

Letters from the Malay Sultanates of the 17th and 18th Centuries: An Unknown Collection in St. Petersburg

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This article deals with Malay letters and documents from the archives of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie—VOC), dating to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The collection of “golden” Malay letters, which belonged to the governor-general of the VOC in Java (1704–1709) Joan van Hoorn, made a long voyage on the ship *Sandenburg* from Batavia to Cape Town and Amsterdam in 1710. Its cultural and historical value was firstly estimated by the outstanding Russian scholar and antiquarian N. P. Likhachev, who purchased it for the Paleographical Museum in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) in 1910. The pages of the fifty-seven diplomatic letters cover one of the most controversial periods of VOC history on the Archipelago, 1683 to 1710, the establishment of its relationships with local nobility and states. The collection represents the original letters of the sultans of Palembang, Gowa, Buton, Bone, Tallo, Banten, and Cirebon, and of prominent historical figures of Malay states as well as the famous Indian merchant from Surat, Abdul Ghafur. They are written in Malay (in Arabic graphic: Jawi and Pegon), Arabic, Javanese (in two scripts: Pegon and Carakan), Dutch, Spanish, Persian, and Chinese. Their investigation will contribute to the academic scholarship on the famous records, reconstructing the history of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) on the Malay Archipelago, and on the peculiarities of Malay letter writing in different languages, scripts, and regions.

Keywords: Malay Sultanates, St. Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Dutch East India Company).

N. P. Likhachev’s Collection in St. Petersburg

The collection of Malay letters that is the subject of this article has remained unknown to scholars for a long time. Since 1938 it has been kept in the special collections of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts¹ in St. Petersburg under the title “Documents of the VOC” (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or the Dutch East India Company). In

2008 the collection was found by the author of this article among the documents in the N. P. Likhachev collection, which are included in the Documental Fund² of the Institute of Oriental manuscripts. This marked the beginning of studying these fifty-seven documents of diplomatic correspondence, or so-called golden letters. The collection represents original letters of the sultans of Palembang, Gowa, Buton, Bone, Tallo, Banten, Cirebon, and of prominent historical figures and nobility of the Malay states, as well as correspondence with merchants of the Indian Ocean and captains of Batavia. They are written in Malay (mostly in Arabic graphic: Jawi and Pegon scripts), Arabic, Javanese (in two scripts: Pegon and Carakan), Dutch (mostly transliterated from Malay originals), Spanish, Persian, and Chinese. The collection was catalogued with the archival code OIC (Oost-Indskaya Companiya East India Company) as OIC 1–57. In order to trace the collection's history, it makes sense to begin with the life of its former owner, Nikolay Petrovich Likhachev (1862–1936). One of Russia's most outstanding scholars, Likhachev was a collector of rare erudition and thorough knowledge in the fields of history, paleography, diplomacy, sphragistics,³ and numismatics. He was born on 12 April 1862 in the town of Chistopol in the governorate of Kazan. In 1892 he graduated from Kazan University, and in 1894 he became a member of the Archeographic Committee in St. Petersburg and a lecturer at St. Petersburg University. During the period from 1902 to 1914 he worked as the vice-director of the public library in St. Petersburg. His scholarly activities, his habit of forming collections, and his immense fortune enabled him to establish the Museum of Paleography in St. Petersburg. In 1930 he was arrested and exiled to Astrakhan, declared guilty during what was called in the Soviet Union at the time the Trial of Academicians.⁴ He died in Leningrad after having returned from exile in 1936.

It is difficult to overestimate Likhachev's contribution to Russian scholarship and culture. His collections of icons, paintings, coins, European and Oriental ancient documents and charters, seals and manuscripts, ex-libris, and autographs are now preserved in the State Hermitage, the Russian Museum, and several Institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He published some 160 scholarly works and many of these remain unsurpassed to this day precisely because of his erudition. As an example of Likhachev's genius I may mention here the first and only catalogue of watermarks in Russian, together with a survey on papermaking in Russia.⁵ As a collector he did not limit himself to geographical regions or fields of interests, about which he wrote: "For decades I have been scouring everywhere and gathering the grains of wealth from Europe in order to bring materials to Russia in order to be studied there."⁶

