MALCOLM H. MURFETT
JOHN N. MIKSIC
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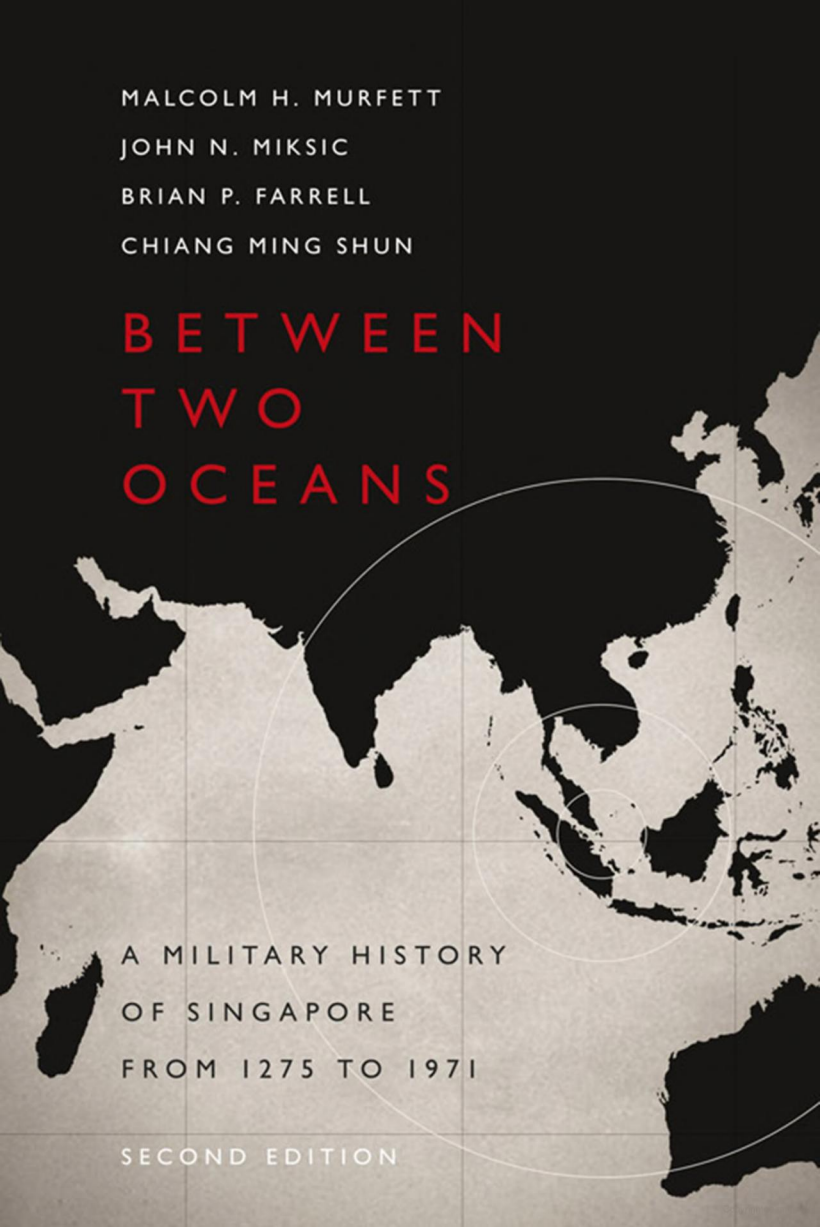
CHIANG MING SHUN

BETWEEN TWO OCEANS



A MILITARY HISTORY OF SINGAPORE FROM 1275 TO 1971

SECOND EDITION

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Published 2011 by Marshall Cavendish Editions
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International
1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196

First published 1999 by Oxford University Press

Other Marshall Cavendish Offices:
Marshall Cavendish International. PO Box 65829 London EC1P 1NY, UK • Marshall Cavendish Corporation. 99 White Plains Road, Tarrytown NY 10591-9001, USA • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd. 253 Asoke, 12th Flr, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

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National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Between Two Oceans : A military history of Singapore from 1275 to 1971 / Malcolm H. Murfett ... [et al.]. – Rev. ed. – Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2011.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN: 978-981-4302-88-3 (pbk.)
1. Singapore – History, Military. 2. Great Britain – Military policy – History.
I. Murfett, Malcolm H.
UA853
355.03305957 — dc22 OCN695935830

Printed in Singapore by Times Printers Pte Ltd

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PROLOGUE

THIS VOLUME EXPLORES the military history of the island of Singapore from approximately 1275 to 1971. In so doing it seeks to dispel several myths that over the course of time have become so entrenched and believable that they have been accepted by many people, often unreservedly, as fact. Because comparatively little is known of the early history of Singapore, the popular view appears to be that Sir Stamford Raffles was the first person to discover the geo-strategic importance of this little diamond-shaped island lying off the southern coast of the Malayan peninsula.

This assumption is well wide of the mark, as John Miksic, the noted regional archaeologist, reveals in the first chapters of this volume. Far from being a sleepy tropical island that escaped the attention of all but a few indigenous natives and isolated remnants of the Chinese diaspora, Singapore—in its various guises—was recognised as an important maritime location centuries before Raffles set foot on the banks of the Singapore River in 1819. By piecing together fragments of the historical record from an impressive range of sources, Professor Miksic has reached the conclusion that Singapore probably first assumed an importance in regional mercantile trade in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. His own archaeological excavations in a few selected sites near the river and on Fort Canning Hill in Singapore have tended to confirm this supposition. Although these excavations have unearthed a relatively small number of thirteenth-century pieces, they have revealed a much richer source of artifacts from the fourteenth century. *Prima facie*, therefore, this would appear to be consistent with the contention that Singapore (Temasik) was used as a

port for certain trading purposes in the thirteenth century and thereafter grew more populous and important. Miksic suggests that the precipitous fall in the fortunes of Temasik at the turn of the fifteenth century was inversely related to the rise of the Malayan port of Melaka. Although not abandoned entirely, Singapore continued to decline well beyond the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511, culminating in its own defeat at the hands of the Portuguese in 1613, when much, if not all, of the ancient settlement of Singapore was burned to the ground.

Singapore lurched on in an inferior position for another ninety years before the island was offered as a gift by the Sultan of Johore to a British sea captain who was visiting Johore on his way to China in 1703. Abdul Jalil's extraordinary offer may have been made as a convenient ploy to bring British power into the region and buttress his own faltering hold over his possessions in the area. Despite the sea captain's politely declining the Sultan's offer, news of its issue spread and was to have enormous influence 116 years later in 1819 when Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was looking to establish a settlement south of the Malayan peninsula for the purpose of protecting the expanding East India Company's trade routes between India and China. Although Raffles began his quest for the development of a British base south of the Melaka Straits by preferring Bangka (off Sumatra), Bintan, Karimun (both in the Riau archipelago), Sambas, and Pontianak (both on the west coast of Borneo), he eventually opted for Singapore and came ashore for the first time on 29 January 1819.

Of Singapore's post-1819 socio-economic and political history, much is known. Far less attention, however, has been given by the academic world—with some notable exceptions—to the military and geo-strategic aspects of the island's development. In this volume, the four authors concentrate their attention on this relatively neglected sphere of Singapore's history. Both John Miksic and Chiang Ming Shun show that British plans for the defence of the island passed through a series of phases in the nineteenth century—some enlightened, others not—but with the essential catalyst for action and effective preparedness being always the likelihood of attack by a superior regional power. In times when that morbid fear was high, defence plans took on much more impressive form than when that factor was removed. Regrettably, inconsistency and imperial arrogance reigned supreme in the days of *Pax Britannica* during the mid-nineteenth century.

By the time the First World War broke out in Europe in August 1914, both the troops and defences of Singapore had become threadbare. This regrettable state of affairs worsened in the months thereafter and finally resulted in

the ill-fated Sepoy Mutiny of February 1915. As Chiang vividly reveals in his investigation of this incident, the symbolism of the British relying upon the Japanese, amongst others, to put down this mutiny was neither lost on the people of Singapore, nor on those who had been called into the breach in this emergency.

The British themselves, however, failed to get the message that defending colonial territories in Southeast Asia under all circumstances was patently more difficult to orchestrate than the European Powers might care to believe. There seemed to be a general unwillingness on their part to accept the fact that the days of Palmerston were gone forever. Being British no longer carried quite the same clout that it had done more than half a century before. This much ought to have been realised by the government in Whitehall if not by the rest of the country. Looking at the much-vaunted "Singapore Strategy" in the inter-war period, however, one is hard-put to see any such recognition save from an enlightened few who nonetheless found themselves outside the charmed circle of real influence in London. Indeed, and almost perversely, the British policy-makers in supporting this imperious strategic plan virtually defied the logic of contemplating what would happen in a worst-case scenario, preferring instead to see imperial defence in the best possible light. It was seen as a duty that they could discharge even in dire emergencies. Sadly, it was as big a myth as the popular conception that Singapore had no significant prehistory before Raffles.

Even so the British did finally come to their senses after the fall of France in June 1940 and admit that their colonies in Southeast Asia were too far away to defend under all circumstances and that Home Waters and the Middle East now took precedence over Singapore and its immediate environs. Notwithstanding the United Kingdom's belated brush with reality, the myth grew up that such a profound policy change was deliberately kept from both the Australasian Dominions. Sinister talk of a great betrayal has been heard for seventy years. Was this yet another example of "perfidious Albion"? Despite the passage of the years and the declassified information that is now in the public domain, the myth persists. This volume addresses the issue and demonstrates that although the British government did act disingenuously, the Australian ministers in Canberra displayed a myopia of strategic that almost defies belief. In the end neither power had any real alternative but to trust to luck; and that particular commodity deserted both of them in December 1941.

