On Paper

Singapore Before 1867

EXHIBITION GUIDE

# On Paper

Singapore Before 1867

INTRODUCTION

What we know about Singapore's early history depends largely on the textual and visual documents held by libraries and archives. These documents not only provide information about past events but enable us to understand the worldviews of their creators.

Historians interested in Singapore's early history traditionally referred mainly to documents held in British institutions. However, by using materials from other sources, re-reading existing documents to uncover new insights, and being aware of the gaps in available information, historians today have painted a more complex and multi-layered picture of early Singapore.

This exhibition transports us to a Singapore before 1867 – a time that is not as well documented as the later periods. 1867 was the year when Singapore, together with the other Straits Settlement territories of Penang and Melaka, became a British crown colony.

EXHIBITION LAYOUT PLAN

1   **Singapore before the 1800s**

2   **Singapura / Singapore: 1819 – 1824**

3   **Documenting Early Singapore**

4   **1867**

Entrance

Exit
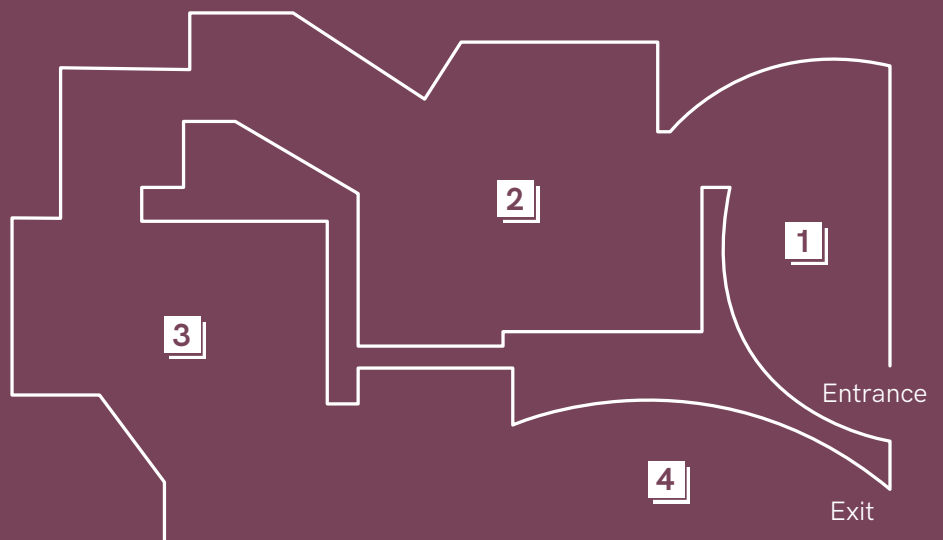
SINGAPURA BEFORE THE 1800S

Singapore's early past has been largely pieced together through historical documents and charts. The earliest records that mention Temasek (Singapore's ancient name) date back to the 14th century. In his 1349 book *Daoyi Zhilue* 《岛夷志略》 (Description of the Barbarians of the Isles), Chinese trader Wang Dayuan (汪大渊) writes about the existence of two settlements on the island, while, in 1365, the Javanese epic poem, *Nagarakatagama*, lists Temasek as a vassal of the Majapahit empire. The existence of a 14th-century settlement on Singapore island was corroborated by archaeological findings that were discovered on Fort Canning Hill and the banks of the Singapore River. Singapore became part of the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th century, and the Johor Sultanate in the 16th century. Early documents and maps provide glimpses into the complex stories of Singapore's early past shaped by shifts in regional and international powers, maritime trade and conflicts.

SEJARAH MELAYU

Edited by Munsyi Abdullah
Singapore, 1840
Collection of National Library, Singapore

Sulalat al-Salatin (Genealogy of Kings), more commonly known as *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), is an important 17th century Malay court chronicle containing stories of early Singapore. Some examples of these stories include how the island first became known as Singapura and the eventual fall of Singapura to the Majapahit army.

