A Medieval Solution to an Early Modern Problem? The Royal Animal Seals of Jambi

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A MEDIEVAL SOLUTION TO AN EARLY MODERN PROBLEM? THE ROYAL ANIMAL SEALS OF JAMBI

ANNABEL TEH GALLOP

Seals in Early Maritime Southeast Asia

_They write with Sanscrit-characters and the king uses his ring as a seal._

From the description of San Fo-qi (Srivijaya) in the _Song-shi_, the official history of the Song dynasty (960–1279)¹

Srivijaya was a city state on the eastern seaboard of Sumatra, initially centred at Palembang and latterly at Jambi, which exercised enormous political and economic influence over large swathes of maritime Southeast Asia from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries (see Map 4.1). While the waxing power of Srivijaya coincided with the medieval era in Europe, its waning moved the Malay world towards early modern times, characterized by the Islamization of formerly Hindu/Buddhist royal courts throughout the archipelago from the late thirteenth century onwards, by heightened contact with China through the Ming voyages of exploration in the fifteenth century, and by the arrival of Europeans in Southeast Asia in the early sixteenth century.

Despite its apparently impressive spatial and temporal reach, Srivijaya remains a shadowy entity, its very existence proposed only in the early twentieth century based upon Chinese accounts of a kingdom called “San Fo-qi” and the deciphering of stone inscriptions in Old Malay.² It has left few physical remains, and our knowledge of its sigillography is likewise limited to the oft-quoted statement above. Indeed, a survey of the early use of seals throughout maritime Southeast Asia during this medieval period yields but a fragmentary picture, comprising a few imported seal stones engraved with Indic or Arabic script and slightly larger numbers of locally manufactured gold seal rings. It is only in Java that a large enough body of evidence exists (in the form of intaglios, gold signet rings, terracotta and clay sealings, and inscriptional references to seals) to posit a continuous tradition of sealing from the ninth century onwards, even though we still have little understanding of how this may have worked.³

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¹ Groeneveldt, _Notes_, 63.
² First proposed by George Coedes in 1918; see Coedes and Damais, _Sriwijaya_, 4.
³ Gallop, “The Early Use.”
Map 4.1. The Sultanate of Jambi and its neighbours
From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, however, the evolution of a coherent sealing culture throughout the Islamic courts of the Malay Archipelago can be discerned. The number of Malay seals—understood as seals with inscriptions in Arabic script from Southeast Asia—swells in the course of the seventeenth century, and by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constitutes a considerable and developed corpus of over 2,000 seals, documented primarily from impressions on manuscript documents, but including some 300 seal matrices. Malay seals can thus be regarded as a subset of the much larger body of Islamic seals worldwide, characterized primarily through the defining presence of Arabic script, which unites seals from all Muslim cultural regions, from Morocco in the west to Mindanao in the east. Many aspects of the inscriptions of Malay seals consciously conform to an idealized Islamic prototype, as, for example, in the use of a standard Islamic-Arabic name such as *Muhammad* or *Abdullah* for the seal holder, rather than an indigenous name or descriptive epithet in Malay or another local language by which he is more likely to have been known. Pious expressions in Arabic are familiar from other Islamic seals, primarily variations on a theme of *al-wāthiq billāh*, "he who trusts in God," and a Hijra-era dating formula.

At the same time, the "Malay" identity of these Islamic seals is never in doubt, whether in form or content. Inscriptions on Malay seals frequently include a toponym, which is rarely found on other Islamic seals; moreover, official titles of nobles and senior ministers are almost invariably expressed in words of Indic, rather than Arabic, origin. Iconographically, Malay seals are larger than most other Islamic seals, and the matrices are made of metal and designed to be stamped in lampblack from the soot of a flame, in contrast to the small engraved hardstone seals stamped in ink common in the Middle East and through Iran into the Indian subcontinent. The most popular shapes for Malay seals are circles and petalled circles, which undeniably recall the auspicious lotus blossom that features prominently in pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist artworks of the region. Another defining iconographic feature is a spatial layout that emphasizes a sacred centre at the midst of the four cardinal points and four further mid-points. These complementary preoccupations manifest themselves in a marked preponderance of Malay seals in the shape of an eight-petalled flower (as can be seen in the seals illustrated in Figures 4.1 to 4.3 and 4.6 to 4.7), while floral seals with four, twelve, and sixteen petals are also common.

There is also remarkable consistency in the content of Malay seals across the whole of maritime Southeast Asia, a geographical area stretching some 3,000 miles

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4 See Gallop, *Malay Seals* and “Malay Seal Inscriptions.”
from west to east, encompassing thousands of islands and hundreds of languages. In the Malay world, the use of a seal was generally restricted to officials of the royal court. The inscription would identify the individual owner of the seal by his (or, rarely, her) name and/or title, sometimes supplemented by a pedigree, toponym, and date, often accompanied by a religious expression and occasionally a talismanic formula. At the same time, there are discernible regional characteristics, especially in the seals of sovereigns, that can enable the origin of a seal to be identified at a single glance. Sometimes this distinction might hinge on a single preferred word or phrase; for example, the divine epithet rabb al-‘arsh, “lord of the throne,” is strongly associated with royal seals from Riau, while the pious descriptor al-mansūr billāh, “he who is protected by God,” is found only on seals of the sultans of Siak. In other cases the defining regional feature might be primarily graphic, and, since its founding in 1772, all sovereign seals from Pontianak, on the west coast of Borneo, are identifiable by their diamond shape and a protective talismanic formula written in disconnected letters around the border. Perhaps most famous of all, for both content and form, is the great seal of Aceh. In the middle of the seventeenth century Aceh adopted and adapted the design of the genealogical seal of the Mughal emperors of India, and for the next 250 years all sultans of Aceh used a large “ninefold” seal with the name of the ruler in a circle in the middle, surrounded by eight smaller circles containing the names of royal forebears.

