Islamic Art Influences on Several *Batu Aceh* Gravestones in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular: Revisited

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Abstract

This study examines the Islamic art influences found on several *Batu Aceh* gravestones in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular, where it is believed that the decorative elements and calligraphy script used for Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh's gravestone was one of the "first examples" design by *ulamas* and artisans from Iran and Iraq. This design was later followed and used for the *Batu Aceh* production in the 15th to 18th century for ruling elites and their families. To determine this, the art history method, and the concept of variety in Islamic art was used to analyse and compare the calligraphy script. Based on the analysis, the calligraphy script on Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh gravestone is a combination of *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth,* which is contemporary with the development of calligraphy scripts in Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, and Egypt developed by Ibn Muqla in the 10th century. This indicates that the gravestone of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh is contemporary with his date of death (1297 CE) based on the calligraphy script and the decorative elements such as the "mihrab image" and the "knot motif" which also has connections to the Islamic Eastern Iranian lands. Other than this, several *Batu Aceh* in the Malay Peninsular were also analysed, namely the *Batu Aceh* found in Kampung Permatang Pasir, Pahang dated 1028 CE, the gravestone of Sultan Muhammad Shah I of Pahang (1475

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CE) and several un-named gravestones in Pahang and Johor. Analysis on these gravestones indicates that all of them had used the same *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth* calligraphy script but varied in designs and motif, where the local artistic influences were combined with the Islamic artistic repertoires.

Keywords: *Batu Aceh, Islamic gravestones, inscriptions in Sumatra and Malay.*

Introduction

The Islamic history of Southeast Asia has always been an interesting but complicated topic, as the proper historical writing of Southeast Asia's Islamic dynasties were only recorded from the 16th or 17th century onwards, while earlier texts that combine history with myth and oral traditions were only made known through early 19th century copies (Lambourn 2008). However, there are several existing objects which would allow us to know the development and influence of the earlier periods of Islam in Southeast Asia, especially in Islamic art. These objects are in the form of gravestones, epitaphs, and inscriptions as they offer hard data in the absence of early written histories, making them a vital piece in discussing the early Islamic history in Southeast Asia. Fortunately, the Malay Archipelago is rich in early Islamic cemeteries. One of them is the gravestone of Sultan al-Malik al-al-Saleh (d. 1297 CE), who was one of the earliest Muslim King of Samudra in Aceh, Sumatra. This gravestone is one of the most important epitaphs as it marks the establishment of the first known Islamic Dynasty in Southeast Asia. Although there are earlier Muslim gravestones, such as the Champa Pillar (1035 CE), the gravestone of Abu Kamil (1039 CE) in Champa, the gravestone of Putri Makhdarah binti Ali (1048 CE) and the daughter of Sultan Abdul Majid ibn Muhammad Shah (Syah) al-Sultan (1048 CE) in Brunei, and the Leran inscription (1082 CE) in Java all have historical significance, al-Saleh's is, however, the most decorated compared to others.

Unfortunately, al-Saleh's gravestone is only studied for its historical significance, palaeographic, socio-political, and cultural perspective where the artistic dimension is often left out. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the Islamic art apparent on the gravestones as it offers valuable information related to the development and influences of the Islamic decorative elements received by the Malays at the same time the faith was accepted. These decorative elements in the forms of calligraphy scripts and motifs

will then be compared to other international Islamic art in Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, and Egypt in order to trace the source of influence. In order to do this, this study would adopt the art history method as it analyses the different qualitative variations of "things" made by man that range from technique of manufacture, or other connotations, to style, with its definition of manners of treating a subject (composition, proportion, colour, etc.) to mode; a complex combination of style and subject matter (Grabar 2006). Among scholars in the field of Islamic art who uses this method is Sheila Blair (2006, 1992) in analysing calligraphy in manuscripts and monuments, Heba Nayel Barakat (2018) in the development and spread of arabesques, and Annabel Teh Gallop (2018, 2005) in analysing different influences in the Malay Quran manuscripts and illumination to name a few.

Previous Studies

In recent years, the gravestone of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh and the *Batu Aceh* in general have received a lot of attention from local and international scholars who are interested in the Islamic history of Southeast Asia. However, the political conditions in north Sumatra had made fieldwork for international scholar extremely difficult, hence the reason scholars such as Othman Yatim (1985), Abdul Halim Nasir (1990) and the Frenchman Daniel Perret together with Kamaruddin Ab. Razak (2017, 1999) had to focus on the *Batu Aceh* gravestones in the Malay Peninsular. In addition to this, Dr Elizabeth Lambourn (2008, 2004), UK is also interested in the *Batu Aceh* production from an art historical perspective, where her studies are focused on finding the influence and the production centre of the *Batu Aceh* to determine whether it was manufactured locally or imported. According to Lambourn (2008), Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh's gravestone was first published by Jean-Pierre Moquette in 1913 in an article entitled "De eerste vorsten van Samoedra-Pase (Nord-Sumatra)" (The First Sovereigns of Samudra-Pasai, North Sumatra). Unfortunately, I have failed to access and retrieve the original article of Moquette, and his works are only readable from other studies who had cited and mentioned his article, such as S. Q Fatimi (1963), Zakaria Ali (1994), Othman Yatim (1998) and Lambourn (2008, 2003). Despite this, Lambourn (2008, 2003) stated that Moquette had analysed the two gravestone pairs situated side by side, one of which is the first Muslim Sultan of Samudra-Pasai, Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh who died in the year 1297 CE and his successor, Sultan al-Malik al-Ẓahir who died in the year 1326 CE and buried next to him.

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In her analysis, Moquette stated that Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh gravestone was imported from the port of Cambay in Gujerat, western India, indicating that the gravestone was not manufactured locally. Moquette argument is based on the similarities between al-Saleh's gravestone with the later gravestone and grave memorial of Malik Ibrahim at Gresik and the daughter of Sultan Zayn al-Abidin of Samudra-Pasai, both of which are dated later in the 15th century. Although it is known from historical records that Cambay grave memorials were indeed imported and used by the ruling elites of Samudra-Pasai and eastern Java, this practice however only started in the first half of the 15th century, not earlier. This is evident in the gravestone stylistics of the Malik Ibrahim and the daughter of Sultan Zayn al-Abidin, but it is by no where near the same with al-Saleh's gravestone.

