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Malaya
through four centuries



An Anthology 1500-1900

compiled by N. J. RYAN

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Through Four Centuries

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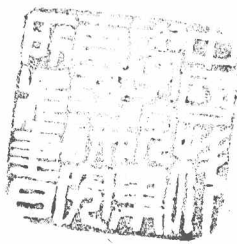
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FOR
MY MOTHER

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Introduction

In South-East Asia Malaya has long been a favoured stopping place for travellers between East and West, and because of its position it has been singularly fortunate in the amount of descriptive writing which has appeared about the country. However, it is also true that comparatively little of this material is easy of access and this collection of passages is an attempt to gather together contemporary accounts of Malaya's history in order to illustrate particular periods and events.

It is perhaps necessary to say something about the method of selecting the passages, for the period covered is from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. In the first place there is extremely little extant historical writing about Malaya before the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, and so one must necessarily begin from there. This selection ends at the beginning of the twentieth century because it was felt that then ended a distinct historical period. Just as the coming of the Portuguese ended the supremacy of the Malacca Sultanate and whatever unity that government imposed on Malaya, so the twentieth century and its material progress saw a gradual return to unity leading to the new State of the Federation of Malaya which exists today. Thus the twentieth century has a unity of its own which is more modern than historical.

Of the passages themselves it must be said that the majority of them are written by strangers to Malaya and therefore they have a certain amount of bias, in that Malaya is regarded through foreign eyes. Because of this one cannot pretend that the passages present a complete picture of Malaya during the four hundred years covered, such a picture being limited by the scarcity of material

which is Malayan in composition. Nearly all the information which we possess today of historical Malaya is contained in the archives and books of other countries and languages, and therefore these selections may appear somewhat one-sided in comment. In general, however, the passages in this book are taken from the writings of people who lived and worked in Malaya and were not 'six-week tourists' who returned home and wrote a book.

Two other points should perhaps be made. The passages may give undue prominence to the unusual or the violent, for it was such incidents that the writers would notice, and more often than not the unusual is more interesting than the commonplace. And also, until the nineteenth century, the Malaya described is coastal Malaya, the interior being little known and largely uninhabited. With these inevitable limitations it is nevertheless hoped that this small collection of passages will serve to introduce readers to some of the original writings upon which Malayan history is based.

It is suggested that the book may be used in two ways. Firstly, though it is not intended to be merely a collection of historical documents nor a source book for history students, it is hoped that the material included will provide suitable descriptions and comments enabling the student to have more than a text-book acquaintance with Malaya's past. At the same time it is also intended that the book be of interest to the general reader, providing him with examples of historical literature concerning Malaya.

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CHAPTER ONE

Merchant Crusaders

It is as well to bear in mind that the Portuguese came to the Far East with the intention of destroying, if possible, the Muslim control of the area's trade. This Portuguese hostility towards Islam had its roots in Europe where the Portuguese had been fighting the Moors for many decades, and to them all Muslims, whether Moors or not, were enemies. Thus, though the Portuguese came to the East to obtain trade, they did not come with particularly peaceful intentions. Trade was to be acquired by force.

The Portuguese discovery of the sea route to the East had been caused by two main factors: first by the closure of the old trade routes through the Levant together with the desire to obtain Eastern goods other than through Venice; secondly by the desire to strike back at the Muslims by cutting the Middle East's trade with the Far East, with the intention at the same time of making conversions to Christianity. Having reached the East the Portuguese aim was to establish a series of fortified posts from which they could dominate the trade routes and more especially deprive the Middle East of the spice trade. They were able to carry out this plan because of their superior sea-power, and, after obtaining control of Goa in India, the Portuguese ventured farther East with the aim of making Malacca one of their strong-points, for at that time Malacca was also the main market for spices.

By the end of the fifteenth century the Portuguese had liberated their country from the Moors and were preparing to go over to the offensive; and on the other side of the world, unaware that she was to be one of the victims, lay Malaya, at that time dominated by and synonymous

with the Muslim Sultanate of Malacca, then at the height of its power and influence. Within a decade the two states were to be at war and Malacca suffered for being of the same religion as the Moors of North Africa.

This chapter deals with two aspects of this period, descriptions of Malacca and its people, and also some accounts of the stern struggle outside the walls of the city. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries life for the Portuguese was seldom peaceful and quiet. They lived constantly on the alert for Malay attacks, and the period was one of intermittent warfare between themselves, the Johore Kings who were descended from the former rulers of Malacca, and the rising power of Acheh. And because of their unyielding hostility to Islam the Portuguese never really made peace with the inhabitants of the Malayan Archipelago, although they were able to hold the city of Malacca from 1511 until they were dispossessed by the Dutch in 1641.

