Gold, Silver and Lapis Lazuli: Royal Letters from Aceh in the 17th Century¹

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Introduction

The glory of the kingdom of Aceh in the early 17th century during the reign of Iskandar Muda needs little introduction, and despite the slow haemorrhage of royal power during the course of the century, nearly all who visited the port were awed by the spectacular court ceremonies. Myriad sources have survived including reports by foreign visitors, official records of the English, Dutch and Danish East India Companies, and chronicles and record books from the Acehnese court, all of which have combined to build a colourful picture of the sultanate at the height of its greatness.

Nonetheless, the picture thus construed inevitably suffers a certain degree of distortion due the cultural differences and political and economic agendas of the various foreign observers. Even Acehnese sources have to be interpreted contextually, with a keen awareness of the chronological distance from the time portrayed. For example, the invaluable compendium of court ritual and port procedure of 17th century Aceh, the Adat Aceh, only survives in an early 19th-century manuscript, while new research has suggested that the Hikayat Aceh was compiled not during the reign of Iskandar Muda but considerably later, during the reign of his daughter Tajul Alam (Braginsky, forthcoming).

Special value can therefore be attached to definitive primary sources in the form of royal letters issued from the court of Aceh in the 17th century. Until recently, only one such letter was known, from Iskandar Muda to King James I of England dated 1615. More recently, two other original letters have surfaced, one from Iskandar Thani of 1639 and another from Tajul Alam of 1661. It is indeed fortuitous that the only three surviving 17th-century royal letters from Aceh in fact represent the reigns of the three best-known rulers of Aceh of that century, and span a period of nearly fifty years. In this paper, the letters will be examined critically, with a special scrutiny of their philological, codicological and diplomatic features, in an attempt to understand better the forces that gave them shape. Full Malay texts with English translations of all three letters are given in the Appendix.

SULTAN ISKANDAR MUDA (r.1609-1636)

Historical background and contents

A Malay letter from Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh to King James I of England, dated 1024 (1615), was presented to the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, by Archbishop Laud in 1635. It was first published by Shellabear (1897:123-30), who also discussed points of linguistic and orthographical interest, since when it has been reproduced several times.

The contents are quite simple - the Sultan politely refuses the British permission to trade at Tiku and Pariaman on the west coast of Sumatra, inviting them instead to conduct their trade at Aceh itself - yet strangely enough, the historical context of this letter and its precise date have never been identified. There is no known contemporary translation, such as is available for the letters from Iskandar Muda to James I presented to Thomas Best on 24 June 1613 (Foster 1934:167) and to William Keeling on 2 July 1616 (Strachan & Penrose 1971:140). The contents themselves appear to present a

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2 Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Laud Or. Rolls b.1.
3 Its codicological features are detailed in Greenstreet & Nicholson (1910:11-13), and it is reproduced in Gallop & Arps (1991:34-35) and Gallop (1994:41,94,127).
4 The letter is only dated with the year, AH 1024, equivalent to the period 31 January 1615 - 19 January 1616; Shellabear wrongly gives the equivalent date as AD 1612, and Ricklefs & Voorhoeve (1977:103) as AD 1613.
puzzle, for it is well documented that the two English ships which visited Aceh in 1615 - the *Hector* and the *Thomas* - did in fact both obtain permits to trade on the west coast of Sumatra.

The answer to this mystery lies in the contrary character of the chief merchant of the *Hector*, John Oxwick, as becomes clear from a study of letters preserved in the India Office Records (Foster 1899). When the *Hector* arrived in Aceh on 15 April 1615, Sultan Iskandar Muda was in Pedir. On 18 April, Oxwick and a fellow merchant, Samuel Juxon, set off for Pedir to present the Sultan with a letter from James I and some gifts, and on 3 May returned to Aceh together with the king’s entourage (Foster 1899:185). From then on, it was Oxwick’s duty to attend the court, while the other English merchants traded in the town. To the consternation of his fellow merchants, Oxwick appeared to make no serious attempt to obtain the all-important trading permit needed to purchase pepper in the west coast ports, and refused to take the advice that they had gathered in the town in the course of their trading activities on the best way to secure such a permit. He seemed to have had only two concerns, namely obtaining a formal reply from the Sultan to the letter from King James, and negotiating tariff-free trade at Pariaman or Tiku. He failed in the latter request, but once he had succeeded in obtaining the royal reply his behaviour grew so rude and arrogant that he earned the wrath of Sultan Iskandar Muda, who told him that Aceh was not beholden to the English, but the English to Aceh, and banned him from the court (Foster 1899:115, 128). Thus his fellow merchants found themselves stuck in Aceh, unable to leave for the west coast without a permit to trade. At an emergency council meeting held on board the ship, a decision was taken to strip Oxwick of his responsibilities until the ship reached Banten, and to appoint in his stead the ship’s commander Arthur Spaight to continue the negotiations at court. This was done on 13 June, and by 27 June Spaight had indeed managed to procure the necessary licence from the king to trade at Tiku, ‘but it cost dear’ (Foster 1899:129). Oxwick himself died of ‘the flux’ (dysentery) on about 20 June, and was buried at Aceh (Foster 1899:128).

This sorry story explains the negative content of the letter, for Oxwick had apparently made the acquisition of the royal reply an end in itself and seemed to have little concern for its contents. Furthermore, although Oxwick only fell out of favour at court after receiving Iskandar Muda’s letter, his maverick behaviour and the disapproval of his colleagues would probably not have gone unnoticed beforehand, and for this he probably forfeited the respect of the court. Style over substance was what Oxwick wanted, and style over substance was what he got, in the form of this beautiful but commercially worthless letter. The lack of contemporary official interest in the letter is now understandable, for Oxwick died at Aceh in disgrace and the contents of the letter were very soon superseded by events. According to the account of fees paid to the court officials who brought the letter, it was delivered on 1 June (Foster 1899:98), and hence we can conclude that it was written in late May 1615.

It is also possible to speculate how this letter reached the hands of Archbishop Laud and thence the Bodleian Library. Among the merchants on board the *Hector* was Samuel Juxon, a ‘linguist’, who accompanied Oxwick to meet Iskandar Muda in Pedir, and following Oxwick’s death it is possible that the letter may have been acquired by Juxon in view of his linguistic interests. Juxon himself died at Aceh soon after Oxwick, on 9 August 1615 (Foster 1899:229). The key question is whether Samuel Juxon was related to William Juxon (1582-1663) ⁵, from 1660 Archbishop of Canterbury and an old acquaintance of William Laud, who in December 1621 he succeeded as President of St.

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⁵ There is no mention of a Samuel Juxon among the family members named in the biography of William Juxon (Mason 1985). However, the Juxons were active merchants in London in the early 17th century; and it would not be surprising to find a Samuel Juxon in the service of the EIC. With thanks to Dr Mason for this information (e-mail, 9.2.2007).
John’s College, Oxford. If there was a family connection between Samuel Juxon and William Juxon, then it is possible that Laud obtained this letter through William Juxon.

**Layout and illumination**

The letter measures 950 x 420 mm, and is still accompanied by its original envelope of yellow silk with a white muslin lining. The silk sheath (423 x 78 mm) is now torn, but would have originally been as long as the lining (500 x 84 mm). The letter is written on ‘Oriental’ paper; at some stage an area of damage in the top-right corner was repaired and the whole letter was backed with calico and provided with a parchment tailpiece (Greentree & Nicholson 1910:11).

The ground of the textblock in the lower-left quadrant (473 x 245 mm) was sprinkled with gold and red ink prior to writing, and is framed by three gold borders of progressively greater width, interspersed with thin ink frames. The decorated headpiece above the textblock comprises a rectangular panel containing three decorative cartouches - two long horizontal panels of gold, flanking a smaller diamond-shaped one of red and gold - against a blue ground decorated with polychrome floral motifs, surmounted by a petalled ogee dome of the same blue, also filled with a floral meander pattern. The borders of the text block join with those enclosing the headpiece and project upwards, flanking the dome, almost reaching the top of the sheet. All around the textblock, frame and headpiece is a floral and foliate meander pattern featuring poppies, in gold with red and blue highlights.

The colours and the motifs of this letter are not paralleled by any other known Indonesian examples of manuscript illumination. Although traces of Ottoman and Safavid influence can be detected, the final result is best seen as a uniquely Acehnese fusion, though perhaps involving foreign craftsmen, of whom there were many at Iskandar Muda’s court. The accounts of the *Hector* include one fascinating item: on 27 May, Oxwick gave one bafta neale (i.e. blue calico) to ‘the gilder which did gild the King’s letter to make haste in the gilding thereof’ (Foster 1899:97). This appears to have been an exceptional payment, for although all foreign merchants were routinely charged for the expense of the ceremonial delivery of the royal letter, neither the *Adat Aceh* or any other sources mention specific charges for the decorating or gilding of the sultan’s letter.

The sheer visual impact of this enormous letter never ceases to thrill. It is not only the earliest and largest illuminated Malay letter known, it is also the finest artistically. Yet a number of other references imply that letters from Iskandar Muda were often of great splendour. Copland describes the sultan’s letter of 1613 as ‘for painting and writing most stately’ (Foster 1934:211), and the letter to the king of France given to Beaulieu in 1621 was placed ‘in a red velvet bag, with gold strings; being writ in the Achen language, in letters of gold, upon very smooth paper, with several gildings and colourings round it’ (Harris 1705:244). Van Vliet, a Dutch factor in Ayuthia, mentions that ‘in 1634, in about September, a certain ambassador from Aatchyn arrived in Siam and brought as usual a letter engraved on gold and a present for the king’ (Ravenswaay 1910:44). From all these comments, we can surmise that this sole surviving original letter from Iskandar Muda may in fact be a typical representative of the splendid epistles sent forth from the Acehnese court during his reign.

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6 Reproduced in Gallop 1994:94.
7 The greater width of the lining is due to the exterior seam.
Compliments

The opening portion of a Malay letter before the contents proper was known as the puji-pujian or compliments, which served essentially to identify the sender and recipient, and to pay respects to both. In an important structural study of the Malay letter, Wilkinson (1907:32) divided the compliments into nine components: This letter / from me / may it be conveyed / by God (or man) / to / you / who live / at x / amen. In the letter under consideration, the second component ('from me') - describing Iskandar Muda's titles and his greatness - alone occupies two-thirds (21 out of 33 lines) of the entire letter-text, the remaining part of the compliments being despatched in just two lines.

This long section of the compliments can very broadly be divided into three stages. In the first two lines, the king is named and his sovereign status emphasized. The second and most substantial part is an enumeration of the richness of the king's possessions, ranging from his palace and grounds to his treasury and gold mines, and his elephants and horses, where attention is focused more on their astonishingly lavish trappings than on the animals themselves. The king's immense wealth is strikingly conveyed not so much by his precious regalia as by everyday objects - water pipes, saddles and even his bathing-scoop - fashioned out of solid gold, suasa (gold-copper alloy) or silver and encrusted with precious stones. In all this we sense a reflection of Iskandar Muda's personal tastes, for his love of rich jewels was well-known. Some items had more than a material significance, such as his permata sembilan jenis, a clear reference to the Sanskrit nava ratna, 'an arm-ornament composed of the nine precious stones, viz. diamond, ruby, emerald, sapphire, topaz, pearls, coral, hyacinth and carbuncle', also found in the regalia of Thai kings (Ravenswaay 1910:17).

Thirdly comes an enumeration of the territories under his sway: on the eastern side Lubuk, Pedir, Samarlanga, Pasangan, Pasai, Perlak, Basitang, Tamiang, Deli, Asahan, Tanjong, Panai, Rakan, Batu Sawar [i.e. Johor] and all the countries subject to Batu Sawar, Perak, Pahang, Inderagiri; on the west Calang, Daya, Barus, Pasaman, Tiku, Pariaman, Salida, Inderapura, Bengkulu, Silbar, Palembang and Jambi. Ito (1984:16) has pointed out that not all these territories were actually under Acehnese control at that time, and the list can be seen more as an indication of Iskandar Muda's grand plans of conquering the whole of the Malay peninsula and the northern part of Sumatra than as a reflection of fact. Certainly, the sultan's burning ambition and personal voice is strongly apparent in this part of the compliments, and we have evidence that he scrutinised

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8 During Best's visit to Aceh, on 1 May 1613 Iskandar Muda held a water banquet, 'his nephew pouring water upon him as he satt, with a gold buckett, for the space of 5 or 6 houres' (Foster 1934:159).
9 Identified by Foster (1934:211, fn.5) from the phrase 'lord of nine sorts of stones' in the letter presented to Best.
10 The list of territories is often found preserved in letter-texts in secondary sources even when the rest of the compliments have been cut. The translation of Iskandar Muda's letter to James I given to Keeling in 1616 begins:

With remembrance of God the Almighty. I, mighty King Jonham ber Doulat of Acheen and other parts of Sumatra, with authority over Jore, send greeting ... (Foster 1900:23).

In the letter of 1621 addressed to the king of France given to Admiral Beaulieu, all that remains of the compliments is the list of dominions:

The Letter of the Grand Siri Sultan, subduer and conqueror, by God's assistance, of several kingdoms, King of Achen, and, by the Divine Favour, of all the countries that lie to the East and West; to the Eastward, the kingdom, territories and sovereignties of Deli; the kingdom of Joor, with its lordships and territories, the kingdom of Paham, the kingdom of Queda, and the kingdom of Pera, with their lands and seigniories: to the westward the kingdom and territory of Priaman, the kindom and territory of Ticow, the kingdom and territory of Passuruam (Harris 1705:244);

while Valentijn reported that in 1621 Iskandar Muda styled himself:
keenly similar statements in missives from foreign monarchs. In 1621, he tackled Beaulieu about the sovereign status of the king of France, because ‘he had seen a letter from the King of England, in which he assumes the title of King of France’ (Harris 1705:245).

The single most striking feature of the compliments in Iskandar Muda’s letter is the absence of any specifically Islamic formulae or references. Throughout the text of the letter, God is referred to by the phrase Tuhan seru alam sekalian, ‘Lord of the whole universe’, rather than Allah. On the contrary, there are recognisable Indic vestiges. His titles appear to have more in common with those of his contemporaries in Ayuthia and Arakan than those found in later Malay letters, and the enumeration of his possessions recalls (albeit selectively) the ‘Seven Jewels of Royal Power’ of a chakravartin or universal monarch: the chakra (wheel), royal chariot, jewel, queen, treasure, horse and elephant. What particularly sets these compliments apart from those in other subsequent royal Malay letters is the emphasis on the possession of material goods (even when these might have symbolic or ritual value) and worldly success rather than on moral attributes.

This is the only known original letter from Iskandar Muda. The only other letter for which a full translation - compliments and all - exists is that presented to Thomas Best in Aceh two years earlier, in 1613, as given in the account of the Rev. Patrick Copland, Best’s chaplain (Foster 1934:211-3). The compliments are very similar to those of the 1615 letter, even identical in parts, save for the list of countries under Aceh’s dominion, which in 1613 is limited to Aru in the east and Priaman, Tiku and Barus in the west. A number of other letters from Iskandar Muda survive in secondary European sources, but it is almost a contradiction in terms to attempt to use these to study the puji-pujian, for, apart from the list of territories, this was the portion of the letter invariably abbreviated or left out altogether in translations and reports, which tend to move straight to the contents or perkataan.

Siri Sulthan, Koning van Atsjeh, Delli, Djohor (dat hy wel geduurig beoorlogt; maar noit veroverd heeft) Pahang, Keidah, Peirah, Priaman, Ticoe, Baros, Passaroewan (hoewel niet wete, dat hy dat oit veroverd heeft) Padang, Sinkel, Labo, Daja, enz. (Valentijn 1726:5.7.1.7).

