Letters of Sincerity

The Raffles Collection of Malay Letters (1780–1824)

Letters of Sincerity is a study in the traditional Malay art of letter writing. The work is based on the Raffles collection of Malay letters first discovered in Aviemore, Scotland, in November 1970. In this book Ahmat Adam provides a transcription from the original Jawi, into Rumi script of a series of letters sent to Stamford Raffles mostly around 1810 and 1811 by rulers of regional Malay polities. He also provides a translation into English, and supplementary notes, which set the letters in the context of the times, and explain the issues which they raise.

In the course of this he additionally provides a detailed guide to the intricacies of Malay-Islamic dating which was in use at that time in the Malay-Indonesian world. His study on this aspect of Malay culture is the first to link Malay dating with Sufism.

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LETTERS OF SINCERITY: 
THE RAFFLES COLLECTION OF 
MALAY LETTERS (1780–1824) 
A Descriptive Account with Notes and Translation

Ahmat Adam

Letter in Malay from Paduka Seri Sultan Ratu Mahmud Badaruddin of 

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# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword by Dr John Bastin</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on orthography</td>
<td>xxii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART I: Letters from the Malay Peninsula</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The Kedah Letters</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Penang Letters</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Perak Letter</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Pedas and Rembau Letters</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART II: Letters from the Johor-Riau-Lingga Kingdom</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Johor and Singapore Letters</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. The Riau Letters</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. The Lingga Letters</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART III: Letters from Sumatra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. The Siak Letters</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. The Jambi Letter</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. The Palembang Letters</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI. The Aceh Letter</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART IV: Letters from Kalimantan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII. The Pontianak Letters</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII. The Sambas Letter</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV. The Banjarmasin Letter</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOREWORD

PROVENANCE OF THE RAFFLES MALAY LETTERS

In 1969, following negotiations with Mr J. R. F. Drake, acting on behalf of his mother, Mrs M. Rosdew Drake of ‘Inshriach’, Aviemore, Inverness-shire, Scotland, it was agreed to place the family’s collection of Raffles’ letters, papers and other materials, including his collection of natural history drawings, on permanent loan in the India Office Library, London (now part of the British Library). In correspondence with Mrs Rosdew Drake earlier in the year, I had raised the question of her depositing the collection in the Library, and in reply to a letter I wrote to her in March 1969 informing her of the likely purchase and presentation to the Library of the Raffles-Minto collection of manuscripts,1 I received the following letter from Mr Drak dated 3 April: ‘I was exceedingly interested to hear of the proposed sale of the Raffles [Minto] documents and of your efforts to get them for the India Office Library. This has set me thinking. With each succeeding generation the interest in Raffles and his letters grows less immediate, and I feel that the time is fast approaching when we should consider parting with them. My mother and I have discussed this a number of times and had vaguely thought of offering them to the British Museum who already have been presented with the bulk of such items as native masks, weapons and the like. But your mention of the India Office Library sounds a much better idea for the letters, especially if you succeed in obtaining the Minto collection for them. … In addition to the letters, there are a number of portfolios containing original drawings and paintings by native artists of the flora and fauna of the Raffles area, some of which are exceedingly beautiful. These we might also consider parting with.’

During the following month, I visited ‘Inshriach’ and was able to make a detailed examination of the collection which contained, among other items, Raffles’ letters to his sister, Mary Ann Flint; the 11th Duke

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and Duchess of Somerset; the orientalist, William Marsden; and his friend, William Brown Ramsay, who served alongside him as a clerk in the Secretary’s office of the East India Company in London. There were also in the collection Lady Raffles’ letters to Charlotte, Duchess of Somerset, as well as letters to her sister-in-law, Mary Ann Flint, all of which threw an entirely new light on Raffles’ personal life. This extensive collection of letters had been brought together originally by Lady Raffles when she was writing the *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, F.R.S. &c.* (London, 1830), and was bequeathed by her on her death in 1858 to her niece, Jenny Rosdew Mudge, the daughter of her sister, Alice Watson Hull, and Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Zachariah Mudge of the Royal Engineers.

During my visit to ‘Inshriach’ in May 1969, I was able to secure the agreement of Mrs Rosdew Drake and Mr Drake to deposit this large collection of Raffles’ letters in the India Office Library, and I informed the Librarian, Mr Stanley Sutton, of the decision immediately on my return to London. He wrote to Mr Drake on 29 May: ‘Dr Bastin has told me that you are willing to deposit on permanent loan here the collection of the papers of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in your possession. I am delighted to learn of this most generous decision, and am very grateful to you for it. … [T]he deposit of your papers will mean that virtually the whole of the official and private papers relating to Raffles will be assembled in one place.’ After further correspondence concerning the conditions governing the deposit of the collection, Mr Drake himself brought most of the letters and the natural history drawings to London by train and they were delivered on the morning of 24 July to the Library at its former address at 197 Blackfriars Road. During lunch on that day, he explained that some of Raffles’ letters and other papers still remained in Scotland, and it was arranged that I would collect them from ‘Inshriach’ and bring them to London for deposit in the Library.

This visit was postponed because of the death of Mr Drake’s parents, but after he informed me on 24 October 1970 of a number of interesting discoveries he had made while sorting his parents’ possessions, including ‘more treasure trove’ relating to Raffles and Lady Raffles, I immediately arranged to visit ‘Inshriach’, which I found in the throes of being cleared of furniture and unwanted household items preparatory to its sale. During the afternoon of the second day of my visit, Mr Drake casually placed before me an old green-velvet covered document case which, he said, he had found in the attic, and which, as it had once belonged to Raffles, might contain some items of interest. I can still remember the excitement I felt on opening the box and finding beneath other papers three neatly bound bundles of Malay letters written in Jawi script, some of them still in their original yellow silk covers, apparently unopened for a century and a half.

The discovery of these Malay letters, which for most part were addressed to Raffles by the Malay and Indonesian rulers in 1810–11, at last resolved the problem of what had become of this part of his correspondence during the period he served at Melaka as Agent to the Governor-General with the Malay States. Like everyone else, I had assumed that he had brought the letters with him to England when he left Java in 1816, and then taken them to Bengkulu where they had been destroyed with his other papers and possessions in the fire on the ship *Fame* on 2 February 1824. This assumption was now clearly mistaken, and it remained to determine what had actually happened to the letters after they reached London in 1816.

During his stay at Melaka as Agent to the Governor-General with the Malay States, Raffles was responsible for enlisting the assistance of the Indonesian and Malay rulers in support of the British invasion of Java. He was also given the task of collecting as much information as possible from his agents and local traders about the political and economic conditions in the Dutch-held Indonesian islands in order to secure a safe passage for the British invasion fleet. These tasks, he claimed, kept him occupied for ten hours a day, and in order to reduce the burden of work he sent a number of the Malay letters he received to his friend John Leyden in Calcutta to translate for the information of the Governor-General, Lord Minto. These particular letters were presumably still in Leyden’s possession when he arrived at Melaka with Lord Minto in May 1811 in his official role as Malay translator. Other letters were doubtless acquired by him as he worked alongside Raffles corresponding with the Indonesian rulers, a task he found somewhat onerous: ‘I have had a very heavy affair of the Malay[,] Javanesse & Bali letters[,] translating those which have arrived, dictating proclamations to send forward in all these lingo & so on.’ The various letters were taken by

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4 Ibid., p. 60.
him to Java where, after his death at Jakarta on 28 August 1811, they were recovered by Raffles who had direct access to his papers. The Malay letters were subsequently kept by Raffles at 23 Berners Street, London, after he arrived from Java in 1816; but in the following year, when he was preparing for his voyage to Bengkulu, he decided to leave them behind, not, as might be supposed, with the bulk of his possessions at the Duke of Somerset's house in Park Lane, Mayfair, nor with the 'great many Boxes of Books and some odds and ends' he left with his Uncle William at 14 Princes Street, Spitalfields, but with William Marsden, whose house, 'Edge Grove', near Watford in Hertfordshire, he visited with Lady Raffles and his sister, Mary Ann Flint, in October 1817, shortly before sailing for west Sumatra.

That the Malay letters were left with Marsden is indicated in an invitation he extended to Raffles on 26 October 1824 to again visit 'Edge Grove': 'I shall then have the pleasure of shewing you your Chest of Manuscripts, in perfect security, but, I am ashamed to say, not much handled - my literary pursuits having carried me in a different direction.' Marsden had published in London in 1812 A Dictionary of the Malay Language and A Grammar of the Malay Language, with an Introduction and Praxis in two quarto volumes, so that, apart from their general interest, the Malay letters were probably left with him in the expectation that they would prove useful in preparing a second edition of the two works. Marsden, however, was diverted from Malay studies to other fields of interest, notably his oriental coin collection, which he described in Numismatica Orientalia (London, 1823–5), and his books and manuscripts, which were listed in his Bibliotheca Marsdeniana Philologica et Orientalis (London, 1827). Clearly, by the time Raffles arrived back in England in 1824, the Malay letters were no longer of interest, and they were returned to him at Christmas of that year when he and Lady Raffles spent 'a few days ... very pleasantly' with the Marsdens in Hertfordshire.

Raffles appears to have been generally lax in reclaiming his other possessions, as it was only after his death that Lady Raffles recovered his books from Spitalfields, and the two sets of Gamelan and other objects from the Duke of Somerset. The Malay letters remained at 'Highwood' in Middlesex until her death in 1858, when they were inherited, along with her other property, by her niece, Jenny Rosdew Mudge, wife of the Revd. William Charles Raffles Flint. He was the son of Singapore's first Master Attendant, Captain William Lawrence Flint, R.N., and Raffles' sister, Mary Ann Flint, and had been adopted by Raffles and Lady Raffles after the death of four of their own children in Sumatra. The letters then passed by descent to Mrs Rosdew Drake, and on her death to her son, Mr J. R. F. Drake, who, in turn, arranged for them to be placed on permanent loan in the India Office Library, together with the other items, including a model of the bust of Raffles by Sir Francis Legatt Chantrey. His generosity in placing 'this wonderful historical
material in the Library’ was acknowledged by Mr Sutton in a letter to him dated 10 November 1970.14

It was fortunate that at this time Professor Ahmat Adam was a postgraduate student at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He immediately undertook the translation of the letters into English, the work being submitted as a thesis to the University of London in 1971 in part fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts (History). It was expected that, when revised, his translation and commentary would be published in London, but, as he explains in the Preface, the revision had to be postponed due to heavy demands of university teaching and administration. It now appears in an expanded form and will be welcomed as an important contribution to our knowledge of Raffles’ relations with the Indonesian and Malay rulers during a critical period of political change in South-East Asia.

John Bastin

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14 The Raffles Family Collection remained on permanent loan in the India Office Library, and thereafter the British Library, until 2007, when Mr Drake’s heir agreed to its sale to the British Library. The funds for the purchase of the collection were raised by public subscription, the principal contributions being made by the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Art Fund, and Friends of the British Library. The fund-raising campaign was organised by Dr Annabel Teh Gallop, Head of the South and Southeast Asia Section of the British Library, who had previously reproduced and translated a number of Raffles’ Malay letters in her book, The Legacy of the Malay Letter Warisan Warkah Melayu, London, 1994: The British Library for the National Archives of Malaysia.

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PREFACE

This work is based on an M.A. long essay that I submitted to the University of London more than three decades ago. Due to the pressure of work both in teaching and administrative work at the universities in Bangi (1975–1995 and Kota Kinabalu (1995–2005), the intention to have the collection of Malay letters published was put aside until there was an opportunity to make the necessary revisions. It was only in recent years that I was able to give more attention to the study of the Malay letters. The final work has, alas, only been completed after I retired and was subsequently appointed as a guest scholar at the Institute of Malay World and Civilization, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 2007.

The intervening years since the translation of the letters was first undertaken have in many ways helped me to ponder and reflect on the work and, in so doing, I have made some changes to improve on the previous translation of the letters. Translating the original version of the letters into Rumi Malay has been very challenging, not only because of the inconsistencies in the Jawi orthography employed by some of the scribes, but also due to the poorly written Jawi script which is, at times, indiscernible. Needless to say, the translation into English has even been more demanding. Nonetheless, over a period of time a clearer understanding began to be acquired of early 19th-century Malay philology, especially in regard to recognizing and interpreting certain words and phrases and comprehending the historic-cultural aspects of the Malay epistolary art and of Malay cultural values for that period.

It is hoped that this modest piece of work will be of value to historians and those interested in the field of Malay studies. While only the letters written in Jawi Malay have been culled from the Raffles collection of Malay letters discovered in Aviemore, Scotland, in 1970, there is, however, one letter from Sultan Mahmud Syah at Lingga, dated 5 January 1811, and one from his chief, Sayid Zain al-Kudsi, written the following day, which are not in the said collection, but are closely related to the issue raised by some of the 1811 letters included in this book. The only original draft of a letter in English found in the Raffles Malay letters collection—though without the original Malay copy—
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The production of this book in its present form would not have been possible without the help, co-operation, and encouragement of many people. I am indebted especially to Dr. John Bastin, himself an avid scholar of Raffles and the Malay Archipelago, who first drew my attention to the collection of Malay letters discovered in Aviemore, Scotland in late 1970. It was Dr. Bastin who encouraged me to publish these letters, which will undoubtedly help to remind historians of the significance of Raffles in shaping the history of the Malay-Indonesian world. I am very grateful that Dr. Bastin agreed to write a foreword to this book.