Between the years of 1892 and 1914 Likhachev spent much time abroad. In France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Turkey, and Egypt he purchased many rare items for his collection and established contact with a large number of erudite antiquarians. He kept up a correspondence with some 170 antiquarians in Paris, London, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Florence, and Istanbul. Upon his return he opened the Museum of Paleography in St. Petersburg, in which he exhibited his different collections. It is interesting to note that Likhachev's memoirs and archives provide extensive information on all this, which may be useful for students of the history of the antiquarian markets in Western Europe before the First World War. Moreover, it gives an idea of the main tendencies

of collecting in Europe during that time, when most attention was paid to letters, documents, charters, and all sorts of archives in Italy.⁷ Moreover, having cooperated with famous antiquarians such as Ludwig Rosenthal in Germany, Gaston Saffroy in Paris, Bernard Quaritch in London, and many others, he brought together a collection of autographs of antiquarians and wrote a special work dealing with the role of connoisseurs of art and collectors in the organization of the place of preservation of ancient documents and manuscripts. It might well be that data preserved in Likhachev's archive can provide interesting information to the student of the history of art and rare collections.⁸

The collection of documents of the Dutch East India Company in Likhachev's collection is now kept in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg. This collection contains letters written in Malay, Javanese, Dutch, Arabic, Persian, Spanish, and Chinese, which date from the period between 1683 and 1710. According to Likhachev's notes, he found the Malay letters in an auction catalogue of Messrs. Frederik Muller of Amsterdam. He purchased them in 1910, when he was in Berlin. Some letters in Chinese he was able to obtain earlier, in 1890, from Gaston Saffroy, the antiquarian bookseller in Paris.⁹ Presumably, the collection belonged to the private archive of Joan van Hoorn, as almost all letters are addressed to him, either as director general in the years 1691–1704 or as governor general of the VOC in the years 1704–1709 in Batavia. The sole exception is one letter, which was addressed to his predecessor, governor general Willem van Outhoorn (1691–1704), written by Pakih Tadjoeidin from Banten in 1695 (OIC 5). However, this letter can also be seen as belonging to the Outhoorn family collection, since Joan van Hoorn in 1691 married Susanna Angela van Outhoorn, who was the daughter of his predecessor, Willem van Outhoorn.¹⁰

One of the most intriguing features of the Van Hoorn-Likhachev collection is their linguistic and geographical diversity. Van Hoorn selected fifty-seven letters for the long voyage to Amsterdam and we might guess that his choice was justified by his diplomatic experience and the scholarly intuition of a person who spent his whole life in the Malay Archipelago. In this collection one can find almost all samples and scripts used for diplomatic correspondence in this period. The Malay letters, written and addressed to him in different languages and scripts, are more than evidence of the fine art of Malay letter writing. They are objects of diplomatic ritual, and important primary sources for the study of the political and economic history of the Netherlands Indies. The formal Malay letter-writing tradition is traced back to the second half of the seventeenth century.¹¹ So this collection is considered to be of significant cultural value as it has preserved a large number of examples of the so-called early Malay letters.

Joan van Hoorn (1653–1711)

Joan van Hoorn was born in Amsterdam on 16 November 1653. In 1663, he departed together with his father Pieter van Hoorn, *Raad Ordinair van Nederlandsch Indië* to the Dutch East Indies, aboard the vessel *Alphen*. In Java he rose from the position of *onder-assistent* to the highest possible office, that of governor general. On 16 July

1710 he returned to Amsterdam with the rank of admiral on board of the ship *Sandenburg*, and died there on 20 February 1711. Joan van Hoorn is an interesting historical figure not only as governor general of Java in 1704–1709, but as a person who contributed much to transferring his considerable knowledge of Javanese and Chinese cultures. His interest in Chinese culture was closely connected to his father Pieter van Hoorn, who was sent as VOC ambassador to the court of the Chinese emperor in 1665, accompanied by his young son. Pieter van Hoorn was famous as a connoisseur of Chinese civilization.¹² In 1704, when Van Hoorn became governor general of the VOC, he followed in his father's footsteps.¹³ Both his private and business interests were closely intertwined with the Chinese community, where he was greatly respected.¹⁴ In Batavia, Van Hoorn was famous for his collaborative policy and close relationships with Chinese residents, even more than with the indigenous population.¹⁵ Significantly, the VOC treated the Chinese community as almost equal economic non-indigenous partners, providing them with comparable administrative structures for Chinese institutions, such as a well-equipped hospital, temples, and cemeteries. Chinese shipping in Batavia also enjoyed special trading privileges. Batavia at that time was as much a Chinese city as a Dutch colonial one.¹⁶ This relatively harmonious situation lasted until the events of the Chinese massacre in 1740. It was never restored after this tragedy. American historian Holden Furber, in his study *Rival Empires of Trade*, has characterized European activity in Asia between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries as "The Age of Partnership."¹⁷ Due to the Dutch collaborative policy Batavia became a capital of regional power in the Java Sea.

