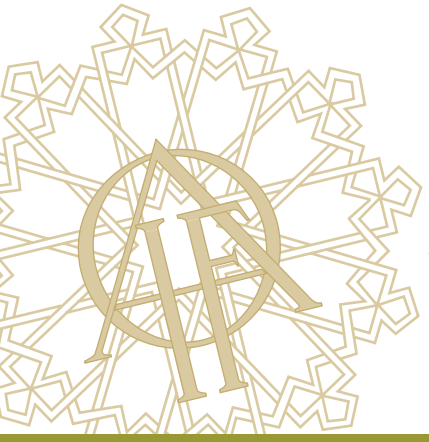
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Elevatio in Malay Diplomatics.

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ANNABEL TEH GALLOP

Elevatio in Malay Diplomatics

The "Look of the Letter"

The study of Islamic diplomatics has generally avoided tackling the 'big picture', and instead has concentrated on building up a firm foundation of detailed and often meticulous case studies delineated by language or dynasty. In view of the long history and wide geographic spread of the use of Persian as a chancery language, the study of Persian diplomatics is probably that which best approaches a global study of Islamic practice,[1] while the study of Arabic documents in the post-classical period, by comparison, has tended to be centred on discrete, non-contiguous dynasties. Every now and then there is a welcome publication of a new body of documents from lesser-known Islamic chanceries, for example, of court papers in Javanese from Yogyakarta (Carey 1980), diplomatic letters in Arabic from the Barbary states (Hopkins 1982) and land grants in Arabic from the Dar Fur sultanate (O'Fahey & Abu Salim 2003), although many other parts of the Islamic world, including much of the Indian Ocean littoral, remain uncharted diplomatic territory.

The emphasis on, and continuing need for, localised micro-studies is entirely understandable given the great variation in content and form, over space and time, of documents from Islamic chanceries. A search for "common denominators"—in the mathematically-precise sense of elements common to all Islamic documents—is in vain, for nothing was fixed, not even that crucial determinant of Islamic identity: the Arabic script and its derivatives. Nonetheless,

1. See especially Busse 1960; Fragner 1999.

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there is a formal unity of sorts to many Islamic documents: there are features that occur and recur in chancery documents from different parts of the Islamic world, even if it is not always possible yet to trace the narrative thread that links them. Leaving aside for the time being the textual composition of documents and focusing instead on the *mise-en-page* or graphic arrangement of the constituent elements on the page—the "look of the letter", to paraphrase Wright[2]—it is possible to propose a different way of approaching Islamic documents, by tracking particular features across spatial, temporal and linguistic boundaries, as has been done for Islamic codices by Déroche *et al.* (2005).

The need for such an approach is underlined by a number of regional studies which interpret certain formal characteristics as local peculiarities, without recognizing their place in the broader scheme of Islamic diplomatics. One pertinent example is the widespread and quintessentially Islamic practice of siting the text block of a document in the lower-left portion of a sheet of paper, yielding a large margin to the right, and then continuing the text diagonally upside-down in the broad right-hand margin.[3] Evidence of this practice is found all over the Islamic world: it can be seen in two 16th century letters in Turkish from the Ottoman "Sultana" Sāfiye to Elizabeth I published by Skilliter (Stern 1965: Pl. XXXIX-XL) and in the 18th-century royal letter in Arabic from Aceh illustrated in this article (fig. 2). A particularly elaborate example is a Malay letter written in 1865 by a professional scribe in Riau (in present-day Indonesia), whereby the entire sheet of paper is covered with text written in four different spatial orientations (Putten 2001:103). Nonetheless, an editor of 16th to 18th century letters from Morocco noted (emphasis added):

> "In many cases the writing is laid out in *a peculiar and characteristic way*. The scribe leaves a margin on the right-hand side of the sheet extending about a third of the way across. He begins his letter on the left-hand side and, when he has filled this side, he turns the sheet from top to bottom and continues in the margin, which is now on his left. But instead of making his lines parallel with those he has already written he begins at the inner corner and writes diagonally so that these new lines make an angle of about 45 degrees with the previous ones" (Hopkins 1982:VIII).

Another reading of this widespread scribal practice as a local phenomenon is found in a fascinating anthropological study of Yemen which makes the writing culture a central metaphor for social change (Messick 1993). In a chapter headed "Spiral Texts", Messick gives a detailed description of how "a Yemeni writer of the period"—around 1920—would write a document, first filling the lower left quadrant of the paper, and then turning the sheet of paper and continuing writing nearly upside-down, with perhaps yet another change of direction so as to arc diagonally through the upper right quadrant. The move from these "spiral texts" to modern documents with their straight lines, ruled borders and equidistant margins is seen as signifying, in the Yemeni case:

2. Wright 1997; I was alerted to the elegance and utility of this "felicitious" phrase by Clinton & Simpson (2006:176, n.15).

3. The roots of this practice probably lie in the similar graphic presentation of marginal annotations in Islamic codices (Déroche 2005:178; Khatibi & Sijelmassi 2001:148-151).

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> "… changes in the basic epistemological structure of the document, with the principles underpinning the document's construction and its authority. These have to do in turn, with a backdrop of changing relations of production and advancing commercialization." (Messick 1993:234-235).