Once the Japanese had launched their attack on southern Thailand and northern Malaya, the limp nature of British defence preparations was

immediately shown in graphic relief. What the Commonwealth had wistfully hoped would ultimately be a Fortress Singapore soon turned into a sick and cruel joke—instead of being an imperial redoubt it rapidly became a military internment camp. A combination of insufficient money and troops, inadequate military matériel, and a gross underestimation of the enemy's ability to wage war would have been reason enough for alarm at the best of times, but the British managed to compound these colossal mistakes with a command structure that lacked cohesion, inspiration and élan. In the heat of battle when decisive judgment was required, their military leaders either failed to lead or invariably chose the wrong option with catastrophic results. Explanations for this débâcle are legion and popular misconceptions have rarely been far from the surface of most of these accounts. For years afterwards the fall of Singapore was often partly attributed to the fact that the guns pointed the "wrong way" (out to sea) and could not be turned to bear on the enemy approaching from the northern landward side. Convenient scapegoats existed from the outset. British military folklore has portrayed the men of the Australian Imperial Forces as a cowardly rabble who fled from the advancing Japanese, thus compromising what was left of a defensive strategy on the island of Singapore. For their part, the Australians have not been slow to accuse Churchill, Percival and the entire British military establishment of both gross deception and utter incompetence. It is high time that an air of unbiased, dispassionate professionalism was brought to bear on this matter. Professor Brian Farrell, a Canadian military historian, has done just that. His research findings separate fact from fiction and the rational from the irrational, while providing a balanced account of a tragic episode in Commonwealth military history.

In the end, of course, this humiliating defeat was to usher in an ignoble succession. From the outset, the Japanese Occupation of Singapore was discriminatory, merciless and excessive. What good the Japanese Military Administration may have accomplished in its 42-month tenure of power was undermined by the horrific deeds done on its behalf by members of the Imperial Japanese Army and the dreaded Kempeitai. Sadly, there are few myths to be dispelled in this era. Claims against the Japanese of sadism, violence and malevolence are almost indisputable. Even those who escaped punitive sanctions were not spared some element of privation, such as insufficient food or medicine, so that all but a few simply had to endure the Occupation. While it may have been character-building for some, the ordeal left an indelible impression on virtually all who experienced it.

Denied the chance of recapturing Malaya and Singapore by the sudden

and dramatic ending of the war in August 1945, the British found themselves unprepared for peace when it actually arrived. Instead of being able to restore some of their military pride lost in the dark days of 1941–42 by making a success of Operation *Zipper*, the British forces were immediately required, amongst other things, to maintain civil order and discipline throughout Southeast Asia. Ironically, this task proved well beyond the limited number of British troops on station in the region. In Singapore and elsewhere, therefore, enemy troops were engaged to assist in carrying out these duties! There was clearly an air of chaotic improvisation about the whole business, providing yet another uncomfortable reminder, if such was needed, that the sterling qualities for which the British Empire had once been justly famous, notably, sound organisational principles and administrative flair, had somehow been lost in transit.

After these embarrassing hiccups, British military rule duly returned to Singapore in September 1945. It did so rather half-heartedly. For several years the three services scratched around in a vain search for an effective role to play in the region. Just when it looked as though Clement Attlee's Labour government had reconciled itself to a much-diminished role east of Suez, however, a succession of international crises spawned by the rise of communism in Malaya, China, and Korea reversed the trend significantly. Singapore's pivotal strategic position was rediscovered in an era increasingly identified with preventing the "domino theory" from being realised in practice.

Although committed to maintaining a military presence in Southeast Asia through its operational base in Singapore, the British government had reason to believe that its colonial empire was coming apart at the seams. An ill-advised conspiracy against Nasser in 1956 ended up costing the U.K. far more than Egypt and the Suez Canal. A defiant "wind of change"—the demand for national self-determination—was blowing not only in Africa but also around the globe, and the U.K. did not look to be positioned economically, militarily or morally to benefit from it. Appearances can on occasion be deceptive, however. Despite only yielding politically that which it could not hope to hold onto, the United Kingdom maintained its military presence in Singapore in the early 1960s and soon found that it could play a regional role in Southeast Asia with great distinction.

But hardly had the struggle for *Konfrontasi* ceased before the U.K.'s seemingly perennial economic predicament came back to haunt Harold Wilson's Labour government in London. Substantial economies from across the broad spectrum of government ministries were now obligatory if the government was to avoid the stigma of devaluation. Far East Command became both a

target and a casualty of this austerity drive. By April 1967 the British cabinet had reluctantly conceded that a British military withdrawal from Singapore was inevitable and would take place in stages over several years. After the devaluation crisis broke in November 1967, however, even that timetable was compressed. Despite cries of treachery from the Conservative party leadership when Wilson issued his notice of withdrawal "East of Suez" in January 1968, the Tories soon found that a shared role in defence matters also suited them best. As a result, Edward Heath's election at the head of a Conservative government in June 1970 failed to do more than make a few cosmetic changes to the overall picture. By midnight on 31 October 1971, Far East Command and AMDA (Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement) had ceased to exist and their place was taken on the following day by the new Five Power Defence Arrangements which remain in place at the time of this volume's publication. Even the token British force that remained behind was finally removed between September 1975 and March 1976. Singapore was basically on its own. Another phase in its military history had begun.

In due course, the story of the military history of the Republic of Singapore needs to be told—but others with the appropriate security access to the definitive sources located in the Ministry of Defence and the National Archives of Singapore will have to be the ones to tell it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IT HAS BEEN two decades since the idea for this book was first mooted by Professor Peter Dennis in the course of numerous conversations he had with Malcolm Murfett of the History Department at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Although Professor Dennis' other academic and administrative duties as the chairman of the History Department at the Australian Defence Force Academy eventually assumed so great a burden that he relinquished his leading role in this project, Dr. Murfett was able to secure the willing services of his colleagues John Miksic, Brian Farrell and Chiang Ming Shun, a former graduate student of NUS, to complete the work in 1999 that had been started in 1991.

Another twelve years have now elapsed since *Between Two Oceans* first appeared in print. Therefore, when the possibility of a second edition of this work was mooted earlier this year by Melvin Neo, the Assistant Managing Editor of our publisher, Marshall Cavendish, we eagerly seized upon the chance to review and update the manuscript. It has proved to be a very worthwhile experience, enabling each of the authors to test and revise their original findings in the light of recent scholarship in the field that has emerged since our original volume was published. It is gratifying to discover that many of the conclusions we reached in the last millennium about Singapore's military history have stood the test of time. Even so, we have been at pains not to be complacent or utterly dismissive of countertheories that have emerged since 1999. Indeed it is our hope that we have done justice to the scholarly endeavours of others in this field. If we have failed in this respect, it is purely our fault. Moreover,

we apologise in advance for any egregious errors that may have occurred as we have brought this revised edition to press.

All four authors should like to take this opportunity of re-acknowledging their grateful thanks to the many people and institutions that have assisted them in the conduct of their research in various countries. We are particularly grateful to Mr. Lee Seng Gee, Chairman, The Lee Foundation, Singapore, who has never failed to provide research funds and travel grants for this project over several years. We have also been singularly fortunate in having Justin Lau as our editor for this book; he was a superb professional throughout and his work is much appreciated by all of us.

In Singapore our gratitude is also extended to Brian Bogaars; Mickey Chiang; Beatrice Chong Choy Hoong; Fiona Hodgkins; Iskandar bin Mydin; Rajwant Kaur; Koh Lian What; Paul Kratoska; Asha Kumaran; Kwa Chong Guan; Albert Lau; Edwin Lee; Clement Liew; Cheryl Lim; Clarence Lim; Lim How Seng; Cheryl-Ann Low; Madeline Marcus, Ministry of Information and the Arts; Rudy Mosbergen; Vimala Nambiar; Ong Su Chern; Seow Siok Mui; Shah Alam; Susan Sutton; Lily Tan; Gabriel G. Thomas; G. Uma Devi; Vinayagan s/o Dharmarajah; Victor A.P. Wong; Lucille Yap; and Tim Yap Fuan.

Grateful thanks also go to those who helped us overseas. In Australia the staff at both the Australian War Memorial, and the Australian Archives in Canberra were very helpful, as were Dr. Ernest P. Hodgkin in Perth and Richard Pennell and Alan Warren in Melbourne. In India notable assistance was provided by Aidar Chakraverti in Calcutta; Chan Keng Howe and Dr. P. Perti in New Delhi; and Thiru Rangamani and Stephen Soh in Madras. In the United Kingdom we were helped by Janet Chisholm; Gillian Doherty; Anthony Farrington; Major (ret.) Alan Harfield; Boris Mollo; Mary Turnbull; John Wenzel, Conrad Woods, and Allen and Cherry Yhearm.

In addition, the authors would like to thank the staff of the following institutions and records centres based in London: Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, Westminster; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, Strand; National Army Museum, Chelsea; Oriental and India Office Records section of the British Library, Euston Road; the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth; the Public Records Office/National Archives, Kew Gardens.

Finally, we should each like to thank our families and close friends for all they have done to support us as we worked on this project initially and again as we revised our work for this second edition. As we indicated well over a decade ago, *Between Two Oceans* took a much longer time to publish than we had originally imagined. Despite the delays that had ensued in the 1990s, we still fervently hoped that our volume would be seen as a fitting and lasting tribute to the late Professor Wong Lin Ken, to whom this work was dedicated. Despite the passing of the years, this sentiment remains as firm and as genuine as when it was first expressed back in 1998–99. Those of us lucky enough to have known and worked with Lin Ken are only too pleased to re-dedicate this book to his memory.

Malcolm H. Murfett
John N. Miksic
Brian P. Farrell
Chiang Ming Shun

Singapore
9 March 2011

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

CHIANG MING SHUN was born in Singapore in 1968. After graduating from the National University of Singapore with a B.A. Hons in History in 1994, he returned to take his Masters in Southeast Asian Studies in 1997. He also has a Masters in Divinity from Trinity Theological College. He is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church in Singapore and is currently pursuing a doctorate at Cambridge University. Rev. Chiang wrote chapters IV and V of *Between Two Oceans*.

BRIAN P. FARRELL was born in Montreal in 1960 and graduated with a B.A. from Carleton University, Ottawa, before gaining his doctorate from McGill University in 1992. He has been teaching Military History at the National University of Singapore since 1993. His major publications include *The Basis and Making of British Grand Strategy 1940–1943: Was there a Plan?* (1998); *The Defence and Fall of Singapore 1940–1942* (2005); and *Malaya 1942* (2010). Professor Farrell wrote chapters VII, VIII, X, XI and appendices 2, 3, and 4 of this current volume.

