachui (Peninsular Malaysia)**

A large producer of pepper, Langkawi was referred to by the Acehnese as Pulau Lada or “Pepper Island”. Its residents moved to Kedah after an attack by Aceh in 1618–19, returning periodically to harvest pepper. Its population of 100 would increase to 700 during the harvest season. The population hit a high of 3,000 right before an attack by Siam in 1821–22, after which the people relocated to Seberang Perai. Langkawi was then often used as a military base by those fighting against Siamese presence in Kedah and was eventually surrendered to the British upon the signing of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty in 1909.



◀ Jalong statue from Kinta Valley, Perak, speculated to be from the Gangga Negara kingdom.

### **Beruas (Peninsular Malaysia)**

Beruas is associated with the kingdoms of Gangga Negara and Manjung, a predecessor of the Perak kingdom today. Believed to

be the centre of Gangga Negara before it was attacked by the Chola Kingdom in 1025, it was subsequently conquered by Melaka in the 15th century, and by the 16th century it was an important trading post with an ample supply of paddy.

**Klang/Clang/Clan/Callang/Calling  
(Peninsular Malaysia)**

Archaeological evidence suggests the existence of settlements in Klang in the 2nd century. Rich in alluvial tin, the region was part of the Melaka Empire between the 15th and 16th



Mangrove forests around Johor and Singapore were home to the Orang Seletar, a sub-group of the Orang Suku Laut. They exploited island and sea resources for both personal use and trade.



▲◀ Containers for betel ingredients from the Malay Peninsula (above) and Myanmar (left).

centuries, and later came under the control of the Johor-Riau Sultanate after Melaka's fall. It became a territory of Selangor Kingdom after 1766. The Klang War from 1867 to 1874 over the monopoly of tin resulted in official British intervention in Selangor.

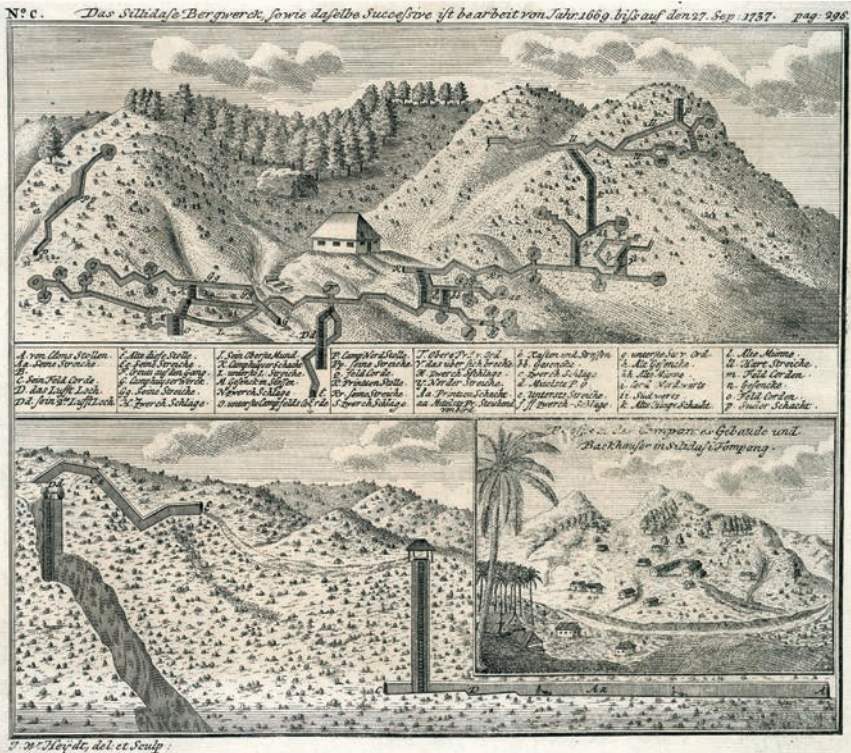
#### **Johor Lama (Peninsular Malaysia)**

Located 20 kilometres away from the mouth of the Johor River, Johor Lama – also known as Kota Batu – was at one time the capital of the Johor Sultanate, successor of the Melaka Sultanate. Its ample freshwater supply made it a strategic port. It served as Johor's capital twice – during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah I from 1540 to 1564 and Sultan Ali Jalla Abdul Jalil Shah II from 1574 to 1587. In 1587, the Johor Sultanate lost a 3-week-long battle to the Portuguese, who captured Kota Batu, confiscated

all military weapons and razed the fort to the ground.

#### **Tanjung Pinang (Riau Islands)**

A trading post located in the south of Pulau Bintan, Tanjung Pinang is named after the areca palm (whose nut is a primary ingredient of betel), known in Malay as *pinang*. Its existence can be traced to the 3rd century. In the 15th century, its main commodities were gambier, copra, spice, pepper and tin. Tanjung Pinang became the centre of the Johor-Riau Kingdom in the 17th century. The Linggi Treaty, signed in 1758, restricted the sale of tin to VOC at a fixed price. However, this restriction was not adhered to by the Malay-Riau rulers, prompting an attack by the Dutch on 6 January 1784. The first Dutch Resident was installed at Tanjung Pinang in 1911.