This article will explore one of the most distinctive such dynastic seals used in the Malay world of Southeast Asia: the animal seal of the sultans of Jambi in east Sumatra. The design of an eight-petalled round seal with animals in four of the petals, which was introduced in the middle of the eighteenth century and adopted by all successive sovereigns of Jambi for the following century and a half, was an exceptionally unusual choice for an Islamic sultanate, as the depiction of living creatures in official contexts is usually strictly avoided in Muslim societies. As will be suggested below, this seal was probably created at a politically critical juncture in Jambi history, as a bold graphic endeavour to unite, symbolically, the two contesting factions at the Jambi court: the Javanese elite, represented on this new seal by the sultan’s Javanese title placed in the other four petals; and the Minangkabau power behind the throne, evoked by images of four legendary animals from the Minangkabau myth of origin.

Chancery Practice in the Muslim Sultanate of Jambi

The Malay sultanate of Jambi was located on the Batanghari, the longest river in Sumatra, which flows from the Bukit Barisan highlands in the west down to the Straits of Melaka in the east. Jambi was the site of Malayu, one of the oldest polities
in Southeast Asia, which was mentioned in Chinese records from the seventh century and which, by the eleventh century, had emerged as the capital of Srivijaya. The ruins of Muara Jambi, the largest Hindu-Buddhist temple complex in Southeast Asia, testify to the importance of the realm. In 1275 Malayu-Jambi was conquered by the east Javanese kingdom of Singhasari; but, with the fall of Singhasari, towards the end of the thirteenth century, Jambi came under the sway of the emerging Javanese empire of Majapahit. In the middle of the fourteenth century a prince of Malaya, Adityawarman, returned to Sumatra from Java and sailed up the Batanghari to establish his own kingdom at Dharmasraya, before moving into the Minangkabau highlands, leaving a trail of monumental stone statues and inscriptions in his wake. With the fall of Majapahit, in the sixteenth century, Jambi regained its independence but retained a deeply embedded cultural legacy of Javanese influence. Javanese remained the court language of Jambi into the eighteenth century.

The kingdom of Jambi probably converted to Islam during the sixteenth century, and in legendary sources the royal family traces its ancestry from the union of a Turkish nobleman and a princess from Minangkabau. The heyday of Jambi was in the seventeenth century, when it became one of the richest pepper-exporting ports in Sumatra, and its ruler took the title of “sultan.” By the end of the century, however, Jambi’s glory days were over and it had cleaved into two polities, with the downstream (hilir) sultan at the court at Tanah Pilih (site of the present city of Jambi), supported by the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, henceforth VOC), and another ruler upstream (hulu), under the patronage of the Minangkabau ruler at Pagaruyung. The kingdom was reunited in the early eighteenth century, but trade declined with the departure of the VOC, and for the rest of the century Jambi was little more than a vassal of Minangkabau. In the nineteenth century resistance to aggressive Dutch expansion meant that once more Jambi was de facto divided into two kingdoms, hilir and hulu, with Sultan Taha Saifuddin based in the highlands, while puppet or “shadow” rulers (sultan bayang) were installed by the Dutch at the downriver court. The capture and killing of Sultan Taha by the Dutch in 1904 brought to an end the sultanate of Jambi.

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7 On the early history of Jambi, see Kulke, “Adityawarman’s Highland Kingdom,” 229–33.
8 Andaya, To Live as Brothers, 66–67, 72.
9 Braginsky, The Turkic-Turkish Theme, 131–54.
10 For the history of Jambi in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Andaya, To Live as Brothers; and Braginsky, The Turkic-Turkish Theme; and, for the nineteenth century, see Locher-Scholten, Sumatran Sultanate.
About seventy Malay seals have been documented from Jambi, with inscriptions in Arabic script, dating from the middle of the seventeenth century to the early twentieth. Most of the sovereign seals from Jambi have been found on letters and treaties with the Dutch now held in the National Archives in Jakarta but, uniquely for a Malay polity, many seals have also been recorded from original manuscript documents still held in remote villages. From at least the seventeenth century onwards the sultans and nobles of Jambi would ratify their relationships of fealty with local chiefs in the hinterland of Jambi, in the upper tributaries of the river Batanghari reaching as far as Kerinci, through the bestowal of royal edicts. Local chiefs (dipati) would be granted sealed edicts written in Malay, confirming their titles and privileges and sometimes specifying the boundaries of land under their jurisdiction, while also outlining their responsibilities, including the upholding of Islamic law and enforcing the royal prerogative to certain forest produce. Occasionally, following the installation of a new chief, or on a visit to the interior by a succeeding sultan, older edicts were reconfirmed with the seal of the new ruler or reinforced with further annotations. Some of these documents have survived for centuries, treated as sacred pusaka or village heirlooms, stored carefully in the rafters of the house of the village chief, and brought out and aired just once a year in the context of a village ceremony and feast. The manuscript heirlooms of Kerinci were first surveyed and documented by P. Voorhoeve in 1940. Similar collections have more recently been recorded in the Serampas region of Merangin, in Sungai Tenang, and in Sarolangun, suggesting that more documents may still be held in other locations in highland Jambi.