The second half of this century in Europe was characterized by an extraordinary public interest in new scientific discoveries. It is important to add that Van Hoorn maintained a regular correspondence with his cousin, famous scholar and burgomaster of Amsterdam Nicolas Witsen (1641–1717), who supported the development of knowledge about Oriental civilization. The gathering of eight Chinese letters from Likhachev's collection (OIC 39–45; OIC 54) provides further insight into this aspect of Van Hoorn's life on Java.¹⁸

During the period of Van Hoorn's career, the Dutch East India Company was in the process of establishing its political and military power in the region. In 1706, 1707, and 1708 furious campaigns were held by the VOC against Madurese and Kartasura forces in East Java. Earlier, the VOC had established its power in Banten after an expedition against this Islamic state in 1682–1684. The Sultanate of Banten lay on the western tip of Java and the southernmost region of Sumatra, Lampung, and had always been a stronghold of Malay Islam. Its rulers achieved much prosperity in trading not only with the Dutch but also with merchants from China, Persia, Portugal, Spain, Denmark, and India. In the state of Banten the Dutch had to deal with severe competition from other traders like the Chinese and English, and with the attempts of the Bantenese to control their own trade. In 1684 Banten became the Company's vassal by treaty. In 1685 Joan van Hoorn was sent as a representative of the Company to Banten.

VOC Correspondence from Likhachev's Collection (OIC 1–57)

In Likhachev's collection there are ten documents from Banten, written between the years 1695 and 1709. Of these ten, four come from Sultan Abu al-Mahasin Muhammad Zain al-Abidin (r. 1690–1733) and six from Pakih Tajoedin (Malay: supreme court judge). The letters of the sultan are more elaborately decorated and visually impressive. All documents bear the small red wax seals that are typical for Banten. The decorated letters of Sultan Abu al-Mahasin Muhammad Zain al-Abidin may be considered the true jewels in Likhachev's collection (OIC 1, 9, 11, and 52). The style of the scripts, Pegon and Jawi, and the decoration of the Malay letters are refined and sophisticated. They are skillfully written with calligraphic enhancement of the last line and letter heading at the top of the sheet. Some letters call to mind the jali-style calligraphy of the Ottoman and Safavid courts' scribes, especially the manner of using dots to fill in the spaces around the letters.¹⁹ It is evident that the sultan's epistles were composed by different scribes. The writing of the word "Sultan" bears a distinguishing mark by one who places the letter "nun" above the word, for example. The distinctive feature of Banten's documents are expertly made decorations in floral and foliate illumination. All the sultan's illuminated letters are written on Indian paper. It is noteworthy that the merchant community of Gujarat had maintained its own settlement in Banten since 1596,²⁰ and the Gujaratis imported the so-called Indian *surat* paper to the Banten court. Bantenese masters decorated it with different floral motives such as the flowers of cloves or cempaka.²¹ In the art of letter illumination each kind of decoration had its own symbolic meaning.²² Regarding correspondence from Banten the work of Indonesian scholar T. Pujiastuti is especially important. It contains a detailed description of Banten letters preserved in various world collections. The early Banten sultans' letters dated before 1682 are preserved mostly in the Public Record Office in London (twelve letters) and in the Royal Library in Copenhagen (two letters). The investigation by Pujiastuti demonstrates that there are no original Banten sultans' letters dated to the period of 1682 to 1781 preserved in world collections.²³ In this sense, the letters by Sultan Abu al-Mahasin Muhammad Zain al-Abidin from Likhachev's collection, written in the period of 1695 to 1709, are valuable pieces of cultural heritage. They fill the lacuna of historical artefacts dated to the long reign of Sultan al-Abidin as well as elucidate the character of his relationships with the VOC.

During the years of Van Hoorn's office as governor general in Batavia, one more important treaty was signed. This strengthened the Company's position in Mataram and Madura. The years of 1704 to 1708 are known in Indonesian history as the first Javanese war for the throne. In the course of this war, Pakubuwono I²⁴ became king (*Susuhunan*) of Mataram in 1705 and signed the new treaty with the Company. According to this treaty Dutch traders were given the monopoly on commercial activities and the eastern part of Madura became the Company's vassal. In Likhachev's collection one can find several letters which are the evidence of Van Hoorn's diplomatic contacts with eminent Javanese aristocrats from several courts who played important roles in the Javanese policy towards the Dutch on the Archipelago. Conspicuous is the fact

that Van Hoorn's correspondence with Javanese nobility dates back to a period before the treaty between the Company and Mataram was signed in 1705. The correspondence dated to the years 1688–1701 refers to the period of tense relations between the VOC and the new court of Kartasura, which was established in 1680. The records of this time are not clear but it is supposed that the king of Kartasura, Amangkurat II,²⁵ himself took part in the plot against the Company in 1686. As a result seventy-five European soldiers headed by Captain Francois Tack were attacked by Surapati's Balinese bands and killed. In 1690s the relations between Amangkurat II and the VOC were gradually restored. The king paid his debts to the Company and in 1696 sent his ambassador to Batavia, as well as asking for the VOC's military assistance.²⁶