The first passages are an account of Malacca as it appeared to the first Portuguese soon after their arrival in Malaya in 1511, and as such they are descriptions of something that was new and strange to the writers. This first account is by the son of Afonso D'Albuquerque, the person responsible for the capture of the city.*

This port of Malacca is very safe; there are no storms to injure it, and never was a ship lost here. It forms a point where some monsoons commence and others end, so that the inhabitants of Malacca call those of India, people of the West, and the Javanese, Chinese and all other of those islanders, people of the East; and Malacca is the

* From *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso D'Albuquerque, Second Viceroy of India*, Volume III, Chapter 18, pp. 87-9, translated by W. de G. Birch, Hakluyt Society, London. The commentaries were written by the natural son of the Viceroy based on the latter's dispatches forwarded to the King of Portugal. The author himself was not an eye-witness of the events described.



The Malay Peninsula

middle of all this. And those which come from the East to the West find here Western merchandise, and carry it away with them, leaving that which they bring of their own here instead, and in like manner do they who come from the West. By these Malacca gradually increased to so great an extent that whereas the place used once to be a village of Pasai, Pasai became at length a village of Malacca, for most of the Moors¹ of Pasai came there to settle.

Every year there used to come to Malacca ships of Calicut, Aden, Mecca, Coromandel and Bengal, of the Chinese and Javanese, of Pegu and all those parts. But those of Siam did not come to Malacca with their merchandise, because they were continually at war with the Malays. And I believe, according to information which I have obtained concerning the affairs of Malacca, that if there was another world and another navigable route, yet all would resort to the city, for in her they would find every different sort of drugs and spices which can be mentioned in the world, by reason of the port of Malacca being more commodious for all the monsoons than any other ports that exist in those parts.

The Malays are proud men by nature and esteem themselves highly for killing men adroitly with stabs of the *kris*.² The Malays are gallant men, they wear good clothing, they will not allow anyone to put his hands on their heads, nor on their shoulders. All their delight is in conversing about military matters, and they are very courteous. No one is allowed to wear yellow colours under pain of death, except only the king of the land, unless he be a person to whom the king gives permission to do so to show him favour and honour. The Chiefs and Rajas, when they speak to the king, have to stand off from him at a distance of five or six paces.

Lords who are convicted to suffer penalty of death

¹ The Portuguese referred to all Muslims as Moors.

² A Malay dagger with a wavy blade.

have the honourable privilege of dying by the *kris* and the nearest relation to the sufferer is the one who kills him. If any man of the people dies without heirs, his property goes to the king; and no one can marry without permission from the king or the Bendahara. If anyone discovers his wife in adultery, he may kill within his house both of the parties, but not outside the house, neither can he kill the one without the other, but he must accuse them before the judge. In the case of a fine for injuries, when it has been imposed, the king used to take half the money, and the injured person the other half.

This then was how Malaya appeared to the first Portuguese adventurers—a prize worth obtaining. In 1509 the first expedition had proved unsuccessful and some Portuguese were held prisoner in Malacca, but even without the excuse of rescuing these Portuguese prisoners, the Captain-General in the Indies, Afonso D'Albuquerque, would have decided to try to capture Malacca. The value placed on its possession was already obvious, as the following passage shows.*

Men cannot estimate the worth of Malacca on account of its greatness and profit. Malacca is a city that was made for merchandise, fitter than any other in the world, the end of some monsoons and the beginning of others. Malacca is surrounded and lies in the middle, and the trade and commerce between the different nations for a thousand leagues on every hand must come to Malacca. And true it is that this part of the world is more valued and prized

* From *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, translated by Armando Cortesao, Volume II, p. 286, Hakluyt Society, London. The book is an account of the East 'from the Red Sea to Japan' and was written in Malacca and India between 1512 and 1515. In 1516 Tomé Pires was sent as an ambassador to China. His embassy was a failure and after waiting to enter China for five years he was arrested by the Chinese in Canton and never seen again.

than the world of the Indies because the smallest merchandise here is gold which is least priced and in Malacca they consider it as merchandise. Whoever is head of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice. As far as from Malacca, and from the Moluccas to China and from China to the Moluccas, and from the Moluccas to Java and from Java to Malacca and Sumatra all is in our power. Who understands this will favour Malacca.

