

The rise of melaka



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IN 1511, despite the brave efforts of its defenders the last defences of Malacca was overwhelmed in the face of a fierce and sustained Portuguese invasion. Sultan Mahmud and his remaining fighting men were finally forced to abandon the city and retreated to Pahang before moving to Johor where his descendents founded the Sultanate Of Johore which lasted into 1914 . The fall of Malacca to the Portuguese brought to an end more than a hundred years of Malay rule. At its height, the sultanate was one of the world's busiest emporia, attracting ships from the Middle-East, India, China, the Ryukyu, and the surrounding islands of the Archipelago. During the period, Malay wealth and power dominated the region. It was also an influential Islamic centre. It was an international enterport of its day the same way Singapore is to us today.

Scholars generally agree that the fall of the Malacca sultanate marked a turning point in Malaysian and world history. But they disagree as to the nature of that importance.

Many Western writers portray the fall of Malacca as ushering in a new political and economic order in Malaysia and South-East Asia, one dominated by the West.

Others, including Asian scholars, dispute this. They insist that the Portuguese Empire was really a commercial enterprise based on a series of strategically-located fortified posts. The Portuguese were never able to impose an influence in the way the Malacca sultanate once did. Within the sphere of power in the Straits of Malacca, the Portuguese were only one of them. And

unlike the Malacca Empire did not expand its influence beyond the City of Malacca.

From the Western perspective, the success of the Portuguese in Asia was of epoch making importance. The capture of Malacca was the highlight of nearly a hundred years of Portuguese exploration. Prior to this, Western traders had travelled overland to reach China. But it was only in 1498 that a Portuguese fleet under Vasco da Gama finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope and arrived at the Malabar Coast of India. For the first time, a Western fleet from Europe had reached Asia. Adam Smith, in his classic *Wealth of Nations*, declared this as one of the two great events recorded in human history. The other, according to him, was the discovery of The New World(America)

For a long time Europe had searched for a sea route to China and the East. But what motivated countries such as Portugal and Spain to undertake early explorations and to seek territorial expansion? Portugal was then only a small and poor country of about a estimated 1 million people.

A mixture of motives such as scientific curiosity, adventure, profits, and religious zeal explains the support given by the state in the early Portuguese and Spanish explorations. One of the earliest patrons was Prince Henry of the Portuguese ruling house and he was keenly interested in science and geography.

But perhaps the overriding factor was that there were profits to be made in the trade of spices.

During the Crusades from the 11th to the 13th century, Christian knights and pilgrims had acquired the tastes of the Mediterranean, including spices.

Spices then meant Eastern luxuries but pepper, nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon were the more highly sought. These various spices soon became essential for food preservation and preparation in the pre-refrigeration era of Europe. But the spice trade was controlled by Arabs and Indian Muslims who dominated the Indian Ocean. Europe could only obtain pepper and cinnamon through the middlemen merchants of Genoa and Venice.

Religious zeal was also behind the attempt to weaken Arab and Indian Muslim control of the spice trade. To this could be added the evangelical hope to bring the gospel to non-Christian lands.

But the Portuguese had very little navigational knowledge to get to Asia. Furthermore, the Muslims controlled long stretches of the waters.

Some explorers decided to try a different route. Hence, six years before Da Gama's voyage, Christopher Columbus sailed westward, believing this to be a shorter and easier way to Asia. Instead, he reached America.

It took several exploratory voyages down the west coast of Africa before Da Gama finally made it to India. If immediate returns were to be measured, then the expedition had really little to show. The trip had lasted more than two years and, of the original crew of 170, only 54 survived. The glass beads, trinkets and textiles brought to Calicut, India, by the Portuguese found no demand. On its way back, Da Gama's mission resorted to seizing a cargo of spices from a small Muslim ship.

From a wider view, Da Gama's expedition must also be seen as really a modest maritime feat compared to Arab seamen who had been circumnavigating Africa for centuries before him. Arabs traded over long distances stretching from ports of the Mediterranean through to India and to China. By the time of China's Tang dynasty, there was a large community of Muslim merchants in Guangzhou (Khanfu to the Arabs). Detailed Arab navigational manuals such as by Ibn Majid provided sailing information from Africa to China.

Likewise, Chinese ships had by the 9th century been trading regularly at Quilon, a port just south of Calicut. The use of the compass and advances in ship technology helped Chinese overseas trade. More than a hundred years before Da Gama, Admiral Zheng He (Cheng Ho) led a Ming fleet of 62 large ships that called on rulers in the South-East Asian region. In the next few years, the Ming emperors sent out six more expeditions. One of these led by Admiral Zheng He reached the east African ports of Malindi and Mogadishu as well as Aden and Hormuz in the Arabian Sea-Persian Gulf area.

For Western scholars, Da Gama's expedition defined the beginning of a new epoch in world history. For over a thousand years, Europe had been on the defensive, having to fight off the Islamic and then the Mongol threats. According to British historian Eric Hobsbawm, Europe after Vasco da Gama took a more assertive international role and over the next 500 years gained hegemonic influence over most parts of Asia. The Portuguese first, and then the Spaniards, the Dutch, the British, and the French carved out empires.

It was under two viceroys, Francisco de Almeida (1505-09) and Afonso d'Albuquerque (1509-15) that Portugal's Asian empire, the Estado da India, was created. D'Albuquerque personally led naval campaigns to seize strategic points along the major trade routes. Goa was captured in 1510, Malacca in 1511, and Hormuz at the entrance of the Persian Gulf in 1515.