Both these studies highlight the need for comparative regional studies of specific elements of Islamic diplomatics, which would serve to clarify the status of features common to many cultures, while also identifying true local peculiarites.[4] Such a treatment could be applied not only to core elements such as the *invocatio* or religious superscription, but also to less prominent aspects of chancery documents. In this paper I offer an investigation of the extent of awareness of one of the more rarified features of Islamic diplomatics—*elevatio*—in the Muslim courts of Southeast Asia.[5]

Elevatio in Islamic Diplomatics

In diplomatics, *elevatio* refers to the practice of removing a word or phrase from its normal position in a sequence of text, and, as a mark of honour, placing these words in a different, more prominent, position on the document. The place in the text from which the phrase is removed is either left blank or marked with a caret or other such graphic device to alert the reader to the need to reinstate an omission. This practice of "honorific elevation" originated in China, and its historic journey westwards through the Islamic world into the Ottoman chancery has been tracked by Ménage (1985:291-299), from which the following account is quoted and summarised:

> "The Chinese practice, in a script whose characters are written in vertical lines, was that when the text reached a name, a title or a concept enjoying special veneration the line was stopped short and the honoured character(s) were made to begin (i.e. to head) the next line, often being elevated one or two spaces above the top margin. This device was adopted by the chanceries of the Mongols …" (Ménage 1985:291).

Ménage then refers to some well-known Ilkhānid examples in Uyghur script, including the letter from Arghun to Philip the Fair of France of 1289.

> "When, with the adoption of Arabic script, texts came to be written horizontally (in Uyghur script as well), the same practice was continued, but with the modifications entailed by the fact that the former top margin was now the right margin … a word occurring in the body of a text which required reverent emphasis might be written well out in the right margin, sometimes in gold, sometimes slighly above the line to which it belonged, and with its place in the text usually left blank, so that the reader could unhesitatingly restore it. In a word, 'elevation' became a horizontal 'extrusion' (Ménage 1985:291).

4. For example, Hopkins (1982:VIII) also remarks, "There is another style of layout of which there is a single example. Here the lines are curved and form, approximately, concentric arcs of a circle centred on the upper right-hand corner of the sheet". Unfortunately no facsimile is given of this letter, which, from the description, does indeed sound singular.

5. This paper was inspired by the brilliant article by Ménage (1985); it has also benefited from the comments of Jan Van der Putten, who helped to impart a sense of proportion to my thoughts.

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The next development came from the Akkoyunlu chancery where "extrusion" was reinforced with "elevation", for in a number of courteous letters from Uzun Hasan (r. 1453-1478) the "extruded" name of the addressee is moved to a higher position, albeit still over the right-hand margin.

> "Right-hand margins, however, being narrow, offered little scope for indicating a gradation of respect towards the various words which had a claim to visual prominence. To judge from the facsimiles which I have been able to see, the chancery which first adopted the solution of moving words up into the blank space above the text—thus reverting to the true 'elevation' of Chinese and Mongol practice—was that of the Khanate of the Crimea." (Ménage 1985:292).

A clear example of this practice is the respectful letter of the Crimean dignitary Eminek to the Ottoman sultan Mehemmed II of 1478. In documents from the Ottoman chancery, *elevatio* only appears during or even after the reign of Suleymān, most probably inspired by Crimean practice, and becomes well entrenched, with examples from the Hungarian Esterházy archive from the early 17th century attesting to its spread into the Ottoman provinces (Ménage 1985:296, 299).

As with many aspects of Islamic diplomatics, scholarly enquiry has focused on the pivotal earlier periods, with less interest in the later 18th and 19th centuries, despite the much larger numbers of surviving documents. It is not known, therefore, just how long this practice survived in Ottoman circles, or how far it spread outwards into the Ottoman sphere of influence. It is also not known whether the "extrusion" of the Persian tradition evolved at its own pace into "elevation", although it has been noted that the practice of extrusion into the right margin continued in Persian *farmān*-s at least up to the 18th century (Fragner 1999:287).

Despite the lack of published studies, later evidence of the spread of *elevatio* can be traced through facsimile publications of original documents. For example, *elevatio* was evidently common practice in Arabic epistles written from Ethiopia in the mid-19th century, mainly addressed to the Egyptian Governors of the Sudan (Rubenson 1987:92, 94, 98, 99, 100, 102). In these letters, there is a blank space at the appropriate place in the text, while the addressee's name, written in a bold *tughra*-like form, is situated above the text block to the left. The elevation of the addressee's name can also be seen in three Arabic letters in Leiden University Library dating from 1798 to 1800 from the ruler of Oman, Imam Sultan b. Ahmad, to the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia (Witkam 2003: Nos. 220, 273, 275). This last example is important as proof that—whether or not its significance was understood or appreciated in Batavia at that time—*elevatio* as a diplomatic practice had certainly made a landfall in Southeast Asia.