The same writer contributes a Portuguese account of the events leading to the capture of the city in 1511,* and it is interesting to compare this account with the passage which follows it, taken from the Malay chronicle *Sejarah Melayu*.

Afonso D'Albuquerque, Captain-Major and Governor of the Indies, arrived at Malacca at the beginning of the month of July in the year 1511, with fifteen sails, great and small, in which came about sixteen hundred fighting men. At this time it is said that Malacca had a hundred thousand men-at-arms, from Kuala Linggi to the hinterland and Kassang which are the limits of the city of Malacca. And the Malays had strong palisades, and on the sea there were junks and Gujerat ships which were ready to fight; because there was then in Malacca a captain from Gujerat who was in favour of war, as it seemed to him that he alone could cope with our ships and men. He was all the more certain of success because of the immense number of natives, though all the natives did not back the king of Malacca; because in trading lands, where the people are of different nations, these cannot love their king as do natives without admixture of other nations. This is generally the case; and therefore the king was disliked, though his mandarins fought as bravely as they could.

* *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, Volume II, pp. 264-5.

As soon as the said Captain-Major arrived with his fleet he spent a few days sending messages of peace, trying as much as he could to avoid war. However, the levity of the Malayans and the reckless vanity and arrogant advice of the Javanese, and the king's presumption and obstinate, luxurious, tyrannical and haughty disposition—because it had been ordained that he should pay for the great treason he had committed against our people—all this together made him refuse the desire for peace. They only attempted to delay matters with Malayan messages, strengthening their position as much as they could because it seemed to them that there was no people in the world powerful enough to destroy them. But the Governor¹ managed to get back Ruy de Araujo and those who were prisoners with him. The king never wanted peace, against the advice of his Laxamana and the Bendahara that he should make peace. But following his own counsel and that of his son, and the Gujaratees and Patika and other young nobles who offered to run completely amok for the king, he would hear nothing of peace, the mullahs telling him that he should not make peace, for as India was already in the hands of the Portuguese, Malacca should not pass to the infidels. The king's intention became known, and it was necessary that he should not go unpunished for what he had done and for the evil counsel he had taken.

The Governor, having taken counsel, landed with his men and took the city, and the king and his men fled. The Captain-Major returned to the ships that day, and did not allow the king to be harmed, to see if he would desist from his obstinate intention. The king was unwilling. Finally the Governor D'Albuquerque landed again determined now to take the city and no longer to be friends with the king. He took the city and occupied it. The King of Malacca fled with his daughters and all his sons-in-law, Kings of Kampar and Pahang. They went

¹ Captain-Major and Governor are D'Albuquerque's two titles.

to Bretao which is the residence of the kings, and the Captain-Major took possession of the city. The city and the sea were cleared up, and the authorities were appointed.

Such was the Portuguese account of the events leading to the capture of the city, somewhat biased perhaps but balanced by the following description of the same event from the 'Malay Annals'.*

Here now is a story of Afonso D'Albuquerque. At the end of his term of office as viceroy he proceeded to Portugal and presenting himself before the Raja of Portugal asked for an armada. The Raja of Portugal gave him four carracks¹ and five long galleys. He then returned from Portugal and fitted out a fleet at Goa, consisting of three carracks, eight galeasses,² four long galleys and fifteen foysts.³ There were forty crafts in all. With this fleet he sailed for Malacca, and when he reached Malacca, there was great excitement and word was brought to Sultan Ahmad.⁴ 'The Franks⁵ are come to attack us! They have seven carracks, eight galeasses, ten long galleys, fifteen sloops and five foysts.' Thereupon Sultan Ahmad had all his forces assembled and he ordered them to make ready their equipment. And the Franks engaged the men of Malacca in battle and they fired their cannon from their ships so that the cannon balls came like rain. And the noise of the cannon was as the noise of thunder in the heavens and the flashes of fire of their guns were like

¹ Carrack or carraque, a type of large transport ship which was frequently converted into a warship.

² Ships larger than galleys, using oars and sails.

³ Foist, foyst, or fust, a light galley.

⁴ The son of Sultan Mahmud, the actual ruler of Malacca.

⁵ The Malays' name for the Portuguese.

* From the '*Sejarah Melayu*' or 'Malay Annals', translated by C. C. Brown, *Journal of the Malay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (JMBRAS) 25 (2 and 3) 1952, pp. 167-9.