

# Sikeureung Seal in Surat-Surat dari Aceh Manuscript: Shape and Content Analysis

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**Abstract** - A letter may be used for both personal and public communication media. For public purpose, letter is used for diplomatic communication media of a government or country. Seal is usually contained in official letter as a sign of legitimacy. In classic manuscript, a seal is commonly placed at the top or bottom of the letter or can be replaced by the sovereign's signature. In Nusantara, the oldest seal in Malay manuscript by Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah dated in 1602 (Gallop, 1994: 4). According to Gallop, seal in Nusantara texts is commonly in the shape of circle. Some of them are decorated with flower petals. Soot ink and lacquer are the most common material used for seal. Seal usually contains the information related to name, time, date, and motto. Sikeureung seal used by Aceh kings for official letters. Sikeureung is the product of acculturation between Islamization and Hinduism or what is called as Indianization (Lombard, 2014:249). The seal is called as "Sembilan Seal" or "Halilintar Seal" because it contains nine tangled circles which formed flower with the biggest circle at the center (Sulaiman, Rusdi, and Abdul, 1992: 42). This study is aimed at describing the forms and content of Sikeureung seal in Surat-Surat dari Aceh manuscript. This research is codicology and philology study. This study is conducted by transliterating the names of Sultan/Sultanah written in the seal and describing the unique shape of Sikeureung based on the names of Sultan/Sultanah reigned during the period.

**Keywords:** Aceh, Sikeureung seal, Manuscript, Letter.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A letter may be used for both personal and public communication media. For public purpose, letter is used for diplomatic communication media of a government or country. According to Van der Putten (in Sedyawati, 2004: 254), letter is a hand-written text on a piece of paper delivered to share information.

Letter can be classified into two types, namely social and political letters (Razak, 2002: 122). Social letter is a communication letter without any political motive and contains personal issue. Meanwhile, political letter is an agreement letter related to politics, economics, or trade between the specified parties, either written by a single individual or organization. The structure of social letter includes: 1) head of letter, 2) seal, 3) appraisal, 4) content, 5) pre-closing, and 6) closing. While political letter includes: 1) head of letter, 2) content, 3) closing, 4) seal, and 5) signature. Therefore, analyzing the position of the seal on a letter will lead to the classification of letter.

Among many letters that contained seal is *Surat-Surat dari Aceh* manuscript (later mentioned as SSA). This manuscript is stored in National Library of the Republic of Indonesia or *Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia* (later mentioned as PNRI), at manuscript storage room in the 9th floor. SSA's call number is ML 447 with microfilm roll call number 665/4. SSA manuscript is enlisted in *Katalog Induk Naskah-Naskah Nusantara koleksi Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia*.

SSA contains of nine pages with the size of approximately 50 centimeters. According to its colophone, this manuscript is written around 1200 AH or around 1800 AD (year conversion according to Proudfoot, 2006: 118). Based on Razak's classification, SSA is characterized as social letter because seal position is on the top of the text.

According to Great Dictionary of Indonesian Language or *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI, e-dictionary, fifth edition), seal or *cap* (n) is 'alat untuk membuat rekaman tanda (gambar, tanda tangan) dengan menekannya pada kertas (surat dan sebagainya); stempel; tera (a means to record signs (figure, signature) by pressing it on a piece of paper (letter or others); stamp). Seal, stamp, or postage is derived from Latin 'sigillum'. "Seal is an addition to a written document of an impression, generally in some mixture of bees-wax, form a finger-ring, or some larger surface, identifiable by the device or wording engraved on it as the property of a particular person or institution. The word 'seal' is used to describe both the impression and the tool (die or matrix) which made it." (Mabillon in Zulistasari, 2007: 2).

Seal is used in correspondence tradition as the sign of legitimation of the written letter. Dymond (1974: 114) argued that seal serves as a symbol of power and legitimacy as well as a test of authenticity and prove the letter validity. The oldest seal in the Malay manuscript used by Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah (ruling in Aceh in 1589—1604 AD). This seal is found in a manuscript dated 1602 (Gallop, 1994: 4). According to Gallop, the common form of seal in Nusantara is circular, sometimes varied with the shape of flower petals. The common material used for ink is soot and lacquer. The seal usually contains the information related to name, date, place, and motto.

