

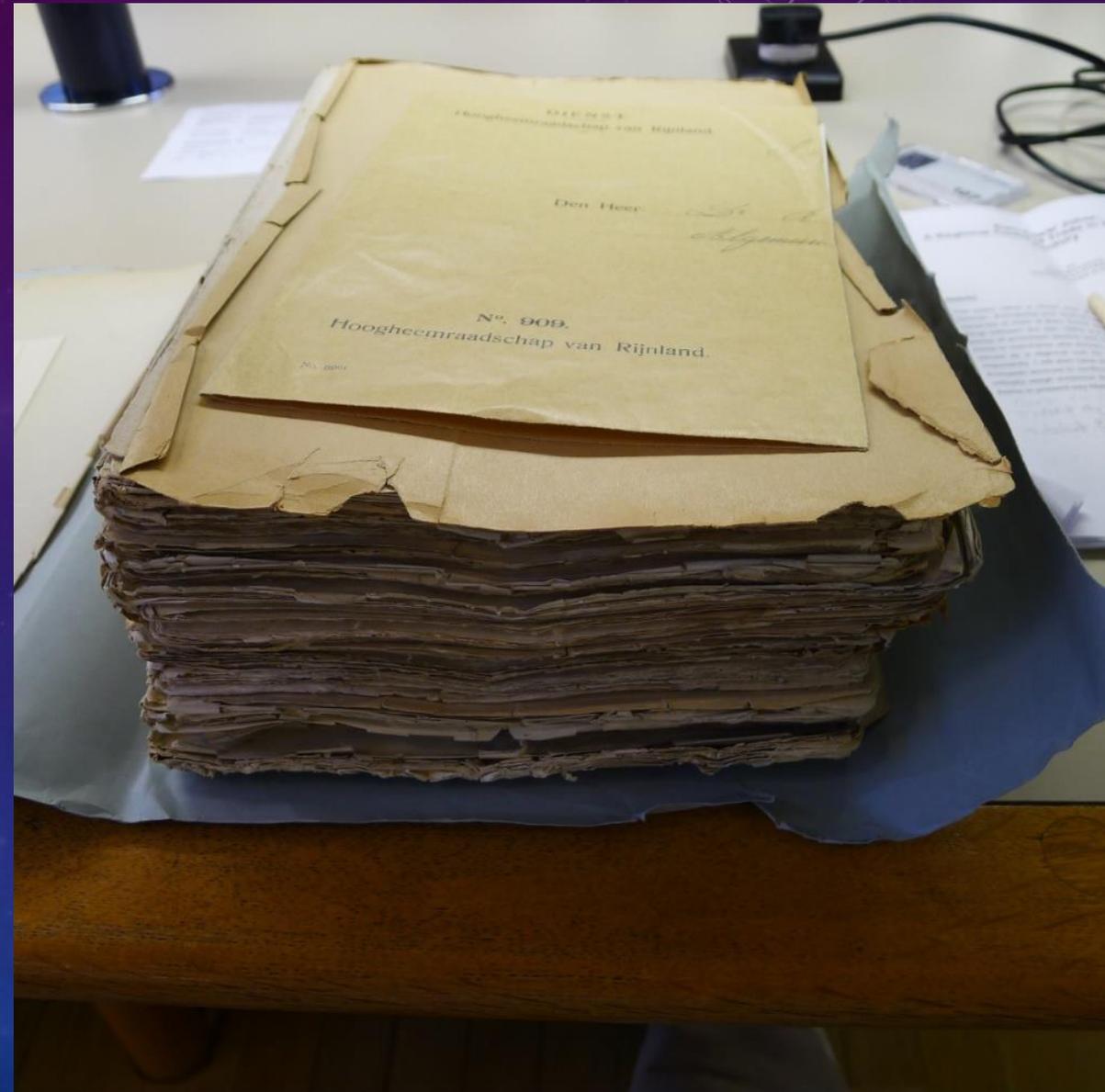
The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle starry pattern. On the left side, there are several overlapping circular elements. A prominent one is a large circular scale with tick marks and numbers ranging from 140 to 260. Other circles include dashed lines, solid lines, and arrows, suggesting a technical or scientific theme.

