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SINGAPORE BEFORE RAFFLES

The Oral History Department and the National Archives will jointly organise an exhibition on 'Singapore Before Raffles' from 14 February to 7 March 1986 at the National Archives Exhibition Hall.

The purpose of this exhibition is to pre-date the history of Singapore before its modern founding by Stamford Raffles in 1819. There are two thematic historical aspects which are considered in this exhibition. The first is the maritime position of Singapore in Southeast Asia and the significance of this for seaborne commerce. This brings us to the second factor. Singapore, because of its position, is subject to the vagaries of external influences emanating from Europe, India, China, Indonesia and the Malay peninsula. An additional theme of the exhibition is the indigenous view of history from the viewpoint of oral tradition.

Evidence of Singapore's pre-1819 history will be gathered from the following sources of information:

- (1) Textual records from Chinese, Malay and European sources;
- (2) Maps and charts of Singapore and the Straits;
- (3) Pictures of Southeast Asian and Chinese ships;
- (4) Archaeological artefacts recovered from Fort Canning;
- (5) Trade wares and
- (6) Oral traditions.

The exhibition will be divided into five chronological and thematic sections:

- (1) Legendary Roots;
- (2) The Island World;
- (3) Fort Canning;
- (4) The Legacy of Melaka and
- (5) Selat Singapura.

To show Singapore's legendary roots there will be exhibits relating to legends about early Singapore, how Singapura may have got its name, how Fort Canning became known as Bukit Larangan and folklore relating to prominent place-names like Radin Mas and Keramat Iskandar Shah.

Singapore is part of the wider island world of Southeast Asia and at a time when the Srivijaya empire ^(7th - 11th c) reigned dominant, there was much maritime trade and inter-island shipping. This section on trade and shipping in the island world will show maps, pictures of ship motifs, drawings of ships, textual records and samples of trade wares and currency.

Artefacts recovered from Fort Canning strongly suggest the presence of a seat of the earliest form of government yet known, possibly dating back to the 14th century. The artefacts, consisting of sherds, roof-tiles, mercury vessels, fish bowls, ornaments, etc suggest a Javanese Majapahit influence and a possible competing Thai influence.

Exhibits on the Legacy of Melaka will depict Singapore as part of this legacy, and later the Johor Sultanate. During the reign of

the Melaka Sultanate, Singapore was a fief of Melaka. Maritime shipping and trade continued to pass through the Straits of Singapore and Keppel Harbour. The Portuguese capture of Melaka in 1511 and the flight of the Sultan south led to the re-establishment of Sungei Johor. By this time, the Portuguese had discovered the Main Straits/Governor's Straits. From the period of the mid-16th century onwards, Singapore was under the domain of the Johor Sultanate. The Orang Laut in Singapore and its adjacent islands continued to play an important role in the maritime region as a manpower base of the Sultans in trade and control of the sea and coastal waters.

The final section, Selat Singapore, continues with the maritime position of Singapore in the 17th and 18th centuries, and maritime charts will be used to illustrate the increasing use of the Governor's Straits/Main Straits and the corresponding disuse of Keppel Straits. Oral testimonies of Malay ethnohistory will be used to show the beginnings of a settled Malay population on the island at Ponggol, Telok Blangah, Kallang River and Pulau Brani. Dutch-Bugis-Johor Malay rivalry in the late 18th and early 19th centuries provided an opportunity for Raffles to legitimise an establishment on Singapore after installing one of the feuding factions as Sultan on the island.

Exhibitions organised by the Oral History Department and National Archives have, in the past, mainly used photographs and textual records. For the first time in this coming exhibition, archaeological artefacts and oral traditions will be used in conjunction with maps, charts, drawings, texts and photographs.