OTTOMAN INFLUENCES IN THE SEAL OF SULTAN ALAUDDIN RIAYAT SYAH OF ACEH (r.1589–1604)

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Introduction
The close links that existed between Aceh and Turkey during the 16th century were forged mainly during the reigns of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah al-Kahar of Aceh (r.1537–1571) and of the Ottoman rulers Sultan Sulayman (the Magnificent) (r.1520–1566) and Sultan Selim II (r.1566–1574), and were cemented by their mutual hostility to the Portuguese. The basis of the relationship was the Indian Ocean pepper trade, with direct shipments from Aceh to the Red Sea ports, while Ottoman military supplies, expertise and manpower were greatly in demand by the Acehnese. Political contact appears to have reached a peak in the 1560s, when an Acehnese embassy presented its case to the Ottoman court, and in the Ottoman archives are preserved copies of several letters from Sultan Selim of 1567 and 1568 concerning plans for a naval expedition to Sumatra (Reid 1969: 404).

While the commercial contact between Aceh and Turkey was based primarily on pepper, it must have been accompanied by trade in other commodities and by gifts of the kind of luxury goods which naturally accompany diplomatic exchanges at the highest level; for example, according to Portuguese sources, an Acehnese ship captured off the coast of the Hadramaut in 1562 was carrying ‘200,000 cruzados’ worth of gold and jewelry for the Sultan of Turkey’ (Boxer 1969: 418). But there is little material evidence still extant bearing witness to this half-century of close contact between Aceh and the Ottoman empire at the height of its glory, other than a Turkish cannon which was captured by the Dutch in Aceh in 1874 and borne off to Holland. However, it will be argued in this paper that Ottoman artistic influence can be seen clearly in a royal Acehnese seal which probably dates from the last years of the 16th century, that of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah (r.1589–1604).

The seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah
The seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah of Aceh is of incomparable importance, being the oldest known surviving Malay seal. It is a round seal, 35 mm in diameter, with the name of the Sultan engraved in relief in the centre, appearing in black against a white background, surrounded by a religious inscription engraved in intaglio in the border, giving a white inscription against a black background. It is known from impressions on three documents, dating between 1601 and 1603. The earliest recorded impression is found

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1 The best sources for this period of contact are Reid (1969) and Boxer (1969).
2 A full catalogue record for this seal can be found in Gallop unpublished: Appendix, p. 27, #50a.
Ottoman influences in the seal of Sultan Alauddin Ria'ayat Syah

Figure 1. The seal of Sultan Alauddin Ria'ayat Syah of Aceh, impressed on a letter from Prince Mauritius in 1601. Den Haag, Nationaal Archief, Staats. Secr. no. 1605 (after Rouffaer 1906: Pl. 1.3)
on a letter in Spanish dated 11 December 1600, sent to the Sultan by Prince Mauritius of Orange-Nassau; the Sultan’s seal was stamped on the letter in Aceh in August 1601 as a sign of receipt, whereupon the letter was returned to the Prince in Holland, and it is now held in the National Archives in the Hague Figure 1. The second, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, is on a trading permit in Malay issued to Captain Hurry Middleton in 1602 (Figure 2). A third, damaged, impression is on a recently-discovered exit permit in Arabic issued to Admiral Joris van Spilbergen, dated Syawal 1011 (28 March 1603), in the collection of the Royal Family Archives in the Hague.2

This seal has been well known since it was first published in 1862 (Wap 1862: 86), but scholarly attention has been limited to the reading of its inscription. In this study the seal will be re-evaluated in the context of other Islamic seals, both from within the Malay world and outside it, and it is found that the greatest insights are gained from a consideration of its form rather than its contents.

Intaglio and relief carving in Islamic seals

In general, Islamic seals are carved in intaglio, whereby the inscription is engraved or incised into the flat surface of the seal matrix, giving a white (or uncoloured) inscription against a coloured, inked background when the seal is impressed in ink on paper.