Due to this, Fatimi (1963) had rejected Moquette's analysis and stated that *"it is totally different from the Gujerati gravestones and their Malaysian prototypes"* (1963: 32). Lambourn (2008) agreed with Fatimi based on her comparative analysis of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh's gravestone with the Cambay productions, where she mentioned that there are no apparent similarities between the two, and Moquette with apparently little or no visual training, had failed to see the striking differences in material and style between al-Saleh's gravestone and the Cambay graves in Southeast Asia (2008: 261). These striking differences can be seen in the material and style of the gravestones, where Cambay stones are carved in a fine white marble while al-Saleh's are carved in a yellowish sandstone. Other than this, Cambay headstones are large, thin arched slabs over a meter high. On the contrary, al-Saleh's stones are short thick slabs with swooping extensions at the shoulder of the stone, locally known as *subang* or "earrings" and ornate "crowns". Moreover, the decorative elements and calligraphy script used differs significantly, as Cambay grave memorials carry several distinctive designs, either rows of low-relief carved trees and lamps, a fabulous floriated Kufic *bismillah,* or simple bands of interlace design, while al-Saleh's gravestones carry none of these and the calligraphic script of both groups is also different (Lambourn 2008: 261-263).

Even so, Lambourn (2008) suggested that al-Saleh's gravestone was not made in the late 13th century or early 14th century, but two centuries after his death (between 1480's and 1520's) as Al-Saleh's gravestone does not provide enough information about the gravestone production, styles of scripts or carving in the late thirteenth century in Samudra, which indicates

that the epitaph is not contemporary with his death (2008: 273). Nonetheless, she still maintains her belief that the gravestone was not imported from Gujerat nor anywhere as there are no external production centres to link with the *Batu Aceh* in Pasai (Lambourn 2003: 237). Even though she had noticed several Chinese influences on a gravestone pair from Cut Madi burial group (both dated 1427 CE) that is seemingly similar to those found on Chinese porcelain, wooden objects, the gravestones and inscription slabs found in the Fujian coastal region dated 14th and 15th centuries, it is still impossible to match the *Batu Aceh* directly to any known Chinese Muslim gravestones as they are no direct matches (Lambourn 2003: 237-238).

Other than Fatimi and Lambourn, Othman Yatim (1985) was the first local Malaysian scholar to establish a typological sequence of the gravestones used by the ruling elites in Aceh and the Malay Peninsular known as the *Batu Aceh* (1985). Although his study focuses mainly on the *Batu Aceh* found in the Malay Peninsular, he recognized that north Sumatra was the principal centre of production of many *Batu Aceh,* thus integrated north Sumatran examples in his analysis and sequence. In Yatim's typology sequence table, he had placed al-Saleh gravestone in the Type A category based on the shape, "earrings" and "crowns" of the stone. However, al-Saleh gravestone differs significantly with the Type A category as the example is more similar to the ones found in Kutakarang or Kuta Kareueung (the main burial ground for the later Sultans and royal family of Samudra-Pasai) dated later in the 15th century, making it clear that al-Saleh's gravestone does not belong to the Type A category. Although Yatim noticed this, he suggested that the current gravestone of al-Saleh was erected to replace the earlier possibly damaged stone but maintain the date of death as the stylistic is not contemporary to the late 13th century (1985: 94). Lambourn agreed with Yatim but suggested that al-Saleh's gravestone is more similar to the Type C attributed to the 16th century production as al-Saleh gravestone is more ornate or *rococo* than any Type A stone (2008: 268). Even so, Lambourn stated that there are still many troubling issues with the typology sequences as the types proposed by Yatim is still overly broad and require considerable fine-tuning because each type subsumes an enormous range of variation and needs better definition if it is to serve any useful purpose (2008: 266-268).

Regardless of the stylistic issues that arises, Yatim stated that the calligraphy script used for the *Batu Aceh* is either 'Late Kufic' or *Nashki,*

and the decoration used consist mainly of floral or vegetal, where the lotus motif is frequently used and appear as a single unit or grouped together on the base, body, heads and tops of the stones; while complete blossoms or 'crowns' appear on the heads or tops of the Othman Type I, J, L and N are attributed to the 17th and 18th century productions (1985: 157). Other than lotus, various forms of vines, rosettes, Acehnese flowers such as *boengong kalimah, boengong awan-awan* and *boengong awan si tangke* were also incorporated into the decoration together with other motifs and designs such as 'webs' or 'nets', geometric, *mihrab* and 'vase' shapes (1985: 158-175). Based on this, Yatim believed that the decorative elements of the *Batu Aceh* gravestone were influenced by the Hindu-Buddha elements introduced by the Indian traders including Gujaratis which was then later combined with Pagan and Islamic elements – especially *sufi* – after the faith was accepted (1985: 177-178). Although useful, there are several problematic issues that arises from Yatim's conclusion.

To start it, I am inclined with Lambourn analysis that al-Saleh's gravestone is nowhere near similar to the Cambay productions, as the style, shape and material differs significantly. Other than this, even though Yatim had pointed out the various decorative motifs evident on the *Batu Aceh* gravestones, he did not specifically mention from where the Islamic art influences came from and has similarities with which international Islamic artistic repertoires; Abbasid, Mamluk, Fatimid or others. This is understandable as he was more concerned with the typology sequence rather than finding the artistic influences. However, since Lambourn had stated that there is no external production centre to link the *Batu Aceh* with, thus indicating a local attribution, the focus should be on analysing the 'mix bag' of influences rather than sorting out the typology sequence since it has raised more questions than answers. This 'mix bag' of influences which Lambourn is referring to might be the Islamic art concept of variety, not unity, as Oleg Grabar (2006) stated that *"One is that it is foolish, illogical, and historically incorrect to talk of a single Islamic artistic expression. …the question is whether whatever they share is a quality of their Islamic culture or of other temporal or regional idiosyncrasies."*(2006: 247). Other than this, Grabar (1987) also mentioned that:

"'Islamic' does not refer to the art of a particular religion, …' Islamic in the expression 'Islamic art' is not comparable to 'Christian' or 'Buddhist'… it refers to a culture or civilization in which most of the

population or at least the ruling element profess the faith of Islam. In this fashion Islamic art is different in kind from Chinese art, Spanish art, or the art of the Steppes, for there is no Islamic land or Islamic people. If it exists at all, Islamic art would be one that overpowered and transformed ethic or geographical traditions, or else one that created some peculiar kind of symbiosis between local and Pan-Islamic modes of artistic behaviour and expression." (Grabar 1987: 1-2, 8)

Therefore, the correct method to study the Islamic art in Southeast Asia is by analysing the different Islamic, Pan-Islamic, and local influences that is combined harmoniously to form a symbiosis of influences rather than treating it as a single (Hindu-Buddha) expression. This idea of symbiosis was also accepted by local and international scholars who are interested in the study of Islamic art and architecture in Southeast Asia, such as Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina (2003), Annabel Teh Gallop (2005), Gülru Necipoğlu (2012) dan Imran Tajudeen (2017). Hence, this study would also adopt this concept of variety to analyse the *Batu Aceh* in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular.