Elevatio in the Malay World: an Early Letter from Ternate, 1522

The first Islamic kingdom in Southeast Asia was established at Pasai, on the northeast coast of Sumatra, by the end of the 13th century. Although there is a reasonably continuous Islamic epigraphic record from various parts of the Malay world in the form of inscriptions on glass, stone and metal from possibly as early as the second half of the 9th century onwards

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(Kalus 2000:23), the earliest surviving Islamic documents on paper from Southeast Asia only date from the early 16th century. These are two letters written in Malay, using the modified form of the Arabic script known as Jawi,[6] sent from Sultan Abu Hayat of Ternate in the north Moluccas and dateable to 1521 and early 1522. They are addressed to the King of Portugal (then John III), and are now held in the Tombe do Torro archives in Lisbon.[7] Their utmost rarity can be seen from available statistics: only 13 other pre-1650 original Malay letters are known, and the next earliest date from 1599 (Gallop 2003:402). Considerable numbers of Malay documents only survive from the late 18th century onwards. The largest proportion of these are diplomatic epistles sent from rulers and ministers of the Malay courts to British and Dutch officials, now preserved in official archives; much less well represented are documents dealing with the internal machinery of the state or correspondence between the courts of the archipelago. It is thus very difficult to talk with any certainty about early Islamic diplomatics in Southeast Asia, as what we know can only be gleaned and reconstructed from later documents.

The uniquely early date of the two Ternate letters means that they have to be interpreted with considerable care, and as regards their use of language Blagden (1930:87) warned that they "cannot be regarded as typical of the Malay epistolary style of the period". Nonetheless, in terms of their *mise-en-page*, both letters reflect an awareness of some general tenets of Islamic chancery practice, with the text blocks sited in the lower-left portion of the sheet of paper with a margin on the right, and at the top the *invocatio*, called in Malay sources *kepala surat*, "letter heading". On the 1521 letter this is *al-Fath*, "the Beginning", while the 1522 letter has two headings: *al-hamd lillāh rabb al-ʿālamīn*, "Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds", and *yā ʿAzīz yā Ghaffār*, "O Most Mighty One, O Ever Forgiving One".

There is, however, one unusual feature in the layout of the 1522 letter (fig. 1), namely the arrangement of the first line, which reads:

Ini surat kasih Sultan Abu Hayat surat datang kepada ayahanda Sultan Portukal

"This is an affectionate letter from Sultan Abu Hayat, a letter to his father the Sultan of Portugal".

The first word, *ini*, "this", starts from a position which extrudes slightly into the right margin, while the line ends with *Sulta* and continues with *n Portukal* climbing up the left-hand edge of the paper at an angle of 90°. What has evidently happened here is that the scribe ran out of room on the first line, but rather than breaking the title of the *Sultan Portukal* and placing *Portukal* on the second line, he continued upwards, ensuring that the titles of both rulers were on the same line. Although this is not an example of *elevatio* in the specific technical sense described above, it does indicate adherence to a protocol that the name of an honoured correspondent should not, if possible, be placed on a lower level. By comparison, there are no oddities of layout with the earlier, 1521, letter, as both titles fit comfortably onto the first line:

6. There are five additional letters in Jawi used to represent sounds in Malay not found in Arabic: c (pronounced 'ch' as in 'chair'), g, p, ng and ny. According to standard conventions for the transliteration of Jawi, the Arabic letter *shīn* is represented by 'sy', pronounced 'sh'.

7. First published by Blagden 1930; reproduced in colour facsimile in Gallop 1994:123.

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Raja Sultan Abu Hayat surat datang kepada mama Raja Portukal, raja (be)sar al-dunia alam

"A letter from Raja Sultan Abu Hayat to his uncle the Raja of Portugal, the great king of the whole world".

Out of many thousands of Malay letters seen, this 1522 Ternate letter is the only one in which—albeit tangentially—the principles underlying the diplomatic practice of *elevatio* are acknowledged. In all other letters in Malay, names and titles, however honoured, simply occupy their expected positions within the text of the letter. However, a crucial piece of evidence has emerged to show that even though it was not apparently part of the Malay epistolary tradition, the Islamic diplomatic principle of *elevatio* was well understood in at least one Malay court in the 18th century.

The Chancery of Aceh in the 18th Century

Despite the relatively large number of Malay letters that have survived addressed to officials of the English and Dutch East India Companies and their institutional heirs,[8] these represent only a very small proportion of the number of epistles actually despatched. In general only translations of the contents of such letters were sent back to England or Holland, while the originals were either discarded or held in local repositories, and have subsequently mostly been lost. Ironically, one of the richest collections of original early letters and documents relating to trade in the Malay world originates from the smallest of the European chartered companies of the time active in Asia: the Danish East India Company, which operated from its base in Tranquebar (Tarangambadi) on the Coromandel coast of India from 1620 to 1845.[9] The Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet) in Copenhagen consequently holds a small but extremely important collection of original Malay documents from Aceh (on the northern tip of Sumatra), Banten (in west Java), Kedah and Johor (on the Malay peninsula), dating from the late-17th to mid-18th centuries.[10]

After the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511, Aceh grew to become the greatest Islamic kingdom in Southeast Asia, establishing direct links with Turkey (Reid 1969) and playing a major part in Indian Ocean trade. As the westernmost state in the Malay archipelago, Aceh was the first port of call for the British and Dutch who arrived at the beginning of the 17th century in search of spices. There is a wealth of information on Aceh in British and Dutch archival sources, and it is therefore surprising that only three original 17th century royal letters from

8. The English East India Company lasted from 1600-1858, whereupon its powers and possessions, including its library and archive, were transferred to the Crown. The Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) lasted from 1602-1799, when its powers were taken over by the state.

9. Cf. Anderson 2001; Tranquebar was under British rule for a brief period from 1808-1815.

10. I am indebted to Ulrich Kratz for drawing my attention to this collection, and for sharing with me copies of the Malay documents with seals (cf. Kratz 1998). The existence of the Aceh documents in the Rigsarkivet was first mentioned in the unpublished M.A. thesis by Anderson 1995:188.

