

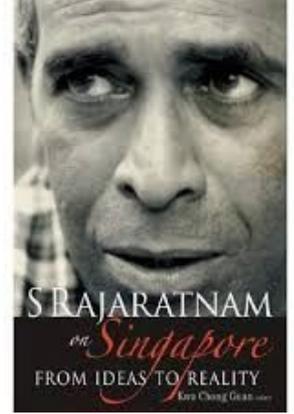
WHY WAS THERE NO SINGAPORE BEFORE RAFFLES?

Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Lecture Series:

1819 & Before:

Singapore's Pasts

S RAJARATNAM



"The island of Singapore as such has no long past. When Raffles founded Singapore in 1819 it was the home of a few hundred fishing folk. All we know of its past prior to this are vague hints that it was used a halting place by mariners, traders and pirates before they moved on to more congenial places. What happened before 1819 -- if anything worthwhile happened at all -- has been irretrievably lost in the mists of time."

28 April 1984

S RAJARATNAM

“Until very Singapore’s past was a matter of supreme indifference for most Singaporeans simply because they believed this island never really had a history worth remembering. For the immigrant Chinese, Malays, Indians and the British Singapore history was merely an extension of the history of the lands from which they emigrated some 170 years ago. Their ancestral lands had proven histories not only stretching back thousands of years but also boasting of a wondrous heritage.....

As against these ancestral histories for us to identify ourselves with a Singapore history could be something of a comedown. It begins in 1819 when Raffles landed in swampy Singapore with some 40-50 unremarkable kampong houses and no more than four hundred Malays, Orang Laut and sprinkling of very lost Chinese.

This is not the stuff out of which enthralling history is made. Nothing very much appears to have happened in Singapore -- if anything happened at all -- before Raffles landed in his unpromising island.”

14 May 1987

ISSUES

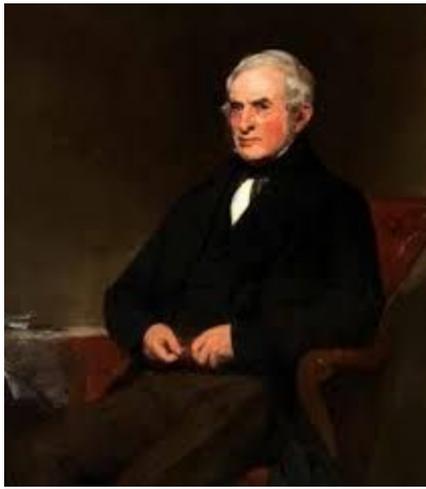
- ❖ How Did Rajaratnam come to this view that there is no Singapore before Raffles?
- ❖ What are the Assumptions underlying this view?
- ❖ How is this View of Singapore's past changing?

THE ORIGINS OF THE BELIEF OF AN UNINHABITED SINGAPORE BEFORE RAFFLES

Raffles:

"From every inquiry I have made I am fully satisfied of the value & importance of the Island of Singapore... it has been deserted for Centuries and long before the Dutch power existed in these Seas -- There are about 2,000 Inhabitants upon it (new Settlers) under a respectable Chief..."

8 January 1819



Dr JOHN CRAWFURD on SINGAPORE BEFORE 1819

"This is the name of an island, which with the exception of a single village of poor and predatory Malay fishermen, and that only formed in 1811, was covered with a primeval forest down to the 6th day of February 1819... for a period of about five centuries and a half, there is no record of Singapore having been occupied, and it was only the occasional resort of pirates. In ...1811... it was taken possession of by the party from whom we first received it, an officer of the government of Johore called the Tumangung. This person told me himself that he came there with about 150 followers,... in the summer of 1811.

(1856)

Both Raffles and Crawfurd:

- ❑ were aware of an earlier settlement on Singapore from their study of Malay history and the Portuguese references to a settlement in the 14th century
- ❑ But Raffles' arrived on a Deserted and Depopulated island
- ❑ Both Raffles and Crawfurd Saw the remains of this earlier settlement
- ❑ So, Concluded that this earlier settlement was abandoned "for a period of about five centuries and a half"

.....before the British "took possession" of the Island of Singapore.

THE TEMPLATE OF SINGAPORE HISTORY IS FORMED...