In transliterating the Arabic sentences as well as translating the Quranic verses and Islamic religious concepts, I am very much indebted to Dr. Zaini Othman of the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization whom I met during my sabbatical leave at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1986, and Dr. Ibrahim Abu Bakar of the Islamic Faculty, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. I would also like to record my appreciation and thanks to former colleagues and other individuals, in particular Dr. Mahayuddin Yahya, now with the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, and Dr. Annabel Gallop, Curator of the British Library, whose assistance I received in the course of my researching and writing have contributed towards the completion of this study.

To the many librarians in several universities, and cities, I would especially like to mention those of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the British Library, the India Office Library, which was once located at Blackfriars, London, the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, the libraries of both the KITLV and Leiden University, the Perpustakaan Nasional in Jakarta and, of course, the Perpustakaan Negara in Kuala Lumpur and the Perpustakaan Tun Seri Lanang of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.

I would also like to thank Universiti Malaysia Sabah and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the former for making it possible for me to spend some time in the Netherlands doing research at both the University of Leiden and the KITLV, and the latter for giving me the opportunity to complete the writing of this book during my sojourn as Guest Scholar at
the Institute of Malay World and Civilization. Thanks are also due to the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Malaysia which, through the good offices of the then Honourable Minister, Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim, enabled me to make a brief visit to Oxford in late 2005.

Last, but not least, I would like to record my everlasting appreciation to my wife, Aysha, whose patience, love, tolerance and persistent encouragement have helped tremendously towards the completion of this book.

A. Adam

ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>Anno Hegirae</td>
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<tr>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>Anno Javanico</td>
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<td>BKI</td>
<td>Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Leiden</td>
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<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Christian era</td>
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<td>f.</td>
<td>folio</td>
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<td>JIAEA</td>
<td>Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia (Singapore)</td>
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<td>JRAS</td>
<td>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</td>
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<td>KITLV</td>
<td>Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Royal Institute for Linguistics, Geography and Anthropology)</td>
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<td>MSS</td>
<td>Malay Manuscripts</td>
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<td>MSRI</td>
<td>Malaysian Sociological Research Institute</td>
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<td>TBG</td>
<td>Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde uitgegeven door het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (Jakarta)</td>
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<td>VKI</td>
<td>Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde [van Nederlandsch-Indie]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GLOSSARY

abjad          Arabic alphabet
adat           custom
Anno Hegirae   year of Prophet Muhammad’s departure from Mecca to Medina which marked the commencement of the Muslim calendar
Anno Javanico  Javanese calendar year
Basmallah      In the name of God
Benggala       the old Bengal presidency
budi           qualities of mind and heart especially based on kindness to others; budi also implies graciousness, prudence and discretion
daualat        the divine element in kingship
daur           chronological cycle
fiqh           the dogmatic theology of Muslims
hikayat        narrative prose romance; history
huruf          letter (of the alphabet)
Jawi           Malay script using the Arabic alphabet
kepala surat   headings on Malay letters which always carried Quranic phrases in Arabic
kerajaan       government, state or domain of a raja; also the condition of having a raja
kitab tarasul  manuals on Malay letter-writing
lebai          title for one who shows religious inclination
likur          a numeral suffix that adds twenty to its numeral; e.g. dua likur means twenty-two
maha mulia     eminently magnificent; sublime
makhdum        title usually given to men of religious learning to mean ‘Master’
marhum         the deceased, the late
nakhoda        ship-master

negeri         city, town; a country; province; district
orang kaya     nobleman associated with the position of Warden of the Coast; in Perak he ruled the estuary
laksamana      a form of address for a sultan; an affectionate epithet; beloved; dear
paduka         one to whom homage is paid; ruler or sovereign prince, noble
crown prince

panembahan     young prince
pangeran       reigning prince (used in Palembang and Java)
pangeran adipati war-leader
anum           Malay quatrain in which the first and third, and the second and fourth lines rhyme and often possess a pleasing assonance in addition to the requisite balance
pangeran anum
pangeran ratu
panglima
pantun

pemayang       a type of boat with outriggers
pemuras        a blunderbuss; musketoon
pencalang      lookout-ship; also a trading ship
penjajab        Bugis warship; a light vessel used by the Bugis
pikrama or pekrama an honorific prefix to the names of chiefs
puji-pujian     elaborate introductory compliments in Malay letters
raden          prince; princess (used in Java and Palembang)
ratu           title for reigning prince
rial           the old Spanish real (dollar)
Rumi           the use of the Roman alphabet; hence ‘Romanised’ or Latin script
salawat        invocations in God’s name for the Prophet Muhammad
samban pukat   dinghy used with nets
seri paduka    an honorific prefix to the names or descriptions of royal personages; honorary non-royal titles of the highest rank
NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

In transliterating the letters from the original Jawi into Rumi Malay I have tried to adhere to the official orthography of both Malaysia and Indonesia, except where the original in Jawi does not change the meaning of words when the consonant [h] is dropped such as saja, dulu, and baru. However, where certain words are spelt consistently in a particular way, the original Jawi spelling is retained, thus rendering words like the standard kerana to be transliterated karena or karna, and syahdan retained as syahadan. The transliteration of bari and dukai has also been retained according to their original Jawi spelling. Likewise, the spelling of the name of the place, Mentok or Muntok and the spelling for Tengku or Tunku have also been retained in accordance with the original Jawi which at times is rather inconsistent.

In certain cases where the Arabic words and phrases need transliteration the rules of transliteration authorized by the Encyclopaedia of Islam have generally been conformed to. Nonetheless, diacritical marks have not been strictly followed, and some degree of flexibility is observed. Words that used to be spelt with the Jawi letter 'ayn, using the apostrophe, are also retained, and rendered in the Rumi transliteration with the apostrophe as in waba'adah, Rabi'-ul-akhir, 'aib, ma'al, and the like. European names are also spelt according to their Jawi rendition, e.g. Gilbatel for Gilbert and Rafols for Raffles. Words which should be written with the initial h in standard Malay, but instead have the h omitted—such as abis, ati—have also been retained in their original form.

In the transliteration of words which, in the reading and interpretation of their meanings, remain unclear or uncertain, the Jawi consonants and vowels (where alif is transliterated as a, waw as w and ya as y, or if it is at the end of a word, l) are given, separated by hyphens.
INTRODUCTION

The discovery of Malay letters written in Jawi script with dates ranging from 1780 [1194 AH] to 1823 [1239 AH] at Inshriach House in Aviemore, Scotland, was an important find for both historians of the Malay Archipelago and scholars of Malay studies. These Malay manuscripts, now finally in the possession of the British Library, have brought to light many new and exciting historical facts about the course of events in the Malay Archipelago in the early 19th century, especially in the years 1810 and 1811, when most of these letters were written. The manuscripts of no fewer than 78 originals in all, together with some Javanese and Dutch manuscripts were thought to have been lost when the ship *Fame*, on which Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles and his wife were returning to England from Bencoolen, caught fire and sank off West Sumatra in February 1824.

The emergence of these original Malay letters has resolved the problem of piecing together certain factual details relevant to the history of the Malay-Indonesian region because a number of copies of the letters that Raffles wrote to the Malay and Indonesian rulers and chiefs in the archipelago are already held by the British Library together with some of the translations of the replies that Raffles received.

When the then India Office Library acquired 48 volumes of Lord Minto’s papers in 1969 questions were raised as to the whereabouts of the original Malay letters which Raffles had sent to the Governor-General to be translated by John Leyden in Calcutta. It is now clear that these letters addressed to the Governor-General must have been handed back to Raffles, probably at the request of Raffles himself, for while he was at Malacca John Leyden was working with Raffles with his own Malay scribes. The interchange of letters would have occurred because

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1 The British Library successfully bought the collection from the descendant of the Drake family in 2006, the collection having hitherto been on permanent loan.
2 This excludes one manuscript, which is not a letter but a one-folio genealogy of the rajas of Siak (*atoran raja-ruja Siak*), which this writer hopes to work on and publish in the immediate future.
Raffles was very interested in collecting and copying Malay manuscripts, including letters. Among these letters are the correspondence of the indigenous rulers with Lord Minto, letters of Malay rulers and chiefs, Malay agents and clerks working for Raffles, letters addressed to the governors of Penang, Philip Dundas and Andrew Bruce, and letters from them to the Malay rulers. There is also one letter to Sultan Ratu Muhammad Bahauddin from the Dutch Governor-General, Reynier de Klerk, dated 1780. There are also English translations of some of the Malay letters by John Leyden. All of these were collected by Raffles and taken to England when he left Java in 1816. He then left them with his books and other documents when he left England for Bengkoolen in 1817. On his death, these letters were passed to his widow, Lady Sophia Raffles who, in turn, on her death bequeathed them to her niece, Jenny Rosdew Flint, wife of the Rev. William Charles Raffles Flint, who was the eldest surviving son of Captain William Flint, Singapore’s first Master Attendant, and Mary Ann (1789–1837). Raffles’ favourite sister.

Although the English letters addressed to Raffles became generally known, the Malay letters remained unnoticed when Mrs M. Rosdew Drake, a descendant of Lady Raffles and successive owner of the letters, moved with her family from London to Scotland during World War II. The green velvet-covered document box containing the Malay letters was placed in the attic of Inshriach House, Aviemore, in Scotland. It was only after the death of Mrs. Drake in 1970 that her son, Mr. Jack Drake, invited Dr. John Bastin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, to examine the letters, and later placed them on permanent loan in the India Office Library.

The letters were written on European-manufactured paper, but there was one Javanese manuscript and a Balinese one written on palm leaf. As mentioned earlier, most of the letters were written in 1810 and 1811. They were replies to the letters that Raffles sent from Malacca, appealing for the support and assistance of the indigenous rulers of the archipelago in the projected British invasion of Java, particularly requesting sailing vessels and supplies of food and livestock for the British invasion force.

Thomas Stamford Raffles was born on 6 July 1781. He entered the service of the East India Company in 1795 as a clerk in the Secretary’s office in London. He was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Presidency Government of Penang and arrived on the island on 19 September 1805. It was around this period that he became interested in the study of the Malay language and began collecting copies of Malay letters. On 22 March 1807 he was appointed Secretary to the Penang Government. In addition to his normal duties in the secretariat, he served as Librarian of the Press, Malay Translator to the Government, and in 1808 as Clerk of the Recorder’s Court.

In 1810, Raffles’ fortune began to change. Lord Minto, the Governor-General of India, was contemplating invading Java, which was only nominally under Dutch rule since the Netherlands was already annexed by France. Under Napoleon Bonaparte France had declared her intention to seize India and the Eastern countries and to destroy British commerce in the East. By 1810 Napoleon Bonaparte had successfully interfered with British shipping by using French bases east of the Cape of Good Hope. As a reprisal, Lord Minto had sent expeditions against the French islands of Bourbon and Mauritius. But he was especially interested in taking Java, which was seen as very important for the safeguarding of British commercial interests in the archipelago. In 1808, Willem Daendels had been sent to Java to strengthen its defence and secure Holland’s interests. In his determination to send an expedition to Java, Lord Minto found his candidate in Raffles who, because of his vast knowledge of the ‘Malay nation’ and the archipelago, was identified as the most suitable person to be given the task of planning the forward operation. Thus on 19 October 1810 Raffles was appointed Agent to the Governor-General with the Malay States. His task was to leave for Malacca and plan for the sending of the expeditionary forces that would take Java.

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4 Ibid., pp. 31–32.
5 Flint was with Raffles in Java and became Master Attendant on 24 April 1820, in place of the Acting Master Attendant, F. J. Bernard, Farquhar’s son-in-law. William Flint died on 3 October 1828.
6 Mary Ann married Capt. William Flint in 1811 following the death of her first husband, Q. D. Thompson (whom she married in 1805), in Penang in 1809.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Raffles continued to look for Malay letters and texts while he was in Malacca. Mussoy Abdullah mentioned that Raffles wanted to buy old Malay letters and texts. See Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, The Hikayat Abdullah (annotated and translated by A. H. Hill), Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1970, pp. 74–75.
Malacca was occupied by British forces in 1795, following the signing in May of that year of the Treaty of the Hague, by which the French and the Batavian Republic concluded an offensive and defensive alliance. The occupation was undertaken in the name of the Dutch Stadhouders, who had fled to England early in 1794 with the aim of preventing the port of Malacca from being used as a base for French attacks on British shipping in the Strait. This ‘arrangement’ was only to serve as a temporary measure; Malacca was returned to the Dutch in September 1818.