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Aceh have survived (Gallop 2007). This makes the presence in Copenhagen of over 40 original documents from Aceh dating from the first half of the 18th century, including 21 royal letters, all the more remarkable.

The Aceh documents in the Rigsarkivet range from small receipts issued by the customs office to royal letters from sultans of Aceh to the Danish East India Company in Tranquebar. Of very great interest is the multilingual nature of the collection. Internal harbour documents are in Malay, but diplomatic missives are written not only in Malay but also in Arabic, Persian and Tamil, and in one of these Arabic letters we find a clear example of *elevatio* applied to the title of the Danish Governor in Tranquebar (fig. 2).

The undated letter is written on a large sheet of paper, with the text block situated in the lower left third of the sheet, with a large empty space above; in the right margin is an addendum, written diagonally upside down. In the centre of the letter, above the text block, is the great seal of the sultan of Aceh, in the distinctive nine-fold shape inspired by the genealogical seal of the Mughal emperors of India (Gallop 1999). The seal is in the name of Sultan Alauddin Ahmad Shah of Aceh (r. 1727-1735), but the letter is from his son Sultan Alauddin Johan Shah (r. 1735-1760).[11] There is an *invocatio* below the seal, *al-hamd lillāh*, "Praise be to God". Positioned diagonally below the *invocatio* are the words *Gernadur Kompeni Telengga Badi adāma Allāh dawlatahu*, "Governor of the Company in Tarangambadi, may God prolong his reign". The letter text commences:[12]

> *Sahīfat al-ikhlās wa-al-mawadda tajrī min bahjat al-qalb al-sāfiyya min bandar al-Āshī dār al-salām min al-Sultān ʿAlā al-Dīn Jūhan Shāh ilā al-muhibb al-ʿizām [sic] sāhib al-tadbīr wa-al-marām wa-maljā' al-hādir wa-al-ghurabā' wa-marjaʿ al-masākīn wa-al-aghniyā wa-naʿnī bihi* [blank space] *tawwal Allāh ʿumrahu wa-azāda kull yawm dawlatahu amīn.*
>
> "A sincere and affectionate letter emanating from the pure heart at the port of Aceh, abode of peace, from the Sultan Alauddin Johan Shah, to the great friend, the master of direction and desire, [the giver of] sanctuary to the attendee and the foreigners [alike], refuge of the poor and the wealthy, by whom we mean [blank space] may God extend his life and prolong his reign each day, amen".

The empty space following *bihi* indicates the need to search for the 'elevated' portion of text commencing *Gernadur*, which is indeed located prominently above the text block.

There are 16 other documents in the Rigsarkivet bearing the same royal seal, written in Malay, Persian and Arabic. Some of the Malay documents are described as decrees (*titah*), and are issued by the Sultan to the Danish East India Company in general, but at least one is a letter (*surat*) from the sultan to the Governor. In this letter the first line contains the title of the Sultan (*Syah Alam zill Allāh fī al-ʿālam*) while the title of the Danish Governor is given on the third line as "the Governor who is based in the King of Denmark's fort in Tarangambadi", *Gurnadur yang duduk dalam kota raja Denmar Telangkambadi* (Kratz 1998:15), with no trace of elevation.

11. Most sultans of Aceh had their own seal, but Sultan Alauddin Johan Shah seems always to have used his father's seal, at least up till 1751.

12. I am most grateful to Michael Laffan for his help with the transliteration and translation of these lines in Arabic (pers. e-mail, 28.11.2006).

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The absence of *elevatio* is not the only formal difference between these royal letters from Aceh bearing the same seal. Indeed, within the general parameters of Islamic documents, the "look of the letter" appears to be strongly influenced by choice of language, the greatest difference being between letters in Persian and those in Arabic and Malay. Two Persian documents are written in a cursive *nastaʿliq*, with widely-spaced lines which curve up towards the left. The letters in Arabic and Malay, on the other hand, are written in small, neat, *naskh*, and in straight, closely-spaced lines.[13]

Returning to the Leiden collection mentioned above of Omani letters sent to Batavia, similarly striking graphic differences can be seen between two letters in Persian and two in Arabic which were written within five months of each other in Muscat in 1800. Both the Arabic letters are written in large strong *naskh*, with the name of the addressee elevated, while the Persian documents are written in sweeping *nastaʿliq* in lines which curve up at the end, with the first two lines indented but the ends of these lines 'stacked' vertically up the left edge of the paper—and with no *elevatio*.

The evidence from both Aceh and Oman suggests that different diplomatic conventions were applied to letters written in different languages issued contemporaneously from the same Islamic chancery. In both cases it appears that *elevatio* could be applied to letters in Arabic but not to those in Persian, nor—in the case of Aceh—to those in Malay.

There is one area of Malay diplomatics where numerous examples of the principle of *elevatio* can be observed, in the 'honorific elevation' of the word *Allāh* in Malay seals. Yet as is suggested below, this practice probably stems from entirely different roots.

Elevatio in Malay Seals

Malay seals can be defined as seals from Southeast Asia which bear inscriptions at least partially in the Jawi/Arabic script or the Malay language (Gallop 2002:3). The earliest known Malay seal is that of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah of Aceh (r. 1589-1604),[14] recorded from impressions on three documents dating from 1600 to 1603 (cf. Gallop 2004).