THE TEMPLATE IS SET



6 February is
ANNIVERSARY of
Singapore....

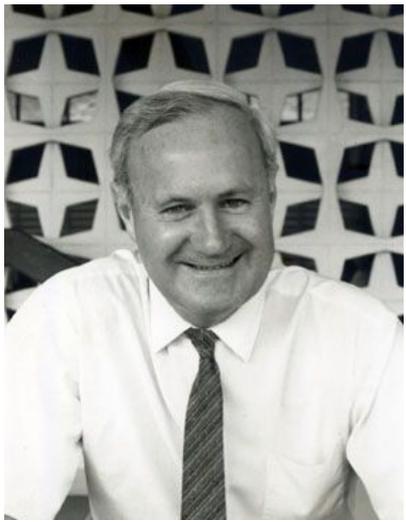
Illustrated London News
22 Apr 1854 "Ball at
Singapore"



Sir Frank
Swettenham,
GCMG, CH
1906/1955

...to him we owe the possession of Singapore, the Gate of the Farther East, a naval base of the highest importance, a great commercial centre, and the most prosperous of British Crown Colonies. Indirectly, the foresight which secured Singapore for the British Empire led also to the extension of British influence throughout the States of the Malay Peninsula...

THE TEMPLATE IS CONSOLIDATED



Raffles
Professor of
History K G
Tregonning ,
1969

“Modern Singapore begin in 1819. Nothing that occurred on the island prior to this has particular relevance to an understanding of the contemporary scene; it is of antiquarian interest only.”



THE TEMPLATE IS INSCRIBED
IN STONE..

*History as taught at the
University of
Malaya/Singapore/National
University of Singapore*

...what is contained in
the STRAITS
SETTLEMENTS
FACTORY RECORDS,
the COLONIAL OFFICE
records....



"Modern Singapore is unique in that she was founded in 1819 on the initiative of one individual, Sir Stamford Raffles, despite almost universal opposition...

The great trading city of the *Malay Annals* was probably a myth. There is no corroboration for this role of Temasek/Singapura... The unique geographical situation of Singapore island ... which has been a cause of Singapore's commercial success in modern times, was not of comparable importance in ancient days, when the routes depended on the trade winds centred on south-east Sumatra... Temasek was at most a small outpost of Srivijaya...

C M TURNBULL, *A History of Singapore 1819-1975* (1977), pg.4



The Dutch and Portuguese unaware of this "peculiarly admirable Geographical position" of Singapore island?

THE PARADOX OF SINGAPORE HISTORY

"A British station commanding the Southern entrance of the Straits of Malacca, and commanding extraordinary local advantage with a peculiarly admirable Geographical position, has been established at Singapore, the ancient Capital of the Kings of Johor."

Raffles. Jan 1819



*Raffles Professor
of History
Wong Lin Ken*

“What we know of the history of Singapore before 1819 indicates that its development could not be separated from the territorial ambitions of Srivijaya, Majapahit, Thailand and the Melaka and Johor sultanates. It has changed its overlord several times, according to the fortunes of the early empires in Southeast Asia. But no historian has yet adequately explained why Singapore failed to be a major trading centre before the 19th century. (1981)



*Sir Richard O
Winstedt*

"How was it that an island which Raffles found to be a mangrove-swamp inhabited by a few fishermen attracted attacks from the Cholas, Majapahit and Siam? As a colony, its fate was bound up with that of the empires of Srivijaya, Majapahit and Siam, each of which owned it in turn. (1935)

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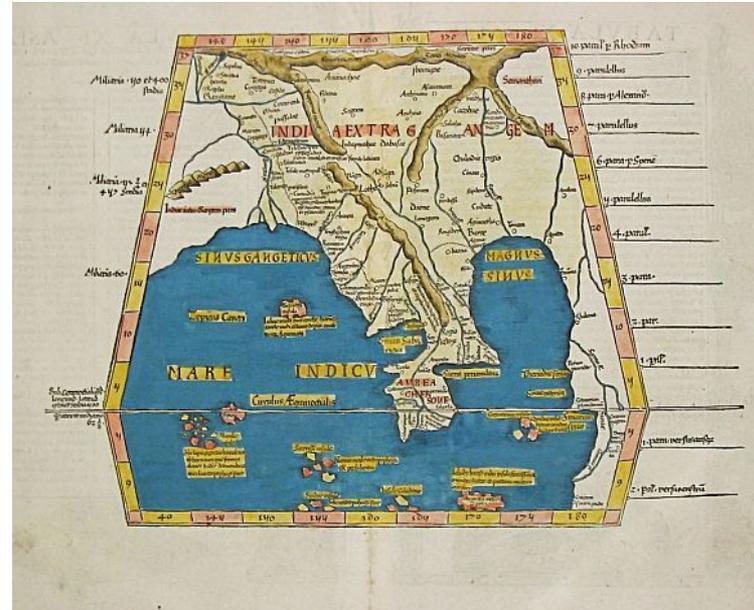
"[the 7th century CE] was a time of great expansion for Srivijaya ...it is highly improbable that, possessing Bangka and being strong enough to attack Java, Palembang would not exercise control over Temasek or Singapura ...it would appear that Singapore was colonised by a ruler of Palembang, probably about the seventh century CE" (19664)