Raffles arrived in Malacca from Penang on 4 December 1810. Within a short time he had established an intelligence network in Malacca. Having recruited native spies who acted as his vakeel (plenipotentiaries), Raffles turned Malacca into his base of operations from December 1810 until the departure of the British invasion fleet in June 1811. Through men such as Sayid Zain (Tunku Pangeran Kusuma Dilaga) of Siak, Haji Mohali of Java, Tengku Raden Muhammad and Sayid Abu Bakar Rum of Palembang, Raffles was able to gather intelligence not only regarding the military strength of the Dutch in Java and their influence in the island states, but also the state of affairs in the indigenous kerajaan in the archipelago.

Between December 1810 and June 1811 Raffles had sent out, besides to the Malay rulers in the peninsula, letters to the rajahs of the states of the Malay Archipelago—Riau-Lingga, Siak, Pontianak, Banjarmasin, Sambas, Jambi, Palembang, Cirebon, Banten, Bali, Madura, Sumenep, Surakarta, and Mataram—all with the request for their co-operation and assistance in the coming conflict with the Dutch. From some of the rulers Raffles asked for supplies of food, from others he sought their friendship and a pledge of loyalty to the British East India Company and to dissuade them from showing any friendship to the Dutch. With the Sultan of Palembang Raffles opened direct negotiations in order to persuade the Sultan to drive the Dutch out of his territories. In addition, Raffles sent spies to Java to collect details about the state of Java, the number and composition of the military forces on the island, the position of the enemy’s fortifications and the defensive plan of the Governor-General, Herman Willem Daendels, and his successor, Jan Willem Janssen. Through his naval agents—Gregg, Macdonald, Smith and Scott—he learnt the possible sea-routes and the best passage to Java. From his correspondence with some of the Malay rulers he was not very successful in procuring supplies of food and livestock, but he was particularly successful in establishing cordial relations with most of them, who for their own personal reasons were only too willing to receive the promise of English assistance and protection.

Raffles left Malacca on 18 June together with the expeditionary force of some 11,000 men with a mission to invade Java. The expedition was led by Lieutenant General Sir Samuel Auchmuty as Commander-in-Chief; he was accompanied by the Governor-General of British India, Gilbert Elliot, Lord Minto. The attendant naval forces of 100 ships, including four battleships of the line, fourteen frigates, seven sloops and eight East India Company cruisers, were placed under the command of Commodore William Broughton.

11 It has been asserted that it was Raffles who put into Minto’s mind the idea of capturing Java from the Dutch. However, this is disputed by Bastin, who argues that such a contention is not proven by contemporary documents. See John Bastin, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, The Ocean Steamship Co. Ltd., Liverpool, 1969, p. 9.
12 There is no evidence that the letters addressed to the last four states brought any replies, or that they ever reached the rulers concerned at all. But in the Bali letters the Raja did inform Raffles that he had conveyed them. See the Bali letters below.
13 See the Palembang letters below.
14 Bastin, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, p. 10.
15 See the Pontianak letters, below. The Sultan of Pontianak was involved in intrigues with the neighbouring rajas, particularly with the Sultan of Sambas and the chiefs of Muntok. He therefore wanted English protection against his neighbours who terrorized his kerajaan and port by their acts of piracy. In another instance, the Raja of Bali expressed his desire for English protection to get rid of the Dutch who were occupying the districts of Blambangan [or Purwa] Peninsula and Banyuwangi, which he claimed as the territories of his forefathers. See the Bali letters, below.
16 The expedition from Malacca set off on 11 June 1811 with fifty-seven transports. The ships were off in small divisions, each in charge of a frigate accompanied by small sailing boats and cruisers. The divisions were made small to enable them to pass through the narrow straits and difficult passes with fewer hazards. The ship HMS Modeste that accommodated Minto and Raffles was, nevertheless, not attached to any division. See C. E. Wurtzbug, Raffles of the Eastern Isles, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1954, pp. 157–158.
The letters written in Jawi script by the scribes of the indigenous rulers in the Malay Archipelago reveal one important fact: the period of the early 19th century had witnessed the dwindling of the indigenous polity. To the rajas of the Malay Archipelago the presence of the Europeans, be they British or Dutch, was a political reality of having to recognize the emergence of other new contending powers, however foreign they might be perceived, who had come to share not only the territories in the archipelago but had also acquired the ‘sovereignty’ of their ‘governments’ or administrations. The ability of the new European powers to command respect both in demonstrating their shrewd business and commercial acumen and no less the superiority of their guns and ships-of-war vis-à-vis the indigenous kerajaan, had convinced the rajas and chiefs of the archipelago that the Europeans had to be dealt with in a manner that would safeguard their immediate interests. Thus, by way of diplomacy through their letters, they were eager to win the friendship of the English and the Dutch depending on the needs of their kerajaan and presumed benefits derived from their association with the Europeans. The Raffles’ collection of Malay letters clearly shows how indigenous Malay–Indonesian diplomatic intercourse was conducted with Europeans around the first decade or so of the 19th century.

To the rulers of the archipelago, Raffles, as Agent to the Governor General with the Malay States, was, like them, a raja but one who was more powerful and thus to be respected, feared and coveted for his friendship, as Sultan Mahmud Ri’ayat Syah of Lingga was to learn. Likewise, the Sultan of Kedah tried, though with little success, to attract both Raffles’ and Lord Minto’s attention and sympathy over his disillusionment with the British East India Company’s attitude towards Kedah and her predicament with the Siamese.

**Traditional Malay Royal Letters**

Letters and royal signs were a vital medium for the communication of royal authority.¹⁸ Letter-writing as such was an important aspect of diplomacy between rajas. Since royal letters would reflect the magnificence, honour and dignity of the rulers, the culture of letter-writing received special attention in the Malay courts. Apart from the decorative layout, beautiful script and tidy formatting of such letters with correct and proper placing of the royal seal, the court scribe had to also ensure that the proper language of etiquette was used, and the preamble employed would, as much as possible, reflect the raja’s identification with the religion of Islam, and the veracity of his words. These were elements of great importance to be taken into account by the court scribe when writing Malay royal letters of diplomacy.

Traditional Malay letter-writing required the ruler to employ able and qualified scribes whose reputation hinged on their mastery of literary Malay, good handwriting in the Arabic script (Jawi) and, not least, their knowledge of the Arabic language and Islamic religion. Of equal importance to a Malay scribe was his mastery of the rules of letter-writing as prescribed by the kitab tarasul (manuals on Malay letter-writing). A scribe’s skillfulness in the art of Malay epistolography was therefore determined by his ability to impress upon the receiver of such royal letters the magnificence, dignity and high status of his raja while also extolling the virtuous qualities of the addressee, all of which were to be reflected in the language of the compliments (puji-pujian).¹⁹ The royal scribe, as pointed out by Newbold, was indeed “looked upon as a littérateur of some rank”.²⁰

It was important for the scribe to be generous in his compliments to the receiver who, if he was a brother ruler or a European of superior position, such as Raffles, was lavished with personal attributes, often perceived as exaggerated, to reflect his authority and power. In order to emphasize the good name of his raja, a skilful scribe, when writing royal letters of diplomacy, would also associate his raja with religious attributes by interspersing Arabic words, phrases, and Quranic verses in the royal letters. A good example of such compliments is found in the letter of the Sultan of Aceh which was addressed to Raffles. But the scribe also had to be aware of the traditional heritage in the art of writing manuscripts, such as wherever possible to name the year of the Hégira by appending a huruf (Arabic letter) to it.

Malay letter-writing has a history of at least 500 years. References to letters have often been made in Malay hikayat with elaborate description of the custom of receiving and reading of royal letters in the courts.

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an indication that letter-writing and the receiving of royal letters were important aspects of Malay court life. Numerous tarasul had been copied and passed down through the ages to provide guidelines to scribes writing all sorts of letters, especially royal ones. Malay texts such as the Tijus-Salatin and the Sejarah Melayu also abound with descriptions of how Malay court etiquette was strictly observed on the receiving and reading of royal epistles.²¹

In his comments on Malay letters, G. W. J. Drewes remarked, “Oriental epistolary style requires that a letter or petition open with a florid and flattering introduction of some length, in particular when courting the favour of temporal potentates.”²² While the statement is generally true on the surface, the scribes of Malay letters, nevertheless, were bound by certain rules and guidelines when writing letters. However, the late Prof. Drewes was quite correct in saying that the elaborate introductory compliments (puji-pujian) are not something circumstantial, but they act as an opening for the subject to be broached by the sender of the letter which is the “real incentive for writing the letter.”²³ The kitab tarasul used by the scribes of Malay letters are unanimously agreed that the most important part of the Malay royal letter is the puji-pujian; it is from the puji-pujian that the finesse and dignity of the Malay raja are reflected. It was also by his way of wording the puji-pujian that the scribe of the royal Malay letter tried to extrapolate the Malay concept of ‘budi’.²⁴ Thus the opening complimentary address was adapted by the scribe not only to suit the different ranks and grades of men who received the letters, but also to the various degrees of relationship between the sender and the addressee. But were these puji-pujian mere concoctions of the scribes? While much has been written on the Malay epistolary art, few writers have really made a study of the connection between the art and the Islamic religious values passed on from earlier generations to the tarasul writers and the scribes. Indeed, few have questioned why the Arabic quotations applied by practitioners of the Malay epistolary craft have in reality been shrouded by mystical elements of religion—Islamic Sufism—even though the scribes themselves may not have been Sufi adherents.

From the 17th until the mid-19th century when the presence of European settlements and centres of power increasingly brought intrusions into the indigenous polity of maritime Southeast Asia, letter-writing by Muslim scribes did not really undergo drastic changes, whether in form, style or formatting. The Islamic elements in the art had, at best, only to be adjusted with the ‘new age’ because of the need to send diplomatic missives to non-Muslim recipients. Since there were different categories of letters, when writing letters addressed to non-Muslims the scribes had to take care to choose the right compliments to be paid, bearing in mind the position, status and authority of the recipient; quite often, the authors of tarasul would remind scribes that excessive compliments could be interpreted as improper, or might even be perceived as an insult to the receiver.²⁵

When writing the reply to a letter, the scribe had to remember that the compliments should be equal to those of the letter being replied to, although a slight excess of puji-pujian was allowed.²⁶ The puji should include flattering remarks about the character of the receiver and salutations of goodwill from the sender. The sender was duty-bound to mention his good intentions—to foster friendship and brotherly affection with the receiver, who was of course a European official occupying the highest position in the administrative hierarchy of a settlement or country whose standing was perceived as equal to that of a raja.

The opening of a Malay royal letter addressed to a European dignitary such as Raffles or Minto, besides offering the highest salutations to God and His Prophet, would include words and phrases which were intended as a way of showing Malay modesty and diplomacy, the vital components of the Malay budi. The allegorical expressions used included ‘a letter of sincerity’, and idioms like ‘whiteness of the heart’, and ‘without limit and duration’ for friendship, and even went to the extent of quoting the allegorical Ma’al [Water of] Kawthar²⁷ from a Qur'an

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²¹ The Sejarah Melayu mentioned that when the letter from the emperor of China arrived at the port of Malacca during the reign of Sultan Mansur Syah, the royal epistle was received with pomp and grandeur. Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals, transl. C.C. Brown, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, p. 87. See also Annabel Teh-G Gallup, The Legacy of the Malay Letter, British Library, London, 1994, p. 13.


²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Qualities of mind and heart, especially those based on kindness to others.

²⁵ See Kitab Tarasul, Leiden Cod. Or. 1764.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kawthar means ‘abundance’. In one of the Traditions, Prophet Muhammad is said to have explained Kawthar as being one of the rivers in Paradise or, as
sura\textsuperscript{28} all point to the fact that Malays, as Muslims, theoretically place very high value on piety and religiosity. As shown by the Raffles Malay letters, in the context of forging diplomatic relationships with the Europeans, albeit their being non-Muslims, the Malay chiefs and rajahs never failed to indicate the Islamic moral code of conduct as the basis of all relationships.\textsuperscript{29} The Quranic injunction that all men are subservient to God was indeed the basis of all relationships.

While the opening puji-pujian of a royal Malay letter may appear superfluous and was often ignored by Europeans receiving such letters, it nevertheless reflected the intention of the sender to demonstrate his sincerity of heart in the establishment of relations. As this writer has mentioned elsewhere, "To the Malay, the heart (hati) is the most important symbol of one's sincerity. A good person is perceived as one having a 'pure and lucid heart'\textsuperscript{30} This corresponds with the definition of the Sufi as one 'who is pure in heart'.\textsuperscript{31} In the Islamic worldview the heart is also the key to all virtuous acts. It is the pure and lucid heart that brings one closer to his Creator.\textsuperscript{32} Thus when the scribes of Malay letters in the early 19th century placed greater emphasis on the 'whiteness of the heart' or 'limpid and lucid heart' they were, to all intents and purposes, influenced by the Islamic Sufi teaching that places emphasis on the heart. That the qualified scribe of Malay letters favoured the Sufi use of imagery of the heart as the basis of all relations is evident from several writings on Sufism.