# HISTORY OF SINGAPORE: PORTUGUESE & DUTCH SOURCES

PETER BORSCHBERG

# SYNOPSIS

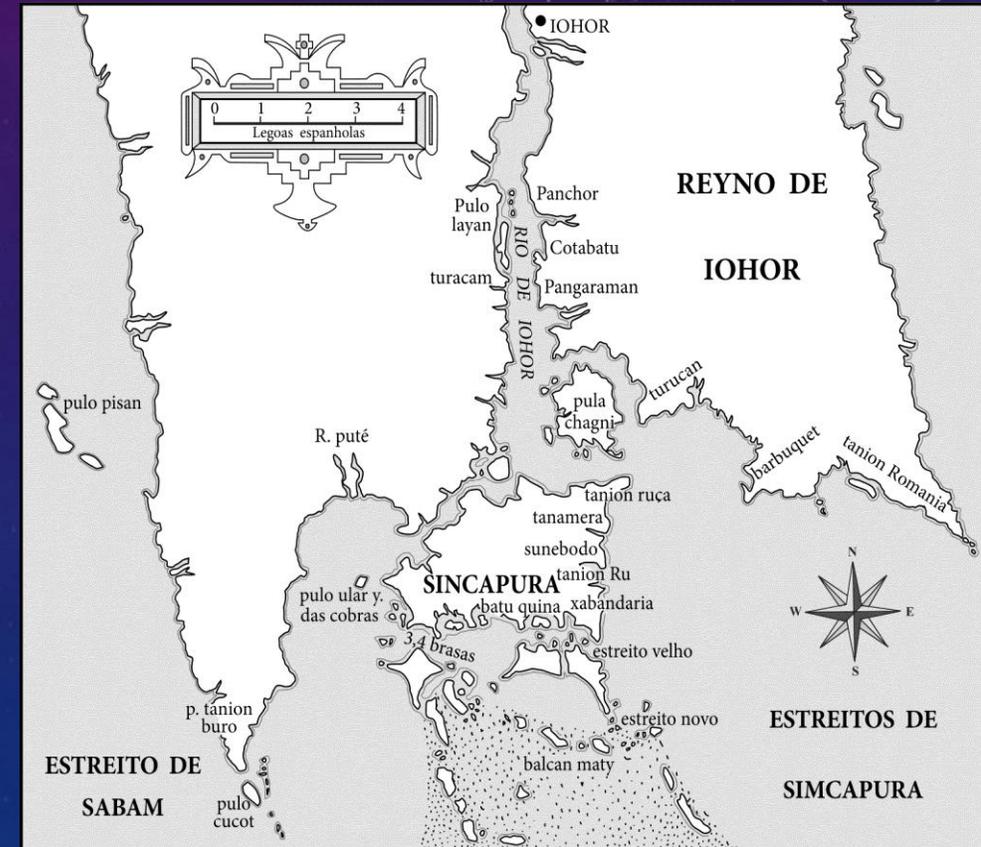
- Preliminary comments
- Series of questions about the nature, scope, problems arising from early sources on Singapore
- Some “patterns”
- Conclusions



17<sup>th</sup> Century documents in the Dutch National Archives

# PRELIMINARIES

- Not a reconstruction of Singapore history as such, but general comments, problematize sources, not overwhelm with detail
  - Step back and share experience working on *different types of sources* over past 2 decades
  - Closer look at those different types of sources, *what they tell us and what they don't*
  - Focus on Portuguese, Dutch materials broadly defined
  - Singapore in early cartography
- Earlier work with Portuguese materials in 1950s
  - Ian Alastair Macgregor, *History, U. Singapore*
  - Carl-Alexander Gibson-Hill, Director, Raffles Museum



Reconstructed map of Singapore and the Johor River ascribed to M.G. de Erédia, 1616-22

# SOME QUESTIONS

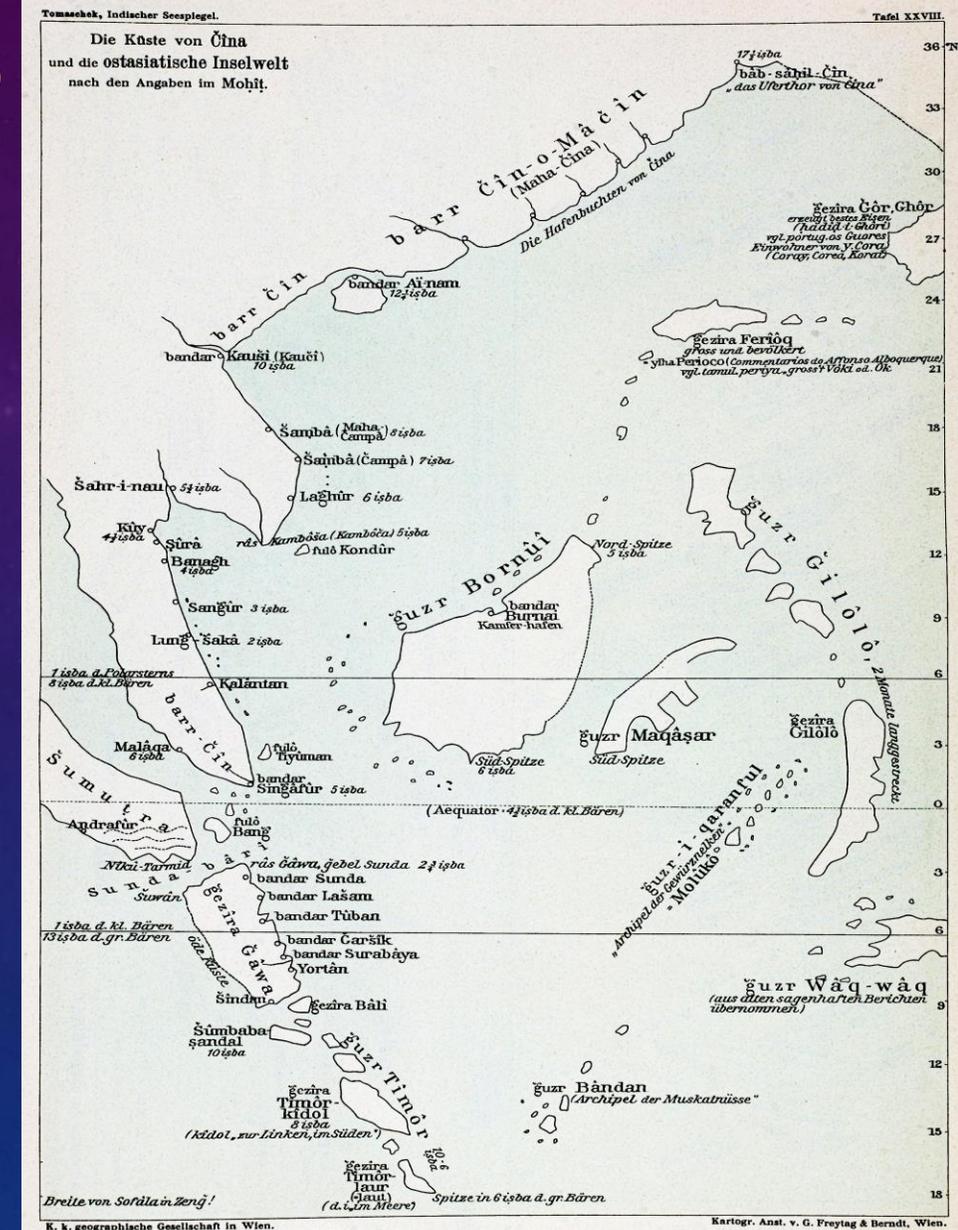
- What types of primary sources are there?
- What is a Portuguese source? Or a Dutch source?
- Who wrote it, drew it? For what purpose or to what end?
- What are the sources interested in? Especially the texts?
- How many? How substantial are these testimonies?
- What are the main challenges arising from cartography?
- When does the toponym Singapore (or one of its many variants) mean and what specifically does it refer to?
- What are the other names for Singapore island/for the settlement? How were they understood by the Portuguese and others at the time?