Among the correspondents of Van Hoorn are such persons as Adipati Djangrana,²⁷ regent of Surabaya in 1697–1709 (OIC 17, letter in Jawi from Surabaya of 1701 written under the name of Susuhunan of Kartasura) and Pangiran Cakraningrat,²⁸ respected and famous among Mataram's court as an old representative of Javanese nobility (OIC 19, letter in Javanese written in Madura in 1704). Noteworthy is that in the end of the seventeenth century Angabei Djangrana II and Pangiran Madura expanded their influence over the territories of eastern Java. The collection also contains one letter written in Jawi by Joan van Hoorn himself, dating to 1696 and addressed to Pangiran Cakraningrat on Madura. In addition, the collection preserved one letter written by one of the most powerful figures in Mataram, famous statesman and military commander Raden Arya Sindureja²⁹ (OIC 20). The letter, with a large oval red wax seal in the left, is written in Javanese script in 1700. These documents are of high cultural value as historical sources and antiquarian rarities.

The court dynasty of Sultan Sepuh from Cirebon³⁰ also had close collaborative relationships with VOC officials. Cirebon was one of the oldest Islamic states on western Java, along with Banten. According to the *Da Asia*, a corpus of Portuguese accounts of the overseas expedition of Joao de Barros in the period 1550–1560 and Javanese historical sources (*Sejarah Banten*, *Babad Cirebon*), after the pilgrimage to Mecca, Fatelehan or Maulana Hasanuddin, an Islamic teacher from Pasai, arrived in Cirebon and spread Islam there.³¹ Later he became the ruler of Cirebon as Susuhunan Gunung Jati and assigned Cirebon and Banten to his two sons.³² During the history of the relationships of these two states, Cirebon always tried to preserve its sovereignty from Banten, with the backing of the VOC. Likhachev's collection possesses four letters written by Sultan Anom³³ (d. 1703) and Pangiran Arya Purbaya³⁴ dated to the years 1686–1703. They are written in Dutch, Jawi, and Javanese. The contents of these letters are clear evidence of very close and collaborative relationships between VOC officials and the court of Cirebon. As historical archival documents they could contribute to the theory of Dutch diplomatic relations with Asian courts proposed by Peter Rietbergen as "double perspective." Rietbergen describes "the permitted presence of the Company," usually supported by the presence of its soldiers, as "legitimized indigenous power."³⁵ For an example, please see the translation of a letter by Sultan Anom (Appendix 1).

The largest portion of Malay letters in Arabic graphic from Likhachev's collection was sent from the Sultanate Palembang on Sumatra. Letters in Jawi from Palembang are

enumerated by nine documents (OIC 21–29). They were written mostly by the son and successor of Palembang Sultan Abdul Rahman,³⁶ who reigned until his death in 1706 at the age of 123. In fact, from 1694 Sultan Abdul Rahman gave power to one of his sons, Pangiran Arya, and in 1700 accorded him the title Pangiran Ratu, indicating that he had been installed above all other princes. In 1701 he was installed as Sultan Ratu Senapati Ingalaga and in 1706 as Sultan Muhammad Mansur.³⁷ Among these letters two were written by Pangiran Arya, one of the senior princes, perhaps the future Sultan Ratu Kamaruddin (r. 1714–1722), and Pangiran Purbaya, son of Sultan Muhammad Mansur. All letters date back to the period between the years of 1700–1709 and possess nine different types of lampblack seals.³⁸