As stated by Martin Lings, "Sufism is the 'heart-wakefulness'.\textsuperscript{33} According to Sufi teachings, the heart is the centre of the soul, which itself is the gateway to a higher heart, namely the spirit. The heart corre-

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\textsuperscript{28} The Quran, \textit{sura} 108.
\textsuperscript{29} Ahmat, 'Islamic Elements in the Art of Malay Traditional Court Letter-Writing', p. 33.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 34.

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\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 50.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 77.
\textsuperscript{36} Syeikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, \textit{Fatuh al-Ghaib} (The Revelations of the Unseen), transl. M. Aftab-ud-din Ahmad, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1967 (new impression), p. 208. As expounded by this great 12th century Sufi mystic, in his seventy-eighth discourse, "It is with this trait [being humble and modest] that the station of the servant is raised high and his position made lofty and his honour and eminence made perfect in the sight of God (glory be to Him) as also in the sight of the people ...".
cultural and, over a period of time, became part of the Malay literary tradition, including letter-writing, which, despite the presence of these elements in the *kiuh tarasul*, was never fully explained by the authors of their mystical secrets.

Thus when a scribe began writing a letter, certain Islamic phrases were chosen as the heading. The Quranic ‘formulas’ most often used by the Malay court scribes were ‘Qawlul u’l-Haqq’ (Saying of the Absolutely Real Truth), ‘Nur u’l-Syams wa’l Qamar’ (Light of the Sun and the Moon) or its variant, ‘Wa’l-Syams wa’l Qamar’ (By the Sun and the Moon),38 ‘Ya qadhiyya al-Hajat’ (O Fulfiller of Wishes) and the ninety-nine names of God. These words and phrases should be viewed in terms of their religious meanings. Many of the phrases are related to the names and attributes of God. *Al-Haqq*, for example, refers to the Creator; it is the name of God, the absolutely real and permanent.39 Others such as ‘al-Fat-h’ [Victory]40 or *Ya Fattahu* [O God, the Great Opener], *Ya Ghaffaar Rahim* [O God, Most Merciful],41 *al-Hamdulillah* [Praise be to God] were also favourite choices for headings. These were popular expressions used by Sufis. The very popular Sufi expressions *Qawlul u’l-Haqq* and *Wa Kalamahu wa Sa’di*42 (meaning His Words are the Real

37 Al-Haqq is the attributive term applied to Allah, whose lordship is fixed, permanent and real. His everlasting divinity is contrasted with that of the false Gods, which is *batil*, meaning vain or unreal.

38 This phrase is taken from the first two verses in sura 91 of the Quran entitled *Shams* [the Sun]. The pair, i.e. the sun and the moon, represent God’s work in nature; they complement each other. While the sun is the source of light, and physical life, the moon that follows or acts as second to the sun illuminates the world. According to Newbold, this heading was generally chosen by scribes when writing letters to non-Muslims. Newbold, British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca, Vol. 2, p. 338.

39 God is fixed or permanent in His divinity and therefore it is by Him that all things become realities. See *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, “al-Haqq”*, pp. 126–127.

40 See Quran, sura 48.

41 See Quran, sura 9, verse 5.


43 See the translation of sura 69 in the Holy Quran.

44 Annabel Teh-Gallop has misconstrued this as an attempt by the Sultan of Aceh to adopt elements of Turkish or Persian and Mughal epistolary practice. See Annabel Teh-Gallop, ‘Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli: Royal Letters from Aceh in the 17th Century’, First International Conference on Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, 24–27 February 2007, p. 21.


wujud (‘Unity of Existence’), found adherents among Malay and Indonesian Sufis. This pre-20th century development had, over the centuries, produced a unique feature in indigenous literary culture. Based on the principle of total submission to God, the Islamic Sufi elements have been shown to have shaped the literary art of writing, including Malay epistolography.

Even in the early tarasul, the scribe was reminded that when writing letters to royalty he “should first begin the letter by praising God and then extend the salawat or benedictions on the Prophet Muhammad and members of his family, followed by his close companions and then only the receiver of the letter”. Such a practice did not come from Persia or India, but from the traditions of the Prophet himself. The Islamic creed that came to Southeast Asia was no different from that of those countries. According to the tarasul, if a letter had begun with praises to God the appropriate heading to be used would be the Basmallah. If the contents of the letter revealed a special request of the sender then the correct heading would be another Sufi statement, “Hawa al-Ghani Subhanahu” (Only God is Bountiful Who is without Need).

One needs only to look at the introduction of a Malay manuscript or text such as the Bustanul Salatin, Salalatus Salatin or the Tuhfat al-Nafis in which the Basmallah and the salawat (invocations in God’s name for the Prophet Muhammad) are clearly displayed. Thus the ‘shapes and forms’ of the letters could easily be explained if the Quranic verses, quotations or so-called ‘formula’ were understood in the context of Islamic religious beliefs. In this regard, there is no better way of understanding them than by studying the way the Malays perceived Islam, and how Sufism had made an impact on Malay literary culture in the courts of the Malay rulers and chiefs.

Sufism was probably introduced to the Malays simultaneously with the introduction of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. As has been pointed out by several writers, the Sufis themselves were responsible for the propagation of Islam in the Malay world. It was the mysticism inherent within the principal doctrine of Sufism that had attracted people in the Malay world. The central core of the teachings of the Sufis that gained popularity was the doctrine of the Wahdattu‘l-wujud (‘Unity of Existence’). Intertwined with the mystical aspect of Sufism was the role of symbolism that the Malays and others in the archipelago who were acquainted with the Sufi orders became attracted to, thus influencing their religious thoughts, everyday life and literary culture. Such symbolism was also reflected in the choice of headings for Malay letters. Certain headings, with their underlying meanings, were considered suitable for certain types of letters. The Quranic word or phrase chosen was then written in a stylized manner forming a triangular shape or design, the apex of the triangle symbolizing the unqualified paramount position of God and the broader base of the triangle representing His creation.

Symbolism and Malay designs could also be seen in the shapes and forms of the royal seals used on the letters. According to the tarasul, the seal of a raja to another fellow raja must always be placed at the top right-hand side of the letter, “with the edge of the seal nearly touching the top of the writing”. The shape of the seal of the Rajas of Pedas and Rembau was of lotus leaf design. The Acehnese cop sikureung (ninefold seal) literally means that the seal is, numerically, one less, i.e. not a complete ten, a symbolic number. Indeed, among the Malay Muslim

47 The doctrine of Wahdattu‘l-wujud nevertheless had increasingly declined by the end of the 19th century following the incessant debate among ulama of fiqh about the alleged practice of pantheism among Sufis who propagated the doctrine. The decline indirectly affected the adoption of the Muslim calendars using the mystical huruf to name the Hegira year.
48 Kitab Tarasul, Leiden, Cod. Or. 1921 (written in 1859 at Surabaya).
50 Leiden Cod. Or. 1921.
51 Even in modern-day semi-religious books by pious Muslim authors this features prominently.
52 It is not possible to give an exact date when Sufism was established in the Malay Archipelago. However, the makhadum (Master) who came to the southern Philippines in the 14th century and Malacca in the 15th century to carry out Islamic conversion of the people were probably Sufis. See Syed Naguib al-Attas, Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practised among the Malays, MSRI Ltd., Singapore, 1963, pp. 21–22.
53 Ibid., p. 10.
54 Gallop, The Legacy of the Malay Letter, p. 49.
55 The shape is certainly not based on the Islamic art form, but rather influenced by the Hindu-Buddha art form inherited by the Minangkabau noble house. Another scholar who has studied the letters of Minangkabau believes that the shape is based on the lotus leaf. See Drakard, A Kingdom of Words, p. 72.
56 The number 9 in Malay-Indonesian mysticism is believed to be a number of power and strength. When multiplied by any number it always produces nine—
mystics letters in the Arabic alphabet and the numbers in the science of numerology are also perceived as having mystical character.

The Importance of the Surat Chap

An important element in royal Malay epistolary craft is the royal seals. Seals called cap,57 a derivation of the Hindi ‘chap’, are impressions stamped in lamp-black, ink or wax (usually red) on manuscripts, letters, treaties and other documents.58 Other than the royal seals, cap were also made by individuals involved in trade or commerce. Since a royal letter or document is a delegation of royal powers,59 it must necessarily bear the royal seal. It was for that very reason that when Raffles sent Tengku Raden Muhammad to negotiate a treaty with the Sultan of Palembang the sultan was perceived by Raffles as dragging his feet in the matter for it looked as though he was in no hurry to ratify the agreement. Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin had even expressed his dismay to Raden Muhammad for not providing the surat cap (letter of authority or seal) to prove his credentials as the plenipotentiary of Raffles. In the eyes of a Malay raja, the seal was a privilege that ought to be conferred only by royalty.60 The failure of Tengku Raden Muhammad to display the seal which he should have been given by Raffles, the ‘English dignitary in Malacca’, had posed a hindrance in his negotiations with the Sultan of Palembang, Mahmud Badaruddin. In writing Malay letters, the ability to display artistic skill in the Jawi calligraphy was undoubtedly an asset to all scribes. Beautiful such as 3 x 9 is 27, but 27 is actually 2 plus 7, which is nine. It is usually associated with the war-leaders (penglima). Among the Javanese mystics, nine—which represents the number of exits found on a man’s body, i.e. counting from his pairs of eyes, ears, nostrils and his mouth right up to the other parts of the body, to include his navel and the anus—symbolizes majesty and power.57 Also called ‘cob’ or ‘meterai’ (from the Tamil word muttirai; also from the Dutch materai). The word meterai was used synonymously with cap, and appears to have been used by the author of the Tajus-Salatin, a work written in Aceh in 1603.58 For more information on the Malay seal see the exhaustive study by Annabel Teh-Gallop titled “Malay Seal Inscriptions: A Study in Islamic Epigraphy from Southeast Asia”, Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2002.59

The Dating of Letters

As was commonly practised by Malay scribes of literary works, the writers of royal letters would, towards the last part of their writing, normally provide a date by mentioning the cycle or name of the Hegira year, although not all the Raffles Malay letters bear the name of the Hegira year to conform with the Malay-Indonesian calendrical system.64

61 Also known as the sugar-palm (Arenga saccharifera). From the enau palm fresh palm-sap called nira could be tapped by cutting off the mayang (palm-blossom). This was used to make sugar (gula kabong) or the alcoholic toddy called tuak.


64 Among the Europeans, it was Stamford Raffles who first pointed out the cycle in Malay dating. In a letter to John Leyden, dated 24 May 1806, he wrote: “Were you aware that the Malays ever used a Cycle ? On this [?] I made such rapid discoveries that I expected to have been enabled to send you their whole Chronology—but it was like the Mountains in labour & produced little or
Where the name of a particular year was given, the Arabic letter representing the cycle may at a first glance seem not to conform to either the Malay or Javanese calendrical cycle, thus confusing many a reader. While the important work of Ian Proudfoot has attempted to solve this problem, the author nevertheless failed to consider the important aspect of Islamic mysticism in the Malay-Indonesian Muslim calendrical systems in pre-20th century Southeast Asia.

The indigenous Islamic calendrical system in Southeast Asia was based on the 8-year cycle with a letter from the Quranic alphabet assigned to each of the years in the cycle. In explaining the method of determining the signature for a particular year, a late 19th-century Malay manuscript explains:

Not knowing the year that is to be assigned with the alphabet [abjad166 you should take [the figure] of the year of the Prophet (p.u.h.), cast off eights, until the Hegira year is used up. Having obtained the remainder, begin by taking the Hegira 1282 as the Alif year and 1283 Hegira as Ha year, 1284 Hegira as Jem year, 1285 as Zay year, 1286 Hegira as Dal year, 1287 Hegira as Ba year, 1288 Hegira as Waw year and 1289 Hegira as Dhal year [sic, Dal Akhir].

The naming of a particular Hegira year after a certain letter in the Arabic alphabet has been a practice since at least 1590 CE. While the

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66 The abjad is the alphabet arranged according to the numerical values of the letters.  
68 This is clearly indicated by the date of the ‘Aqua'id of Al-Nasafi’, See Al-Attas, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript*, p. 9.