Moreover, Yatim did not provide an explanation for his analysis of the calligraphy script (Late Kufic or *Naskhi*) as the characteristics, historical background and development of the script were not discussed in detail to provide a satisfactory answer. This manner of analysis was then followed by Zakaria Ali (1994) as he suggested that the Arabic script was *Thuluth* instead of 'Late Kufic' or *Naskhi* based on the vertical line of the *alif*, from which the letters *tā, zā, kāf, lām* and *mīm* are formed. Ali (1994) also mentioned that the technique used is the deliberate lengthening of the shafts, where a series of tall *alifs* with hooks and letters such as *ha, dal, mīm, fa, wāw* and *ain* are relegated to the bottom half (1994: 219-220). Other than this, the verticals of the *alifs* symbolizes the flight of birds, and the top head of the gravestone is decorated by a crown of interlacing or knot motif (Ali 1994: 220).

Unfortunately, the knot motif and the calligraphy script were not elaborated by Ali, and neither Fatimi (1963) and Lambourn (2008, 2003) discussed the Islamic artistic influence further. This problematic issue was highlighted by Yatim (1998), where he stated that there is a lack of comparison studies to understand the earlier Islamic art used on early Muslim gravestones, particularly the *Batu Aceh;* as most of them concentrated more on finding similarities with the Indian and Chinese

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civilizations rather than international Islamic arts (1998:133). On the other hand, other scholars such as Nik Hassan Shuhaimi and Zuliskandar Ramli (2018) are more concerned with the historical significance of the epitaph, which is to indicate the earliest Islamic evidence in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile Daniel Perret and Kamaruddin Ab. Razak (2017) had proposed a new classification method for the *Batu Aceh* in the Malay Peninsular, and had also provide a systematic record, detailed descriptions and epigraphical analysis of monuments found in the Malaysian Peninsular (Perret, Razak & Kalus 2004). Considering this, Lambourn (2008, 2003) is the only international scholar to discuss the artistic dimensions of the *Batu Aceh* from an art history perspective, particularly on the origin and beginning of the artistic tradition. Other than this, Inagurasi (2017) had provided a descriptive analysis of the decorative motifs of al-Saleh gravestone and comparing it with other *Batu Aceh* found in Riau, Banten, Lombok and Makassar to highlight the diversity of ornaments. Unfortunately, his study was only limited to the Indonesian region. Therefore, let us now analyse and compare the artistic repertoires of Sultan Malik al-Al-Saleh gravestone with international Islamic art in detailed manner.

Stylistic analysis of the script and decorative elements of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh gravestone

Although there has been several significant research done on al-Saleh's gravestone, not much is said about the motif and especially the calligraphy script used for the inscription. As far as I am aware of, there are two scholars, Yatim (1985) and Ali (1994); who had studied the calligraphy script but did not elaborate upon it much further. According to Ali (1994), the calligraphy script on al-Saleh's gravestone is *Thuluth,* while Yatim (1985) claimed it as 'Late Kufic'. Between the two, Ali's opinion of *Thuluth* is much more acceptable than Late Kufic, as the characteristics of the alphabets is far different from Late Kufic. This can be seen in the tall, elongated shafts of the *alif* in al-Saleh's inscription that has a small triangular serif added to the top right, and the tail ends with a bend towards the left, which is similar to *Thuluth* and *Muḥaqqaq.* These scripts belong to the cursive style of calligraphy developed by the great calligrapher Muhammad ibn Muqla (d. 940 CE) who was a vizier at the court of three Abbasid Caliphs, and later refined by Ibn Bawwāb who established the 'six calligraphy styles' known as *al-aqlām al-sitta* that manifest during the 10th century (Porter & Barakat 2004). This is contrary to the round script 'Late Kufic', or also known as Eastern and Persian Kufic as the scripts are often

associated with manuscripts transcribed in the eastern Islamic lands and derived from Kufic (Blair 2006: 143).

According to Blair (2006), the Late Kufic is characterised by the varying thickness of the strokes and the alphabets ascenders on tall letters which are diagonal or curving. This difference is apparent if we were to compare al-Saleh's inscription with the earliest surviving Quran manuscript from the 9th century made in the eastern Islamic lands which was corrected by Ahmad ibn Abu l-Qāsim al-Khaywāni in Shaʿbān 292/ June 905 (Blair 2006: 148). Other than this, Blair's study on the monumental inscriptions from early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana (1992) would also provide a comprehensive understanding regarding the development, description, and characteristics of the several types of Kufic including Late Kufic, Eastern, foliated, floriated and interlaced Kufic which differs significantly with al-Saleh's inscriptions.

The differences are apparent if we were to compare the final *alif* in al-Saleh's inscription with the Late Kufic script, where the top of the individual *alif* in the Late Kufic starts from left to right in a movement like a swan's neck, while the final *alif* in the Late Kufic has a small vertical spur that bends towards the right at the bottom. This alone is sufficient to notice the differences between the Late Kufic and al-Saleh's inscription, as the tall elongated *alif* for al-Saleh's inscription has a small triangular serif added at the top right and the tail ends with a bend towards the left. Other than this, a similar loop or hook is added to the ends of other letters in the Late Kufic script, such as the top of *alif* or *lam* and the opening of the initial *ʿayn. Dal* is relatively small in proportion to other letters if it were to be compared with the *dal* in Kufic which is often large as *kaf.* Furthermore, ligatures are angular, as are looped letters and the body of *mīm* and the head of *fāʾ/qāf* are often diamond shaped. Preceding letters are usually joined to the base stroke of *jīm* and its partners (Blair 2006: 147). This contradicts with the characteristics of the scripts used in al-Saleh's inscription which bares no similarities with the 'Late Kufic' except for the tall ascending letters. With this is mind, let us now examine the characteristics of *Thuluth* and *Naskh.*

According to Blair (2006), the person who is responsible for the transformation of round scripts is Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAli ibn Ḥilāl, known occasionally as Ibn al-Sitrī and more commonly as Ibn al-Bawwāb. Ibn al-Bawwāb is known for his efforts in refining and revising the writing

method of ibn Muqla and vested it with elegance and splendour where he
formalised a system for writing the cursive scripts appropriate for writing
the Quran. These round scripts were then grouped in sized pairs and
canonized as the Six Pens, which included calligraphy scripts such as
Tawqīʿ and its smaller counterpart *Riqāʿ, Thuluth/Naskh,* and
Muḥaqqaq/Rayḥan (Blair 2006: 195). One of the best examples of Ibn al-
Bawwāb writing is the most famous Quran codex in the Chester Beatty
Library, whose long and full colophon reports that ʿAli ibn Hilal had
transcribed this complete copy *(jāmiʿ)* of the Quran in Baghdad in
391/1000-1 (Blair 2006: 162). In this manuscript, the words and lines are
packed more closely together, and the letters are pitched just to the left of
vertical, while individual words and letters like *kaf* typically slope
downward from right to left. The slope imparts a forward movement to the
script, a flow that is enhanced by the strong sub linear rhythm created by
the long swooping tails of final *nūn, yāʾ* and similar letters, which extend
beneath the next word and sometimes encircle other descending tails before
tapering to a point (Blair 2006: 164).

