

The Evolution of Malay Scripts

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Exhibition

More than 250 million people in the world speak Malay, in its various forms, and its antiquity has been said to be comparable to that of English. Malay is an Austronesian language centred in maritime Southeast Asia. Being the *lingua franca* of maritime Southeast Asia, this sub-region has been referred to as the Malay Archipelago.

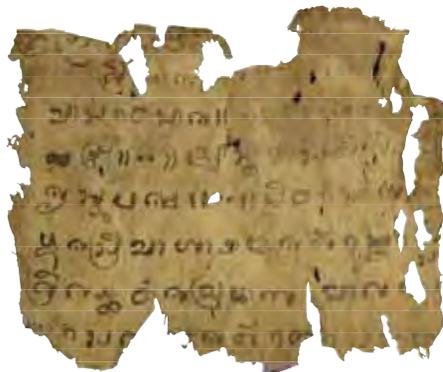
The Malay civilisation covers a wide temporal and geopolitical span and has, throughout history, successfully melded the cultural influences from other major civilisations like the Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic and the West into its own. The adaptation of different writing systems to express the Malay language, from the ancient Pallava (Sanskrit), Rencong and Kawi scripts to the more modern Jawi and Roman scripts, has left behind a vast legacy of written words. The medium of preserving and transmitting this written legacy, from stones, barks and leaves to more portable paper forms, also shows the receptiveness of the Malays to technology that could broaden the reach and impact of their intellectual tradition.

The evolution of Malay scripts is testament to the level of literacy and extensive interactions with other civilisations that Malays experienced for centuries. In this regard, the Evolution of Malay Scripts (EMAS) Exhibition will motivate Malays (and others) to read more and continue the tradition of promoting literacy; as well as becoming more proactive in learning from others.

This exhibition will showcase the development of the Malay scripts from the Indic to the Islamic and later European influences. In the corresponding progression, Malay has been written in various scripts from Pallava, Kawi, and Jawi to the

current Latinised or Romanised form. Hence, while an understanding of the past can be derived from the numerous historical and archaeological findings, an appreciation of the evolution of the Malay script will reveal the phases and periods of external influences on the people known as the Malays. It will also provide insights into the worldview, strategic-mindedness and adaptability of the Malays.

The exhibition represents NLB's efforts to preserve the national memories and build a shared history of Singapore. It showcases invaluable manuscripts, letters, publications and artefacts that document the development of the Malays' rich intellectual heritage through their different writing systems.



The Tanjung Tanah Manuscript is a legal code of 34 pages that contains two texts, one in the old Melayu script, and one in an ancient form of the Kerinci script.

Image courtesy of Dr Uli Kozok, University of Hawai'i

The EMAS Exhibition is, however, more than just about the Malay scripts or the

Malays. It is more about learning, being open to ideas and the dissemination of knowledge. It is about cross-cultural communications and exchanges. All these are very relevant in the age of knowledge-based economy for today's society to continue reinventing itself but at the same time keeping in touch with its roots.



This 5th century stone edict with an inscription in the Pallava, Sanskrit script originated from Kutai, East Kalimantan.

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The exhibition begins on 16 December 2006 and is located at Level 10, Lee Kong Chian Reference Library