1National Archief, Staats. Secr. no. 1605. This impression was first reproduced in the form of a rather awkward drawing by J.H. Hengstman, an official of the Rijks Archief, in Wap 1862: 86; a much better drawing was given in Millies (1871: Pl. XVII); while a somewhat more accurate facsimile of the whole document was published by Nettic (1937: Pl. 13) Rouffaer (1906: Pl. i) published an excellent facsimile photograph of the original impression. A colour facsimile of the full document was recently published by Wasing-Vauser (1995: 35).

2Bodleian Library, MS Douce Or.4-4; transcribed, translated and translated by Strobos (1977: 121-122); and reproduced in Gwoneon and Nicholson (1910); Lewis (1955: 144); Gilsup (1951-56) and Gilsup (1994: 45).


or a raised inscription standing out against a flat background if the seal is impressed in a pliable medium such as clay, lead or wax. Very few Islamic seals are engraved in relief, where the background matter of the seal matrix is cut away leaving the inscription standing proud, giving a coloured inscription against an uncoloured background when the seal is impressed in ink, or a sunken inscription when the seal is impressed in clay or wax.

At certain places in the chronological spectrum, however, the ubiquity of intaglio-carved seals was interrupted, and a brief hiatus followed the conversion to Islam in 1296 of the Mongol Il-Khan dynasty. During the course of the 13th and 14th centuries, the seals used by the Mongol rulers of Persia and Central Asia gradually evolved from large, square Chinese official seals inscribed with Chinese characters in square seal script, which were always carved in relief, through various hybrid forms of bilingual seals in Chinese and Arabic and seals with combined relief and intaglio carving, towards small, round, cursive, intaglio, recognisably Islamic seals of the 15th century and later (cf. Soulavar 1992: 129). A similar change can be noticed in seal rings, for in the 14th century Islamic rings with relief inscriptions began to appear in Persia for the first time under Chinese influence (Wenzel 1993: 62–3, 229). Nonetheless this was only a temporary blip on the sigillographic landscape, and the supremacy of intaglio seals was soon re-established, and while relief seals continued to be found occasionally in the Islamic world, they were definitely the exception to the norm. A major change only took place towards the end of the 19th century with the spread in use of the modern lever seal and rubber stamp, as a result of which many Islamic seals began to be carved in relief.

The use of both relief and combined intaglio-relief royal Mongol seals in Persia in the 14th century can therefore be regarded merely as marking a phase of evolution between Chinese and Islamic seal cultures. On the other hand, a small but distinct ‘cache’ of seals with combined intaglio-relief inscriptions can be identified, which seem to reflect a regional fashion rather than an evolutionary stage. All are Ottoman seals dating from the second half of the 16th century, and each has a central panel carved in relief

Figure 2. Another impression of the seal of Sultan Alauddin Ria'ayat Syah, showing in detail one of the decorative knots in the border, from a trading permit of 1602. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce Or.e.4

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surrounded by a border engraved in intaglio. At least 14 such seals have been published,6 with others noted in unpublished manuscripts (Figure 3).7 Most significant is the evidence of Claudia Römer, who studied 116 seals found on military petitions submitted to the Ottoman authorities of Buda during the reign of Murad III (1574–1595). As the seals were almost invariably impressed on the reverse of each petition (Römer 1995: 103), they are not usually visible in this facsimile publication of the documents. But although Römer does not enumerate the method of engraving for each seal – her detailed and pioneering analysis focuses instead on the literary form of the seal inscriptions – her general remarks it is clear that a considerable proportion of these seals have combined intaglio-relief inscriptions:

In the hitherto cited literature seal impressions reproduced in facsimile generally show the inscription in white on a black background (i.e. the inscription [on the seal matrix] was incised), whereas both on our "art" and on the meravilh defterleri we find beautiful combinations of