The Portuguese took over Malacca but the city never regained the prosperity and the power that was seen during the sultanate period. Once Malacca was no longer ruled by Malays, it lost the daulat, or legitimacy, to command tributes and trade from the surrounding states. Where there was one dominant emporium in the Straits of Malacca in the 15th century, by the turn of the 16th there were several. The Portuguese presence survived largely by allying itself with one or several of the local states.

From the local historians' point of view, the fall of Malacca had at least three other major impacts on the immediate course of South-East Asian history. Firstly, the shift of Muslims merchants from Malacca contributed to the rise of Aceh. New commercial prosperity and political power strengthened Aceh's claim to being the new Islamic centre in the Straits. Aceh, at the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries, conquered most of north Sumatra and extended influence over the Peninsular west coast states.

The Aceh push to the coast states were anyway interrupted by The Portuguese Empire & The Johore Empire which after the fall of Malacca took control of most of the Malacca former Vassal states such as Pahang, Perak, Terengganu and Temasik(Singapore). The three powers continued to

struggle with each other for control of the Malacca straits trade on into the 18th century.

The Sultanate of Melaka or Malacca Sultanate (Malay: Kesultanan Melayu Melaka) was a Malay sultanate centered in the nowadays state of Melaka, Malaysia. Traditional historical treatise marks circa 1400 as the founding year of the sultanate by a traitor Malay Raja of Singapura, Iskandar Shah, who was also known in certain accounts as “ Parameswara”. The view however is being compete by a new historical contract that place the founding year in circa 1262. At the height of the sultanate’s influence in the 15th century, its capital grew into one of the most important entrepots of its time, with domain covering much of the Malay peninsula, Riau Islands and a significant portion of the east coast of Sumatra.

As a noisy international trading harbor, Melaka appeared as a center for Islamic tutorial and dissemination, and encouraged the development of the Malay language, literature and arts. It heralded the golden age of Malay sultanates in the archipelago, in which Classical Malay became the lingua franca of the Maritime Southeast Asia and Jawi script became the primary medium for historical, religious and intellectual exchange. It is through these intellectual, spiritual and cultural developments, the Melakan era witnessed the enculturation of a Malay status, the Malayisation of the region and the subsequent formation of an Alam Melayu.

In 1511, the capital of Melaka fell to the Portuguese Empire, forcing the last Sultan, Mahmud Shah (r. 1488-1511), to decline to the further reaches of his empire, where his progeny established new ruling dynasties, Johor and

Perak. The legacy of the sultanate remained, with significance lies in its far-reaching political and cultural legacy, which, arguably, continues to be felt in modern times. For centuries, Melaka has been held up as an exemplar of Malay-Muslim civilization. It established systems of trade, diplomacy, and governance that persisted well into the 19th century, and introduced concepts such as *daulat*- a distinctly Malay notion of sovereignty - that continues to shape of a new generation understanding of Malay kingship.

Before the arrival of the first Sultan, Malacca was a fishing village to live by local Malays. Malacca was founded by Parameswara, also known as Iskandar Shah or Sri Majara, the last Raja of Singapura (present day Singapore) following a Majapahit attack in 1377. He found his way to Malacca around 1400 where he found a good port-it was accessible in all seasons and on the strategically located small point of the Malacca Straits.

According to a popular legend, Parameswara was resting under a tree near a river while hunting, when one of his dogs cornered a mouse deer. In self-defence, the mouse deer pushed the dog into the river. Impressed by the courage of the deer, and taking it as a propitious omen of the weak overcoming the powerful, Parameswara decided on the spot to found an empire on that very spot. He named it ' Melaka' after the tree under which he had taken shelter, the Melaka tree (Malay: Pokok Melaka).

In collaboration with united countries from the sea-people (orang laut), the wandering proto-Malay privateers of the Straits, he established Malacca as an international port by compelling passing ships to call there, and establishing fair and secure facilities for warehousing and trade. Mass

settlement of Chinese, mostly from the imperial and merchant fleet occurred during the dynasty of Parameswara in the nearby of Bukit Cina (“Chinese Hill”), which was perceived as having excellent Feng Shui.

Palace of Malacca’s Malay Sultanate came from its strategic location, Malacca was an important stopping point for Zheng He’s fleet. To enhance relations, Hang Li Po, according to local folklore a daughter of the Ming Emperor of China, arrived in Malacca, accompanied by 500 attendants, to marry Sultan Manshur Shah who reigned from 1456 until 1477. Her attendants married locals and settled mostly in Bukit China (Bukit Cina). (See Zheng He in Malacca). At the height of its power, the Sultanate of Malacca ruled over the southern Malay Peninsula and much of Sumatra. Its rise helped to hold off the Thai’s southward expansion, as well as hasten the decline of the rival Majapahit Empire of Java, which had been declining in power as Malacca rose. Malacca was also pivotal in the spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. After Vietnam (then known as Annam) destroyed Champa in the 1471 Vietnamese encroachment of Champa, they engaged in hostilities with Malacca with the intent of conquest.

“ In the 9th month of the year 1481 envoys arrived with the Malacca again sent envoys to China in 1481 to inform the Chinese that, while Malaccan abassador were returning to Malacca from China in 1469, the Vietnamese attacked the Malaccans, killing some of them while castrating the young and enslaving them. The Malaccans reported that Vietnam was in control of Champa and also sought to conquer Malacca, but the Malaccans did not fight back, because they did not want to fight against another state that was a tributary to China without approval from the Chinese. They enquired to face

the Vietnamese party to China which was in China at the time, but the Chinese inquire them since the disturbance was years old, they could do nothing about it, and the Emperor sent a letter to the Vietnamese ruler responsibility him for the incident. The Chinese Emperor also ordered the Malaccans to lift soldiers and fight back with violent force if the Vietnamese attacked them again.