



# Tracing the Melaka Sultanate Tradition in Early Colonial Melaka Municipality

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**Abstract.** The rise of Melaka Sultanate city as the international trade centre and ‘emporium of the east’ in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries has been well explained and discussed by many scholars. The Melaka Sultanate city has gone through two and a half centuries of its historical narrative. However, less academic study has been done to trace the Melaka Sultanate physical constructs and municipality in their geo-location. This study investigates historical records in its attempt to trace Melaka Sultanate constructs within the municipality of colonial Melaka period. This study is moulded by the nature of investigative and exploratory research; a study which built its understanding by collecting, examining, analysing and assembling ‘relevant puzzles’ into the mix based on the historical information as fundamental ground in making its case. Data collection in the research includes analysis of archival materials which provides descriptive information related to the municipality contemporary to the Sultanate period and historical visuals, largely municipal plans produced in the post Sultanate period. In achieving its objectives, this study is driven by narrative analysis, and visual anthropological analysis framework. Based on the finding of this study, there are strong cases where constructs in the tradition of Melaka Sultanate can be traced within the post Melaka Sultanate municipal plans. The research contributes to a reconstruction study of Melaka Sultanate in view of heritage to tourism that is align with SDG11.4 & 8.9.

**Keywords:** Melaka Sultanate Tradition · Melaka Sultanate Constructs · Melaka Sultanate Municipality

## 1 Introduction

It had been five hundred years since the City of Melaka Sultanate was last seen and has been subjected to four evolutionary periods. Melaka had gone through colonization period by the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally, the British before gaining its independence with the formation of the Federation of Malaya since 1957 (Malaysia since 1963). These periods have made their marks as part of evolutionary changes based on

the important of its time and under jurisdiction of who claimed to be the heritor of the place, which characterised what Melaka is now. Currently, Melaka seems to be a historical fusion of all the above identities, except none of the object in the location (Melaka Sultanate city parameter) claimed to be built during the era of Melaka Sultanate. In the absence of remaining historical Melaka Sultanate's buildings, in the 1970s, reviews of the Sultanate's artefacts were dominated by reviews of royal tombstones.

The fact that no legitimate visual record on almost all constructs of Melaka Sultanate has impacted on national identity and heritage. A generation without their historical memory could literally lose their identity [1]. Melaka Sultanate city is one of the world's most significant fifteen century maritime civilization; claimed to be at par with Venice, Cairo and Canton. In a writing, it was argued that the Malacca port hosted 2,000 ships at any given time, comparable to modern day Singapore harbour [2]. However, there are many anomalies and discrepancies in view of text and visuals relationships on Melaka Sultanate city.

For example, if we take 1262 [3] as the founding year of Melaka Sultanate and 1511 as the date it fell, the duration would be 249 years. On the other hand, Portuguese's rule of Melaka was 1511–1641 (130 years), the Dutch 1641–1825 (184 years), while the British 1825–1957 (132 years). The independent Malaya/ Malaysia is now 65 years old.

The underlying premise of this study is based on the idea that the Melaka Sultanate was a 250 year civilization; the longest of all evolutionary periods. This fact should not be taken for granted. It is too simplistic to perceive that the entire Sultanate civilization completely vanish especially in the early colonial period. Based on this perspective, the trace of constructs in the tradition of Melaka Sultanate is not impossible in the light of historical text and visuals.

## 2 Methodology

This research employs qualitative method and was carried out as an investigative study, a research method pursued with motivation to rediscover obscure information that can provide better understanding of sultanate's municipality [4]. As investigative research, this study obtains its comprehension based on historical records in building its case [4]. The researcher immersed himself into exploring descriptive clues and evaluating accounts primarily from Portuguese, supported by Malay and Dutch records. As such, the study was shaped by documents analyses; where documents were given voice, interpretation and meaning sought to put into context and build an understanding on the lost city of Melaka Sultanate.

This study profited from the narrative analysis framework proposed by Czarniawska [5] which investigates, determines, evaluates and analyzes descriptive clues that could bring better understanding on constructs and municipality in the Melaka Sultanate. Wherever needed, this study put each information into perspective by employing other supporting documents be it text or visual to revealed as much comprehensive idea about Melaka Sultanate municipality.