6Three are among the 72 Islamic seals published by Hammer-Purgstall (1830). The first in the seal of Sokollu Mehmed Paşa, who served as Grand Vizier to three Ottoman sultans: Suleyman I (1556–1566), Selim II (1566–1574) and Murad III (1574–1595); it is a 12-petalled round seal (Hammer-Purgstall 1830: 22–23, Bd 1 no 40). The second, a round seal with a central inscription surrounded by six oval cartouches, is the seal of Isma'il Paşa, who died in the siege of Zenta (Hammer-Purgstall 1830: 20, 27, 32–33, Bd 1 no 15). The third is a small elliptical seal of a German Muslim convert called Mahomed, a renegade soldier who died during the capture of Prague in 1575 (Hammer-Purgstall 1830: 32, 46, Bd 1 no 8). Also elliptical are a seal used by Rasiad the Mujęhid in his capacity as Chief Judge of Ruseń from 1557 to 1566 (Kobetič 1989: 41, 166, 217); and an uncut waqf seal of Ahmad ibn Našr (Kut and Beyoğlu 1984: 219). In the Vever collection in the Schloffer Gallery is a round seal with a detailed border dated 1587 in the name of Muhammad Qad'Abd Allah (Lowery and Beach 1988: 395, no. 35). From the Bibliothèque nationale, five seals with combined intaglio-relief engraving – two elliptical and three round – are found on an album page containing 57 16th-century Ottoman seal impressions (Richard 2000: 359), while another elliptical seal is found on the first page of a code with a royal Ottoman provenance (Richard 2000: 355). See also two seals reproduced in Römer (1995), on documents Nr.15 and 54-90, discussed further below.

7I am grateful to Muhammed Isra'Maley for drawing my attention to this seal.

Furthermore, in discussing seals comprising an inner circle or oval surrounded by an outer border, she notes that the central cartouche is usually the part where the inscription is black against a white background,8 in other words, such seals were engraved in relief in the centre and in intaglio in the border.

Of a slightly later date are four round seals on documents sent to the hadik of Ottoman Transylvania in the second half of the 17th century (Güboğlu 1958: 189–3), while seals with relief centres have been noted on Turkish documents from the Maghreb into the 18th century,9 reflecting a tendency for the preservation of peripheral areas long after they have been superseded in cultural centres.

In line with the picture for Islamic seals generally, the vast majority of Malay seals are carved in intaglio, producing a white inscription against a black or other coloured background when stamped in lampblack – the standard Malay sealing medium – or ink. In a recent catalogue of some 1,500 Malay seals dating from c.1600 to the early 20th century (Gallop unpublshsed: Appendix), only 112 seals (7%) have carving in relief; this figure includes nine seals which combine relief and intaglio engraving. A more meaningful presentation of these figures takes chronology into account: of these 112 seals with relief carving, 100 date from after 1850 (including eight of the nine seals with combined relief and intaglio engraving), with only 12 dating from before 1850. The larger group reflects the international trend towards the engraving of seals in relief towards the 20th century, and further examination confirms the Western influences in this tendency. Of these 100 later seals, 74% are at least partially engraved in Roman script, against a figure of 16% for all Malay seals. The association of relief carving with Roman script, and hence Western influence, is underscored by the fact that in seven of the eight seals in this group which combine relief and intaglio carving, the Malay legend in Jawi script is carved in intaglio and the Roman-script inscription is carved in relief.

Malay seals carved in relief in the pre-1850 period are, by comparison, exceedingly rare. As noted above, there are only 12 known seals engraved in relief, representing just 1% of the total number (866) of pre-1850 Malay seals known. Nor is there any pattern to their distribution: they are spread randomly over a period of 250 years and originate from all corners of the Malay world, from Kendah to Kutai to Madura. Of these 12, only one combines intaglio and relief carving, and this is the seal of Sultan Alauddin Raja Syah of Aceh (see, however, the "Postscript" below).

What this statistical survey of Malay seals has served to highlight is just how exceptional is the use of combined intaglio and relief carving on Sultan Alauddin Raja Syah's seal: no other Malay seal engraved in both intaglio and relief is documented prior to the 1880s. Yet this seal dates from the only known period when combined intaglio and relief carving for seals was in vogue in the broader Islamic world, namely in Ottoman

8Die bisher in der genannten Literatur in Faktoren wie wiedergegebenen Siegelblank-weißen lieder werden eine Schrift auf schwarzem Grund auf (z.B. die Schriftzeichen wurden eingeritzt), finden wir sowohl auf unsamen "art als auch in den meistens davorliegenden Konturen der Schriftzeichen, die schwarz auf weißen Grund erscheinen, und eingeritzte Schrift, die im Abdruck weiß auf schwarzem Grund erscheint" (Römer 1995: 103–4). Ich bin sehr dankbar zu Jonathan Del Mar für die Hilfe mit der englischen Übersetzung.