The seal contained in SSA Manuscript is Sikeureung seal. This seal is used by the ruling sultan/sultanah in Aceh. Sikeureung seal (Lombard, 2014: 249, wrote it down as *asthikureuëng*) is a kind of seal used by the kings of Aceh in writing important letters, such as appointments, power of attorney, decree, and even diplomatic agreements between nations (Madjid, 2014: 152). A letter written without this seal will not be considered as valid. Sikeureung seal is an acculturation between Islamization and Hinduism or what is called as Indianization. In Aceh, this seal is also called "Sembilan seal" or "Halilintar seal" (Sulaiman,

Rusdi, and Abdul, 1992: 42). This seal is called as “Sembilan” because the word ‘*sikeureung*’ is an Acehnese language which means ‘nine’ (Fakhriati, in Kramadibrata (ed.), 2017: 14). In addition, this seal does have tangled nine circles which form like a flower with the biggest circle at the center. The circle at the center contains the calligraphy of the name of the ruling sultan, while the surrounding eight circles are the names of sultans who ruled in the previous era. (Madjid, 2014: 152).

This study aims to describe the forms and contents of *Sikeureung* seal contained in SSA manuscript. This research is a philology and codicology study. This study is conducted by transliterating the names of the Sultan/Sultanah written in the seal and describing the various forms of the seal. Those methods are conducted based on the fact that the content and form of the seal are determined by the ruled sultans/sultans.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Letters and Aceh had been studied by both local and foreign researchers. Studies on letters with philological approach were already conducted by Mu’jizah, Pudjiastuti, and Khumaeroh. Mu’jizah (2005) studied illumination on Malay letters, while Pudjiastuti (2007) reviewed the letters of Sultan of Banten. Both researchers conducted the study with additional approaches of codicology and history. However, research on manuscript can also be conducted with linguistic assistance as implemented by Khumaeroh (2008). Khumaeroh analyzed the sentence written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century collection of Cohen Stuart personal letter stored in PNRI.

Furthermore, there have also been several studies on Aceh using manuscript, such as *Adat Atjéh*, *De Hikajat Atjéh*, and *Bustan us-Salatin*. *Adat Atjéh* was studied by Drewes and Voorhoeve (1958), and Teuku Iskandar conducted research on *De Hikajat Atjéh* in the same year. Meanwhile, research on *Bustan us-Salatin* was conducted by Wilkinson in the previous century, with the exact year of 1899.

Lombard (2014) conducted research on Aceh from historical sources and published his book under the title *The Kingdom of Aceh Zaman Sultan Iskandar Muda* (1607-1636). In addition, there are also several studies that had been attempted by the team of Aceh Documentation and Information Center in 1992. The research is published under the title *Aceh: Human, Society and Culture*.

Another codicology and sigilography studies was conducted by Gallop and Zulistasari and published under the title *Malay Seal Inscriptions: An Islamic Study of Epigraphy from Southeast Asia* (2002). Zulistasari (2007) analyzed postage for her postgraduate thesis in University of Indonesia entitled “Postage of the Late Ternate Sultanate in the 17<sup>th</sup>—19<sup>th</sup> Century”.

This research seeks to fill the research gap of the aforementioned studies. Therefore, research on seal which contained in manuscripts from Aceh is academically required, especially on *Sikeureung* seal.

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

According to Ackoff (in Christomy 1991: 65), research method is a framework that governs the application of theory, measurement, and data analysis. Philological method includes the knowledge of ways, techniques, or instruments carried out in philological research. The main task of a philologist is to rediscovered a manuscript that is free from mistakes, gives the best understanding, and can be accounted for as the closest text to the original (Soebadio, 1975: 3).

Research method in philological research consists of diplomatic, critical, intuitive, objective, combined, or grounding methods (Baried, 1994: 66-68). Diplomatic edition is the publication of a text carefully without making any changes. This is the purest editing method, because it displays the manuscript as it is and not added with any commentary by the translator or editor. Critical method is a way of publishing a manuscript by correcting minor errors and irregularities in accordance with the applicable spelling provisions. All improvement efforts must be accompanied by accountability from clear and precise references (Robson, 1994). The intuitive method only lasted until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This method takes the oldest manuscript, and corrects it based on taste, logic, and broad knowledge. The next method is objective which is similar to stemma method with the aim to look for a familial relationship between the texts. The combined method produces a new transliteration based on the collected texts with several gaps. The last method is grounding that choose the best manuscript as a basis for another variant of manuscript by providing comments by the analyzer.

In transliterating seal, this current study utilizes the same method used in transliterating manuscript text. It is based on the fact that the seal is included in the script, and uses the same alphabet as the script. The transliteration of *Sikeureung* seal in SSA in this study used diplomatic method. This method is chosen because the author does not want to add or subtract the content of the seal. Writing of the names or other words in the seal will be displayed as it is in order to allow the reader to compare the author's transliteration with the original photo of theseal.