The first reference to the use of seals in Jambi is found in a treaty between the VOC and the “pangoran Dupatij Anum” of Jambi dated July 6, 1643, and stamped with “His Highness’s seal.” Pangiran Dipati Anum ruled Jambi from 1630 until his death in 1679 (see Table 4.1). From 1661 he was known as Pangiran Ratu, after installing his son as junior ruler, and then in 1669—at the zenith of Jambi’s

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11 Voorhoeve, “Tambo Kerintji,” 1970. When some of the same villages in Kerinci were revisited by Uli Kozok in 2007, for a project to digitize pusaka collections, certain of the documents seen by Voorhoeve in 1940 were found to be still extant; see the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme, EAP117; and Kozok, A 14th Century Malay Code.

12 Fieldwork in the villages of Renah Kemumu and Renah Alai was undertaken by David Neidel in 2003 and 2004; see Gallop, “Piagam Serampas.”

13 Fieldwork in the village of Muara Mendras was undertaken by Heinz-Peter Znoj in 1989; see Gallop, “Piagam Muara Mendras.”

14 Recorded in the village of Lubuk Resam (personal communication on Facebook from Sriwahyuni, November 2015).

15 Heeres, Corpus Diplomaticum, 412.
Table 4.1. Rulers of Jambi, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries

Regnal names in bold are confirmed from seals
A signifies the use of an animal seal

Pangiran Ratu
r. 1630–d. 1679
r. from 1669 as Sultan Agung; personal name Abdul Jalal

Sultan Abdul Muhyi
Sultan Anum Ingalaga, r. 1679–1687
deposed by Dutch in favor of his son, Sultan Kiai Gede; d. 1699

Pangiran Pringgabaya
ruled upstream at Mangunjaya,
supported by Minangkabau;
d. 1716

Sultan Kiai Gede
ruled downstream, supported by Dutch; d. 1719
Sultan Muhammad Syah
d. 1726

Sultan Astra lngalaga
r. 1719–1725 (deposed), 1727–1742 (abdicated)

Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin
Sultan Anum Seri lngalaga
r. 1743–1770

Sultan Masud Badaruddin
Sultan Ratu Seri lngalaga
r. 1777–ca. 1790

Sultan Mahmud Muhyiuddin
Sultan Agung Seri lngalaga
r. ca. 1805–1826

Sultan Muhammad Fakharuddin
Sultan Anum Seri lngalaga
r. 1827–1841

Sultan Abdul Rahman Nasiruddin
Sultan Ratu Anum Dilaga
r. 1841–1855

Sultan Ahmad Nasiruddin
Sultan Ratu Inga Dilaga
r. 1858–1881
(“shadow ruler”)

Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin
Sukta Ratu Seri lngalaga
r. 1886–1899
(“shadow ruler”)

Sultan Ratu Taha Saifuddin
Sultan Agung Seri lngalaga
r. 1855–d. 1904
power—he became known as Sultan Agung, taking the title also borne by two of his most powerful contemporaries, the sultans of Mataram and Banten in Java. The only seal of this ruler that has been recorded, however, found on a letter of 1669, simply bears his title of “Pangiran Jambi” (#640). A round seal with a broad border of six-petalled flowers in a meandering vine pattern, it is one of the most beautiful early Malay seals known. The seal of his son and successor, Sultan Abdul Muhyi Anum Ingala (r. 1679–1687), also has an original and attractive design of an eight-petalled circle with the inscription “al-Sultan Abdul Muhyi ibn Abdul Jalal” written around a four-petalled flower in the centre (#899). The next surviving royal seal is the eight-petalled circle seal of Abdul Muhyi’s grandson, Sultan Astra Ingala (r. 1719–1725, 1727–1742), found on a treaty with the Dutch of 1721 (#896).

Royal Animal Seals of Jambi

Until the reign of Sultan Astra Ingala, in the early eighteenth century, all known royal seals of Jambi can be characterized as typically Malay in form, with shapes of circles or petalled circles, embellished with delicate floral and foliate scroll patterns. But, from the second half of the eighteenth century until the late nineteenth century, the sovereign seals of eight rulers of Jambi conformed to a very unusual design. All still take the traditional form of an eight-petalled circle, with the Muslim regnal name of the sovereign inscribed in the centre; but, while four alternate petals enclose the ruler’s unique Javanese regnal title, the other four petals each contain an image of an animal.