▲ Gold mining in Sumatra

### Pedir/Pidie (Sumatra)

An independent kingdom located in the north of Sumatra, rich in sandalwood, limestone, pepper and cloves. It also exported silk, benzoin and gold from its interior. A prosperous port in the 16th century, Pedir exported 6,000–10,000 *bahar* of pepper a year. It was always in competition with Pasai, before they were both conquered by the Aceh Sultanate in the 1520s.

### Perlak/Peureulak/Ferlec (Sumatra)

Perlak was abundant with a type of timber, *peureulak*, which was highly sought after for shipbuilding; this

timber was one of its main exports.

Traders who stopped by relied on the high-quality Perlak timber to repair their ships. The Perlak Kingdom was ruled by harbour kings who were also pepper merchants. It was successful at resisting several attacks by Srivijaya before uniting with Pasai to form the Samudra-Pasai Kingdom. Sultan Makhdum Alauddin Malik Abdul Aziz Syah Johan (d. 1292) is recorded as the last Sultan of Perlak.

### Samudra-Pasai/Pasai/Pase (Sumatra)

Better known as Pasai, its hinterland produced gold, camphor and pepper.

Pasai controlled Sumatra's pepper exports – reported by Tomé Pires to be 8,000–10,000 *bahar* a year. The Samudra-Pasai kingdom was governed by the ruler of the port, whose authority did not extend further inland. Pasai merchants traded with inland communities directly, travelling frequently between Aru and Barus, through areas inhabited by cannibals. The Javanese came to trade rice and

spices for Pasai's pepper, which they then sold to the Chinese. Pasai fell to Majapahit in the 14th century; its last ruler was Ratu Nihrasiyah Rawangsa Khadiyu (r. 1400–28). The Samudra-Pasai Kingdom was succeeded by the Aceh Sultanate.

#### **Banda Aceh (Sumatra)**

Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh, was formerly known as Kutaraja. In the



Graves of the sultans, Banda Aceh



*Sejarah Melayu*, Aceh is referred to as Lamuri. The Sultanate of Aceh was founded by Ali Mughayat Syah in the middle of the 15th century. In 1873, Aceh went on a 30-year military campaign against the Dutch over its monopoly of the pepper trade and its expansion of power.

#### **Aru/Haru/Karo (Sumatra)**

Aru is mentioned in the Javanese poem *Nagarakrtagama* (1365) as one of Majapahit's vassal states. Its economy was largely based on its slave market. According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, the ruler of Aru embraced Islam around the same time as the rulers of Lamuri and Perlak. Aru's attempt to capture Melaka in 1488 failed, although it managed to destroy Melaka's territory along the coast. After the fall of Melaka in 1511, Sultan Hussein from Aru visited Sultan Mahmud in Bintan and married princess Raja Puteh, a descendant of the Melaka Sultanate. Aru was constantly attacked and fought over by Johor and Aceh. In 1612, Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh succeeded in conquering the Kingdom of Aru.

#### **Kota Cina (Sumatra)**

Lying between Medan and Belawan, this site was active between the 11th and 14th centuries. Kota Cina's name means "Chinese town/stockade", implying a resident Chinese community. This appears to be corroborated by the large number of Chinese artefacts found at the site, including pottery from the late Northern Song and early Southern Song periods, gold foil scraps inscribed with Chinese characters, and hundreds of Chinese coins. However, the name "Kota Cina" itself was likely given during the historical

► Mangosteen-shaped gold filigree ornament from Sumatra





Tobacco plantation in Deli

period after villagers unearthed a large number of Chinese coins. Whether it was a Chinese settlement remains unclear. Interestingly, the Buddhist artefacts found are related to the Theravada branch of Buddhism, in contrast to the Mahayana branch practised by the other Sumatran communities during this time period. Theravada comes from Sri Lanka and a few Sri Lankan coins were also found at Kota Cina.

### **Barus (Sumatra)**

Ancient Indian texts referred to Sumatra as Karpuradvipa (“Island of Camphor”). India’s camphor supply came from Barus, an entrepôt where Chinese potsherds, West Asian

glass, South Asian glass beads and Persian Gulf pottery have been found in appreciable quantities. It also shows evidence of bronze-working and locally made pottery. Sumatran gold was exported from Barus in the 16th century. The name appears in Ptolemy’s writings (2nd century CE) and in an 8th-century Chinese text that names it as one of the two capitals of Srivijaya. The Arabs and Persians knew it as Fansur/Pancur. A Tamil inscription dated to 1088 points to a foreign enclave of the Ainnurruvar merchant guild at Lubok Tua in Barus.

### **Deli (Sumatra)**

Located in northern Sumatra, Deli was the successor to the Aru Kingdom.



