

Jan Just
with warm regards,
Annabel
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OTTOMAN INFLUENCES IN THE SEAL OF SULTAN ALAUDDIN RIAYAT SYAH OF ACEH (r.1589–1604)

ANNABEL TEH GALLOP

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.1566–1578),¹ 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.² 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

¹The best sources for this period of contact are Reid (1969) and Boxer (1969).

²A full catalogue record for this seal can be found in Gallop unpublished: Appendix, p. 27, #504.



Figure 1. The seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah of Aceh, impressed on a letter from Prince Maurits in 1601. Den Haag, Nationaal Archief, Stadh. Secr. no. 1605 (after Rouffaer 1906: Pl. I)

on a letter in Spanish dated 11 December 1600, sent to the Sultan by Prince Maurits 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 Hague³ (Figure 1). The second, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, is on a trading permit in Malay issued to Captain Harry Middleton in 1602⁴ (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.⁵

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 of 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,

³Nationaal Archief, Stadh. Secr. no. 1605. This impression was first reproduced in the form of a rather awkward drawing by J.H. Hingman, an official of the Rijks Archief, in Wap (1862: 86); a much better drawing was given in Millies (1871: Pl. XVII); while a somewhat enhanced facsimile of the whole document was published by Banck (1873: Pl. [I]). Rouffaer (1906: Pl. I) published an excellent zincographed photograph of the original impression. A colour facsimile of the full document was recently published by Wassing-Visser (1995: 29).

⁴Bodleian Library, MS Douce Or.e.4; transcribed, transliterated and translated by Shellabear (1897: 121–122), and reproduced in Greentree and Nicholson (1910); Lewis (1958: 144); Gallop and Arps (1991: 36) and Gallop (1994: 45).

⁵Koninklijk Huisarchief, A13 XI-B-1; published in Wassing-Visser (1995: 35).



Figure 2. Another impression of the seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat 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

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. Soudavar 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 a few 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 3. Seal of Sulayman bin 'Abd Allah, stamped in the colophon of an Ottoman manuscript, *Kitāb i firāsāt-nāmah*, a work on physiognomy and palmistry dated AH 963 (AD 1555/6). The seal is engraved in relief in the centre, giving a black inscription on a white background, and in intaglio in the border, giving a white inscription against a black background. It measures 14 × 19 mm. London, British Library, Or.9681, f.97r

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 – from 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 'arz and on the *mevāğib defterleri* we find beautiful combinations of

⁶Three are among the 72 Islamic seals published by Hammer-Purgstall (1850). The first is the seal of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who served as Grand Vizier to three Ottoman sultans: Sulayman I (r.1520–1566), Selim II (r.1566–1574) and Murad III (r.1574–1595); it is a 12-petalled round seal (Hammer-Purgstall 1850: 22–23, Bd.1 no. 48). The second, a round seal with a central medallion surrounded by six oval cartouches, is the seal of Isma'il Pasha, who died in the siege of Zenta (Hammer-Purgstall 1850: 20, 27, 32–33, Bd.1 no. 15). The third is a small elliptical seal of a German Muslim convert called Mahmud, a renegade soldier who died during the capture of Prague in 1575 (Hammer-Purgstall 1850: 32, 46, Bd.1 no. 8). Also elliptical are a seal used by Hamid ibn Muhammad in his capacity as Chief Judge of Rumeli from 1557 to 1566 (Sotheby's 1989: 41 lot.162, Pl. V), and an undated *waqf* seal of Ahmed bin Nabi (Kut and Bayraktar 1984: 219). In the Vever collection in the Sackler Gallery is a round seal with a petalled border dated 1587 in the name of Muhammad Qurd 'Abd Allah (Lowry 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 codex with a royal Ottoman provenance (Richard 2000: 357). See also two seals reproduced in Römer (1995), on documents Nr.15 and Nr.90, discussed further below.