10Cf. the seal of the Bey of Tripoli, PRO SP 024/061, also nos. 70 and 76.
seals of the late 16th century, and the specific form of its manifestation – with the centre inscription in relief and the border inscription in intaglio – also accords with that of contemporaneous Ottoman seals.

The ‘Ottoman’ knot

The suggestion of Ottoman influence in the seal of Sultan Alauddin Riazaq had been strengthened by the presence of a small decorative element on the seal: a tiny heart-shaped plaited knot which is found three times in the centre carved in relief (and therefore appearing in black on white), and three times in the border in intaglio (in white on black) (see Figure 2).

Various manifestations of this knot can be found on many Islamic seals and coins, probably all deriving ultimately from the Chinese ‘everlasting knot’, and reinforced by the popularity of decorative plaited Kufic script from the 10th century onwards. In its oldest form, a full plaited ‘everlasting knot’ is found on a few anonymous seals in Kufic script which can be dated to the 11th and 12th centuries (Kahs 1987: 238, 292–3). The knot takes a distinctive form in some Persian and Transoxanian seals of the fifteenth centuries as a plait in the middle of a double line bisecting the seal (Figure 4). In another manifestation, it forms part of a looped border on Il-Khan, Timur and Ottoman coins, and most beautifully, on the gold seal of the Ottoman Sultan Selim I (r.1512–1520), as well as on coins of his reign.

Our interest here is focused on the stand-alone form of this knot, in which it resembles an upside-down small heart (Figure 5) or a bud (Figure 6). One of the earliest known seals with this motif is that of the Timurid ruler Shah Rukh (1405–46) (Richard 2000: 360).

1Cf. the seal of the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Umm Husayn (r.1453–1478) in Bureh (1959: Taf.73); see also Kazas (1981: PI. V, no. 22); Reinaud (1928: PI. IV, no. 112).

2Tranquility 1959: 10, 12; cf. also Kazas (1980: 41) for a seal possibly attributed to the Golden Horde, 13th century.

3Murshe 1825: 1, PI. XXXII.


5Perhaps conversely, the knot is also present on a few Mughal coins of Akbar (r.1556–1605) (Marsden 1825: 2, PI. XXXII), but has not been found on any royal Mughal seals.
The inscription in the centre panel of the seal was first read by Millies (1871: 77), based on the impression stamped on the letter of Prince Mauritius:

السلطان علاء الدين بن فرمان شاه
al-Sultân ‘Alâ’ al-dîn bîn Firman Shâh
‘The Sultan Alaeddin, son of Firmansyah’

Working independently from the second impression in the Bodleian, Shellabear’s (1898: 122–23) reading implied a Malay grammatical context:

السلطان علاء الدين شاه برمان
al-Sultân ‘Alâ’ al-dîn Shâh berfirman
‘The Sultan Alaeddin Syah commands’

Rouffaer (1906: 379) repeated Millies’s reading, which Snouck Hurgronje (1907: 54) amended to

السلطان علاء الدين شاه بن فرمان شاه
al-Sultân ‘Alâ’ al-dîn Shâh[î] bîn Firman Shâh
‘The Sultan Alaeddin Syah, son of Firmansyah’

based on a reading of two occurrences of the word Shâh, in the first of which the final dâh had been left out due to lack of space. 16

Of these three choices, the first that can be discounted is Snouck’s. This is because the element that he interpreted as the n.Sha of Firmansyah (Ex n.Sha a h) is in fact

16 ‘De eerste raad is wegens gebrek aan raad de ha weggelaten’ (Snouck Hurgronje 1907: 54).

simply the nın of Firmans, but he failed to recognise as a decorative ornament the small heart-shaped ‘Ottoman’ knot discussed above, which is set in the middle of the nın, reading it instead as the three dots of a shîn. The sole hadh can therefore be reunited with the first occurrence of hadh, returning us to Millies’s reading of al-Sultân ‘Alâ’ al-dîn bîn Firmans Shâh. 17