JOHN N. MIKSIC was born in Rochester, New York in 1946. After obtaining his A.B. from Dartmouth College in 1968, he joined the Peace Corps. After spending four years in Malaysia, he conducted archaeological research in Sumatra, receiving his Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1979. Since that time he has lived in Sumatra (1979–81), before moving to Java (1981–87) and settling in Singapore. He is an Associate Professor in the Southeast Asian Studies Programme at the

National University of Singapore and head of the Archeological Unit at the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. His recent books include the *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Southeast Asia*. He wrote chapters I, II, III and appendix I of *Between Two Oceans*.

MALCOLM H. MURFETT was born in Grove in the United Kingdom in 1948. After studying at both Keele and Leeds universities, he won a scholarship to New College, Oxford, to do graduate work leading to the award of a D.Phil in History in 1980. While at Oxford he was appointed the Principal Research Assistant to the Earl of Birkenhead and worked for five years on the officially commissioned single-volume life of Sir Winston Churchill. He joined the Department of History at the National University of Singapore in 1980. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1990. Professor Murfett's publications include *Fool-proof Relations: The Search for Anglo-American Naval Cooperation During the Chamberlain Years, 1937–1940* (1984); *Hostage on the Yangtze: Britain, China and the Amethyst Crisis of 1949* (1991); *In Jeopardy: The Royal Navy and British Far Eastern Defence Policy 1945–1951* (1995); *The First Sea Lords: From Fisher to Mountbatten* [ed.] (1995); *Naval Warfare 1919–1945: An Operational History of the Volatile War at Sea* (2009); *Imponderable But Not Inevitable: Warfare in the 20th Century* [ed.] (2010). He wrote the prologue and chapters VI and IX of this book.

1

GEOGRAPHY AND TRADITIONAL WARFARE IN PRE-BRITISH SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE PLACE OF SINGAPORE

MILITARY HISTORIES of particular places may be divided into two categories: those that focus on specific events such as battles, and those that study the influence of military considerations on the development of a place—such as an island or a city—over a period of decades or even centuries. The authors of this book have found it necessary to employ both approaches in order to explore the military history of Singapore, albeit with particular emphasis on the strategic aspects of its military story. The word "strategy" implies considerations relevant to long-range planning to achieve a particular goal. In discussing the strategic significance of a site or area, the historian must be able to identify long-term trends—underlying factors which provide continuity over a long period of time—in order to reach beyond the surface flow of daily events. Important variables for those who hold this view of history include geography, technology, economics, and cultural institutions. These contrast with the short-term phenomena which appear on the surface of history as the concrete manifestations of underlying structures.

The strategic importance of a place is not a timeless, unchanging quality. It varies from one period to another, in response to developments in weaponry, transportation, political conditions, economic activities, and the shifting

position of that place in a wide and often complex web of geographical and cultural relations. It must also be emphasised that strategic importance is not least a matter of psychological perception rather than objective reality. Psychological perception in turn is derived from the assumptions and beliefs—including religious ideas—of all groups with actual or potential influence on events in the place under study.

In discussing the evolution of perceptions of Singapore's military and strategic importance, several historical phases can be distinguished. The beginning of each phase is marked by changes in the perceptions of Singapore's strategic importance held by the group of people with most influence over the events which took place there. The indigenous people of Singapore have for much of its history not been the major group whose perceptions must be considered. In fact, whether Singapore's significance rose or fell at the start of a new phase has depended largely on trends and perceptions external to Singapore itself. Singapore's strategic significance has varied not only with time, but also according to the location of the person or group whose perception we are attempting to describe. Thus when we speak of Singapore's strategic significance, we must define not only the time period with which we are dealing, but also the point of view relative to which this significance is being evaluated. As we shall see, in the long sweep of Singapore's 700-year history there have been times when Singapore's strategic significance fell from the point of view of one category of observers, but remained steady or even rose from another perspective. Like the physical universe which Einstein revealed to us, the strategic universe lacks fixed reference points. Geographical relationships, which might be thought to be stable and constant, in the Singapore context turn out to be relatively unimportant determinants in and of themselves. Geography facilitates some developments and makes others less likely, but has not determined the course of Singapore's strategic history.

It is not possible to create a single method for evaluating Singapore's military importance. One important variable is the scale of analysis. Singapore's strategic significance varies, depending on whether we are dealing with the subject at the local, regional, or global level. The local level encompasses the Riau and Lingga archipelagoes, western Borneo, eastern Sumatra, and the Malay Peninsula as far north as Melaka. The regional level stretches from Java in the south to Thailand in the north. The global level includes Japan, the Near East, Europe, and North America. These levels can be shown on a map as concentric circles.

Throughout the entire history of Singapore's strategic significance, military

Singapore's strategic importance

considerations have never been separable from economics. Singapore's stature in the strategic calculations of various parties has depended greatly on the shifting configuration of patterns of trade passing through the Straits of Melaka.

Maritime traffic between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea became firmly established 2000 years ago. Since that ancient connection was formed, at least one important seaport serving this trade has been located in the vicinity of the south entrance to the Straits of Melaka. The precise location of the port has changed several times. The oldest port known to have existed in this region was located rather far to the south of the Straits, in the region of Palembang, South Sumatra.[1] Other locations have included Jambi, also in Sumatra; Bintan, in the Riau archipelago; Melaka; and several locations along the banks of the Johore River. Thus considerations of economic activity, including locations of external markets and favoured sailing routes, can never be far from evaluations of the strategic considerations of various parties in which Singapore played a part. For the moment, however, economic factors must be relegated to the background. The primary variable which has determined all other calculations regarding Singapore's military importance is of course the military context. It is this context that we must first establish before we investigate Singapore's part in the strategic pattern which prevailed when it first came into existence.

THE NATURE OF EARLY SOUTHEAST ASIAN WARFARE

In pre-fifteenth-century Southeast Asia, warfare was endemic but fought on a small scale. The earliest clear references to events in the insular portion of western Southeast Asia come to us from Chinese documents. These sources consist of records of diplomatic missions to the Chinese court between A.D. 430 and 452, from a kingdom whose name is preserved in Chinese transcription as *Ho-lo-dan* or sometimes *Ho-lo-to*.[2] This kingdom was probably located in West Java. The very first mission of which we have any knowledge brought with it a letter from the Indonesian king to the king of one of the kingdoms into which China was then divided, asking for help:

> My country once had a large population and was prosperous. My country was never bullied by other countries. But now the situation is different and we have become weak. My neighbours vie with each other in attacking me. I beg Your Majesty to extend your protection from afar...If you pity me I hope that you will send missions ordering these countries not to maltreat us so that Your Majesty's reputation as the protector of the weak will be known everywhere.[3]

This old Southeast Asian diplomatic note betrays the fact that at the dawn of regional history, considerations of inter-polity security were already a subject of great concern to local rulers. It is of course not possible to extrapolate back into the remote past of Southeast Asia such concepts as "states" defined by discrete boundaries which had to be defended. Early Southeast Asian polities were not organised on a territorial basis. Land was an abundant resource in early Southeast Asia. The major resource over which ambitious rulers contended for control was not land; it was people. Until the late nineteenth century, the principal factor which limited the aspirations of an ambitious ruler of a Southeast Asian kingdom was manpower: people to grow the food, manufacture the crafts, conduct the ceremonies, and perform all the other activities in which the ambitions of rulers are normally expressed.

The reasons for this general lack of population are still subject to debate,[4] but the overall situation was undeniably one of competition between ambitious people to accumulate followers, by force if necessary (or if possible). Thus a sixteenth-century Chinese source quotes Southeast Asians as saying that "it is better to have slaves than to have land."[5] Given a scarcity of people and an abundance of empty land, the obvious strategy to adopt when attacked is to decamp if possible rather than attempting to defend a fixed position with the probability that some defenders will be lost even if the battle is won. New towns could always be founded, and new lands cleared for agriculture, but people to inhabit them and work them were more difficult to come by. In many parts of the world, such as Mesopotamia, India and China, some of the oldest archaeological remains which can be connected with settlements are defensive walls, but in Southeast Asia it is debatable whether any such structures were built of permanent materials before the construction of the fourteenth-century Lines of Singapore.[6] Local languages contain numerous words for "fort, stockade"—*kubu, benteng, kota*—but in all cases the image which these terms conjure up is that of a temporary defensive barrier built of nothing more substantial than wooden logs.

The mode of warfare in ancient Southeast Asia, particularly in the coastal and insular areas such as the one of which Singapore formed a part, therefore took the form of surprise attacks, raids aimed mainly at capturing moveable property and people with the objective of taking them back to one's own home territory, rather than occupying new areas in order to expel the previous occupants and thus gain more room for one's own subjects. Some of the larger kingdoms based in rice-growing areas in Cambodia, Thailand and Burma did demonstrate an inclination toward a different system of values in which land

tenure did play a role of some importance, but even there the major constraint on agricultural production always seems to have been lack of people rather than land.

It is for this reason that trade assumed an importance for societies of the Straits of Melaka and Java Sea beyond the ordinary level found in many other early civilisations. Maritime trade provided access to items which were not available locally. In Southeast Asian society, the possession of rare items in itself conferred on their possessor an aura of special power and status. This phenomenon was certainly not unique to Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian trade with China since its inception in the Three Kingdoms period in the third century A.D. had been motivated by a desire on the part of the imperial Chinese court for access to "rare and precious" items such as incense, pearls, kingfisher's feathers, ivory, fragrant wood, tortoise shell, and other items associated with the South Seas, the *Nanhai*. The Chinese court monopolised commerce in many of these items. The obvious connotation was that those who could display these items could use them to claim status. In Southeast Asia, a similar dynamic operated. Men became powerful in many cases because they could distribute tokens of status obtained from distant sources. Such tokens included Chinese silk and other textiles, and metal objects. As late as the seventeenth century, the Sultans of Palembang still maintained the loyalty of the hinterland peoples of South Sumatra, and extracted such important items as gold and ivory from them, in return for gifts of salt, cloth and iron—all imported commodities. The Palembang rulers situated in the estuarine zone along Sumatra's east coast had direct access to these items, whereas the mountaineers of the west coast did not. The balance of political power was largely determined by matters of access to foreign imported goods. Indigenous Malay sources specifically acknowledge this, in such bald statements as "where there is sovereignty, there is gold"[7]. Thus control over trade passing through the Straits of Melaka provided the surest means of acquiring followers, who were the most prized commodity in ancient Southeast Asia, the main measure of wealth. The use of military means to retain power or expand it had to be weighed very carefully in terms of costs versus benefits to be gained. Such equations determined the strategic deliberations of ancient Southeast Asians.