Despite this, Ibn al-Bawwāb did not label the round scripts which he used
to transcribe the Quran, making it difficult to identify whether the script is
either *Naskh* or *Thuluth* as they share similar characteristics. Due to this,
scholar such as Rice (1955) had designated the text script as *Naskh* and the
display script as *Thuluth.* This was then generally agreed and followed by
other scholars as *Naskh* was used to transcribe a variety of texts and
became the most common script for transcribing books and small Quran
manuscripts due to its neat and balanced script with equal division between
flat and round shapes, and heavy and light strokes making it easy to read.
Sharing the same similarities with *Naskh*, other scholars stated that *Thuluth*
is *Naskh's* larger counterpart. However, this was rejected by some
especially calligraphers as there are several differences between the
modern version of *Naskh* and *Thuluth* that we know today with those of
Ibn al-Bawwāb. For example, the calligrapher Ḥabīballah Faḍāʾilī called
Ibn al-Bawwāb's text script as *Naskh* mixed with *Rayḥan* with traces of
Thuluth, while Ugur Derman simply stated *Rayḥan* for the text script and
Tawqīʿ for the display script (Blair 2006: 167).

The *Rayḥan* script which literarily translates as sweet basil can be traced
back to ʿAli bin ʿUbayda al-Rayḥani, a writer and intimate of the ʿAbbasid
caliph al-Maʾmūn, who was described in the *Fihrist* as a master of elegant
writing and style (Blair 2006; Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992). Similar to

Naskh, *Rayḥan* is the smaller counterpart of *Muḥaqqaq,* where the modern version of *Rayḥan* is written with serifs on *alif* and *lam,* letters that are looped are opened and not filled in or blind, has longer tails and the bowls of certain alphabets are more rounded than those of *Naskh* (Blair 2006: 167). Therefore, Blair (2006) stated that the round scripts that Ibn al-Bawwāb had used in his Quran manuscripts falls between the scripts mentioned above as we know them today but has several distinct differences. For example, the round script used in contemporary Quran manuscripts made in the region (Baghdad) has shorter tails and smaller bowls, which is a feature commonly associated with the modern *Naskh.* However, Blair stated that *"it is anachronistic to imagine that these scripts were uniform in all times and places. Styles of writing changed. Criteria varied"* (2006: 168). Let us now analysed the calligraphy script on al-Saleh's inscription.

As mentioned earlier, the *alif* in al-Saleh's inscription has a small triangular serif on the top right while the tail ends with a bend towards the left, a characteristic similar to the *Thuluth* and *Muḥaqqaq.* However, it is erroneous to say al-Saleh's inscription had only incorporated one script, but a combination of two, *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth;* where the characteristics of *Muḥaqqaq* can be seen in the letter *nun* which is more rounded and the tails of *wāw* is smaller than the usual *Muḥaqqaq* as the bowls are shallow, similar to the bold *Thuluth* script. On the other hand, the unauthorized connections of *ha* and *alif* is a feature attributed to *Thuluth.* Furthermore, the individual *dhal* and *lam* is bigger like the ones in *Muḥaqqaq* while the tail of *yā'* has a long swooping tail which extends beneath the next word or attached to another alphabet like the *Thuluth* script. Other than this, another interesting feature of al-Saleh's inscriptions is the tail of *rā'* that are raised like hooks, and the writing style of the beginning and joined *ha* has the characteristics of *Thuluth.* Furthermore, the *lam alif* in the inscription located inside the round shaped object which resembles the body of a lamp, and the combined *ʿayn* in the main body text in the centre of the slab is also like the *Muḥaqqaq* script. Based on this, al-Saleh's inscription is comparable and similar to the Quran manuscripts found in the eastern Islamic world (Iran), such as the the part 8 of 30-part Quran found in north-west Iran dated cira 1175-1225 CE (Folio 5), Quran fragments dated circa 1250-1350 CE (Folio 10) and the two folios found in Iran dated circa 1250-1300 CE (Folio 8) which can be seen in the Nasser D. Khalili collection of Islamic art (Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992: 49-56). Both Qurans has a combination of several scripts in the manuscripts,

such as *Muḥaqqaq* for the main text while *Thuluth* and *Kufic* are used for the incidentals (Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992).

However, al-Saleh's inscription also has similarities with the *Muḥaqqaq* style written by Abu'l-Majd jamāl al-Din Yaqūt ibn 'Abdallah al-Mustaʿṣimī, or commonly known as Yaqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī who was born in the first decade of the 13th century in Central Anatolia. According to Nasser D. Khalili and James (1992), Yaqūt was brought to Baghdad during his youth and was taught by the leading calligraphy master of the day in Baghdad, Ṣafiy al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mu'min al-Urmawī, who worked first for al-Mustaʿṣim bi'llah and then for his Mongol conquerors, Hülegü and Hülegü's minister, Ata-Malik Juvayni (1992: 58). He is known for his Quran manuscripts which are written in *Muḥaqqaq, Naskh* and *Rayḥan*, where one of his Quran manuscripts namely the part 15 of a 30-part Quran (Folio 11) dated 1282-3 CE found in Iraq, probably Baghdad written in *Muḥaqqaq* has close similarities with al-Saleh's inscription, especially the combined *alif* and *hā', lām alif, fā', rā'* and the individual *alif, dhāl/dāl* and *nūn* (Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992: 60-62). Similar to their Iranian counterparts, the manuscripts attributed to Yaqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī also combines several scripts, such as *Muḥaqqaq* for the main text and *Kufic* for the incidentals.

