

# The Analysis of Golden Letters Ornament

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**Abstract**—The Raja's letter in Malay is a proof of the high writing culture which is accompanied by ornamentation, etiquette and high artistic standards throughout the archipelago. Very few people know about the relics of this beautiful archipelago king's letter, even where the original manuscript is stored, rarely know about it. For that reason, in an effort to raise awareness of our love for the height of our own culture, the authors raised the golden letter as material and focus of research. The research method used is a Qualitative Approach, with Analytical Descriptive Method in order to obtain a systematic picture, valid conclusions, and classified according to certain criteria and patterns. From the results of the study, the writer can conclude, the letter ornaments used are floral, leaf and geometric patterns. Arabesk patterns or continuous leaf motifs are almost the same as those found in the decoration of the Koran, Muslim architecture, and Indonesian handicrafts. In addition to the Indonesian style, this cannot be separated from the influence of Islamic culture in the other Muslim world, thus enriching the diversity of Islamic art. Plain paper media originated from Europe and China, paper decorated with gold and prada originated from India and Europe. Furthermore, the silver stamp was influenced by the era of the Prophet, the cover of silk cloth with the influence of India / Persia, the ornaments used were influences from Ottoman-Turkish, Persian, European, and native patterns themselves, the writing of addresses on paper that originated from Malay patterns themselves.

**Keywords**—ornaments, golden letters, illumination

## I. INTRODUCTION

This research article departs from the interest of the author in the decoration of the Golden Letters of the King of Nusantara, which was exhibited at the National Library in 1991 and in several other places. The writer's admiration for past works with a very high artistic touch in the writing culture has strengthened the curiosity and sought to study it.

Meanwhile, there is still much less discussion about ancient manuscripts, especially Malaya letters, both in terms of decoration or ornamentation, writing and content. This letter in the Malay language is a testament to the high culture of writing and high artistic etiquette and standards throughout the archipelago but few people know about it [1].

From this little problem, the author is interested in examining the existence of golden letters in a study entitled:

**ANALYSIS GOLDEN LETTER ORNAMENTS.** The research method used is a qualitative approach, with a descriptive analysis method. The technique used is a literature study, namely an assessment of sources related to the problem under study, direct observation of manuscripts or duplicates, photo reproduction, and interviews to complement the collected data, and content analysis techniques.

The limitations of the problem that the writer did in this study emphasized the discussion of the visualization characteristics of the manuscript: ornament, color, line, shape, composition, and calligraphy style. The focus of the research object analyzed was golden letters (predominantly gold) in the 17th and 19th centuries.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Ornament Definition

In the Indonesian Encyclopedia, "ornament" is explained, "as any geometric ornament or anything else". The main function of ornament is to decorate implicitly concerning aspects of life, for example, to add to the beauty of an item so that it is better and more attractive.

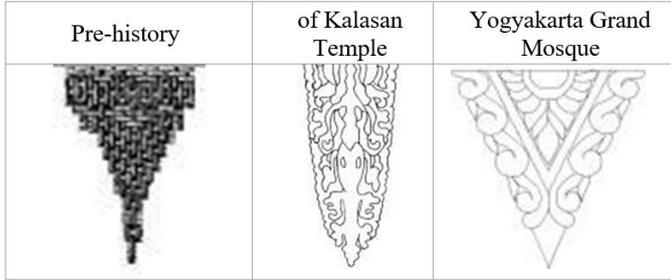
Etymologically, ornament comes from Greek (*ornare*) which means decoration or jewelry. The decoration or ornament itself consists of various types of motifs that are used as jewelry, be it human, animal, plant, and earth stone motifs [2].

Archipelago ornament is an ornament that grows and develops in the territory of the Republic of Indonesia, where each archipelago in Indonesia has a very beautiful ornamental style. Nusantara ornaments are widely applied to various media materials according to the results of the regional wealth [2].

### B. The Influence of Islam

The influence of Islam in Indonesian art is the result of trading activities that began around the 11th century. Traders from Gujarat Province in western India built settlements along the eastern coast of northern Sumatra, in Aceh and Pasir. Islamic centers were built gradually in Demak and Jepara along the north coast of Java, and in the 14th century, converts were found as far as Trowulan in East Java [3].