Among fifty-seven documents there are also letters from the sultans of the Malay states Buton (OIC 30), Bima (OIC 31, 33), and Gowa (OIC 8). The island of Celebes is represented by four letters from Bone written by the famous Arung Palakka La Tenritatta, *Matinroe ri Bantualak* (r. 1672–1696) in 1688 (OIC 32) as well as La Patau, *Matinroe ri Nagauleng* (r. 1696–1714) dated to 1703 and Arung Palakka's wife, the Makassarese princess Sira Daeng Talele Karaeng Ballajawa, dated to 1703 and 1709.³⁹ A full description of all documents in this collection is beyond the scope of one article. However, two letters in Persian deserve mention. They are sent from the Indian port of Surat and written by the well-known Persian trader from Basra, Mulla Faharuddin Abdul Ghafur (1622–1718). These letters date back to 1707 and 1709 and are catalogued under OIC 7 and OIC 49. Abdul Ghafur was a leader of the mercantile community in Surat, the “blessed port of the Moghols” of the eighteenth century, and owned seventeen ships which were sailing along the routes to Mocha and Batavia under the convoy of VOC ships. His name is frequently mentioned on the pages of the *Generale Missiven* by W. Ph. Coolhaas in the context of the trial between the VOC and Abdul Ghafur concerning his three ships attacked and plundered by pirates in 1684.⁴⁰ Moreover, Coolhaas mentions two letters dated to 1704 and 1705 written by Abdul Ghafur in Persian and addressed to VOC quarters in Batavia in the context of the incident with Ghafur's vessel *Fez Rizai*, arrested by the Dutch in Malacca in 1703.⁴¹ The best description of this historical figure is presented by prominent Indian historian Ashin Dasgupta, who also described the role of Abdul Ghafur in trading activity and the religious life of Gujarat's port Surat. Abdul Ghafur and his descendants belonged to the *Patni jamat* Sunni community. He was one of the richest and most powerful persons of Surat, possessing a house in Saudagarpura, the swell district of rich ship-owners and aristocrats, with a beautiful garden and its own city gates on the river. His grandson built a mosque in Surat for the *Patni jamat* community in 1723. Abdul Ghafur was an outstanding Indian merchant, establishing mercantile and diplomatic relationships with Dutch, British, French, and Portuguese trading companies. Ashin Dasgupta distinguished Mulla Abdul Ghafur as “a merchant prince” of the Indian Ocean.⁴² At present, there is no indication that the original letters belonging to the hand of Abdul Ghafur have been preserved in other world collections than Likhachev's

The Diplomacy of Malay Letters

Batavia became a powerful trading capital and practiced diplomatic relationships with its regional neighbours. Envoys from abroad were regularly received with much pomp; upon arrival they were accompanied to Batavia Castle, where the ceremony of presentation of letters to the governor general and the councillors of the Indies took place. The ceremonial exchange of gold-leafed letters, accompanied by the exchange of gifts between the governor general and the envoys, was exemplary of the great value given to diplomatic relationships. In Malay culture, the writing of such diplomatic correspondence achieved high artistic forms; it was a competition in courtesy. The colonial administration of the VOC also took part in the elaborate rituals and wrote letters in Arabic, Persian, Malay, Bugis, Portuguese, Spanish, and Chinese. Splendid ceremonies were held according to Malay *adat*⁴³ when royal letters were dispatched and received. In the *Sejarah Melayu*⁴⁴ it is mentioned that the origin of such ceremonies with letters is attributed to the reign of Sultan Muzafar Shah (d. 1456), the first Muslim ruler of Malacca. According to the descriptions that are preserved and which were written by Europeans, elephants took part in these ceremonies.⁴⁵ They carried coloured umbrellas on their backs, each color symbolizing the rank of the letter, while the biggest elephant carried a small castle (like a coach), in which the royal letter was placed in a great basin of gold and wrapped in a piece of silk.

The VOC established well-organized civic structures in Batavia, reminiscent of the Netherlands. Malay captains provided translators for writing letters to the neighbouring port principalities. The High Government, with the governor general at its head, appointed *kapiteinen* (captains) among the population, who functioned as mediators between the governor general, the VOC administration, and the inhabitants. It is interesting to note that the earliest object in Likhachev's collection is a yellow small cotton envelope with inscription and date in Jawi: "*pada Kapiten Melayu 1642*" (OIC38).⁴⁶ Several letters have a commercial content and are written by Malay captains. For example, there is one letter from 1706 by the Balinese captain (*Capteyn*) Lampiden (OIC 46). Coolhaas in his *Generale Missiven* mentions this person as the first Balinese captain in Batavia till his death in 1711 in the context of his letter written to the High Government dealing with a rebellion by Javanese Prince Pangiran Adipati Anom in 1704.⁴⁷ The earliest letter in Likhachev's collection dates back to 1683. This letter (OIC 13), translated into Dutch from Malay, was written by one of the Malay captains and addressed to *ordinaris raad van India J. van Hoorn van Capitan* (name is unreadable).

