الله عليك بالله ثم على لكننا
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
الأولين الذي خلق ثم الفعلاء
الأخيه والعالم يا بسم الله
عليه اليوم هو لعنت الله على
أعداءه مرجع اليوم الذي قررت
Above and right Letter in Malay and Arabic from Abdul Halim of Kelantan in Mecca to Sultan Abdul Hamid of Pontianah, 12 Safar 1233/26 June 1866. In accordance with Ottoman practice the seal, impressed in black ink in the bottom left corner, is inscribed: "LAMM 1838.3.1000."

Left and above Letter from Fath 'Ali Shah of Iran to King George III, accompanied by his seal stamped on a separate piece of paper surrounded by illumination, 1808. The seal reads: al-'izz illah / girfī khatim-i shah / zi qadr-i 

This text appears to be a continuation of a historical or cultural description, possibly related to diplomatic correspondence or inscriptions. The text is likely to be about historical events, diplomatic relations, or the significance of the seals mentioned.
Neither too high nor too low:
the position of the seal on a letter

Delicate protocol surrounded the positioning of the seal on a royal letter in some Islamic societies, for its placement depended on the perceived relative status of sender and recipient. When the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r.1605 – 1627) wrote to King James I (r.1603 – 1625) in 1619 on the occasion of the first English diplomatic mission to India, his seal was not stamped on the letter itself. On his return, the British ambassador Sir Thomas Roe is said to have reported Jahangir’s concerns over the placement of the seal, ‘lest, if under, hee should disgrace himselfe, if over, it might cause distast to the king;’ and the solution, apparently, was to send the great seal itself to London ‘that so His Majestie might according to his own pleasure affixe it.’ The seal sent was said to be silver.¹ Four years earlier, when another royal letter from Jahangir was delivered to the English merchants, the solution had been to send an ink impression on a separate piece of paper, for ‘if it were on top itt sheweth supercroft; if underneath, inferiourtye; but being loose, equalltye.’² An illuminated Persian letter from Fath Ali Shah of Iran (r.1797 – 1834) to King George III (r.1760 – 1820) in 1808 is accompanied by a separate piece of paper bearing an impression of his seal, suggesting that this custom was also then current in Qajar Iran. However, in the earlier Safavid era the custom had been to stamp the royal seal on the back of letters to foreign monarchs, showing that even in the same place different protocols may have prevailed at different times.

¹. Miller, 1915, 188
². Miller, 1915, 187

Left and above Letter from Fath Ali Shah of Iran to King George III, accompanied by his seal stamped on a separate piece of paper surrounded by illumination, 1808. The seal reads: Al-hamdu la ilaha illallah / geben bismillah / wassalam wahu shah ziti quadrat / astall qurur dar hajf / shah cunam Fath Ali 1217, ‘Glory is for God. With the help of eternal power the royal seal has settled in the hands of Fath Ali Shah, the King of the Arya, 1217/1802 – 31: 48 mm. The National Archives, FO 94/196(1)
The exact position of the seal on a Malay letter was also of the greatest importance. As a general principle, the higher or more to the right the position of the seal on a letter, the greater the social standing of the sender of the letter compared to the person addressed. In Malay guides to letter writing, the known tenets, there is more information on the position of the seal than on any other aspect, for the decision could have serious diplomatic repercussions. In 1666, Sultan Abdal Jalil of Johor (r.1623 – 1677) explained to the Dutch Governor of Melaka that ‘it was the custom that the name and seal of both rulers and commoners be placed in the middle of the letter. However, in the last two letters he received from Jambi, the Panggeran Ratu had put his name and seal on the top of the letter, thus clearly and arrogantly indicating that he was greater than the ruler of Johor.’ This was one of a number of provocative incidents between Jambi and Johor in the 1660s which culminated in the destruction of Johor by forces from Jambi in 1673.

Very few letters exchanged between the Muslim courts of Southeast Asia have survived. In the letters sent by Malay rulers to European officials, the usual neutral polite position for the seal of the sender was in the right hand margin with its midpoint alongside the start of the first line. In letters from many other parts of the Muslim world, though, the standard position for the seal was in the bottom left hand corner, at the end of the text.

1 Foster 1899: 568.
2 Foster 1899: 568.
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4 Andaya 1975: 89.