A Muslim trading vessel, 16<sup>th</sup> Century

# WHAT TYPES OF PRIMARY SOURCES?

- 1) Material objects (archaeology).
  - Mostly 15<sup>th</sup> C., but little if anything from later periods
  - Subject of separate paper in this series
- 2) Texts
  - Navigational instructions (rutters), travel reports, letters, treaties, chronicles, encyclopaedia entries; printed or manuscript form
- 3) Maps, charts
  - manuscript and published
- 4) Scientific
  - E.g. evidence of precipitation/droughts, volcano eruptions, tsunamis, spread of diseases, etc.
- Not all of equal significance, esp. for reconstructing the history of Singapore; *focus today on texts and cartography (2+3)*

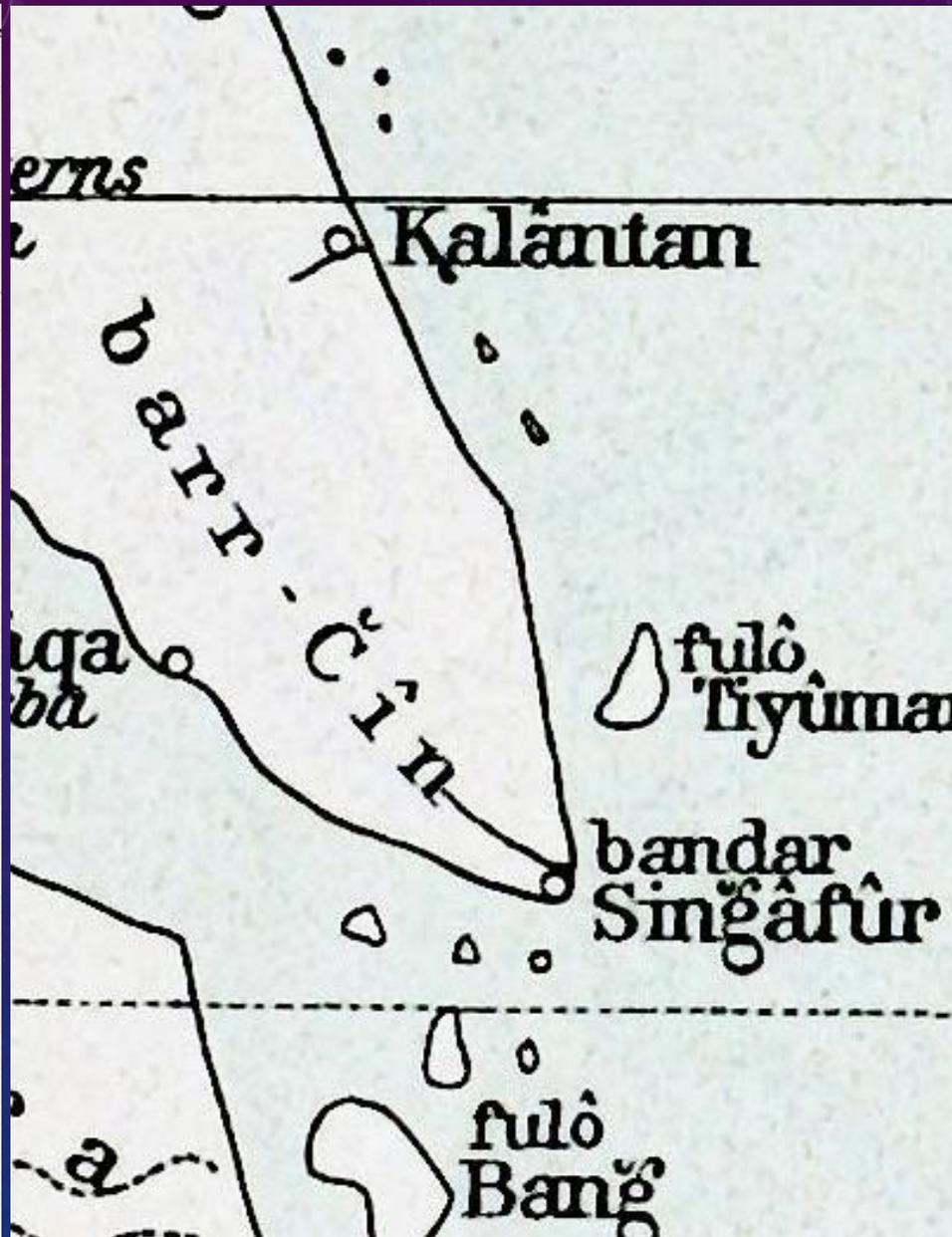
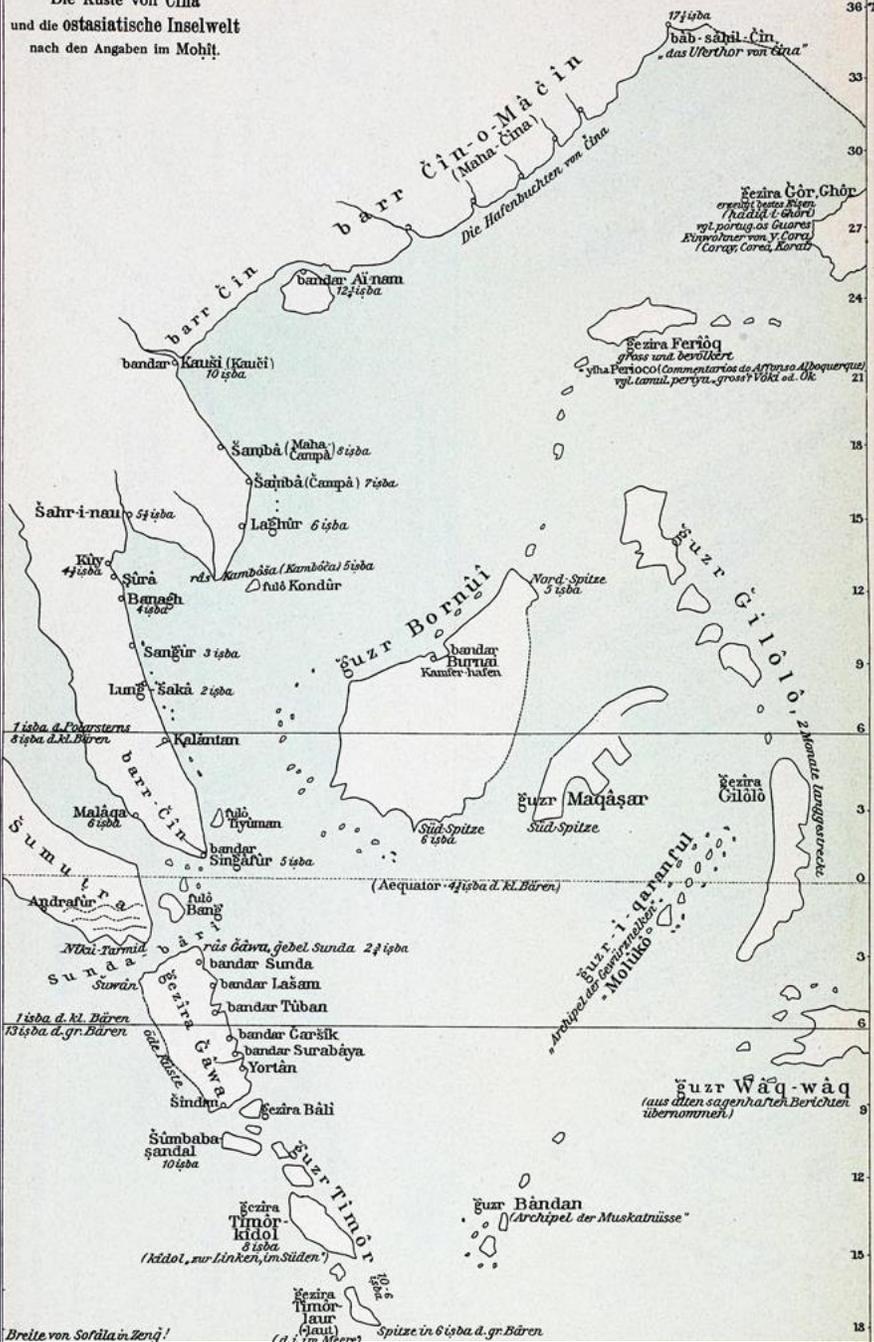