SEARCHING FOR EARLY SINGAPORE

Roland Braddell starting with Ptolemy...

Ptolemy's “*Sabara emporium*”
is Temasek/Singapore?



SEARCHING FOR EARLY SINGAPORE:

Hsu Yun-Ts'iao

Tan Yeok Seong

SOUTH SEAS SOCIETY

Searching the Classical Chinese Records and Histories for
Singapore.

MALAYAN HISTORICAL STUDIES

THE
GOLDEN
KHERSONESE

Studies in the Historical Geography of the
Malay Peninsula before A.D. 1500

PAUL WHEATLEY

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA PRESS

SEARCHING FOR EARLY SINGAPORE

Paul Wheatley

Studying Early Singapore as the
Historical Geography of settlement



SOUTH EAST ASIAN STUDIES PROGRAM

A HISTORY OF SINGAPORE

EDITED BY
ERNEST C.T. CHEW
AND
EDWIN LEE

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

“The Geographical Setting” by Geographer Lim Joo-Jock was how the Early History of Singapore was framed by Assoc Prof Ernest Chew and his History Dept colleagues in their *A History of Singapore* in 1991





SEARCHING FOR EARLY SINGAPORE

Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill
Journal of the Malayan Branch of the
Royal Asiatic Society

Studying sailing charts and Rutters

Sailing past Singapore

"Malayan studies was of antiquarian interests only, the preserve largely of expatriates such as Charles [sic] Gibson-Hill, the eccentric, loveable genius who ran the Raffles Museum and edited the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)* or Tom Harrison, the editor in Kuching of the *Sarawak Museum Journal*/"

Tregonning, in Nov 1989 memoirs, pg. 11

"ANTIQUARIANISM" : how the past was studied between the 15th and 19th centuries in Europe by amateurs and dilettantes randomly bits and pieces of evidence of the past which have no relevance for the present.

So, for Tregonning, the work of Gibson-Hill, and all who contributed to JMBRAS - Wheatley, Braddell, & ct

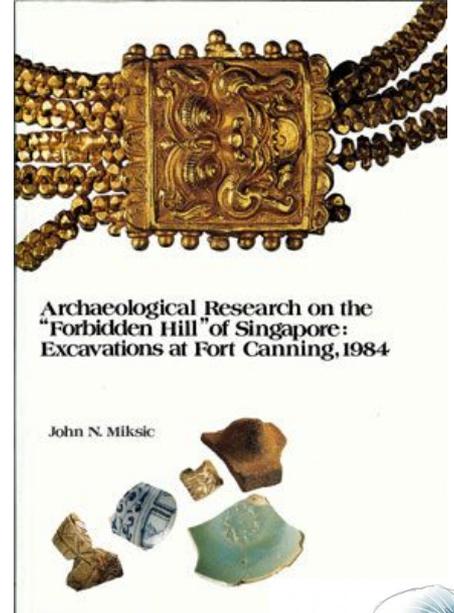
Of ANTIQUARIAN INTEREST ONLY BECAUSE:

IT DID NOT CONNECT TO TREGONNING'S (and also Turnbull's, Wong Lin Ken's or Ernest Chew and his History Dept. colleagues') BRITISH COLONIAL PAST LEADING TO THEIR DECOLONIZING PRESENT AND POSTCOLONIAL FUTURE.