The inscriptions on Malay seals generally comprise a combination of the following elements: a religious expression, the title and/or name of the sealholder, his pedigree, a toponym, the date and a talismanic element. The spatial arrangement of this inscription was usually straightforward, the centre panel being read from top to bottom[15] with reasonably clearly-defined lines, while border inscriptions could be read smoothly in either a clockwise direction with the letters facing outwards, or anticlockwise facing inwards. The lines of script in the central panel were sometimes separated by ruled lines across the seal face, or by elongating certain

13. There is a clear need for research into the criteria which influenced the choice of language for diplomatic documents issued in the chancery of Aceh.

14. An Islamic seal or talisman of foreign manufacture, excavated in Barus, north Sumatra, from a site dateable to between the second half of the 9th century and the end of the 11th century, may in fact be the oldest Islamic inscription found in the Malay world (Kalus 2000:23).

15. Unlike, say, Mughal seals which were generally read from bottom to top.

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letters in each line to form 'letter lines' which served the same purpose (cf. fig. 3). However, in a few seals a non-standard layout of the inscription is noted, and in almost all cases this is found to arise from efforts to ensure that the word *Allāh* is placed in the prime position at the top of the seal, regardless of its syntactic position in the inscription.

The most common religious expression found on Malay seals describes a personal relationship between the sealholder and God in the grammatical form *al-X bi-[Allāh]*, where X is a verbal noun denoting the sealholder, usually evoking his submission to God, while *Allāh* is sometimes combined with, or substituted by, one or more other "Beautiful Names". Of a corpus of 1,500 Malay seals, 22% bear an expression of this form, and it occurs in all parts of maritime Southeast Asia (Gallop 2002:185). Within this group of seals, the single most common formula is *al-wāthiq billāh*, "he who trusts/confides in God".

In eight seals with a religious legend of this form, the words *billāh* or *Allāh* are removed from their expected position in the inscription and 'elevated' to the top of the centre panel of the seal. In four seals—from Pontianak (#59)[16] on the west coast of Kalimantan (fig. 3), Bone (#895) in south Sulawesi, Patani (#1099) in present-day southern Thailand and neighbouring Kelantan (#1231) on the north-east coast of the Malay peninsula—bearing the expression *al-wāthiq billāh*, the word *billāh* is placed above *al-wāthiq* at the top of the seal. In a seal from Johor with the legend *al-wāthiq billāh taʿālā* (#140), the phrase *billāh taʿālā* is elevated, while in a seal from Mempawah (#48)—also on the west coast of Kalimantan—which begins *al-wāthiq bi-ʿināyat Allāh*, "he who trusts in the favour of God", the word *Allāh* is raised. In another seal from Bone (#871) which starts *al-mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh*, "he who entrusts himself to God", the word *Allāh* is elevated two lines to the top (fig. 4), while a seal from Kelantan (#1480) reading *al-mustaʿīn billāh*, "he who seeks help from God", has *billāh* at the top. A more major displacement is evident in two seals of Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Shah of Aceh (r. 1760-1781) (#491,823), where the word *Allāh* from the royal epithet *zill Allāh fī al-ʿālam*, "the shadow of God on earth", is relocated four lines up to the top of the seal (fig. 5).

The present writer's study of Malay seal inscriptions has suggested that some of most popular religious legends on Malay seals can be linked to the regnal names or *alqāb* (Ar., singular *laqab*) of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs (Gallop 2002:189-190), in particular al-Wāthiq billāh (9th Caliph, r. 842-847) and al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh (10th Caliph, r. 847-861), as well as al-Mustaʿīn billāh (12th Caliph, r. 862-866). This suggestion is strengthened by the choice of regnal titles of 19th century sultans of the house of Banjarmasin, in south Kalimantan, who—uniquely for the Malay world at that time—adopted ʿAbbāsid-style *laqab* as a formal element of their titles. Thus we find the regnal names Sultan Sulaiman al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh (r. 1801, 1808-1825), in emulation of the 15th caliph, and Sultan Adam al-Wāthiq billāh (r. 1825-1857) and Sultan Tamjidullah al-Wāthiq billāh (r. 1857-1859).

16. This number preceded by a hash '#' is the unique seal reference number from the catalogue of Malay seals appended to Gallop 2002.

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It is in royal seals from Banjarmasin that elevation of the word *Allāh* is particularly noticeable. In the seal of Sultan Sulaiman (#4) the inscription is written in four clear lines from top to bottom: 1) *ʿalā Allāh* 2) *al-Sultan* 3) *Sulaiman* 4) *al-Muʿtamid* (fig. 6). In view of the type of religious legends found on most Malay seals, we would expect to read the seal in the order 4-1-2-3, *al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh al-Sultan Sulaiman*, 'He whose support is in God, Sultan Sulaiman', but in this case, the *laqab* or honorific title *al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh* is an integral part of the regnal name of Sultan Sulaiman, and the seal should be read in the order 2-3-4-1. Similarly, the seal of Sultan Sulaiman's son and successor Sultan Adam (#5) is inscribed in three lines from top to bottom: 1) *billāh* 2) *al-Sultan* 3) *Adam al-Wāthiq*, and is meant to be read in the order 2-3-1.

