

A is for adventure, advantage, and advocate



'It was in 1914, I was on a collecting expedition with the Director of the Museum, 100 miles up the river. We had planned to trek further into the interior, when the war cries of the tribes people spread through the jungle and they were on the path thirsting for heads, our 100 porters left us, and there we were, a small body of 17 collectors.'²

The colonial archive is littered with 'we set off at daybreak' accounts. The history of collecting cannot be seen without some recourse to the discourse of adventure and exploration. It would seem that they go hand in hand. So too, the accounts of illness;

many an ill-fated expedition ended up aborted, with fever-wracked bodies being sent back to milder climates. The accounts seem to heave with unspoken dangers, of illness, poison darts, unfaithful porters, but equally the numbers accumulated of dead, stuffed, embalmed, dried, cooked, deboned animal carcasses, crated and ferried across and through the jungle, rivers, seas, to museums, zoos, and private collections seem enough to prove some sort of advantage. An advantage in the technologies of dislocation.

Advocacy is when we speak for something or someone, often assumed unable to be otherwise heard.

M is for mute, martyr, and Matang

The objects' 'performance' emerges when they are utilised in exhibitions; curators provide their 'lines' in the form of labels and text panels. When they are back in the museum store, they are 'resting', like actors between jobs.

We may question these objects' roles, their relationships to the stories they tell during a 'performance', and how their role in a museum can be reconciled with their previous role in 'real life' as opposed to 'stage life'.³



Père Bourien, *On the Wild Tribes of the Interior of the Malay Peninsula*, Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London, vol. 3, 1863.

John Turnbull Thomson, *Glimpses of Life in Malayan Lands*, Oxford University Press, Singapore and New York, 1864.

Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utan and the Bird of Paradise*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1869.

John Frederick Adolphus McNair, *Perak and the Malays: Sarong and Kris*, Tinsley Brothers, London, 1878.

Nicholas Miklouho-Maclay, *Dialects of the Melanesian Tribes in the Malay Peninsula*, Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, no. 1, 1878.

Emily Innes, *The Chersonese with the Gilding off*, Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1885.

Frank Athelstane Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, The Bodley Head, London, 1895.

Hugh Clifford, *In Court and Kampong: Being Tales & Sketches of Native Life in the Malay Peninsula*, Grant Richards, London, 1897.

Ambrose R. Rathborne, *Camping and Tramping in Malaya: Fifteen Year's Pioneering in the Native States of the Malay Peninsula*, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1898.

Walter William Skeat, *Malay Magic: Being an Introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1900.

Nelson Annandale and Herbert C. Robinson, *Fasciculi Malayeneses: Anthropological and Zoological Results*

of an Expedition to Perak and the Siamese Malay States, 1901-1902, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1903.

Walter William Skeat and Charles Otto Blagden, *Pagan Races of the Malay Peninsula*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1906.

Giovanni Battista Cerruti, *My Friends the Savages: Among the Sakais in the Malay Peninsula*, Tipografia Cooperativa Comense, Como, 1908.

Cuthbert Woodville Harrison and Mrs H. C. Barnard, *An Illustrated Guide to the Federated Malay States, Malay States Development Agency*, London, 1910.

Richard Olaf Winstedt, *The Aboriginal Races, Census of British Malaya*, London, 1922.

Carveth Wells, *Six Years in the Malayan Jungle*, William Heinemann, London, 1925.

Richard James Wilkinson, *Papers on Malay Subjects: Life and Customs*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1925.

Ivor Hugh Norman Evans, *Malay Beliefs, Papers of the Ethnology & Archaeology of the Malay Peninsula*, Cambridge, 1927.