11 Among the titles used by the king of Ayuthia in letters to foreign potentates ca.1634 were the phrases ‘most powerful and highest Master of a hundred and one Golden Crowns and of kings adorned with nine kinds of precious stones ... his house is made of gold and precious stones. He is the divine Master of the golden thrones of the towers, of the white, red and round tailed elephants ...’ (Ravenswaay 1910:17).

12 In a letter in Portuguese from the king of Arakan to the Governor-General in Batavia, received on 8 March 1637, he is described as the ‘head of the golden house with the red and white elephants’ (Colenbrander 1899:72).

13 Agrawala 1963:Appendix I; I am grateful to Jana Igunma for this reference.

14 In the earliest known letter-text from Sultan Iskandar Muda, written to Prince Maurits in 1610, only a very condensed form of the compliments can be found in the surviving translation: Met de hulpe Godes, die het alle reegeert ende bewaert ende danck waerdich is, een coninck boven alle coninghen grooter ende machtiger als einige wareitsche (Banck 1873:74).
SULTAN ISKANDAR THANI (r.1636-1641)

On a visit to Leiden University Library in 1997 to gather material for a catalogue of Malay seals\(^{15}\), among the items consulted was Cod.Or.4818, a collection of miscellanea from the legacy of the Dutch scholar, P.J.Veth. Besides some 19th century letters from Sumenep, Riau and Palembang, the portfolio contained an unusual-looking letter folded over several times. On opening this letter, its extraordinary importance very quickly became apparent: it was a letter from Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah (Iskandar Thani) of Aceh to Frederik Hendrik, Prince of Orange (1584-1647), dating from 1639\(^{16}\).

The letter had in fact already been partially identified, for the portfolio contained a contents list in ballpoint pen, in the hand of Dr P. Voorhoeve\(^{17}\), which described this item as a letter from Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah? v. Aceh aan G. G. Anton van Diemen. It is puzzling that Voorhoeve never published the existence of this letter – the oldest known Malay letter in Leiden University Library – especially since his catalogue of Acehnese manuscripts includes an appendix of non-Acehnese texts relating to Aceh, such as royal edicts (sarakata) in Malay (Voorhoeve & Iskandar 1994:261). The reason may lie in his evidently low estimation of its worth, for his description of the letter continues (op behang, afschrift?), ‘(on wallpaper, a copy?)’. But this was no copy on wallpaper: it was an original illuminated Malay letter, and the only known surviving letter from the reign of Sultan Iskandar Thani.

Historical background

The balance of power in the the western Indonesian archipelago in the late 1630s rested on four major players: Aceh, Johor, the Portuguese in Melaka and the Dutch in Batavia. As the Dutch began to plan their attack on Melaka, although Johor had indicated a willingness to assist them, their preferred choice of ally was Aceh, a valuable trading partner with long-standing anti-Portuguese credentials (Bassett 1969:432-6). Soon after Iskandar Thani’s succession to the throne on the death of Iskandar Muda, a steady stream of envoys from Batavia attempted to secure an Acehnese commitment to a joint attack. On 22 April 1638 J. R. Van Deutecom arrived in Aceh; by his return to Batavia on 26 August he had secured valuable trading privileges for the Dutch, as well as assurances of the Sultan’s intention to attack Melaka with Dutch assistance (MacLeod 1903:1919; DasGupta 1962:184-5; Kathirithamby-Wells 1969:465). But shortly after Deutecom’s departure, news was received in Aceh of the invasion of Pahang by Johor (Siti Hawa 1992:41). This blow was felt keenly by Sultan Iskandar Thani, a prince from Pahang, and on 18 October 1638 an Acehnese embassy arrived in Batavia to suggest that the proposed attack on Melaka be postponed until the return of the Sultan’s retaliatory expedition to Pahang and Johor (Tiele 1890:357; Bassett 1969:434). When this Acehnese embassy left Batavia on 21 May 1639 to return to Aceh, where they arrived on 27 June, they were accompanied by a Dutch mission led by Paulus Croocq. On raising the question of the invasion of Melaka, he received only prevarications from Iskandar Thani, who first wanted to settle the Pahang matter. Croocq left Aceh on 5 September and arrived back in Batavia on 11 November (Tiele 1890:389-90; MacLeod 1903:1920). Finally, on 10 April 1640 Jean de Meere was sent to Aceh; this time Iskandar Thani flatly refused to help the Dutch unless they cut off all connection with Johor. Instead, the Dutch formed an alliance with Johor, and thus on 14 January 1641 Portuguese Melaka fell to the Dutch-Johor forces, without any Acehnese involvement (MacLeod 1903:1921-22; DasGupta 1962:186).

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\(^{15}\) I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Jan Just Witkam for all his assistance during my visit to Leiden in September 1997, and to Hans van der Velde for his patience in meeting my endless requests for manuscripts.

\(^{16}\) Leiden University Library, Cod.Or.4818.a.I.3.

\(^{17}\) Identified by J.J.Witkam.
The letter under consideration from Sultan Iskandar Thani to Prince Frederik Hendrik was brought to Batavia by Acehnese envoys accompanying Croocq at the end of his mission, and was thus probably written in late August or early September 1639. It was conveyed to Holland in December 1639 in the personal charge of the commander of the then departing fleet, Nicolaes Leendersz. Cockeb. Croocq’s mission was not viewed as a success by Batavia: not only did Croocq not secure positive responses to his requests for aid and trade, but the Sultan’s presents were deemed substandard. Croocq had presented the Sultan with a keris valued at 20,000 reals; on his departure he received for the Governor-General a keris valued (by Batavia) at 200 reals and, for himself and others, a number of kerises of ‘relatively trifling’ value. Amongst the Sultan’s gifts to Prince Frederik Hendrik, one very large bezoar stone was suspected not to be genuine (MacLeod 1903:1920; Coolhaas 1964:57).

Contents of the letter

The letter itself opens with a long and elaborate enumeration of Sultan Iskandar Thani’s titles and attributes (discussed in detail below), after which the Sultan pays compliments to the Prince - and to his military might - and alludes to the friendship which has existed between their two nations since the time of the late Makota Alam. He then states that he is sending his envoys to Batavia to Governor-General Anton van Diemen, reiterating his desire to attack Melaka but explaining his need to wait until the return of his fleet under Orang Kaya-Kaya Maharaja Seri Maharaja18. He attempts to whip up antagonism to Johor by reviving memories of Johor’s alliance with the Portuguese, and warns that unless Johor is dealt with first, trouble is in store, for Johor is drumming up support for Melaka from Siam and Patani and other neighbouring countries. Turning to matters of trade, he reminds the Dutch that he has forfeited an annual income of an estimated one bahar of gold in granting them exclusive trade on the west coast, and also requests them to desist from harassing Indian traders in Aceh. In response to van Diemen’s request for trade in Pahang, he grants them a part of the trade, whilst stressing that this is not an exclusive right. As a present he sends two pieces of rock-gold and four bezoar stones.

As with so many royal Malay epistles, this is a carefully crafted and extremely diplomatic letter, deploying both bombast and subtlety as judged appropriate to convey what is essentially a negative message. While the Sultan declines to pledge himself to an immediate attack on Melaka - the main objective of the Dutch - because of his fixation with the crisis in Pahang, all his current actions and plans are expressed within the broader context of the invasion of Melaka, in an attempt to win Dutch support for his position. Thus the letter proper opens with a bang – ‘we’re really going to make that Melaka suffer, besiege it and seize anyone trying to supply food to Melaka’ - and his current military expedition (to oust Johor from Pahang) is described solely in terms of an attack on Melaka’s supply lines. He then proposes a more long-term strategy of concentrating on gradually cutting off Melaka’s supply routes, thus eventually enabling it to be taken more easily. He justifies this strategy by citing a ruler’s responsibility to minimize losses on his own side - a clear reference to the decimation of Iskandar Muda’s fleet in the attack on Melaka in 1629. Only in the next few lines does the Sultan try hard to convince the Dutch to support him against Johor, which is presented here as a prerequisite to a successful campaign against Melaka.

18 The Orang Kaya Maharaja Seri Maharaja was an illegitimate son of Iskandar Muda. He was dismissed from his post in March 1640, but under Tajul Alam he became Kadi Malik al-Adil (Ito 1984:71).
A contemporary Dutch translation

In fact, the text of this letter is not completely unknown, for a contemporary Dutch translation was published by Banck\(^\text{19}\) (1873:76-78) and is reproduced in Appendix B.3. Now the emergence of the original letter affords an interesting opportunity to compare the two. Although the general gist of the translation is reasonably accurate, there are some significant differences, which fall into three broad categories. Firstly, linguistic limitations combined with a cavalier attitude to Indonesian titles have rendered the Sultan’s name almost unintelligible\(^\text{20}\). The flowery language of Malay compliments, with an abundance of Arabic words, is notoriously difficult to translate, but there seem to be no grounds at all for the phrase *Coninck van de gantsche werelt, die gelyck einen Godt daer over is*, 'King of the whole world, who is like a God over it', and the translator appeared to be so thrown by *yang gunawan pengasih lagi dermawan* that he left it untranslated. Only carelessness can account for the confused rendering of the envoys’ names, for while there are three *dan* in the original, there are only two *ende* in the translation, giving the impression that only three envoys were listed by name, rather than four\(^\text{21}\). Secondly, protocol has led the Dutch translator to enhance the titles and honour paid to Prince Frederik Hendrik. The description of the gift fills only one line in the Malay letter but five in the Dutch\(^\text{22}\), including statements of friendship not found in the original. Thirdly, there are some small but non-negligible changes in the contents proper: in discussing the attack on Melaka, Iskandar Thani speaks alone but the phrase ‘with the help of the Dutch’ is added in the translation.

It is extremely common to find such examples of non-accidental, qualitative divergences in contemporary translations of early Malay letters (in addition to inevitable stylistic differences or cases of genuine misunderstanding). During an uneasy truce between Brunei and the Spaniards, the Sultan of Brunei wrote a letter to Governor Francisco Tello in Manila. According to the official Spanish translation which was made on 27 July 1599, the Sultan wrote of receiving a letter from Don Tello:

> It gave me much happiness, for I understood thoroughly the message conveyed by it to me from your Lordship. I am exceedingly rejoiced in heart and mind, for I desire fast friendship with the captain-general of Manila. (Nicholl 1975:81)

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\(^{19}\) Banck did not give the source of his text or any information as to its date. In his search for seals of Sultan Iskandar Muda and Sultan Iskandar Thani, G.P. Rouffaer made enquiries as to the whereabouts of the original of Banck’s letter, and was informed by an official of the Rijksarchief that only a translation was held there, in *ingekomen stukken van het jaar 1639, Kolonial Archief, portfeuille 1029* (Rouffaer 1906:382). I am grateful to Dr. Ben Slot of the Algemeen Rijksarchief for confirming that Banck’s source is today numbered VOC 11264 (B. Slot, personal fax communication, 18.2.98), which is described in the published catalogue as *Kopie-missive van de sultan van Atjeh Iskander Thani (sultan Moghal) bij zijn troonsbetijging, aan prins Frederik Hendrik, 1636 [sic]. 1 stuk. NB Het betreft hier een vertaling* (Meilink-Roelofsz 1992:373). Another copy of this translation is found in VOC 1131, pp.1433-36.

\(^{20}\) A similarly obscure rendering of Sultan Tajul Alam’s title as ‘Sultan Nulma Alam’ in a letter of 1661 given in the Daghregister led one historian to speculate that this referred not to Tajul Alam at all, but to her successor Nurul Alam (Kathirithamby-Wells 1969:472, fn.116). In fact, as can be seen from our letter, what was intended by this form of wording was *sultan al-muazzam*.

\(^{21}\) According to MacLeod (1903:1920) two envoys accompanied Croocq to Batavia; Tiele (1890:390) mentions ‘three envoys and a suite of 50 people’. There were often differences of opinion between Indonesians and the Dutch as to which of the accompanying suite ranked as envoys.

\(^{22}\) While the original Malay simply states ‘two pieces of rock-gold and four bezoar stones’, it was presumably the aforementioned doubts about the authenticity of one of the bezoar stones which led to the addition of the qualifying phrase ‘one of which is very large’ in the Dutch translation, perhaps to pre-empt any difficult questions from the court. An inventory made in 1673 of the possessions of Amalia van Solms, widow of Prince Frederik Hendrik, included ‘one very large bezoar stone’ (Wassing-Visser 1995:40).
However, the original Malay text said more than that, both *yang tersurat* and *yang tersirat* (emphasis added):

Terlalulah suka hati kita menengar bunyi surat Sennyor Kapten sangat hendak muafakat dan berkasih-kasihan dengan kita; demikianlah kehendak kita pun mau berkasih-kasihan dengan Kapten Minila, *seperti mana adat kita berkasih-kasihan dengan Kapten Melaka*23

This barely-veiled reference to the arch-enemies of the Spanish, the Portuguese in Melaka - underlining the very clear limitations of the warmth of the Sultan’s feelings towards the Spanish - was completely omitted in the Spanish translation, despite the assurances given by the translators to the authorities:

The above translation was made by Constantino Xuarez and Miguel Yaat, a native of Burney. They declared it to have been thoroughly and exactly made, without any change of sense. They signed the same before me, Estevan de Marquina, alcalde-mayor of Tondo and its district, for the king our sovereign. (Nicholl 1975:82).

There is no denying the great importance of European translations of early Malay letters, especially when they are the only surviving record of the correspondence, but the above examples are a salutary reminder that contemporary translations are rarely a truly faithful record of what was written.

**The meaning of *mas kudrati***

However, in one instance the Dutch translation does throws light on the meaning of a Malay phrase which might otherwise have been misunderstood, namely, *mas kudrati*. In the opening compliments, the Sultan refers to his *kelian mas kudrati yang cemerlang cahayanya*, and he sends to Prince Frederik Hendrik *bata mas kudrati dua buah*. The word *kudrati* (q.d.r.t.y) is not found in any of the main historical dictionaries of Malay by Marsden, Klinkert or Wilkinson, where only the form *kudrat*, from the Arabic *qudrat* meaning ‘power’ is given (Wilkinson 1985:489), but probably reached the Malay world from the Persian *qudrati* having the sense ‘divine; not produced by man; natural’ (Steingass 1996:957). *Kudrati* is found in *Kamus Dewan* as *murni, tulen, jati*; this dictionary specifically gives *mas kudrati* as *mas tulen* (KD 1994:721), ‘pure gold’.

The word is also used in one of the stock phrases in the formulaic openings of 18th and 19th century royal letters and edicts (*sarakata*) written in Malay to describe the sultan’s sovereign power, in the context *duduk di atas tahta singgahsana mas kudrati sepuluh mutu*24. The phrase *mas kudrati* occurs in the *Bustan al-Salatin*, in the phrase *singgahsana emas kudrati yang bertatahkan ratna mutu manikam*, ‘a throne of kudrati gold studded with precious stones’ to describe the throne of Iskandar Thani (Siti Hawa 1992:33), and *singgahsana emas kudrati sepuluh mutu yang bertatahkan ratna mutu manikam* for that of Sultan Tajul Alam (Siti Hawa 1992:46).

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23 Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla; Filipinas, 18B, R.9, N.132\1\1, Carta del Rey de Brunei a Francisco Tello, Gobernador y Capitan General de las Islas Filipinas, 27.7.1599. I am grateful to Paolo Paddeu for supplying me with a reproduction of this letter.