Reconstructed map based on information in the 1558 copy of the *Muhit* in Vienna

# WHAT IS A “PORTUGUESE SOURCE”, OR A “DUTCH SOURCE”?

- Texts found are written in an array of *European* languages: Portuguese, Dutch, German, Spanish, Italian, Latin.
- Also testimonies in *Asian* languages
  - E.g. 16<sup>th</sup> C. Ottoman rutter *Muhit*---brief mention of Singapore port and location.
  - Often fragmentary, inconclusive, generic
- What is a “Portuguese” or a “Dutch” source? A q. of language? Individual affiliation? Location working from?
  - Not all texts affiliated with the Portuguese/Dutch were written in P/D.
  - Examples: John of Empoli (Italian); Jacques de Coutre (Spanish and Portuguese); Johann Verken (German). Catholic missionaries in Latin (Francis Xavier’s letters from Singapore) other vernaculars (Italian, Spanish, etc.)

Die Küste von Čina  
und die ostasiatische Inselwelt  
nach den Angaben im Mohit.

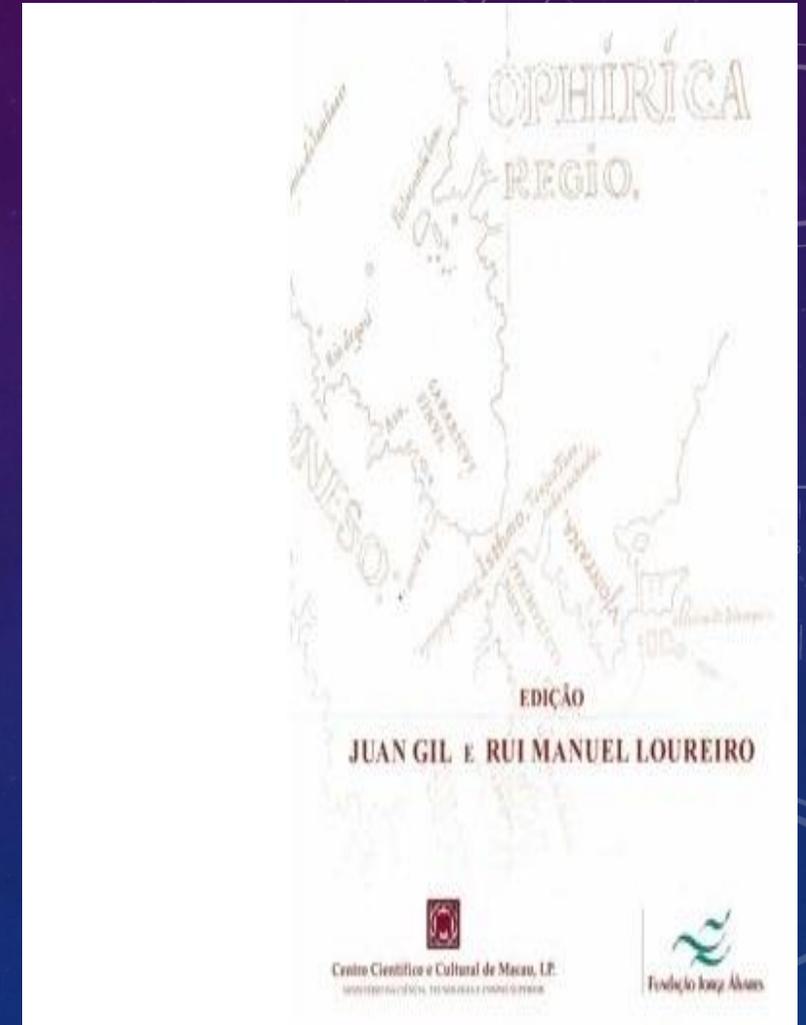


**Seidi Ali (1558)**  
Reconstruction by  
Tomaschek, 1897

 *Bandar Singapur*  
(Port Singapore)  
at tip of Malay  
Peninsula which is  
labelled  
*barr – Cin*  
(Coast of China).

# WHO WROTE IT, DREW IT, AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE OR TO WHAT END?

- A case of “know your author”, know the context
  - E.g. Tomé Pires
    - Pires’ works problematized by Rui Loureiro, etc.
  - Manuel Godinho de Erédia, etc.
    - Erédia’s works under scrutiny, problematized by Jorge Flores, Rui Loureiro, John Everaert, etc.
- Statements on Sg can be confusing or virtually meaningless
- Find myself going back many times to a given source. Takes a lot of time and care.



Most recent major source: Erédia’s “Treatise on Mt. Ophir, 1616” ed by Juan Gil and Rui Loureiro (based on orig. ms. in BNF, Paris)

# HOW SUBSTANTIAL ARE THE TESTIMONIES?

- About 1000 known testimonies of varying length in all European languages
- *The vast majority are very short*, but can range from a few words to a few pages
- Mentions over 1 paragraph are rare; e.g.: Jacques de Coutre. These are the most valuable, potentially yield the most substantive, useful information.
- Often do not tell us what we would like them to: e.g. letters of Francis Xavier, Erédia's "Mount Ophir"; John of Lisbon's rutter for the Singapore Straits.
- Mostly references to natural features, the waters, the islands and the *orang laut* who live and move about in the Straits. Often generic and of little value historically
  - 3 main types/patterns of accounts:
    - A) Enthusiast: "string of pearls": factoids connected with "and".
    - B) Adolescent: mainly interested in themselves, their friends and immediate associates
    - C) Incidental: not the main focus, an "aside" with little or no detail.