⁷I am grateful to Muhammad Isa Waley for drawing my attention to this seal.

inscriptions engraved in relief, which appear in black against a white background, and incised inscriptions, which give white impressions against a black background.⁸

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;⁹ 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 *hakim* of Ottoman Transylvania in the second half of the 17th century (Guboğlu 1958: 180–3), while seals with relief centres have been noted on Turkish documents from the Maghreb into the 18th century,¹⁰ reflecting a tendency for the preservation of trends in 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 unpublished: 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 underlined 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 Kedah to Kutai to Madura. Of these 12, only one combines intaglio and relief carving, and this is the seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat 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 Riayat 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 Faksimile wiedergegebenen Siegelabdrücke weisen öfter weisse Schrift auf schwarzem Grund auf (d.h. die Schriftzeichen wurden eingeritzt), finden wir sowohl auf unseren 'arz als auch in den *mevāğib defterleri* schöne Kombinationen von erhaben ausgeschnittenen Schriftzügen, die schwarz auf weissem Grund erscheinen, und eingeritzter Schrift, die im Abdruck weiss auf schwarzem Grund erscheint' (Römer 1995: 103–4); I am very grateful to Jonathan Del Mar for his help with the English translation.

⁹'Der Zentralteil ist meistens derjenige, der schwarz auf weissem Grund erscheint' (Römer 1995: 105).

¹⁰Cf. the seal of the Bey of Tripoli, PRO SP 102/4/73, also nos. 70 and 76.



Figure 4. Seal of unknown provenance, probably from Persia or Central Asia, with a knotted plait in the middle (after Reinaud 1828: Pl. IV, no. 112)

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 Riayat Syah is further 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 (Kalus 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 seal¹¹ (Figure 4). In another manifestation, it forms part of a looped border on Il-Khan, Patan and Ottoman coins, and most beautifully, on the gold seal of the Ottoman Sultan Selim I (r.1512–1520),¹² as well as on coins of his reign.¹³

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 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,

¹¹Cf. the seal of the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan (r.1453–1478) in Busse (1959: Taf.III); see also Kalus (1981: Pl. V, no. 2.2); Reinaud (1828: Pl. IV, no. 112).

¹²Uzunçarşılı 1959: f.c.,12; cf. also Kalus (1986: 41) for a seal possibly attributed to the Golden Horde, 15th century.

¹³Marsden 1825: 1, Pl. XXXIII.

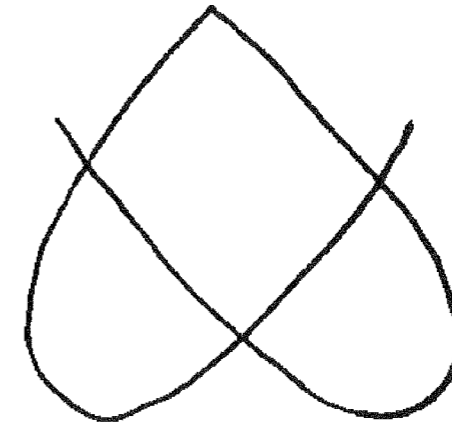


Figure 5. Upside-down heart-shaped knot motif

figure 111). The knot is also found on the seals of the Qara Qoyunlu prince Pir-Budaq of ca.1453 (Soudavar 1992: 129) and of the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Ya'qub (r.1479–1491) (Richard 2000: 360, figure 113), but it appears to be most strongly associated with Ottoman seals and coins from the 15th century onwards. In a survey of 155 *waqf* seals from Turkey, the knot was found on 13 seals,¹⁴ including the seals of Sultan Bayazid (r.1481–1512) (Figure 7) and Sulayman I (r.1520–1566) (Figure 8), and four Grand Viziers; and it is found on nearly all Ottoman coins from the reign of Sulayman I right into the 18th century (Marsden 1825:1, Pl. XXIII–XXVI)¹⁵ (Figure 9). Most pertinently for the Acehnese case, the knot is also found in all of the 14 published 16th century seals noted above with combined intaglio and relief engraving, while Römer (1995: 105) commented on the frequent presence of 'flourishes and knots' in her large sample of Ottoman seals. One of these seals – that of Qalayliqoz 'Ali Pasha, the *Beglerbegi* of Ofen, dated AH 988 (AD 1580/1) (Römer 1995: 106, Nr.90) – bears a striking resemblance to the Acehnese seal. Like the Acehnese seal it is round, comprising two concentric circles, both of which have a thin double-ruled outline. The central panel is carved in relief and other outer border in intaglio, and several scattered examples of the stand-alone knot can be seen in the border of the Ottoman seal (Figure 10).