The use of plant motifs with stylized forms based on dense and full decorative patterns is an ancient Islamic decorative art style in Indonesia that can be distinguished from the styles of ornamental art in other countries. In the book, Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja, entitled *The Continuity of Pre-Islamic Motifs in Javanese Mosque Ornamentation Indonesia*, the publisher Novel & Noble Communications Helsinki 2018 [4], shows a comparison of the application of ornaments to temples and mosques in the archipelago (figure 1).



Source: Helsinki [4].

Fig. 1. Comparison of table ornament.

C. The Art of Writing Letters

For centuries Malay was the official correspondence language in the archipelago. Traditional Malay letter writing is governed by rules depending on the degree of relationship between the sender and the recipient. Letters are usually written by professional scribes, who refer to the so-called manuscript guidelines *terraced*. The most beautiful royal letters are nicely decorated and sent and received in a festive ceremony style [5].

In the book Indonesian Heritage [5], it is explained that the Malays began to learn to write, namely, when Islamic traders and broadcasters arrived around 1300 AD. Then starting the process of attracting Malays to Islam, they found the Malay language they had to learn. However, because the Malays were not known for their ability to write, the preachers began teaching them, using the writing they used, namely Arabic. The oldest surviving example of Malay written in Arabic script is an inscription on a rock found in the land of Trengganu on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

In John W. Creswell's book [6], it is stated that Qualitative Methods have a more diverse approach to academic research than quantitative research. Although the process is the same, qualitative procedures continue to rely on data in the form of text and images, have unique steps in their data analysis, from different research sources and strategies. The main objective of qualitative research is to understand art and to provide a complete description of the findings validly against what is the object of research.

Sources and types of data in this study include books, reproductions of original works of gold letters, exhibition

catalogs of the 1991 Golden Kings of the Archipelago, the internet, and other documents, both in the form of notes and photos of works. Data collection techniques used are literature study, observation, and interviews.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Malay Letter Design

Malay letters in general have their designs and are rich in decoration, resulting in a culture of high-quality letter writing. The following are parts of the Malay letter design, including letterhead, letter stamp/seal, letter compliments (first part of the letter text), letter content, letter cover, the gift to the recipient, and letter illumination.

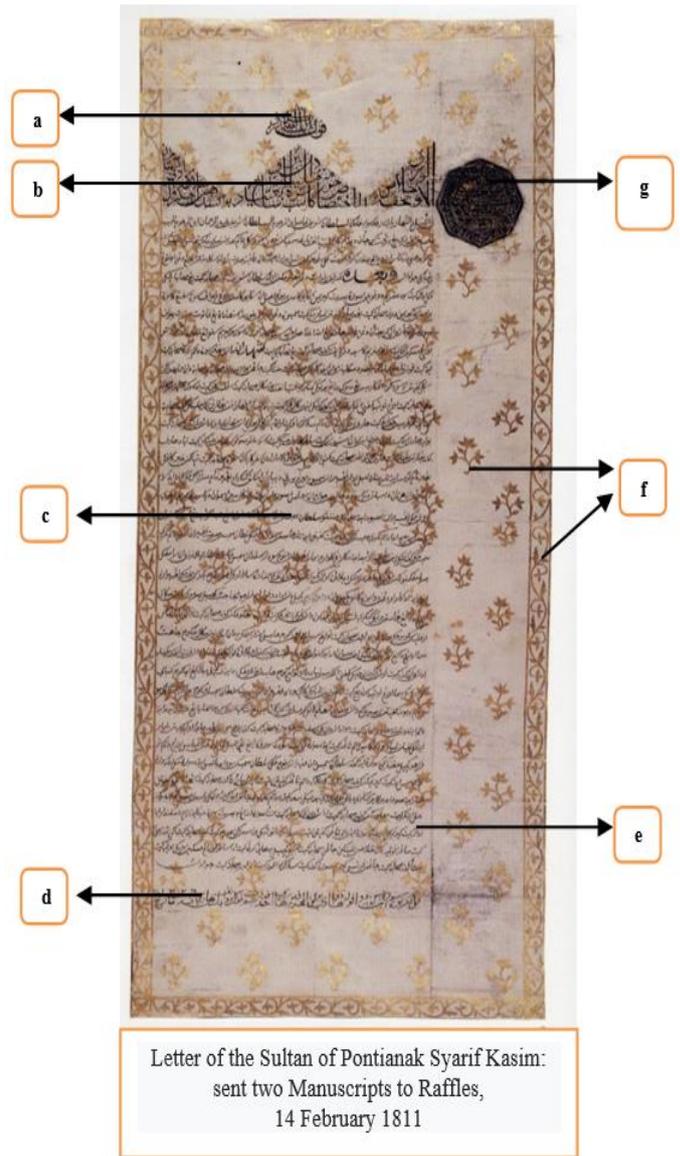


Fig. 2. Malay letter design (Golden letters, No. L.9 photo courtesy Lontar).