The crux of the difference between Millies’s and Shellabear’s readings is therefore whether the two conjoined letters situated in the lower right quadrant represent hâ or h.n. Judged solely on the shape of the letter forms, the reading berfirman is preferred (in this case the dot above the râ should be regarded as belonging to the fâ of firman), as the shallow sweeping curve of the râ exactly mirrors that of the nın of firman below, and can be differentiated from the deeper, box-like shape of the three other nin in the centre panel. And yet there are two textual objections to the choice of berfirman. Firstly, there is a broad preference in early royal Malay seals for the use of Arabic over Malay, except for elements of (mainly non-sovereign) proper titles (Gallop unpublished: 279). Secondly, although the Malay word firman is derived from the Persian farman (itself derived from the Sanskrit parman) which means a royal decree (Steingass 1996: 921), according to Wilkinson (1985: 441), the verbal form berfirman is used in Malay exclusively for God, and this restricted usage is confirmed by a check on occurrences of the word berfirman in Acehnese texts of the late 16th and early 17th century. 18 On the other hand, there is one strong piece of evidence in favour of the reading al-Sultân ‘Alâ’ al-dîn bîn Firmans Shâh: coins of this ruler read ‘Alâ’ al-dîn bîn Firmans Shâh (Hulslof Pol 1929: 16; Alifan 1986: 36).

17 Or, less likely, al-Sultân ‘Alâ’ al-dîn Shâh bîn Firman.
18 The 730 occurrences of the word firman (with alliax) in the texts contained in the Malay Concordance Project (including, from Acorn, the poems of Harun Fuad Alifan, Taj al-Sulat, Hikayat Aceh, Rani al-Sulatun and Hikayat Raja Perak) neatly all apply only to God save where Firmans is used as a proper name (of Sultan Firmans Syah) in the Hikayat Aceh and the Rani al-Sulatun, and Syah Firmans in Hikayat Raja Danaukay and Syah Raja Danaukay). The only occurrence of the term firman meaning royal orders are in three later texts: Syahir Budinasi, Miss Melayu, and Syahir Perang Jahan, but the verbal form berfirman is never found in a secular context (MCP: firmans, 10 October 2002).
As for the border inscription, Millies (1871: 77) reported 'the original itself is rather indistinct in part of the marginal legend, which seems to contain an ordinary votive formula’; on the basis of which comment most subsequent writers appear to have thankfully and hastily absolved themselves of the need for further investigation.\textsuperscript{17} Snouck rather acutely retorted that, save from some minor discrepancies in the spelling and use of diacritical points, the inscription was perfectly clear, and he gave first a diplomatic transcription:

\begin{quote}
الواقي بالملك إخثار يبنجُ لمناكّ وارضاءً أداه الله عزٌ وفرصٌ أولٌ
\end{quote}

and then an ‘improved’ one, mainly affecting the final word (Snouck Hurgronje 1907: 54):

\begin{quote}
الواقي بالملك إخثار يبنجُ لمناكّ وارضاءً أداه الله عزٌ وفرصٌ أولٌ

\textit{al-ma\'tiq bi-al-malik ikhthārāh liqαb al-mumāliq wa-ruṣulāh uddān}

\textit{Allāh ‘izzuha wa-nazz wa-sliyā‘āshu}

‘he who trusts in the King [i.e. God], who has chosen him to possess kingdoms and is pleased with him; may God perpetuate his glory and grant victory to his court’
\end{quote}

Snouck’s reading was based on the seal impression from Prince Maurit’s letter reproduced in Rouffiac (1906: Plate 1), where the final part of the border inscription is indeed rather indistinct. On the basis of the Bodleian impression, which is clearer in this part of the seal, a new reading has been proposed for the final word: \textit{wa}s‘yula, ‘his banner’ (Gallop 1994: 45).\textsuperscript{20} This reading is preferable not only as it negates the need to


\textsuperscript{20}Read in 1994 by Yoos Hamid Safadi, then head of the Arabic section, the Béatrice Library.
background, and in a time of royal absolutism, it is unlikely that the king’s seal would have contained a plea for the victory of his nobles.