In addition, we also employed visual anthropological analysis framework proposed by Collier [6] to cross examine findings based on the narrative analysis in context of tracing constructs in the tradition of Melaka Sultanate within colonial Melaka municipality. The earliest municipal plans of Portuguese Melaka were carefully chosen especially

drawn by cartographer who had been or had stayed in Melaka. This is to ensure authentic visualization of Portuguese Melaka city covering: i) the Melaka hill and the surrounding area and ii) the cosmopolitan town of Upeh. Focus was given to municipal plans which offer detailed visual impression or textual description for analysis.

### 3 Narrative Analysis

Based on the historical narrative, it was a nobleman among the Celates who convinced Raja Iskandar Syah to establish Melaka on the current site [7]. Celates is European term, which refers to 'orang laut' (literally means 'sea people') or orang selat (literally means 'straits people') who according to Tome Pires played a major role in the Srivijaya Empire, later during the Melaka Sultanate, and the Johor Sultanate [8]. This ethnic group has distinct cultural characteristic which may help the study to trace the tradition of Melaka Sultanate. The Celates were the loyalist to the King of Palembang since the time of Srivijaya. They provided security support and later, armies from its protected territories allowing the government of Melaka Sultanate to grow and becomes much competent; thus, stimulate its social organizations to become more complex [8]. A prosperous country will attract foreign people like traders, religious preachers and trans-migration of population [8]. Such places typically will become center for the development of culture and civilization. The Sultan in return would preserve the honour and special relationship with Celates and would look after their welfare and was given a significant role in Melaka's economy and security [8].

Melaka population grew to 40,000 by the time Sultan Alauddin inherited the throne and became 190,000 by the evening of the Portuguese attack [9]. This figure is consistent with Malay Annals which use the term of 'nineteen laksa' [10]. By 1511, Melaka was reported to have 100,000 individuals ready to take up arms and fight for the Sultan [6]. These indigenous inhabitants of Melaka may consist of those who were born locally or from various part of the Malay Archipelago [8]. Tome Pires described cosmopolitan city of Melaka with no less than eighty-four distinct spoken languages by its inhabitants in which Malay become the lingua franca [7].

As a result of rapid growth in population which includes various communities, there was a critical need for the supply of food [11]. Pires specifically illustrated that there were about one thousand one hundred and fifty orchards of various kinds within the Melaka territory itself [7]. This factor alone has a big repercussion in tracing the manifestation of a more authentic socio-cultural and economic activities carried out by the natives of Melaka Sultanate period. Furthermore, the importation of food into the Melaka Sultanate city was encouraged from the neighbouring territories and tax levied on the goods was considered as 'trifle' [7].

The structure of municipality of the Melaka Sultanate city can be simplified into 2 distinct territories; i) the royal compound at the south east and ii) the town of Upeh at the North West Melaka city; sandwiching the Melaka river. The royal compound used to be the centre of Melaka City administration during the periods of Melaka Sultanate, Portuguese Melaka and Dutch Melaka. The town of Upeh was the centre of trading activities where warehouses were built based on territorial groups of foreign and local ethnics [8].

## 4 Visual Anthropological Analysis

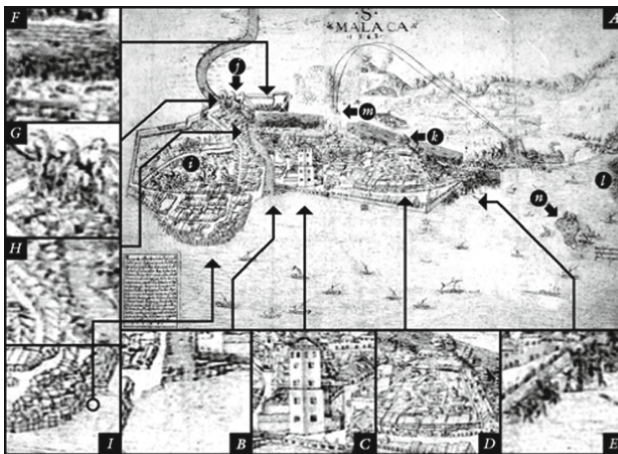
In tracing the Melaka Sultanate municipal tradition, this study carefully selected and reviewed early colonial Melaka municipal plans in building up its case. This study views those municipal plans as among the most important historical visuals in tracing Melaka Sultanate tradition because of the richness of their data and drawn by cartographers that were there in Melaka during their time.