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source for adoption of the 8-year Malay, Javanese or Acehnese calendrical systems by the Muslims of island Southeast Asia has for a very long time remained unexplained. An equally intriguing question for many is why certain letters in the Arabic alphabet were chosen for the 8-year calendar. Sources from the Malay manuscripts have not been very clear about the reasons for the choice of the letters, but it is a well-known fact that the letters in the Quranic alphabet have been perceived by the Muslim mystics in Southeast Asia as having the mystical qualities that define the divine attributes of God. This brings us to inquire whether they were adopted for usage in the 8-year cycle because of the inherent mystical or magical character as stipulated by the science of the secrets of letters. In the *Bayan al-Alif wa Huruf al-Hija'iyya*, an old Malay manuscript which describes the mystical symbolism of the twenty-eight letters in the Quranic alphabet, there is an enumeration of the Sufi interpretation of the letters as having mystical religious attributes. Each letter is stipulated as being endowed with a *mashahbat* (grade) that represents the Absolute Essence of Unity and Oneness of God and His manifestations through divine attributes. Through the symbolism of the *huruf* (letters) in the Quranic alphabet, the phenomenal world is shown to appear in a series of seven grades or emanations, proceeding from *Ahadiyya*, *Wahda* and *Wahidiyya*, ‘Alam al-Arwaah (the World of Spirits),’ ‘Alam al-Mithal (the World of Ideas),’ ‘Alam al-Ajsam (the World of Corporeal Body)’ to ‘Alam al-Insan (the World of [the Perfect] Man). Wahda and Wahidiyya, together with *Ahadiyya*, represent God’s Absolute Unity.

The above grades, according to the *Bayan al-Alif wa Huruf al-Hija'iyya*, are represented by the Quranic alphabet of thirty letters. But there appear to be only seven letters chosen for tabulating the 8-year cycles. These seem to reflect the seven grades that encompass the

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69 As pointed out by Proudfoot, while the 8-year cycle was commonly used in Southeast Asia before the 20th century, this form of the Islamic calendar is not very well known elsewhere in the Muslim world. See Proudfoot, *Old Muslim Calendars of Southeast Asia*, p. 1.  
71 See the section on *Huruf Hija'iyya* in Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, MSS 2488.
doctrine of *Wahdattu l-wujud* (Unity of Existence). For example, the grades of *Wahda* and *Wahidiyya* are represented by the letter *Ha*, which signifies the grade of the One-ness of God at which all existing things are united under the name Allah. The letter *Alif*, which is the grade of non-determination [*la ta’ayyun*], symbolizes the Absoluteness of God’s Essence, while *Wahda*—referred to as the treasure chest of God’s Being—which contains the aspect of unity in all the particulars of existence, is represented by the letter *Ba*. It is also known as the grade of Reality that is Muhammad. *Wahidiyya*, which is represented by the letter *Waw*, is the grade of Fixed Prototypes and the Reality of Man. It is the object of God’s knowledge and contains the essences of all existence. These four are the fixed essences of the World of Spirits, the World of Ideas, the World of Corporeal Bodies and the World of the Perfect Man (*Insan al-Kamil*). The manifestation of these *huruf* in symbolism is based on the Sufi school of *Wahdattu l-wujud* which, in the eyes of certain Muslims—those who adhere strictly to the legalistic *fiqh* school—borders on pantheism.

These seven grades (*martabat tujuh*) that followers of the *Wahdattu l-wujud* espouse in their Sufi beliefs were popular among the Malays [as well as Acehnese and Javanese] of island Southeast Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries. The doctrine formed the basis of the mystical teachings of the metaphysical principles of the Essence of Unity and the Oneness of God. Indeed, prior to the 20th century, it formed the core belief of the alleged pantheistic creed, *Wahdattu l-wujud*.76

72 The propagator of the doctrine was Ibnul Arabi who based his thinking on *Zauq* Sufism. In its essence, the doctrine stipulates that the existence of the Universe is the existence of God. God is the *hakikat* (reality of the Universe). See Hamka, *Tasawuf*, pp. 145–149.

73 Descriptions of the principles of the seven grades are based on the work of A. H. Johns, ‘Malay Sufism’, *JMBRAS*, 30(2), 1957 and Perpustakaan Negara, MSS 2488.

74 According to this principle the One-ness and Absoluteness of God is the true and real Existence. His Light (*Nur*) is part of his Essence which emulates the Reality that is Muhammad (*Hakikat Muhammadiya*). From this existence (*Wujudiyah*) emanates the four Essences in all the grades.

75 For a more detailed exposition of Sufi teachings in the Malay world see Johns, ‘Malay Sufism’.


Interestingly, the seven letters chosen for the 8-year Malay and Javanese calendrical cycles seem to coincide with the *martabat tujuh*.

As explained earlier, the adherents of the seven *martabat* who belonged to the *Wahdattu l-wujud* strongly espoused the principle of God’s Unity and His omnipresence in the Universe. Muslim mystics have always believed that the Quranic alphabet carries certain meanings of the signs of God’s attributes. The letter *Jen* is said to signify divine beauty [*jamal*], i.e. qualities of forgiving, knowing and leading aright that characterize God; and the letter *Dal* signifies that there is no explanation or proof to convey God’s perfection of knowledge in regard to His Essence. *Zay* signifies one’s enhancement in dignity when one is bestowed with God’s mercy to embrace faith and guidance in Islam. Heaven is the reward for those who are blessed by God. In a man’s being would congregate the four elements: firstly, faith in God; secondly, the religion of Islam; thirdly, the doctrine of God’s Unity; and fourthly, the wisdom of Holiness (intuitive knowledge). The letter *Waw*, on the other hand, signifies the duties of a Muslim who is reminded of his constant loss if he neglects to pray, fast and perform all other obligations to God.

According to the *ilm al-huruf*—the science of the secrets of the letters of the Arabic alphabet (also known as the *ilm al-abjad*)—each letter bears one of the four elements: Earth (turban), Water (ma’), Air (hawa) and Fire (nar).77 In Islamic Sufism these are elements of man’s physical body. Earth symbolizes the Being of God, under the name of the Wise, Water His Being under the Giver of Life, Air His Being under the name the Strong, and Fire His Being under His name the Mighty.78 Symbolism of the letters in the Quranic alphabet, as pointed out by the renowned Prof. Annemarie Schimmel, is indeed well-known among Muslims in mystical circles.79 They believe that each of the letters used in the Holy Quran possesses symbolic meanings and represents a certain numeral.80

77 The mystics believe that the four elements are in possession of the twenty-eight letters which, when divided into four categories, would correspond to the four elements; this makes each element possess seven letters. Al-Attas, *Some Aspects of Sufism*, p. 45.

78 According to the mystics in [Shi’ite] Sufi thought, Man’s physical body is identical with the Being of God as revealed under the above names. See Johns, ‘Malay Sufism’, p. 26.


80 According to the science of the secrets of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, the letter *Alif*, whose shape resembles the numeral 1, symbolizes the unity and
Looking at the Arabic letters used in the 8-year cycle as used by manuscript writers in the Malay Archipelago, it is now clear that the choice of certain letters in the Arabic alphabet made by Malay, Javanese, Acehnese and other Southeast Asian Muslim scribes suggests that it was the mystical symbolism which the letters represent that led to the invention of the calendrical system based on the 8-year cycle. The seven letters chosen to signify the year do reflect, interestingly enough, the seven grades of mysticism mentioned earlier. As for the 8-year cycle, the number eight in Persian literature symbolizes the eight paradises that Muslims believe in.\footnote{Ibid., p. 187. Incidentally, the number eight in Buddhist teachings also reflects cosmic equilibrium as propounded by the 8-fold path of Buddhism.}

That the number eight has been chosen as the cycle (daur) by both the Malays and Javanese is interesting, for eight is indeed an auspicious number for both Shi’ite Islam and Buddhism. In each cycle of a Javanese\footnote{From Sanskrit vindu. The original meaning of vindu is a drop of water taken as a measure also, a kind of measure (as in music: vindu mali). See M. Monier-Williams, Sanskrit English Dictionary, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd., 1999, p. 731.} (eight years), the first of Muharram falls consecutively, beginning with \textit{Alif} (Alif), which has a numerical value of one, followed by \textit{He} [Ha] (5), \textit{Jimawsal} (3), \textit{Je} [Zay] (7), \textit{Dal} (4), \textit{Ba} [Ba] (2), \textit{Wawu} [Waw] (6) and \textit{Jimakir} [akhir] (3) with \textit{He}, \textit{Je} and \textit{Jimakir} denoted as \textit{kabisat} (leap years);\footnote{See Irfan Anshory, ‘Mengenal Kalender Hijriah’, Pikiran Rakyat, 28 January 2006.} whereas in the Malay and Acehnese octennial calendars, the letters representing each cycle are in the order of \textit{Alif}, \textit{Ha}, \textit{Jim}, \textit{Zay}, \textit{Dal}, \textit{Ba}, \textit{Waw}, and \textit{Dal akhir}. These letters representing the years also convey the nature of each year whereby letters representing certain years could indicate weather patterns which may influence health conditions and daily lives of the people. Thus, \textit{Alif}, \textit{Ha}, \textit{Zay} and \textit{Waw} years are said to be years of heat, whereas \textit{Jim}, \textit{Ba} and the two \textit{Dal} are years of rain.\footnote{Dal awal, like the Javanese Jimawsal, is the proper designation of the letter. See the introduction for the \textit{Sejarah Melayu}, Raffles MS. No. 18, edited by R.O. Winstedt, JMBRAS, 16(3), 1938, p. 42.}

All the octennial cycles (be they Malay, Javanese or Acehnese) also share a similarity when the total numerical values of the seven letters are added, excluding the last letters \textit{Dal akhir} (for the Malay and Acehnese cycles) and \textit{Jimakir} (for the Javanese \textit{windu}). When the numerical values of the letters are added together they total 28, which—according to the science of numerology—is a perfect number. Muslim mystics connect the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet in which the Holy Quran is written with the moon that wanders through the 28 lunar mansions to complete its four phases.\footnote{Or \textit{Dal akhir}. See C. Snouck Hurgronje, \textit{The Atjehnese}, transl. A. W. S. O’Sullivan, Vol. 1, E.J. Brill, Leyden, 1906. p. 197. Syed Naquib is wrong to assume that the letter is Dhul [pronounced Zaf]. See Al-Attas, \textit{The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript}, pp. 22, 28 and 29.}

As practised in the epistolary craft of the Malay world since the 16th century, the designation of each year in the calendrical daur system was based mainly on the 8-year cycle.\footnote{Proudfoot, \textit{Old Muslim Calendars of Southeast Asia}, pp. 24–25. See also S. Resowidjojo, \textit{Almanak Kampung}, Dinas Penerbitan Balai Pustaka, Djakarta, 1959, p. 122.} The system is called by its Malay term, \textit{dawr}\footnote{The Quran names 28 prophets before Muhammad and, like the full moon, the last Prophet of Islam completes the prophecy of God. For an elaboration on the significance of the number 28, see Annemarie Schimmel, \textit{The Mystery of Numbers}, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, pp. 238–239.} \textit{kcel} (little daur) which distinguishes it from the \textit{dawr besar} (larger daur) (cycle of 120 years). The years in this cycle are divided into groups of eight.\footnote{ Skeats erroneously regards the cycle as a Malay borrowing from the Arabs. See Walter William Skeats, \textit{Malay Magic}, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1967, p. 554.} Nevertheless, even though the larger \textit{dawr}
was known to the Javanese, Malays, and Acehnese, it was the little daur that was most commonly used. In the middle of the 17th century the Javanese began to adopt the 8-year cycle (little daur) as practised by the Malays. Even though the Javanese windu continued to use the Saka era when Sultan Agung officially introduced the Islamic calendar in 1633 CE, the naming of the year by using the Arabic huruf indicated the Islamic year despite the presence of the Saka year. For example, the Anno Hegirae of 1043 which coincided with Anno Javanico 1555, names: karsa, karswarsa, jimantra, duryanta, dhrama, pisaka, wahyu, digwarsa. When this larger cycle was first introduced with letters of the Arabic alphabet, it began on a Friday (Jumawlah legi) and thus was known as kurup Junngiah (i.e. the year of Alif [f] began on Jumawlah legi), thus creating the Friday cycle (AJ 1555/1043 AH/1633 CE—AJ 1674/1162 AH/1748 CE). The second cycle (AJ 1675/1163 AH/1749 CE—AJ 1794/1282 AH/1865 CE) was called kurup Kamsiah (Alip-Kemis-Kilwan), meaning the Thursday cycle. The first year of every windu within the 120-year period begins on Wednesday, thus the Alif year (1) indicates the Wednesday, Ehe [Ha] (5) indicates Sunday. Jimawal (3) indicates Friday, Je [Zay] (7) indicates Tuesday, Dal (4) indicates Saturday, Be [Ha] (2) indicates Thursday, Wawu [Waw] (6) indicates Monday and Jimakir (3) indicates Friday. The windu in which the first year of the cycle commences is known as the huruf Arba 'ayah cycle (the Wednesday letter cycle). However, since the Raffles letters fall within the period 1780—1824, only the Thursday cycle (kurup Kamsiah) is relevant in the present discussion. In his work British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca, Vol. 2, p. 356, Newbold also mentioned about the larger daur though without much elaboration. On the Javanese windu, see Manfred Kudelek, ‘Calendars and Chronologies’ in Christian Freksa et al. (eds.), Foundations of Computer Science: Potential, Theory, Cognition, Springer, Berlin-Heidelberg, New York, 1997, pp. 212—213.

