(A) Carmilian, 13th–13th c., with its impression. Inscribed with the names of the Twelve Imams, 30 mm. (P341). 1481/2-1482/3.

Seal of the shrine of Imam Rida in Mashhad, Iran, with the names of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones and their attributes set in small circles surrounding the centre inscription, which is dated 1193/1683. At the centre are the words 'As-Ilha willa, there is no power except in God' (mu shka Allah la qawwalu illa Ilha). 148 mm. 166.0-167.0 "or 167."
Dates on seals and amulets

Apart from the rare examples of administrative seals (see 1.1.), early seals are undated. Dates do not begin to appear with any frequency on seals until about the sixteenth century. They are important because they allow us to ascertain when particular styles of script or types of inscription were popular, and offer the possibility of being able to assign dates to the large body of seals without dates. The dates appear in the form of numerals, and in some cases only three numerals are shown, the initial '1' having been left out. Occasionally dates are written from right to left, rather than the usual left to right. Moghal seals often additionally gave the regnal year of the emperor, while seals of Europeans might bear a date solely in the Christian era.

In this section all the items are from the collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, and they have been arranged in chronological order. Shown on this page are dated amulets (inscribed in positive), and overleaf are dated seals.
Above Carnelian, dated 1111/1699 – 1700.
Amal... Majid... Tahir Muhammad 1111, 'Work of... Majid... Yar Muhammad 1111.' 15 mm. IAMM 2004.5.76

Above Carnelian, in a silver mount, dated 1122/1710 – 11. Yar Khan Jafari padishah-i ghazi 1122 shahi alwani rakhaman 5, 'Yar Khan, vessel of the warrior king, 1122, the merciful king of the world 5.' 30 mm. IAMM 2013.11.04

Above Carnelian, dated 1135/1721 – 2.
Allah uabcdefghi la Allah tabahnu al-
Mutalib 1135, 'I entrust my life to God, His servant al-Mutalib.' 13 mm. IAMM 2004.8.48

Below Carnelian, dated 1153/1740 – 9.
al-muhabb Sharaf Jahan 1153, 'The
repentant [servant of God], Sharaf Jahan 1153.' 14 mm. IAMM 2004.5.69

Below White stone, dated 1153/1740 – 1.
Mohammad Jafri... 1153. 20 mm. IAMM 2004.5.76

Below Carnelian, dated 1153/1740 – 1.
al-mutawakkil Allal al-Ghazi Taha Ali Reza 1153, 'He who entrusts himself to God, the Sufficient One, His servant Ali Reza 1153.' 20 mm. IAMM 2004.5.67
‘His servant’:
seals from the Hijaz

Calligraphic niceties on Islamic seals tend to be regionally specific, and it is therefore somewhat surprising to find one particular seal design used in very diverse places. Most of the seals in this group are small wide ovals, and all share the initial word of the inscription – 'abdulaha, 'His servant', meaning the servant of God – written in a highly distinctive way. The tail of the initial letter, 'ayn, sweeps around the whole seal, making an elaborate knot at the top, and forming an enclosure for the rest of the inscription, which invariably consists of the sealholder’s name, and perhaps a date. Two shallow arcs formed at the top of the seal on either side of the knot are always filled with floral or foliate fronds.

So far ten such seals have been documented, bearing dates from 1821 to 1863. Five are from Southeast Asia, including one inscribed 'abdulaha Abdillah ibn Muhammad Amin 1258, 'His servant, Abdullah, son of Muhammad Amin, 1258–1842 – 3'. This is the seal of a famous Terengganu scholar, Wan Abdullah bin Wan Muhammad Amin, known as Tok Syaikh Duyong, who was born in Patani in ca.1802.

From 1832 he spent long periods in Mecca before returning to Terengganu in 1846, where he held the post of Mufti from 1853 until his death in 1889. His seal is found stamped in all his books still in the possession of his descendants. Two seals belong to Muhammad Ghaith, an Acehnese trader who made regular visits to the Hijaz, and who in 1849 acted as an envoy from the Acehnese Sultan Mansur Syah to the Ottoman court (B). Two camelion seal matrices are in the Ashmolean Museum, one bearing a Persian name, Bahram, and dated 1260/1844 – 5, and the other a name perhaps from the north-western part of the Islamic world, Anton Mihkhal, dated [12]249/1833 – 4.7

Another seal in the name of Khair al-Kahan is stamped – together with many other seals – on a formal address in Samaritan and Arabic to Queen Victoria from the Samaritans of Nablus, Palestine, in 1875.8 The earliest dated seal in this group is that of the Commercial Agent of Jeddah, Muhammad Zargham, dated 1237/1821 – 2, while the latest, dated 1280/1863 – 4, is that of another Malay resident of Mecca, Muhammad Yunus from Batahuhara in north-east Sumatra, who is known to have been a khulija of the Khalidiyya-Naqibbandiyya
His servant':
seals from the Hijaz

Seals tend to be regionally specific, surprising to find one particular seal
in another region. Most of the seals in this group
are the initial word of the inscription
the servant of God — written in a
vocalic form of the initial letter, ‘ayn, sweeps around
the knot on the top, and forming an
inscription, which invariably consists of
many letters. Two shallow arcs formed
the knot of the seal are always filled with
date of the seal. There are dates that
have been documented, bearing dates from
the tenth to the thirteenth century. Among these,
Muslim, and dated 1280/1863 — 4; is that of another Malay resident
of Mecca, Muhammad Yunus from Batu Bahara in north-east Sumatra,
who is known to have been a khalif of the Khaldiyah-Nababandiya
brotherhood in Mecca (A). An undated octagonal bloodstone seal
in the British Museum, in the Persian name Haydar, is from the
collection of the Dukes of Blacas, and hence predates 1869 (D).

One likely source for such similar seals being used by people from
southern Asia is the melting-pot that was the Hijaz, not only due
to the annual hajj pilgrimage but also because long periods of
study were spent in the Holy Cities. Documents in the Ottoman archives
reveal that many non-noble Southeast Asians pilgrims, who would not
otherwise have had seals in their home communities, had seals made
on arrival in the Hijaz in order to comply with Ottoman bureaucratic
rules or to conform with Middle Eastern practice (C). A Meccan or Jodlan
origin might thus be a logical common factor linking seals used by
Muslims from all over the world.

Muslim 1984: 53 — 57.

Khalaf 1986: 20, 22.


Above A document issued from the Sanctuary of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, with the seal and signature of the Shaykh al-Islam, the Deputy Keeper and the Treasurer of the Sanctuary, 1879. The letter is addressed to Bhagwan Shah Jahan of Bhopal in central India, informing him of the appointment of a new official in charge of pilgrims from his kingdom. BL Or.13811

(C) Seal of Idris of Aceh: 'abduhku Idris ibn Abdal Rauf al-Ary 1288, 'His servant, Idris, son of Abdul Rauf, of Aceh, 1288/1871 — 2' (91927), on a petition in Arabic to the Ottoman authorities complaining about the Dutch treatment of pilgrims, ca. 1873, with 63 seals of pilgrims from Aceh and Kerinci (see 1.3). Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, Istanbul. A.30108/1875: 315

(D) Bloodstone seal of Haydar: 'abduhku Haydar, 'His servant, Haydar', of unknown provenance, but of similar design to the seal impressions. 10 mm. (JP25), BL 106112 — 29 125