24 A *sarakata* of 1708 reproduced in the *Adat Aceh* (Drewes & Voorhoeve 1958:p.118); a *sarakata* of 1861 (van Langen 1888:472); a *sarakata* of 1869 (Damsté 1917:1235); a letter of 1873 (Reid 1969:107); a *sarakata* of 1883 (Tichelman 1938:356). However, as evidence of the archaicness of this word, it was misunderstood by two scribes, for we find *mas kursi* [k.w.r.s.y] *itu* in a *sarakata* of 1868 (Tichelman 1938:352) and *mas kertas* [q.r.t.s?] *itu* in a ca. 19th century *sarakata* (Tichelman 1933:370).
Three other instances have been documented of the use of the word *kudrati* in a Malay text. The oldest such occurrence is in the *Syair Bahr an-Nisa*, said to have been composed in the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah (r.1588-1604), in the allegorical place-name *Kota Kudrati* (Braginskaya 1993:78,257). In the *Hikayat Aceh*, the word *kudrati* occurs twice in the sense of 'natural', but not directly in the form *mas kudrati*. The word *kudrati* is also found in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, where the Raja of Rum enjoyed a *singgahsana emas kudrati sepuluh mutu yang bertatahkan ratna mutu manikam* (Kassim 1994:562), but this, like his pleasure-garden, can be shown to be a direct borrowing from the *Bustan*, thus confirming the (so far as is known) exclusively Acehnese usage of the word.

These references would naturally lead to the conclusion that the *bata mas kudrati dua buah* mentioned in the letter were two ingots of pure gold; after all, a not unlikely gift from the Sultan of Aceh, famed for his treasuries of gold. But that this was not the case is apparent from the Dutch translation, where the gift is referred to as *twee minerael steenen uyt myn goutmynen*, 'two mineral stones from my goldmine'; while van Diemen - who would undoubtedly have seen them with his own eyes - describes them rather dismissively as *twee bergsteenen uyt d’Atchinese goudtmine* (Coolhaas 1964:57), 'two mountain stones from an Acehnese goldmine'. The probable solution is supplied by Marsden, who distinguished between two types of gold mined in the hinterlands of Padang: *amas sungei-abu*, or alluvial gold, and *amas supayang*, of which he wrote:

> [This] is what we usually call rock-gold, consisting of pieces of quartz more or less intermixed with veins of gold, generally of fine quality, running through it in all directions, and forming beautiful masses, which, being admired by Europeans, are sometimes sold by weight as if the whole were solid metal. The mines yielding this sort are commonly situated at the foot of a mountain, and the shafts are driven horizontally, to the extent of from eight to twenty fathoms (Marsden 1986:166).

Van Diemen's evident lack of admiration notwithstanding, in every other respect this description seems to explain the two pieces of *mas kudrati* which Iskandar Thani sent to Frederik Hendrik. Thus it appears that in mid-17th century Aceh, the term *mas kudrati* referred variously to a) the natural state in which the gold was found, hence *kelian mas kudrati*; b) pieces of gold in this natural, unprocessed state, as in *bata mas kudrati* or rock-gold, and c) the fine-quality gold extracted from this rock-gold, which was then used for various purposes, such as the royal throne.

### Layout and illumination

The letter measures 720 x 300 mm, and comprises two pieces of paper pasted together. Any watermark or other look-through characteristics the paper might have had have been obscured by the illumination, for the whole sheet has been painted with a thick layer of powder-blue pigment, with a very powdery, chalky texture. Over this is a repeating pattern in silver-white of a diamond-shaped trellis, each aperture (measuring 83 x 60 mm) containing a flower. The regularity of the pattern, the fact that it stops a....

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25 After a lacuna in the manuscript, the text continues .... *galian mas yang merah yang sepuluh mutu dan tanah cempaga kudrati yang netiisa mengalir di atas bukit galian itu dan beberapa daripada kolam minyak tanah kudrati* ... (Iskandar 1958:164); *kudrati* is interpreted here as Ar. *’natuurlijk’* (Iskandar 1958:198).

26 The word *kudrati* was searched in the Malay Concordance Project (http://online.anu.edu.au/asicontag/ahcen/proudfoot/mcp/) in January 2007; of 87 texts searched, the word *kudrati* was found in only three: *Hikayat Aceh*, *Bustan al-salatin*, and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. 
few millimetres short of the righthand edge of the paper, and the appearance of the flowers all indicate that the pattern was stencilled or stamped.

Both the pattern and the colours of this letter are extremely unusual in the context of other Malay illuminated letters, and a superficial visual analogy with wallpaper – as noted by Dr Voorhoeve – is not entirely unjustified. Blue is rarely found in Malay manuscript art in books and even more rarely in illuminated letters, especially not the powder-blue of this letter. On scientific analysis\textsuperscript{27}, this blue colour was found to derive from lapis lazuli: the blue pigment consisted of small amounts of finely-crushed lazurite (obtained from lapis lazuli) mixed with a larger quantity of silica (SiO\textsubscript{2})\textsuperscript{28}, the white of the silica crystals thus diluting the intense blue of lazurite to give the resulting light-blue colour found here. Lapis lazuli was highly valued at the Acehnese court, and was used in the rich caparisons of Iskandar Thani’s elephants and horses, as stated in the compliments of this letter, and its use in ceremonial court accoutrements is well-documented in the \textit{Hikayat Aceh} (Iskandar 1958:113,164) and the \textit{Bustan al-Salatin} (Siti Hawa 1992:12,15,29,54,60,62).

At the top of the sheet, in tiny letters in the middle, is the heading \textit{Huwa Allah Ta’ala}. The seal of the Sultan is imprinted in the right hand margin, above the text-block. Although the shape - two concentric circles, the outer one 44 mm in diameter and the inner one 28 mm - is still visible, the illuminated surface of the paper has proved inimical to the (lampblack?) seal impression, which is now almost completely illegible. The inscription in the inner circle appears to begin with the name of the ruler, \textit{Paduka Seri Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah}. The (Arabic?) inscription in the outer circle is oriented outwards.

The textblock of 46 lines occupies the bottom-left quadrant of the sheet; the text is written in a strong black ink. The letter was originally rolled from the bottom up, with folds starting at 35 mm across at the bottom and growing to 40 mm by the middle and 45 mm at the top of the sheet. It would probably have been delivered in a silk envelope. Unfortunately, the blue pigment has flaked badly along the folds of the letter, obscuring many parts of words and sometimes even damaging whole lines of text. While it has often been possible to reconstruct the text from the surviving portions of letters above and below the line of damage, there are some places where the text has been rendered totally illegible.

\textbf{Compliments}

In the letter from Iskandar Thani, the self-description of the sender in the opening compliments fills 19 of the 46 lines of text (parts of which are now unfortunately illegible). He is heralded as the \textit{sultan al-muazzam wa-al-khaqan al-mukarram}\textsuperscript{29} and his name and title proper are followed by Muslim epithets of kingship, \textit{zill Allah fi al-‘alam} and \textit{khalifat Allah}. His moral and intellectual attributes are praised in terms of the sun, moon and stars; the round globe and the deep sea. His lineage is traced back to Alexander the Great in his own right, for as a prince of Pahang he was a direct descendant of the kings of Melaka, and thence of the progeny of Alexander who appeared

\textsuperscript{27} With the kind permission of Dr Witkam, some tiny detached fragments of pigment found in the letter-folder were brought back to London in March 1998. With the assistance of M.Barnard and D.Jacobs of the British Library’s Oriental Conservation Studio, the fragments were sent to Dr Peter Gibbs of the School of Chemistry, University College, London for analysis by ramon microscopy.

\textsuperscript{28} E-mail communication from P.Gibbs to D.Jacobs, 21.4.98.

\textsuperscript{29} In the \textit{Sejarah Melayu}, in a letter Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah of Johor addresses Sultan Mansur Syah of Pahang as \textit{al haqani almukarram waihamam almuhtaram} (A. Samad 1986:296).
on Bukit Siguntang. His great possessions include his gold-mines and his mosque\textsuperscript{30}. He is likened to Nusyirwan the Just and Hatim Tai, two exemplary men whose deeds are narrated in the \textit{Taj al-Salatin}, \textit{Sejarah Melayu} and the \textit{Bustan al-Salatin}\textsuperscript{31}. His elephants and horses and their rich trappings are described in loving detail, with the emphasis on the rarity of the beasts themselves, including elephants with four tusks \textsuperscript{32} and hermaphrodite ones, and the variety and nobility of the stock of his horses. His dominions get only a passing mention in the conventional form ‘territories in the east and the west’, and he is praised for the way he bears witness to the greatness of God through his deeds and government. Apart from his worldly interest in his animals, the overall impression is one of pious humility, and we note how it is usually his attributes that are praised, rather than the person of the king himself. There is a loose rhythmic structure and many examples of assonance in this long passage, with some of the attributes and titles arranged in complementary pairs, in the form

\textit{ialah raja yang ...} , \textit{lagi raja yang ...}

It is interesting to note that Prince Frederik Hendrik is addressed only as \textit{kapten}, not \textit{raja}, and while his military prowess and capability is praised, no mention is made of his sovereignty. In fact, this is a faithful reflection of the constitutional reality of his status as stadholder and military commander, and yet, in the early years of the 17th century, the Dutch merchants quickly began referring to the Prince of Orange as their sovereign or even ‘Coninck’ or ‘King’ within the context of correspondence with Indonesian rulers (Wassing-Visser 1995:30). This letter shows that after several decades of contact with the Dutch, the Acehnese court had a clear comprehension of the system of government in the Netherlands\textsuperscript{33}. As mentioned above, this is the only surviving original letter from Iskandar Thani’s reign; however, a full translation of a long letter to Governor-General van Diemen, received on 11 September 1640, is given in the Daghregister\textsuperscript{34} (van der Chijs 1887:6-8). It comes as a great surprise to find that the translation of the opening compliments of this letter are a word-for-word match of the compliments in the letter to Prince Frederik Hendrik a year previously! Even if the compliments had been similar, it is wellnigh impossible to believe that two translators\textsuperscript{35} would have arrived at identical translations. Yet here we find exactly the same convoluted rendering of Iskandar Thani’s name, and even the same phrase - \textit{yang gunawan pengasih lagi dermawan} - left untranslated in the middle. The implication is that this part of the compliments was copied verbatim from the earlier translation of the Prince Frederik Hendrik letter, and we have no way of telling how much of it actually relates to the letter to van Diemen.

\textsuperscript{30} This is probably a reference to the Bait al-Musyahadah mosque built by Iskandar Thani mentioned in the \textit{Bustan al-Salatin} (Siti Hawa 1992:21).

\textsuperscript{31} Nusyirwan Adil is mentioned in all three texts; Hatim Tai is described in \textit{pasal} 22 of the \textit{Taj al-Salatin} (Khalid 1992) and in \textit{bab} 6, \textit{pasal} 1 of the \textit{Bustan} (with thanks to V.Braginsky for the last reference).

\textsuperscript{32} An elephant with four tusks named Biram Empat Gading is mentioned in the \textit{Bustan}; it was one of eight elephants presented by Sultanah Tajul Alam to the Gujerati ambassador shortly after the death of Sultan Iskandar Thani as a sign of good faith and of her intention to honour Aceh’s obligations (Siti Hawa 1992:44).

\textsuperscript{33} A similar acknowledgment of the republican status of the Netherlands is reflected in the avoidance of imperial terms in the preliminaries of a letter in Persian from the Safavid chancellery to the Dutch Estates General in 1629 (Mitchell 1997:199).

\textsuperscript{34} No earlier letters from any Sultan of Aceh have been fully translated in the extant Daghregisters; in most instances, only a synopsis of the contents is given.

\textsuperscript{35} Or even the same translator, a year later.
Valentijn gives a long list of titles commonly used in the letters of the King of Aceh which appears ultimately to derive from the same source but which has since been corrupted, for while the original letter has *raja yang mengempukan gajah putih kedua matanya cemerlang seperti bintang timor* and Banck has *die den witten oliphant heeft*, *wiens oogen glinsteren gelijck als de morgensterre*, Valentijn (1726:7) has *Een Koning ... wiens oogen als de Morgensterren glinsteren*, ‘A king ... whose eyes glisten like the morning star’ (!).

**SULTANAH TAJUL ALAM SAFIATUDDIN SYAH (r.1641-1675)**

**Contents and historical context**

The English Commonwealth did not long outlast the death of Oliver Cromwell, and on 8 May 1660 Charles II was proclaimed King of England in London. On 12 October 1661 Sultanah Tajul Alam of Aceh sent an impressive illuminated letter via the English East India Company to congratulate Charles on his accession to the throne, and to reaffirm the cordial ties between Aceh and the English dating back to the time of Iskandar Muda. She confirms that she has given Henry Gary authority to establish a factory in the port, and permission for three English ships a year to visit the west coast pepper ports, but stresses that English trade is threatened by the wretched Dutch, and begs the English to take action. She sends with the letter various gifts of forest produce including camphor, agila, ambergris and a bezoar stone from a porcupine.

The queen’s letter had little effect on the Directors of the East India Company in Surat in view of the much broader problem of hostilities with the Dutch, nor were the prospects for trade in Aceh appealing or the queen’s gifts appreciated. When the Directors sent a letter to the remaining factors in Aceh at the beginning of May 1662, it was not accompanied by stock for trade or anything for presentation to the queen:

> The present sent (as said) by the Queen unto our soverigne lord the Kinge is soe dispicable that it deserves not the name nor title of one, and the ellephant given the President is of the same esteeme: one being unworthy soe royall a person, and the other being unprofitable. [So] that wee have noe reson to returne acknowledgment for either, but shall send it [i.e. the present] unto the Honourable Company and shall leave it unto them to dispose of (Foster 1923:83).

Sultanah Tajul Alam was left to wait a long time for a reply; in a letter to the Company in London from the President and Council in Surat on 28 January 1664 it was mentioned that some years previously the Queen of Aceh had sent a letter and present to King Charles, ‘whose answer shee is very inquisitive after; please to order an enquiry after it’ (Foster 1923:316).

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36 Valentijn implied that these titles belonged to same king who was ruling in 1621, but since he did not differentiate between Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani (giving Iskandar Muda's date of death as 1641), we take these titles to be Iskandar Thani's.

37 In 1999, Dr. Ulrich Kratz, of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, was contacted by an prominent collector of Islamic art and asked to identify a document from a photocopy. The A3-sized photocopy appeared to contain the textblock of a large illuminated Malay letter, which Kratz identified as a missive from Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah of Aceh to King Charles II of England. Kratz (1999) was also able to identify references to the letter in the records of the East India Company in ca.1661/2 (Foster 1923:83, 316, 322-3; Sainsbury 1922:71). A year later, the present writer was shown the original letter briefly by a consultant on Islamic art responsible for its conservation, and in May 2005 was given a colour photograph of the letter. This discussion is based on that photograph (Figure 3), and a copy of the photocopy of the letter text (Figure 4) kindly provided by Prof. Kratz, to whom I am indebted for first alerting me to the existence of this letter.
Layout and illumination

As the original letter is currently mounted within a cardboard frame, it was not possible to ascertain whether there were any annotations on the reverse, or whether the topmost edge contained a tiny letter heading as found on the previous two letters discussed. The exact dimensions of the letter are not known, but on the basis of the copies available, are at least 620 x 330 mm; the textblock measures exactly 290 x 240 mm.

Two contrasting modes of illumination can be distinguished in this letter. The whole sheet of paper is sprinkled with droplets of gold and silver (the silver since having tarnished to dark grey) and the entire surface is also dotted with irregularly shaped pieces of gold leaf. Cutting across this impressionistic, even frenzied, decorative scheme are the crisp lines of ruled red, gold and blue framing the text and an empty rectangular panel above. The vertical frames on the left and right of the textblock and upper panel are extended upwards, almost to the top of the sheet of paper; and flank a slightly shorter inner pair of vertical frames arising from left and right of the rectangular panel. This smaller pair of vertical frames flanks an ogival arched headpiece containing a bold floral meander pattern set against a deep blue ground.