91 See Al-Attas, The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript, pp. 27—32.
92 As early as 1590, the 8-year cycle was already in use in the Malay calendrical system, as evidenced by the dating of the ‘Aqaid Al-Nasafi.’ See ibid., p. 20. See also J. G. de Casparis, Indonesian Chronology, E.J. Brill, Leiden/Koln, 1978, p. 39.
93 The windu are grouped into a cycle of four: Windu Adi, Windu Kutuhara, Windu Sengara, and Windu Sancaya. In discussing the dating of the Raffles letters, however, as far as the letters from Java and Bali are concerned, the Windu Sancaya covers the years of 1810—1811.
94 The practice had already been in use even eight years earlier, i.e. in 1625. See below.
95 Thus it is not quite correct, as claimed by Ricklefs, to say that the Anno Hegirae was not adopted by Sultan Agung when he allowed the Anno Javanico to be used. See M. C. Ricklefs, Modern Javanese Historical Tradition, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1978, Appendix I, p. 232.

that was inaugurated on Friday, marked the first cycle called Alif, although it is aligned to the letter Jim in the Malay dau. The Malay dau kecil differs from the Acehnese dau and Javanese windu only in terms of its arrangement of the huruf. Both the Malay and Acehnese occennial calendars nevertheless differ from the Javanese cycle in that the last huruf of the cycle for both is Dal akhir (latter Dal) while in the Javanese windu it is Jimakir.

Table I shows the three cycles, in which the different arrangements of the letters in each cycle distinguish one from the other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
<th>The Octennial Cycles and the Numerical Values of the Huruf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Numerical Value</strong></td>
<td><strong>Remainder after being Divided by 8</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alif 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha 5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zay 7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dal 4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba 2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waw 6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dal 4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the little daur practised by Malays and Acehnese, each year in the cycle is represented by the huruf Alif, Ha, Jim, Zay, Dal, Ba, Waw, and Dal. Both the Malay and Acehnese dau systems nevertheless differ from the Javanese windu, which has a slight difference in the sequential order of the letters. In the Javanese windu, the Arabic huruf denoting a particular Hegira year are arranged in the following order: Alif, Ha, Jimawal, Zay, Dal, Ba, Waw and Jimakir (the latter Jim). In both the Malay (including Acehnese) and Javanese calendrical systems, whenever the 8-year cycle was completed the letter Alif would again be used to indicate the beginning of another cycle. Each cycle began from year one of the Hegira. The Javanese way of determining the year, however, was based on the general assumption that the first cycle commenced...
from the Hegira year of 1035 (1625 CE). This date coincided with the conquest of Surabaya by Sultan Agung in the Javanese Caka year of 1547 [Anno Javanico]. Since the year 1035 AH marked the beginning of the Javanese windu, its first cycle must have begun with Alif.76 The table in Appendix X shows the differences between the Malay, Acehnese and Javanese 8-year cycles, as indicated by the alignment of the letters in the three cycles. The table has been constructed based on the date of the Aqaid Al-Nasafi (the earliest dated Malay manuscript available) which is used as the starting point for determining the cycle, bearing in mind that the Aqaid was written in the year of Ba in 998 Hegira.

TABLE II
The Numerical Order of the 8-Year Cycles According to the Huruf
(Using Alif as the First Cycle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Javanese</th>
<th>Acehnese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Alif</td>
<td>1. Alif</td>
<td>1. Alif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ha</td>
<td>2. Ehe [Ha]</td>
<td>2. Ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Alif</td>
<td>7. Waw</td>
<td>1. Alif</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

76 According to Resowidjoe, the year 1035 AH corresponds to the Windu Adj 1 (first cycle of the windu); or 1547 Caka year (Javanese Muslim calendar) or 1625 CE. See Resowidjoe, Almanak Gampang, p. 151.
77 Some Javanese, however, say that Sultan Agung officially changed the Javanese calendar to an Islamic lunar year in 1633 CE, which corresponded with the Javanese Caka year of 1555 and the Hegira year of 1043. The year coincided with his pilgrimage to the holy grave of Sunan Bayar at Tembayat. This date also marked the beginning of the 8-year cycle of the windu, commencing with ‘Kuntara’. See M. C. Ricklefs, ‘Islamising Java: The Long Shadow of Sultan Agung’, paper read at the 15th IAHA Conference, Jakarta, 27 August–1 September 1998, p. 4.

In both the Malay and Javanese systems the calculation for finding a Hegira year is done by dividing the figure representing the year by eight, and the remainder is then applied to the mnemonic phrase ahjaz dabuda (ahjaz dabuja) for the Javanese windu); thus the Hegira year of 1035, for example, will have the letter Alif as the name of the year. But in the Acehnese 8-year cycle the method of determining the name for the Hegira year is slightly different; the calculation is also done by dividing the year by eight, but the year-letters are instead counted off in the above order, beginning with Waw to the number of the remainder. Thus if the remaining figure is four, the Hegira year will be, after counting four places from Waw, the year of Ha.

Looking at the dates on some of the Raffles letters written in various parts of the Malay Archipelago, which have dates complete with their huruf signatures, one finds that the letters written in 1810 [1225 AH] and 1811 [1226 AH] have conflicting huruf as their signatures. The letters written in 1811, for example, seem to have the letters Jim, Ba, Zay, Waw and Dal to signify the year. While the Penang letters seem to describe 1811 as the year of Jim, one of the Kedah letters describes it as the year of Dal, while the Acehnese letter bears the letter Ba, and the Bali letters indicate that 1811 was a Zay year. It becomes even more confusing when Raffles' scribe wrote 2 Jim [the second or latter Jim] for the letters sent from Malacca to the Sultans of Palembang and Lingga in December 1810. The two letters from Penang dated 1225 Hegira [1810] also describe the year as a Zay year. The discrepancy in the designation of the appropriate Arabic huruf for the cycles could only mean that there was no uniformity in the application of the daur and windu systems throughout the Malay Archipelago.

While normally the method for the identification of the abjad (alphabet) for most years could be made by relying on the table for the Malay, Javanese and Acehnese 8-year cycles, the case of the Raffles...
Malay letters clearly shows that there is no single way of identifying the huruf of particular years. For example, when divided by eight the Hegira year of 1225 would give a remainder of one which, if based on the logic of the windu and dawr formula, would be designated as the year of Waw for the Javanese windu and Alif and Waw for the Malay and Acehnese systems respectively. But Raffles’ letter to Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin in 1225 AH, on the contrary, has 2 [the second] Jim as the name of the year cycle, while the letter from Haji Mohali to Raffles, which is also dated 1225, has Waw as the name of the cycle. Haji Mohali appears to have chosen Waw because this huruf, which represents the seventh cycle in the Javanese Sancaya Windu, is aligned to the letter Alif, which is the first cycle in the Malay dawr.

The designation of a huruf to a Hegira year in a particular cycle could very well depend on the choice of the cycle made by the scribe. If the Javanese or Acehnese windu was adopted, the scribe’s calculation would have to take into account factors such as the weekly cycles, or the application of the Arba‘iyyah or the Khamsiyah [Javanese: Kamsiah] cycles or whether a certain year was a leap year (tahun kabisat).

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101 See Appendix X.
102 Proudfoot’s explanation that several documents from Penang, all dated 1225, had variously been named as the year of Zay, Waw, and Jim because the scribes “had no interest in regulating the Muslim calendar” is rather simplistic. As I have tried to show below, the naming of the year with a huruf very much depended on the interpretation of the scribe when using the principles set much earlier by the Sufi zyekhs.
103 The phrase ‘Tahun 2 Jim’ in Jawi does not mean ‘Tahun-tahun’, as understood by both Gallop and Proudfoot, but rather ‘the year of the second Jim’.
104 See Appendix X.
105 Thus the Arabic letter assigned to a particular year could also differ because of this factor. Raja Ali Haji, the author of the Tahfiz al-Nafs, also made a distinction between the Arba‘iyyah and Khamsiyah counts which, when attempting to name the Hegira year of 1158 which, when divided by eight, gives a remainder of six, could either give the year of Ba for the Arba‘iyyah count (Ba being the sixth huruf in the order of the Javanese and Acehnese 8-year cycles) or Alif for the Khamsiyah year-count. In choosing Alif, the author was using the numerical value of six which is possessed by Waw as his rationale, for Alif happens to be aligned to Waw. But by choosing Alif the author was entering the next 8-year cycle. See Tables I and II. See also Virginia Matheson-Hooker, Tahfiz al-Nafs, Sejarah Melayu Islam (translated with introduction by Ahmad Fauzi Bati), Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1991, p. 266. Cf. Hurgronje, The Aljehnese, pp. 199–200.

Besides using a computed table in which either or both the Javanese and Malay sequential orders of the Hegira dates are displayed, which would make it easier for a scribe to refer to when he needs to ascertain which letter would qualify a certain year, the numerical value of a particular huruf could also be used when the excess figure is obtained after the figure for the year is divided by eight. For example, for the Hegira year of 1236, which is signified as the year of Jim, the excess of four is viewed by the scribe as in agreement with Dal akhir, which has a value of four. However, Dal akhir is in the eighth position in the order of the Malay dawr; but another huruf, also in the eighth rank, is Jimakir in the Javanese windu (see Table II). The scribe then decides to name 1236 AH as the year of Jim (although he is silent on whether it is the former or later Jim. Likewise, for the year 1225 AH, when divided by eight has a remainder of one, the scribe has named the year as Jim. Now according to the normal rule of the Malay 8-year cycle, the remaining figure one should be regarded as an Alif year. But Alif is also aligned to the letter Jim, even though Alif is in first position of the Javanese windu and Jim is in third place in the Malay dawr. So the letters written in Malacca and Sambas in 1225 AH have the year designated as the year of Jim by the scribes. The same Hegira year has also been described as a Waw year. If the table for the Malay and Javanese dates is used, then obviously the huruf assigned for this year is also correct, for Waw is the derived huruf in accordance with the Javanese windu, which is aligned to the Alif year in the Malay dawr. The application of Zay can be explained by looking at the position of the abjad (alphabet) in the Javanese windu and the Malay dawr (see Table I) and then refer to the following quotation from another Malay manuscript:

To find the name of a year in the Arab Hijrah era, you take the figure of the year, cast off eights, and inspect the size of the remainder; if the excess is one, the year is a ha year; if the excess is two, the year is jim; if the excess is three, the year is za; if the excess is four, the year is da; if the excess is five, the year is ba; if the excess is six, the year is waw; if the excess is seven, the year is jim; if the excess is eight, then the year is an alif year...

106 For further discussion on the Javanese calendrical system, see Casparis, Indonesian Chronology; Soebardi, 'Calendrical Traditions in Indonesia', Majalah Ilmu-ilmu Sastra Indonesia, 3, 1965; and Resowidojo, Almanak Gambang.
107 Leiden Cod. Or. 2805, f.29r. as quoted by Proudfoot, Old Muslim Calendars of Southeast Asia, p. 101.
Table III
The Numerical Order of the 8-year Cycle According to the Huruf
(Using Ha as the First Cycle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Javanese</th>
<th>Acehnese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ha</td>
<td>1. Ha</td>
<td>1. Ha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ha, as shown by the above quotation and Table III, is designated as the huruf for the Hegira year that gives a remainder of one when divided by eight. Since Ha in the Javanese cycle is aligned to Zay in the Malay dawur, the date of 1225 AH, therefore, could also be named as the year of Zay. Thus, 1225 AH has several huruf to qualify it as a year.

The year 1226 AH has also been designated variously as a Ba year by an Acehnese scribe, a Zay year by the scribe in Bali, and as Dal year by the scribes in Malacca and Kedah; the letter from Cirebon gives the date as a Jim year. The figure 1226 when divided by eight gives a remainder of two. The 'traditional' computed calendrical table which I have constructed based on the chronological order of the 8-year cycles using Alif as the first cycle would apply the letter Jimakir to the year. Thus the letter from Cirebon is correct in the huruf. However, the Acehnese scribe Pucut Kaya bin Muhammad Hassan has named the year as a Ba year. The letter Ba was chosen, I believe, because it has the numerical value of two. The huruf also signifies the mystical grade (martabat) of Wahda, which is the first grade to which any description [of God] can be applied. Wahda is also referred to as the treasure chest of God's being which contains, under the aspect of unity, all the particulars of existence which exist particularized at the grade Wahidyya.110

The Bali letters, on the other hand, have Zay as the huruf for the year. Zay, which is fourth in the order of the Javanese windu, is actually aligned to the huruf Ba in the Malay dawur (see Table II). So, the scribe in Bali saw no error in the choice of Zay for naming the year 1226. In applying Dal awal to the said year, the Malacca and Kedah scribes were merely relying on the instruction given in the manuscript quoted by Proudfoot. According to the instruction, "if the excess is two the year is jim". However, Jim [awal] in the Javanese windu is aligned to the huruf Dal awal in the Malay dawur.111

Having seen how the huruf were selected by the scribes of Malay, Javanese and Acehnese letters and also the Bali letters when attempting to name a particular Hegira year, it cannot be dismissed that the methods used were mainly based on the intuitive feeling that Sufis strongly advocate in their action in life.112 While this does not mean that the scribes were all Sufis, the tradition, nonetheless, was inherited from the Islamic mystics. However, not every scribe was conversant with the dating system; in some cases, the scribe failed to designate the correct Arabic letter for a particular year.