Some historians have used *Sejarah Melayu* to trace the beginnings of Singapura to 1299. Containing stories about the rise and fall of the Melaka Sultanate, *Sejarah Melayu* was composed not so much to record historical events but to help bolster support for the Melaka rulers and their successors in Johor and Riau. They did this by tracing their lineage through Singapore back to Palembang.

MAO KUN (茅坤) MAP, FROM WU BEI ZHI 《武备志》

Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1594 – 1640)
China, late 19th century
Donated by Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations
Collection of National Library, Singapore

The Mao Kun map is believed to be based on the naval expeditions of the great early 15th-century Ming Admiral Zheng He (郑和), who made several voyages from China to Southeast Asia and across the Indian Ocean. It is the only known map that features the name Temasek (Danmaxi, 淡马锡) which is marked on a hill.

MAP OF THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE MALAY PENINSULA

André Pereira dos Reis
1654
Collection of Maritime Museum Rotterdam

This hand-drawn map is one of only two extant maps that depicts the place name *Shahbandaria* (indicated here as Xebandaria) on Singapore island. *Shahbandaria* means harbour-master's compound, indicating the existence of a functioning port on the island.

Additional toponyms provided on the map include *Bareiras Vermelhas*, literally "red barriers" in Portuguese, a reference to the red-orange lateritic hills of Tanah Merah and *Tanion Tanhit*, possibly representing a corruption of the Malay name Tanjung Tauhid, today's Changi Point.

SINGAPURA/SINGAPORE: 1819 – 1824

On 6 February 1819, Sultan Husain, Temenggung Abdul Rahman, and the British East India Company (EIC) represented by Stamford Raffles, signed a treaty that granted permission to the British to set up a *loji* or factory (trading post) on land owned by the Malay rulers. This 1819 treaty, however, did not make Singapore a British colony. It was only in 1824 that Singapore was ceded to the British. Interestingly, the location of these important treaties is still unknown and what remains are scribal copies made for record purposes.

Before June 1823, Singapore was ruled by three parties – the EIC and the two Malay chiefs. Both the Sultan and Temenggung regarded Singapore as an adaptation of a typical Malay port, and, as the island's rulers, they were therefore entitled to a share of the wealth generated. Raffles, on the other hand, thought they were unreliable partners who would impede Singapore's development and tried to limit and erode their powers. In 1824, the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty led to the withdrawal of Dutch objections to the British factory in Singapore, which then paved the way for the British to negotiate for the full sovereignty of Singapore.

SCRIBAL COPY OF 1819 TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND ALLIANCE
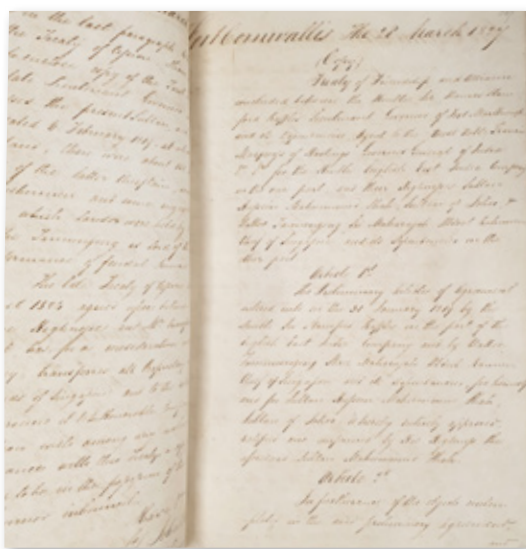
Penang, 1827
Collection of National Archives of Singapore

On 6 February 1819, the East India Company (EIC), represented by Stamford Raffles, signed a treaty with Singapore's Malay rulers, Sultan Husain and Temenggung Abdul Rahman. The treaty granted the EIC the exclusive right to lease a plot of land to set up a British trading post in return for annual cash stipends. The Temenggung was also granted half of the duties collected on visiting native vessels.