## IV. ANALYSIS OF SIKEUREUNG SEAL’S SHAPE AND CONTENT IN SURAT-SURAT DARI ACEH MANUSCRIPT

The most common shape of seal found in manuscripts produced by kingdoms in Nusantara is circular. According to Gallop (1991: 53), this form is most popularly used in Malay manuscripts and categorized as the oldest seal form. The circular form used by the kings/sultans in Nusantara, especially the Malays, exemplified the Islamic gold currency (mohur) in India during the reign of Akhbar (1556-1621) (Razak, 2002: 114).

The seal used by Aceh sultan/sultanah is called as *Sikeureung* seal. This seal is shaped like a flower composed of nine circles. There is one largest circle at the center with eight smaller circles surrounds it. This stamp is decorated like a flower petal with a larger outer circle. Based on the research by Gallop (2002: 110-111), there were 13 *Sikeureung* seals found during 250 Kingdom governments of Aceh, ranged from 17th—19th century.

*Sikeureung* seal is made from soot ink applied to a piece of paper. Then this seal is likely to be cut and sticked on a letter. It is observed from different colors of the manuscript, and this seal has uneven surface with the script. *Sikeureung* seal, which consists of nine circles, is always associated with the word *ibn*. The way to read is starting from the circle in the middle, then to the circle around the 30°. Continued in clockwise direction, until the last circle with 'timur' word in it.

From the explanation above, there are several different things from Gallop's description above. In SSA script, there are other forms, namely only one circle with decoration. In addition, there is no 'timur' word in the last circle. The following parts will discuss the forms and contents of *Sikeureung* seal contained in SSA manuscript stored in PNRI collection.

### Seal 1.

This seal has nine circles with decorations that shaped like flowers. At the distance between large and small circles is given a decoration like fence. In addition, between the small circle with one another is decorated with vine leaves. The vine closer to the large circle has 5 leaves, while the vine on the outer end has 9 leaves + 1 leave facing inward. The seal size is 7.3 x 7.3 cm in diameter. This seal is contained in SSA manuscript dated 1185 AH. The biggest circle in the middle reads "Paduka Sri Sultan Alauddin Mahmud Syah Johan Berdaulat Fil Alam". This is in accordance with the history book (MD Azwar, 2011: 193) that in 1174-1195 AH, Aceh was ruled by Sultan Alauddin Mahmudsyah, the 35th sultan in Aceh. Next, based on Gallop's instructions, read the seal from head to the circle at 30°. Thus, the circle on the direction of 1 o'clock reads "l-n Sultan Alauddin Ahmad Syah". The circle in the direction of 2 o'clock reads "n Sultan Raja Iskandar Muda. The circle in the direction of 4 o'clock reads "bin Sultan Alauddin Mughali Sya". The circle in the direction of 5 o'clock reads "bin Sultan Aniyat Syah". The circle in the direction of 7 o'clock reads "bin Sultan b-l-r-w-d Shah". The circle in the direction of 8 o'clock reads "bin Sultan M-r-m-n Shah". The circle in the direction of 10 o'clock reads "bin Sultan Mansur Shah". The circle in the direction of 11 o'clock reads "bin Sultan Alauddin Johan Shah". Compared to MD Azwar's research, the only appropriate and recorded name is Sultan Alauddin Ahmadasyah, which is in the circle in the direction of 1 o'clock. However, according to the record, Sultan Mahmud is not the son of Sultan Ahmad, but his grandson.

### Seal 2.

This stamp has nine circles with decorations shaped like flowers. The distance between the small circles are decorated Arabic letters. This ornament when reads "Bismi-allah-arrahman-arrahim-....." in counter-clockwise direction (unreadable due to damaged condition of the manuscript and the seal). The seal size is 8 x 7.5 cm in diameter. The biggest circle in the middle reads "Paduka Sri Sultana Tadjul Alam Safiatuddin....." Based on Gallop (2002: 111), this seal is the oldest seal, which is issued between 1641-1675 AD. The biggest circle (at the center) and the surrounding small circles contain the text: "Paduka Seri Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin [Syah] berdaulat Allah fi al'Sam ibnat] // al-Sultan Raja Iskandar Muda / johan berdaulat / ibn al-Sultan Ali Riayat Syah / ibn al-Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah / ibn al-Sultan Firman Syah / ibn al-Sultan Muzafar Syah / ibn al-Sultan Inayat Syah / ibn Abd Allah al-Malik al-Mubin" (Gallop, 2002: 112).