The first ruler known to use such a seal was Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin Anum Seri Ingala (r. 1743–1770) (#900) (Figure 4.1), who was the younger brother of Sultan Astra Ingala. On his seal and that of his successor, Sultan Masud Badruddin Ratu Seri Ingala (r. ca. 1777–1790) (#644) (Figure 4.2), the animals are quite clearly formed and distinct from one another. Although difficult to identify precisely, each seal displays an elephant and three other animals that may resemble a tiger, cat, dog, or buffalo. In the seals of all subsequent rulers, however, from Sultan Mahmud Muhyiuddin Agung Seri Ingala (r. 1805–1826) (#639) up to Sultan Taha Saifuddin Agung Seri Ingala (r. 1855–1904) (#1802) and his downstream Dutch-installed “shadow” ruler (bayang), Sultan Ahmad Nasiruddin Ratu Inga Dilaga (r. 1858–1881) (#906), the four animals appear in a stylized form.

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16 Here, and elsewhere, the # number refers to the unique seal record number in Gallop, “Malay Seal Inscriptions,” and in the forthcoming enlarged catalogue. Seal #640 is also reproduced in Gallop, “Piagam Serampas,” 319.

17 Reproduced in Gallop, “Piagam Serampas,” 319.
with little distinction among them, all appearing as a kind of hybrid four-legged creature with a tail and a trunk (Figure 4.3).

The portrayal of animals on the seal of state of a Muslim sovereign is an extraordinary development, flouting the widespread Islamic convention of avoiding the depiction of living creatures in official and religious contexts. Of the over 2,000 Malay seals documented from the Islamic world of Southeast Asia over a period of four centuries, these eight Jambi seals are the only ones to feature animals, apart from the heraldic beasts found in coats of arms on Dutch colonial-era seals. A similar absence of animal images is evident in all other catalogues of Islamic seals, save for very early examples reflecting continuing influences from the Sasanian
Within the royal Jambi chancery there must have been a profound attachment to this seal, and all it signified, for the design to have survived for over 150 years. Although in the course of this period the depiction of the animals has clearly undergone a process of stylization, four quadrupeds remain indubitably present on the seal. The seal is even found stamped, seemingly unself-consciously, on Sultan Taha Saifuddin’s letter of 1858 written in Arabic to the Ottoman sultan Abdülmecid. The Ottoman ruler is addressed as “the glory of

tradition,\textsuperscript{18} or very late seals.\textsuperscript{19} Within the royal Jambi chancery there must have been a profound attachment to this seal, and all it signified, for the design to have survived for over 150 years. Although in the course of this period the depiction of the animals has clearly undergone a process of stylization, four quadrupeds remain indubitably present on the seal. The seal is even found stamped, seemingly unself-consciously, on Sultan Taha Saifuddin’s letter of 1858 written in Arabic to the Ottoman sultan Abdülmecid. The Ottoman ruler is addressed as “the glory of

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\textnormal{\textsuperscript{18} See Porter, \textit{Arabic and Persian Seals}, 84–85.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textnormal{\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 112–15.}
\end{flushright}
Islamic kings and God’s Caliph over the rest of humanity,”²⁰ and Sultan Taha requests that Jambi be recognized as Ottoman territory, in an attempt to gain protection against Dutch aggression. Yet at the head of this letter—couched as an appeal from a Muslim vassal to his spiritual and temporal overlord—is impressed a seal that could be regarded as blatantly contravening the general tenets of the faith.

Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century the steady rise of Islamic reformism was probably responsible for the demise of the animal seal. The round

seal of the last “shadow” ruler of Jambi, Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin Ratu Seri Ingalaga (r. 1885–1899) (#679), still places the sultan’s Javanese regnal name in four separate cartouches in the border—recalling the four petals of yesteryear—and yet there are no animals depicted on this seal (Figure 4.4). A late seal of Sultan Taha, dated 1305 (AD 1887/8), could perhaps be interpreted as an attempt to channel aspects of the old sovereign seal into a form more acceptable to Islamic (specifically Ottoman) sensibilities: it contains the only known example of zoomorphic calligraphy on a Malay seal, arranged in the shape of a bird (#681).

The significance of these unprecedented animals is not easily deciphered, nor are there any obvious sources or parallels that come to mind from other artworks in Jambi, such as woodcarving or metalwork. As noted earlier, however, the petalled-circle shape of the seals themselves is undoubtedly ultimately derived from the lotus blossom. The lotus flower is a symbol of purity in Buddhism and Hinduism, and deities are often portrayed or sculpted seated on a round padmapitha or “lotus-throne,” adorned with a single or double row of lotus petals. A lotus pedestal would thus serve as a base for “anything divine, holy or auspicious, be it a deity or a symbolic object,” and it is therefore hardly surprising that petalled circles resembling lotus blossoms were such a popular choice for a royal Malay seal with the name of the sovereign inscribed in the centre.

There are many such manifestations of the lotus excavated at Muara Jambi, probably dating from the ninth to early fourteenth centuries, including padmapitha in stone and brick. Of particular interest are numerous bricks from Muara Jambi engraved with eight-petalled lotus flowers, which in the shape and orientation of the petals are almost exactly identical to the two earliest royal animal seals of Jambi (Figure 4.5).

In view of the close iconographic similarity between the outline of the earliest royal animal seals and the particular form of the lotus blossom on bricks from Muara Jambi, one question that arises is whether the design of the Jambi seal could perhaps be related to a mandala or another tantric diagram at one time current in Jambi. In the ninth century Srivijaya was closely connected with esoteric Buddhist scholarly networks that, centred on the great university of Nalanda in Bihar, stretched from India to Sumatra and Java, and northwards through Central Asia to China and Japan.

