





# WORLD HISTORY FOR MALAYANS

*from Earliest Times to 1511*

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## PREFACE

THIS book has been written to meet the requirements of the University of Cambridge Overseas Higher School Certificate and of the entrance examination and first-year studies at the University of Malaya. It presents, within a small compass, an account of some part of the history of the four great cultures—Islamic, Indian, Chinese and European—that are mingling and clashing in South-east Asia today. It is an account of world history as seen from Malaya, and it is hoped that it will appeal, not merely to the student of Malaya and Singapore, but also to that part of the general community who are interested in their heritage.

No single book of this size can cover in detail such a comprehensive course as is here outlined, and a list of suggested additional reading is given at the end of the book for the guidance of both teachers and students.

K. G. TREGONNING

*University of Malaya,  
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*PART ONE*  
**EARLY CIVILISATIONS**



## Chapter 1

### THE ANCIENT WORLD

**DURING** the life of this globe, which conservative experts would have us believe was formed some three thousand million years ago, there have been four major Ice Ages. Caused perhaps by a slight change or tilt in the new path of the young planet round the sun, immense layers of ice crept towards the equator from the poles, and came down for thousands of years from the high mountains of Asia into areas that are now lush and tropical.

The last of these long ages saw man survive in the struggle to exist, while nearly all of his pre-Ice Age associates perished. For by the time of the last Ice Age, man had existed long enough, thousands of years in all probability, to outstrip by far his fellows. His greater brain, the evolution of a spoken language and his delicate pair of fore-legs enabled him to fight both the wild elements and the brutal nature in which he roamed and lived.

One of the areas in which he roamed and where he survived was South-east Asia. It may even have been the place where he first evolved. In those days, before the Ice Age ended and the slowly melting snows raised the seas of the world some hundred feet, Sumatra, Java and Borneo were all joined to Malaya, and in this vast area ancient man wandered as a nomadic hunter, a parasite living off nature as best he could.

In Java has been found a man-like person of immense antiquity, who lived as early as any man, perhaps 500,000, perhaps 1,000,000 years ago. And the Perak River valley, particularly near Lenggong, has produced the clumsy stone choppers that some of these "Java Men" used. These choppers are very similar to the most ancient human instruments found in other parts of the world, where pre-literate man, a nomad, a hunter in scanty groups, lived much the same life as he did in Malaya.

This is the early Stone Age, or Palæolithic Age, and it lasted for hundreds of thousands of years.

This age ended, and change and improvement came (as nearly always in Malayan history) with outside migration. New arrivals brought fresh ideas to tolerant indigenous people. With the Ice Age over and the world in much the geographical shape it is today, new faces, and a new way of life, appeared in Malaya. The great significance of this New Stone Age is not so much in the improvement of implements, from the rough choppers to the well-finished and finely made stone tools on display in the museums of our main cities, as in the vital change that occurred in the way of living. There was a change from a wandering, hunting life that had reached a cultural dead end to a settled agricultural life. This occurred in many parts of the world. It was an essential step forward, a step towards civilisation.

In Malaya we find this change coming in two stages and so with two foreign contacts. First there appears a race of men, genuine *homo sapiens*, wandering down from the north. They lived in the peninsula for several thousands of years. They appear to have been the ancestors of the Melanesians in the Pacific, where they later migrated. These Hoabinhians, as they are called (after a site in Indo-China), or Melanesian cave-dwellers, were skilful hunters with a more complicated and advanced way of living than the ape-like Palæolithic stumbler.

These Mesolithic people lived in caves and rock shelters, which may suggest that it was still very cold, or that humans had managed to live through the ice-cap period by their momentous discovery of fire and by their sheltering in warm places, and the tradition was still maintained. Man is still amazingly conservative and practises customs that are long out of date. In all probability, he was even more conservative two hundred generations ago.

The search for these dwelling-places in Malaya is being actively pursued. Eleven sites so far have been discovered. It is obvious that there were far more Hoabinhians than Old Stone

Age men in the peninsula, and more and more caves are likely to be excavated as interest in Malayan archæology grows among the schools. But many of the caves that appear likely residences of the Mesolithic men were also occupied by innumerable bats, and as their droppings make excellent fertiliser for market-gardens, these have been dug out and all archæological remains have been destroyed. Nevertheless, enough has been discovered to show that these early inhabitants of Malaya lived mainly in the centre and the north of the peninsula, in the caves of the steep, sometimes sheer, limestone hills on the edge of the central range.

