A Place on the Strait: Temasek, Singapura and the Maritime Trade of the Malay World: summary

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The island of Singapore controls the southern exit of the Strait of Malacca, the shortest sea route between the Indian Ocean and China, a position that made it a potential market from the earliest times. In the fourteenth century, Temasek or Singapura was a real port with a court on Fort Canning Hill and a commercial district on the river, documented by Wang Dayuan, the *Nagarakretagama*, the Malay Annals and extensive archaeological finds. Around 1400 its ruling house moved to Malacca, which became the greatest port of Southeast Asia by combining Chinese recognition, Islamic commercial networks, an administration organised around foreign merchants and written maritime law. Portuguese and Dutch attempts to control the trade of the Strait by force and monopoly drove merchants to alternative ports, including Johor and Riau, and left the island of Singapore without a market for two centuries. The British foundation of 1819 revived an old port under new institutions. The history of the Strait shows that location creates opportunity while protection, predictable rules and openness to many communities decide whether a port prospers.

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