The first half of the 17th century brought heightened political, commercial and diplomatic activity to the Straits of Singapore and Melaka. Key elements included rivalry between Johor and Aceh, the rapid expansion of the Acehnese Empire, the arrival of the Dutch East India Company, and the waning of Portuguese power and prestige across the region. Archives in Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands contain detailed information on these developments in the forms of maps, rare printed works, and unpublished manuscripts, many of them unfamiliar to modern researchers.

The Singapore and Melaka Straits draws on these materials to examine early modern European cartography as a projection of Western power, treaty and alliance making, trade relations, and the struggle for naval hegemony in the Singapore and Melaka Straits. The book provides an unprecedented look at the diplomatic activities of Asian powers in the region, and also shows how the Spanish and the Portuguese attempted to restore their political fortunes by containing the rapid rise of Dutch power. The appendices provide copies of key documents, transcribed and translated into English for the first time.