The above discussion has shown that it is indeed futile to explain the mechanism of Muslim dating in Southeast Asia through any other means. The Islamic elements in the art of Malay epistolary culture and literary writings certainly need to be studied. Their source is undoubtedly Sufism. It would also seem reckless to dismiss as 'not valid' the description and instructions provided by the original authors of most, if not all, Malay manuscripts who were presumably either Sufis or adherents of some form of Islamic Sufism, particularly in regard to the methods of calculating the dates and the naming of the Hegira year.113

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108 See Appendix X.
109 Perpustakaan Negara MSS 2488, 'Bayan al-Alif wa Huruf al- Hijaiyya'.
110 Johns, 'Malay Sufism', p. 23.
111 See Table I. It was therefore not unusual that Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin's letter to Raffles was dated as the year of Dal awal. See Kedah II.
112 Sufism is not, and never has been, a doctrine based only on logical thinking or the rationale of the mind. Uppermost in the Sufi mind is the application of azzaq (intuitive feelings) when reaching a conclusion in an undertaking. See Hamka, Tassuf, p. 129.
113 See Proudfoot, Old Muslim Calendars of Southeast Asia, p. 102.
Raffles’ scribes

For his correspondence with the rajas and chiefs of the Malay Archipelago, Raffles employed several clerks and copyists during his short stay in Malacca. When he arrived from Penang in December 1810 he had engaged a certain Mr. Merlin to undertake the work of a copying clerk for documents in English. 114 But as Agent to the Governor-General with the Malay States his work in Malacca required him to employ more Malay scribes. In this he was assisted by Ibrahim son of Kandu, 115 a Tamil Muslim who had served him as a clerk or scribe during his sojourn in Penang. His other scribes were the Malacca-born Tamil Muslims Tambi Ahmad bin Nina Merikan, Ismail Lebai 116 and his brother Muhammad, who were uncles of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsi. 117 These scribes appear to have played a very important role in presenting Raffles’ diplomatic approaches to the indigenous rulers of the archipelago and were responsible for the manner in which the message of diplomatic language was relayed.

Looking at the collection of Malay letters one cannot help feeling that Stamford Raffles was fortunate to have employed clerks who were not only professionally skilled in the Malay epistolary art, but were also like local intellectuals of the period who were genuinely interested in collecting Malay manuscripts, a hobby that Raffles himself was personally committed to. Ibrahim son of Kandu, whom Raffles had known since his days in Penang, was himself a known copyist and collector of Malay manuscripts. From December 1810 until Raffles’ departure for

Java in June 1811, Ibrahim was his principal scribe and copyist. As a man of literature of the time, it was also Ibrahim who gave his copy of the Sejarah Melayu which he had obtained in Malacca to John Leyden in Calcutta, who then used it to produce a translation of the Malay ‘classical’ work into English. It was through the contacts of clerks such as Ibrahim that Raffles was able to collect numerous Malay manuscripts of various kinds in several of the Malay kerajaan.

The Emissaries

It is worthwhile to note that Raffles’ network of intelligence and ‘patronising’ diplomacy towards the rajas and chiefs of the Malay kerajaan would not have achieved much success without the co-operation and loyalty he received from his trusted captains who, as the emissaries of the East India Company, impressed the native rulers and chiefs when they came in their large European ships to accompany the native agents when visiting the various Malay states. It was people like David Macdonald, 118 John Scott, 119 Charles Tait, 120 William Greig, 121 and

114 Abdullah, The Hikayat Abdullah, p. 73.
115 Ibrahim, towards the end of 1810, was already thirty years of age; he was born in Kedah in 1780. His father Kandu, a Chulia merchant, had moved to Penang during Francis Light’s time. On Ibrahim Kandu, see C. Skinner, ‘The Author of the Hikayat Perintah Negeri Benggala’, Bijdragen, 132, 1976, pp. 201–205. See also Ahmad Royal’s Hikayat Printah Negeri Belanda (ed. and trans. C. Skinner), Bibliotheca Indonesica, KITLV, The Hague, 1982, especially Appendix 6, ‘An Account of Bengal, and A Visit to the Government House, by Ibrahim, the son of Candu the Merchant’, pp. 188–192.
117 See Abdullah, The Hikayat Abdullah, p. 75.
118 Macdonald was commissioned to the Indian navy in December 1809. He rose to the rank of Captain and became Commander of the H[onourable] C[ompany’s] cruiser Ariel. Together with Tengku Raden Muhammad, Macdonald was sent by Raffles to Palembang to deliver his letter to Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin, but was not allowed to stay beyond 48 hours. Macdonald was assigned by Raffles to provide intelligence on the Dutch forces in the Lampung country and the vicinity of Palembang. Raffles described him as “the best naval authorities available”. Raffles to Edmonton, 31-1-1811, MSS Eur. F 148/4. See Captain Macdonald’s Narrative of his Early Life and Services Embracing an Unbroken Period of Twenty-two Years, 3rd edn, Cheltenham, c. 1840, p. 335.
119 John Scott, son of country-trader William Scott, served as Raffles’ Assistant upon the recommendation of John Leyden. Scott accompanied Tunku Pangran in the HC cutter Arethusa [also spelt Arathusa] on his mission to Lingga, Muntok and to Banten, Cirebon and Mataran. Raffles’ attitude towards Scott was, however, one of disdain. In a letter to John Leyden, he wrote, “I fear I shall never get any thing out of John Scott—in truth but in confidence he is not worth his Salt—I have as yet got nothing from him but trouble and I have my doubts how far he may be capable …”. See Bastin, John Leyden and Thomas Stamford Raffles, p. 49.
120 Captain Charles Tait, who was a free merchant with the agency house of John Palmer & Co., Calcutta, was commander of the country ship Thainstone. He was the emissary sent by Raffles to Riau. Ibid., p. 106.
121 William Greig commanded the 200-ton country brig Lord Minto, built and
Lieutenant Smith\textsuperscript{122} who served Raffles well in ensuring the success of his mission. It was they, together with Raffles’ appointed accredited agents—Sayid Zain (more popularly known as Tunku Pangeran) of Siak, Tengku Raden Muhammad, a near kinsman of the Sultan of Palembang, Sayid Abu Bakar Rum, Haji Muhammad Mohali, Syeik Ali,\textsuperscript{123} and Tambi Ismail\textsuperscript{124}—who gave their undivided loyalty to Raffles in carrying out the missions entrusted to every one of them.

These were the people who mattered in Raffles’ attempt to establish relations with the native rulers and it was they who ensured the successful conveyance of the letters of European diplomacy which in the Malay diplomatic jargon were called ‘letters of sincerity’.

\textsuperscript{122}Before William Greig was sent to Bali, Lieutenant Smith had already been on a mission in the \textit{Arethusa} (the cutter which was previously under the orders of Capt. Macdonald) to meet the Balinese rajas. Lady Sophia Raffles, \textit{Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles}, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1991, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{123}He was sent by Raffles to visit the court of the raja of Sambas. See the Sambas letter below.

\textsuperscript{124}Tambi Ismail was sent to meet Raja Ali of Pedas.

\section{THE KEDAH LETTERS}

The following Kedah letters reveal an interesting aspect of the state’s relations with Siam in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These letters complement what Rollins Bonney tried to show in his book\textsuperscript{1}—that the Sultan of Kedah, being harassed by Siam, had tried to find a way out of his problems with Siam by approaching the East India Company for assistance. A Thai scholar, Dr. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, has in her writings overzealously claimed that “Kedah-Siam relations were harmonious, with Bangkok apparently allowing the Sultan a free hand in the internal affairs of Kedah.”\textsuperscript{2} She has also dismissed the sources advanced by Bonney and other scholars who used Anderson and Burney as “woefully unreliable and baseless”.\textsuperscript{3} The letters from Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin to Raffles and Lord Minto nonetheless support Bonney’s thesis that Siam was genuinely posing a threat to Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin of Kedah, despite Kobkua’s dismissal of it as pure concoction by the Sultan, to use as a pretext to entice the British to help him. The letters also do not in any way indicate the Sultan’s attempt to cover up his fear of the threat from his near relatives or to hide his anxiety over the security of his own throne during the said period.


\textsuperscript{2}Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, “A Brief Moment in Time: Kedah-Siam Relations Revisited”, \textit{JMBRAS}, 72(2), 1999, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 87.
Kedah. May the Lord God of all the world cause it to be delivered to our friend, the Tuan General [sic] who administers the government of the province of Bengal, the abode of prosperity; who also holds jurisdiction in every land, leeward and windward, whichever is under the control of the beherma6 of the European Company; he is one who is extremely prudent in his deliberations, full of perfection in his governance which is proper, and whose famous name is mentioned with loud voices of adoration by both the distinguished and the humble people; he is furthermore praiseworthy and highly reputed for his bravery in war as well as standing security for his office and fefts over districts under him; and further, his name is celebrated for helping friends and associates whose aspirations are correct; in this age he is peerless.

The circumstance is, may it be known to our friend, that in 1200 AH [1784 CE], when our father was still alive, Mister Laik [sic, Light]7 who

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4 Based on the date on the royal seal, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Syah, formerly known as Tunku Pangeran, succeeded his uncle, Sultan Diya’uddin Mukarram Syah, in 1219 AH (1804). But his ascendency to the throne was not without the assistance of the Siamese. In 1801–1804 he made himself almost the tributary ruler of Siam by making obeisance at the Siamese court. To please the Siamese he went further, by increasing the value of the bunga emas and bunga perak. Sultan Diya’uddin, whose rule of Kedah was brief (1798–1804), had abdicated on being pressured by the Siamese king, Rama I, who ordered him to step down. He died in 1845. On the political intrigue within the court of Kedah and the struggle between Sultan Diya’uddin and Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin, which involved the British and the court of Siam, see Bonney, Kedah 1771–1821, pp. 103–127.

5 Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Syah was the son of Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Zainal Abidin Mu’azzam Syah with his gundik (unofficial wife). Finding himself too old to govern, Sultan Muhammad Jiwa abdicated in 1770 in favour of his son, Tunku Abdullah. But Sultan Abdullah had to face opposition from many quarters immediately after he became sultan. A rebellion broke out in 1771 in which the Bugis under the command of Raja Haji also participated in the factional war started by the opponents of Sultan Muhammad Jiwa and his son. The Bugis inflicted untold damage when they destroyed property and sacked the royal capital, Alor Star. It was during this period that Sultan Muhammad Jiwa wrote to the British East India Company to ‘reinstate him in the possession of his Country’ and to assist in ridding Kedah of the Bugis invaders. He then contacted the English merchants at Aceh and invited them to come to Kedah to forge some form of co-operation. It was Francis Light who came in April 1771, as agent of the merchant Francis Jourdain. Light promised to help on condition that a trading licence was issued to

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6 B-h-r-m-a [beherma, bihrama, behrama, bahrama, beharam or behram], probably a corruption of pikrama or pekrama from the Sanskrit, vihrama, meaning courage, heroism; also name of a minister of Mirgakan-data; in Malay, ‘Pikrama’ is an honorific title. See M. Monier-Williams, Sanskrit English Dictionary, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd., 1999, p. 955. See also the Penang Letters, fn 23.

7 Francis Light, an employee of the Madras firm of merchants Jourdain, Sullivan & Desouza, was posted by the company to Kedah, where he attained an influential position with the Sultan of Kedah. From 1771 Light was involved in causing Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Syah to cede the island of Pulau Pinang to the British since a station for repairing British ships was much needed. In 1786, the Sultan of Kedah agreed to cede Penang in exchange for the East India Company’s protection plus an annual payment of $6000 a year. An agreement was then signed and Light was appointed first Superintendent of the new British colony of Pulau Pinang when it was occupied by his forces in July 1786. Light did not abandon his role as a principal merchant even though he was the administrator of the island. Pulau Pinang was christened Prince of Wales Island. However, the speedy growth in prosperity of Penang as a trading port soon eroded the revenues of Kedah and he therefore demanded additional compensation for his loss. Light died on 21 October 1794. By the time of his death the population of Penang had
was obeying the command of the European King [sic], and instructed by the Governor-General of Bengal, Cornwallis, came to see my late father bearing precious gifts of splendid articles. According to him, the European king and the [Governor-] General of Bengal had instructed him to request Pulau Pinang as a place for the purpose of repairing ships-of-war, and he extolled the greatness of the splendour, power, wisdom and good character of the supreme king in dispensing assistance to friends and associates and he also praised the benefits gained that keep the English Company prosperous and those who govern in friendship with the Company. He further mentioned that whatever thing our father required that the great king and the General [sic] of Bengal could possibly provide, they would assist, and every enemy of the country of Kedah would as far as possible be prevented from committing crimes against Kedah. Help would be given to rectify any shortages; also, a land rent of 30,000 rial per annum would be paid for the island of Penang; and [in] several clauses there were also undertakings given.