Little is known of the weaponry or strategy employed in the earliest Southeast Asian warfare. The main source of information now extant consists of literature, which cannot always be taken as an accurate reflection of what took place. The ideal which these sources depict is a fight between two

champions. Standing armies did not exist. Military forces were raised by rulers passing demands on to their vassals. By the fourteenth century some sources suggest that some troops in Java were being paid, but this practice does not seem to have been adopted in the Malay realm of which Singapore formed a part. Military strife was depicted in traditional sources as a contest between individuals, the outcome to be determined not simply by skill and might, but by spiritual qualities. Thus the winner was deemed to have achieved success by right of superior moral and religious virtue. Victory was the sign that the winner possessed such virtue. It seems that rulers often personally led their troops in battle. Thus when a leader fell, the army with him might then crumble even though the rest of the battle might be in their favour. Even the first casualty might be seen as an omen of defeat.

Weaponry in ancient times consisted of a number of types. The best-known Malay weapon is the *keris*, the wavy-bladed short sword, which was normally used to stab rather than to slash. The *keris* and the spear or lance often had supernatural qualities attributed to them. They were often handed down through many generations as *pusaka*, heirlooms which could provide a special protective power to the descendants of an ancestor who made or used the weapon. Spears and *keris* could be highly decorative works of art, but were also known as being highly effective, well-wrought arms. More feared by the Chinese, however, were the blowguns used by pirates. These were treated with vegetal poisons, and could act at a distance.

The *Malay Annals* of 1612 gives the impression that the Malays of Melaka were confounded by the Portuguese use of cannon in 1511. This is probably an anachronism; "Southeast Asians were familiar with firearms well before the arrival of the Portuguese." Why then did the annalist adopt this tone? One obvious answer is that he wished to explain away the Malays' defeat.

In the sixteenth century Southeast Asians began to cast bronze artillery pieces, but these too seem to have served more for ceremonial purposes than as effective weapons. "The most profound impact of the new [military] technologies, in Southeast Asia as in Europe, was in strengthening the authority of the regimes which possessed them over their hinterlands which did not."[8] During the seventeenth century, however, Southeast Asians became adept at producing their own flintlocks and muskets. These could be manufactured by villagers; the Bugis, Balinese and Minangkabau gunsmiths were best-known for their skills.[9] Thus by the end of the seventeenth century gunpowder had become a widespread commodity in Southeast Asia, not a monopoly of the elite.

THE SRIVIJAYAN ERA, A.D. 100–1000

After several centuries during which only vague reports from distant China are available to confirm the existence of several competing entrepôts around the southern entrance to the Straits of Melaka, the kingdom of Srivijaya emerged in the late seventh century as a major political and commercial power. Between A.D. 672 and 689 Srivijaya's sway spread from its heartland at Palembang to encompass the entire Straits of Melaka and perhaps strategic points on the west coast of Borneo and western Java as well. By A.D. 775 isthmian Thailand was also part of this South Sumatra-centric sphere of influence. For the next 300 years Srivijaya's capital Palembang engrossed international shipping passing between the Indian subcontinent and the Chinese empire. The wealth from this seaborne equivalent of the Silk Road raised Srivijaya to a level of prosperity which elicited expressions of admiration and respect even from the imperial court of China. Some Srivijayan officials rose to become leaders in foreign merchant communities established in ports along the south coast of China, where the Chinese allowed foreign diplomatic missions to present tribute and engage in strictly controlled but highly lucrative trade with designated Chinese merchants.

Srivijaya's sphere of control extended to the northern entrance to the Straits of Melaka, but the nature of the kingdom's influence there is difficult to describe. The Chinese considered Srivijaya in the late first millennium A.D. to be a "double kingdom": one centre of authority lay at Palembang, the other somewhere in the area of northern Sumatra or on the opposite coast, in the region of Kedah and southern Thailand. Archaeologists have identified important trading sites dating from this period at Sungai Mas, Kedah, and Laem Pho and Takuapa, southern Thailand, with abundant remains of ceramics and glassware from both China and the Persian Gulf. While there is evidence that these areas acknowledged Srivijaya's suzerainty, the Chinese report that the part of the kingdom situated in the northern Straits had its own administration.

The nature of the early polities in the Straits of Melaka has been a subject of study for many years. Early commentators, impressed by Chinese descriptions of the kingdom's wealth and power, concluded that Srivijaya could be classified as an early centralised "state," an autocratic empire.[10] Subsequent refinements in the theory of political evolution and the study of inscriptions from early Southeast Asia have significantly altered the terms of this discussion. Most historians are now of the opinion that coarse generalisations such as "state," based on a theory of unilinear political evolution applicable worldwide, do not accurately convey the range of legal, social and economic relations which existed in early Southeast Asia. For the moment, most scholars dealing with the

early kingdoms of Southeast Asia prefer to use special terms such as "galactic polity"[11] or "mandala"[12] to refer to the class of political institutions found in the region, without making any commitments regarding the comparability of this class to those found in other parts of the world.

In the first millennium A.D., Southeast Asia contained few concentrations of dense, settled agrarian populations. In a few fertile zones—first and foremost central Java, the Tonle Sap region of Cambodia, the fringes of the Chao Phraya valley in Thailand, the coast of Vietnam, and the Irrawaddy of Burma—there formed centres of civilisation able to mobilise sufficient human resources to build religious monuments of impressive size. The largest of these, Borobudur in Java, was unchallenged as Southeast Asia's largest structure from its building around A.D. 800 until Angkor Wat was built over 300 years later.

These monument-building kingdoms were able to persuade large numbers of people to contribute their labour and other resources to common religious projects, but their rulers had little power to compel their subjects to engage in large-scale military conquests. One might speculate that they also lacked the inclination to do so, but this may be too charitable. The image of the "world conqueror" was well-known in both the versions of Hinduism and Buddhism which evolved in Southeast Asia. The ideal world would be ruled by a single *cakravartin* (literally "wheel-turner") who would attain supreme power through his superior spiritual qualities (although in mythology the *cakravartin*'s destiny still had to be played out on the battlefield). In Southeast Asia, the ambitions of would-be world conquerors were checked by the ability of those subjects who were disinclined to play the roles of the subordinate characters in the martial epics to move out of reach of the military recruiters. Fertile land suitable for agriculture was not scarce in the Southeast Asia of A.D. 1000.

The Javas and Cambodias of early Southeast Asia had few characteristics in common with the Frances and Germanys of medieval Europe, but those that did exist are highly instructive. In particular it is fascinating to observe that, just as the monument builders of both Europe and Southeast Asia were militaristic agrarian kingdoms in the hinterlands, in both regions the important trading kingdoms were situated on the margins of the land-based empires and left less conspicuous monuments.[13] It is also useful to note that medieval Europe possessed geographic analogues of ancient Southeast Asian maritime kingdoms, of which Venice is but the best-known.[14]

In strategic terms, it seems to have been in the interests of the major land-based empires of Europe to allow the small trading ports at the peripheries to maintain their own independent existence. If the old idea of the militaristic

"state" is not a useful concept to use in describing ancient kingdoms in either Southeast Asia or Europe, the concept of symbiosis between extensive militaristic hierarchically-organised agrarian polities and smaller trading kingdoms with more flexible social structures may hold more possibilities for future comparative historical research, with implications for long-term strategic studies.

In ancient Southeast Asia, since manpower was a scarce resource, it was conserved as much as possible. In warfare, manpower was hoarded rather than expended; the objective of much military activity in Southeast Asia until the nineteenth century was to capture people, not land. Thus the whole nature of the strategic equation in early Southeast Asia has to be viewed in an entirely different light from the calculations used to formulate long-term plans in more familiar circumstances of over-population such as existed in ancient Europe, India, or China.

Contemporary documentary sources as well as descriptions of Southeast Asia from the period of early European contact suggest that one source of Srivijaya's ability to monopolise Southeast Asian maritime commerce, and indeed all shipping between the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, lay in her ability to attract the allegiance of skilled seafaring people. Although traders from other parts of Southeast Asia, India, and as far west as the Persian Gulf were found in South China's ports, all evidence suggests that the ships themselves which carried goods and people through the Straits were mainly if not exclusively built and sailed by Indonesians, principally the people of North Java, East Sumatra, western Borneo, and the islands off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula denominated the Riau and Lingga archipelagoes.

Srivijaya seems to have been born in a series of military actions. The first inscriptions from the late seventh century refer to military movements including an expedition against *bhumi jawa* "which had not yet submitted." This inscription was found at Kota Kapur, on the island of Bangka, which formed a primary source of skilled seafaring manpower in ancient Southeast Asia. Srivijaya's inscriptions all come from a brief period at the very beginning of the kingdom. Once the kingdom had established its suzerainty over the Straits of Melaka, and possibly western Borneo and western Java, carving of inscriptions ceased. No doubt other kinds of literary activity continued, but using perishable materials which have not survived. For the next three centuries, a kind of equilibrium seems to have existed in the Straits, whereby Srivijaya continued to reap the harvest of inter-Asian sea trade.

Although the Srivijayan inscriptions contain references to military commanders, using a Sanskrit term, their duties are not described. Judging from

much later practices in effect when Europeans arrived, it would seem that there was no tradition of a standing army in any of the polities of the Straits of Melaka. As in ancient Europe, in times of need armed men were mobilised by the nobles faithful to the paramount ruler. In the Srivijayan domain, the significant source of armed force would have been found on the water, not on the land. The main fields of battle in the region were at sea. The main resources worth fighting over were the cargoes of trading ships and the populations of coastal and estuarine villages.

