

Early Travels and Voyages in Southeast Asia Showcase Exhibition



by ONG ENG CHUAN

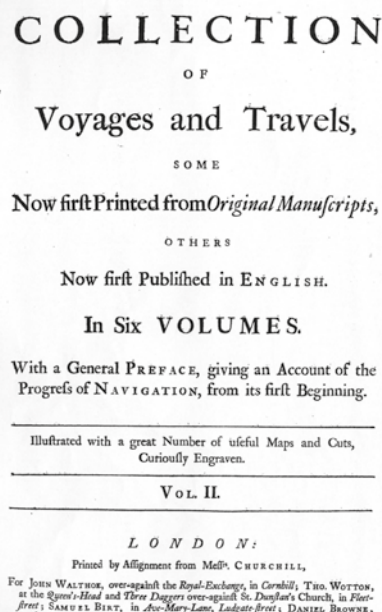
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The Rare Materials Collection at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library forms part of the Singapore and Southeast Asian Collections. It contains the rarest, most interesting or significant items relating to the history of Singapore and Southeast Asia dating as far back as the 16th century. The collection contributes to an impressive representation of Southeast Asian cultural heritage throughout the centuries.

This exhibition *Early Travels and Voyages in Southeast Asia* is the second in a series of exhibitions on *Impressions of Early Singapore* that aims to highlight some of the many treasures that are found among the more than 2,000 titles in the Rare Materials Collection. It tells the story of voyages and travels as narrated by the early voyagers themselves or transcribed from their journals. The exhibition also chronicles the accounts of voyages to the region by early European and other voyagers culminating in the founding of modern Singapore.

The first travellers who traversed the Southeast Asian seas and the adjoining Indian Ocean were Arab and Indian traders who transported precious commodities, especially spices from the Spice Islands to ports in India for sending by overland transport to Europe where they were highly valued. From the east came the Chinese traders who brought with them wares from China. Thus trade routes had been established in the Southeast Asian region from time immemorial. As Singapore lies at the crossroads between East Asia and South Asia and the eastern part of the East Indies, voyagers travelling between these regions would have passed by Singapore using the Singapore Strait.

The first voyage round the world was attributed to the Portuguese voyager Ferdinand Magellan, who started his epic voyage in 1519. While Magellan was on his circumnavigation, exploratory voyages were also being made by the Portuguese to find a way to the East Indies by going round Africa. In 1488, Bartolomeu Diaz



First published in 1704, this six-volume work includes the translations of voyages published in various European countries tracing the expeditions of explorers from Columbus to Captain John Smith. Essays include adventures and accounts of Asian countries in the 17th century including China, the Philippines and the East Indies.

Churchill, A., & Churchill, J. (1732). *A collection of voyages and travels, some now first printed from original manuscripts, others now first published in English.* London: J. Walthoe.

Call no.: RRARE 910.8 CHU v. 1 - 6
Microfilm no.: NL25456 - NL25461
(Vols. 1 - 6)



The city of Palembang



Translated from the Dutch explorer Linschoten's *Itinerario: Voyage ofte schipvaert van Jan Huyghen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien, 1579-1592*, originally published in 1596. Linschoten's *Itinerario* is considered the most important work on the East Indies at that time. It was an essential reference for navigators in the East Indies seas having been translated into other European languages as well. In particular, it greatly stimulated Dutch and English expansions in Asia.

Linschoten, J. H. van. (1598). *John Hvhigen van Linschoten, his discours of voyages unto ye Estate & West Indies*. London: Printed by Iohn Wolfe, printer to y Honorable Cittie of London.

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Microfilm no.: NL8024

ZIEKE REIZIGER,

RAMBLES IN JAVA

AND THE STRAITS.

IN 1852.

BY A BENGAL CIVILIAN.

With Illustrations.

LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL AND CO.,
STATIONERS' HALL COURT.

TEJGSMOUTH:
GEORGE HENRY CROFTON, ROYAL LIBRARY.
CALCUTTA: THACKER, SPINK AND CO.
BOMBAY: THACKER AND CO.

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Written by a "Bengal civilian" (Charles Walter Kinloch) who visited Singapore en route from Calcutta to Samarang in Java to recuperate from an illness. The book, written from a diary kept by the author during his trip, gives details of his travels in Java and the Strait of Malacca in 1852. Of Singapore, he observes that "the merchants, who form by far the largest section of the community, seem to look upon money-making as the chief object of their lives, and their topics of conversation rarely extend to any other subject than that of nutmegs or the last price current."

De Zieke reiziger or, Rambles in Java and the Straits in 1852. (1853). London: Simpkin Marshall.

Call no.: RRARE 959.82 ZIE
Microfilm no.: NL11154

discovered the south coast of Africa, and in 1497, Vasco da Gama was sent out to lead the first Portuguese voyage to India. The success of his expedition paved the way for the Portuguese to extend their influence to India, the East Indies and beyond and for the other Europeans to explore the Indian Ocean.

The half-century between 1500 and 1550 saw the Portuguese establish control over the sea routes and trading ports of the Indian Ocean; reach the source of the oriental spice trade, and establish relations with China and Japan. Malacca, which was the most important port on the route from India to Indonesia and China, was conquered in 1511. Its conquest enabled the Portuguese to take control of a large part of the trade on this route.

Portugal's dominance of trade continued until its western European rivals finally challenged it in the late 16th century. With the weakening of the Portuguese and Spanish naval powers, the English, French and the Dutch started to send ships on voyages to the East Indies.

In 1595, Cornelius Houtman steered Dutch ships to the East Indies and started the Dutch spice trade. Three years later, the Dutch were established at Java and at the beginning of the 17th

century, the British and the Dutch soon formed their respective "East India Company" to establish trade routes as well as discover new lands and to take over some of the lucrative trade controlled by Portugal and Spain.

Before the founding of Singapore, the island would have seen many visitors due to its strategic location along the trade routes, its proximity to other settlements and the presence of the Europeans in the East Indies. However, there were no significant accounts of visits to the island in the published narratives that proliferated from the late 15th century onwards. It was only after the island was founded that there were accounts of visits to the island.

After Raffles officially claimed the island on behalf of the British, it thrived as a trading port and many accounts were published of voyages and travels made to the island. These usually described the physical features, climate and port of the island.

Members of the public are invited to view the exhibition on *Early Travels and Voyages in Southeast Asia* on Level 10, Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, National Library from 25 March to 24 September 2009.