ANGLO-DUTCH TREATY
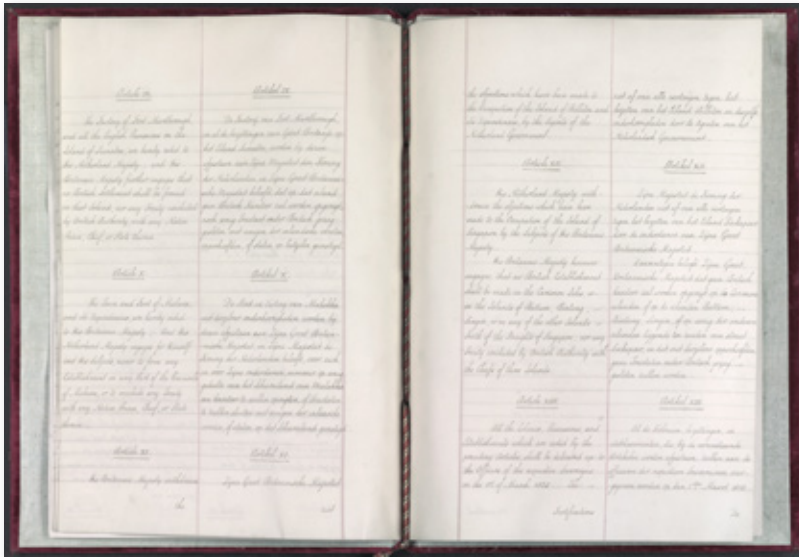
London, 30 April 1824 (ratified)
Collection of Nationaal Archief

The 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty, also known as the Treaty of London, was primarily drawn up to settle long-standing trading and territorial disputes between the two colonial powers in Southeast Asia. As part of this treaty, the Dutch agreed to withdraw their objections to the British settlement on Singapore. Prior to this treaty, the Dutch considered the British factory illegal because the British had signed the treaty with Sultan Husain who, according to the Dutch, was not the true sultan of Johor. They claimed that the real sultan of Johor was their vassal, Sultan Abdul Rahman and Singapore was part of his sovereign lands.

THE BUTE MAP

circa 1820
Collection of The Bute Archive at Mount Stuart

Known as the Bute Map, this is the earliest known landward map of Singapore and was likely commissioned within the first year of the establishment of a British trading post in Singapore. Remnants of ancient Singapore, as well as proposed military installations, are depicted on the map. It provides a remarkable view of the early development of the settlement.

DOCUMENTING EARLY SINGAPORE

Primary sources on Singapore before the 1860s are not scarce; there is a wealth of information in government records, manuscripts, maps, books, artwork and photographs. However, these were usually created by and for Europeans who would have regarded Singapore from a colonial perspective.

Non-European sources, on the other hand, are scarce. It was not until the late 19th century when more people could access printing technology that primary sources from the indigenous population and non-Europeans could be recorded.

This imbalance, or lack of non-European primary sources, leaves gaps in the understanding of our history, especially when it concerns the lives and perspectives of the diverse population that made up the majority of Singapore in the 19th century.

This section features print and manuscript sources on early Singapore – a large part featuring European authors and a smaller, but no less significant section on indigenous sources – that will allow us to glimpse into the lives of the inhabitants of the young British colony.

PLAN OF THE TOWN OF SINGAPORE

Philip Jackson
London, 1828
Collection of National Library, Singapore

When Raffles arrived in Singapore on his third and final visit in October 1822, he was unhappy with the way the settlement had expanded. He then set up a Town Committee to plan the future layout of the settlement. His guidelines to the Committee included having separate designated enclaves for the various ethnic communities. For instance, "Chinese Campong" was designated for the Chinese community in today's Chinatown.

EXTRACT LIST OF THE POPULATION OF SINGAPORE

Copied 28 January 1828
Collection of National Archives of Singapore

According to the official census recorded here, the population of Singapore in January 1828 – the second official census – numbered 14,885 (excluding military personnel and convicts). This second official census notes an increase in population from the first official census undertaken in January 1824, which had recorded a population of 10,683. Both censuses note a remarkable increase in population since 1819, then estimated to be 1,000 inhabitants.

