PLATE 1

One people — audience at a cultural show on the Singapore Padang
The Peoples of Malaya

BY

DAVID R. HUGHES

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>List of Illustrations</strong></td>
<td>(vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>List of Plates</strong></td>
<td>(vii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acknowledgements</strong></td>
<td>(viii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>(ix)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The Earliest Peoples of Malaya—The Old Stone Age—The Middle Stone Age—The New Stone Age—The Bronze Age—The Iron Age—Summary.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Aborigines—Types and distribution—The Negritos—The Senoi—The Aboriginal Malays—The origin of the aborigines.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The Indians—The coming of the Indians—Types and their distribution—The estate worker—The shopkeeper and merchant—Hinduism—Hindu festivals and marriage—The Sikhs—Dancing—Music.</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 One People—The emergence of a Malayan nation—The minority groups—The contribution of the West—Adjustments—The future role in Asia of an independent Malaya.</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bibliography</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig.</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Old Stone Age artifacts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>New Stone Age artifacts</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bronze Age artifact</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Iron Age artifacts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Map of Malaya showing distribution of the three groups of Malayan aborigines</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A wavy-bladed Malay kers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thai-type puppet figures used in the shadow play</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Map showing localities from which the Chinese came to Singapore and Malaya</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Typical Indian dance posture</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF PLATES

PLATE 1 One people—audience at a cultural show on the Singapore Padang Frontispiece Between pages 56 & 57

PLATE 2a A Negrito
PLATE 2b A Senoi
PLATE 2c A Semai girl of mixed racial origin
PLATE 2d An Aboriginal Malay
PLATE 3a Aborigine felling a tree
PLATE 3b Burning off a ladang
PLATE 3c Aborigine shooting with a bamboo blow-pipe
PLATE 3d Aborigine shooting with a bow and arrow
PLATE 4 Two Malays in typical dress
PLATE 5a Entrance to a village mosque
PLATE 5b A Malay kampong scene
PLATE 5c Malay women street-market vendors
PLATE 6a A sawah (rice-field)
PLATE 6b Batek work
PLATE 7a The Mosque in the centre of Kuala Lumpur
PLATE 7b The famous Mosque and the Ka'aba in Mecca
PLATE 8a A Chinese towkay (businessman)
PLATE 8b A Chinese girl in a cheong-sam
PLATE 8c A street-market scene in Chinatown, Singapore
PLATE 9a A typical Chinese temple
PLATE 9b Worshipping at a temple altar
PLATE 9c A Chinese funeral
PLATE 10a A typical Chinese shop sign
PLATE 10b A Chinese association name-board
PLATE 11 A Chinese wayang (opera)
PLATE 12a A Tamil foreman of labour
PLATE 12b A Tamil girl tapping rubber
PLATE 12c A Sikh officer in the Malayan Police
PLATE 13a A Hindu temple in Singapore
PLATE 13b An Indian trader's shop
PLATE 13c Hindu devotees at Thaipusam
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Plates 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d.
*Ministry of Culture, Singapore: Plates 1, 8b, 8c, 13c.*
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INTRODUCTION

This book is written for the general reader, rather than for the expert. For the anthropologist, archaeologist, geographer, historian, economist or sociologist interested in Malaya and Singapore, a wealth of specialized literature already exists.

There has not as yet, however, been published a book dealing with—or attempting to deal with—the way of life of the various communities of these two countries as a whole. This is what this book, albeit somewhat inadequately, sets out to do.

Those who know Malaya and Singapore will, beyond doubt, cavil at the many omissions. Others may wonder why emphasis has been laid upon certain aspects of the subject and not upon others.

In mitigation, it must be said that in a book of this kind and length, the embarrassment of material and the consequent competition for space are intense. The book is frankly an experiment, and if it brings to some readers an awareness of the possibility of the beginning of a unified Malayan culture, then the writer, at least, will have been encouraged to pursue the subject further.

The sources to which the writer is particularly indebted are listed in the bibliography at the end of the book.
THE EARLIEST PEOPLES OF MALAYA

The story of the earliest peoples of Malaya is still largely wrapped in a shroud of mystery. Much work has been accomplished by prehistorians and archaeologists, but much more remains to be done before the opening chapters of our country’s story can be written for all to read and understand.

The evidence that at present exists regarding the lives of those earliest ‘‘Malayans’’ is meagre and unspectacular when compared with that of some of Malaya’s neighbours. There is nothing in Malaya, for example, to match the splendour of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, or the Borobudur in Java. Nor have fossil remains as ancient, or as important, as those of Pekin Man (Homo erectus pekinensis) or Java Man (Homo erectus d’abois) yet been discovered within the peninsula.

Prehistory is usually understood as extending up to the time when written records first occur. In Malaya, continuously recorded history did not begin until about A.D. 1400, co-incident with the founding of Malacca. Before this foundation, a number of written records did exist, notably the Malay Hikayat2 and Sejarah2, but their accurate interpretation today presents many insuperable difficulties. There also exists a number of accounts of travellers, official and otherwise, who visited the Malayan Peninsula in those early days. These records come mainly from China and India, and,