In support of the suggestion of 16th-century Ottoman influence in the use of this motif in the seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah of Aceh, it must be stressed that this distinctive knot is not found on any other of the over 1,500 Malay seals documented to date.

The reading of the inscription

While the discussion above has focused on iconographic features of the seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah, recognition of the formulaic use of the 'Ottoman' knot in a decorative context can also help to resolve discrepancies in the reading of the inscription on the seal.

¹⁴Kut and Bayraktar 1984: 20, 22, 24, 69–73, 169–70, 207, 219, 230.

¹⁵Perhaps consequently, the knot is also present on a few Mughal coins of Akhbar (r.1556–1605) (Marsden 1825: 2, Pl. XXXIX), but has not been found on any royal Mughal seals.

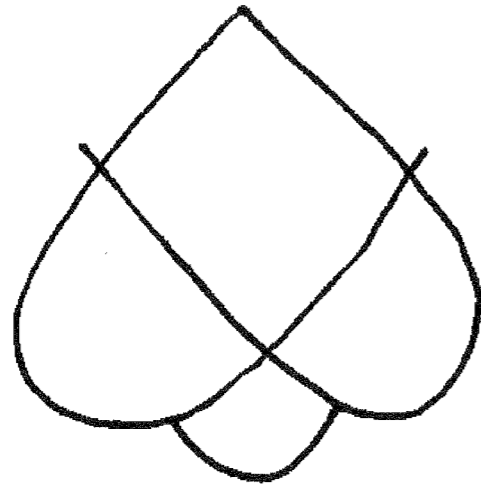


Figure 6. Upside-down bud-shaped knot motif

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 Maurits:

السلطان علاءالدين بن فرمان شاه

al-Sultān 'Alā' al-dīn bin Firmān Shāh
'The Sultan Alauddin, son of Firman Syah'

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

السلطان علاءالدين شاه برفرمان

al-Sultān 'Alā' al-dīn Shāh berfirman
'The Sultan Alauddin Syah commands'

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

السلطان علاءالدين شاه [ه] بن فرمانشاه

al-Sultān 'Alā' al-dīn Shā[h] bin Firmānshāh
'The Sultan Alauddin Syah, son of Firmansyah'

based on a reading of two occurrences of the word *Shāh*, in the first of which the final *hā'* 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.sh.a of *Firmānshāh* (f.r m.a n.sh.a h) is in fact

¹⁶'De eerste maal is wegens gebrek aan ruimte de *hā* weggelaten' (Snouck Hurgronje 1907: 54).

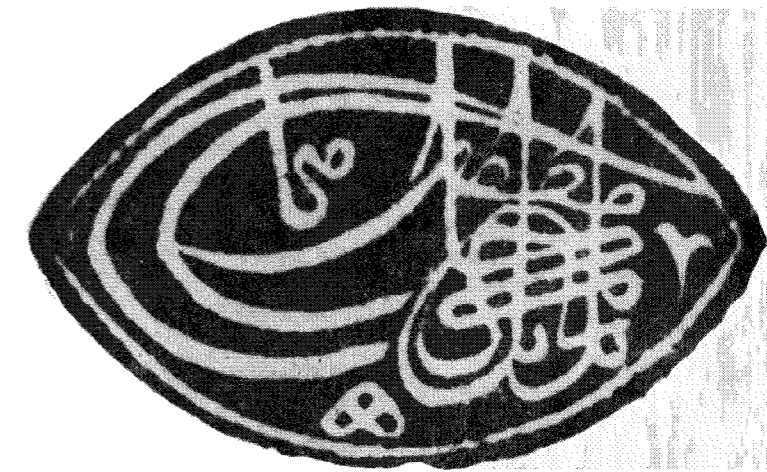


Figure 7. The seal of Sultan Bayazid (r.1481–1512) (after Umur 1980: 120)