And our father was in concord with all the ministers that the country of Kedah is adjacent to Siam and Burma. Both are superior to Kedah; and considering that the king who is in possession of the government in the European continent is bigger and much more powerful than Siam or Burma, it would be more prudent to be in concordance with the English company since the white man is correct in governance, nothing other than straight and conforming to the adat. If Siamese or Burmese aggression were to come, which is contrary to the adat, the Company’s power could be employed as shelter to acquire strength to repel the peril. And our father was glad to have the Company’s officials as friends with the expectation of taking shelter under the Company’s power for strengthening the state of Kedah. This is the dispatch from all of us much later because the country of Kedah is very small and does not have much power and if possible would like to depend on the Company’s power to repel the threat of Siam or Burma. Thus it is with a sincere and lucid heart that we wish to forge a friendship with the Company and so the island of Penang is given according to the request of Mr. Light, the vakeel of the former General [sic] at Bengal.

A letter of agreement with the Company was then drafted in accordance with the wishes of our late father. It was given to Mr. Light to be conveyed to the General [sic] of Bengal. After quite some time Mr. Light returned to meet our father, bringing along sepoys with the intention of occupying Penang Island. He told our father that, as requested by our father, the General [sic] of Bengal had consented. And he had assigned the people who were to stay for good in Penang Island to come first. As for the letter that our father had given, he said, the General [sic] of Bengal had already sent it to Europe to inform the European [English] king and to obtain the seal [sanction] that was to be given to our father. In six months it would come back hither.

And so our father gave permission for the occupation of [Penang] and clearance of the woods for the purpose of establishing a settlement in Pulau Pinang. Our father even instructed the rakyat to help with the work and sent chiefs to assist in guarding the settlement so that bad people would not be able to create trouble during the early period of clearing the land. Such was his preliminary command. And he waited for the letter from Europe; and after six to seven months had passed still no letter had come. After one year had gone our father demanded the letter, but Mr. Light was still putting it off, asking for an extension of time. But after having waited for six years and there was still no letter from Europe, it became apparent that there was nothing tangible to hold on to. The only thing our father received in one year was 10,000 rial [dollars]. The rest of the undertakings were not fulfilled by Mr. Light. Since our father insisted on having the letter, a little quarrel between Kedah and Penang broke out.8 Then [they] reconciled. An agreement was made at that time.9 Following that, several people came and a Governor was appointed by the Company to rule in Pulau Pinang. And then our father died without receiving any letter from Europe or from the General [sic] of Bengal.

After the demise of our father, our uncle10 became the ruler of Kedah in 1215 Hegira [1799 CE], the year when Sir George Leith became Lieutenant Governor ruling over Pulau Pinang.11 He demanded

8 Referring to the attempt made by Sultan Abdullah to get the island back by launching an armed invasion, which failed.
9 The treaty that was concluded in 1791 with the East India Company entitling the Sultan to receive an annual sum of 6,000 Spanish dollars for as long as the British occupied Penang.
10 Sultan Diya’uddin, the brother of Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Syah who succeeded the latter following his death in 1798.
11 Sir George Leith was appointed Lieutenant-Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Penang on 20 April 1800.
the coastal land lying opposite Pulau Pinang. His excuse was Penang was too small and it was impossible for the Company’s men to look for timber to do their work and to rear cows and buffaloes. And our uncle, well aware of the need to avoid giving problems to the Company, agreed to give the coastal land strip with the border and boundary determined, all in the hope of getting dependence on the power of the Company for the purpose of strength in order to be protected from the threat of enemies. And Sir George Leith gave an undertaking as stipulated in fourteen clauses and made it one spread. All previous and latter-day promises were already written in the Company’s books.

From the time our father was ruler until during the reign of our uncle there was no major trouble or disturbance. Moreover, there was not a single agent or anyone who was willing to help in delivering the treaty document to the European king or to the one who was the General [sic] of Bengal. It was all very quiet until an option was made with whoever became Governor to rule Pulau Pinang. This is the outcome of duty and an assessment of the affairs of government between Kedah and Penang. It is not possible to receive a decisive decree from Europe. And so there is no authorized place for us to hold on to that is definite in anything. And during the period of our reign over the state of Kedah when the old Siamese king was still alive, he was a good ruler as he ruled in accordance with the adat [custom]; always consistently, until his death. But when his son succeeded him in the year 1225 Hegira [1810 CE], Siamese aggression against the country of Kedah became visible. He made demands from us much in excess of the ancient adat. Moreover, we could no longer bear it. For ages the situation between Kedah and Siam had seen the demands of the Siamese being obeyed by past rajas according to what was proper and in accordance with the adat of government.

For the sake of protecting the country, there is no desire to be at war with them because they are more numerous than the Kedah population. Their demands have become increasingly more excessive, and the work imposed on us is burdensome, for they ask for things which do not conform to the ancient adat of governance, and still we obey to the extent that is bearable to protect the people and to avoid evil, so as not to create enmity with them. We have done some things that were never done by the ancient rajas, and we have disbursed much expense to realize their wishes. And yet they never seem to be satisfied; we have no respite from them. And we are not able to be rid of endless problems and hardship. They are trying to find ways of putting the blame on us and also they do not trust us, accusing us of conspiring with the Burmese, because this year they are at war with the Burmese.

The intention of Siam to find means of attacking Kedah is because it wants to rule over Kedah. We have tried to find ways to free ourselves from the enmity with Siam but we failed and there appears to be no virtue to it. We have mentioned everything regarding our affairs with Siam to the Governor of Pulau Pinang, asking for his help in making a decision and we have requested the assistance of the Company, as was hoped with confidence by our father because Kedah and Pulau Pinang are but one spread, like the situation of one being. Whenever Kedah experiences difficulty or trouble so also does Pulau Pinang.

The Governor’s advice was for us to find ways not to sever the affection with Siam. He said it was not possible to get authority to assist us because the beherma of the European Company has issued a decree that it was forbidden to render assistance to a [Malay] raja in the business of war. To our mind it might apply to other negeri, but not to Kedah because Kedah and Pulau Pinang are of one entity. The people have been much troubled and afflicted with difficulties. Every undertaking and effort to avoid enmity with Siam has exhausted us, in trying to find ways and means of not severing affection with Siam. There is no longer strength within us to acquiesce to the demands that exceed the ancient adat. Since our father had pleaded for help from the Governor of Pulau Pinang, the authority for the Company, we can reject the demands of the Siamese because our father had forger the affection that placed the stake of friendship with the Company. And thus it gave the impression of weakness in the strong power of the great raja in the continent of Europe who is well-renowned as a paramount ruler and one who is more powerful than any other.

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12 Referring to Seberang Perai (Province Wellesley). The cession of this territory took place on 15 July 1800 (1217 Hegira) with a compensation of 2,000 Spanish dollars paid to the Sultan of Kedah.
13 The old Siamese king referred to was Rama I.
14 Referring to King Rama II.
15 This is the date written in the original Jawi letter. But the date given by Anderson is 1215. Obviously the scribe was more correct in his date, even though according to several sources Rama II only ascended the throne in 1809 (1224 AH). See J. Anderson, ‘Political and Commercial Considerations Relative to the Malayan Peninsula and the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca’, JMBRAS, 35(4), 1962.
To our mind, between Kedah and Pulau Pinang the situation is of one existence. This is to remind the great king and our friend if it is still not well-understood. For that reason, in case the Governor of Pulau Pinang is unable to obtain authority to assist us, if it is already made known then the country of Kedah should not be perceived differently from Pulau Pinang. This is why we are asking for a decree from you and imploring you to help us convey this information to the great king in the continent of Europe as well as to the superiors of the Company, everything about our affair as mentioned in the letter; we have solicited for a decree to be granted as was previously agreed upon by Mr. Light with our father because we are no longer a man with authority and what is more our country is small. The name bestowed by the king of Europe will give an equitable and bounteous name and we shall be able to thank the great king for lavishing his royal bounty. And we beg to be sheltered under the daulat of power of the great king of Europe in taking sanctuary from every threat of enemies who wish to inflict injustice and aggression over the country of Kedah. We beseech the king of Europe to shower affectionate love on us as would be the situation for the followers of the great king himself. We pray that a command be issued to the person who will become the Governor-General in Pulau Pinang with authority to render assistance in anything that causes us trouble or problems and be consistent in whatever decree is issued by the king of Europe so as to let Kedah and Pulau Pinang exist as one entity.

Further to that, to the best of our power we shall not stay quiet over whatever problems faced by Pulau Pinang. We also request a letter of command from the king of Europe and yourself so that we can keep it as an assurance of confidence of being under the shelter of the power of the king of Europe until the time of our great-grandchildren who live in the country of Kedah. It is our fervent hope to be able to receive kindness and help from our friend regarding all matters.

There is no gift for our friend that is suitable for the pleasure of the eyes, except a dagger in a gold-plated casing together with a pair of brass [wares], and a mongkal [sic, bongkal] of gold, things worn by Malay, which is not as it should be; like the proverbial flower. May it be of some use. Please, by any chance, do not dishonour it. Letter is written on the twenty-sixth of Dzulqadah 1225 Hegira [23 December 1810 CE].

Kedah 1

Warkah Paduka Sri Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Syah ibni al-marhum Paduka Sri Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Syah, satu lembab, 30 x 36.5 sm
Tiada cop mohor
Dialamatkan kepada Gabenor Jeneral Benggala

Warkat al-ikhas watuhfat al-ajnas yang termaktub di dalamnya ta`azim yang salim serta mufakat tulus dan ikhlas berkash-kashan

19 Translation for ‘seperti sekuntum bunga’, an old idiomatic expression for ‘like a young girl’. Malays, as testified by several of their proverbs and pantun, are fond of using ‘flower’ as an idiomatic reference to girls or young women in general. Flowers are naturally beautiful and generally fragrant, but they nevertheless do not last forever, for they wilt or fade, just like the beauty of a woman over a period of time. When a Malay scribe of royal letters ended his letter with such an expression as ‘not as it should be’ he was merely being polite and humble to the recipient to indicate that the ‘varied gifts’ that would usually accompany the letter were but the raja’s sincere expression of modesty and that such gifts were like the proverbial flower or sekuntum bunga (literally, ‘a flower’), which should be accepted. Rejection would incur in the giver a sense of ‘malu’ (feelings of shame). For Malays, to be put to shame is to be in an abominable situation of being ‘ahir’ (dishonoured). This is the negative aspect of the essence of the Malay budi. See Lim Kim Hui, Budi as the Malay Mind: A Philosophical Study of Malay Ways of Reasoning and Emotion in Peribahasa, PhD thesis, University of Hamburg, 2003. See also R. J. Wilkinson, ‘Malay Proverbs on Malay Character’ in his Papers on Malay Subjects: Malay Literature (Pt. 3), F.M.S. Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1907, pp. 1–20.
16 It is not clear what object of tembaga (Malay for brass or copper) is being referred to. It could be objects such as a pair of brass trays, platters or containers, or perhaps the term merely refers to a pair of bar-copper (tembaga lantak). It is worth noting that the Malay word tembaga is in fact a generic term. See R. J. Wilkinson, A Malay-English Dictionary, Macmillan & Co. Ltd, London, 1959, Vol. 2, pp. 1191–1192.
17 Measure of weight of gold, equivalent to 16 meyam or 53.9 grams.
yang tiada berputusan selagi ada perkaran cakrawala, matahari dan bulan, daripada beta Paduka Seri Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Syah ibni al-Marhum Paduka Seri Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Syah, yang mempunyai kerajaan negeri Kedah. Barang disampaikan Tuhan sarwa sekalian alam ke hadapan sahabat beta, Tuan Jeneral yang mentadbirkan kerajaan negeri Benggala darul makmur; lagi memerintah di atas segala negeri yang di atas angin dan di bawah angin; barang yang dalam perkerjaan pegangan Beherma Kompeni Eropah; lagi sangat bijaksana akan bicara sangat sempurna perintahnya patut, masyhur; bahana diakas oleh mulia dan hianya [sic, ianya] lagi kepujian serta kebimbingan masyhur berani di dalam perpecahan; lagi menanggung martabat dan pegangan beberapa negeri yang di bawah tangan, lagi sangat masyhur namanya pada menolong sahabat handainya pada barang maksud atau sepatutnya; pada zaman ini sukar taranya.


21 To make known.
22 Anderson put the year as 1199. See Anderson, ‘Political and Commercial Considerations Relative to the Malay Peninsula’, p. 75.
23 From Portuguese ‘mestre’.
24