Lasting Impressions
Seals from the Islamic World

Annabel Teh Gallop
and Venetia Porter
Islamic seals were the namecards of their day. In early Islamic societies a seal presented the image a person wished to project to the world, yet often conveyed much more than was written or perhaps intended. A seal inscribed simply with the name of the owner and a pious phrase might also reveal when and where that person lived, their social status and aspirations, and their religious beliefs. While the calligraphy and design of a seal reflected the artistic spirit of its time and place, it could also be shaped by personal taste, whether cutting-edge or conservative.

Presented in this book are over 300 Islamic seals, dating from the earliest days of Islam through to the modern era. They include both matrices made of precious stone and metal, and impressions stamped on manuscript documents and books, mainly from the collections of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, the British Library and the British Museum. Unlike European seals which are primarily pictorial, in Islamic seals the inscription takes centre stage. It is this focus on writing, in the sacred Arabic script, which links seals from all parts of the Muslim world, from Morocco to Malaysia, and from Iran to India and Indonesia.

Masterworks in miniature, each of these seals leaves lasting impressions of the people who commissioned and used them, and the Islamic worlds in which they were created.
Annabel Teh Gallop is curator for Maritime Southeast Asia at the British Library. Her Ph.D. was on Malay seal inscriptions: a study in Islamic epigraphy from Southeast Asia (2002), and she has written widely on Malay seals, letters and documents, and on the art of the Qur'an in Southeast Asia.

Venetta Porter is curator of Islamic and Modern Middle Eastern Art at the British Museum. Her publications include Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum (2011) and Word into Art (2006), and, as editor, Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam (2012).
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Nilai Sebentuk Tanda
Cap Mohor Dunia Islam
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البصمة الخالدة
الأختام في العالم الإسلامي
Lasting Impressions
Seals from the Islamic World

Annabel Teh Gallop and Venetia Porter

with contributions from
Heba Nayel Barakat, Nurul Iman Rusli, Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria, Fariba Roomi, Arif Naushabi and Jan van der Putten

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in association with the British Library and the British Museum
2012

British Library-British Museum travelling photographic exhibition the Islamic World, which toured the UK in 2010 and 2011.

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itations.

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Ahmad Sayf al-Din (see § 1). IAMM 1004. S.62

-Right side, Muhammad bin Muhammad, 27.3 mm. (P129). IAMM 1004. S.62

scribed with the shahada: La ilaha illa Allah Muhammad rasul Allah, "There is no god but God,
22 mm. (P142). IAMM 1004. S.62

estion from the IAMM collection (see § 4.S.1).

g gemstones, from an album of Indian occupations, drawn in a Lucknow style, ca. 1825. BL 4480.0.0186
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It is with great pleasure that I endorse this scholarly publication, *Lasting Impressions: Seals from the Islamic World*. This is a publication that highlights not only the importance of seal culture, including the tradition of writing and recording, around the Islamic world over a span of 1300 years, but dedicates much attention to South East Asia. Exposing the compelling role of the Malay world is for sure one of the major endeavours of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, and this publication certainly aspires to fulfill that aim. With this short foreword, I leave you with a guiding verse from the Holy Quran, to contemplate:

2:282 O ye who believe! When ye deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing Let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties: let not the scribe refuse to write: as Allah Has taught him, so let him write.
irman’s Foreword
Syed Mokhtar Albukhary

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Director’s Foreword
Syed Mohamad Albukhary

This book and exhibition, *Lasting Impressions: Seals from the Islamic World*, is indeed a very important endeavour undertaken by two experts in the field, Annabel Gallop of the British Library and Venetia Porter of the British Museum. The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia is proud to support and publish this scholarly work and present it to art historians, seal art specialists and enthusiasts. We are also proud to make available the Iamm collection as a prominent component in the book, thus exposing the marvels of the Malay world seal culture perhaps for the first time in such depth.

Although engraved seals are among the tiniest artifacts found in museums and collections, they were always cherished as being very valuable personal possessions. The seal impressions were the proof of a person's consent on documents such as marriage certificates, commercial interactions, and waqf deeds. They came in different shapes, mirroring a wide range of decorative embellishments from around the Islamic world. Today we recognize seals as symbols of authority pertinent to government officials yet since they were recommended by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ they became a prominent part of the Muslim culture.