The unique drowned landscape of western Indonesia—created when the sea level rose 10,000 years ago and inundated the Sunda Shelf, which now lies beneath the South China Sea—fostered the birth of a specialised ecological adaptation. Although we do not yet possess any archaeological data to date the inception of this way of life, it seems likely that for thousands of years the swampy coasts and offshore islands of the Straits have been exploited by specialised ethnic groups who live as nomads not in deserts, but at sea, spending most of their lives in boats migrating from place to place in search of food and goods for trade. In the nineteenth century these people consisted of many small groups, each with its own area and ethnic name. Although there are still many remnants of these groups, their way of life is rapidly vanishing. A generic term for peoples pursuing this way of life in the Straits is Orang Laut, Malay for "Sea People."[15]

The Orang Laut have formed a resource of potential strategic significance for much of the history of the Straits. Their importance is basically due to two factors: their military potential, and their economic role. As specialised hunters and gatherers of sea products, the Orang Laut have long been courted by coastal middlemen who have made significant profits by exchanging cloth, metal, and imported luxury goods for pearls, tortoise shell, coral, and seafood. From very early times, it would seem that the Orang Laut of the southern Straits had a special relationship with the ruler of Srivijaya and his successors. This relationship can be linked to the Kota Kapur inscription, set up in an area usually associated with this population, and traced through a series of semi-legendary chronicles, especially the *Sejarah Melayu* ("Malay Annals").[16] A common motif in the legends is the desire of the fragmented sea nomads for a focal point, a sense of cohesion, an intermediary with the outside world, a source of needed goods, and a means by which they could satisfy their desire for a ruler with divine protective powers.

When the Orang Laut were not under the direction of a strong ruler, they could change a formerly strategic place into one to be avoided. Although we

lack sufficient historical documentation to tell the story, it is likely that the rise of Srivijaya was in part due to the success of the early ruler in discovering a mixture of ritual and commercial inducements which was able to convert the Orang Laut from a disorganised population not averse to marauding and piracy, thus discouraging maritime trade, into a community which gave up their predatory propensities in return for a steady income derived from compelling ships to call at Srivijaya's ports to pay dues and delivering tribute in the form of sea products, in return for which they received *anugerah*, "tokens of esteem" from Srivijaya's ruler. The earliest source which describes trade routes in the Malay Peninsula is a fragment of a report written by two Chinese envoys sent to a major port in the southern Mekong Delta called Funan in about A.D. 250. The original report is lost, but citations of it in later works show that the route from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean did not pass through the Straits of Melaka. Instead ships unloaded their cargoes on the east coast of what is now the Thai portion of the Malay Peninsula. From here the goods were transported across to the west coast, reloaded on other ships, and carried across the Bay of Bengal.

It is possible that such an arduous procedure was adopted because the route through the Straits of Melaka was unknown at this time. This seems quite unlikely, however, because at Funan the envoys obtained information about ports in western Indonesia, perhaps in South Sumatra, which had contact with India. It is quite likely that South Sumatran ports were in contact with both India and Funan at this time. It is also likely that the portage was undertaken because of unsafe conditions in the Straits themselves, due to the piratical activities of the inhabitants. While it is true that several portage routes across the peninsula continued to be used until the twentieth century, the direct sea route was obviously superior in terms of time and effort needed to transport goods. When conditions in the Straits were safe, the transpeninsular routes were less used.

When the Malay court reformed itself in the Johore–Riau area after Melaka fell to the Portuguese in 1511, the Orang Laut are known to have formed one of the four main components of the Johore power structure—the others being the ruler himself; his ministers; and the council of nobles, *orang kaya*. It is probable that such a structure reflects the older system in the Straits as well, but we have no resources with which to study this period.[17] The various *suku* ("tribes") of the Orang Laut had specialised duties in the court. Positions as couriers and envoys obviously suited their ability to travel rapidly by water. Others were blacksmiths, including sword-makers; this specialty is less easy to account for,

but is well-attested. The sword-making specialty may have been related to the other duty which they fulfilled: armed levies.

The Orang Laut were mainly bound to the Malay rulers by ties of personal loyalty rather than desire for financial compensation. They rejected attempts by other individuals to purchase their loyalty. They voyaged from Johore and Riau as far as Thailand to avenge the "rude handling" of ships belonging to the Johore Sultan. The *Sejarah Melayu* shows however that they did expect some kind of generalised reciprocity of a material nature. Archaeological surveys in the Pulau Tujuh sector of the Riau Archipelago have recovered substantial evidence that Orang Laut burials of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries contained large quantities of Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese porcelain and glassware. The Pulau Tujuh sector was not on the international trade route at the time; it thus seems probable that the Orang Laut obtained these prestigious items from the Malay rulers of Singapore. This would be but one example of the type of goods which the Orang Laut might have received as gifts from the Malay rulers in exchange for their loyalty. By directing the Orang Laut's energies into more predictable channels, strong Malay rulers could keep piracy sufficiently in check to make the voyage through the Straits attractive to merchants.

A second focus of historic Orang Laut activity in addition to Bangka is found on the island of Karimun. This island is situated in the centre of the southern entrance to the Straits of Melaka, about 30 km west of Singapore.

Karimun may well have been known to the Chinese as early as the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–906), under the name Luo-yue, which several scholars believe is a transcription of the Malay word *laut*, "sea." This place was not an important port, nor did it ever send any missions to China.[18] It is said to have lain on the northern shore of the Straits of Melaka, opposite Srivijaya,[19] according to the *Xin Tang-shu* of Jia Dan, A.D. 1060. The context of this and later references suggests that this place was a rendezvous for shipping, rather than a port of call. There are two reasons for suspecting that "Luo-yue" is Karimun. The first is that in later centuries—by 1225, and continuing thereafter—Karimun played the role of landmark where ships would rendezvous before sailing east, hence corresponding with the description in the *Xin Tang-shu*. The second is the presence of an inscription on the north coast of Karimun, which suggests Karimun occupied a special position within the Srivijayan empire. The inscription is undated, but from the style of script epigraphers conclude that it was probably carved during the Srivijaya period, perhaps between A.D. 800 and 1000. The Sanskrit text reads, "Mahāyānika Golayantritasri Gautama Sripada." It can be translated as "the illustrious feet of the illustrious Gautama, the Mahayanist, who

possessed an armillary sphere." It seems to be meant to commemorate the pride of the local ruler who obtained a rare and precious astronomical instrument, probably from India. References to feet in Hindu and Buddhist inscriptions are common; they are often used as symbols for the high and mighty, who could not be referred to directly, for it would be disrespectful to do so.[20]

Karimun Island holds a commanding position at the southern entrance to the Straits: on the east it is only 9 km from Johore on the Malay Peninsula, on the west it is 20 km from Pulau Rangsang, a large but swampy and sparsely inhabited island separated from Sumatra by only a narrow and shallow strip of water. Just south of Pulau Rangsang lies the mouth of the Kampar River which leads to the densely populated Minangkabau hinterland in West Sumatra. Several sites of ancient Buddhist monuments lie along the Kampar's course, the most famous being Muara Takus, a collection of ruins of brick temples built around A.D. 1000 or slightly later. The inscription itself is unique in Southeast Asia. It is carved in letters about 30-cm high on the side of a cliff on the north side of Karimun. From the top of the cliff one has a complete view of the Straits. It would be difficult to pass an observation post here without being observed. Near the foot of the granite cliff is a stream of fresh water. A Portuguese author named Tome Pires who arrived in Melaka soon after its conquest in 1511 says that the people of Karimun were *Selates*, his word for Orang Laut (probably derived from *Orang Selat*, "People of the Strait"). Pires calls the small islands between Karimun and Rangsang the "Selates Islands."[21]

In the late nineteenth century Karimun's population was still largely composed of descendants of Orang Laut. The custom of dwelling permanently on boats was still followed by some Orang Laut of Karimun after World War II.[22] In the late 1980s a group called the Orang Akit resided a few kilometres west of the inscription site. They possessed wooden houses on land, but many families owned fishing boats which provided a major source of their livelihood. They described themselves as descendants of intermarriage between Orang Laut and Chinese, and belonged to a religion they described as Buddhist. One of their ritual activities involved periodically decorating the site of the inscription with flags of coloured cloth. In the 1840s, Karimun was notorious as the base of a group of piratical Orang Laut of the *suku* Galang. The Galang pirates were a scourge of Singapore shipping. It seems likely that in earlier times Singapore, especially the Kallang Basin, had formed part of their range. When Raffles arrived in January 1819, the Orang Laut formed the majority of Singapore's population.

The significance of the Karimun inscription obviously derives not from its contents, which even if totally deciphered would not afford any important

historical illumination. Its interest lies rather in the fact that as a late Srivijayan inscription it indicates that Karimun was more than an ordinary island for the southern Straits population. The chief of Karimun may have had special duties in the Srivijayan kingdom. It is likely that the island's role as a rendezvous for foreign shipping also made it a natural site for a lookout point.

The role of an intelligence-gathering position was vital to the Srivijayan system. In 1178 the Chinese author Zhou Qufei remarked, "If some foreign ship, passing this place [the capital of the southern Straits, then at Malayu-Jambi], should not enter here, an armed party would certainly come out and kill them to the last." A few years later, in 1225, the harbourmaster of Canton, Zhao Rukuo, in his treatise *Zhufanzhi* wrote in similar terms that "If a merchant ship passes by without entering, their boats go forth to make a combined attack, and all are ready to die [in the attempt]. This is the reason why this country is a great shipping centre."[23] The use of armed force to compel ships to enter a port was based on the requirement that all ships entering the harbour had to pay duties. It seems that the policy of using armed force to force ships to pay duties even if they had no desire to trade was an ancient feature of Asian maritime commerce. As early as the time of Ptolemy around A.D. 100, ships which called at ports where no foreign trade was permitted were escorted away under armed guard.[24] Such a system was found in Aceh (North Sumatra) as recently as the nineteenth century.[25]

Karimun's importance in the pre-European period of the Straits of Melaka can now be put in perspective. Karimun had no resources other than its Orang Laut and its location. Despite its potential as an intelligence-gathering station, it never became the centre of an important political entity. The island did however continue to play an important role in strategic calculations in the nineteenth century; as we shall see, Raffles considered it as a possible location for his planned base in the southern Straits.

A NEW PHASE: THE RISE OF MALAYU-JAMBI, 1025–1275

At the start of the eleventh century Srivijaya was at the height of its prosperity. Its rulers in this period endowed temples in China and India. No ports in the Straits area had dealings with foreign merchants except with leave from the Srivijayan ruler. The wealth from port dues and other trade-related sources flowed to a very limited group of Sumatran nobles.