CURRENT APPROACHES TO EARLY SINGAPORE

John N Miksic and archaeology of Early Singapore

Continuing today under the Archaeological
Unit of Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre



CURRENT APPROACHES TO EARLY SINGAPORE

Re-reading the Malay Annals/Sejarah Melayu on the Founding of Singapura: Between mythos and History

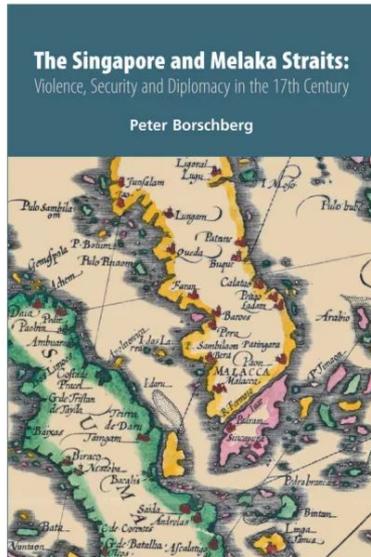
Oliver W. Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History* (1970)

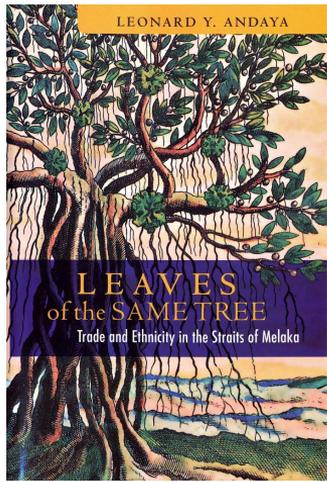
Andrea Acri on a deeper reading of the *Malay Annals*

CURRENT APPROACHES TO EARLY SINGAPORE

Searching the Early Modern Portuguese & Dutch Records/Archives/Cartography

Peter Borschberg: From Hugo Grotius to Portuguese-Dutch Rivalry/Conflict





CURRENT APPROACHES TO EARLY SINGAPORE

(Re)Framing Malay History

Leonard Y. Andaya on the *orang laut* in Malay history

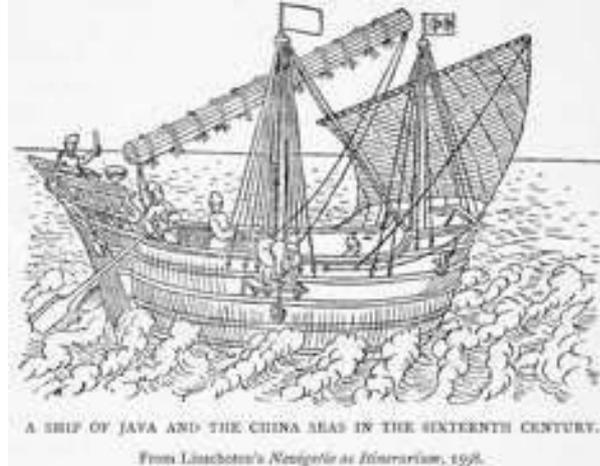




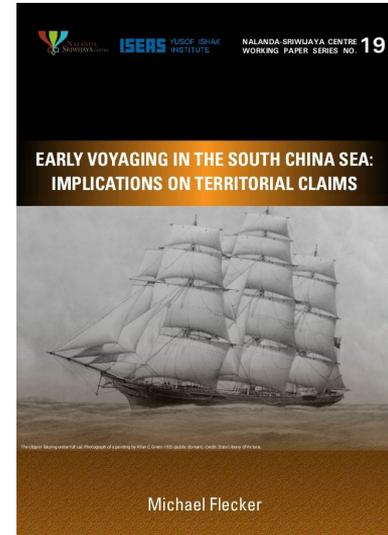
CURRENT APPROACHES TO EARLY SINGAPORE

Mike Flecker on

The Malay ships sailing in the Straits



A SHIP OF JAVA AND THE CHINA SEAS IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.
From Lisachoten's *Navigatio ac Itinerarium*, 1598.



CONCLUSION:

Does the Current Approaches Lead to a "CONNECTED" History of Singapore:

- ❖ *Connecting Singapore's Pre-1819 Past with its Post-1819 Past and its Post-1965 Present?*
- ❖ *Connecting Singapore with Others across Space & Time?*

Turnbull (2009 edn *History of Modern Singapore*, pg. 4):

"The findings of careful archaeological work carried out in the late twentieth century...together with the study of pre-colonial records, charts and maps, supplement but basically support the previous known story: namely that Temasek appeared and flourished for a few decades as one of a number of moderately prosperous ports in the region but came to a sudden, violent and mysterious end at the close of the fourteenth century....that, after the fall of Temasek, nothing of significance took place on the island until Raffles's party landed in 1819."