All diplomatic correspondence arrived at Batavia Castle and was systematically catalogued in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries in the form of *contractenboeken*. In addition, all letters from Asian rulers were translated into Dutch. The majority of these translations of original letters were compiled in the VOC's principle chronicle—the Daily Journals of Batavia Castle. In 2014 researchers, supported by a joint project of the National Archive in Jakarta (ANRI) and the Corts Foundation in the Netherlands, created a database of diplomatic correspondence which consists of more than 4,300 letters referenced in the Daily Journals of Batavia Castle, identified and published online at

<http://www.sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/diplomatic-letters>. In this way, thousands of letters were translated and recorded. However, rare samples of originals have survived and are still scattered in institutional and private collections. Some of them, precisely eight letters from Central Java, South Sulawesi, the Southern Philippines, and the kingdom of Siam, were recently selected for publishing in the frame of same joint project.⁴⁸

The Art of Malay Letter Writing

The history of Malay letter writing is some four hundred years old. The two earliest known letters were written in the twin kingdoms of Ternate and Tidore, centres of the clove trade. They were sent by the infant Sultan Abu Hayat to King John III of Portugal in 1521 and 1522. They are considered to be the oldest Malay manuscript documents in the world, preceding by at least half a century any other known Malay text in manuscript.⁴⁹ Much has already been written about a small group of early seventeenth-century Malay letters from Aceh, which are now kept in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. These documents date back to the period of the first official contacts between the English East India Company and the Sultans of Aceh. This collection contains one of the most beautiful and richly decorated letters, addressed to King James III and sent in 1615 by the Sultan of Aceh, Iskandar Muda.⁵⁰

The outward appearance of the Malay letters resembles letters in Arabic, Persian, and other Islamic languages which use the Arabic script. Malay guides to letter writing are known by the generic term *kitab terasul*, and these were much influenced by Persian guides of epistolary etiquette, called *Inshā*, and which date back several centuries. However, the term *terasul* covers a wide semantic range and can also denote esoteric texts compiled for initiated persons. In practice, they served as manuals of correct letter writing and were used by professional scribes in royal courts.

But even if there is a strong Persian influence on the style of Malay letter writing, it is clear that Malay letters have their own distinctive features as well. An analysis of the structure of the letters was made first by Wilkinson in 1907⁵¹ and explored further by Annabel Gallop in 1994.⁵² We mention here some of these: the letter headings *kepala surat yang pendek*,⁵³ the seals, the opening compliments *puji-pujian*,⁵⁴ the size of the text block in the lower left quadrant of the letter, and the use of silk pouches as envelopes. The majority of letter headings were written in Arabic (short Quranic quotations or religious phrases), whereas the position of the heading on the page reflected the rank of the sender towards the addressee. The writing of headings provided a marvellous opportunity for calligraphers to show their skill. The most frequently encountered headings are *Qawluhu al-ḥaqq wa kalāmuhu al-ṣidq*,⁵⁵ *Yā qāḍī al-ḥājāt*,⁵⁶ and *Nūr al-shams wa al-qamar*,⁵⁷ written in *naskh* and *nasta'liq*.

The best examples of Malay calligraphy are considered to be the letters of Sultan Mahmud Shah of Johor and Pahang to Sir Thomas Raffles. One can see also special paragraph marking words in Malay letters, such as *bahwa ini*, *syahdan*, *maka*, *sebermula*, or *hatta*. The compliments introduced by *wa-ba'dahu* in Arabic, or *kemudian daripada itu*

in Malay, were usually put in the end of the text, sometimes including the statement about gifts, supplied together with the letter. This part of the text as a rule demonstrated the erudition of the writer and the level of etiquette. The Malay seal (*tanda*; in Javanese *pra-tandha alamat*, *cap*, *meterai*; *khatam*, which in Arabic means both seal and talisman; in Persian *mohr*; in Old-Javanese *mudra*) like all Islamic seals is the individual sign of its owner. The earliest known Malay seal dates back to 1602 and is of Sultan Alauddin Riyat Shah of Aceh (1589–1604). Malay seals were usually made in the form of a circle and petalled circles or octagons and ovals. Seals from Jambi had the shape of buffaloes, lions, tigers, and elephants. Based on some fifteen hundred specimens of Malay seals, Annabel Gallop has proposed a classification on a regional principle while paying attention to the typical features in seals from Malacca, Jambi, Palembang, Aceh, and so on. Moreover, she writes that Arabic-style pedigree is a distinguishing feature of Malay seals and only some seals from Minangkabau were written wholly in Malay.⁵⁸ In a paleographical sense, the Likhachev collection is a unique gathering of different original samples of South and South East Asian letter writing. It distinguishes itself especially by its illuminated letters from Java and a collection of seals from different Malay states which are not encountered on other documents. It contains various kinds of red wax seals of diverse forms (circle, oval, hexagonal, octagonal, as well as wax decorative seals in the forms of butterfly and crawfish with inscriptions in Jawi, Pegon, and Javanese in Carakan script, different types of Malay lampblack seals from Palembang, Buton, Bima, and Gowa. Noteworthy is that letters written by Pangiran Adipati Cakraningrat from Madura (OIC 18, 1689; OIC 19, 1704) contain red wax seals of octagonal form with inscription in Jawi “*Pangiran Adipati Cakraningrat*.” According to Gallop’s data, Malay seals from Madura are only known from the early nineteenth century.⁵⁹ In this context the Likhachev collection contributes a new earlier sample of seal from Madura to the study of Malay seals. The diversity of represented seals demonstrates the regional peculiarities of local letter -writing.