### 4.1 Portuguese Melaka Municipality in 1568

Figure 1 can be regarded as the most detailed impression on Melaka produced by the Portuguese available in public domain. The cartographer of this impression is unknown but lived in the city in 1568 [14]. The impression not only reveals in detail every construct in the fortress city (which used to be the Sultanate compound) but also buildings in the trading town of Upeh. The formation of streets in the impression seems very consistent with the one drawn by Eredia in 1613 (See Fig. 2). Misericordia tower in Fig. 1(c) drawn in coherent form and feature with that of Casper Coreia's impression of 1515 were very close to the period of Melaka Sultanate. It is also very similar with Eredia's impression of 1604 based on the vertical arrangement of its four large windows.

The revelation of the Melaka city at the side of the trading town is extremely rare and much helpful. In general, the parameter of trading town during the Portuguese period had been down sized from the original Sultanate period [13]. This is based on the number of villages which survived during this period which does not reflect the varieties of merchants especially middle eastern Muslims who also stayed in Melaka before the time of the Portuguese.

For instant, Tome Pires once had mentioned thousands of merchants from Farsee and Arabs, among whom were 'rich merchants' to have stayed in Melaka [7]. Their village is nowhere to be found in this impression or other municipal plan of Portuguese.



**Fig. 1.** Bird's-Eye View of Melaka in 1563 (Source: Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro)

Apparently, among the villages which survived were, Kampong Bendahara (Bendahara village), Kampong Jawa (Javanese village), Kampong Keling (Indian village) and Kampong Cina (Chinese village). King of Kampar who was reported to had replaced Nina Chatu as Bendahara [7] likely move into Kampong Bendahara with his followers in July 1514.

We believe that there is no ground to perceive ethnic groups were asked to switch settlement that can caused major changes on the parameter. Fundamentally those settlements were designed and developed to serve specific ethnic and cultural preferences. Therefore, settlement parameters and buildings in the trading town of Upeh has the case to have direct tradition since the period of Melaka Sultanate; subjected for further investigation.

Buildings in Fig. 1 can be seen in various forms and orientation seemingly drawn based on individual form and character. Large magnitude of structures which were constructed extending beyond the edge of the shoreline at the side of trading town Fig. 1(I) remind us of the unique structure and characteristic of the Celates or 'orang laut'. Tome Pires described this tribe at length and declared them as originally came from Bintang or Bintan of Riau Archipelago [7]. Such type of houses still exists until now; for example, at Riau Islands themselves and eastern Malaysia.

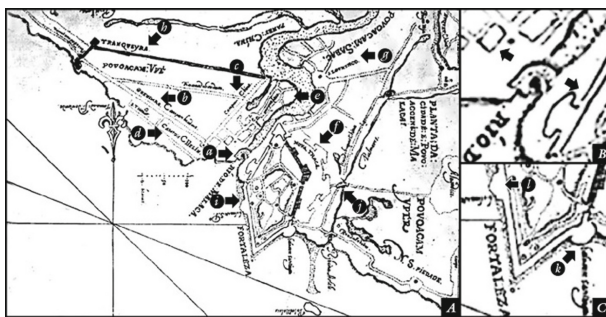
Celates regarded as the loyalist of Melaka Sultanate and continue to serve the backbone of naval force as Sultan move to Johor to establish the old Johor government [7]. Strongly embedded in the historical narrative of Melaka Sultanate, this study suggested that there is no ground to believe that the structure in Fig. 1 (I) which relates to the work of Celates were built by them during Portuguese Melaka. On the other hand, Portugese is not known to have cultural root in building structures as such.