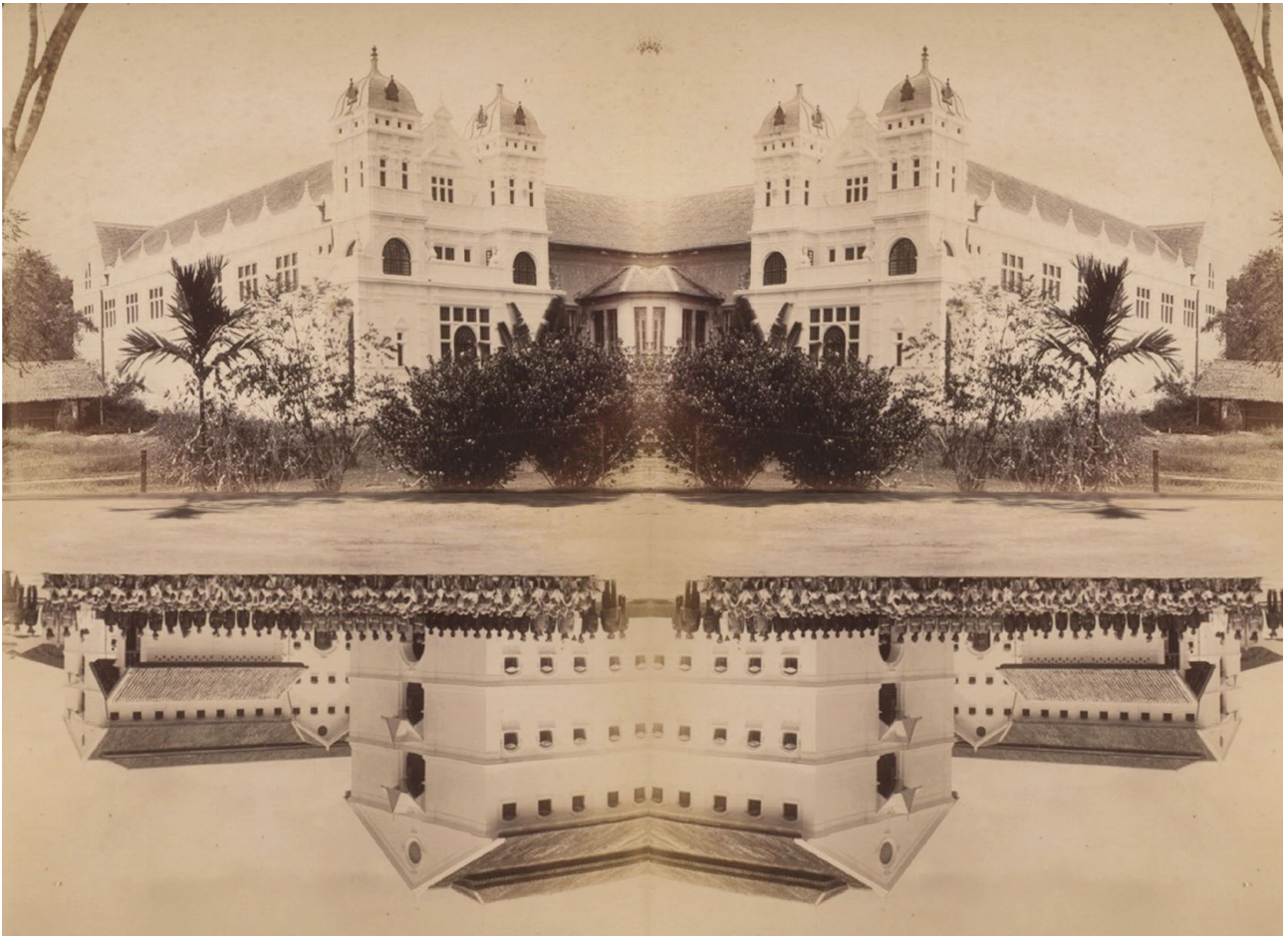
Charles Hose, *Fifty Years of Romance and Research: Or, a Jungle-Wallah at Large*, Hutchinson and Company, London, 1927.

Henri Fauconnier, *The Soul of Malaya*, Elkin Mathews and Marrot, London, 1931.

Leopold Ainsworth, *The Confessions of a Planter in Malaya: A Chronicle of Life and Adventure in the Jungle*, H. F. & G. Witherby, London, 1933.



T is for technology, taxonomy, and tautology



In Taiping there are over forty firsts: the first hill resort for experimental plantations and cooler leisure time; the first swimming pool nestled in amongst the hills; the first clock tower to bring time into order.

The first jail and the first museum were developed two years apart, sandwiched in between the first turf club and the first hospital. Sited directly across the road from each other, one rehabilitates minds and the other bodies.

Taiping Prison is one of the earliest permanent penitentiary institutions in the Federated Malay States. It was built in 1879 to quell further unrest in the wake of the Larut Wars. This was a few years after the murder of J. W. W. Birch, but it was successful in suppressing further large-scale warfare between the Chinese clans. It remains until today in the same spot.