The appearance of the letter suggests the use of a type of ready-gilded writing paper imported from Surat in India and often used by both the Dutch and many Indonesian rulers for diplomatic correspondence. Such Indian paper was usually decorated with floral motifs all over the surface, and was sometimes splattered with gold and silver droplets, but what is unique in an Indonesian context is the added illumination in the form of the decorative frame and coloured headpiece. On the other hand, it is possible that the whole letter may have been decorated in Aceh, but using Perso-Indian techniques of splattering gold and silver and pasting gold leaf. Examination of the original letter would confirm which of the possibilities is the more likely.

Compliments

The opening compliments giving the name of the sender and listing her attributes occupy 15 of the 33 lines of text, and are so densely-written that they actually account for over half the total number of words in the letter (400 out of 783 words). There is a remarkable degree of correspondence with the puji-pujian in Iskandar Thani’s letter written over 20 years previously. Of the 26 distinct sets of attributes in Iskandar Thani’s, all but five are repeated in Tajul Alam’s letter, which also includes several new formulations, giving a total of 32 sets of attributes (see Table 1). In some cases the correspondence is word-for-word while in other cases there are slight differences of phrasing; especially interesting are the deliberate changes.

Thus one of the few clauses found in Iskandar Thani’s letter but not in Tajul Alam’s is lagi raja yang ngurniayi kesukaan akan yang dikasihinya dan kedukaan akan yang dimarahinya, ‘and a king who dispenses good fortune to those he favours and misfortune to those who have incurred his wrath’, suggesting an appreciation of realpolitik in the reduced military might of the kingdom in the intervening period. In a more subtle change, while Iskandar Thani’s sense of justice is likened to that of Nusyirwan Adil and his liberality to Hatim Tai, these names are ommitted from Tajul Alam’s letter. Instead, her sense of justice is likened to that of ‘Sultan’ Ibn Abd al-Aziz, refering to Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the fifth Umayyad caliph (r.717-720) and to later generations ‘an exemplar of the
Muslim virtues of piety, equity and humility’ (EI2 Cobb 2000:821-822) who features prominently in the *Taj al-Salatin* and the *Bustan al-Salatin*.  

The correspondence between the compliments in Iskandar Thani’s letter and Tajul Alam’s, written 21 years later, can also be taken as evidence of the use of a *kitab terasul* – a Malay guide to letter-writing containing selections of suitable opening compliments – in the royal chancery of Aceh at this time. Finally, it should be noted that while both Iskandar Muda’s and Iskandar Thani’s letter describe themselves as *surat*, Tajul Alam’s letter is called *sitemi* and also the Arabic *kitabat*, ‘writing’. The word *sitemi* all but disappears from Malay writing from Aceh by the 18th century, although the Acehnese word *esuteumi* is still found (cf. Gallop 2003).

### Table 1. Comparison of the opening compliments in the letters from Iskandar Thani and Tajul Alam

Sets of attributes/phrases in common have been highlighted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iskandar Thani, 1639</th>
<th>Tajul Alam, 1660</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. ialah khalifat Allah yang zatnya upama matahari yang betuk pada ketika duha,</td>
<td>2. ialah khalifat Tuhan seru alam sekalian yang zatnya upama matahari yang betuk pada ketika duha,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. lagi raja zill Allah yang sifatnya upama bulan purnama;</td>
<td>3. lagi raja zill Allah yang sifatnya upama bulan purnama;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ialah raja yang pilihan Allah yang perangainya upama bintang thuraiya;</td>
<td>4. ialah raja yang pilihan Allah Ta’ala yang perangainya upama bintang thuraiya;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ialah raja yang raja al-diraja anak cucu raja Iskandar Zulkarnain;</td>
<td>5. ialah raja al-diraja anak cucu a(l) Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ialah raja yang akalnya upama daerah yang buntar,</td>
<td>6. ialah khalifat Allah lagi raja yang menyatakan hikmat Allah yang ghaib,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. lagi raja yang fikirnya upama laut yang dalam;</td>
<td>7. ialah raja yang melimpahkan syara’ Allah,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ialah raja yang mengempukan makam yang awani;</td>
<td>8. lagi yang men...kan segala yang musykil[?],</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. lagi raja yang empunya hal yang a’la;</td>
<td>9. ialah raja yang akalnya upama daerah yang buntar,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. ialah raja yang menyatakan perangai Allah takhalluquwa [bi- akhlqal Allah,</td>
<td>10. lagi raja yang fikirnya upama laut yang dalam,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

40 In the *Taj al-Salatin*, there are three anecdotes about Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (Khalid 1992:55-56, 75-79, 87); identified through a *Malay Concordance Project* (http://online.anu.edu.au/asianstudies/ahcen/proudfoot/mcp/) search on *Abdul Aziz* on 6.2.2007.


42 28 *kitab terasul* manuscripts have been traced, including some from Aceh, but none contain sample compliments of the kind used here.
11. lagi raja yang .... 
12. ... yang ...
13. ialah ... hadratnya?] [mengelenggarakan] segala bala tentaranya;
14. ialah raja yang gunawan pengasih lagi dermawan;
15. ialah raja yang adil lagi fadil upama Nusyirwan Adil pada menyatakan adil Allah,
16. lagi raja yang terlebih murah upama Hatim Tai pada menyatakan karam Allah;
17. ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan kelian mas kudrati yang cemerlang cahayanya,
18. lagi raja yang mengempukan masjid suasa gilang gemilang diyânya;
19. [ialah raja yang .... yang bertatahkan ratna mutu manikam;
20. ialah] raja yang mengempukan gajah putih kedua matanya cemerlang seperti lintang timur, dan gajah bergading empat, dan gajah merah, dan gajah warna lembayung, dan gajah borek, dan gajah sauk, dan gajah bangkun berkenah, dan gajah khuntha;
21. ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan gajah berpakaian mas bepermata belazuardi dan beratus-ratus gajah peperangan yang berbeluhan besi dan behalap gading besi malila dan berkaus besi dan tembaga;
22. ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan] kuda berpakaian mas bepermata belazuardi, berkaus besi dan sausa dan beratus-ratus kuda tizi daripada kuda perang yang seru jenis, daripada jenis Arabi dan Iraqi dan Rumi dan Turki dan Kuci dan Belaqi dan Lahur dan [Abaya] dan Tongkin dan Gudh;
23. ialah raja yang mengempukan kerajaan di barat dan di timur,
24. lagi raja yang ngurniai kesukaan akan yang dikasihinya dan keduakan akan yang [dimarahinya;
25. ialah raja yang menyatakan kenayatan seru bagi ‘azmat Allah Ta’ala,
26. lagi raja yang] menyatakan kenayatan pelbagai kibriya’ Allah Ta’ala,
A contemporary English translation

Three copies of a contemporary translation of this letter are held in The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) of the UK. The first has the appearance of a draft, while the second two appear to be identical corrected fair copies; one of these copies is presented in Appendix C.3.

This translation is a perfect example of both the uses and limitations of contemporary European translations of royal Malay letters as historical sources. The gist of the contents is quite accurate – the professing of congratulations to King Charles on his accession to the throne, followed by urging the English to continue trading in Aceh, the granting of permission to Henry Gary for a factory, and the complaints against the Dutch – but all nuance and sense of balance is lost, with many compliments for the King and the English not found in the original.

Most extraordinary – and most potentially misleading – are the compliments, which bear no relation whatsoever to the actual puji-pujian in the original Malay letter. Some of the phrases are immediately reminiscent of Iskandar Muda’s letter, but the actual English terminology is strangely familiar – and so it proves. It appears that this translation is based on Copland’s report of the letter from Iskandar Muda to James I presented to Thomas Best in 1613, which was published in Purchas his pilgrimes in 1624. The first part of those compliments reads:

Peducka Sirie Sultan, King of Kings, renownmed for his warres, and sole king of Sumatra, and a king more famous then his predecessors, feared in his kingdome and honoured of all bordering nations: in whom there is the true image of a king: in whome reignes the true methode of government: formed (as it were) of the most pure metall and adorned with the most finest colours: whose seat is high and most compleat, like to a christall river, pure and cleare as the christall glasse: from whom floweth the pure streame of bountie and justice: whose presence is as the finest gold: King of Priaman and of the mountaine of gold, viz. Salida, and lord of nine sorts of stones .... his vessels for bathing of pure gold, his sepulchre of gold ... (Foster 1934:211-212).

As can be seen, these have been copied more or less verbatim by the translator of Sultanah Tajul Alam’s letter, only pausing to modify the gender (‘sole mistress of Sumatra’, ‘lady of nine sorts of precious stones’, etc.). This suggests that at least in later years the EIC (and perhaps the VOC, too) simply kept to hand one translated example of the compliments of a royal Aceh letter, and – either believing these to be unchanging, or regarding any differences as merely cosmetic – reproduced this as and when necessary.

43 Foster (1923:83) gives the reference to the Public Record Office series C.O.77, vol.viii (pp.192, 194, 196). A complete photographic copy of the series C.O.77 is held in the India Office Records at the British Library, with the shelfmark MSS.Phot.Eur.149; it is clear that the original volumes have been refoliated since Foster inspected them. The translations of the letter are found in MSS.Phot.Eur.149/8, ff.152-153, 154, 156; that presented in Appendix C.3 is f.156.
And yet the English translation does proffer some valuable information not found in the Malay original, notably the date: 28 Safar 1072 or 12 October 1661 in the Julian calendar (but 23 October 1661 in the current Gregorian calendar). This fact and a few other details deriving from Malay phrases that are not found in the original Malay letter – for example, the reference to the ‘prophet Issah’ and the title ‘Orang Kaya Putih’ awarded to Gary – suggest that the English translation of the contents (if not the compliments) may be the result of an oral working session between a court official and an East India Company linguist.

ROYAL LETTER-WRITING IN ACEH IN THE 17TH CENTURY

Until recently the letter from Sultan Iskandar Muda of 1615 was the only known original royal letter from 17th-century Aceh. It was both an icon of Malay epistolography and its greatest enigma. It was by far the earliest known illuminated Malay letter, yet also - turning evolutionary theory on its head - the largest, most impressive and most sophisticated artistically. It bore no seal, normally an essential mark of authority on a formal royal letter. The unusual heading, usually accorded a prominent position in most Malay letters, is here written in such tiny letters and placed so far at the top of the sheet as almost to escape notice. The part of the compliments glorifying the sender was longer than in any other Malay letter seen and unique in its wording, and there was no accompanying gift. In short, though this epistle broadly conformed to the standard format of a Malay letter, comprising puji-pujian (opening compliments), perkataan (contents) and termaktub (concluding statement), bearing a kepala surat (heading), and with its text-block sited in the lower-left quadrant of the sheet, in each of its constituent parts it was quite different from any other Malay letter, whether from elsewhere in the archipelago or from a later century in Aceh’s history.

It might have been expected that the recent discovery of two further royal Malay letters from 17th-century Aceh would throw light on Iskandar Muda’s letter and help to interpret some of its most enigmatic features, yet an initial comparison raises more questions than it answers, for there are as many differences as similarities between the three letters. In this section, formal aspects of the three letters – illumination, letter heading and compliments – will be compared with each other and with contemporary epistolary practice in the broader Islamic world and other Malay kingdoms, as well as with other royal letters from Aceh, to try to better understand the forces which shaped royal letter-writing in Aceh in the 17th century.

Layout and illumination

It is probably true to say that despite the extraordinarily rich tradition of Islamic manuscript illumination from at least the 14th century onwards, the decoration of Islamic documents only became widespread in the 18th and 19th centuries, although the use of illumination in specific contexts in royal documents can certainly be found earlier. In imperial Ottoman firmans, illumination was focused on the royal monogram (tughra) at the head of the letter from the early 16th century onwards, becoming larger and ever more elaborate by the end of the century (Nadir 1987:15-16), but examples of Ottoman documents with illumination covering the whole sheet are only known from the 19th century. In both Persia and Mughal India only a few finely illuminated documents are known from the 16th and early 17th centuries compared to the profusion of later years.

In the Muslim courts of Southeast Asia, a distinction must be made between royal letters illuminated within the palaces of the archipelago, and letters written on gilded ‘Surat’

44 Only one illuminated firman of the Mughal emperor Akbar is known, dating from the very late 16th century (reproduced in Brand & Lowry 1985:120).
paper imported from India as described above. Apart from the three Aceh letters, there are no other known examples of ‘locally’ illuminated royal letters from the Malay world until the late 18th century. Even from Aceh itself in later years, only one other illuminated letter is documented. The Danish National Archives in Copenhagen holds an important collection of over 40 original documents from Aceh dating from the first half of the 18th century, including 21 royal letters, written in Malay, Arabic and Persian. The only illuminated document in this collection is a badly-damaged letter in Persian from Sultan Alauddin Ahmad Syah dated 1733. The style of illumination is quite unusual, with a stencilled pattern of tulips outlined in gold against a background of splattered blue droplets, and it is possible that this too is an example of ready-decorated Indian paper.

This broad survey serves to confirm Iskandar Muda’s letter of 1615 as a landmark not just of Malay illumination but also of Islamic art, and it is also clear that despite the lesser artistic quality of Iskandar Thani’s and Tajul Alam’s letters, their very scale and lavishness would still have set them apart from other diplomatic missives of their time. The contrast between Iskandar Muda’s ‘golden’ letter and Iskandar Thani’s ‘silver’ letter could not be more pronounced, but it is interesting to note Tajul Alam’s return to the structural model of Iskandar Muda’s letter. Even though the artistry of Tajul Alam’s letter is decidedly inferior, we note the same basic principle of a textblock covered with gold droplets, enclosed within a ruled illuminated frame with extended verticals flanking a domed headpiece filled with floral motifs on a blue ground.

**Letter headings**

It is unfortunate that the limited opportunity to inspect the original letter from Tajul Alam did not confirm whether or not there was a letter heading (kepala surat) at the top, for the most distinctive feature in common between the otherwise very different letters of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani is the heading. In both letters, *Huwa Allah Ta’ala*, ‘He [is] God the Exalted’, is written in identical tiny letters in the middle at the very top edge of the sheet.

In a similar vein, in an exit permit written in Arabic granted by Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah to a Dutch captain in 1603, the heading *Huwa* (He [i.e. God]) is written at the very top, and also in comparatively minuscule letters (Wassing-Visser 1995:35). Although the collection of 18th-century Aceh documents in Copenhagen bear a wide variety of headings, at least one royal letter has the heading *Huwa al-Ghani*. Conversely, *Huwa* has not been encountered as a heading on letters from any other Malay state, where by far the most common heading is *Qawluhu al-Haqq*, ‘His word is the Truth’ (Gallop 1994:60), its popularity presaged by the heading *Qawluhu al-Haqq al-Mubin* on the 1599 royal letter from Brunei. Even the size and location of the heading on the 17th-century Aceh letters is unusual in the context of other Malay letters, where headings tend to be larger in size and placed more centrally on the sheet of paper.

If, however, we turn to the broader Muslim world, we find *Huwa* to be a common constituent of the *invocatio* (heading) in Ottoman documents of the 15th and 16th centuries, where, as in our two Acehnese letters, it was placed at the very top edge of the sheet of paper, separated from the main text-block by a wide space (and thus often cut off or lost). In Safavid Iran, letters sent to European heads of state during and after the reign of Abbas I (r.1588-1629) mostly bore *invocations* commencing with *Huwa* (Mitchell 1997:184,194), while *Huwa* by itself was the heading of choice on Sufi letters (Rajabzadeh 1992:294). In Mughal India, *Huwa*, conjoined with such epithets describing

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46 Cf. the 100 letters published in facsimile in Gallop 1994.
the divine attributes of God as may be in keeping with the subject of the text’ was a favourite choice for the *sarnama* at the top of a Mughal firman (Mohiuddin 1971:63).