Exceptional care has been taken over the placement of the inscription on the seal of Sultan Adam's son, Pangiran Perabu Anum (fig. 7). The seal is round, with a centre and border inscription: *ibn al-Sultan Adam al-Wāthiq billāh // Pangiran Perabu Anum yang terhiasi dengan bintang kurnia serta jadi kepala alat peperangan*, "the son of Sultan Adam al-Wāthiq billāh // Pangiran Perabu Anum, recipient of awards of honour, and chief of the accoutrements of war" (#1260). This is the only Malay seal known where the name of the sealholder is placed in the border rather than the centre, which in this case bears his pedigree, arranged 1) *billāh* 2) *ibn* 3) *al-Sultan Adam* 4) *al-Wāthiq*, in order that the name of God should occupy the most prominent position.

One of the most exquisite examples of the honouring of the Divine Name through elevation is manifest in the small quatrefoil personal seal of Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah of Kedah (r. 1778-1797) (fig. 8). The inscription simply bears his non-sovereign name and title: *Raja Abdullah ibn Muazzam Syah*, "Raja Abdullah, son of Muazzam Shah" (#174), but through the positioning of the word *Allāh* from the name *ʿAbd Allāh* at the top of the seal, a religious dimension is emphasized in what might otherwise be regarded as a secular inscription. In this calligraphic masterwork, the elongated *nun* of *ibn* serves as a central divider between the ruler's name above and his father's name below, while the exaggerated yet symmetrical final *ha* of *Syah* alone at the bottom of the seal ends the inscription with an elegant ornamental flourish.

Such Malay seals are of course not unique, and similar examples of the honorific elevation of the name *Allāh* can be found in Islamic seals across the ages and continents. These range from undated early seals of the "classical" period with Kufic inscriptions (Grohmann 1952:135; Kalus 1986:5, 6) to seals of the 18th-century Ottoman emperors Mahmūd I, Osmān III and ʿAbd al-Hamīd I, all of which bore inscriptions starting *al-hamd lillāh*, written such that *lillāh* nestled above *al-hamd* (Kut & Bayrakhtar 1984:31-39).

Although it might be tempting to see a link between these seals and the Islamic diplomatic practice of *elevatio*, there is a much more direct theological and sigillographic authority for this phenomenon: *hadīth* concerning the seal of the Prophet Muhammad. Al-Bukhārī relates that when the Prophet wished to write to the Byzantines, he was told they would not read his letter unless it had a seal, and so he adopted one of silver with the inscription *Muhammad rasūl Allāh*; according to al-Masʿūdī, this happened in Muharram AH 7 (May/June 628) (Allan 1960-:1103). According to another tradition, the words were arranged horizontally on the signet, with *Allāh* at the top, *rasūl* in the middle and *Muhammad* at the bottom (Welch 1979:23): the paradigmatic example of the honorific elevation of the name *Allāh* in an Islamic seal.

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Conclusion

This article set out to explore the extent to which the Islamic diplomatic practice of *elevatio*—as described by Ménage (1985:291-299)—had permeated the chanceries of the Malay world of Southeast Asia. The result of this investigation may appear somewhat anticlimatic: there are no 'true' examples of *elevatio* in Malay letters, and although numerous examples of the honorific elevation of the name of God can be documented in Malay seals from all over the archipelago, this practice appears to stem from a different source of authority. Nonetheless, the one unambiguous example of *elevatio* from the Malay world—in a letter in Arabic sent from Sultan Alauddin Johan Shah of Aceh to the Governor of the Danish East India Company in Tranquebar—serves to confirm that in the mid-18th century, the royal chancery of Aceh was fully aware of both principle and practice of this diplomatic nicety.

Especially significant is the implication—confirmed by a group of Omani letters from around 1800—that different diplomatic traditions were deemed appropriate for documents in different languages issued simultaneously from the same chancery, an important factor for consideration in any study of the diplomatic conventions of the Islamic world.