# WHAT ARE THE TEXTS INTERESTED IN?

- Occasionally get calls and emails about “discoveries” on Singapore. Vast majority are about the Straits.
  - What can be observed from the deck of a passing ship or fetching fresh water on land
  - Thick foliage concealed view, restricted to the immediate coastline or river banks.
- Direct references to a settlement exist in Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and German, but problems:
  - Inconclusive about size, exact location, or level of activity in the port
  - BUT: functional port with laksamana and later a shahbandar in 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> C.

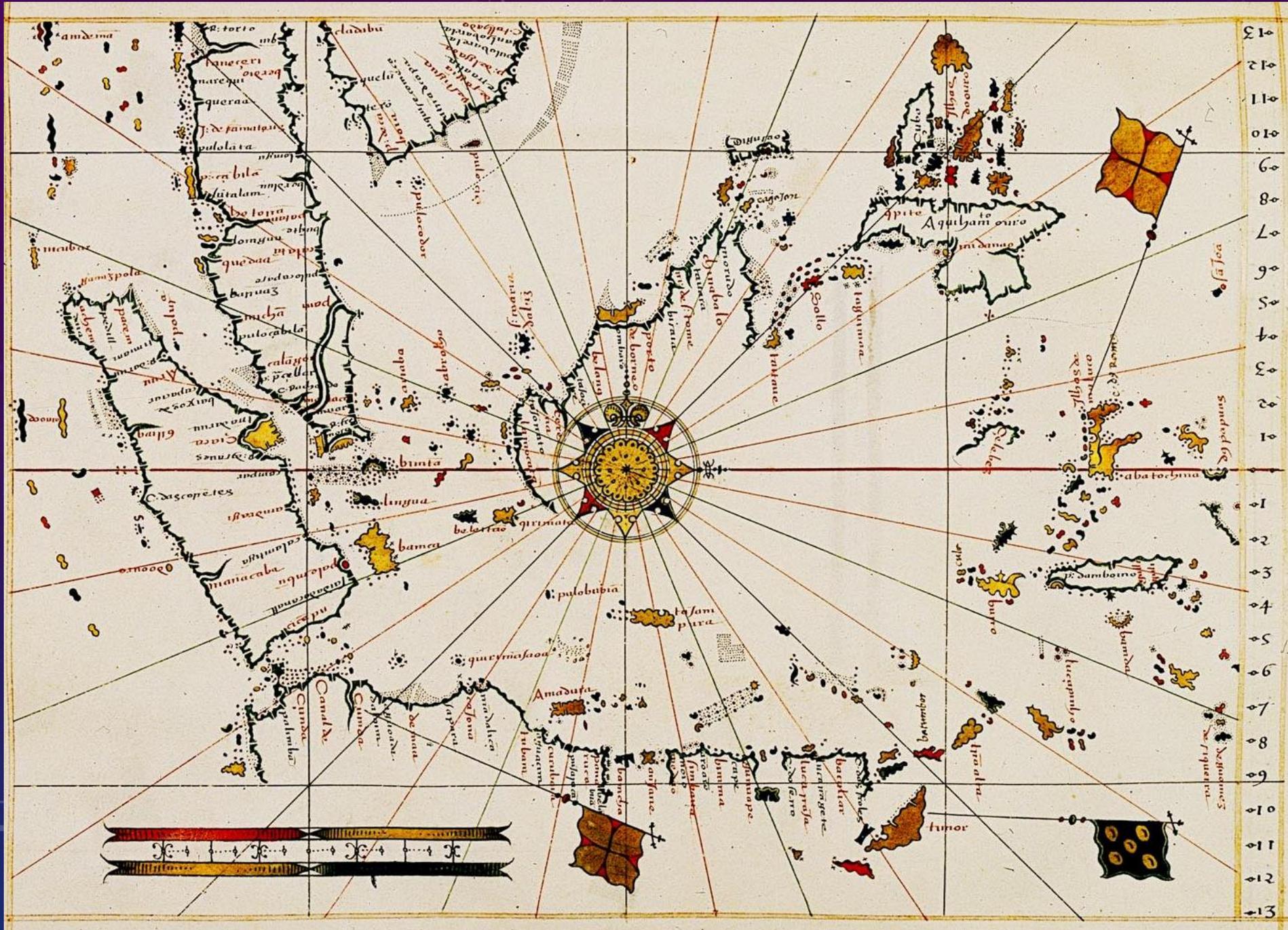
# HOW DO THE PORTUGUESE SOURCES STACK UP TO THE DUTCH ONES?

