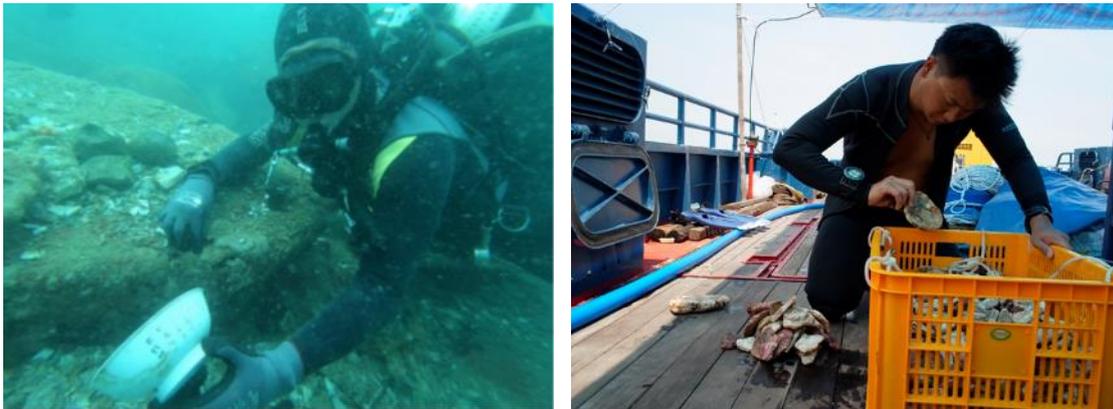


MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

TWO HISTORIC SHIPWRECKS DISCOVERED IN SINGAPORE TERRITORIAL WATERS, MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ONGOING

*Findings will contribute towards the understanding and safeguarding of our maritime
archaeological heritage*



Maritime archaeological works conducted at the sites of the two historic shipwrecks.

Singapore, 16 June 2021 – The understanding of Singapore’s maritime history and heritage, dating as far back as the 14th century, will soon be enriched, due to the discovery of two historic shipwrecks within Singapore Territorial Waters around Pedra Branca and the resulting archaeological research which is still ongoing.

2 In 2015, some ceramic plates were discovered by divers involved in a maritime operation in Singapore Territorial Waters around Pedra Branca, which led to the discovery of the first historic shipwreck (termed “Shipwreck 1”) about 100m to the north-west of Pedra Branca. In 2016, the National Heritage Board (NHB) commissioned the Archaeology Unit of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) to survey and investigate the site, and to conduct excavations to recover wrecks and found objects from Shipwreck 1. The excavations lasted until 2019, during which further detection surveys conducted by ISEAS in the immediate vicinity led to the discovery of the second historic shipwreck (termed “Shipwreck 2”), about 300m east of Pedra Branca. A series of excavations to recover objects from Shipwreck 2 were carried out from 2019 to mid-2021.

3 The surveys, investigations and maritime archaeological excavations are part of efforts to safeguard Singapore's maritime archaeological heritage and were carried out in accordance with international best practices pertaining to the recovery and protection of maritime wrecks and artefacts.

4 As the two shipwrecks were found within Singapore Territorial Waters, the ownership of the shipwrecks and artefacts are determined by Singapore's domestic laws. In accordance with the Merchant Shipping Act, a one-month notice period¹ was given for potential claimants to claim the wrecks. As there were no claims at the end of the window period, the Singapore Government has a statutory right to the unclaimed wrecks and their artefacts.

Research findings

5 ISEAS' findings and research data, based on the recovered artefacts, suggest that the two shipwrecks originate from two different time periods.

6 According to ISEAS' research to date:

- Shipwreck 1 contained Chinese ceramics, which may date back to the 14th century, a period in history when Singapore was widely known as Temasek. Direct parallels can be made between the finds from Shipwreck 1 and those from the archaeological excavations at Empress Place (conducted in 2015) and from past excavations at Fort Canning Park.
- Shipwreck 2 is likely to be the *Shah Munchah*, a merchant vessel built in India, which sank while voyaging from China back to India in 1796. Artefacts recovered from Shipwreck 2 include a diverse range of Chinese ceramics and non-ceramic artefacts such as copper-alloy, glass and agate objects, as well as anchors and cannons of the ship. The cannons were typically mounted on merchant ships employed by the East India Company during the 18th and early 19th centuries, and used mostly for defensive purposes and signalling.
- The finds from both Shipwrecks 1 and 2 will contribute towards the research and enhance insights into the maritime trading history of Singapore and the region in their respective time periods.

¹ The notice was issued on 11 May 2021 and expired on 10 June 2021.

Next Steps – Conservation, Research and Future Access

7 The artefacts retrieved from the maritime archaeological excavations are currently stored and stabilised at secured facilities, and the process is being managed by NHB and ISEAS. After desalination, they have to be meticulously cleaned, conserved and catalogued. In-depth research and documentation will also need to be carried out.

8 Once the conservation, research and documentation have been completed, NHB will work towards exhibiting the artefacts in its museums, expected to be from end 2021. Archaeological reports and research papers may also be published by ISEAS.

9 Mr Yeo Kirk Siang, Director of NHB's Heritage Research and Assessment, said: "As an island that has been serving as the gateway to Asia for centuries, Singapore today is the legacy of our rich maritime heritage. The wide range and large quantities of artefacts from the two shipwrecks will bring invaluable insights into the maritime trading history of early Singapore and the region, reflecting the interconnectivity of pre-19th century Singapore. We will continue to research on the significance of the artefacts and find ways to promote the knowledge, so as to enable more people to learn about them and Singapore's maritime history."

10 Dr Michael Flecker, Visiting Fellow with Archaeology Unit and Project Director of Maritime Archaeology Projects at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, who has more than 30 years of experience in the field, said: "Remarkably, the first ancient shipwreck found in Singapore waters seems to be contemporary with 14th century Temasek. Apart from a large cargo of Longquan green-ware and other ceramics, she carried more Yuan dynasty blue-and-white porcelain than any other documented shipwreck in the world. Many of the pieces are rare, and one is believed to be unique. Shipwreck 2 has been identified as the *Shah Munchah* which was lost in 1796. Much of her Chinese cargo would have been transshipped in India for the onward voyage to Britain. Had she survived another 23 years, she would almost certainly have called at the re-established port of Singapore. Her incredibly diverse cargo provides great insights into the type of goods that would have been exchanged and purchased by the new inhabitants of this fledgling city."

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About the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the National Collection. Through the National Collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.

About ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS)

ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (formerly Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security, and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are the Regional Economic Studies (RES, including ASEAN and APEC), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS). The Institute is also home to the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC), the Temasek History Research Centre and the Singapore APEC Study Centre.

ISEAS Archaeology Unit was formed in 2010 and inaugurated by the late President S R Nathan to promote archaeology in Singapore and Southeast Asia.