Much needs to be done with these fascinating and important materials of diplomatic correspondence written in the “uniform” style of the Malay letter-writing tradition, reflecting a variety of nuances of social status and regional peculiarities of decorative styles and handwriting scripts. The work on digitization, transliteration, and translation of letters has already been started in St. Petersburg in order to prepare the materials for publishing, supplied with historical research and facsimiles of documents. Without any exaggeration, one of the most intriguing features of Likhachev’s collection is its linguistic and geographical diversity. The letters cover almost all the Archipelago, India, Comoro islands, and China, bringing to light the nature of Indonesia’s maritime past.

Batavia was one of the main city-ports of maritime trading and diplomatic contact between various islands ports of the Archipelago and city-ports in countries across the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The scale of the Likhachev collection’s correspondence and the linguistic, toponymic, naval, and historical data it contains opens the field for constructing a new historical dimension of the “Archipelago state.” Seafaring has always played a part in shaping civilization and the Malay Archipelago has verily its own maritime history closely associated with the trading activity of the VOC.

Our knowledge about Malay letter writing will benefit greatly from studying the peculiarities of different scripts and languages, different compositional structure, spatial boundaries, Islamic calligraphy, floral illumination, and seals. The collection possesses unique samples of regional scripts and illuminations and a number of samples of personal and trading seals, which are not encountered in the catalogue of Malay seals. The materiality of the illuminated pages and sophisticated style of writing of the surviving medieval artifacts opens new possibilities for research. For these reasons, the collection deserves serious scholarly attention, as the study of these documents could contribute much to the history of the VOC, maritime diplomacy, and trading in the Indian Ocean, as well as to Malay epistolography. It is hoped that this short introduction serves as a first overview of the Islamic epistolary heritage of Southeast Asia in the collection brought together so assiduously by the exceptional Russian scholar and antiquarian N. P. Likhachev.

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Notes

- * Irina R. Katkova worked as a fellow-researcher and curator of the Malay manuscripts collection in the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2001–2015. The first research on this collection was published as an article supplied with a description of the collection (in Russian). See Katkova, “Pisma hollandskoy Ost-Indskoy kompanii,” 209–23. In 2012, some samples of N. P. Likhachev’s collection were exhibited at the State Hermitage in the frame of the exhibition devoted to N. P. Likhachev, antiquarian and academician (see Katkova, “Pisma,” 2012). At present Katkova continues this project under a grant for research and digitization supported by the General Consulate of the Netherlands in St. Petersburg. The author expresses gratitude to the General Consulate of the Netherlands in St. Petersburg and the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden for support and research in the libraries of St. Petersburg and Leiden.
- 1 The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences is situated in St. Petersburg on Dvortzovaya nab. 18. It was founded in 1818 by the president of the Russian Academy of Sciences as an Asian museum for gathering manuscripts, documents, and other rarities; during the Soviet period it was reorganized as the Institute of Oriental Studies (1930). Since 2007 it bears the name Institute of Oriental Manuscripts.
 - 2 Documental Fund was organized in the Institute of Oriental Studies in 1952. Bogdanov, “Opisanije materialov,” 179–89.
 - 3 Sphragistics (Greek): the scientific study of seals or signet rings.
 - 4 More than one hundred scholars and academics, mostly in humanitarian fields, were imprisoned in Leningrad in 1929–1931 in the course of the Soviet “Trial of Academicians.”
 - 5 Likhachev, *Paleograficheskoe znachenie*, 1899. Not long ago an English translation was published: J. S. G. Simmons and Bé van Ginneken-Van de Kastele. *Likhachev’s Watermarks: An English-Language Version*. Amsterdam: Paper Publications Society, 1994.
 - 6 Likhachev, *Vospominanija bibliophila*, 256.
 - 7 *Ibid.*
 - 8 Likhachev, *Vospominanija bibliophila*, 192–211.
 - 9 Opis 2. Arhiv RAN, 103.
 - 10 Van der Kloot, *De Gouverneurs-Generaal*, 71–5.
 - 11 Wilkinson, *Malay Letter-Writing*, 152–153.
 - 12 Van Hoorn, *Gesprekken*.
 - 13 De Haan, *Oud Batavia*, 718.
 - 14 Blussé, *Strange Company*.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 73–97.
 - 16 *Ibid.*
 - 17 Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade*.
 - 18 Blussé, *Chou Mei-Yeh’s Voyage to the West*.
 - 19 Asmah, *Beautifying Jawi*, 194–223.
 - 20 Colombijn, *Foreign Influence*, 19–30.
 - 21 Cempaka (Malay): a tree with flowers smelling of incense (*Michelia champaca*).
 - 22 Mujizah, *Surat Melayu Beriluminasi*.
 - 23 Pudjiastuti. *Perang, Dagang, Persahabatan*, 298–304.
 - 24 Pakubuwono I: Pangiran Puger of Kartasura court, in 1704 was recognized by the VOC as Susuhunan of Mataram, reigned 1704–1719.
 - 25 Susuhunan Amangkurat II (d. 1703): king of Kartasura 1677–1703.
 - 26 Ricklefs, *War, Culture and Economy in Java*.
 - 27 Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 6:343. Adipati Jangrana, or Angabei Jangrana II, regent of Surabaya (1693–1709), son-in-law of Angabei Jangrana I (d. 1693);