1) *Head of letter*: Namely a short religious expression usually in Arabic, written on the top of a sheet of paper with Arabic khat stacked or called the Tsulutsi Jali type of khat. The shape of this letterhead is what forms an isosceles, ellipse, round, and arbitrary triangle. The choice of words and their location sometimes changes according to the rank of the author and the recipient and purpose of the letter.

The sounds of the letterhead that are commonly used are: *Qawluhu al-haqq is* (His true), *al-syams wal Qamar* (sun and moon), and others. The example sound of the letterhead above is "*Qawluhu al-haqq wa kalamuhu al-sidq*" (His word is true, and His speech is sincere).

2) *Praises*: The first part of the text of the letter contains the opening praises expressed in the official Malay or flowery Arabic, namely stating the name, title, and address of the sender and recipient. The sentence of praise usually reads:

*"Bahwa ini warkat tulus dan ikhlas serta suci putih hati yang tiada berhingga dan kesudahan selagi ada peredaran cakrawala matahari dan bulan, dari pada beta Seri Paduka Sultan Mahmud Syah yang mempunyai tahta kerajaan negeri Johor dan Pahang serta daerah takluknya sekalian. Maka barang disampaikan Tuhan seru alam sekalian apalah kiranaya datang kehadapan majlis sahabat beta ialah Seri Paduka Thomas Raffles,"*

3) *Content of the letter*: Arabic word wabadahu ('after that') marks the end of the praise and the beginning of the actual content, or gist of the letter. For example, the essence of Sultan Syarif Kasim's letter (14 February 1811) was to complain to Raffles about piracy activities by his neighbors, the Sultan, and Pangeran Anom of Sambas.

4) *Closing of the letter*: Writing a cover letter is sometimes attempted to be written in one line so that it is stacked using khat Tsulutsi Jali. Then it ends with the date and place of writing in the Islamic calendar (Hijri). After finishing writing the letter, the **address** will be written on the stationery or the back of the letter. Especially for the king's letter, it is usually put on the cover of a yellow silk letter. Important diplomatic affairs letters are usually delivered to the envoys they appoint and are greeted with traditional accompaniment or ceremonies, while ordinary letters are delivered by the skipper or merchant.

5) *Gifts*: Towards the end of the content section, the sender usually suggests a gift accompanying the letter, or is a warm greeting. For example, in the letter of the Sultan of Pontianak, Syarif Kasim gave gifts to Raffles two manuscripts, namely one law book and one Hikayat Raja Iskandar, because Raffles also gave the Sultan a cloth and a pair of gold shoes. In addition to the gifts in the farewell letter in the farewell letter of Panembahan Sumenep to Raffles (1816) and the farewell letter of Sultan Cakra Adiningrat Madura to van der Capellen (1826), there were also farewell greetings or just warm greetings from the Sultan's family.

6) *Illumination/decoration of letters*: In the custom of Malay letter writing, the way to organize writing on paper is considered from the diplomatic point of view and the beauty of the appearance of the ornament. Almost all the letters that the writer studied were written on one sheet of paper, but if more than one sheet is usually the paper is joined with glue or other adhesive and made into one sheet so that it is longer.

7) *Stamp of the letter*: In the Malay world, the stamp is also called a stamp, tera, or mohor and has been used for more than 1000 years. Evidence of the use of the stamp is the discovery of the stamp of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah from Aceh, which is found in documents dating to around 1602. Judging from its shape and decoration, perhaps this Malay stamp is the most beautiful compared to the stamp found in other Islamic countries [7]. Various kinds of matris stamp can be seen in figure 3.