As a conclusion, al-Saleh's inscription in Sumatra is contemporary to the development of the round scripts in Baghdad, Anatolia and the eastern Islamic lands as the *Kufic* script intended for copying the Quran became less frequent in the 11th until 12th century and disappeared from practical use in the 13th century, from which the round script reached its culminating point of growth (Fatimi 1963: 41). This analysis therefore rejects Lambourn and Yatim statement which claims that al-Saleh's gravestone was not made in the late 13th century, as the script was in fact developed, refined, and canonized by Ibn Bawwāb in the 10th century and was already widely used in Baghdad, Anatolian, and Eastern Iran for Quran manuscripts during the 13th century (Blair 2006; Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992; Rice 1955). The script was probably disseminated to the Malay Archipelago by the 9th century as the sea trading network through the Red Sea and Iraq and Syria by land, river, and sea travel to reach the Persian Gulf was later improved by the Abbasid after their capital was moved from Kufa to Samarra in Baghdad, which allows them to control the Tigris River that connects the Persian Gulf directly (Ramli & Shuhaimi 2009: Hattstein & Delius 2004). This is also supported by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-

Attas as he believed that the correct timeframe for the initial Islamization of Sumatra should have been during the period between the 9th and 10th century or even earlier (2011: 20). Therefore, al-Saleh's gravestone is indeed contemporary with his date of death. However, I personally believe that al-Saleh's gravestone is not the first Muslim gravestone in the Malay Archipelago to be erected in this particular type, shape, design, and decorative elements as there are earlier graves than al-Saleh's which are not discovered yet. As in the words of Blair, *"arguing from negative evidence is always dangerous, since what has survived does not necessarily reflect what was made. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence"* (2006: 175).

It is not surprising that al-Saleh's inscription follows the same practice of combining several scripts which belongs to the same round script group. This also indicates that Quran manuscripts were the main source of inspiration for Islamic artistic repertoires which were brought together by the *ulama* in their effort to spread the Islamic faith in Southeast Asia. These traces of influence are also evident in the Quran manuscripts found in east coast of the Malay Peninsular – specifically Terengganu – as the scripts used by copyist in the region belongs to same round script group in Baghdad, Anatolia, and Iran, such as *Naskh* for the main text, *Thuluth* for the surah headings and *Riqā'* for colophons (Akhbar 2015). In addition to this, the red Quran cover for Qurans found in the east coast region of the Malay Peninsular also has similarities with the Qurans from the Mughal Dynasty (Ros Mahwati & Ramli 2018). This is not surprising as it is stated in the Malay Annals or *Sulalatus Salatin* (Genealogy of Kings) written sometime between the 15th and 16th century (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2013) that a particular Sultan Muhammad from Monghyr (located in north-eastern India) known as a *fakir* in the annals, who came to the Malay Archipelago to spread the Islamic faith brought with him a copy of the holy Quran for the righteous Malay Muslim king, Merah Silu to read (al-Attas 2011: 20-21; Ahmad 1996: 56-57). This can be seen in the translated version of the *Sulalatus Salatin* by Dr. John Leyden (1821), where it is mentioned *"When the morning came, the fakir landed, and brought with him the Koran, and ordered Marah Silu (Merah Silu) to read the Koran; and he read it. Then said the fakir to Sheikh Ismail, the Nakhoda of the vessel, "this is the land of Samadra, mentioned by the holy prophet"* (1821: 68-69). According to al-Attas (2011), the period in which the *fakir* had come to Sumatra from north-eastern India was estimated in the 9th or 10th century, which is contemporary to the establishment of the "six calligraphy

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style" by Ibn Muqla, and copies of the Quran in that period was certainly written in *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth* scripts. However, based on the date on al-Saleh's gravestone and the period in which the calligraphy script had developed in the Islamic lands, the calligraphy style on al-Saleh's gravestone is not nearly refined and lacking several distinct characteristics like their Iranian, Baghdad and Anatolian counterparts, indicating that it was made locally.

Other than calligraphy, another interesting decorative element on al-Saleh gravestone is the knot motif situated at the head of the slab inscription, above the 'vase-shaped panel' or 'kalimah' panel[1]. Although Yatim had pointed out and discussed the various decorative motif found on several types of *Batu Aceh* (floral/vegetal, web/nets, geometric, *mihrab* and vase shapes)*,* it is surprising that he did not discuss nor analyse the knot motif found on al-Saleh's gravestone. Referring to Yatim's analysis, he stated that the *Batu Aceh's* artistic repertoires were influenced by the Islamic and Hindu-Buddha traditions from India as it was the religion practiced by several in the region before the arrival of Islam. Despite this, the knot motif on al-Saleh's gravestone is not of Hindu-Buddha influences, rather it belongs to the Islamic artistic repertoire as it was used earlier in the eastern Iranian lands and made popular by the Turks from Central Asia (Aslanapa 1971). This similarity is obviously apparent if we were to compare al-Saleh's knot motif with the ones found on the tomb tower at Radkan West (INM 145) built by the Bawandids, an Iranian dynasty who ruled Tabaristan for some seven centuries (665-1349) (Blair 1992: 85). Based on the stylistic analysis of the calligraphy script, Blair stated that the script is interlaced *Kufic* as the knot motif is either interlaced with, above or even at the middle of the alphabets. To better understand this, Blair's (1992) alphabetic chart of the inscription around the tomb tower at Radkan West (31) (see figure 1) should provide a better clarification of the interlaced *Kufic* and the stylized knot motifs.
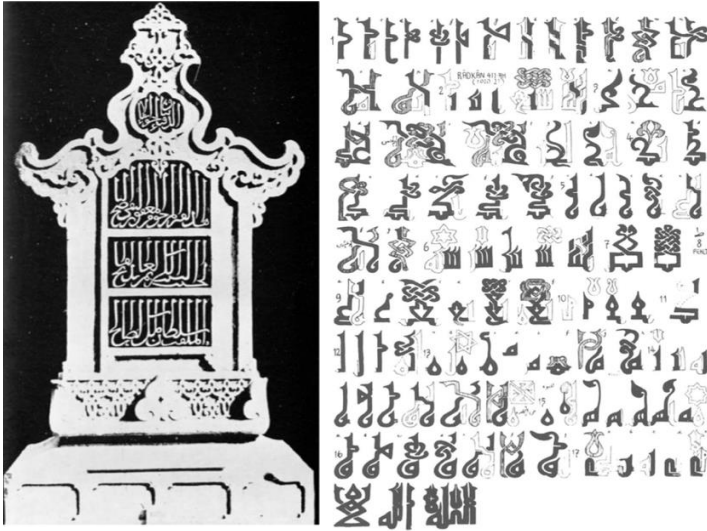
Figure 1: *(left)* Gravestone of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh dated *Ramadhan* 696/23 June – 22 July 1297, Samudra district, Aceh (From Moquette 1913 as cited by Lambourn 2008) *(right)* Alphabetic chart of the inscription around the tomb tower at Radkan West (From Blair 1992)