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21 Around this time Jambi also became famous for its calligraphy batik, decorated with stylized Ottoman-style tughras, birds, and other zoomorphic devices: see Kerlogue, “Islamic Talismans.”

22 Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, Indo-Javanese Metalwork, 27; Gallop and Porter, Lasting Impressions, 166–68.

23 Acri, “Esoteric Buddhist Networks.”
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ninth century and found at Dunhuang) shows, at the cardinal points, the four vajra guardians each accompanied by an animal: an elephant, snow lion, tiger, and dog.\textsuperscript{24} Notwithstanding the apparent similarity between these four animals and those found on the much later royal animal seals from Jambi, there is little evidence of Indian Pala influence on Sumatran art of that period,\textsuperscript{25} and the absence of attested examples of a \textit{Vajradhātu} mandala in a Sumatran context is also problematic.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure44.png}
\caption{Seal of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin (r. 1886–1899); although there are no animals, the placement of his Javanese regnal name al-Sultan / Ratu / Seri / Ingala in four cartouches in the border recalls the petals of the “animal seals.” The seal is inscribed in the centre sanat 1304 al-wāthiq billāh al-Jalī Maulana al-Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin ibn al-Sultan Muhammad Fakharuddin al-marhum, “The year 1304 (AD 1886/7), he who trusts in God, the Resplendent One, our lord the Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin, son of the late Sultan Muhammad Fakharuddin.” Museum Bronbeek 2011/02/02-1-1. Reproduced courtesy of the Museum Bronbeek, Arnhem.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{24} Sketch of a Tang dynasty \textit{Vajradhātu} mandala with the five Dhyāni Buddhas, British Museum 1919.0101.0.173; reproduced in \textit{Zwalf, Buddhism}, 222.

\textsuperscript{25} Lunsingh Scheufer and Klokke, \textit{Divine Bronze}, 37.

\textsuperscript{26} Excavations at Candi Gumpung at Muara Jambi revealed inscribed gold plates with the names of twenty-two tantric deities, which have been interpreted by Boechari ("Ritual
Hence, while lotus imagery has continuously featured in artworks from Sumatra for over 1,000 years, it is difficult to posit a direct link between a Buddhist mandala that may or may not have been known at Jambi during the Srivijaya period and a chancery innovation at the Muslim court in the eighteenth century. It seems more pertinent to investigate reasons for introducing the new seal design at this particular juncture in Jambi’s history.

A Towering Presence: Minangkabau Patronage in Jambi

The last purely “floral” royal Jambi seal to be documented was that of Sultan Astra Ingalaga, found on a treaty with the Dutch of 1721, while the first “animal” seal was that of his younger brother, Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin, who came to the throne in 1743. What was the catalyst for the momentous change in the sigillographic landscape of Jambi during the second quarter of the eighteenth century? A clue might lie in the political upheavals of this period, during which the major power behind the throne of Jambi was Minangkabau.

Sultan Astra Ingalaga was the son of Pangiran Pringgabaya, who in 1690 had founded a new royal court called Mangunjaya, upstream at Muara Tebo, choosing to place himself under Minangkabau patronage rather than live downstream in Jambi at Tanah Pilih, under the rule of his Dutch-installed brother, Sultan Kiai Gede.

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Deposits,” 238) as belonging to the Vajradhātu mandala, but by Max Nihom (“Mandala,” 246) as deriving from the Vajrasekharatantra.
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(r. 1687–1719). Installed by the Minangkabau ruler, Pringgabaya was given the title of Sultan Maharaja Batu Abdul Rahman,27 and for the next two decades his hulu realm flourished at the expense of the hilir court of Kiai Gede. After a reconciliation between the two brothers in 1708, Pringgabaya was subsequently exiled by the Dutch to Batavia, where he died in 1716. With Kiai Gede’s death in 1719, and under great pressure from upstream communities, the Dutch agreed to bring Pringgabaya’s son, Raden Astrawijaya, from Batavia to Jambi, where he was installed as Sultan Astra Ingalaga. There was continuing opposition from the “downstream” court faction of Kiai Gede’s family, however, and in 1725 Astra Ingalaga was deposed and imprisoned, while Kiai Gede’s son was installed as Sultan Muhammad Syah. After Muhammad’s sudden death, in December 1726, the Minangkabau court at Pagaruyung intervened to propose a settlement. In March 1727 the Minangkabau ruler himself, the Yang Dipertuan, travelled downriver and appeared in Tanah Pilih, after which Astra Ingalaga was freed after two traumatic years of captivity and reinstated on the throne of Jambi. Despite this dramatic show of support, Astra Ingalaga’s reign continued to be marked by declining trade and tensions between both hulu and hilir and Minangkabau newcomers and local highland chiefs, exacerbated by conflicts between the royal princes themselves. Finally, in 1742, Astra Ingalaga was persuaded to step down in favour of his youngest brother, Pangiran Sutawijaya, who was installed as Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin Anum Seri Ingalaga.28