With the hadith of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the art of the seal emerged and flourished around the Islamic world. They were cherished by royalty and in many dynasties official bureaus were established to regulate and safeguard the royal seal. Complex administrative systems developed early on during the Umayyad Dynasty with Diwan al-Khatam or ‘Office of the Seal’, with officials known as Saheb Et tabs in the Middle East and North Africa, Mohsrar in Mughal India and Safavid Iran, and Nisanci in Ottoman Turkey.

*Lasting Impressions: Seals from the Islamic World* reveals the beauty and significance of the seal in the Muslim world with a special emphasis on the Malay world. I would therefore like to thank the British Library and the British Museum for their collaboration, and Annabel Gallop and Venetia Porter for all their time, effort and hard work. I would also like to congratulate all Iamm staff who have contributed to this project, and invite scholars to further research the topic and unveil more knowledge of the world of Islamic seals.
Preface and Acknowledgements

This book has grown out of a travelling photographic exhibition, Lasting Impressions: Seals from the Islamic World, produced by the British Library and the British Museum in 2010. The exhibition toured the United Kingdom for two years, visiting libraries and museums in Liverpool, Cardiff, Birmingham, Leicester, Lewisham, Cambridge, Exeter and Oxford, as well as being shown in London in the John Addis Gallery of Islamic Art in the British Museum.

The exhibition was one of a number of activities organised to showcase a collection of drawings and manuscript letters from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781 – 1826), acquired in 2007 by the British Library with the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Art Fund, Friends of the National Libraries, Friends of the British Library, Mr John Koh and other donors. Raffles arrived in Penang in 1805 at the start of a twenty-year career in Southeast Asia in the service of the East India Company, and is best known today for founding a British settlement at Singapore in 1819. The Raffles Family Collection includes about a hundred royal Malay letters, sent from rulers and senior officials of the Malay courts of the archipelago to Raffles, who was based in Melaka in 1810 and 1811. It was the seals on these letters which formed the core of the photographic exhibition Lasting Impressions: Seals from the Islamic World, together with images of other Islamic seal impressions found on manuscripts in the British Library, and seal matrices from the British Museum.

We were delighted to be invited by the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia to collaborate in the staging of an exhibition on Islamic seals at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, which would present the Museum's own growing and increasingly important collection of Islamic seal matrices and manuscripts bearing seal impressions, and to write a book on Islamic seals. This book has given us the opportunity to develop the themes first presented in the photographic exhibition, which gave a broad introduction to Islamic seals culture. Building on our earlier work and publications – Porter on the Arabic and Persian seal matrices and amulets in the British Museum, and Gallop on Islamic seal impressions on manuscripts from Southeast Asia – we have sought to bring together the scholarship on both seal matrices and seal impressions, and to place a special emphasis on seals from the Malay world. The book has also aimed to highlight the seals in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, including rarities such as a unique collection of legal documents from Xinjiang (1.6) and the carnelian seal of a Mughal princess (1.10).

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We would like to express our gratitude to the Director of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Syed Mohamad Albukhary, for sharing our passion for Islamic seals and for inviting us to write this book. We would also like to record our appreciation for the warm collaboration we have enjoyed with the Curatorial Affairs Department of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, especially from Dr Heba Nayel Barakat, Nurul Iman Rashi, Ros Malwati Ahmad Zakaria and Fariba Roomi, who selected and interpreted the exhibits from the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia collections, and contributed to the text and captions of this book. Our appreciation is also extended to the photographers and graphic unit of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, especially Ahmad Marida Alias. We would also like to thank our contributing authors Arif Naushahi and Jan van der Putten, and our colleagues Colin Baker, Muhammad Isa Waley and Ursula Sims-Williams for help in identifying, reading and describing items from the British Library collections.

Many institutions and private collections have kindly given permission for images of items from their collections to be included in this book; these are acknowledged individually at the end of the book. For assistance with images we are very grateful to Ali Akbar, Jorge Santos Alves, John Falconer, Thoralf Hanstein, Elizabeth Hunter, Kristina Münchow, Daniel Perret, Anna Pezzopane, Pedro Pinto and Alex Teoh. Our special thanks are due to Hannah Yates who designed this book, and who also designed the original photographic exhibition and accompanying leaflet.

Annabel Teh Gallop, British Library, and Venetia Porter, British Museum

1 For a list of verses in 2010 see Gallop & Porter 2010: 12.
2 Full transliterations and English translations of these letters are presented in Ahmadi (2009), and many of the letters are reproduced in facsimile in Gallop (1994).
3 Porter 2011.
4 Gallop 2002.