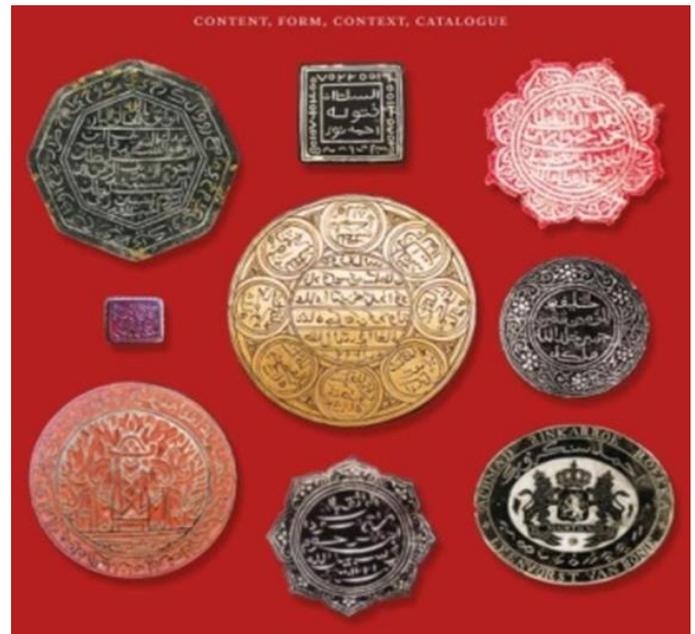


Fig. 3. Various kinds of matris stamp.

B. *Letter of Sultan Aceh Iskandar Muda to King James I, 1615.*

Sultan Iskandar Muda is the greatest king of Aceh. During his reign (1607-1636) Aceh became the main force in the western part of the archipelago.



Media: ink, watercolor and gold, on Chinese paper.  
Size: 95 X 42 cm. Created in 1615 AD.

Fig. 4. Letter of Sultan Aceh Iskandar Muda (Golden letters, photo courtesy Lontar).

Judging from the shape of the ornaments and arches that adorn the letter above (figure 4), it reminds the author of the results of Islamic architecture as applied to mosques, palaces, and gates. It could be that the letter decoration maker of Sultan Aceh Iskandar Muda was inspired by the arch of the Alhambra Palace. Alhambra Palace Arch can be seen in figure 5.



Fig. 5. Alhambra Palace Arch, Granada Andalus Spain.

When viewed visually, the ornate pattern shows the Safavi-Iranian influence in the *unwan* which is shaped like a blue dome, but with interpretations and distinctive indigenous characteristics, then the center is decorated with white, green, black, and gold.

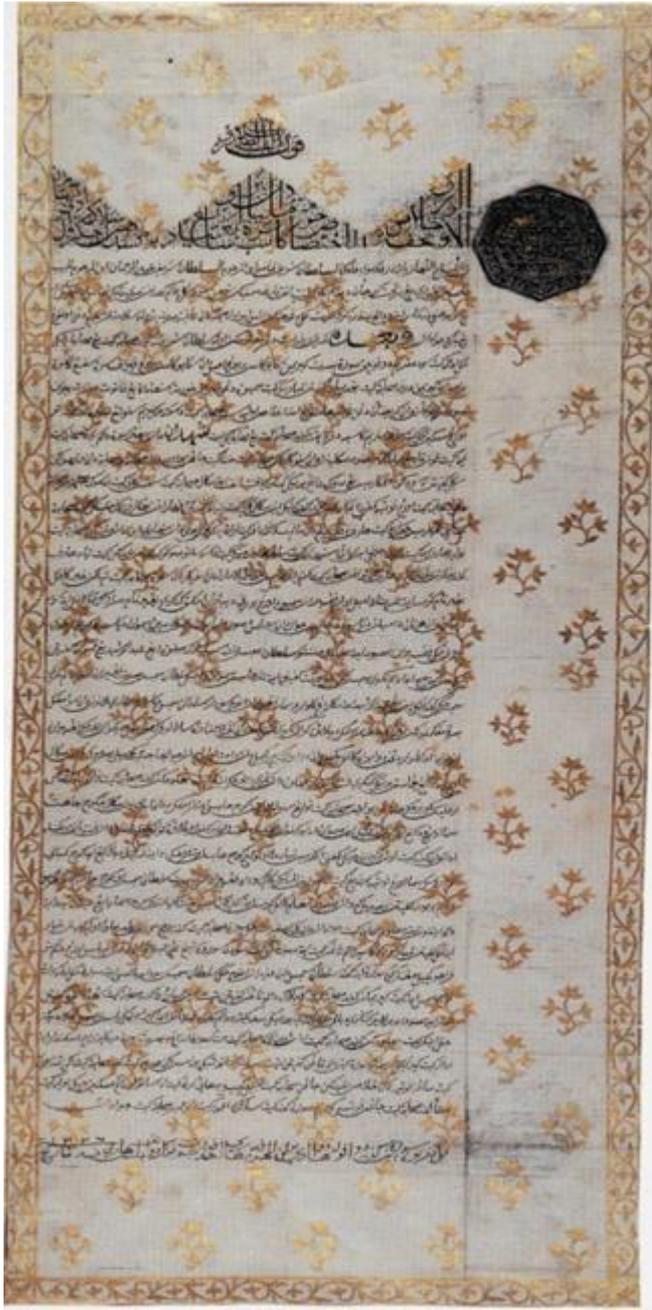
The decorative motif on the outer side of the letter (figure 6) shows the complete types of shrubs, starting from stems, leaves, and flowers in various forms. The motif used is only one type of plant, namely the medieval motif *flower* from the Ottoman Turks. This madat flower is probably an intoxicating tree found in the Middle East and is also called *the Sufism motif* as well as the vine.