### Seal 3.

This seal has nine decorated circles which formed a circular shape. This *Sikeureung* seal is more faded than the other seals. Between the biggest circle and the surrounding small circles, there is a picture of three leaves. Meanwhile, between small circles and others, on the outside are five arches (like in curly braces '{') which are drawn from short to long. This seal has the diameter of 6.7 x 6.7 cm. This seal is contained in SSA manuscript dated 1286 AH. The biggest circle in the middle reads "Paduka Sri Sultan Alauddin Johan Alamsyah Johan Berdaulat Zilullah t- al Alam". The circle in the direction of 1 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Tadjul Alam". The circle in the direction of 2 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Zainal Asrin". The circle in the direction of 4 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Johan Shah". The circle in the direction of 5 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Muhammad Syah Berdaulat". The circle in the direction of 7 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Mahmud Syah". The circle in the direction of 8 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Ahmad Syah". The circle in the direction of 10 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Mansur Shah". The circle in the direction of 11 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Iskandar Muda".

### Seal 4.

This seal is exactly the same as Seal 3. Both are faded, while the Arabic letters in Seal 4 is clearer than Seal 3.

### Seal 5.

This seal is the most damaged seal in terms of color (very faded), the writing is also faded, and there is a hole in one of the small circles right in the word following 'Sultan'. This condition imposes difficulties in transliteration process. This seal has nine circles with an ornament of two curves on the outside, and a flower with three petals between the largest circle in the center and the surrounding small circles. The biggest circle in the middle reads "Paduka Sri Sultan Alaaddin Mansur Johan Berdaulat Zilullah Fil Alam". The circle in the direction of 1 o'clock reads "Sultan Ahmad Shah". The circle in the direction of 2 o'clock reads "Sultan Johan Syah". The circle in the direction of 4 o'clock reads "Sultan Mahmud Shah". The circle in the direction of 5 o'clock reads "Sultan .....". The circle in the direction of 7 o'clock reads "Sultan Johar Alam Shah". The circle in the direction of 8 o'clock reads "Sultan ..... Al m-k-m-l". The circle in the direction of 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock are unreadable.

### Seal 6.

Unlike the other seals, this seal only has one circle. This seal is decorated by veins outside the circle and closed by two layers of unbroken arch. This ornamental seal is shaped like a sunflower with big pistil and seven small petals. Three leaves are drawn between the two veins. A star-shaped ornament, a plus sign, or a picture of the sun are found between the writings of the sultan's name. The size of the seal is 6.3 x 6.3 cm in diameter. The circle in the middle reads "Paduka Sri Sultan Alaaddin Mansur Syah Johan Berdaulat Zilullah Fil Alam". This seal is included in the letter dated 1272 AH. The Sultan's name is slightly different from MD Azwar's historical record. In his genealogical record, the Aceh sultan who ruled in 1272 Hijri was Sultan Alaidin Ibrahim Mansur Syah (MD Azwar, 2011: 193). This study assumes that it is just another name for the sultan whose name is printed on the seal.

### Seal 7.

This stamp has nine circles with decorations shaped like flowers. The distance between large and small circles are decorated with tangled three vines. In addition, outside the small circle, between one another is decorated with tulips. This seal is 6 x 6 cm in diameter. The biggest circle in the middle reads "Sultan Sri Alaaddin Ahmad Syah Johan Berdulah l-n". The circle in the direction of 2 o'clock reads "Sultan Mansur Shah n". The circle in the direction of 3 o'clock reads "Sultan r-y-n al a....n Shah ibn". The circle in the direction of 4 o'clock reads "Sultan Abdul Rahim Syah ibn". The circle in the direction of 6 o'clock reads ".... Al Malik....n". The circle in the direction of 7 o'clock reads "Sultan Ali Riayat Syah ibn". The circle in the direction of 9 o'clock reads "Johan Berdaulat ibn". The circle in the direction of 11 o'clock reads "Sultan Raja Kandar Muda". The circle in the direction of 12 o'clock reads "Sultan".