simply the *nūn* of *Firmān*, 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 *nūn*, reading it instead as the three dots of a *shīn*. The sole *hā'* can therefore be reunited with the first occurrence of *shā*, returning us to Millies's reading of *al-Sultān 'Alā' al-dīn bin Firmān Shāh*.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 *b.r* or *b.n*. Judged solely on the shape of the letter forms, the reading *berfirman* is preferred (in this case the dot above the *rā'* should be regarded as belonging to the *fā'* of *firman*), as the shallow sweeping curve of the *rā'* exactly mirrors that of the *rā'* of *firman* below, and can be differentiated from the deeper, box-like shape of the three other *nūn* 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 *farmān* (itself derived from the Sanskrit *parmāna*) 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 Acehese 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-Sultān 'Alā' al-dīn bin Firmān Shāh*: coins of this ruler read '*Alā' al-dīn bin Firmān Shāh*' (Hulshoff Pol 1929: 16; Alfian 1986: 36).

¹⁷Or, less likely, *al-Sultān 'Alā' al-dīn Shāh bin Firmān*.

¹⁸The 730 occurrences of the word *firman* (with affixes) in the texts contained in the Malay Concordance Project (including, from Aceh, the poems of Hamzah Fansuri, *Taj al-Salatīn*, *Hikayat Aceh*, *Bustan al-Salatīn* and *Hikayat Raja Pasai*) nearly all apply only to God save where *Firman* is used as a proper name (of Sultan *Firman Syah* in the *Hikayat Aceh* and the *Bustan al-Salatīn*, and *Syah Firman* in *Hikayat Raja Damsyik* and *Syair Raja Damsyik*). The only occurrences of the noun *firman* meaning royal orders are in three later texts: *Syair Bidasari*, *Misa Melayu*, and *Syair Perang Johor*, but the verbal form *berfirman* is never found in a secular context (MCP: *firman*, 10 October 2002).



Figure 8. The seal of Sulayman the Magnificent (r.1520–1577) (after Umur 1980: 158)

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.¹⁹ Snouck rather acidly 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:

الواثق بالملك اختاره لقبص للممالك وارتضاه ادم الله عزه ونصر اوليه

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

الواثق بالملك اختاره لقبص الممالك وارتضاه ادم الله عزه ونصر اولياءه

al-wāthiq bi-al-malik ikhtārah liqabḍ al-mamālik wa-irtaḍāh ādāma

Allāh ‘izzahu wa-naṣr awliyā’ahu

‘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’

Snouck’s reading was based on the seal impression from Prince Maurits’s letter reproduced in Rouffaer (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: *liwā’iyahu*, ‘his banner’ (Gallop 1994: 45).²⁰ This reading is preferable not only as it negates the need to

¹⁹Cf. Rouffaer, 1906: 380; Greentree and Nicholson 1910: 11; Siegel 1979: 24, 28 n. 20; Gallop and Arps 1991: 128.

²⁰Read in 1994 by Yasin Hamid Safadi, then head of the Arabic section, the British Library.

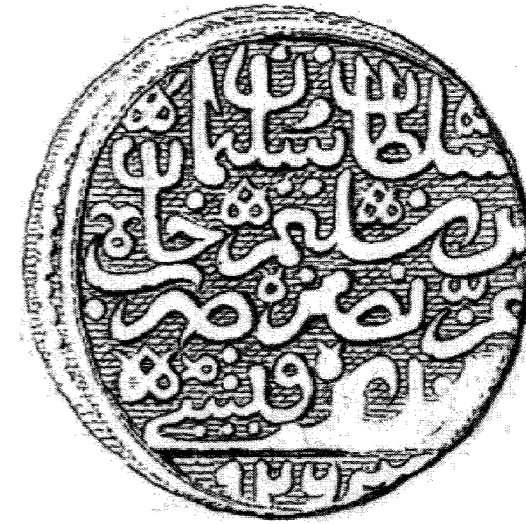


Figure 9. A coin from the reign of Sulayman the Magnificent dated AH 926 (AD 1520/1) (after Marsden 1825:I, Pl. XXIII)