In 1025 a calamity befell Srivijaya. The Chola kingdom of South India launched a naval raid which abducted the Srivijayan king. No more is heard of him; probably he died in captivity in India. For the next 100 years, most of

Srivijaya's old domains in the area of the northern Straits of Melaka, from Barus on Sumatra's west coast to Kedah in north peninsular Malaya and Takuapa in South Thailand, seem to have been dominated by representatives of powerful Tamil trading companies. These organisations combined commercial, military and diplomatic functions in a manner more than mildly similar to the later European East India Companies.[26] The Bujang Valley in Kedah seems to have been the central node of Tamil power in Southeast Asia. Numerous shrines were built there in typical South Indian style, and some sources suggest that the Chola crown prince was sent there as a kind of viceroy to learn the arts of ruling before returning to South India to assume the throne.[27] In the southern Straits, the centre of trade during the late eleventh century shifted from Palembang to Jambi. The ancient kingdom of Malayu centred here had opened economic and diplomatic relations with China even before Srivijaya's rise.

For 250 years, from about 1025 to 1275, no single successor to Srivijayan thalassocracy appeared. Instead a number of busy ports evolved. Archaeological research along the east coast of Sumatra has identified several sites, some containing extensive and dense layers of broken Chinese porcelain, others with sizeable brick monuments mainly constituting ruined Buddhist structures.

After the early twelfth century, Chola power shrank and disappeared from Southeast Asia due to the gradual decline of the kingdom in its home base in South India. Simultaneously a phenomenon appeared which had a momentous impact on the Straits of Melaka: the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants.

The Song dynasty was at the time coming under increasing pressure from Mongols; in 1126 the northern capital at Luoyang fell. The Chinese capital moved south, but for the next 150 years the court was under constant military pressure. Cut off from overland trade routes, and in need of funds for defence, the Song relaxed many of the old restrictions on contact between Chinese and foreigners. This enabled aspiring southern Chinese to initiate their own commercial voyages. As a result, overseas Chinese settlements began to appear along the coasts of the Straits of Melaka in the twelfth century.

The inception of Chinese settlement overseas had two important effects on Southeast Asian society. It fostered the development of an urban–rural dichotomy, which does not seem to have previously existed in Southeast Asia; and it rendered impossible the reimposition of a Srivijayan-style monopoly on foreign trade. Chinese merchants, endowed with great commercial power and backed by the prestige of the Chinese court, could not be forced to confine their activities to one or two ports.

In 1225 Zhao Rukuo mentioned for the first time a place in the Straits area

called "Ling-ya-mon": "In the winter, with the monsoon, you sail a little more than a month and then come to Ling-ya-mon, where one-third of the passing merchants (put in) before entering this country (of San-fo-ts'i) [Malayu-Jambi]."[28] The translator-editors of the English text note that:

> ...some Chinese scholars, consulted on the meaning of this ambiguous phrase, think the passage may be mutilated and that it implies that a levy of one third ad valorem was made on merchandize at Ling-ya-mon (Lingga Strait and Island) before merchants were allowed to proceed to San-fo-ts'i. This interpretation seems forced; it appears much more likely that the Dragon's Tooth Strait was a convenient harbour for ships coming from the west and from Chan-ch'ong when sailing for San-fo-ts'i, and that many of them stopped there. Ling-ya-mon, "Dragon's Tooth Strait," thus would have referred to Berhala Strait, south of Lingga Island, in 1225, and signified a port of call where some dues were probably collected.[29]

Systematically acquired archaeological evidence from Lingga is not yet available, but unconfirmed reports suggest that Chinese ceramics of the Song dynasty may be found there. This affords a preliminary reason to agree with Hirth and Rockhill that in 1225 "Ling-ya-mon" may have been a Chinese name for the strait south of Lingga Island, where some ships stopped to pay duty, perhaps in preference to travelling to Jambi. The term "Ling-ya-mon" may have been used simply because of its resemblance to the local name, "Lingga." The name reoccurs a century later, in a slightly different form, and possibly referring to a location in Singapore.

THE CLASSICAL SINGAPORE PHASE, 1275–1400

When the story of Singapore begins, in the late thirteenth century, the societies of the Straits of Melaka area were in the process of adjusting to new social and commercial factors. The new presence of Chinese shipping played a strategic role, the effect of which was still in the process of making itself felt. Also a new type of Southeast Asian political expansion was beginning. The people of the Chao Phraya basin, mainly newly immigrant Thais, were in the process of forming a centralised kingdom which would eventually overthrow the Khmer and become the most powerful force on the mainland of Southeast Asia. More directly relevant to Singapore is the kingdom of Singhasari in East Java. In about 1275 Singhasari reached a new level of integration and reversed the centuries-old relationship with the Malays in which the Malays had usually had the upper hand in their rivalry.

It is not yet generally appreciated that Singapore even existed during the period before the arrival of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in January 1819; it is even less widely known that Singapore once possessed significant traces of ancient fortifications. These traces were however clearly described by Dr. John Crawfurd, during his first visit to Singapore.[30] Subsequently, in 1823, he became Singapore's second Resident. Dr. Crawfurd visited Singapore for the first time between 21 January and 25 February 1822, during the course of a voyage from India to Siam which he undertook on a diplomatic mission. Crawfurd had long been in the region; he had joined the East India Company in 1803, and was sent to Penang in 1808. He had worked in several positions during the British occupation of Java from 1811–1815, and in 1820 he published a long work, *A History of the Indian Archipelago*, which demonstrated his deep interest in history and antiquities.[31] He was therefore both naturally inclined to notice such aspects of his surroundings, and well qualified by experience in other parts of Asia to identify and make accurate observations of ruins.

In his journal's entry for 3 February, Crawfurd described a morning stroll "round the walls and limits of the ancient town of Singapore." His circuit began at the beach, probably along what is now the edge of the Padang, to "a wall" which he followed until it came to a hill (Fort Canning), thence back to his starting point by the Singapore River. He took pains to describe the wall in some detail. Its breadth he estimated at about sixteen feet [5 m] at its base; obviously it tapered to a narrower dimension at the top, but he does not describe the wall's cross-section. The wall's height he calculated as eight or nine feet [2.4–2.7 m], and its length a mile [1.6 km] from the shore to the foot of the hill. At that point the wall terminated.

The wall was paralleled for about two-thirds of its length by a little stream which flowed on its north side. At a certain point, about 1 km inland, near the site of the present National Museum, the wall seems to have terminated, while the stream continued in a more or less direct line. Where the wall ended, however, a dry ditch or moat began, and ran up the side of the hill. Crawfurd does not describe this moat any further; perhaps that area was still overgrown by vegetation. Crawfurd inspected the wall closely, noting that there were no signs of such refinements as embrasures or loopholes for guns. Furthermore, there were no signs that similar walls had once defended the other borders of the "ancient town." From these details he concluded "that the works of Singapore were not intended against firearms, or an attack by sea; or that if the latter, the inhabitants considered themselves strong in their naval force, and therefore thought any other defences in that quarter superfluous." Although it is

not expressly stated, the wall must have been constructed of earth, and could perhaps be better termed an embankment. There were ruins of structures on Fort Canning Hill, which Crawfurd describes as made of baked brick "of good quality," so one may take his silence on the matter of the wall's composition as evidence that it was not constructed of that material.

The "Old Malay lines" were used as a landmark and reference point in the 1820s. A letter from the Resident, Col. William Farquhar, to Lt. L.W. Hull, secretary to Raffles, dated 23 December 1822, states that:

> The range to the westward of Government Hill towards Panglima Prang compound remains unoccupied with the exception of a portion of the North East side of the one near the western extremity of the old Malay lines where a Chinese gambier plantation had been commenced prior to our establishment at Singapore.[32]

The wall was still in existence in the mid-1820s. A map of Singapore drawn in 1825 clearly indicates a feature termed "The Old Lines of Singapore." The location of this feature corresponds precisely to Crawfurd's description of the old wall and stream, and it can therefore be concluded that the "Old Lines" and the "wall" are the same thing.[33]

There is a brief reference in an early tourist guide to Singapore to the dry ditch or moat on the slope of the hill.[34] The stream on the outside of the wall came to be called the Freshwater Stream, and a bridge was built across it near its mouth. Subsequently the stream was canalised and is now called the Stamford Canal. Most of its former course is now invisible; that which remains appears from beneath the ground beside the Cathay Building, between Orchard and Handy Roads, where it runs within concrete banks, appearing to be no more interesting than any other artificial drainage channel, until it disappears at the junction of Buyong Road and Buyong Lane. A small plaque commemorating the former bridge over the river's mouth is placed at the junction of Stamford Road and Connaught Drive, opposite the northeast corner of the Padang, but it is doubtful that one out of a thousand passers-by takes note of the unobtrusive black plaque, and even if one were to do so, it would be a mystery as to why a bridge should ever have existed there, since the old stream is now invisible as it courses to the sea kilometres further east, beyond Marina Park.

The course of the wall, or "Old Lines," is identical to that of modern Stamford Road. The embankment was undoubtedly levelled at an early stage of nineteenth-century Singapore's development. The map of 1825 is the only one to depict it. The former existence of this now-vanished landmark deserves to be

more widely known and appreciated. The Old Lines demonstrate that ancient Singapore occupied an unusual position in early Southeast Asian history. By investigating the precise nature of this peculiarity, we obtain an instructive glimpse into the position of ancient Singapore in the political, economic and geographical contexts of early Southeast Asia. All these factors in turn are intimately associated with the particular topic of the history of military strategy in the environs of Singapore.

Since, as stated earlier, ancient Southeast Asian warfare was endemic but fought to capture people not land, why was a wall built in Singapore? When was it built? What was its purpose? That the date of the construction must be attributed to a time earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century is clear; in 1819 Singapore's population totalled 500 at most. Many of these were boat-dwelling sea nomads who did not build houses on land, much less fortifications.