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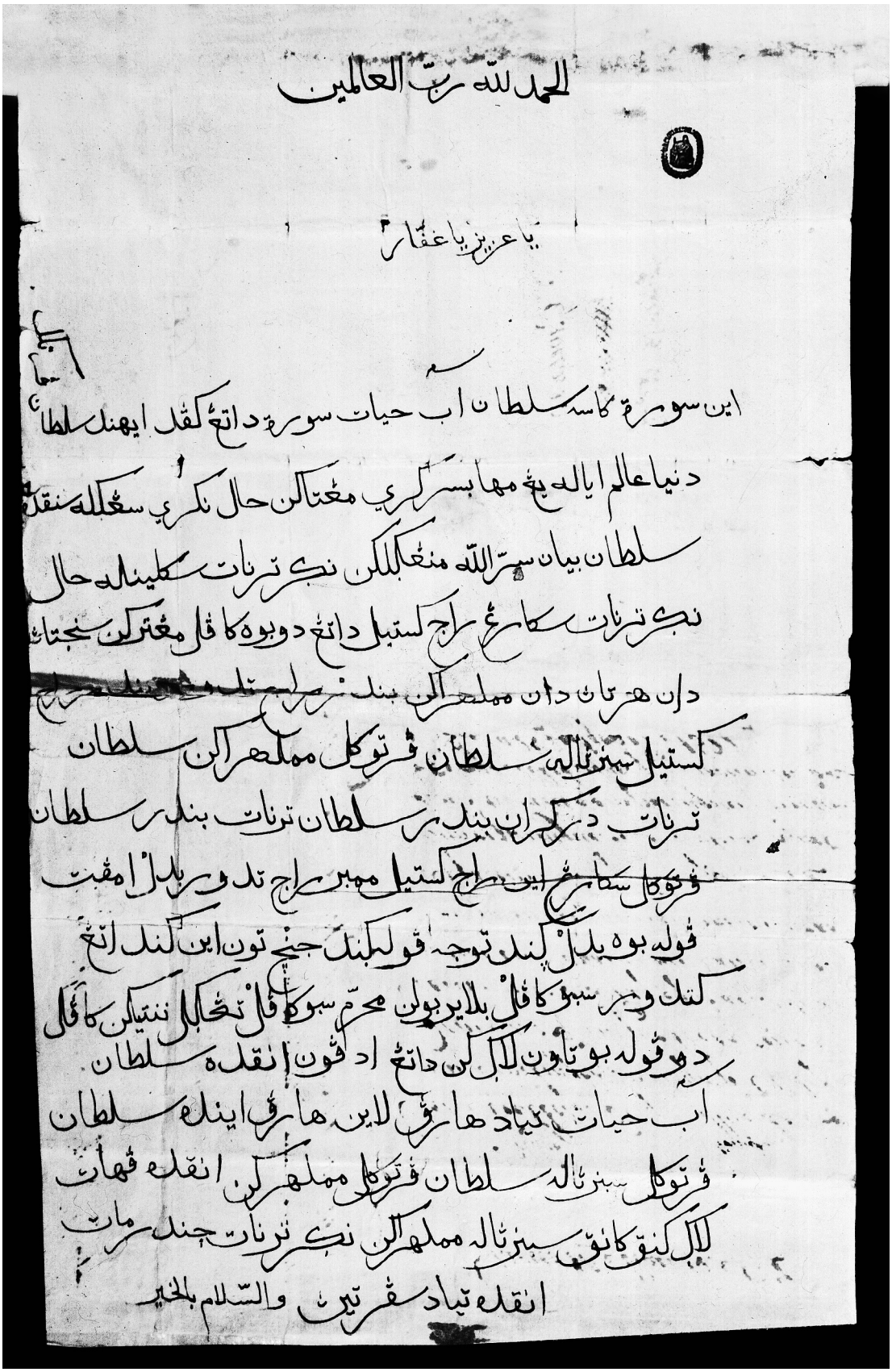


Fig. 1. Letter in Malay from Sultan Abu Hayat of Ternate to King John III of Portugal, [1522], with the title of the King of Portugal raised at the end of the first line.
ANTT, Lisbon, Portugal, Gavetas da Torre do Tombo, Gaveta 15, Maço 15, Doc. 7.

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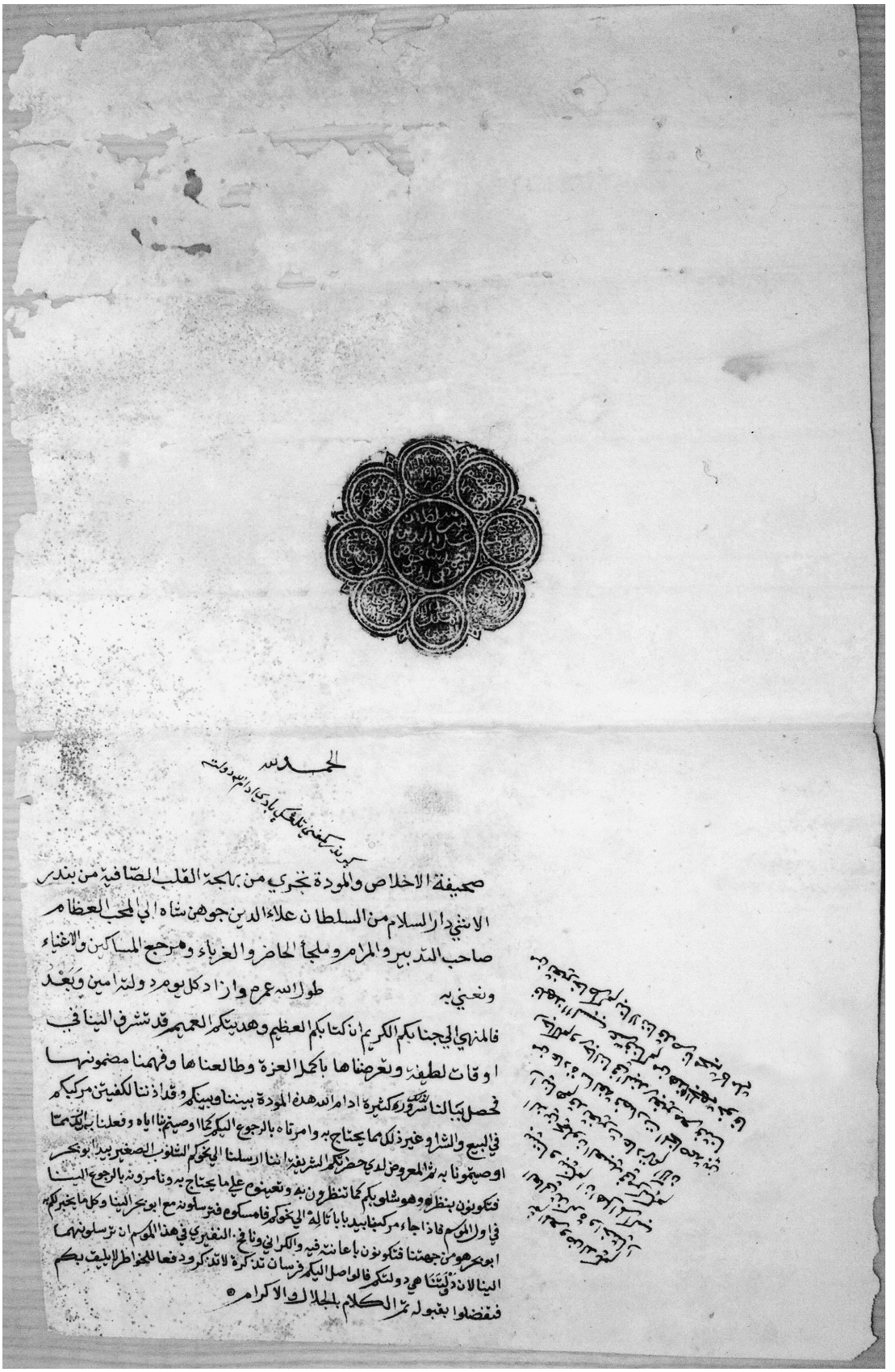