The work of Celates can also be traced on structural constructs in Fig. 1(H) which partly protruded exceeding the Melaka Riverbank. In another research, this construct has been opined to be the floating market of the Melaka Sultanate [17]. The protruded part of those structures has strong case to serve in making easy the process to unload-up agricultural commodities from farmers' boats and disseminate them to the city center during Melaka Sultanate. This is in relation to the existence of one thousand one hundred and fifty orchards at inland of Melaka as reported by Tome Pires in 1512 [7]. Portuguese took over Melaka in 1511. Orchards which have borne fruit especially in such magnitude cannot be created in one year. Thus, it's only fitting that those orchards already exist during Melaka Sultanate.

## 4.2 Portuguese Melaka Municipality in 1613

Figure 2 is a municipal plan produced by Emanuel Godinho de Eredia who was brought up in Melaka. This municipal plan illustrated both the fortress city and the rarely reveal, trading town. The study views this municipal plan as an extremely important source of information because the naming of its territories seemingly retained the Malay words. The network of streets in the plan is structural to the development of properties alongside; can also be seen to compound villages.

As we can see, Figs. 1 and 2 support each other well. While Fig. 1 provides most visual detail in the rarely reveal cosmopolitan town of Upeh, Fig. 2 put various textual context of the city through its labelling. In Fig. 2, we can learn the identity of settlements that existed



**Fig. 2.** Municipal Plan of Portuguese Melaka in 1613. (Source: “Planta da cidade e povoacoes de Malaca”, Declaram de Malacca, 1613, Bibliotheque Royale, Bruxelles)

during Portuguese Melaka even though the overall parameter of town of Upeh had been downsized. Based on Portuguese historical record, there was a successful negotiation of good will reported as requested by Chinese captains and this was granted by Alfonso D’Albuquerque personally [9]. In the negotiations we learned that the last transactions between Chinese captains and Malay merchants, before their departure, which coincided with the coming of the monsoon season. Bras D’Albuquerque noted that:

*“...the Chinese set forth for their own land highly pleased with Alfonso D’Albuquerque ...”* [9].

The identity of the Malay merchants on the other hand, could be best suited in relation to warehouses located at the village of Bendahara. In other segments of the report, Alfonso warned not to touch the houses or warehouses belonging to Nina Chatu, a prominent Indian merchant who was very meritorious to Portuguese [9]. In this case, Nina Chatu’s properties were mentioned in plural both ‘houses’ and ‘warehouses’ were undoubtedly still intact in the transition between the era of Melaka Sultanate and Portuguese. In a larger picture, Nina Chatu’s properties justified as a subset to the Indian Village was intact.

This phenomenon was reported as being the basis of other merchants to make the same plead; upon which all of them granted, except from the Malays [9]. Even though properties and belongings of the native Malays were seized, and general orders were given to put them all to death “...whosoever they were found” [9]. The identity of the village was clearly revealed in the plan of Fig. 2. Some Malays perhaps rejoined the community of Melaka City when king of Kampar was appointed as the second Bendahara of Portuguese administration [7].

The municipal plan in Fig. 2 was published in 1613 that is about a hundred years after the end of Melaka Sultanate period. There is no doubt that many possible changes occur in the trading town. Considering the hostile situation from local resistance especially the series of raids in the first fifty years of Portuguese Melaka and the development of motherland Portugal after 1580, Melaka city likely did not experience rapid physical development after all.



Development of Portugal itself after 1580 was not encouraging especially because it lost its independence to Spain [12]. Resulted from power vacuum due to the death of King Sebastiao in the disastrous battle in Morocco which Portugal lost most of its army and its youth, the Portuguese become much weaken [12]. This has dragged Portugal to a controversial royal crisis which Spain's monarch led by King Phillip II had exploited on, invaded it, claimed its throne and assumed control of its empire; leaving Portugal with some autonomy to run the empire [12]. Melaka in this context is a hostage to the fortune of Spain. Spain was reported to have been continuously pressuring Portugal with greater demand on manpower and monetary; which was regarded as 'burdensome and unacceptable' [12].