- he was murdered in the court at the desire of the VOC for his treachery towards the Company. Ricklefs, *History*, 117.
- 28 Pangiran (prince) Cakraningrat II (r. 1680–1707), powerful prince of West Madura and eastern Java, north of the Brantas river; the VOC considered him as a reliable ally. Ricklefs, *History*, 110–2.
- 29 Kanjeng Raden Arya Sinduredja, Javaneese commander and prominent state figure in Kartasura court. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 6:174.
- 30 According to the contract of 1705 signed between the VOC and Pakubuwono I, Cirebon was recognized as a VOC protectorate. Ricklefs, *History*, 111.
- 31 Barros and Do Couto, Dos feitos que os portugueses fizeram no descobrimento dos mares.
- 32 Mulkhan, *Syekh Siti Jenar*.
- 33 Sultan Anom (d. 1703); Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 6: 159, 472.
- 34 Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 6: 799.
- 35 Rietbergen and Scholten, “Een dubbel perspectief,” 1–14.
- 36 Sultan Abdul Rahman of Palembang, reigned 1662–1706; was remembered in local tradition as an ideal ruler; maintained positive relations with the VOC.
- 37 Andaya, *To Live as Brothers*.
- 38 Gallop, *Malay Seal Inscriptions*, 279.
- 39 Niemeijer et al., *The Diplomatic Correspondence*, letter of the King of Bone La Patau Paduka Sri Sultan Idris Azim ud-Din (r. 1696–1714), doc 16; letter of Sira Daeng Talele Karaeng Ballajawa to the Supreme Government, 1697 (*Harta Karun*), doc. 17.
- 40 Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 6: 212, 343.
- 41 Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 6: 359.
- 42 Dasgupta, *India and the Indian Ocean World*, 13.
- 43 *Adat*: Malay (a derivation from Arabic), meaning traditional systems of formalized social conduct and patterns of behavior, considered to be prescribed by semi-divine ancestors.
- 44 *Malay Annals*, originally titled *Sulalat-us-Salatin* (Genealogy of Kings) is a literary work that gives a romanticized history of the origin, evolution, and demise of the great Malay maritime empire, the Malacca Sultanate, written in Jawi (Arabic Malay) between the 15th and 16th centuries. Raffles MS, No 18, ed. by R. O. Winstedt, *JMBRAS* 16:3 (1938): 42; Krusenstern MS (Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St. Petersburg), ed. by Revunenkova, E. *Sulalat-us-Salatin*, 12–23.
- 45 Gallop, *The Legacy of the Malay Letter*, 15–17.
- 46 Katkova, “Pisma hollandskoj Ost-Indskoj kompanii,” 220–3.
- 47 Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 130, 569.
- 48 Niemeijer, *The Diplomatic Correspondence*, 1–9.
- 49 Marsden, *Bibliotheca Marsdeniana*. A catalogue of books and manuscripts collected with a view to the general comparison of languages and to the study of oriental literature.
- 50 Gallop and Arps, *Golden Letters*.
- 51 Wilkinson, *Malay Letter-Writing*.
- 52 Gallop, *The Legacy of the Malay Letter*, 15–7.
- 53 Malay, short introductory formula to the text of letters written in a calligraphic manner, mostly in Arabic in the form of short Quranic quotations or other religious phrases.
- 54 Malay: compliments; a special set of formal phrases inserted in the beginning of the letter (opening compliments), in the end of the letter, and special phrases inside the main block of the text.
- 55 Arabic: “His Word Is the Truth and His Speech Veracity.”
- 56 Arabic: “O Fulfiller of Needs.”
- 57 Arabic: “Light of the Sun and the Moon.”
- 58 Gallop, “Malay Seal Inscriptions.”
- 59 Gallop, “Malay Seal Inscriptions,” 278.