Other than the Radkan West tomb tower, similar knot motifs like al-Saleh's are also found on other monuments in the early Islamic Iranian lands and Transoxiana, such as the painted inscription around the interior of the Pir-I ʿAlamdar at Damghan (34) dated 1027 CE, the inscription in knotted *Kufic* in the tomb of Shah Faḍl in Uzbekistan (47) dated 1055-60 CE and also the band in foliated Kufic on the stone fragments from Ghazna (69), Afghanistan attributed to the Ghaznavid dynasty to name a few (Blair 1992). Other than monuments, similar knot motifs are also found on a bowl made in Central Iran circa 1200 CE and in the upper frame of the Quran illumination made in city of Shiraz in south-west Iran dated 1336-1354 CE (see figure 2). Evidence of the knot motifs found on portable objects such as bowls and Quran manuscript illumination indicates that these objects were items brought together by the *ulamas* to Southeast Asia where the Islamic artistic repertoires were probably later copied and followed by local artisan.
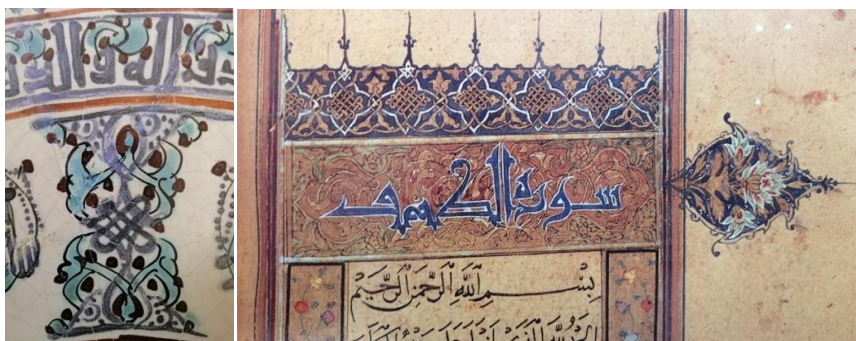
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Figure 2: *(left)* Details from a bowl found in Central Iran dated circa 1200 CE (IAMM 2012.2.11) (From Waley 2018) *(right)* Volume containing five *surahs* of the Quran made for the Inju'id Princes (31) (From Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992).

Another interesting aspect of al-Saleh's gravestone is (borrowing Yatim's terminology) the curly shoulders and the so called 'mihrab' designs which are apparent on the Othman Types A and B. Although the shape and design of the curly shoulders are unique, Yatim did not elaborate upon it further and had only discussed about the different terminologies given by early scholars regarding the various shapes of the gravestones (Yatim 1985: 63). This was probably due to his interest in providing a typology sequence rather than the artistic repertoires. Therefore, let us now analyse the curly shoulders and 'mihrab' design from an art historical perspective.

Based on the earlier discussion, if were to accept the notion that the Islamic artistic repertoires were brought to Southeast Asia via portable items such as bowls, Quran manuscripts and probably scrolls – for example, the roll attesting to the completion of the Greater and Lesser Pilgrimage (*haji* and *umrah*) certificate (Blair 2006: 215-216) – in which all of them were heavily decorated, then we should analyse these items in search for similar designs and motifs. To start with, if we compare the top, head, and shoulder design of al-Saleh gravestone with the bowl found in Central Iran as shown above, similar characteristics are apparent especially on the top of al-Saleh's gravestone which looks like a flower bud or arrow shape, and the curly shoulders is similar to the winged palmettes in the arabesque design. This arabesque composition which has a small flower bud shape and winged palmettes (or also known as split palmettes) derived from the Sassanid winged symbol (Barakat 2018: 34) are sometimes combined with knots or interlaced designs happens to be the most common or general

arabesque composition found all over the Islamic lands. It is used to decorate objects, monumental inscriptions and also Quran illuminations, such as the Quran leaf found in North Africa (catalogue 1 & 2), the decorated arabesque dado panel for the façade of the Ghaznavid Sultan Masʿūd III palace (catalogue 8 & 9), the mihrab panel and tile from the Timurid Dynasty in Central Asia (catalogue 18 & 21), an Iznik tile from Ottoman Dynasty in Turkey (catalogue 22, 35, 56, 57) and a Door panel and wood plaque from the Mamluk Dynasty in Egypt or Syria (catalogue 27, 28, 29) to name a few (Waley 2018).

However, in our effort to prove the Islamic artistic repertoires were brought to Southeast Asia through portable objects, most likely Quran manuscripts, early examples of this arabesque composition (with respect to its own artistic preferences and time period) can be seen in the decorative Quran markers of the single-volume Quran found in Iran or Iraq dated circa 1000-1050 CE (Folio 1) and 1050-1150 CE (Folio 2), the part 8 of a 30-part Quran found in North-West Iran dated circa 1175-1225CE (Folio 5), the two and single folios found in Iraq, probably Baghdad dated circa 1300-1310CE (Folio 22) and 1313-1325CE (Folio 24), the two folios from part 14 of a 30-part Quran attributed to the Mamluk Dynasty probably in Cairo dated circa 1310-1320CE (Folio 39) and 1329CE (Folio 41), and also the part 24 of a 30-part Quran found in Iran or Anatolia dated circa 1280-1320CE (Folio 49) to name a few (Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992).

Figure 3: The different arabesque decorative Quran markers found in the Quran of Iran, Anatolia, and Egypt from the 11th – 14th century CE
(From Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992)

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By examining these examples, the similarities are obvious in the shape but varied in their designs. As we can see, some of the wings of the palmettes are curled upwards and more elaborate while some are the opposite. Moreover, the top or crown of the palmettes are sometimes separated from the main body of the arabesque and evenly spaced out, while others are tightly squeezed together as one whole unit design. Other than this, some of the wings are lengthier while others are short. The similarity of the arabesque Quran decorative markers with al-Saleh's gravestone is obvious, as the curly shoulders on al-Saleh's gravestone is apparently another form of the winged palmette, as the wings are curved downwards but has a short upward curl towards the end. Al-Saleh's artistic repertoires can be seen as a combination of Iranian, Anatolian, and Egyptian but with its own regional preferences. Hence, lets us now analyse the mihrab design on al-Saleh's gravestone.

According to Yatim, the mihrab design can only be found on several types of *Batu Aceh,* namely the Othman Type A and B where the frames are sometimes inscribed with the name of the deceased, quotations from the Quran, the *shahādah* or several lines of Sufi poems (1985: 176). Furthermore, he mentioned that the reason he named the panels as 'mihrab' is due to the reason that it resembles the mihrab shape or niche used in mosque to indicate the direction of the *qiblah*. Other than this, he noticed the practice of using the mihrab design on gravestone is similar to the Middle East and linked with the Sufi concept of the mihrab being a door or gate that one must enter after death to meet his lord, or even a reference to the gates in the seven layers of heaven (1985: 175). Unfortunately, he did not elaborate upon it much further nor mentioned where specifically in the Middle East it was used, for what purpose and for whom. It must have been important or specific, as the mihrab design was only evident on two types of gravestones, namely the Othman Type A and B.