The role of the Yang Dipertuan of Pagaruyung as “kingmaker” in Jambi reflected the special awe and respect that the rulers of Minangkabau commanded throughout Sumatra. Inheriting the mantle of Adityawarman’s fourteenth-century highland kingdom and his imperial title of “Supreme King of the Great Kings” (maharajadhiraja),29 the kings of Minangkabau claimed descent from Iskandar Zulkarnain, the name by which Alexander the Great is known in the Islamic world. In Malay chronicles, the first ruler of Minangkabau is honoured as one of three princes to appear at Bukit Seguntang, the sacred hill near Palembang. Numerous royal houses of Sumatra attribute their origins to Minangkabau, including Jambi and Inderagiri on the east coast of the island and Barus, Muko-Muko, and Inderapura on the west coast.30 Yet the realm of Minangkabau was more easily described in terms of its aura and charisma than its physical infrastructure or other tangible

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27 ’Soeltan Aboe’l-Rachman’ (Wellan, “De loge,” 449n).
28 This overview of a complex period of Jambi history is summarized from Andaya, To Live as Brothers, 133–68.
29 Kulke, “Adityawarman’s Highland Kingdom,” 234.
30 Drakard, A Kingdom of Words, 4–5.
signs of executive power, and Jane Drakard has famously characterized the polity as a “kingdom of words,” whose power and authority was “realized and actuated through language and the dissemination of royal signs.”

Displays of Minangkabau ascendancy in the _rantau_—areas of traditional Minangkabau migration and settlement outside the heartland—appear to have been especially evident in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In addition to embassies by Minangkabau princes and envoys and substantive migration by Minangkabau settlers and traders, one manifestation of royal authority was through the issuing of Minangkabau royal letters and seals of patronage. Many of these are known only from reports in Dutch accounts, such as a letter sent to the Dutch in Jambi announcing Minangkabau support for Pringgabaya’s upriver realm: “Duli Yang Dipertuan had made his grandson, Sultan Sri Maharaja Batu Johan Pahlawan Alam Syah, king of Mangunjaya, and had given him the lands from the foot of Gunung Merapi to Mangunjaya.” Approached through the prism of Dutch translations preserved in the VOC archives, it is often difficult to appreciate the original wording and nuance as well as physical manifestation of these royal grants. Therefore, extant royal Minangkabau seals of patronage, a number of which have been documented, are of very great interest. Compared to other Malay seals, which typically serve only to identify the seal holder by name, title, and other attributes, the inscriptions on Minangkabau seals of patronage constitute nothing less than a full grant of authority. One such seal (Figure 4.6) was issued to a ruler of Jambi, bearing the lengthy inscription:

*Sultan Abdul Jalil yang mempunyai tahta kerajaan negeri Minangkabau mengaku anak kepada Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin yang mempunyai tahta kerajaan negeri Jambi menyerahkan rakyat hingga kaki Gunung Berapi hilir hingga kuala Jambi mudik.*

Sultan Abdul Jalil, who possesses the throne of sovereignty in the state of Minangkabau, acknowledges as his son Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin, who possesses the throne of sovereignty in the state of Jambi, granting him authority over the people up to the foot of Gunung Berapi, downstream to the Jambi river mouth and back upstream.

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31 Ibid., 3.
32 Ibid., 127, 207.
33 Andaya, _To Live as Brothers_, 154n24, citing a Dutch translation of a letter to the Dutch in Jambi from the king of Minangkabau, received on January 2, 1712.
“Sultan Abdul Jalil” was a regnal title of Minangkabau sovereigns. But who was the ruler of Jambi named as “Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin” on the seal, honoured by such a mark of support?

In common with other Malay states, each ruler of Jambi had a not inconsiderable number of names and titles, used at different stages of his life, and in different contexts. It is not always easy therefore to identify an individual ruler from the different appellatives used in a variety of sources ranging from early European reports to Malay chronicles to official documents such as treaties, letters and edicts, and, indeed, seals. With the introduction of the “animal seal,” each Jambi sultan is identified by both his Muslim regnal name and his Javanese title, but the situation is not so clear for the preceding period. Although no “Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin” of Jambi is known, the name of “Sultan Abdul Muhyi” is confirmed by his own seal and a number of other sources as the name of the son of Sultan Agung, who ruled from...
1679 to 1687. Nevertheless, the historical chronicle of Jambi, *Hikayat Negeri Jambi*, assigns the name “Sultan Abdul Muhyi” to the elder son of Sultan Maharaja Batu, namely Sultan Astra Ingalaga, whose Muslim regnal name is otherwise unknown. If there were indeed two rulers of Jambi named “Sultan Abdul Muhyi,” it is more likely that the “Sultan Abdul Muhyiuddin” to whom the seal was presented was Astra Ingalaga than his grandfather. First, it was Astra Ingalaga who owed his restoration to the throne to the intervention and recognition of the Minangkabau ruler. Second, this seal is almost identical in shape and inscription to the Minangkabau seal of patronage issued to Sultan Mahmud Syah of Siak (r. 1746–1760), suggesting that the two seals can be assigned to a similar time period. The heavy hand of Minangkabau in the state of Jambi during the first half of the eighteenth century may thus offer an explanation for the introduction of the “animal seal,” either during the second reign of Sultan Astra Ingalaga from 1727 or with the succession of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin in 1742, and a clue to the significance of the animals themselves may possibly be found in the Minangkabau myth of origin, the *Tambo Minangkabau*.