Sri Indrapura Palace, Siak



Minangkabau women in songket attire, Sumatra

Its main exports were rice, horses, slaves and forest products, which were traded for textiles, weapons, opium and ceramics. Conquered by Aceh in 1539, Deli formed a trade alliance with the VOC in Melaka and Batavia. In the 1800s, Deli prospered on the back of its tobacco industry.

### **Siak (Sumatra)**

Located on the east coast of Sumatra, Siak was a principal port of the Minangkabau that thrived in the 15th century. The Siak River connected to the Minangkabau Highlands, which were rich with gold. The river was the main route used by the Minangkabau to get to Melaka, to whom the Siak ruler paid tribute in the form of gold.

### **Batu Bara (Sumatra)**

According to folklore, Batu Bara was named after a huge stone that emitted red light at night. It was established by the Minangkabau and divided into a few districts – Lima Puluh, Tanah Datar, Lima Laras and Pesisir – each led by a Datuk. Tobacco and coffee plantations were opened in the 1800s. Batu Bara was also well known for its *songket* textile industry.



▲ Kota Kapur inscription, Bangka Island

### **Jambi (Sumatra)**

An important port-city from the 7th century, under the reign of Srivijaya, Jambi was the main stopover for traders travelling between China and India. It exported tortoise shells, wood resin, pearls, sandalwood, perfume and incense. In 1025, the Chola Kingdom of South India destroyed Jambi, Srivijaya and Palembang. In 1275, Jambi went into a decline after it was conquered by Singhasari's ruler, Kertanagara, as traders opted for Perlak, Samudra-Pasai and other east Javanese ports instead. It came under

the rule of Majapahit in the 14th century and the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th century.

**Bangka/Banka/Banca (Sumatra)**

Located in the east of Sumatra, Bangka was subordinate to the ruler of Jepara. Its name may derive from the Sanskrit word *vanga* which means “tin”, or *wangka*, a type of Chinese vessel. Bangka exported

forest products such as wood resin, sandalwood, dye, gutta percha, cotton and iron obtained from its hinterland. Malays from Palembang resided in Bangka from the 16th century onwards. The Dutch VOC opened tin mines on the island in 1710 and obtained a monopoly on tin in Bangka from the Sultan of Palembang in 1722. Tin-mining activities increased with the arrival of the Chinese.



Candi Kembar Batu, Muaro Jambi



Pinisi boats at Sunda Kelapa harbour, Jakarta

### **Sunda Kelapa (Java)**

Sunda Kelapa was the chief port of the Hindu Pajajaran Kingdom, trading in pepper, gold and rice in the 16th century, as well as slaves from the Maldives and Java. Foodstuff and locally manufactured coarse cloth were exported to Melaka and other destinations.

### **Demak (Java)**

Demak exported food supplies from its hinterland but was dependent on its ship supply trade with Melaka. It was the most important political centre of the Javanese maritime kingdom between the 15th and 16th centuries,

prospering under the rule of Sultan Trenggana (r. 1505–18, 1521–46). Its port was closed in the 16th century, replaced by Jepara, which had a better harbour.



▲ Demak Sultanate coin



▲ The pagoda-like Great Mosque of Jepara

### **Jepara (Java)**

Jepara was an important port, subordinate to Demak. Being located in a bay which could be entered by large ships made it highly attractive to traders plying between Java and the Moluccas. Jepara exported rice to Melaka and the Spice Islands. It became the main port of the Mataram Kingdom in the 17th century. Jepara's trade declined due to sanctions and attacks by the Dutch between 1618 and 1646.

### **Lasem (Java)**

Located between Tuban and Jepara, Lasem was blessed with a huge supply of teak from the forests of Rembang, making it a centre of the shipbuilding industry. It was a territory of Majapahit in the 14th century. In 1512, Alfonso de Albuquerque left

Melaka for Lasem and brought back with him 60 Javanese shipbuilders. Lasem was conquered by Mataram's Sultan Agung in 1616. The port began to decline towards the end of the 19th century.

### **Tuban (Java)**

Tuban's overseas trade record goes back to the 11th century. It was the port of departure for sea voyages to the Moluccas. In the 13th century, a Chinese expedition landed in a vain attempt to conquer the island. By the 15th century, it was an important port where numerous Chinese from Guangzhou and Quanzhou had settled. Its native ruler became a Muslim by the mid-15th century. Surrounded by a thick wall harbouring some 1,000 residents, Tuban was a court capital

which could not be easily captured. It was eventually defeated by Sultan Agung of Mataram in 1619.

**Gresik/Grise/Agasim (Java)**

A naturally sheltered harbour on the channel running between the island of Madura and mainland Java, Gresik flourished at the beginning of the 14th century. It traded spices, sandalwood and honey for textiles

and porcelain. Gresik was connected to the Bengawan Solo river, which linked it with the interior settlements of Central Java and East Java such as Pajang, Kartasura and Surakarta. In the 16th century, Surabaya's produce was traded via the port of Gresik. In 1764, Gresik was placed under the control of the VOC. ♦

▼ An early 18th-century Dutch map of Java





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## Trade routes, ancient ports and cultural commonalities — a voyage into Southeast Asia's surprising past

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