According to Khoury (1991), these mihrab designs which are usually (but not always) flat or two-dimensional, have depiction of lamps suspended by three chains beneath an arch, flanked by candlesticks and often accompanied with verses of the Quran such as the Throne Verse (2: 255), the Light Verse (24: 35), the *shahādah,* pious invocations and sometimes references to the mysticism of Ghazali's *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (the Niche of Light), are known as "mihrab images" (1991: 11-12). These mihrab images are often found in mausoleum, gravestones, cenotaphs, and a variety of shrine-related objects in many parts of the Islamic world, such as Egypt,

Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Yemen dating from the late 11th century onward and is connected with death and eschatology based on the texts that codify rules pertaining to death, burial, and commemoration. Although found significantly, these mihrab images vary in design, as there are some mihrab images that do not incorporate all the characteristics mentioned above. For example, the mihrab of Imam Riza at Mashhad, Iran dated 1215 CE does not have the candlestick motif and are only composed of several inscribed rectangular frames within which are a series of inscribed and slightly recessed arches, and the image of a small hanging lamp appears at the innermost point of this architectural composition, beneath the trefoil arch where the Throne Verse is inscribed around the lamp (1991: 14).

In addition to this, Lamb (1966) reported that several small glass lamps of a shape well known from Medieval Egyptian and Syrian mosque lamps were also found at Pengkalan Bujang, Kedah. He described this lamp as being *"…of a greenish more or less transparent material, very bubbly, with a base, a globular body, and a bell-shaped mouth. Around the body are a number of lugs for suspending the lamp"* (Lamb 1966: 75). This is similar the lamp depictions commonly found on mihrab images. Although the decorative elements of the lamp found in Pengkalan Bujang has faded over time, it is usually heavily decorated with arabesques and inscribed with the Light Verse (24: 35) written in the *Thuluth* calligraphy script, such as the Egyptian Mosque lamp commissioned by Sayf al-Dīn Shaykhu Al-Nāṣirī dated 1350-55 CE to name a few (Barkman 2015:129). This indicates that portable objects such as glass lamps, glass beads, glass fragments and bottles found in many places in the Malay Peninsular were the medium to carry the Islamic decorative elements from Iran, Iraq and Egypt during the Abbasid and Fatimid period in the 13th century or earlier (Ramli & Shuhaimi 2009 & Lamb 1966).

Contrary to Yatim, Khoury (1991) stated that the mihrab images is not used to show the direction of the *qiblah* like niches found in mosque, but functions as a commemorative object whose primary function is to indicate the presence of some special quality of sanctity associated with a place or a person, and the basis for designating the mihrab image on a gravestone is limited to commemorate an identifiable person (1991: 15). This fits well with the description and context of al-Saleh gravestone, as he is the descendant of Abu Bakar al-Siddiq, the first Khalifah after Prophet Muhammad PBUH and a leader who was responsible for spreading the Islamic faith in the Malay Archipelago (al-Attas 2011). Despite this, al-

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Attas (2011) stated that Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh was not the first Muslim ruler in Sumatera, as the scattered gravestones in Blang Mei proved that there were earlier Muslim ruler named al-Malik al-Kamil who died on the 7th day of the month of Jumadā al-Ula in the year 607H (1210 CE), and also the grave of the king's cousin named Yaʿqūb (died 1232 CE) who was the son of his paternal uncle *(ibn ʿamm)* and identified as the Commander who Islamized the land of Gayo and the surrounding regions of western Sumatera (2011: 16-17). This confirms al-Attas theory that the Islamization of Sumatra happened during the period of between the 9th and 10th centuries or even earlier (2011: 20). Unfortunately, there were no pictures of the gravestone given by Sayyid ʿAlawī bin Ṭāhir bin ʿAbd Allah al-Ḥaddād al-Ḥaḍramī, who was the first person who analysed the inscription, as he was more intent on the historical aspect and genealogy rather than decorations, which was followed in the same fashion by Sayyid Muhammad Naquib al-Attas later. Despite this, there are several differences in the mihrab images found in other Islamic lands with those of al-Saleh's.

To start with, the Quran Throne Verse and the candlestick motif on al-Saleh's gravestone is no where to be seen, as the inscription on the front part of the headstone contains information about the deceased (name, date of death and pious attribution towards the deceased) while Sufi poems and the Quran verse surah al-Ḥashr (59: 22-24) were inscribed at the back of the headstone (Ali 1994: 218). The use of different verses of the Quran other than the Light Verse and the Throne Verse is common, as there are examples of mihrab images in Iran and Iraq that uses the Quran verse 5: 58-59 which mentions about the *awliyā Allah* (the friends of God) for the mihrab of Panja 'Ali at Mosul (1287-1288CE), and the plaques for the shrine of Shaikh Fathi in Mosul dated in the 13th century uses the Quran verses surah 112 (al-Ikhlas) and 10: 26 (Khoury 1991: 13, 16). Shaikh Fathi's mihrab image is unique as it carries neither the usual lamp and candlestick motif, where the word "Allah" appears immediately beneath the arch and the remainder spaces is filled with geometric patterns containing the names Muhammad, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali (Khoury 1991: 16). Therefore, it is understandable that the choice of selecting Quran verses is based on personal preferences which might have been favoured or attributed spiritually or personally to the deceased. Despite this, several *Batu Aceh* productions in the Malay Peninsular especially Johor, Perak and Pahang have the Throne Verse inscribed on them, which will be discussed later in the following.
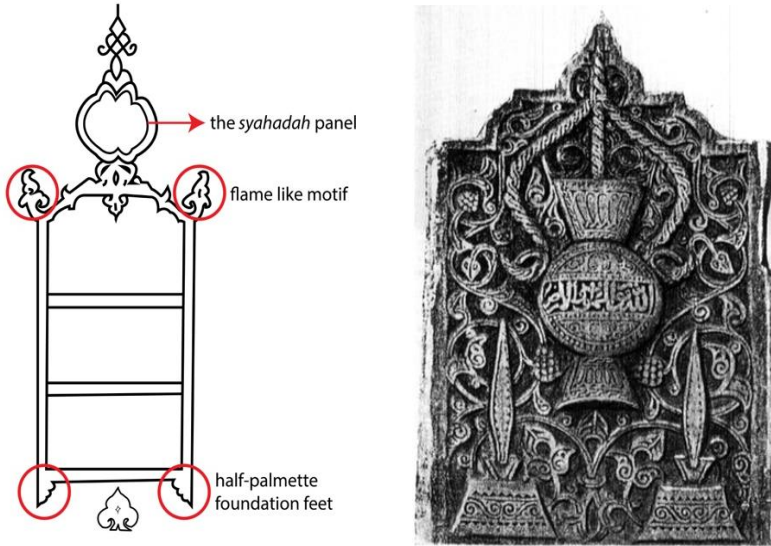
Figure 4: *(left)* the outline for Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh's mihrab image *(right)* The two candlesticks on the left and right of the mihrab image from the Budayriyya Madrasa in Cairo (built in 1357 but is no longer extant) (From Khoury 1991)