A bold line compounding the trading town in Fig. 2 (h) stretching from Chinese village at the north west of the city, then twisted towards the sea is a Portuguese wall also appeared in impression of 1568 (See Fig. 1). This study regards the bold line (h) that appears in both Figs. 1 and 2 referred to the same wall that cuts the parameter of the trading town of Upeh which is relatively larger during Melaka Sultanate. This bold line is labelled as 'Tranqueyra' which in Portuguese simply means 'fortress'. With a smaller parameter town of Upeh is believed to be is much practical for the Portuguese to govern. As a result, settlements for merchants from the Middle East which constitute a large group during the Melaka Sultanate appears to be in total absent during Portuguese Melaka period. Tome Pires's once gave an impression in reference to the time when Diego Lopes de Sequeira arrived before the port of Melaka:

*"...Parsees, Bengalees and Arabs there were more than four thousand men here, including rich merchants and some who were factors for others..."* [7].

Bengalees may be a subset of settlement or village of merchants from 'Bunuaqujlim' or 'Benua Keling'; simply means Indian Continent. If the three categories of above merchants shared about the same proportion, then Arab merchant communities alone exceed more than a thousand in population; no longer surfaced in either the above settlement map or in Tome Pires description of 'the four Xabamdares' (syahbandar or harbourmaster) segregation of municipal administration [7]. It is tricky to understand the term Parsees as it may refer to the Persian as modern-day Iran or the Zoroastrian descendant who in history migrated from Persian to Gujarat and Sindh between the 8th and 10th century CE [14].

On the other hand, even though merchants from Gujarat came from India, it does not seem that their warehouses located at Kampung Kling or Indian Village in the above municipal map. This is because the merchant's community from Gujarat has a significant population, many with great deal of merchandise and capital. There were a thousand Gujaratees during the coming of Lopez de Squeira [7]. Merchant from Gujarat had one designated 'Xabamdar' which in itself a municipal office during the reign of Melaka Sultanate [7].

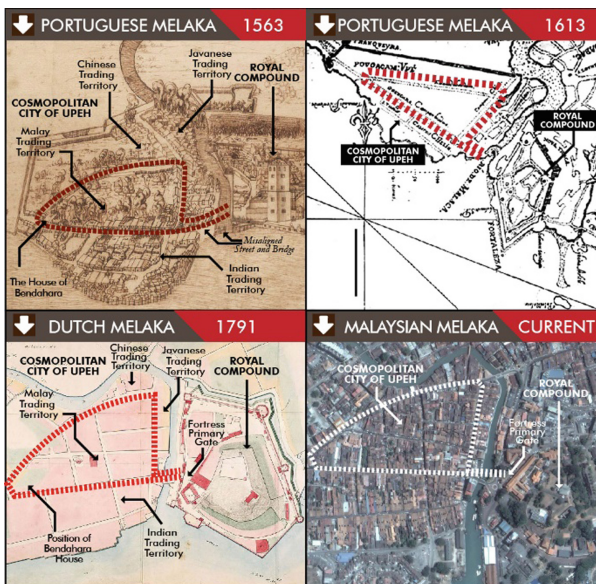
Based on this historical information, there is good ground to believe that Gujarat's merchant community likely own settlement territory in the municipality of Melaka Sultanate but did not show during Portuguese administration as seen in the above map. In addition to the discussion merchants from western Asia like Turkey, North African like Egypt or Central Asia like Armenians and many others were also non-existent [7].

Eredia's municipal map above may shear light on aspects of common denomination between the two periods. The trading town during Melaka Sultanate is expected to be relatively extensive.

At the south east of the city there is an area labelled as 'Provoacam Sabac' or Province of Sabak; also, believably preserved in original Malay name. 'Sabak' in old Malay term means 'dapur tempat memasak makanan ketika diadakan kenduri' or 'an apparatus or place to cook at time of festivity' [15]. This study proposed that this area was designated as settlement of loyalist to Sultan likely among the Celates and local Malays since it is so closed to the royal compound. According to Malay Annals, it was the tradition of rulers of Melaka, to allocate massive livestock for banquet during royal feast [10]. This study suggests that it is not a coincidence 'Sabak' was one of the important places for such activities as in old Malay term it means 'place to cook at the time of festivity'. All these information is necessary in providing clues on the traceable nature of the Melaka Sultanate tradition.