‘improve’ the original inscription, but also for an unlikely nuance in Snouck’s reading of *awliyā’ah* (plural of *waly*), which has the meaning of ‘friends, helpers; clients, slaves; favourites’ (Steingass 1993: 1233). Prior to the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah, the real power in Aceh had been in the hands of the great mercantile nobles, the *orang kaya*. Soon after Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah ascended the throne in 1589, he massacred a large number of leading *orang kaya* by stratagem at a feast, and then took steps to ensure that they would not rise again to be a threat to the king (Reid 1975: 48–49). Against this



Figure 10. Seal of Qalayliqoz ‘Ali Pasha, dated 1580 (Römer 1995: 106, Nr. 90). Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. A.F. 157, f.90

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 فرمان شاه //

الواثق بالملك اختاره لقبض الممالك وارتضاه ادم الله عزه ونصرلوايه

al-Sulṭān 'Alā' al-dīn bin Firmān Shāh // al-wāthiq bi-al-Malik ikhtārah liqabḍ al-mamālik wa-irtadāh ādāma Allāh 'izzahu wa-naṣr liwā'iyahu
 'The Sultan Alauddin, son of Firman Syah // 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 banner'

Conclusion

There are thus two design elements in the seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat 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

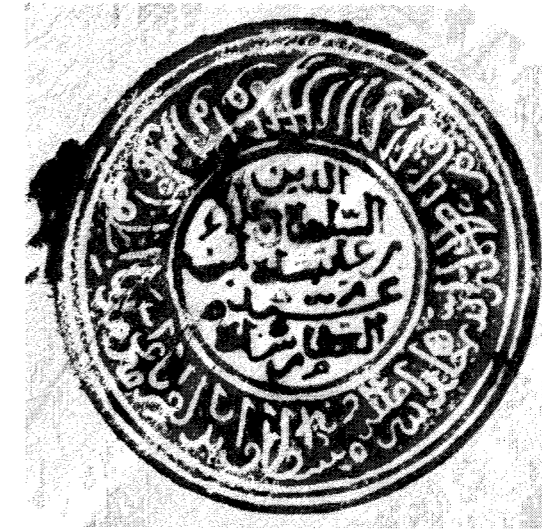


Figure 11. The seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah of Pahang, from a peace treaty in Portuguese dated 1614. Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional, Col. Pombalina, Cod.507/F.345, f.511

named Alauddin Riayat Syah,²¹ is stamped on a treaty in Portuguese dated 1614²² (Figure 11). After the seal of Sultan Alauddin Riayat 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.²³ 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 على الدين رعائيساه ابن عبد الغفار شاه //
 الواثق بال... القايم با... خلد الله ملكه و سلطانه ...

al-Sulṭān 'Alā' al-dīn Ri'āyat Shāh ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffār Shāh // al-wāthiq bi-al-... al-qā'im bi-... khallada Allāh mulkahu wa-sulṭānahu ...
 'The Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah, son of Abdul Ghaffar Syah/he who trusts in the ... he who is steadfast ... may God preserve his realm and dominion ...'

²¹This 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.1567, r.1592–1614), who in 1614 poisoned his father and killed his older brother Raja Abdullah, and then ascended the throne himself (Linehan 1973: 33–35).

²²A peace treaty in Portuguese between the King of Pahang (*El Rey de Pão*) and Diogo de Mendonça Furtado, Capitão-mor of the Southern Seas, on behalf of the King of Portugal, dated 16 August 1614. Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Col. Pombalina, Cod.507/F.345, f.511; reproduced in Saldanha 1997: 423.

²³The next earliest seal known from the Malay peninsula is that of the Laksamana of Johor, Datuk Paduka Raja Tun Abdul Jamil, found on a letter dated 1687 (Gallop unpublished: Appendix, p. 252, #1033).

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.

The British Library
96 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DB
UK
annabel.gallop@bl.uk

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