## HINDOO PAGODA AND (CHULIA) MOSQUE, SINGAPORE

John Turnbull Thomson
Singapore, 1846
Courtesy of Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, New Zealand

Painted by Thomson, the Government Surveyor of the Straits Settlements, this watercolour depicts two religious buildings along South Bridge Road. On the left of the painting is Sri Mariamman Temple, the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore. Its *gopuram* (pyramidal entrance tower) structure of the Hindu temple was built in 1844, replacing a wood and *attap* structure built in 1827. On the right of the painting is Jamae Mosque, also known as Masjid Jamae. Completed in 1833, this mosque also replaced a wooden structure built in the late 1820s.

OPENING PAGE OF SYAIR DAGANG BERJUAL BELI (POEM ON BUYING AND SELLING)
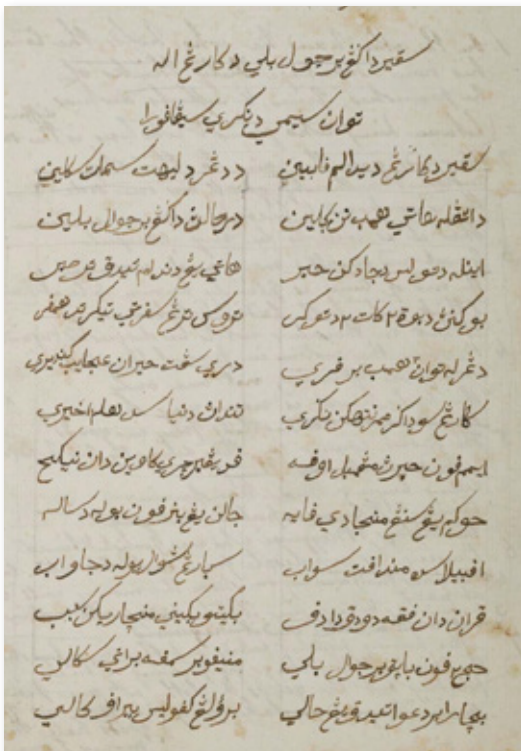

Tuan Siami (or Simi)
Singapore, 1830s
Collection of Bibliothèque National de France

This *syair* (narrative poem) is unique as it provides a critical look at life in early colonial Singapore from a local perspective. Its theme is on the unfair trading practices imposed by the EIC and their network of Chinese and Indian middlemen. The author is believed to be named either Tuan Siami or Simi. What is certain is that the author had worked for the EIC as his poem indicates a familiarity with the workings of the colonial government – he informs the reader that he has written this poem in the customs house.

WILL OF TAN KIM SENG
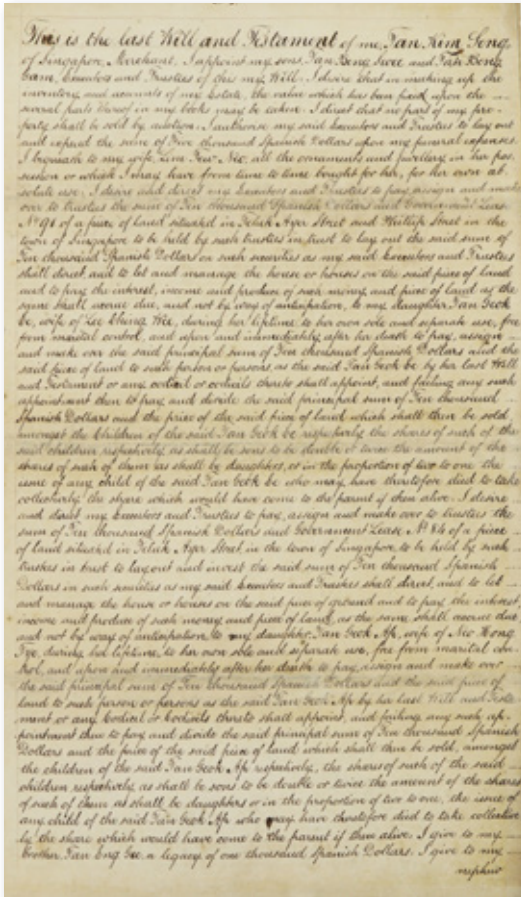
Singapore, 13 April 1862
Donated by Koh Seow Chuan
Collection of National Library, Singapore

Tan Kim Seng (1805–1864) was a prominent trader, property owner and community leader. Born in Melaka, he came to Singapore in the 1820s to set up a business, which prospered. His will gives us an idea of the extent of his wealth, and also an understanding of his family relationships. Tan passed away in 1864 and was estimated to have been worth 2 million Spanish dollars. Aside from donating to charities, Tan left most of his wealth to his wife, four sons and two daughters.