## 5 Findings and Discussion

The structure of municipality of ancient Melaka city can be simplified in 2 distinct territories. The royal compound at the south east and the town of Upeh at the north west Melaka city; sandwiching the Melaka river. The royal compound used to be the centre of Melaka City administration during the periods of Melaka Sultanate, Portuguese Melaka and Dutch Melaka. The town of Upeh was the centre of trading activities where warehouses were built.



**Fig. 3.** Preservation of Three-Cornered Street of Melaka in the Tradition of Melaka Sultanate (Dutch Melaka, 1791 (Source: The Malaysia Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1985)



In principle, the study had made the case that territories and warehouses belonged to Chinese, Indian and Javanese merchants were preserved as they cooperate with Portuguese administration during and after the 1511 war [9]. As such, Chinese, Indian and Javanese territorial parameters and their buildings in the trading town of Upeh has direct tradition of the Melaka Sultanate period as we can approximate in Portuguese Melaka municipal impression of 1658.

Interestingly, Malay territorial parameters in the tradition of Melaka Sultanate also preserved in the municipality of Portuguese Melaka because it was compounded by primary streets of Upeh which remained unchanged. Primary streets are structural to the municipality of a city and cannot easily be restructured because there are buildings at both sides of them. Drastic change of such primary streets would literally means demolishing buildings along them. The preservation of the three-cornered street in Fig. 3 during Dutch's Melaka and modern Malaysian Melaka is a testimony of the perspective. In conclusion, Fig. 3 roughly depicts the three-cornered street that were existent during the time of the Melaka Sultanate and shows how this pattern persisted throughout the eras of Portuguese Melaka, Dutch Melaka, and Malaysian Melaka.

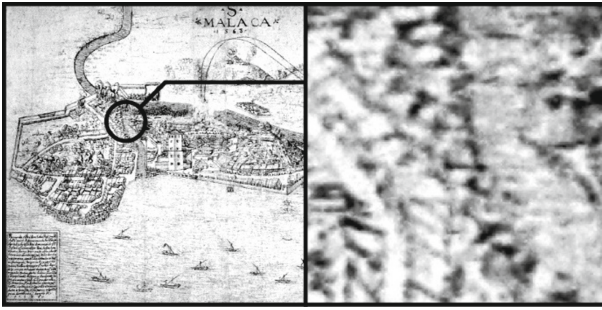
Since the buildings in those territories were untouched, the network of streets of Upeh remained as they were during Melaka Sultanate. This especially in regards of the formation of three-cornered street circling the town of Upeh. The house of Malay Bendahara even surfaced in Eredia's municipal plan of 1613. In this municipal plan, many names of places were preserved in its old Malay words. Although this plan was created about one hundred years after the end of Melaka Sultanate period, it is as if it took much early reference to the city. Kampung Bendahara or Bendahara village was spelled as 'Bemdara' in the municipal plan. There is no other Portuguese's writer who used this unique spelling other than Tome Pires who began writing his account of Melaka in 1512 which is very closed to the Melaka Sultanate era.

This study regards Celates also as a structural factor that can help identify the traceable element of Melaka Sultanate city. The role and importance of Celates in setting up the foundation of Melaka Sultanate should not be underestimated. According to Tome Pires, Celates were privileged in their participation of local retails, become nobility [7] and later also became the backbone of Melaka's military and naval striking power [8].

The trace of Celates identity can still be seen in the Portuguese Melaka municipal impression of 1658. Although the town showed sign of mixed racial identity, the study



**Fig. 4.** A Case Celates constructs at the River Mouth of Melaka



**Fig. 5.** The Case of Floating Market of Central Melaka

sees the part of Portuguese Melaka city which contains a magnitude of structures protruded at the shoreline (Fig. 4) and at the central Melaka river bank (Fig. 5) was originally built by ‘orang laut’ or ‘sea people’ or ‘Celates’ and in the tradition Melaka Sultanate. The Melaka Sultanate was founded as a maritime civilization and such structures were meant in manifesting the infrastructure to unload-up goods coming from the straits and river of Melaka.