The *Tambo Minangkabau*, which recounts the legendary history of the Minangkabau polity, is known today from a large number of oral and written sources. Although the earliest dated manuscript was copied in 1824, on the basis of intertextual references in other Malay chronicles and documents, it has been proposed that the *Tambo Minangkabau* took on its present Islamic form in the first half of the seventeenth century. According to the *Tambo Minangkabau*, Iskandar Zulkarnain, who was the youngest son of Adam and Eve, had three sons, named Sultan Seri Maharaja Alif, Sultan Seri Maharaja Dipang, and Sultan Seri Maharaja Diraja. After a tussle for the golden crown, the youngest son, Sultan Seri Maharaja Diraja—whose name echoes the title of the fourteenth-century king Adityawarman—was acknowledged by his two older brothers as the victor. Sultan Seri Maharaja Alif departed to become the emperor of Rum (that is, the eastern Roman empire and its Ottoman successor state) and Sultan Seri Maharaja Dipang became the emperor of China, while Sultan Seri Maharaja Diraja set sail

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36 Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) Or. 72: see Iskandar, *Catalogue*, 762. In her edition of another manuscript (Leiden University Library Or. 2013), Indiyah Prana Amertawengrum (“Hikayat Negeri Jambi”) gives the name as “Sultan Abdul Mukhyi”; but in the reproduction of the microfilm of the manuscript shown on page 222 of her thesis, the name appears to read “Sultan Abdul Muhyi.”

37 #659, reproduced in Gallop, “Royal Minangkabau Seals,” 283.

38 Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*, 90.
for Sumatra, accompanied by a princess and four animals: a she-goat of the forest (*kambing hutan*), a learned dog (*anjing mualim*), a Siamese cat (*kucing Siam*), and a Cham tigress (*harimau Campa*). When the ship arrived at Gunung Berapi (Mount Merapi in west Sumatra) the animals turned into beautiful women, and the king married all four women as well as the princess. These five wives bore him five daughters, whom the king gave in marriage to the five master boatmen who had repaired his ship, and their descendants then populated the Minangkabau lands.\(^{39}\)

The marriage between the first king of Minangkabau and the four animal-women has been interpreted by some anthropologists as uniting the patrilineal, male principle, representing the Minangkabau dynasty, and the matrilineal, female principle of Minangkabau’s social structure, representing Minangkabau territory.\(^{40}\) Others see the four animal-women as representing a range of different female characteristics.\(^{41}\) In any case, compared to other origin myths of a wide range of polities throughout the Malay archipelago, very often involving marriage of a male outsider to a princess discovered in a clump of bamboo or in a mass of foam, the presence of four (extraordinary) animals among the companions of the founder of the kingdom of Minangkabau has been described as “a fairly unexpected feature”—as unexpected, indeed, as the presence of four animals on the seal of the sultan of Jambi. I accordingly suggest that the iconic role of four animals in the ancient Minangkabau myth of origin offers the most plausible explanation for the design of the new royal seal of Jambi. Even though the selection of animals seen on the Jambi seals may not always tally exactly with those named in the *Tambo Minangkabau*, it should be noted that variant forms of the legend are known,\(^{43}\) and that both the elephant (*Gajah Sakti*) and the buffalo (*Si Binuang Sati*) occupy positions in the pantheon of Minangkabau signs of greatness listed in chronicles and royal letters and edicts.\(^{44}\) The design of the Jambi seal could therefore be seen as a masterly composition, placing the Islamic name of the sovereign in the centre, and harmoniously balancing in alternating petals in the border the symbols of the two rival cultural factions in Jambi: Javanese, associated with the downstream court at Tanah Pilih; and Minangkabau, the towering presence among the upriver communities in the highlands.

The design of the animal seal should perhaps also be considered in the particular context of chancery practice in Jambi. As noted above, to a much greater

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 96–97.


\(^{41}\) Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*, 97.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.


\(^{44}\) Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme*, 103.
extent than in other Malay states, edicts and decrees issued by sultans and feudal lords to village chiefs have been carefully stored and kept in Jambi, in some cases surviving for over three centuries. These edicts were regularly retrieved and checked, and several are known to bear later annotations, amendments, and further seals as a sign of subsequent ratification. It is unlikely that many of the recipients were literate, and perhaps in Jambi there was a heightened appreciation for a royal seal that could be easily “read” visually. At least three noble Jambi seals documented from multiple copies of decrees dating from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are highly unusual for Malay seals in iconographic terms.

A seal of Pangiran Temenggung Kabul di Bukit, in fact, bears no inscription at all; it displays a complex intertwining shape intersecting with a small circle, emulating a four-petalled flower but also recalling certain magical and talismanic designs (#1408). Pangiran Temenggung Kabul di Bukit was the representative of the sultan of Jambi at Muara Mesumai, who acted as an intermediary between the sultan and the chiefs (dipati) of Kerinci, and eight edicts bearing this seal are known, two of which date from the late seventeenth century. Two other seals are typically Malay in shape, eight-petalled circles, but with the inscription in the border and including an array of objects in the centre. One is the seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya (#901), the pre-regnal title held by Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin, the first ruler of Jambi known to use an animal seal. This highly distinctive seal, recorded from about fourteen letters and edicts from the first half of the eighteenth century, contains a crescent, two small circles, and a two-bladed sword representing Dhu al-Faqar, the sword of the Prophet, arranged in an unmistakably anthropomorphic assemblage eerily resembling a human face (Figure 4.7). The seal of Pangiran Temenggung Mangku Negara, found on four documents, is similar in composition (#1411). Against such a background, and with such a postulated audience, the creation of the “animal seal” of Jambi is perhaps less surprising than it might otherwise be perceived to be.

