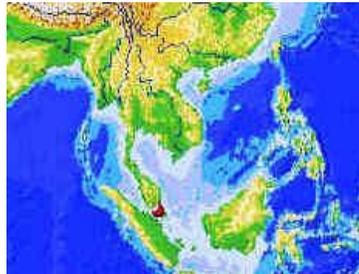


## PORTUGUESE MALACCA 1511-1641 History of Colonial Malaysia.

Written by Marco Ramerini

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### The Portuguese conquest:

At the time of the Portuguese arrival in the Asian seas, Malacca, thanks to its strategic position on the strait bearing the same name, was a remarkable trading center for the trade and shunting of spices. At that time, Malacca was ruled by a Muslim Sultanate.

The town extended its influence over a vast territory, which included the whole Malaya Peninsula.

Its port was frequented by a multitude of ships and merchants from all the Asian nations of the time: Arabia, Persia, China, India, Japan, Indonesia, Ceylon, and Bengal. In it were gathered and sold all the Asian spices: pepper, cloves, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, etc.

After their arrival in India, the Portuguese soon became aware of the importance of the city. An expedition sailed to Malacca in 1509 but failed, and many of the Portuguese were captured and imprisoned by the Sultan.

In 1511, the ViceRoy of India, Afonso de Albuquerque, decided to organize an expedition destined to conquer Malacca. At the head of 1.100 - 1.200 men and 14 ships, Afonso de Albuquerque arrived in view of Malacca in June of 1511 and immediately demanded the rescue of the Portuguese that were taken prisoners in the 1509 expedition. The Sultan tried to gain time to strengthen the town defenses. He was well aware of the small number of Portuguese troops and was confident on his powerful army of 20.000 men and 2.000 guns.

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Albuquerque wasted no time. At dawn of 25 July 1511 the Portuguese attacked the town concentrating the assault on the bridge on the river dividing the town. After a fierce battle the bridge was conquered by the Portuguese, but at nightfall they were forced to retreat.

After some days of preparations, on 10 August 1511, the Portuguese renewed the attack. Albuquerque had the assistance of some Chinese junks that were anchored in the port. The use of a junk offered by the Chinese merchants was decisive, as this junk was used as a bridgehead. This time the attack was successful and the Portuguese finally succeeded in establishing a bridgehead in the town.

There were then several days of siege in which the Portuguese bombarded the city. On 24 August 1511 the Portuguese again attacked only to discover that the Sultan had escaped. With Malacca was now in Portuguese hands, they sacked the town, but following Albuquerque's orders, they respected the property of those who sided with them.

B. W. Diffie and G. D. Winius in the book "Foundations of the Portuguese Empire 1415-1580" write: "the capture of Asia's greatest trading city by a mere 900 Portuguese and 200 Indians must rank as an event in the history of European expansion no less stunning than the better known conquest of Tenochtitlan by Hernando Cortés".

#### **Malacca a Portuguese town:**

Malacca was one of the three key-points, with Goa and Hormuz, which gave Portugal the control over the main Asiatic trade routes.

After the conquest, Albuquerque immediately ordered the building of a fortress on the south side of the river. This fortress was called "A Famosa" and it was finished in November 1511.

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The gate to Albuquerque's fortress "A Famosa". Here, the Vice Roy ordered the erection of a large stone monument inscribed with the names of the men having taken part in the exploit.

*Ruy de Brito Patalim* was appointed Captain of the "Fortaleza de Malacca" and about 500 Portuguese soldiers were left as garrison.

Shortly thereafter, Albuquerque prepared the ships for the return with the Malacca's booty. However, during the return voyage to Goa his ship "*Flor do Mar*" sank during a storm and all the treasures fetched in Malacca's were lost.

Several Florentine merchants took part in the Portuguese enterprises in Asia. Amongst them, *Giovanni da Empoli*, was present in Malacca during the siege and the conquest. He described his experiences in an interesting letter to his father.

After the conquest of Malacca, Portugal's policy in the Malaya Peninsula was either to establish alliances with local rulers or to convince the adjoining Kingdoms to accept Portuguese suzerainty.

From his base at Johore, the old Sultan of Malacca repeatedly attacked Malacca in 1517, 1520, 1521 and in 1525. At last, in 1583, a peace treaty was signed.

Malacca was repeatedly under siege in 1550, 1567, 1571 and the main enemies were Johore and Atjeh (in Sumatra).

In Malacca, Albuquerque established a new administration, minted a new currency and built a wooden chapel close to the fortress.

Adjoining the fortress, a stone church dedicated to "*Nossa Senhora da Anunciada*" was erected in 1521, and later to "*Nossa Senhora da Assumpção*". On 4 February 1558 this church was consecrated as a Cathedral.

Many Portuguese "Casados", mostly artisans, merchants or farmers, settled in Malacca.

In 1532, the Confraria da Misericórdia was founded and a beautiful wooden hospital for the poor was also built. The church also started a school.

Active missionary work began in 1545 with the arrival of *St. Francisco Xavier*.

In 1552 was set up the "Camara" (Municipal Council) of Malacca.

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***Detail of the gate of "A Famosa" where the Portuguese made the last attempt to resist.***

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In 1602-1603 the Dutch blockaded Malacca by sea, but this was only a first timid attempt.

In 1606 Johore and the Dutch concluded an alliance against the Portuguese and in 1607 they set again the town under siege. Reinforcements from Goa aborted the attempt.

Eredia estimated that the Christian population in Malacca in 1613 was around 7.400. There were eight parishes in the town.

In 1629 Atjeh made a new great effort, but this time again the Portuguese were victorious.

The Dutch made several fruitless attempts between 1623 and 1627, and in 1633 a blockade was set up.

At the time of the Dutch attack in June 1640, there was, in Malacca, a garrison of about 50 Portuguese soldiers, more than 300 Portuguese "Casados" with their families and 2.000 or 3.000 Mestiços and Native inhabitants.

The last siege of Portuguese Malacca began in June 1640 when a combined Dutch-Johore fleet of 1.500 Dutchmen, 1.500 Malays, 12 Dutch ships, 6 sloops and 40 Johore vessels was sight off the Malacca port. The siege was extremely hard and nearly 1.500 Dutchmen lost their lives. After five months of siege, the Portuguese defenders were without gunpowder and with a severe scarcity of food. Despite the difficulties, under the command of Dom Manuel de Sousa Coutinho, which was sick, they were able to hold out the siege.

On 14 January 1641, Dutch commander Willmsoon Kartekoe ordered the last desperate assault. The Portuguese defenders made a fierce final resistance in the **Fortaleza Velha** and the Dutch were finally driven back.



**Malacca 1630s.** from the "Livro das Plantas das Fortalezas, Cidades e Povoa•oes do Estado da India Oriental" 1600s.

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In desperation, the Dutch commander offered to the Portuguese honourable terms of surrender. The brave (and dying) Portuguese commander accepted the generous terms. Dying two days later, he was buried by the Dutch with military honours in the church of S•o Domingo.

The city of Malacca was thus in Portuguese hands from 24 August 1511 till 14 January 1641.

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The descendants of the Portuguese of Malacca still today speak Creole Portuguese (**Papia Kristang**), they are Christians and have Portuguese surnames.

The Eurasian community has 12.000 members in the Malaya Peninsula.

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[A Beautiful book on Portuguese Malacca community: "Save our Portuguese Heritage Conference 95. Malacca, Malaysia"](#)

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