While this use of *Huwa* appears to demonstrate clearly Aceh’s awareness of contemporary pan-Islamic trends, it should also be stressed that elements of Turkish, Persian and Mughal epistolary practice were only selectively adopted in Aceh. A significant factor influencing the choice of *Huwa* as a letter heading in Aceh may also have been the importance accorded to this word by prominent Acehnese *ulama* in their writings: Hamzah Fansuri is said to have regarded *Huwa* as the Name above all over Beautiful Names, and Syaikh Syamsuddin of Pasai especially favoured *Huwa* and *Allah* (Nieuwenhuijze 1945:95-6).

**Compliments**

As has already been mentioned, the length of the ‘from me’ element of the opening compliments in all three Aceh letters is without parallel in any other known Malay letters from other parts of Nusantara. In many Malay letters, the full compliments naming both sender and addressee can be quite brief, but when elaborate, almost invariably more words are devoted to the qualities of the recipient. Even royal letters from Aceh in the first half of the 18th century addressed to the Danish East India Company all conform to the broader Malay pattern of tending to honour the recipient, as can be seen in the opening compliments of a letter bearing the seal of Sultan Jamalul Alam Badrul Munir of Aceh (r.1703-1726) to the Dutch governor of Tranquebar:

*Tulus ikhlas yang sempurna serta kasih tiada berkeputusan dari bawah kemuliaan sultan al-azam wa-ilham al-kuram datang kepada gurnadur yang dalam negeri Terangbadi, ialah yang mempunyai gah yang sempurna pada antara segala yang setara dengan dia pada segala dusun dan bandar, ialah yang muktad pada segala majlis dan segala tempat, ialah perhiasan negeri dan laut, ialah tuan segala raja2 dan segala orang besar2, ialah yang menerbitkan kemurahan pada segala yang kesukaran, ialah yang melimpahkan kemurahan serta menagihkan berkasih dan bersetia yang tiada mengubahkan perjanjian setinya dengan seorang jua pun, barang berkekalahan jua kiranya dalam yang demikian itu selama adalah cahaya matabhari pada aflaknya dan cahaya bulan pada awurnya amin.*

Perfect honesty and sincerity and never-ending affection from the presence of the great sultan and the noble inspiration to the Governor of the state of Terangbadi, he who has the most perfect courage of all his equals in all lands and ports, he who is at the ready for all councils and in all places, he who is the ornament of the nation and the seas, he is the lord of kings and chiefs, he who is the font of generosity to all those in need, he who overflows with generosity and is steadfast in his affections and loyalty and never breaches his treaties of amity with anyone, may he be perpetuated in all these qualities for as long as the sun shines on the heavenly spheres and the moon shines on the east wind, amen.

In the Muslim world beyond Southeast Asia, in the 15th and 16th centuries royal letters were normally written in Persian, or occasionally in Arabic. After the *invocatio* praising God, the letter-text commenced with a string of honorifics preceding the name of the addressee, which was followed by greetings and blessings, before proceeding to the business at hand. In other words, these ‘compliments’ only comprised a ‘to you’ component accompanied by benedictions; the sender himself was not named, nor accorded titles or attributes (Ménage 1985:289). At the Safavid courts in the 16th and

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48 Statens Arkiver, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen; Ass. Komp. 2188a MM; read from the facsimile in Kratz 1998:[23].
17th centuries, this same basic format was also used for correspondence with Christian rulers (Mitchell 1997:195-200). At the Mughal court the format for royal letters was similar, but with provision for the (optional) mention of the sender only after the eulogy to the addressee as set out above (Islam 1979:11-12). Indeed, during the first English embassy to the court of the Mughal emperor Jahangir, Sir Thomas Roe reported back to the EIC that the letter from the King James – which began in the conventional way, ‘James, by the Grace of Almighty God, etc. ... To the high and mightie Monarch the Great Mogor, etc., Greeting’ (Foster 1899:553) – had caused offence at the Mughal court because the king’s name had been written before that of the emperor (Foster 1899:347). Jahangir’s reply to James opens (according to the English translation) only with benedictions for the recipient (Foster 1899:557-560).

In an interesting development at the Ottoman court, a few openly hostile letters between Ottoman and other Muslim rulers in the 15th and 16th centuries flouted diplomatic niceties by placing the sender’s name with attendant attributes before that of the addressee, and according the addressee fewer honorifics than might have been expected; and two such letters were in the vernacular Turkish rather than the customary Persian. This deliberately discourteous format has been identified by Ménage (1985:289) as the likely inspiration behind elements of a new Ottoman epistolary style developed during the reign of Sulaiman the Magnificent (r.1520-66) specifically for correspondence with Christian rulers, using the vernacular Turkish, and in the ‘from me / to you’ form.

Returning to Aceh, it can thus be observed that the letter in Arabic from Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah to Queen Elizabeth I in 160249 began in the standard international Muslim epistolary style, with benedictions followed by praise for the addressee and then a brief mention of the sender.

What all these examples confirm is that by any contemporary epistolary standards - whether from within the Malay archipelago or beyond - the extraordinary length of the self-description in the compliments of Iskandar Muda’s letter could only have its origins in what would be regarded in Islamic diplomatic circles as deliberate discourtesy, even though this style may then have evolved into a standard format for royal Acehnese correspondence – at least with Christian rulers – throughout much of the 17th century. What were the forces responsible for bringing about these changes in royal epistolary practice in Aceh?

The role of Acehnese ulama in the composition of royal letters

The suggestion above that the choice of Huwa as the preferred heading at the court of Aceh may have been influenced by prevailing theological preferences can be explored further through the important thesis by Takeshi Ito (1984) on Aceh in the 17th century, The World of the Adat Aceh. Previous studies of Acehnese ulama and literati have approached their subjects from an almost exclusively theological, literary or philological angle, but by drawing on not only the Adat Aceh but also the Hikayat Aceh and the Bustan al-Salatin, as well as contemporary travel accounts and Dutch archival sources, Ito has supplied a political, economic, diplomatic and administrative context to their activities50.

In particular, Ito has highlighted the pivotal role played by Syaikh Syamsuddin (d.1630) at the court of Aceh from the time of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah through to the reign of Iskandar Muda: ‘In his capacity as chief councillor and scholar, he played a significant

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49 An English translation of the complete letter by Rev. William Bedwell, first published in Purchas in 1624, is given in Foster 1940:110-1.
role in political affairs, as contemporary European sources indicate, particularly in guiding foreign policy with "infidel" European powers, since he was one of the best informed of political developments in the various parts of the Muslim world' (Ito 1984:260-61). The 'schech' who conversed with de Houtman and tried to persuade him to convert to Islam in September 1599 and the 'archbishop' mentioned by John Davis during the same visit; the 'Syaikh al-Islam' in the *Hikayat Aceh* who was ordered by Sayid al-Mukammil to read a letter brought to Aceh by a Portuguese envoy (in November 1600); the 'chief bishop' who headed the trade negotiations with Sir James Lancaster in June 1602, and the 'rassedor' – 'one of the Kings chiefest subjucctts, to whom the Kinge doth referr all his chiefe and waightie matters of statte' (Foster 1934:165) - who negotiated with Best in 1613, have all been identified as probably referring to the one person of Syaikh Syamsuddin (Ito 1984:249,281). It is thus likely that the 'Sheriffe [i.e. Sharif] or Byshoppe' who drew up the trading privileges for Keeling in 1616 (Strachan & Penrose 1971:140; cf. Ito 1984:281), and 'the Bishop of Achin' to whom Oxwick presented one fine white bafta and a comb-case on 13 May 1615 in the course of his efforts to procure Iskandar Muda's letter (Foster 1899:97) also refer to Syaikh Syamsuddin. These sources not only demonstrate beyond doubt Syaikh Syamsuddin's hands-on role in the negotiating of trading privileges with European merchants and envoys, but they also provide compelling evidence of his involvement in the preparation of the attendant royal letters.  

Given the pivotal role of Syaikh Syamsuddin in Aceh's correspondence with European powers from the reign of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah onwards, it is clear that the presence or otherwise of Islamic elements in Acehnese royal letters of this period needs careful interpretation. As Syaikh Syamsuddin was a party to the courteous letter in Arabic from Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah to Queen Elizabeth in 1602, which began with lengthy benedictions, it is likely that the impetus for the change in epistolary style must have stemmed from the new sultan, against the background of an increasingly hectic port of Aceh as various European merchants jostled each other to buy pepper.  

It is thus suggested here that the lengthy compliments in Iskandar Muda's letters to European potentates – as best represented in his letter of 1615 to James I – were those deemed appropriate for a *kafir* king, and represented a new development in epistolary practice in Aceh. The lack of overtly Islamic or otherwise spiritual or moral elements should be seen as a deliberate omission; the focus on material goods and worldly success reflecting both a relationship which was fundamentally materialistic in nature, and the subject matter of the letter, namely a request for trading rights. Indeed, the choice of the term *Tuhan* for God rather than *Allah* in the text of the letter can be seen almost as an attempt to protect the most divine Name from besmirchment. At the same time, such an approach allowed plenty of scope for indulgence of Iskandar Muda's personal passions for precious metals and rich jewels, and his great territorial ambitions were given voice in the lengthy enumeration of his dominions. The foregrounding of material wealth is also made manifest in the magnificent vehicle of Iskandar Muda's words, the enormous illuminated scroll. Nonetheless, the religious allegiance of the sovereign is unmistakable in the heading situated at the very top of the letter, in tiny letters but indubitably there.  

Turning to the letter of 1639 from Iskandar Thani, the question naturally arises as to whether his spiritual mentor Nurudddin al-Raniri exercised a similar supervisory role in his foreign correspondence as did Syaikh Syamsuddin for Iskandar Muda. During the reign of Iskandar Thani, there is less documentary evidence in contemporary records for

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51 That these two aspects of foreign relations were inextricably entwined is most evident in Iskandar Muda's letter to Keeling in 1616, in which the substance of the trading agreement is given in the royal letter itself, while the request for trading privileges is also addressed directly in the letter of 1615. The letter to James I given to Best in 1613 only contains diplomatic niceties, as negotiations for trade at Tiku and Pariaman were still continuing.
the involvement of Nuruddin in negotiations with foreigners, but the question of whether his hand can be discerned in the letter to Prince Frederik Hendrik is supported by the internal evidence. It is well known that Nuruddin was strongly influenced by both the Sejarah Melayu and the Taj al-Salatin and, as shown above, the compliments in this letter do reveal a close familiarity with both these texts. Although the Bustan al-Salatin was not completed when this letter was written, the extolling of Iskandar Thani’s virtues is stylistically very similar to those found in the account of his accession in the Bustan, where his descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain is also specifically mentioned (Siti Hawa 1992:20-21).

In this letter - addressed to a politically and commercially important but potentially dangerous ally - we get the impression of the compliments being carefully composed according to the specific needs of the letter. This, too, is a letter to an non-Muslim ruler, but quite a different approach is taken here. Instead of all but shielding the Islamic element from the uninitiated and meeting materialism with materialism, we find a more didactic - and literary - approach in the introduction of suitable Islamic exemplars, for example Nusyirwan the Just, who despite being a kafir was renowned for his goodness and justice, and Hatim Tai. In the Taj al-Salatin, Hatim Tai was so famed for his generosity that he incurred the wrath and jealousy of the kings of Rum [Byzantium], Sham [Syria] and Yemen. Each made extortionate demands upon him hoping to ruin his reputation, but all their requests were gladly met in full, deeply shaming the requester. This reference to Hatim Tai may have been intended to presage the part of the letter in which the Sultan reminds the Dutch of just how many trade concessions he has already made to their incessant and rapacious requests (the subtlety of which allusion was doubtless lost on them). Perhaps on a personal level, the compliments reflect Iskandar Thani’s evident delight in the variety of his elephants and horses.

Thus although the emphasis on self-description in the compliments initiated by Iskandar Muda was retained by Iskandar Thani, a completely different flavour prevails, with the emphasis on virtues appropriate for a king who is the shadow of God on earth. This epistolary style was adopted Tajul Alam with no significant changes, suggesting that the ideal of kingship carefully painted in these compliments was fully subscribed to by the queen herself. Critically, no gendered changes are made. While Malay is a gender-neutral language, with raja embracing equally the sense of king or queen, Arabic is most certainly not, yet in the first line we find the indubitably male sovereign epithets sultan al-muazzam wa-al-khaqan al-mukarram, ‘the great sultan and illustrious king’ applied to Tajul Alam. In fact, the only gendered epithet is the uniquely Acehnese Berdaulat, ‘the Sovereign one’, accorded to all queens of Aceh, while all kings of Aceh from the time of Iskandar Muda onwards bore the title Johan Berdaulat, ‘the Sovereign Champion’ (Gallop 2002:89).

52 In early 1642 Nuruddin did manage to secure royal permission for a Gujerati ship to trade directly on the west coast (Ito 1984:301).
53 Nuruddin was commissioned to write the Bustan al-Salatin in 1638, and probably only completed it sometime in 1641 or 1642 after the death of Iskandar Thani (Jelani 2004:38).
54 Hatim al-Tai bin Abd Allah bin Sad was a poet who lived in the second half of the 6th century A.D.. Proverbial for his liberality and hospitality, the figure of Hatim quickly became very popular in adab literature (Arendonk 1971).
56 In her study of the queens of Aceh, Mulaika Hijjas (2001:59) has made the point that Malay royal titulature is not gender specific, and in the Bustan all the queens are referred to as Sultan. On Tajul Alam’s royal seal, however, her title is given as Sultanah (Gallop 2002:112).
Conclusion

The three surviving royal Malay letters from 17th-century Aceh – from Iskandar Muda, Iskandar Thani and Tajul Alam – excel all other known Malay letters both in terms of artistry and opulence, and for the length and unique composition of their compliments. A new epistolary style appears to have been initiated by Iskandar Muda, remarkable for its emphasis on material riches and absence of overtly Islamic references. Since it is known that the king's spiritual mentor, Syaikh Syamsuddin, played a critical role in Aceh’s relations with foreign powers, the lack of Islamic formulations should be interpreted as a deliberate omission, designed for correspondence with non-Muslim powers. The letter from Iskandar Thani, however, bears the clear literary imprimamateur of his spiritual advisor, Nuruddin al-Raniri, and this epistolary style appears to have been adopted unchanged long into the reign of Tajul Alam. Thus even though we know that Nuruddin was replaced as spiritual advisor to the queen by the Minangkabau scholar Saifurrijal in 1644, Nuruddin’s influence on royal letter-writing – as on so many other aspects of the Aceh’s Islamic written heritage – survived long after his departure from Aceh.

In conclusion, in 17th-century Aceh, royal letter-writing followed a unique path that set it aside from epistolary practice in other parts of the Malay world, with two distinct styles, initiated in the reigns of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani. In addition to the political, economic and diplomatic realities which shaped the content of the letter, two forces - sacred and profane - can be detected in the composition of the compliments: the influence of the king’s spiritual mentor, and the personal policies and passions of the king himself.