Fig. 6. The decorative motif on the outer side of the letter (Photo courtesy Lontar).

C. *The Letter of the Sultan of Pontianak sent two Manuscripts to Raffles, 14 February 1811*

The Sultan of Pontianak, Syarif Kasim, asked Raffles in this long and beautiful letter for help against pirate activities led by the Sultan and Prince Anom of Sambas, a neighboring kingdom on the west coast of Kalimantan. This Sambas ruler had collaborated with the Ilanun pirates and attacked the traders in Pontianak, Mempawah and Banjar. Sultan Syarif Kasim warned that if Raffles did nothing, then British interests would be affected, after thanking him for the gift of cloth and a pair of golden shoes, Sultan Kasim rewarded him with two manuscripts, namely one law book and one manuscript. *The story of Raja Iskandar*. The warning of Sultan Syarif Kasim was not ignored by Raffles and in July 1813 British troops defeated Sambas, but Prince Anom escaped.



Media: gold ink, on English paper. Dimensions: 78 X 32.5 cm  
20 Muharram 1226 (14 February 1811)

Fig. 7. The letter of the Sultan of Pontianak (Photo Courtesy Lontar).

Sultan Syarif Kasim's letter (figure 7) dated 1811 consists of two decorative patterns (figure 8), namely letter border ornaments and letter background decorations. Surrounding the letter is bordered by a fringe motif, which is the leaf and flower grooves similar to the margins of the Koran. The motif in the center is patterned regularly with a flower motif. The color used for the writing is black and the decoration is gold.



Fig. 8. Two decorative patterns (Photo courtesy Lontar).

*D. Farewell Letter from Panembahan Sumenep in Madura to Raffles, May 1, 1816*

The letter ornament characterizes European ornaments, this is what supports the close friendship between P. Sumenep (Nata Kusuma) and Raffles, so that it is very different from the ornaments found in the letters other gold. The distinctive feature of European ornament is visible at the top of the letter, in the form of a naturalistic European style crown. The maroon colored crown (red heart) is supported by a series of roses tied by a dangling ribbon symmetrically formed in a plane with a round base to write the Letter Head.

The ends of the rose flower arrangement are closed with a motif, a type of grass tied symmetrically with a short ribbon. Even though the shape of the rose is drawn naturally and looks 3-dimensional with the coloring technique *aquarelle*, the stems and leaves of the rose are not detailed like thorny stems and jagged rose leaves. The letter can be seen in figure 9.



Media: gold ink and watercolor, on English paper  
Size: 46.5 X 37 cm  
3 Jumadilakhir 1213 (1816 AD)

Fig. 9. Farewell letter from Panembahan Sumenep (Photo courtesy Lontar).

**E. Farewell Letter from Sultan Cakra Adiningrat in Madura to Raffles, 16 December 1816**

The decorative motif is in the form of a clump of creeping plants identical to jasmine, from leaf stems to flowers in stylized form. The flower stylization is described as quite simple so that it still looks rather natural and its characteristics are easy to see. Leaf shapes are varied in different sizes ranging from small, medium to large leaves with different shapes.