An archaeological survey of Sumatra identified seven sites of *benteng*, "earthworks/walled sites." Of these seven, two were judged to post-date European arrival; one was not studied. Another, Muara Takus, is a Buddhist site consisting of a number of religious structures surrounded by a low wall, in this instance built of brick; the wall's function is clearly symbolic. There is a second, earthen wall associated with the site, the function of which is unclear. There is however no evidence that the site, which lies in the centre of Sumatra, far from the sea, was ever a trading centre or occupied by a dense population, and so it would seem that the second wall's purpose was probably not defensive either.[35] The fifth site, Bawang, also known as Haur Kuning, in the province of Lampung, is associated with an inscription in Old Javanese dated A.D. 997, and a stone foundation. The site at the time of the survey was overgrown with jungle, so no firm interpretations of the wall's function, or even its extent, could be formed—but once again the site's location, in a hinterland location, argues against a defensive function. The site of Mambang, in South Sumatra province, lies on the bank of the Musi River, upstream from Palembang, Srivijaya's capital. Although pre-European statuary has been found approximately 4 km away from the site, only nineteenth-century ceramics have so far been found in association with the *benteng* itself. Finally, the site of Pugungraharjo, also in Lampung, consists of an extensive complex of enigmatic remains enclosed by a large earthen rampart and trench. The remains include terraced pyramids of earth reinforced with stone, on top of one of which villagers discovered a statue of thirteenth-century style; a set of stone seats surrounding a stone pillar forming a complex associated with non- or pre-Indic religious practices; and

some areas where Chinese ceramics dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have been found, brought to the surface during agricultural operations.[36] Once again, the site lies in the interior rather than near the coast, and does not seem to have been an important trading centre. Zhao Rukuo stated that the capital of San-fo-ts'i ("Three Vijayas," perhaps referring to Malayu's capital which probably then was located at a site now called Muara Jambi) was surrounded by a wall built of bricks.[37] No trace of such a wall now remains, although there are ruins of several brick religious complexes extant, each surrounded by walls.

From this data, we can conclude that in all Sumatra no sites with evidence of permanent fortifications dating from the pre-European (or pre-Islamic) period have yet been found. It is possible that such sites may yet be discovered, but they cannot have been common at best. This circumstance suggests that fourteenth-century Singapore was highly unusual among trading ports along the Straits of Melaka: its population cooperated to construct a permanent fortification, investing much labour in an immoveable asset. This can only mean that they believed Singapore to be a location with more than common potential as a trading port. The Singaporeans perceived threats; we can only speculate as to what they may have been, but it seems likely that they were the dual expanding mandalas of the Thai and the Javanese. To turn for a moment to a subject which may be more correctly termed tactical rather than strategic, one may ask why the Singapore wall was located along the north side of the settlement only. One can only speculate, but it would seem that the residents of fourteenth-century Singapore considered their naval defences adequate to meet any threat from that quarter, and that any invader would choose to land somewhere away from the settlement rather than launch a frontal attack from the sea. The fortification was therefore designed to forestall an invasion from the landward flank rather than the seaward frontage. It is suggestive to compare this pattern of threat perception with that which materialised much later, in the twentieth century.[38]

The name "Dragon's Tooth Strait" reappears in Chinese works on Southeast Asia in the fourteenth century. In 1320 a mission from the reigning Yuan dynasty visited this place to obtain tame elephants. Perhaps stimulated by this attention from the imperial court, the people of the Dragon's Tooth Strait sent a diplomatic/commercial mission to China in 1325. About five years later a Chinese merchant, Wang Dayuan, visited Lung-ya-men and other places in Southeast Asia. Was this "Lung-ya-men" the same as the "Ling-ya-mon" mentioned a century earlier by Zhao Rukuo? The two principal authorities

who have discussed this question concur that at this time the Strait lay somewhere close to Singapore, though they disagree as to its precise location. C.A. Gibson-Hill concluded that the Strait which Wang described must have been the western entrance to Keppel Harbour, the narrow stretch of water which passes between Labrador Point and Sentosa Island.[39] Another scholar, J.V.G. Mills, suggested that the Strait was in fact that now known as Singapore Main Strait, about 15 km south of Singapore.[40] In either case, the Dragon's Tooth Strait now seems to have become the main artery for shipping entering the Straits of Melaka, whereas formerly the main route seems to have passed south of Lingga. This northward shift of the trade route must have occurred somewhere between 1225 and 1330. What was the reason for this change? No clear answer can be given. From 1275 until at least 1292, South Sumatra seems to have been dominated by the East Javanese kingdom of Singhasari. The most overt demonstration of Singhasari's claim to overlordship is a statue of the Buddhist deity Amoghapasha found in the Batanghari valley of Jambi, with an inscription stating that the statue was given to the people of Sumatra by King Kertanagara of Singhasari. This image is a near-exact replica of another found at Candi Jago, near Kertanagara's capital in East Java. The erection of a statue of a deity closely associated with the king was a common way of asserting claims to overlordship in ancient India; it seems likely that a similar intention explains this statue's presence in the heartland of the old Malay kingdom. Possibly the trade route moved further north to avoid interference from the Javanese. However, this explanation seems unsatisfactory. If the Javanese could reach Jambi, they could certainly reach Singapore. Also, foreign merchants would have no need to avoid Javanese-controlled areas; it made no difference to them whether the taxing authority was local or distant.

Certainly the use of the route near Singapore by ships intending to sail directly from the east through the Straits of Melaka was much more economical than the route further south. Possibly the Chinese sailors only learned of the existence of this route at about the beginning of the fourteenth century. The complex nature of the waters, winds and land features in the Riau Archipelago caused the early European mariners much difficulty. It took the British some time to discover the existence of the Keppel Harbour strait; Raffles was unaware of it when he founded the British settlement at the mouth of the Singapore River in 1819. Only the Orang Laut knew all the intricacies of the area, and they did not willingly share their knowledge with outsiders. Archaeological evidence suggests that settlement around the Singapore River only began in the second half of the thirteenth century. It is impossible to tell whether the

inception of this settlement was the cause or the result of the shift in the trade route. The most that can be said in the present state of our knowledge is that the two developments were interrelated.

Wang Dayuan applies the name "Dragon's Tooth Strait" to a place which is "bordered by two hills of the Dan-ma-xi barbarians which look like dragons' teeth, between them there is a waterway."[41] He describes the "fields" of this place as "barren," yielding little rice, indicating that his use of the term also included the land on either side of the Strait. Next he describes the custom of the "chief" who puts on ceremonial dress and a bejewelled crown, which was found in the ground "in ancient times," to mark the beginning of the new year. The common people, he says, wore cotton jackets and black sarongs. Chinese were already living "side by side" with the indigenous people. The items traded there by the Chinese were "red gold, blue satin, cotton prints, Ch'u-chou-fu porcelain, iron caldrons, and such like things."[42] Ch'u-chou (in modern transcription Quzhou) is the name of a prefecture in Jiangxi province, in the region of the famous Longquan pottery kilns.

This information would suggest that the Dragon's Tooth Strait was a typical port in the southern Straits which existed mainly due to trade rather than locally produced items. In fact the source explicitly states that "Neither fine products nor rare objects come from here. All are obtained from intercourse with Chuan-chou traders." Wang then goes on to add information which shows that the intentions of the Dragon's Tooth Strait inhabitants were not at all peaceful, however:

> When junks sail to the Western Ocean the local barbarians allow them to pass unmolested but when on their return the junks reach Ji-li-men (Karimon), [then] the sailors prepare their armour and padded screens as a protection against arrows for, of a certainty, some two or three hundred pirate prahus will put out to attack them for several days. Sometimes [the junks] are fortunate enough to escape with a favouring wind; otherwise the crews are butchered and the merchandise made off with in quick time.[43]

It is difficult to reconcile the two images of Lung-ya-men which Wang presents. How could Chinese traders live side by side with the pirates who butchered Chinese traders? Is it possible that the references to the traders had been transposed from the description of the next port? This was called Banzu/Pan-tsu. Wang described it as "the hill back of Lung-ya-men, it is like a coil cut off [at the top], it rises to a hollow-topped summit enclosed in a series of

[rising] slopes [lit., coils]; as a consequence the people live all around it."[45] Here too "The soil is poor and grain scarce." In contrast to the people of Lung-ya-men, the people here "By custom and disposition are honest." Their appearance also was much different from those at Lung-ya-men: they wore their hair short rather than long, with fancy head-cloths of gold-brocaded satin, and red "oiled-cloths" as sarongs. Their industries included making salt by boiling sea-water, and brewing rice wine. Items offered for sale were the casques of hornbills, which the Chinese carved into decorative items; cotton; and laka wood, possibly a local product. In exchange the Chinese traders offered green cotton cloth, iron, both in bars and in the form of pots, "native cotton prints," "dark red gold" and other items not specified.

The name Banzu/Pan-tsu is certainly derived from the Malay word *pancur* ("spring [of water]").[44] Although this name is not used for the hill in any other source, archaeological and other evidence show that it could be no other place than Fort Canning Hill. And, indeed, in 1819 there was a spring on the west side of the Fort Canning Hill, which according to the inhabitants had been the king's bathing place during the time when a Malay royal family had lived on the hill. This may be a reference to the fourteenth century. The spring was an important source of water for ships during the 1820s, when an aqueduct was built to collect the water and channel it from the spring to the bank of the river. Perhaps it was used in a similar manner during the fourteenth century, which would explain why this name of "spring" would come to stand for the hill.