Finally, quite apart from their intellectual and historical value, these three beautiful letters, illuminated with gold, silver and lapis lazuli, occupy a unique position as perhaps the only surviving tangible link to the glory that was Aceh in the 17th century, when the splendour of the sultanate was made manifest in elaborate court ceremonies parading the dazzling riches of the royal treasury.
APPENDIX: Transliterations and translations of the letters

Editorial conventions:
[maka]  reliable restoration
[maka?]  unreliable restoration
ma(ka)  text added by editor
{make}  text found in the original but deemed redundant by editor
....  text obliterated/damaged in original

Notes on orthography:
There is remarkable consistency in all three letters, with several archaic orthographical features noted in other old manuscripts from Aceh found in all the letters, for example the form mengempukan. The r of the suffix ber- is omitted in words like bepermata, belazuardi, behalap and beniaga; cf. Iskandar 1958:14, Siti Hawa 1992:xlviii. The form menyunjung for menjunjung which occurs in B & C is also noted in Iskandar 1958:12 and Siti Hawa 1992:xlvii. A clear distinction is always made between fa (one dot) and pa (three dots); ga always has three dots underneath, and final nya always has three dots underneath.

A Letter from Sultan Perkasa Alam (Iskandar Muda) of Aceh to King James I of England, 1024 (May 1615)
Bodleian Library, MS Laud Or.Rolls b.1
The following transliteration and English translation is reproduced from Shellabear (1898:126-130). The spelling has been updated, and any changes from Shellabear have been noted.

A.1 Malay text

Huwa Allah Ta’ala

Surat daripada Seri Sultan Perkasa Alam johan berdaulat, raja yang beroleh martabat kerajaan, yang dalam takhta kerajaan yang tiada terlilit oleh penglihat, yang tiada terdengar oleh peneng, yang bermaligai gading, berukir berkerawang, bersendi bersindura, bewarna sadalinggam, yang berair mas, yang beristana sayojana menentang. Yang bersungai berikat batu pelinggam, yang upama cermin sudah terupam, yang berpancuran mas bepermata beberapa daripada pancuran perak; raja yang mengampukan perbendaharaan daripada seni mas, dan seni perak, dan daripada kelian\(^57\) mas yang dalam negeri Priaman pada gunung negeri Salida; yang mengampukan permata sembilan jenis, yang berpayung mas bertimbalan yang beratnya beratus kati; yang berpeterana mas, yang berciu mas; raja yang mengampukan kuda yang berpelana mas, yang berombak mas bepermata; raja yang berzirah suasa, dan berketopong suasa, dan yang bergajah bergading mas, berkumbank perak, bergenta suasa, yang berantai suasa; raja yang bergajah berengka tinggi suasa, dan yang berprisai suasa, dan yang berlembing suasa, dan yang istinggar suasa, dan yang berkauda yang berpelana suasa, dan yang bergajah kursi perak, dan yang berkop perak, dan yang bergong suasa, dan yang beralat mas dan suasa dan perak, dan yang bertimba mas bepermata; raja yang menyegerrahakan nisyan diri daripada nisyan mas, yang bergelar Makota\(^58\) Alam, yang turun-turunan daripada raja bernisyan suasa; raja yang mengampukan raja-raja yang beratus-ratus daripada pihak mashrak, yang dalam negeri yang takluk ke Deli, dan yang dalam negeri yang takluk ke Batu Sawar; dan daripada pihak maghrib, yang dalam negeri yang takluk ke Priaman, dan ke Barus; raja yang memuat gajah peperangan tujuh puluh dari laut, dan beberapa daripada segala pakaian, dan persenggrahan yang indah-indah, dan daripada segala senjata yang mulia-mulia; raja yang beroleh kelebihan daripada limpah

\(^57\) Shellabear: galian, but spelt clearly k.l.y.n in all three letters presented here.
\(^58\) Shellabear: Megat
kelebihan Tuhan seru alam sekalian dalam takhta kerajaan Aceh, Dar al-Salam, iaitu raja yang netisa mengucap puji-pujian akan Tuhan seru alam sekalian daripada dilimpahkannya kelimpahan karunianya pada menyerahkan negeri daripada pihak masyarak seperti Lubok dan Pedir dan Samarlanga\textsuperscript{59} dan Pasai dan Perlak dan Basitang dan Tamiyang dan Deli dan Asahan dan Tanjung dan Pani dan Rokan dan Batu Sawar dan segala negeri yang takluk ke Batu Sawar dan Perak dan Pahang dan Inderagiri, maka daripada pihak maghrib seperti negeri Calang dan Daya dan Barus dan Pasaman dan Tiku dan Priaman dan Salida dan Inderapura dan Bengkulu dan Salibir dan Palembang dan Jambi; datang kepada raja yang di negeri Inggeris yang bernama Raja Yakub, yang mengampukan negeri Britani dan negeri Fransi dan negeri Irlandia. Dikekalkan Tuhan seru alam sekalian jua kiranya kerajaannya, dan ditolongnya jua kiranya ia daripada segala seterusnya.


Adapun surat ini disurat dalam negeri Aceh pada bilangan Islam seribu dua puluh empat tahun.

A.2 English translation

A letter from His Excellency Sultan Perkasa Alam, the Sovereign Champion\textsuperscript{60}, the king who possesses kingly rank, who is upon the throne of a kingdom which (human) vision cannot cover nor (human) hearing fully comprehend, whose palace is of ivory, engraved with network, with joints of red-lead, of the colour of vermillion and gilt; whose palace front extends as far as the eye can reach, whose river is enclosed with marble rocks, like unto a polished mirror, who has water pipes of gold set with jewels and many water pipes of silver. The king who holds in his possession treasuries of gold dust and silver dust, and of gold mines in the country of Priaman in the Salida mountain; who holds in his possession nine kinds of jewels, who has umbrellas of gold, one carried on each side of him, weighing hundreds of catties, whose throne is of gold, whose cushions are of gold; The king who holds in his possession a horse with a golden saddle, with golden trappings weighing hundreds of catties with a golden bit set with jewels; The king whose coat of mail is of gold alloy, and whose helmet is of gold alloy, and whose elephant has golden tusks, a frontlet of silver, bells of gold alloy, with a chain of gold alloy. The kings whose elephant has a high howdah of gold alloy, and show shield is of gold alloy, and whose spear is of gold alloy, and whose matchlock is of gold alloy, and whose horse has a saddle of gold alloy, and whose elephant has a seat of silver, and whose howdah roof is of silver, and whose gong is of gold alloy, and whose implements are of gold and gold alloy and silver, and whose bathing bucket is of jewelled gold. The king who has provided for his own monument with a monument of gold, styled Makota Alam, descendant of the kings with monuments of gold alloy. The king who holds in his authority hundreds of kings of the eastward side, in the countries which are subject to

\textsuperscript{59} Shellabear: Semerlang
\textsuperscript{60} Shellabear: Johan the majestic
Deli, and in the countries which are subject to Batu Sawar, and on the westward side in the countries which are subject to Priaman and Barus. The king who equips seventy elephants of war on the sea coast, and store of all garments, and beautiful country seats, and magnificent weapons. The king who has received superiority from the abundance of the superiority of the Lord of all the universe, on the throne of the kingdom of Aceh, the abode of peace; who is the king who continually gives praise to the Lord of all the universe for the abundance of His grace which He has abundantly supplied in giving over to him the countries on the eastern side, such as Lubok and Pedir and Samarinda and Pasangan and Pasai and Perlak and Basitang and Tamiyang and Deli and Asahan and Tanjong and Pani and Rokan and Batu Sawar and all the countries subject to Batu Sawar and Perak and Pahang and Indragiri, and on the western side such as Calang and Daya and Barus and Pasaman and Tiku and Priaman and Salida and Inderapura and Bengcoolen and Salibar and Palembang and Jambi.

To the king of England, named King James, who holds in his authority Britain and France and Ireland. May the Lord of all the universe perpetuate his kingdom, and also assist him against all his enemies.

After that, be it known unto the king that I was very much pleased to hear the words of the letter which the king ordered to be presented to me. Now it is stated therein that the king requests that the English people may trade in Tiku and Priaman, and that they may settle there to trade, as in the time of His Highness the late Saidu ‘I-Mukammal. Now it is my decree that the English people cannot, as desired by the king, receive my permission to trade in Tiku and Priaman, and cannot settle there to trade, for those countries are wild, and moreover are distant from us. If the people of Tiku or Priaman should molest them, we should certainly get an infamous report with King James. By the grace of the Lord of all the universe, if the English people who are servants of the king desire to trade, let them trade in Aceh; and if they desire to send their factors to trade, let them send them to Aceh, so that whoever shall molest them we may quickly make inquiry and punish with a just punishment, since they are the servants of the king who is in correspondence with us. May the Lord of all the universe give peace to King James on the throne of the kingdom of England for ever.

This letter was written in Aceh in the year of the Mohammedan era one thousand and twenty-four.

B. Letter in Malay from Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah [Iskandar Thani] of Aceh to Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange, [August/September 1639]
Leiden University Library, Cod.Or.4818a.I.3

B.1 Malay text

Huwa Allah Ta’ala

Surat yang menyampaikan tulus daripada hadrat paduka seri sultan al-mu‘azzam wa-al-khaqan al-mukarram Paduka Seri Sultan Aluddin Mughayat Syah Johan Berdaulat zill Allah fi al-‘alam; ialah khalifat Allah yang satnya upama matahari yang betuk pada ketika duha, lagi raja] zill Allah yang sifatnya upama bulan purnama; ialah raja yang pilihan Allah yang perangainya upama bintang thuraiya; ialah raja yang raja al-diraja anak cucu raja Iskandar Zulkarnain; ialah raja yang akalnya upama daerah yang buntar, lagi raja yang fikirnya upama laut yang dalam; ialah raja yang mengempukan makam61 yang awani62, lagi raja yang empunya hal yang a’la; ialah raja yang menyatakan perangai

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61 m.q.a.m, ‘Resting place, place of residence, dwelling’ (Steingass 1996:1289); probably to be taken in its more usual Malay meaning of tomb, by analogy with the mention in Iskandar Muda’s letter of his tombstone (nisan) of gold.
62 a.w.n.y; from Pers./Ar. aun (a.w.n), ‘quiet, peace, tranquillity’ (Steingass 1996:122).
Allah takhalluquwa\textsuperscript{63} [bi-akhlaq Allah, lagi raja yang .... yang ... ialah ... hadratnya mengelenggarakan?] segala bala tentaranya; ialah raja yang gunawan pengasih lagi dermawan; ialah raja yang adil lagi fadil upama Nusyirwan Adil pada menyatakan adil Allah, lagi raja yang terlebih murah upama Hatim Tai pada menyatakan karam Allah; ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan kelian mas kudrati yang cemerlang cahayanya, lagi raja yang mengempukan masjid suasa gilang gemilang diyânya; [ialah raja yang .... yang bertatahakan ratna mutu manikam; ialah] raja yang mengempukan gajah putih keda matanya cemerlang seperti bintang timur, dan gajah bergading empat, dan gajah merah, dan gajah warna lembayung, dan gajah borek, dan gajah sauk, dan gajah bangkun berkenah\textsuperscript{65}, dan gajah khusnata; ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan gajah berpakaian mas bepermata belazuardi dan beratus-ratus gajah daripada gajah perang yang [berbeluhan besi dan behalap\textsuperscript{65} gading besi maillia dan berkaukus besi dan tembaga; ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan] kuda berpakaian mas bepermata belazuardi, berkaukus mas dan suasa dan beratus-ratus kuda tizi daripada kuda perang yang seru jenis, daripada jenis Arabi danIraqi dan Rumi dan Turki dan Kuci dan Bbcuq dan Lahur dan [Abaya] dan Tongkin dan Gudh; ialah raja yang mengempukan kerajaan di barat dan di timur, lagi raja yang ngurnia\textsuperscript{66} kesuakaan akan yang dikasihinya dan keduakan akan yang [dimarahinya; ialah raja yang menyatakan kenyataan seru bagi ’azmat Allah Ta’ala, lagi raja yang] menyatakan kenyataan pelbagai kibriya’ Allah Ta’ala,

sampai kepada Kapten Apris Andrik, yang gagah lagi berani pada melawan seterunya, ialah yang amat setiawan pada segala yang dikasihinya, lagi yang amat bijaksana pada merintahkan segala pekerjaan, ialah yang mengempukan beratus-[ratus kapa]l peperangan yang mustaid dengan segala] alat senjatanya, dikekalkan Tuhan seru alam sekaian jua kiranya menda(pat) bahagia Kapten dengan sempurna sejahteranya.

Adapun [biba dinyatakan Tuhan seru alam sekaian kepada .... kita bahwa Kapten] Apris Andrik itu amat sangat berkasih-kasihan, daripada masa paduka marhum Makuta Alam datang kepada masa kita menyenjungh khalifat Allah, tiada jua berkeputusan tali rantai muhabbat dan mudat antara Kapten dengan hadrat kita, ... [yang lagi kita pun demikian jua.

Dan barang diketahui Kapten bahwa kita menitahkan Seri Bija Pekerma?] ....ala Syaraf dan Maharaja Perbuana dan Seri Bija Indera dan Tun Ratna al-Diraja ke Jayakarta mendapatkan Kapten Gurnadur Jeneral Anton pan Diman karena kita hendak menyakiti Melaka itu dan menyenjungh khalifat Allah, tiada jua berkeputusan tali rantai muhabbat dan mudat antara Kapten dengan hadrat kita, ... [yang lagi kita pun demikian jua.

Adapun [biba dinyatakan Tuhan seru alam sekaian kepada .... kita bahwa Kapten] Apris Andrik itu amat sangat berkasih-kasihan, daripada masa paduka marhum Makuta Alam datang kepada masa kita menyenjungh khalifat Allah, tiada jua berkeputusan tali rantai muhabbat dan mudat antara Kapten dengan hadrat kita, ... [yang lagi kita pun demikian jua.

Karena adat raja-raja menyerang negeri hendaklah dengan perkasyanya, [negeri yang diserang] pun mau alah, rakyat yang menyerang pun jangan binasa.  Tetapi jikalau tiada dahulu dibinasakan yang menolong orang Melaka itu niscaya adalah kita mengadap dua tiga pekerjaan, karena [orang] Johor itu sudah bersumpah setia dengan raja Portekal

\textsuperscript{63} t.kh.l.q.w.a, fully pointed with fathah over t and kh and sukun over w; from takhalluq (t-kh-l-q), i.a. kindness (Steingass 1996:288).

\textsuperscript{64} b.ng.k.w.n b.r.k.n.h

\textsuperscript{65} b.h.a.l.p. Wilkinson (1985:31) has under alap (a-l-p), mengalap, ‘to pick fruit by cutting the stalks with a knife fastened at the end of a long pole’. By analogy, alap (=halap) could mean a knife or other sharpened point attached to the end of an elephant’s tusks like a bayonet. That such weapons may have been in use in Aceh in the early 17th century is apparent in a battle scene in the Hikayat Aceh describing a fight between two elephants: Maka Nélita itupun ditikam Ratna Mutu Manikam terus kumbanya. Maka Nélita itupun lari, ‘Nélita was stabbed by Ratna Mutu Manikam right in her forehead, whereupon Nélita took flight’ (Iskandar 1958:177).

\textsuperscript{66}’.r.n.y.a.y
akan bersuatu senjata dengan orang Melaka, [dan menyuruh] ia ke Siam dan ke Patani
dan kepada [segala negeri? yang hampir kepadanya akan membantu Melaka itu?.

Adapun negeri] Periam dan Bandar Khalifah

I.67 dan Inderapura, pada masa
dahulu beniaga ke negeri itu daripada Perangsis dan Inggris dan Dinmar dan yang
lainnya pun, maka adat hasil daripada segala mereka yang beniaga itu akan kita pada
setahun kimat sebahara emaslah kita hilangkan maka pada masa sekarang ini daripada
kash [kita akan orang Holanda suka .... beniaga dalam negeri ini.