### Seal 8.

This seal has nine circles with an ornament of two curves in the outside, and a flower with three petals between the largest circle at the center and the surrounding small. Although filled with decoration, this seal maintains the circular form (not like flowers). This seal is 7.5 x 5 cm in diameter. The biggest circle at the center reads "Paduka Sri Sultan Alaaddin Mansur Syah Johan Berdaulat Zilullah Fil Alam". The circle in the direction of 1 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Ahmad Syah". The circle in the direction of 2 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Johan Syah". The circle in the direction of 4 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Mahmud Syah". The circle in the direction of 5 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Mahmud Syah". The circle in the direction of 7 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Johar Alam Shah". The circle in the direction of 8 o'clock reads "Sultan Sayid Al Mukamil". The circle in the direction of 10 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Makuta Alam Iskandar Muda". The circle in the direction of 11 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Tadjul Alam Sapitadin". This seal is probably the same as Seal 5, but issued in the different year, because even though the contents of the sultan's name and decoration are almost identical, the writing of the word is different. Seal 5 does not contain the word *ibn*, while Seal 8 includes the word. In addition, the word separation of the name of the ruled sultan is also different. Seal 5 is written as Paduka Sri/ Sultan Alaaddin/ Mansur Syah Jo/han Berdaulat/ Dzilu/llah Fil Alam. Meanwhile, Seal 8 shows different structure, "Paduka/ Sri Sultan Ala/uddin Mansur/ Syah Johan Berdau/lat Zilullah Fi/l Alam."

### Seal 9.

This seal is similar with Seal 8 in terms of form and content. This seal has nine circles with an ornament of two curves on the outside, and a flower with three petals between the largest circle at the center and the small circles surrounding it. Although it is decorated, this seal maintains the circular shape (not like flowers). This seal is 7.5 x 5 cm in diameter. The biggest circle at the center says "Paduka Sri Sultan Alaaddin Mansur Syah Johan Berdaulat Zilullah Fil Alam". The circle in the direction of 1 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Ahmad Syah". The circle in the direction of 2 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Johan Syah". The circle in the direction of 4 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Mahmud Syah". The circle in the direction of 5 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Muhammad Shah". The circle in the direction of 7 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Johar Alam Shah". The circle in the direction of 8 o'clock reads "Sultan Sayid Al Mukamil". The circle in the direction of 10 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Makuta Alam". The circle in the direction of 11 o'clock reads "ibn Sultan Tadjul Alam". Compare to Seal 5 and 8, this seal is the most perfect in terms of form, content, color, and name mention.



## V. CONCLUSION

*Sikeureung* seal (or *thikureuëng*) is the seal used by Aceh kings in writing important letters, such as appointments, power of attorney, decree, even diplomatic agreements between nations (Madjid, 2014: 152). A letter written without this stamp will not be considered as valid. *Sikeureung* seal is the product of culture acculturation between Islamization and Indianization, because this stamp exemplifies the stamp of King Akhbar from India. In Aceh, this stamp is also called "Sembilan Seal" or "Halilintar Seal" (Sulaiman, Rusdi, and Abdul, 1992: 42). This seal is called "Sembilan Seal" because the word '*sikeureung*' is an Acehnese language which means 'nine' (Fakhriati, in Kramadibrata (ed.), 2017: 14).

*Sikeureung* seal has circular form, and sometimes varied with the shape of flower petals. The number of seals in the form of a circle is five (seal 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9), while there are four seals shaped like a flower (seal 1, 2, 6, and 7). The average size of the seals is 6.5 cm. The material used for *Sikeureung* seal is soot ink which then applied to the letter paper. *Sikeureung* seal contains the names of the ruled sultan and the previous king, namely his father, grandfather, or brother. However, not all seals contains the name of the sultan's father, some of them mentions grandfather's name, as stated in Seal 1.

Although called as "Nine Seal", this seal doesn't have nine circles at all. There is also a seal with one circle which contains the name of the ruled sultan. It can be seen in Seal 6. During the sovereignty of Paduka Sri Sultan Alauddin Mansur Syah Johan Berdaulat Zilullah Fil Alam, there are two seal with same shape, but different structure in name separation. There are also several seals with different forms such as Seal 5, 6, 8, and 9. Seal decoration consists of tulips, sunflowers, arches like curly braces, fences, elongated vines, tangled three leaves, and three-petal flowers. This research is still far from perfect. In order to become a better article, discussion and suggestions from scholars of field of philology or codicology are strongly needed. Research on seals from the other kingdoms in Nusantara is also needed as there are still many other seals from Nusantara that have not been studied.

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Attachment (the pictures of seals)

Seal 1



Seal 2



Seal 3



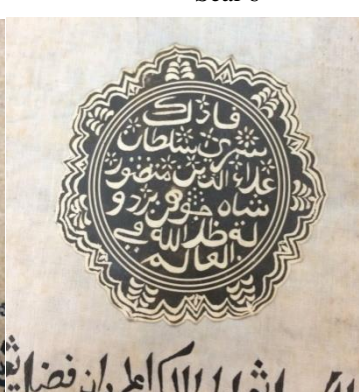
Seal 4



Seal 5



Seal 6



Seal 7



Seal 8



Seal 9