- Context and authorial intention are crucial
- Portuguese sources, esp. the printed chronicles: celebrate heroic exploits; military or also commercial focus; sometimes stories/oral histories (e.g. information in T. Pires on Parameswara).
  - Much depends on purpose of document, first-hand familiarity and level of education of the author
- Dutch: In late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> C: steep learning curve.
  - Collecting as much information as possible.
  - As trading company: interested in products for trade, market mechanisms, taxes, gifts, who's who at the royal courts and what the Portuguese are up to.
- Unexpected level of analysis and depth for the period c. 1595-1640.
  - Luso-Dutch conflict (c.1581-1640) leaves a vast paper trail!
- For reconstructing local conditions (e.g. on Johor) the Dutch sources yield more detailed/useful information: What trade in? How and whom to approach to get business done?
- Barring some exceptions, the Portuguese textual sources less diverse and detailed

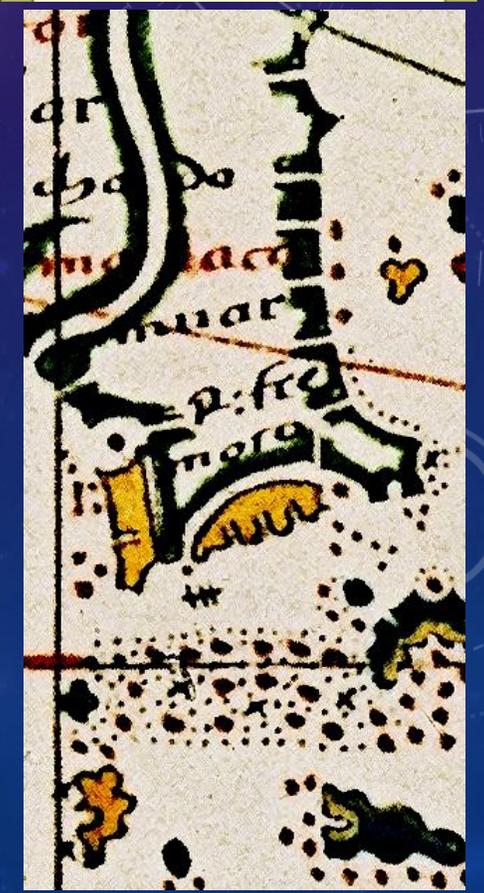
# WHAT ARE THE ISSUES ARISING SPECIFICALLY FROM HISTORICAL CARTOGRAPHY?

- A collage of information
- How much of it is based on actual experience?
- Garbled place names
- Uncertain locations:
  - (Singapore sometimes a city or settlement on the mainland, confused with Johor Lama or Batu Sawar in 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> Centuries?)





**Gaspar Viegas (1537)**  
Belived to be the first map to recognizably show Singapore Island.



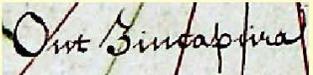
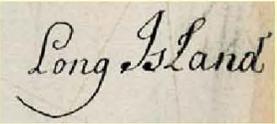
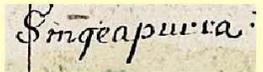
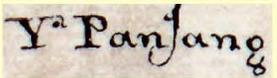
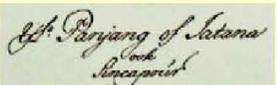




## André Pereira dos Reis (1654)

- ✦ Most detailed map of its time (2 ms. copies)
- ✦ Old Strait between Singapore and Sentosa
- ✦ Name *Sincapura* attached to the island with the *Xebandaria* (harbour master's compound)
- ✦ Governor's Strait north of Batam



1558	bandar Singâfûr
1569	 Cincapura
1570	 Singatola
1625	 Omt Singapora
1675	 Long Island
1680	 Singapurra
1710	 Pullo Polle
1755	 PULO ou ISLE PANJANG
1770	 Y <sup>e</sup> Panjang
1785	 Y <sup>e</sup> Panjang of Satana ook Singapore
1803	PULO PANJANG
1823	Sincapour Island
1826	<b>SINGAPORE</b>

# Varied spellings, references, locations

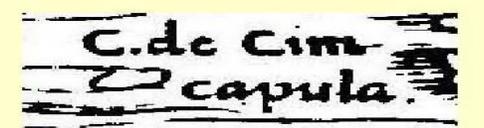
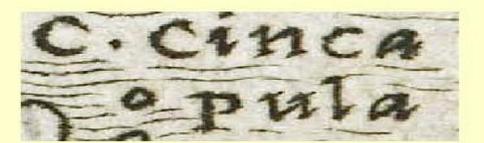
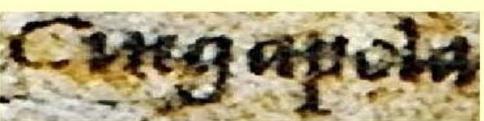
- Confusion in the charts and maps is mirrored in the written texts
- Not always clear what a given name refers to, or where it is exactly located
- Different names, locations over time for the settlement, island (see left)

# WHEN IS THE TOPONYM SINGAPORE (OR ONE OF ITS MANY VARIANTS USED) AND WHAT DOES IT REFER TO?

- Many references to the name “Sincapura” or one of its many orthographic variants,
- Island, Settlement and port (porto), cape, promontory (ponta), coastal range, gateway (porta)
- Hinterland (charts, Thevet)
- One of the straits (1-3): Old and New Straits, after c.1616 main strait (“Governor’s Strait”)
- Zedler’s German *Universal-Lexicon* (1H 18<sup>th</sup> C): 5 entries on SG under different spellings: reflects methodology of compilation, confusion, what an intelligent person could find.