Syahadan akan segala kapal yang] beniaga ke Aceh Dar al-Salam yang ada surat
sembah mereka itu ke bawah duli kita, seperti kapal Gujerat dan kapal Masulipatan dan
Benggala dan Dabul dan Kerapatan dan barang sebagainya, maka janganlah dicabul
orang Holanda akan orang yang tersebut itu.

[Dan dipohonkan Kapten Kurnadur Jeneral Anton pan Diman ke bawah duli kita
dagangan dalam negeri Pahang itu ... sebahagi] akan Kapten beniaga dan sebahagi lagi
akan orang yang lain, maka itupun kita kurniai akan dia.

Adapun kiriman kita akan Kapten Apris Andrik bata mas kudrati dua buah dan
guliga empat buah dalamnya beserta buah. Wa-al-salam bi-al-khayr.

B.2 English translation

He [is] God the Exalted

A letter conveying sincerity from the presence of His Majesty the great sultan and the
illustrious king, His Majesty Sultan Alauddin Mughayat Syah, the Sovereign Champion,
the shadow of God on earth; he is the viceroy of God, whose essence is like the
scorching midday sun, and also the king, the shadow of God, whose qualities are like the
full moon; he is the king chosen by God, whose disposition is like the Pleiades; he is the
king of a royal line of kings descended from King Alexander the Great; he is the king
whose understanding is like a round globe, and the king whose counsel is like the deep
sea; he is the king who possesses a tranquil resting-place, and the king who enjoys the
most exalted position; he is the king who bears witness to the kindly nature of God ....
commands his armies; he is the king with magic powers, loving and charitable; he is a
king who is as just and virtuous as Nusyirwan the Just in bearing witness to the justice of
God, and a king of utmost liberality, like Hatim Tai, in bearing witness to the benevolence
of God; he is the king granted by God the Exalted the possession of mines of fine gold
which glitters and gleams, and the king who possesses a mosque of gold alloy which
shines out bright; he is the king who ... studded with precious jewels; he is the king who
possesses a white elephant whose two eyes shine like the morning star, and elephants
with four tusks, and red elephants, and purple elephants, and speckled elephants, and
lasseoed(?) elephants, and ... elephants and hermaphrodite elephants; he is the king
granted by God the possession of elephants caparisoned in gold studded with jewels and
lapis-lazuli, and hundreds of elephants for use in war with steel-framed howdahs, their
tusks sheathed and tipped in steel and their feet shod in steel and copper; he is the king
granted by God the possession of horses caparisoned in gold studded with jewels and
lapis-lazuli, with horseshoes of gold and gold alloy, and hundreds of swift horses for use
in war, of all kinds of stock, Arab and Iraqi and Byzantine and Turkish and Cochin and
Balkan(?) and Lahur and Abaya and Tongkin and Gudh; he is a king who possesses
kingdoms in the west and the east, and a king who dispenses good fortune to those he
favours and misfortune to those who have incurred his wrath; he is a king who bears
witness to the ... of God the Exalted, and a king who bears witness to the manifest power
of God the Exalted,

to Captain Prince Hendrik, who is brave and fearless against his foes; who is most
loyal to those he loves, and most wise in all his undertakings; and who possesses
hundreds of fully-armed men-of-war; may the Lord of all the universe preserve the
Captain in good fortune and perfect peace.

The Lord of all the universe has revealed .... to us the loving and friendly nature
of Captain Prince Hendrik, and from the time of his late majesty Makota Alam until the

I.67 I.e. Tiku.
time that we were appointed as God’s viceroy, never have the chains of love linking the Captain and our royal presence been broken, and it is our hope that long may this continue[?].

May it please the Captain know that we are sending Seri Bija Pekerma ... Syaraf and Maharaja Perbuana and Seri Bija Indera and Tun Ratna al-Diraja to Jayakarta to meet Captain Governor General Antonio van Diemen, because we’re really going to make that Melaka suffer, besiege it and seize all those supplying food to Melaka. As for the fleet under Orang Kaya-Kaya Maharaja Seri Maharaja, we have sent four galleys together with other smaller boats to ... who have supplied provisions to Melaka; by the grace of the Lord of the universe, when the fleet returns we will send another expedition, thus keeping up the attack without rest; in this way the people of Melaka will suffer greatly, and so they should be delivered with ease by the Lord of all the universe into our hands. For according to royal custom, when we attack other states we should fight with great valour, forcing our foe to surrender, but aiming to spare our own forces from decimation. But if we do not first wipe out Melaka’s allies we will certainly have two or three problems on our hands, because those Johor people have sworn an oath of allegiance with the king of Portugal to take up arms alongside the people of Melaka, and they have sent to Siam and Patani and all neighbouring countries for assistance for Melaka.

As for Periaman and Bandar Khalifah and Inderapura, in the past the French and English and Danes and others too came there to trade, and the levies and dues from all this trade amounted to an estimated one bahar of gold per year, which we have now forfeited because of our affection for the Dutch, who desire ... trade in this country.

As for the ships who come to Aceh Darussalam to trade who have presented their letters of obeisance to our royal person, namely ships from Gujerat and Masulipatan and Bengal and Dabul and Kerapatan and others, we request that the Dutch should desist from interfering with all these as listed above.

Furthermore, as for Captain Governor General Anton van Diemen’s request to our royal person regarding trade in Pahang ... he is granted a share of the trade, the remainder being shared amongst others; this we have granted him.

Our gift to Captain Prince Hendrik is two ingots of rock gold and four bezoar stones, with their fruit[?]. With peace and goodwill.

B.3 Contemporary Dutch translation of the letter

Algemeen Rijksarchief, VOC 11264, published in Banck 1873:76-78

De Koning van Atchin aan Prins Frederik Hendrik

Desen brief compt uyt een suyver gemoet van den hoochsten Paducka, Sery, Sultan, Nelmolam, Welgaka, Nelmock, Aron, Adin, Magaitcha, Jouhender, Doulet, Liloula, fil, Coninck van de gantsche werelt, die gelyck eenen Godt daer over is, glinsterende als de son op den middach, een coninck, die syn schynsel gelyck de volle maen geeft, van Godt uytvercoren, waerdich gehouden te werden, soo als men de Noortstar doet, wesende van conincklycke afcomste ende geslachte des grooten Alexanders, vol verstandt gelyck eenen ronden cloot, die hem heen ende weder rolt, connende soo veel gissing maken als de zee diep is; oock een coninck die alle gestorvene heyligen haere begraeffenissen heeft verbeteret, synde soo rechtvaerdich als Godt is, ende soo groot van vermogen dat al myne slaven onder myn vleugelen connen schuylen, ben van een verstandige resolutie, omme alle myn onderdanen te beschermen, Jangh, Goenawan, Penassy, Lagie, Dermawan, een coninck, die in alles goet recht doet, gelyck als denouden coninck heeft gedaen, den liberaelsten boven alle coningen, een dien Godt almachtich verleent heeft plaetsen, daer men van Godts gemaect koudt can graven, die de Sawasse of half goudt ende coopere kerck heeft, sittende op een throon van fyn goudt, gemaect, verciert, vol van allerhande costelycke gesteenten, die den witten oliphant heeft, wiens oogen glinsteren gelijck als de morgensterre, oock oliphanten met vier tanden, roode, purpere ende bonte oliphanten, Sawach, mitsgaders Benloena ende Queen oliphanten, daer toe my Godt almachtich oock heeft verleent soo veel diverse goude cleeden, geesmalteert, ende met allerhande gesteente versiert, tot dracht van geroerde oliphanten, bovendien
noch soo veel honderden oliphanten om in den oorloch te gebryucken met ysere schootvrye huysjens, die haere tanden met stael ende de hoeven van coper overslagen syn, oock soo veel honderden paerden, die haere cleedinge insgelycx van gout geesmalteert, ennde soo veel honderden paerden, die haere cleedinge insgelycx van gout geesmalteert, ende de hoeven van coper overslagen syn, oock soo veel honderden oliphanten om in den oorloch te gebryucken met ysere schootvrye huysjens, die haere tanden met stael ende de hoeven van coper overslagen syn.

Gaende desen brief aen Syne Hoochheyt ende vorstelycke genade Frederick Hendrick by der gratie Gods prince van Orangien, grave van Nassau, ens., die wegens syne cloecke daden tegen desselfs vyanden, in den oorloge seer vermaert is, onderhouedende daer toe oprechtyck alle gemaeckte contracten, met de geene hem ter contrarie geen rechtyckende oorsake geven, synde seer verstandig in alle saecken, hebbende soo veel honderden oorlochscheppen, die altyt met behoorlycke gereetschappen bereyt ligen, welcke ick bidde den grooten Godt tot afbreuck van Syne Hoochheits vyanden, soo wel laeten continueren, mitsgaders syne Hoochheyt in alle desselfs aenslagen geluck ende victorie geven.

Voorders hebbe aan den Nederlandschen gouverneur generael op zyn versouck oock vergunt den vryen handel in 't rycke van Pahangh, nevens andere vreemdelingen elck de helft.

In de landen van Priaman, Bander, Galiffa ende Indrapoura, daer in ouden tyden alle luyden quamen handelen te weten alle jaeren meer heeft opgebracht als 360 pondt gouts, hebbe ick de Nederlanders alleen vergunt te negotieren, sulcx dat daer door een goet gedeelte van myn encomste come te missen. Des is myn begeeren dat de Nederlanders de vreemdelingen die tot myn conincklycke stad Atchin comes, als namentlyck van Gouseratte, Masalipatan, Bengalen, Debril, Carrapatta, ende van alle andere plaetsen ongemolesteerd sulcx laten varen.
den eenen vry groot is, welcke rariteyten, Uwe Hoochheyt in danck gelieve te accepteren, sonder soo seer te sien op de waerdigheyt van 't present als wel op het genegenheit van den sender. Godt beware ende zegene Uwe Hoocheyt lange jaeren.

B.4 English translation of the contemporary Dutch translation above

This letter comes from a pure heart from the highest Paducka, Sery, Sultan, Nelmolam, Welgaka, Nelmock, Aron, Adin, Magalitcha, Jouhender, Doublet, Liloula, fil, king of the whole world, who is like a god over it, shining like the sun at midday, a king whose radiance gleams like the full moon, chosen by God and worthy to be esteemed as the North star; being of royal origin and descended from Alexander the Great; full of wisdom like a round globe which rolls him to and fro[?]; capable of as many conjectures as the sea is deep; also a king who has restored all the graves of the saints who have passed away; being as righteous as God; and with such great riches that all my slaves can shelter under my wings; having made a wise resolution to protect all my subjects; jangh goenawan penassy lagie dermawan; a king who always dispenses justice just as the old king did, the most liberal of all kings; one to whom Almighty God has granted places where gold created by God can be mined; who possesses a mosque of sawasse or half gold and copper; being seated on a throne made of fine gold, decorated all over with all sorts of costly precious stones; who possesses the white elephant, whose eyes shine like the morning star, also elephants with four tusks, red, purple and spotted elephants, Sawach elephants, and Benloena and Queen elephants, for which Almighty God has also granted me so many gold cloths of different sorts, enamelled and encrusted with various precious stones, to dress these elephants, as well as so many hundreds of elephants to use in war, with armoured howdahs, whose tusks are covered with steel and whose feet with copper; also so many hundred horses, their clothing likewise of gold, enamelled and studded with precious stones, with horseshoes of gold, and of half gold and copper, as well as so many hundreds of large horses to use in war, of all kinds of stock, namely Arabise, Arrackie, Rooms, Turkse, Ballacky, Locfoorz, Tongansz, and Gootsz; being a king who reigns from the East to the West; pleasing those who win my favour, and, on the contrary, letting the ill-disposed feel my wrath; who can also reflect God's might and everything that Almighty God has shaped and made;

thus wends this letter to His Highness and royal grace Frederick Hendrick, by the grace of God Prince of Orange and Count of Nassau, etc., who due to his brave deeds against his enemies is renowned in battle, maintaining therefore sincerely all the contracts with those who on the contrary have no righteous cause, being very wise in all matters, possessing so many hundreds of men-of-war, always kept fully equipped, and I beg the great God for the ruin of His Highness's enemies, and for the continuation of his wellbeing, and to grant success and victory to His Highness in all his campaigns.

To the whole world and myself it is well known what a friendly correspondence Your Highness had held with my forefather, the former king Paducka, Mochom, Mascatta, Alem, [which has lasted] up to the present time when Almighty God has chosen me as king, which friendship between us both should be like and remain as indissoluble as a golden chain, linking each to the other, which from my side will never be severed.

May it further please His Highness to know that I have sent Siribiedie, Packerma, Malvyeasraff, Maradia, and Bowanna, Siry, Biedia, Endra and Timradt Nude Rajda to the Governor-General, Antonio van Diemen, in Batavia; to bring the Portuguese town of Malacca into utter distress, to besiege it and to prohibit all people from bringing food there, for sending my fleet under my representative Maradea, I have launched(?) 4 galleys, together with all the bantings and champans, being vessels to destroy Rahan and Sia (which supply Malacca) as well as all other [places] which do so, and if it pleases Almighty God that the above-mentioned fleet returns, I will immediately dispatch another one there, to reduce that foul Malacca to the utmost misery; thus, we hope, Almighty

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68 I am extremely grateful to Dr Marijke Klokke for her assistance with this translation; any shortcomings in its subsequent reworking are entirely my responsibility.
God will let me completely conquer that city with the help of the Dutch; it being a custom of all kings, who intend to besiege certain places, that they first investigate everything thoroughly, in order to overcome their enemies without decimating their [own] subjects. If I do not first destroy all those who help Malacca, there is no doubt that this situation will last for some time(?), for the people of Johor have promised to assist Malacca with (men?) and weapons, and [they] will also send for assistance to Siam Petany and all the lands situated there.

In the lands of Priaman, Bander, Galiffa and Inderapura, where in the past all people would come to trade, namely French, English and Danish, and according to my reckoning bring in 360 pounds of gold each year, I have permitted only the Dutch to trade, so that I have come to forfeit a large part of my income thereby. It is my wish that the Dutch should leave unmolested the foreigners who come to my royal capital of Aceh, namely those from Gouseratte, Masalipatan, Bengalen, Debril, Carrapatta, and all other places.

Furthermore, the request of the Dutch Governor-General has been granted for a permit for free trade in the kingdom of Pahang, alongside other foreigners, each [party] having half.

To the renewal of the indissoluble friendship between the crown of Aceh and Your Highness, we are sending two mineral stones from my goldmines since the gold is fine there, and in addition four Besar stones, one of which is very large, which rarities may it please Your Highness to accept gratefully, without considering so much the worth of the gift but rather the affection from the sender. God preserve and bless Your Highness for many years.