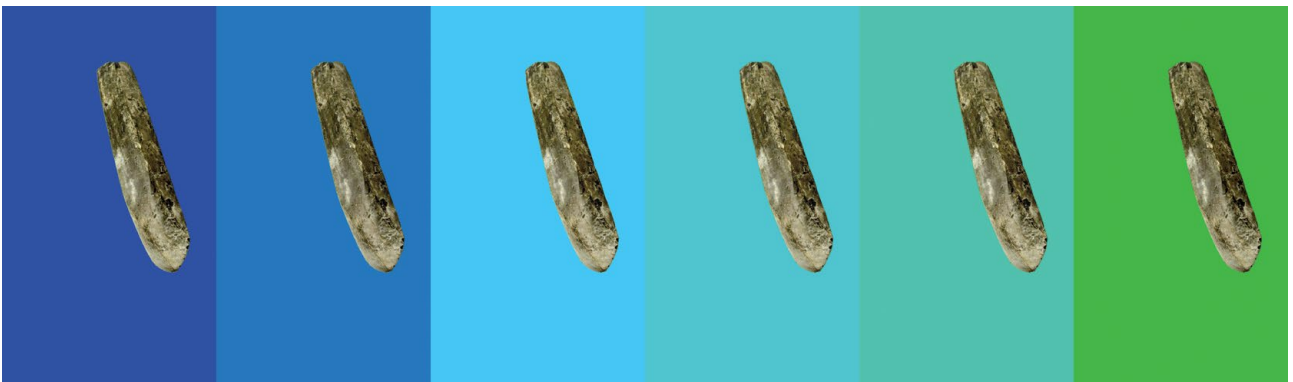
Perak Museum was built in 1883, and opened in 1886, and is the oldest museum in Malaysia. There are 5,074 cultural collections, 523 nature collections, and 2,877 miscellaneous items. Its Nature Gallery houses one-hundred-year-old animal species, and some of its original dioramas are still on display.

G is for green, which replaces blue, and *gigi guntor*

'An amateur ethnologist, Ivor Evans took up his post as a junior civil servant of the British north Borneo Company in 1910. This was his chance to study 'savage' culture at first hand. He noted with interest that archaeologists in neighbouring Sarawak had already unearthed ancient stone implements, and he hoped to pioneer the discovery of such treasure in British north Borneo.

Armed with the trusty catalogue of the Scottish Museum of Antiquities, Evans set off to make enquiries among the local villagers. To his surprise, he found that they recognised some of the illustrations in his catalogue, stabbing excited fingers at the smooth, palm-sized stones labelled as adze-heads. These, the villagers informed him with straight-faced authority, were not adze-heads at all, but *gigi guntor*, or thunder teeth. To be precise, they were thunderbolts, charmed objects that could be found among the roots of coconut palms, which had been struck by lightning.

Evans, who was not about to go digging for thunderbolts beneath coconut trees, set off to get a second opinion.'⁶



J is for journey, against time and through space

IV) AN EXPEDITION

Planning the Start

B: Ali, bila tetap gamak kita nak bejalang esok?

B: Ali, what time are we starting to-morrow?

B: Ali, bila tetap gemak kita hendak berjalan esok?

A: Kawang ikuk bila-bila pung.

A: Whenever you like.

A: Kawan ikut bila-bila pun.

B: 'dah, kalau begitu gak, gelap esok.

B: All right then, crack o' dawn to-morrow.

B: Sudah, kalau begitu, gelap esok.

A: 'dah apa-la, 'tapi takut 'dak tekejut, 'tu-la. Dang jenera gak, 'dak tahu-la.

A: All right. The only thing is I'm afraid I shan't wake up. If I once go fast asleep, there's no knowing.

A: Tidak apa-lah, tetapi takut tidak terkejut, itu-lah. Dan jendera tidak tahu-lah.

B: Amor, ayang mu bukap ada? Boleh dengar kukok.

B: Well, you've got some fowls, haven't you? Their crowing'll wake you.

B: Ambohi, ayam mu bukan ada? Boleh dengar kukok.

A: Hey, ayang 'dak boleh bechara, kadang sepuluh kali semalamang pung bekukok. Kalau murai boleh jugak bechaya, 'tapi bunyi pulak aluh sangat.

A: You can't go by the fowls. Sometimes they crow ten times a night. You can trust the Robbins, but they don't sing loud enough.

A: Hey, ayam tidak boleh bechara. Kadang sa-puluh kali samalaman pun berkukok. Kalau murai boleh juga perchaya tetapi bunyi pula halus sangat.

B: Ho'r, kalau begitu gak, mari kita tidor semegek-la. Orang pukul geduk 'tu, kita jaga-la.

B: Well, let's go and sleep at the mosque then. We shall wake with the drum.

B: Ho'r, kalau begitu, mari kita tidur mesjid-lah. Orang pukul geduk itu kita jaga-lah.

On The Way

B: Ali, mu tengok 'dak kapal terbang?

B: Have you ever seen one of these aeroplanes, Ali?

B: Ali, mu tengok tidak kapal terbang?

A: 'dak rajing sekali lagi.

A: Never in my life.

A: Tidak rajin sa-kali lagi. B: Allah, pandai sunggo dia chari akhtiar itu macham-macham: tidak begitu, begitu. Berapa tinggi terbang itu?

B: Orang kata sayuk.

B: Out of sight, they say.

B: Orang kata sayup.⁵



S is for sabotage, stability, and stores



...along, against, within, and through, we are all inextricably linked to the archive and its demands.

Not a place or location but a methodology.

Seeking stability, creating crisis, suspending time.

Can we choose who we swim downstream of?

Bathing downstream of a contaminant is never a good idea. But the opposite for an enlightened one.