The design of the royal animal seal of Jambi is probably best regarded as an innovative and original creation of a masterly strategist at the royal court of Jambi in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. While the identity of the designer will probably never be known, he (or possibly she) might have been a royal scribe or artist or advisor at the court, and a few individuals who were active around that time can actually be named. Royal edicts sometimes bore the names of their writers, and one such scribe was Ki Astra Negara, who penned an (undated) edict issued by Sultan Astra Ingalaga, which is now held in the village of Muara Mendras. As

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45 Kozok, A 14th Century Malay Code, 225.
46 See Gallop and Porter, Lasting Impressions, 176.
seals were a royal prerogative in the Malay world, relatively few matrices were made, and hence there were no professional seal engravers. Instead, seals were made as required by gold- or silversmiths, probably working from an inscription written out by a trained scribe. We have the name of one noble goldsmith in Jambi at that time, Ngabei Karta Laksamana, who was sent from the court upstream in 1722 to the gold mines at Tebo to negotiate between local people and incoming Minangkabau. Such a combination of artistic and political skills might well characterize the creator of the royal animal seal of Jambi.

Figure 4.7. Seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya, later Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin of Jambi (r. 1742–ca. 1770), with an assemblage of objects in the centre, including the sword Dhu al-Faqar, resembling a human face, and inscribed in the borders Ini cap Pangiran Suta Wijaya // Lā ilāha illā Allāh (x4), “This is the seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya // “There is no god but God” [Qur’an 47:19] (x4).” Documented on at least fourteen documents dating from 1709 to 1763 (the last perhaps used by his successor to the title). From a contract with the VOC, October 16, 1763, ANRI Riouw 68/7. Reproduced courtesy of the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta.

48 Andaya, To Live as Brothers, 163.
Conclusion

Although a few isolated examples of Islamic seals have been documented in Southeast Asia dating from the medieval period, a coherent Islamic sealing culture really begins to appear only around the turn of the seventeenth century. The main impetus for this development seems to have been the arrival in the region of the Dutch East India Company, which brought with it a zeal for treaty making with local states that exceeded that of earlier European powers, namely the Portuguese and Spanish. During the first century of their evolution Malay seals betray a rich range of international influences, primarily from the Islamic heartlands to the west. Thus the earliest known Islamic seals used in Southeast Asia, stamped on a letter from the sultan of Ternate to the king of Portugal of 1560, closely resemble Timurid seals of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and were probably imported from the Persianate world, while the oldest known seal from Aceh, that of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah (r. 1589–1604), references Ottoman seals in style and engraving technique.

By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the VOC had largely succeeded in imposing a trading monopoly across much of the archipelago, greatly curtailing the number of other foreign merchants entering harbours and ports in Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Sulawesi, and the Moluccas. Around the same time we can discern a more introspective “Malay” and less “international” flavour to Islamic seals in Southeast Asia. The range of Arabic expressions found on seal inscriptions becomes less inventive and more formulaic, talismanic formulae begin to creep in, and there is an iconographic shift towards traditional forms, with a marked preference for the quintessentially Malay lotus blossom. And so, at a time of political crisis and factionalism in Jambi, when the royal seal was reimagined as a symbol of conciliation, the designer appears to have dug deep into history and retrieved, from the medieval legend of the origins of the Minangkabau kingdom, the emblems that would make Malay sigillographic history.

Seals have been standard-bearers of human cultures for thousands of years, dating back to the earliest known human civilizations. While in all cultures seals have performed essentially the same functions of securing property and verifying and authenticating documents, there is extraordinary variation in their distribution and mode of use; within societies, there could also be considerable fluctuations and hiatuses in the use of seals. It is not usually possible to extrapolate from one

49 Gallop and Porter, Lasting Impressions, 34–35.
50 Gallop, “Ottoman Influences.”
51 Whereas before 1750 just 10 per cent of Malay seals have petalled circle shapes, in the second half of the eighteenth century the proportion rises to 37 per cent.
52 See the editor’s introduction to this issue.
society to another, and thus detailed regional studies are needed to ascertain the precise mode of use of seals within one culture at a certain time. This focus on just one such seal—the royal animal seal of Jambi on the east coast of Sumatra in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—has shown how the sovereign seal was reinvented to function as much more than merely a symbol of authority. It was also loaded with the responsibility of embodying the fragile unity of the state.
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Abstract One of the most distinctive royal seals used in the Malay world of Southeast Asia was the animal seal of the sultans of Jambi in east Sumatra. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards all successive sovereigns of Jambi used an eight-petalled seal with animals pictured in four of the petals. This was an exceptionally unusual choice for an Islamic sultanate, and it suggests that this seal was probably created at a politically critical juncture in Jambi history, as a bold graphic endeavour to unite, symbolically, the two contesting factions at the Jambi court: the Javanese elite, represented on this new seal by the sultan’s Javanese title placed in the other four petals; and the Minangkabau power behind the throne, evoked by images of four legendary animals from the Minangkabau myth of origin.

Keywords seals, Islam, Malay, Jambi, Sumatra, Javanese, Minangkabau, animals, lotus