SINGAPORE HARBOUR AND THE CHINESE QUARTER

Illustration from *Ocherki Perom i Karandashom iz Krugosvetnogo Plavaniya v 1857, 1858, 1859 i 1860 godakh…*
**Aleksei Vysheslavtsev**
Saint Petersburg, 1862
Collection of National Library, Singapore

Written and illustrated by the doctor onboard the *Plastun*, this memoir describes the voyage of the Russian naval clipper from 1857 to 1860. The journal also contains some of the earliest views of Singapore executed by a Russian artist. The *Plastun* arrived in Singapore on July 1858 where it anchored for a week. This illustration depicts Telok Ayer.

1867

Singapore, together with Penang and Melaka, became the Straits Settlements in 1826. In 1830, the Straits Settlements became a Residency under the British government in India. This meant that Singapore was run by a legislative council based in Calcutta (Kolkata). With little to no official representation in India, residents in Singapore had limited say in the passing of laws and regulations that affected their daily lives and businesses. As early as 1840s, some Singapore residents wrote to the Governor of India for more proactive governance from India which eventually became a call for the Straits Settlements to be governed as a colony in its own right. This took place in 1867 and Singapore became its capital.

SCRIBAL COPY OF STRAITS SETTLEMENTS LETTERS PATENT, 1867
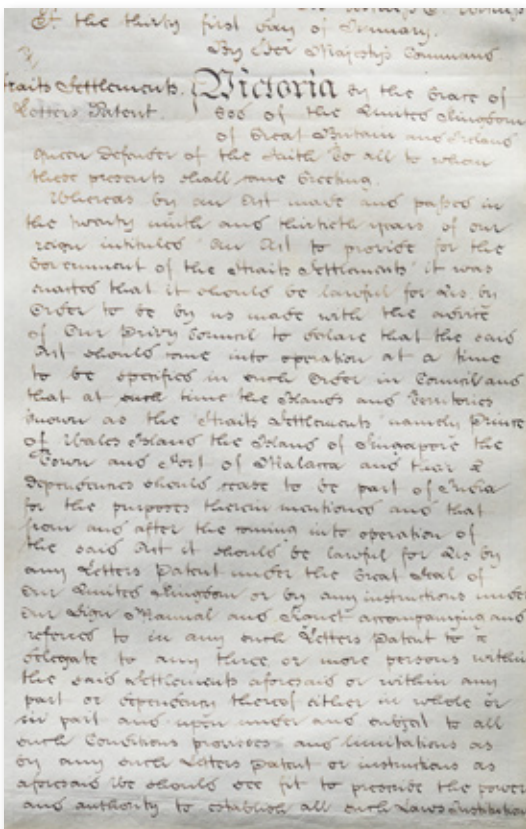
Collection of National Archives of the United Kingdom

The Straits Settlements – comprising Singapore, Melaka and Prince of Wales Island (Penang) – became a British Crown Colony on 1 April 1867. This landmark event was made official by the Straits Settlements Letters Patent of 1867. It documents the reading and enactment of the British parliamentary act that approved the transfer of the administration of the Straits Settlements from Calcutta, the capital of British India, to the Colonial Office in London.

THANK YOU
FOR VISITING THE EXHIBITION

Check out **www.nlb.gov.sg/exhibitions/** for more information on our programmes, workshops and guided tours.

 📘 📷 ▶️ nationallibrarysg   📘 📷 nationalarchivessg

Organised by

NLB | **National Library** Singapore

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE
An institution of the National Library Board