1502  
1504  
1507  
1508  
1513  
1516  
1522  
1525  
1529  
1541  
1547  
1548  
1554

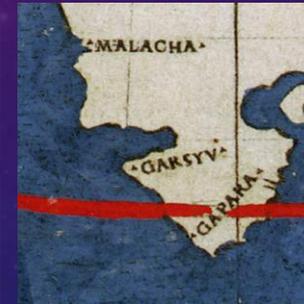
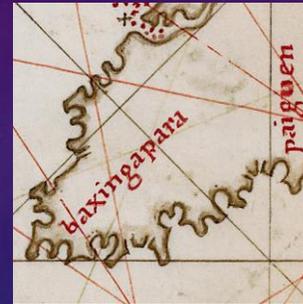


# TOPONYM IN EARLY E. CARTOGRAPHY

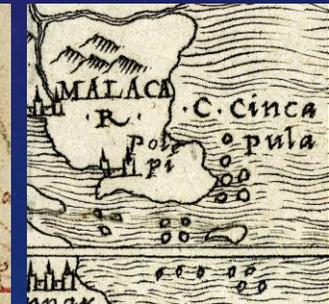
- ❖ Maps before 1516 have the prefix BA, BAR or GAR which means Country or Coast
- ❖ A middle section GIM, SYN, XIN, equivalent to Sin or Çin
- ❖ And the ending GAPARA (or a corruption thereof), being gopara, gapura (gate, gateway)
- ❖ On maps before the 1550's Singapore generally refers to a gateway (point of transition), cape, promontory

# An elastic toponym, varied spellings with different meanings

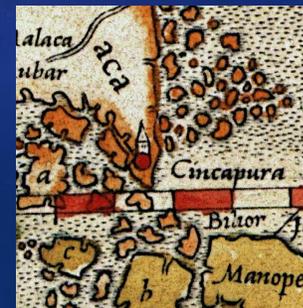
- Gateway, Promontory, (Coastal region)

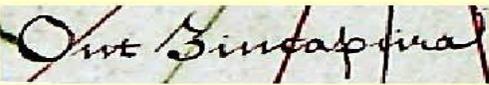
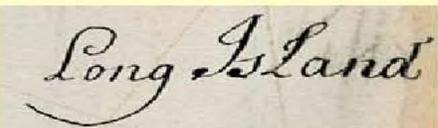
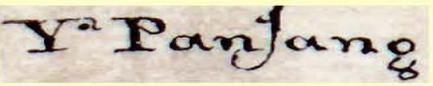
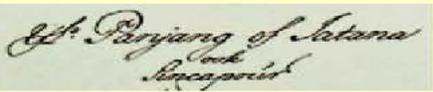


- Cape



- City (on mainland)



1558	bandar Singâfûr
1569	 Cincapura
1570	 Singatola.
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1675	 Long Island
1680	 Singeapura:
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1785	 Y <sup>a</sup> Panjang of Satana Saccapouit
1803	PULO PANJANG
1823	Sineapour Island
1826	<b>SINGAPORE</b>

WHAT ARE THE OTHER NAMES FOR SINGAPORE ISLAND/FOR THE SETTLEMENT? WHAT DO THEY MEAN AND WHAT DID THE PORTUGUESE AT THE TIME THINK THEY MEANT?

- Beyond the “Lion City”
- B. de Albuquerque and J. de Barros: “falsa demora”
- “Singgah Pura” (Wheatley)
- Isla de la Sabandaria Vieja, Sabandaria (settlement)
- Pulau Panjang, ‘t Lange Eylandt, Long Island, Isle Panjang, Ysla Panjang, etc.
- Insel Gubernator (Laimbeckhoven)

# SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Are there more sources to be found?
  - Not in the obvious places
- Do the EM sources contain dark and undisclosed secrets that are waiting to be discovered?
  - If they do exist, not immediately recognizable as such, perhaps using different toponyms, adds complexity to evaluation
- The sources are what they are, warts and all
  - Do not necessarily inform us what we would want them to, lack depth, preoccupied with other priorities (e.g. Francis Xavier's letters)
- Numerically more for certain periods and less for others (Portuguese sources: 1511-1640), Dutch for the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> C, esp. first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> and last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> C.



## SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Written sources are often difficult to read and difficult to understand. Much depends on the nature, purpose of the document and the level of education of the author/copyist
- Fragmentary, range from a few words to a few pages
- Not always clear what the toponym “Sincapura” is taken to refer to: city, port, settlement, island, promontory, coastal range, strait, hinterland
- Offer alternative *historical* explanations (Singapore as “falsa demora”)
- Many (if not most) references are ephemeral/irrelevant for the purposes of our historical enquiries today
- Some substantial testimonies (esp. Dutch materials)

# BEYOND SINGAPORE: QUESTIONS FROM EARLY WRITTEN SOURCES

- Recently been reviewing materials again from a different vantage point: diplomatic rituals, peace making, and indigenous agency in early phase of colonial expansion
  - Malays: “Embrace” your enemy!
  - Europeans: “With (a little) help from my friends” (How much help *did* the Dutch in particular get when they arrived in the late 1500s and early 1600s?)
  - Together: Are there “joint projects”?