It seems incontrovertible that the Lung-ya-men by this time was the strait between Labrador Point and Sentosa. This identification is reinforced by the nature of the topography there. Until it was blown up in 1848, a pillar of granite stood several metres from the south shore and rose several metres in the air. This distinctive feature was variously known in the early nineteenth century as Lot's Wife in English, and Batu Berlayar ("Sail Rock") in Malay. To Chinese sailors, this rock might have reminded them of the two wooden pegs at the bows of their junks through which the anchor cables ran. In the Amoy language of southeast China these pegs are also known as "Dragon's teeth."[46]

Sentosa Island was formerly known by several names, one of which is Blakang Mati. The meaning of the name is obscure; the words literally mean "Behind Dead." According to the Malay author Abdullah Munshi, in the early nineteenth century there were still many stories of the pirate lair which once existed there. His description is rather colourful, but may not be too greatly exaggerated:

> Now at this time the seas round Singapore so far from being navigated freely by men, were feared even by jinns and devils, for along the shores were the sleeping-huts of the pirates. Whenever they plundered a ship or a ketch or a cargo-boat, they brought it into Singapore where they shared the spoils and slaughtered the crew, or fought to the death among themselves to secure their gains.
>
> All along the shore there were hundreds of human skulls rolling about on the sand; some old, some new, some with hair sticking to them, some with the teeth filed and others without...The Sea Gypsies were asked 'Whose are all these skulls?' and they replied 'These are the skulls of the men who were robbed at sea. They were slaughtered here. Wherever a fleet of boats or a ship is plundered it is brought to this place for a division of the spoils. Sometimes there is wholesale slaughter among the crews when the cargo is grabbed.'[47]

The similarity of Munshi Abdullah's reported conversation to Wang Dayuan's fourteenth-century account of the Dragon's Tooth Strait is striking. It is difficult to understand why the Chinese sailors would have chosen to sail through this narrow passage, which has several natural hazards, as well as the human one, in preference to the broad Main Strait only 15 km south. One can only assume that once again incomplete knowledge was responsible.

Thus there were three place-names associated with the Singapore area in the fourteenth century. Lung-ya-men was the western entrance to Keppel Harbour and surrounding shores. Pancur was "the hill behind" this strait, Fort Canning Hill. The third name, Dan-ma-xi, is a Chinese transliteration of Temasik. Wang's reference to Lung-ya-men as the strait between "two hills of the Dan-ma-xi barbarians" suggests that Temasik was a larger inclusive term. It must have been meant as a general toponym covering the south coast of Singapore and the offshore islands.

The name Temasik was relatively well-known in the fourteenth century. In 1330, perhaps precisely when Wang was visiting Pancur, a Vietnamese prince, Tran Nhat Duat, died. In his memorial, the Vietnamese annals mention that he had been able to serve as an interpreter for the Malay envoys from Sach-ma-tich, the Vietnamese transcription of Temasik.[48] A Javanese poem written in the sixteenth century, the *Pararaton*, records that the famous Prime Minister of Majapahit, Gajah Mada, swore to unify the Indonesian archipelago by conquering a number of countries, among them Temasik. Although this source is not unimpeachable, indisputable confirmation for Majapahit's interest in and claims over Temasik is found in a Majapahit court poem dated 1365 in which Temasik appears in a list of Majapahit's vassals.[49] It is therefore established that

by the middle of the fourteenth century Temasik had become a port of some importance, known from Java to Vietnam and among the traders of South China. There is yet another party who was also interested in Temasik: the expanding Thai.

To return now to the subject of Singapore's ancient fortification wall, it is quite possible that the wall already existed at the time of Wang's visit around 1330. In a section of his account describing the people of Hsien/Xian (usually interpreted as a Chinese transcription of "Siam"), he notes how a group of them had besieged Temasik for over a month. The people of Temasik however "shut up their gates" and held off the invaders. A stalemate ensued which was only relieved when a Chinese mission happened to pass by the place. This illustrative anecdote concerning ancient Temasik provides two useful pieces of evidence. First, it indicates that Chinese vessels not intending to call at Temasik regularly passed by close enough that they were able to see what was going on at the port. The normal sea lane thus ran very close to Temasik at this time. Second, it shows that the people of Temasik were in fact prepared for such an eventuality as a siege, a type of encounter which seems to have been rare in ancient Southeast Asia; in fact, the only other known description of such a military encounter also concerns Singapore. This is the Malay depiction of the attack on Singapore by the ruler of Majapahit during the reign of the last of the five kings mentioned in the *Sejarah Melayu*. The Javanese defeat Singapore due to treachery when a Singapore official, embittered against his ruler for an injustice done him, opens the gate of Singapore's fort after the battle had continued for several days without result. The fort itself is not described; it could have been a wooden stockade. However, the official and his wife were turned into stone in the moat of Singapura. This reference to the moat is reinforced by the statement that the rock could still be seen "to this day." This account corresponds to the Freshwater Stream on the north of the Old Lines of Singapore still visible in the early nineteenth century. The concern of the chronicler to point out a visible landmark which would confirm his version of events in early Singapore is interesting because it is unique; this is the only instance of such a reference to an existing trace of the past to be found in the entire *Sejarah Melayu*. Apparently the *parit Singapura* or "Singapore moat" was a feature of some renown in the Malay society of its time, as one would expect of an unusual defensive work.

The version of events leading to the fall of Singapore found in other works differs from that in the *Sejarah Melayu*. The Portuguese authors in Melaka recorded several versions of the history of Singapore's downfall. One of the most reliable in other matters, Tome Pires, who was writing only about 120

years after the event took place, says that Temasik's last ruler was a usurper from Sumatra named Parameswara. Parameswara had tried to declare independence from Java, but fled after the Javanese destroyed settlements on Bangka (probably these were his Orang Laut supporters). He came to Temasik, assassinated the local ruler, and "governed the channel and the islands...and he had not trade at all except that his people planted rice and fished and plundered their enemies, and lived on this the said channel of Singapore." This remark seems to be a reference to the piratical tendencies of the inhabitants. Parameswara had been accompanied by Orang Laut when he evacuated Palembang. While he stayed in Temasik, they occupied the waters around Karimun. According to another Portuguese author, João de Barros, the Singapore population hated the Orang Laut who came with Parameswara,[50] possibly because they had murdered a local man.

The murdered ruler of Singapore had been related to the king of Siam by marriage; probably Singapore at this time was a Siamese vassal. In revenge, after five years the Siamese attacked and drove Parameswara away. Another possibility is that he refused to pay tribute to Siam. The Chinese author Ma Huan in the early fifteenth century noted that Melaka in its early years paid tribute to them; failure to do so "would have provoked an attack."[51]

Parameswara evaded capture once again and fled into the jungles of the southern Malay peninsula. A few years later, his faithful Orang Laut discovered the advantages of the site of Melaka and invited Parameswara there to start a third kingdom.[52] De Barros also wrote that the Siamese, not the Javanese, were responsible for expelling Parameswara from Singapore to a place about 35 or 40 km upstream in what is now Johore.[53] The son of Alfonso d'Albuquerque, conqueror of Melaka, says that Parameswara was driven from Sumatra by a Javanese attack and came to Singapore; he adds the detail that a large town already existed there.[54]

Thus it seems clear that the attackers who invaded Singapore in about 1396 or 1397,[55] whether Javanese or Siamese, intended not to destroy Singapore but to punish one man, Parameswara. He successfully evaded capture twice, before founding a third centre north of the entrance to the Straits of Melaka. Here he seems to have found a site which was still sufficiently close to the south entrance to the Straits to enable him to regulate shipping, while simultaneously being remote from the attentions of both the expanding mandalas of the Javanese and the Siamese.

It seems that Melaka's rise was tied to Singapore's fall. De Barros wrote that when Parameswara's old enemy, the king of Siam, died, Parameswara:

> began to compel the ships which formerly navigated in the Strait between Malacca and Sumatra that they should no longer go to Singapore and also the ships from the East which used to come there to exchange merchandise with those from the West, according to old custom; as a result of this Singapore began to become empty of merchants who came to live in Malacca.[56]

Nevertheless Temasik was still known to the Chinese of the early fifteenth century. The name appears on the *Wu Bei Zhi* sailing charts, compiled from charts made during the Zheng He voyages of 1403–1433. The Zheng He charts in turn had probably made use of Arab sources.[57] A Chinese author, Shun-feng, writing around 1430, mentions Dan-ma-xi Strait as a place where passengers could change ship.[58]

The name "Singapura" is first known from an Arab source of 1462.[59] It may however have been introduced by Parameswara after his usurpation, in order to give his new capital a grander-sounding name with a Sanskrit derivation. Parameswara seems to have considered Temasik to be the most eligible location to establish a successor to the old royal capital at Palembang which had represented a main political centre for a very long time—700 years. The selection of Temasik as a plausible replacement for this ancient centre from which the trade of the Straits of Melaka could be controlled says much about the perception of Singapore's location in the eyes of the Malays. It seems probable that Parameswara was successfully dislodged from his position in Singapore because he was unable to muster support from among the local population. Nevertheless once Melaka became an alternative, trade was slowly drawn there from Singapore, and the population gravitated northward as well.

Factors which probably contributed to Singapore's fourteenth-century rise included the settlement of Chinese there; probably they established themselves there in small numbers when it was still a rather small settlement, and their interaction with local resource gatherers contributed to the port's growth. Perhaps some Chinese sailors discovered the shorter route through the Dragon's Tooth Strait around this time. Unsettled conditions in South Sumatra after the Javanese Pamalayu expedition of 1278 may also have made a more northerly approach an attractive option. Singapore itself possessed several advantageous features. One of these was the spring of water on Fort Canning Hill which gave the place its name in Wang Dayuan's *Dao Yi Zhi Lue*. Water was always a critical resource both for settlements and for ships in pre-modern times. A dependable and plentiful source was a valuable asset; Raffles' concern for developing the spring in 1819 indicates the perpetuation of the prominence which


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II

WHY THE BRITISH CAME TO SINGAPORE

Between 1682 and 1786 the British possessed only one foothold in all of Southeast Asia: the settlement of Bencoolen (in modern Indonesian orthography Bengkulu), on the southwest coast of Sumatra. This possession was originally obtained as a reaction to the Dutch attainment of supremacy over the port of Banten, West Java. Banten had been for over a century the main spice mart in Asia, and both the Dutch and the British made it the objective of their first voyages to the East Indies in 1596. The British established a factory there, and had good relations with the rulers. However in 1682 the Sultan fell out with his son and appointed heir, and the Dutch seized the opportunity to rid themselves of the main rival to their own commercial centre a mere 120 km to the east, at Batavia (modern Jakarta).

In 1685 the Dutch obtained exclusive rights to Banten's foreign trade, and all other Europeans were expelled. The British then formulated the strategy of trying to implant another factory in the centre of one of the main pepper-producing areas that had formed the foundation of Banten's prosperity: Bencoolen. This they succeeded in doing, only to be bitterly disappointed by the results. The settlement was located far off the main trade routes, had a sparse population, and few resources. For the 140 years of British occupation, the settlement


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