The reading of the seal can now be given in full:

السلطان علاء الدين بن فرحان شاه

الواق لبلك الخضر المأكاك وارتحاء إمام الله عز وجل صواو

al-Sultan ‘Ali’ al-din bin Firman Syah // al-wātīhq bi-al-Malik ikhāthah

لاباب al-mamatlik wa-irraddah adīma Allah ‘izzahu wa-nār liwa’syahu

‘The Sultan Alauddin, son of Firman Syah // he who trusts in the King

[Ez. God], who has chosen him to possess kingdoms and is pleased with
him; may God perpetuate his glory and grant victory to his banner’

Conclusion

There are thus two design elements in the seal of Sultan Alauddin Syah of Aceh which indicate late 16th-century Ottoman influence: the combination of intaglio and relief carving, with a centre panel engraved in relief and the border engraved in intaglio, and use of a stand-alone heart-shaped knot as a decorative element, which has so far not been noted in any other Malay seal. Yet Ottoman influence cannot be discerned in all formal aspects of the seal. For example, the continuous round border inscription is not typically Ottoman, as in most Ottoman seals with border inscriptions the inscription is usually contained within a number of distinct cartouches, sometimes separated by rosettes or elaborate plaited knots (as in Figure 3); nor is the hand directly comparable with that found on other Ottoman seals of the same period. This strongly suggests that the seal was made in Aceh, but within a climate of a considerable degree of acculturation, and leaves open the possibilities that the seal was either made by a Turkish craftsman, perhaps long resident in Aceh and adjusted to Acehnese norms, or by an Acehnese or other foreign craftsman with some knowledge of the iconographic vocabulary of Ottoman seals.

Recent research on Malay seals has shown that the 17th and early 18th centuries were a period when Malay seals were strongly oriented westwards towards the broader Islamic world. Compared to Malay seals of a later date, seals from this early period display a comparatively high use of Arabic, considerable technical expertise, and relatively creative and non-formulaic inscriptions (cf. Gallop unpublished: 279). Sultan Alauddin’s seal is one of the finest of this genre: it is a superb example of a Malay seal which was created firmly within an international Islamic context, drawing on a wide pool of iconographic references, which were then executed with craftsmanship of a quality hardly matched in any subsequent royal Malay seals.

Postscript

As this article went to press, Dr Jorge Santos Alves kindly brought to my attention a previously undocumented Malay seal from Pahang, the seal, of a sultan of Pahang also named Alauddin Syah, is stamped on a treaty in Portuguese dated 161424 (Figure 11). After the seal of Sultan Alauddin Syah of Aceh discussed above, this Pahang seal is one of the earliest Malay seals known and certainly the oldest seal recorded from the Malay peninsula.25 It is round, with the sultan’s name impressed in black against a white ground in the centre and with a religious expression in white against a black background in the border:

السلطان عليه وليداة ابن عبد الفتاح شاه...


bi-al…al-q’a’tm bi…khalīda Aḥād mulkahu wa-taltānahu...

‘The Sultan Alauddin Syah, son of Abdul Ghaffar Syah // he who trusts in the…be who is steadfast…may God preserve his realm and

dominion…”

24This seal is of great historical significance as the first known source for the name of this sultan of Pahang, the second son of Sultan Abdul Ghaffar (b.1507, d.1592–1614), who in 1614 poisoned his father and killed his older brother Raja Abdullah, and then succeeded the throne himself (Limchuan 1973: 33–35).

25A peace treaty in Portuguese between the King of Pahang (Al Rei do Pão) and Diego de Mendonça Ferado, Captian-mor of the Southern Sea, on behalf of the King of Portugal, dated 16 August 1614. Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Col. Pomboalins, Cod.507/F.345, f.511; reproduced in Subhanb (1997: 425).

The next earliest seal known from the Malay peninsula is that of the Laksamana of Johor, Dato Paduka Raja

Tun Abdul Jamil, found on a letter dated 1687 (Gallop unpublished: Appendix, p. 252, #1035).
Even though it does not feature the "Ottoman knot", the striking similarity between the Pahang and Aceh seals — in shape and the use of combined intaglio-relief engraving — strengthens the suggestion that these two early Malay seals are probably best regarded not as exceptions to the rule, but as rare surviving representatives of a highly sophisticated stage in the evolution of Malay sigillography.

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