Fig. 2. Letter in Arabic from Sultan Alauddin Johan Shah of Aceh (r. 1735-1760) to the Governor of the Danish East India Company in Tranquebar, India, n.d. [18th c.], with the title of the Governor removed from the body of the letter, leaving a blank space, and 'elevated' diagonally above the text.
Copenhagen, Rigsarkivet, MS As. Komp. 2188a, QQ (1).

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Fig. 3. Seal of Sultan Syarif Kasim of Pontianak, on the west coast of Kalimantan, impressed in lampblack on a letter to Thomas Stamford Raffles in Melaka, 16 Safar 1226 (12 March 1811), with the word *billāh* placed at the top.

#59; diameter 68 mm; inscribed: *al-wāthiq billāh al-Khāliq al-Bārī wa-huwa ʿabduka al-Sultan al-Sayid al-Šyarif Kasim ibn al-marhum al-Sultan al-Sayid al-Šyarif Abdul Rahman ibn al-marhum al-Habib Husain al-Kadri // Maʿrūf al-Karkhī Yā Budūh Yā Mahdār Yā Hāfiz Y[ā] Hafiz Yā Kāfī Yā Muhīt*, 'He who trusts in God, the Creator, the Maker, and he is Your servant, the Sultan Sayid Sharif Kasim, son of the late Sultan Sayid Sharif Abdul Rahman, son of the late Habib Husain al-Kadri // Maʿrūf al-Karkhī! O Budūh! O Presence! O Guardian! O All Preserving One! O Sufficient One! O Comprehending One!'. London, British Library, MSS.Eur.D.742/1, f. 32.



Fig. 4. Seal of Hasanuddin, from Bone, Sulawesi, impressed in lampblack on a contract between Bone and the Dutch, 17 December 1768, with the word *Allāh* placed at the top.

#871; 44 x 33 mm; inscribed: *al-mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh Hasanuddin ibn Abu Bakar*, 'He who entrusts himself to God, Hasanuddin, son of Abu Bakar'. Jakarta, Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, Makassar 273/24.

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Fig. 5. Seal of Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Shah of Aceh (r. 1760-1781), from a lithographed chart of royal Aceh seals, with the word *Allāh* raised four lines and placed at the top.

#823; diameter 45 mm; inscribed: *Paduka Seri Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah johan berdaulat zill Allāh fī al-ʿālam 1182*,'Paduka Seri Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Shah, the champion endowed with sovereign power, the shadow of God on earth, 1182' (AD 1768/9). Leiden University Library, Or.8244.



Fig. 6. Seal of Sultan Sulaiman of Banjarmasin, impressed in yellow wax on a letter to the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia, 5 Safar 1221 (24 April 1806), with *ʿalā Allāh* placed at the top.

#4; 36 x 29 mm; inscribed: *al-Sultan Sulaiman al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh*,'The Sultan Sulaiman al-Muʿtamid ʿalā Allāh'. Leiden University Library, Cod.Or.2239.II.77.

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Fig. 7. Seal of Pangiran Perabu Anum of Banjarmasin, son of Sultan Adam (r. 1825-1857), impressed in red ink, in an album of seals from Kalimantan, with *billāh* placed at the top of the centre panel.

#1260; diameter 41 mm; inscribed: *ibn al-Sultan Adam al-Wāthiq billāh // Pangiran Perabu Anum yang terhiasi dengan bintang kurnia serta jadi kepala alat peperangan*, 'the son of the Sultan Adam al-Wāthiq billāh // Pangiran Perabu Anum, who is decorated with honours and is head of the armoury'. Leiden, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, 128-9.



Fig. 8. Seal of Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah of Kedah (r. 1778-1797), impressed in red ink on a letter to Frances Light, 2 Syawal 1206 (24 May 1792), with *Allāh* placed at the top of the seal.

#174; width 20 mm; inscribed: *Raja Abdullah ibn Muazzam Syah*, 'Raja Abdullah, son of Muazzam Shah'. London, British Library, Add.45271, f. 11.

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