Portuguese is not known to have cultural connection on such form of constructs, and there is no historical record to assume ‘Celates’, the loyalist to Sultan, taking a huge role in the development of Portuguese Melaka. This study obtains no further information regarding how these structures (in Fig. 4) was put to use during Portuguese Melaka but during Dutch Melaka period it was a landing place for fish and fish market. As such this study propose those structure was a ‘gateway’ to land goods from feeder boats to central Melaka. It is a part regulation during Melaka Sultanate era that commodities within its empire cannot but otherwise sold in or through Melaka [8]. Incentive in a form of very low taxation on food was levied by Melaka Sultanate administration to attract supply into the cosmopolitan city [7].

The structure that protruded through the water of Melaka River at the location (Fig. 5) seemingly reflected the answer to the need of a meeting point between wholesalers and local people with commodities. The existence of one thousand one hundred and fifty orchards [7] refers to inhabitants living at the inland along Melaka River. They were obviously settled at the inland in much less density areas as farmers. The magnitude number of orchards during Melaka Sultanate era can be seen as how local native respond to the needs of food supply in the cosmopolitan city.

From the characters of these structures and based on the principle of ‘form follows function’, this study proposes this phenomenon as a floating market; a form of market of which floats on rivers which allows trading and transactions sold from boats. Perhaps this practice is comparable to various floating markets in South East Asian at present e.g. in Thailand and Vietnam. Floating markets is a practice not uncommon in the Malay Archipelago. Some of these floating markets are believed to have survived for many centuries [16]. In Thailand, floating markets has its historical root from the ancient period of Ayutthaya which began in 14th century [16]. This is arguably contemporary to the era of the Melaka Sultanate.

## 6 Conclusion

There is great deal of visual information from a detailed observations on the Portuguese Melaka impression of 1563 (Fig. 1), which shared similar municipal structure to Eredia's plan of 1613 (Fig. 2). The preservation of the naming of villages using native words in the plan supported the arguments presented in this paper. The study suggests that Portuguese Melaka impression of 1563 were likely in approximation with the municipality of Melaka Sultanate; within a scaled down parameter. The wall, 'Tranqueyra', in the Portuguese municipal plan of 1613 (Fig. 2) reduced the original parameter of Melaka Sultanate trading town- Upeh. This may explain why several ethnic communities especially from Middle Eastern regions are absent from these plans. These communities were known to have their base in Melaka during the Sultanate era. As such, we opined that based on historical accounts, the parameter of Upeh during Melaka Sultanate was very likely much larger.

The network of streets of Upeh originated from Sultanate era was structural to the municipality of the town and compounding all the settlements is very likely were preserved during Portuguese Melaka. This especially in regards of the formation of three-cornered street circling the town of Upeh. The house of Malay Bendahara which even surfaced in Eredia's municipal plan of 1613 is also likely rooted in Melaka Sultanate tradition. Figure 2 also maintained names of places from its old native tradition from the Melaka Sultanate period. These includes old Malay words; among those are Sabac (which means place to cook at time of festivity), Upeh (related to Palm tree), Yler ('iler' means excitement for food), Ayer Leleh (rivulet) and Ujung Pasir (end of sandy shore). These were in relative to non-native Malay word like 'Tranqueyra' which means fortress in Portuguese, likely in reference to Portuguese tradition.

Massive building structures protruded at the edge of shoreline of river mouth and at the riverbank of Portuguese Melaka city looked very similar to the work and tradition of the Celates which as discussed earlier, maintained a very close relationship with the Melaka palace and played an important role in the establishment of cosmopolitan city of the Melaka Sultanate city. In a nutshell, close scrutiny of the historical record shed evidence of the resemblances and continuation of the tradition of the Melaka Sultanate municipality structures, buildings and footprints throughout the Portuguese era.

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