The caves where Mesolithic man left evidence of his occupation begin in Perlis at Bukit Chuping. Then, coming south, there is a site in Kedah, four caves in Perak, two more over on the other side of the range in Kelantan and three farther south in Pahang. Without doubt, in untouched caves far from any market-garden there lie undiscovered the pottery, implements and bones of more of these men. The most characteristic of these implements is the stone cutter, or chopper, made by flaking off two sides of a conveniently shaped stone, rather in the way a pencil is sharpened. Held clenched in the hand, this was a dangerous weapon or a useful tool. By it they killed all of the various types of animal in Malaya, the broken bones of which lie beside the long-dead fires in their caves.

The Hoabinhians quitted their caves and moved, after about eight thousand years, either into the central mountain range or southwards out of Malaya, somewhere around 2000 B.C. Pushing them aside when necessary, intermarrying with them when desirable, came the ancestors of the modern Malay. With them they brought down from the north the New Stone Age, or Neolithic period. The skilled hunting culture of the Mesolithic Age is replaced by agriculture, and the home moves from the cave to the settled river valley.

This movement has made the collection of evidence about them difficult. What with floods, with tropical jungle growing quickly over deserted areas, with the destroying plough of later

settlers, and with the fiercely corrosive effect of the laterite soils of Malaya, it is a wonder that anything at all has been discovered. But it has. In remote kampongs, and kampongs not so remote, there can be seen and sometimes purchased the typical stone cutter, or adze, that the Neolithic man used, and which the country Malay keeps in the belief that they are "batu lintar," thunder-stones of magical origin. And another source of discovery are the tin-mines. The alluvial dredges have unearthed many relics of our past, both Neolithic and later. Only one actual site has been found, and that was at Nyong, in Pahang, in 1930, but from the kampongs and the dredges archaeological detectives of the calibre of M. F. Tweedie have been able to reconstruct the scene.

These people lived in three main areas, all well away from the coast. The Perak River valley from Grik, some distance downstream, was one of these. Another was the valley of the Pahang River, inland near the central mountain backbone. The third was the Kelantan River. A fourth area, of much smaller size, was in Perlis, where Neolithic remains, mixed with Greek vases of the fourth or fifth century B.C., were found in 1951.

The Neolithic economy was one of simple agriculture. One of the crops grown was rice. Botanical evidence points to South-east Asia as the original home of this cereal, and from here it spread to China. On the Tembeling River, a branch of the Pahang, was found a strange, flat knife. It is now quite famous, and is preserved in the Raffles Museum. This may have been used for cutting the paddy.

Another food grown was yams. We deduce this from the fact that from Madagascar to Tahiti the word similar to the Malay is used for yams. As these people are related to the Malay and their tongue came from here, then they must have been using that crop before their great dispersion in the Neolithic period.

These agriculturists made a great variety of pottery, and it is obvious that they lived a richer, fuller life than their Mesolithic predecessors. Most of this pottery, in many cases marked

by a characteristic design of crossed lines, as if conservative man was still copying on his clay the rushes with which he had first fashioned a container, is most attractive. Hardly two vessels are alike, and there are clear signs of ambition in the various shapes of the well-proportioned and graceful dishes and bowls. These primitive people were not merely potters, they were artists.

This invention of pottery, as with the occupation of agriculture, the art of spinning and weaving, and the domestication of such animals as the cow and the dog, was in all likelihood the work of the woman, who had the opportunity, while her man went hunting, to experiment and investigate. All the momentous steps that lifted man out of the savage dead-end existence of Palæolithic and Mesolithic hunting, and made him not a parasite on nature but an improver on it, were made by woman. Probably not until modern times did she enjoy again such a position of equality. This, in ancient history, was her finest hour.

While this Neolithic way of life continued peacefully for thousands of years in the valleys of Malaya, no new contacts came to clash or to change. But elsewhere in the world, where, as in Malaya, a Palæolithic had yielded to a Neolithic existence, fresh discoveries ushered in a new era. This resulted in Civilisation, or the cultural life of cities. It occurred at such a little time ago historically that we still have much of the outlook, many of the fears and some of the beliefs of our nomadic and Neolithic ancestors. We are still very close to the Stone Age.

The areas where these vital discoveries occurred first, and which then went on to produce the very first civilisations in the world, were the Indus valley in India, the Euphrates-Tigris basin in Iraq and by the Nile in Egypt. All of them are wide, fertile valleys with a low rainfall, where the river either floods or can be used easily for irrigation. Here developed the fluvial civilisations, and these we must briefly consider. In them all the essential prerequisites to a city life were discovered independently, not by woman this time, but by man.

Each of these discoveries, which added together usher in