The letter border motif is a series of half-blooming jasmine flowers sideways. The basic shape of the fringe motif is like an inverted 'V' letter. The letter can be seen in figure 10.



Media: gold ink and watercolor on English paper  
Size: 32 X 20 cm  
14 Muharram 1231 (1816 AD)

Fig. 10. Farewell letter from Sultan Cakra Adiningrat to Raffles (Photo courtesy Lontar).

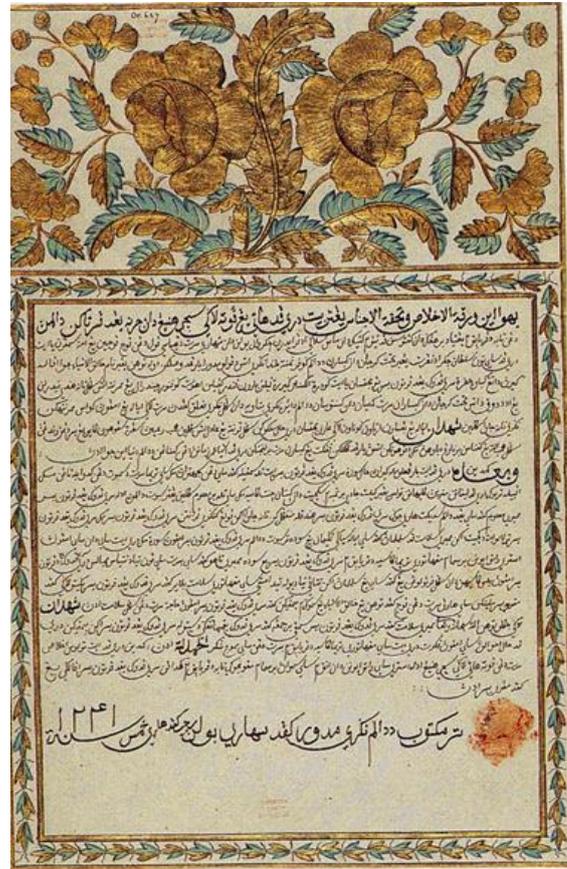
**F. Farewell Letter from Sultan Cakra Adiningrat in Madura to Van der Capellen, 9 February 1826**

The similarity of the ornament can be seen in the frame containing the strands of jasmine and roses and the picture of the flowers on the top of the letter with gold and blue color.

The strong influence of the European art style can be seen in the three 'golden letters' from Madura, especially in the crown and arrangement of roses in the letter from Panembahan Sumenep.

Ornamental motifs can be identified as rose flower motifs, although 3 leaves are slightly different from the characteristic of rose leaves. The oddity of these leaf shapes can be understood as the stylized leaf shape.

The decorative motifs on the edges of the letters are arranged in a fully symmetrical manner both in the decorative form and in the number of motifs arranged. However, after observing it, there are differences in the number of motifs arranged between the decorative motifs on the right and left sides, as well as between the top and bottom. The letter can be seen in figure 11.



Media: gold ink and watercolor, on Europe paper.  
Size: 40 X 26 cm  
1 Rajab 1241 (1826 AD)

Fig. 11. Farewell letter from Sultan Cakra Adiningrat to Van der Capellen (Photo courtesy Lontar).

## V. CONCLUSION

The authors conclude, in terms of ornamentation, the motifs commonly used are flowers, leaves, and geometric patterns. The arabesk pattern or continuous leaf motif is almost the same as the motif found in the decoration of the Koran, Muslim architecture, as well as Indonesian handicrafts such as wood carvings, silver handicrafts, and other woven items. In addition to the Indonesian style, there is, but it cannot be separated from Islamic culture in the other Muslim world, thereby enriching the diversity of Islamic art. Especially for the art of letter writing, its influences are varied and complex. Plain paper media originated from China and Europe, paper decorated with gold plated came from India and Europe, the type of khat used was generally the type of khat Ta'liq combined with Tsulutsi Jali, but especially the oldest Surah (1615 AD) the whole was Naskhi's khat. Furthermore, the stamp made of silver influences the stamp of the era of the Prophet, the cover uses silk cloth with influence from India / Persia, the ornaments used are influenced by Ottoman-Turkish, Persian, European, and indigenous patterns themselves, the writing of the address is on patterned paper. comes from the Malay style itself.

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