C. Letter from Taj al-Alam Safiat al-Din Syah of Aceh to King Charles II of England, [1660]
Private collection

C.1 Malay text

Sitemi yang maha mulia daripada paduka seri sultan al-muazzam wa-al-khaqan almukarram Taj al-Alam Safiat al-Din Syah berdaulat zill Allah fi al-'alam yang di atas singghasana takha kerajaan negeri Aceh Dar al-Salam, ialah khalifat Tuhan seru alam sekelian yang zatnya upama matahari yang betuk pada ketika duha, lagi raja zill Allah yang sifatnya upama bulan purnama, ialah raja yang pilihan Allah Ta'ala yang perangainya upama bintang thuraiya, ialah raja al-diraja anak cucu a(l)-Sultan Iskandar Zukarnain, ialah khalifat Allah lagi raja yang menyatakan hikmat Allah yang ghaib, ialah raja yang melimpahkan syara' Allah, lagi raja yang men...kan segala yang musykil[?], ialah raja yang akalnya upama daerah yang buntar, lagi raja yang fikirnya upama laut yang dalam, ialah raja yang mengempukan makam yang awani dan hal yang a'la, ialah raja yang nur...nya menilik kepada jamal Allah dan basarahnya69 menilik kepada jalal Allah, ialah raja yang menyeru segala hamba Allah kepada jalan Allah, lagi raja yang menyatakan hikmat Allah dengan keramatnya, lagi raja yang menyatakan 'adil Allah dengan siasatnya, ialah raja yang menyatakan takhalluq bi-akhlāq Allah, lagi raja yang menutup segala yang berceda lagi yang mengampun segala yang berdosa, dan ialah raja yang terdiri[?] [panja ...bung] segala hambanya, lagi raja yang sempurna bicaranya pada mengelenggarakan segala bala tentaranya, ialah raja yang gunawan pengasih lagi dermawan, ialah raja yang adil lagi fādil upama Sultan Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz pada menyatakan adil Allah, lagi raja yang terlebih murah pada menyatakan karam Allah, lagi yang mengitarkan segala bau-bauwan kemurahannya pada segala tepi langit takhta kerajaan, ialah raja yang mengempukan kelian mas kudrati yang merah mutunya, lagi yang mengempukan masjid suasa yang diperbuat daripada raja mas kudrati, dan ialah

69 From b.s.r, Ar. sight, vision (Steingass 1996:190).
raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan gajah yang putih matanya cemerlang seperti bintang timur, dan gajah bergading empat, dan gajah merah, dan gajah borek, dan gajah sauk, dan gajah bangkun berkenah, dan gajah kunthā, ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan gajah berpakaian mas belazuardi yang makmur dan beratus gajah peperangan, ialah raja yang karunia Allah Ta’ala mengempukan kuda berpakaian mas bepermata belazuardi dan beratus2 kuda tizi peperangan yang seru jenis daripada jenis Arabi dan Rumi dan Turki dan Kuci dan Lahur dan Abaya dan Tongkin dan Gudh, dan ialah raja yang mengempukan kerajaan barat dan timur, lagi raja yang menyatakan kenyataan seru bagi ‘azmat70, dan karunia Allah Ta’ala dalam takhta kerajaan negeri Aceh Dar al-Salam,
datang kepada Sultan Karulus Sikundus yang kerajaan dalam negeri Inggeris yang makmur, ialah sultan yang perkasa lagi bijaksana lagi yang mengempukan negeri Britan Besar dan negeri Inggian dan negeri Sekotlan dan negeri Feransia dan negeri Irlan.

Adapun barang tahu Sultan Karulus Sikundus maka tatkala terdengarlah kepada sam71 cermin kalbu kita akan khabar Sultan Karulus Sikundus sudah menyunjunng anugerah Tuhan seru alam sekelain mengantikan72 takhta kerajaan ayahanda dan menyunjunng makota yang turun temurun daripada silsilah raja yang tua2 itu, maka terlalulah kesukaan kita, lalu berkehendaklah kita menyenuruh mengantahkan73 sitemi kita yang maha mulia ini kepada gubernur kompeni yang besar, supaya disampaikan oleh gubernur kompeni kepada Sultan Karulus Sikundus kitabat kita yang mula serta bingkis yang tuhfat2, akan menagihan segala perjanjian anak Aceh Dar al-Salam dengan anak Inggeris seperti zaman yang dahulu kala pada masa paduka marhum Makota Alam yang dimulakan Tuhan seru alam sekelain. Maka jangan kirinya berputus kapal dari negeri Inggeris yang makmur itu ke bandar Aceh Dar al-Salam yang mula, supaya berkekalanlah kasih kedua buah negeri itu seperti adatnya yang dahulu kala.

Sebermula Andrik Kehari yang telah {dalam} dalam bandar kita dulapan belas bulan lamanya ialah kita kurniai berusaha gudang dalam bandar kita, dan beberapa daripada rakyat Sultan Karulus Sikundus itu kita kurniai beniaga ia dalam bandar Aceh Dar al-Salam. Dan lagi pula kita kurniai pada tiap2 tahun tiga buah kapal anak Inggeris mengu... dan Sulibar74. Maka yang kehendak kita akan anak Inggeris beniaga dalam segala negeri yang takluk ke bawah duli kita, maka itulah maka tiadalah beroleh anak Inggeris beniaga dalam segala negeri itu. Maka hendaklah sangat2 bicara Sultan Karulus Sikundus akan ihwal yang demikian itu, supaya jangan kesakitan atas segala anak Inggeris yang beniaga itu. Lagi pula barang beroleh anak Inggeris beniaga dalam segala negeri itu karena si celaka itu sangat makar dan pencurian sehingga anak Inggeris pun kesukaran karenanya. Maka dari karena inilah kita memberi khabar dengan kitabat yang ikhlas ini kepada Sultan Karulus Sikundus.

Bahwa hadiah kita akan Sultan Sikundus khalambak beratnya empat tahil tujuh dinar75, dan gaharu beratnya seketi dua belas tahil tiga dinar, dan ‘anbar beratnya empat belas dinar, dan geliga landak satu beratnya sepuluh dinar, dan peti Jipun berperawis76 gewang77 dan bermelamang78 panjangnya tiga jengkal sebuah, iaitu akan tanda tulus dan ikhlas jua adanya, tamat al-khayr.

70 ‘.t.m.h, ’atlamat, Ar., Greatness, majesty, awe-inspiring, pron. adhmat (Wilkinson 1985:438).
71 Ar. s.m.', hearing (Steingass 1993:509).
72 m.ng.n.t.y.k.n, i.e. menggantikan
73 m.ng.n.t.t.k.n, i.e. mengantarkan?
74 s.w.l.y.r
75 This use of dinar as a measure of weight is very unusual, and is not mentioned at all in the Adat Aceh.
78 b.r.m.l.m.', i.e. bermelamang? ‘melamang, a broad flat-bottomed native boat’ (Wilkinson 1985:654).
C.2 English translation

A most honoured missive from Her Majesty the great sultan and the illustrious king [sic], Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah, the Sovereign one, the shadow of God on earth, who is on the throne of the kingdom of Aceh, Abode of Peace, she is the vicegerent of the Lord of the whole world, whose essence is like the scorching midday sun, and also the queen who is the shadow of God, whose qualities are like the full moon; she is the queen chosen by God the Exalted whose disposition is like the Pleiades; she is the queen from a long line of kings descended from Sultan Alexander the Great; she is the vicegerent of God and the queen who bears witness to the mysterious secret wisdom of God; she is the queen who spreads all around her the law of God, and who .... the difficulties; she is the queen whose understanding is like a round globe, and the queen whose counsel is like the deep sea; she is the queen who possesses a tranquil resting-place, and an exalted position; she is the queen whose [sight?] is focused on the beauty of God and whose vision is focused on the majesty of God; she is the queen who calls all God’s servants to the path of God; and the queen who gazes on the creatures of God with a gaze of mercy and sympathy; she is the queen who bears witness to the secret wisdom of God and His holy places, and the queen whometes out the justice of God and His punishments; she is the queen whose manners bear witness to the virtues of God; she is the queen who silences those who complain and who forgives those who have sinned, and she is the queen who .... all her servants, and the queen who shows perfect judgement in the organising of her troops; she is the queen with magic powers, loving and charitable; she is the queen who is as just and virtuous as Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz in dispensing the justice of God, and the queen of utmost abundance in bearing witness to the generosity of God, and who spreads the perfume of her liberality to all corners of the skies above her throne and kingdom, she is the queen who possesses mines of rock gold of red quality, and who possesses a mosque of gold alloy made from the king of rock gold, and she is the queen who through the grace of God the Exalted possesses elephants; she is the queen who bears witness to the evidence of the majesty (of God), and who through the grace of God the Exalted possesses elephants caparisoned with gold and lapis lazuli ... and hundreds of war elephants; she is the queen who through the grace of God the Exalted possesses horses caparisoned with gold studded with lapis lazuli and hundreds of swift horses of all kinds of stock, Arab and Byzantine and Turkish and Cochin and Lahur and Abaya and Tongkin and Gudh, and she is the queen who possesses kingdoms in the west and the east, and the queen who bears witness to the evidence of the majesty (of God), and who through the grace of God the Exalted is on the throne of the kingdom of Aceh, Abode of Peace, to Sultan Charles the Second who reigns in the prosperous kingdom of England, he is the sultan who is valiant and wise and who posseses the states of Great Britain and England and Scotland and France and Ireland.

Wherefore this is to inform Sultan Charles the Second that when the news reached the mirror of our heart that Sultan Charles the Second had borne upon his head the favour of the Lord of all worlds and had taken the place of his father on the throne of the kingdom and had placed on his head the crown descended from the kings of yore, we were overjoyed. Therefore we commanded that this our most honoured missive be sent to the Governor of the great company in order that the Governor of the company could convey to Sultan Charles the Second our honoured letter together with the accompanying precious gifts, in order to reaffirm all the agreements between the people of Aceh, Abode of Peace, and the English, just as in the olden days during the time of the late Makota Alam, who is honoured by the Lord of all worlds. And so please never cease from sending ships from the prosperous country of England to the honoured port of Aceh, Abode of Peace, for the sake of the lasting friendship between our two countries, as was the case in the past.

As for Henry Gary who has been in our port for eighteen months, we have allowed him to construct a warehouse in our port, and we have allowed several subjects of Sultan
Charles the Second to trade in the port of Aceh, Abode of Peace. And furthermore we have granted permission for three English ships a year to visit ...] and Sulibar, for it is was our wish that the English should trade in all countries that form part of our dominions, but they have been apprehended by the accursed Dutch, and that is why the English are unable to trade in these dominions. And so we beseech Sultan Charles the Second to do something about this state of affairs, in order to safeguard the English traders from harm. For whatever the English do manage to acquire through trade in these dominions [is at risk] because the scoundrels are up to treachery and theft, and the English are suffering; this, therefore, is why we are sending news in this sincere letter to Sultan Charles the Second.

Our gift to Sultan (Charles) the Second is camphor weighing four tahil seven dinar, and agila weighing one kati twelve tahil three dinar, and ambergris weighing fourteen dinar, and one bezoar stone from a porcupine weighing ten dinar, and a boat-shaped Japanese chest inlaid with shells three hand-spans in length, as signs of our honesty and sincerity; the end, with goodwill.

C. Contemporary English translation, 1661

British Library, India Office Records, MSS.Eur.Photo 149/8, f.156

Paaducka Sirie Sultan Queene over many Kings sole Mistress of Sumatra feared in her kingdoms and honoured of all bordring nations, in whom there is the true image of a prince, and in whom reignes the true method of Goverment formed as it were of the most pure metall and adorned with the most finest coulours, whose seate is high and most compleate like unto a Christall river, pure and cleare as Christall itselfe, from whom floweth the pure streame of Bounty and Justice whose presence is as the finest Gold, Queene of Priaman and of the mountains of Gold, viz. Salida, Pidier and Nelabow, lady of nine sorts of precious stones, whose vessells of bathing are all of pure gold, her sepulcher of the same mettall, Crowne of the Universe and maintainer and Defendresses of the faith of the Musslemins or true beleivers etc.

This great Queene sendeth her letter of salutations unto his Majesty of great Britaine Charles the Second King of England, Scotland, Ffrance & Ireland, Deffender of the Faith of that great prophett Issah, or Jesus Christ etc.

Wherein wee cannot sufficiently express most puissant Prince the Joy that wee received when wee were made acquainted with the happy tydings of your Majesty's safe returne into your owne country, and that divine providence had restored you to your Crowne and kingdomes and seated you upon your Majesty's ffather (of blessed memory) his throne, neither could wee doe less then manifest the same by these our congratulatory lines which wee much desire may communicate the ardency of our desires for the continuance of that ancient league, amitie and friendship with your Majesty our ancestors ever kept and maintained with the kings of that your most glorious monarchy which the intercourse of letters between us may conserve, unto your Majesty's subject viz. Henry Gary who lately hath setteld a factory on this our court of Acheene, wee have in the behalfe of his employers the English East India Company granted free trade and custome for as many ships as shall of theires come to this our port, the 1/5 of three shippes customes that shall come every monsoone bringing freight goods belonging to moores merchants, is alsoe freely granted allowed and given them with many other libertys all which in regard hee hath desired our licence for his departure to Surratt, wee have ratified unto Francis Cobb /f.156v/ in the behalfe of the said Company. Wee would have granted them many more munityos and priviledges then they already enjoy, especially to have had the free trade of Tecco and Priaman, etc., other ports on the West side of this island which they much endeavoured to obtaine, did not that insulting nation, the Hollanders impeede it, who appropriate to themselves the trade of all this part of the world not permitting any merchants whatsoever to trade to any place, But our confidence is that your power great Sire will make them sensible of the extraordinary
insolencys they soe constantly committ, they practising nothing else, than how to live by vapine and violence haveing already deprived many princes in these southerne parts of theire lawfull possessions and inheritances, haveing also by their great force att sea constrained us to yield, and submitt to subscribe to conditions both very dishonourable and prejudiciall unto us, and know not how soone they may molest us againe, if not timeley by your Majesty’s great prudence and benignity towards us, suppresssed and restrained, how much theese theire hostile and insolent proceedings are unpleaseing to God, and disonant to his most sacred Lawes, your Majesty well understands, and wee hope will take it into consideration.

It is much our desire that your Majesties subjects vissitt this our port often, bringing with them yearly the commodities of other countryes in lieu whereof they may exchange for such as this our kingdome affords. And now because that this our letter may safely come to your Majesty, wee have appointed the Governor of the honorable English East India Company to deliver it into your Majesty’s hands, as our own Ambassador, and for its more safe conveyhance it is now sent unto the President of your nation in Surratt by the hands of Oran Kaya Puttee Henry Gary, your Majesty’s most faithfull subject who hath resided at this our Court eighteen months unto whose care and custody is alsoe committed viz. one piece of garoo or lignum Aloes, 1 piece of Salumbark, 1 piece of Amber grease, 1 besar stone of a Porcupine, and a Japon sowitzte, which wee send unto your Majesty as a Pledge of our affections, and honour, and the continuance of our League, soe many yeares since begunne betweene yours and ours predesselers, soe wee wish your Majesty a prosperous reigne, tranquillity within your kingdomes and victory over all your enemys.

Given at our Pallace of Achiene the 28th day of the moone Safferr and of the Hegira 1072 w[hich] according to the Julian acco[unt] is the 12th October anno domini 1661.

28 Safar AH 1072 is equivalent to Sunday 23 October 1661 AD in the Gregorian reckoning.
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Figure 1. Letter from Sultan Iskandar Muda to King James I of England, 1615. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Laud Or.Rolls.b.1
Figure 2. Letter from Sultan Iskandar Thani to Prince Fredrik Hendrik of Orange, 1639. Leiden University Library, Cod.Or.4818a.I.3
Figure 3. Letter from Sultanah Tajul Alam to King Charles II of England, 1661
Private Collection
Figure 4. Detail of the textblock of the letter from Sultanah Tajul Alam to King Charles II of England, 1661.
Private Collection
Figure 5. Letter in Persian from Sultan Alauddin Ahmad Syah to the Danish East India Company in Tranquebar, south India, dated AH 1146 (AD 1733)
Figure 6. Detail of the top part of the letter from Sultan Iskandar Thani showing the heading, *Huwa Allah Ta’ala*

Figure 7. Detail of the text from the letter of Iskandar Thani, showing damage to the ink along the folds of the letter.