However, if we scrutinize al-Saleh's mihrab image closely, we can see that the panel has two foundation feet looking like half-palmettes, which, from a personal perspective, can be considered as a replacement for the candlestick motif as there is a seemingly flame-like motif or just another form of arabesque on the left and right side of the top frame of the mihrab image (figure 4). Other than this, the top section of the headstone where the *shahādah* panel is located, the round shaped object surrounding the *shahādah* resembles the body of a lamp which is suspended by three short chains in the form of arabesque under the knot motif. The practice of placing the *shahādah* on the body of the lamp was also found in the 16th century example of a tile composition placed in the mosque courtyard of Darwish Pasha or also known as the *Tekiyya Darwishiyya* in Damascus, where the word "Allah" is placed on the neck and a portion of the *shahādah* is inscribed on the body of the lamp (Khoury 1991: 13). Similar practices can also be seen in Turkey, produced during the rule of Ottoman Empire. Another interesting characteristic of al-Saleh's decoration is the flower bud, or the single arabesque motif unit located at the bottom band of al-Saleh's headstone. This arabesque motif is similar to the Mihrab of Fatima

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Khatun in Iran dated in the 12th century, where the same motif is also placed at the bottom band of the mihrab but smaller in size and arranged more closely (Khoury 1991: 16). This indicates that most of the early Islamic artistic repertoire in Southeast Asia resembles more and is similar to their Iran and Iraq counterparts, but with its own regional preferences uniquely to the Southeast Asia region in shape, design, arrangement, and motif.

Figure 5: *(left)* The headstone of Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh in Aceh
(From *https://www.mapesaaceh.com/2019/05/sultan-al-malik-ash-shalih-wafat-dalam.html,* courtesy of MAPESA, Aceh) *(right)* The Mihrab of Fatima Khatun in
Iran, dated 12th century (From Khoury 1991)

However, different from their Iranian, Anatolian, and Egyptian counterparts, the whole shape of al-Saleh's gravestone is actually a bigger version of the arabesque design which was used for grave markings instead of being a small decorative element in objects, Quran manuscripts or monumental inscriptions. This notion was not found in other parts of the Islamic world therefore making it especially unique to the Southeast Asia region. In addition to this, if we look at Yatim's typology table, the *Batu Aceh* production after the 13th century varied in shape and design, where local influences and motifs are evident compared to al-Saleh's gravestone. This might indicate that al-Saleh's gravestone was probably one of the "first examples" introduced by the *ulamas* who spread the Islamic faith to these lands that served as a guideline for royal burial practices, where the

design and motif were later adapted, improvised, and combined with local influences which allows them to recognise and differentiate the grave of a ruler/elite with others. This is not a farfetched idea as Sultan al-Malik al-Saleh was a pious Muslim ruler of Samudra-Pasai based on the inscription on his gravestone, therefore everything attributed or intended for him must have been an example for their royal families. If we were to accept this, then the mystery to Yatim's typology sequence is answered as the *Batu Aceh* production starting from the 1500 CE – 1800 CE was done by local artisan with their own local and regional artistic preferences that was adapted and improvised from "the first example" (al-Saleh's gravestone), crafted by the *ulamas* or artisans from other Islamic lands (most probably Iran or Iraq). This explains why the later *Batu Aceh* productions are not the same like al-Saleh's as the shapes and design are simpler, like the pair of gravestone from Cut Madi (dated 1427CE), the single gravestone from Teungku Sareh (grave XX, dated 1429CE), a pair of gravestone from Teungku Sidi (grave VII, dated 1437-1438CE) and the Kuta Kareueng grave VII (dated 1438CE) to name a few (Lambourn 2004); or more elaborate, such as the Othman Type C, D, E, G, H, I and N (Yatim 1985).
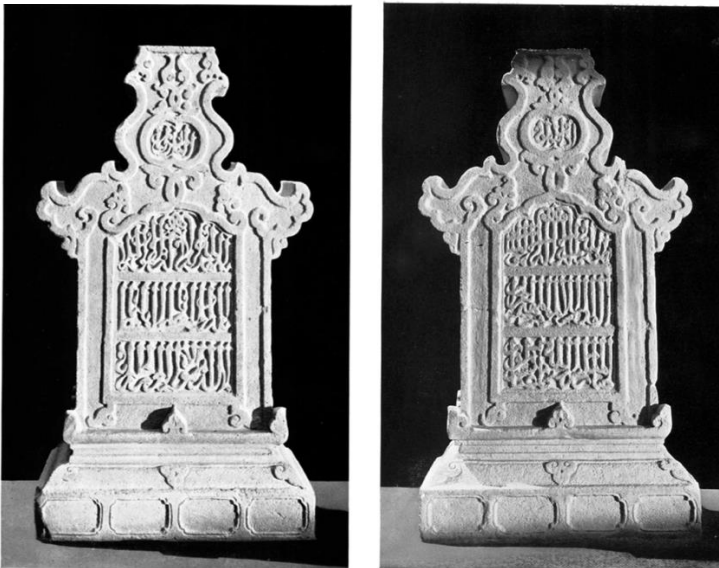

Figure 6: *(left)* Plate XIX, the front piece of the unidentified *Batu Aceh* gravestone in Johor *(right)* Plate XX the back piece (From R.O Winstedt 1932)

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However, there is one *Batu Aceh* gravestone found in Kampong Raja, Ulu Pagoh, Johor which is seemingly similar to al-Saleh's. According to R. O Winstedt (1932) the gravestone (figure 5) is without a name nor date of death, as the inscription on the front piece of the headstone only mentions *"God hath borne witness that there is no God but He. And the angles and those who are endowed with wisdom profess the same, who execute righteousness, there is no God but He, the Mighty, the Wise"* while on the back piece mentions *"He is God, besides whom there is no God. The King, the Holy, the Giver of Peace, the Faithful, the Guardian, the Powerful, the Strong, the Highest, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner"* (1932: 162). It is important to note that this gravestone was found in the same burial area as Sultan ʿAlā Uddīn, the son of Sultan Manṣūr Shah (died 1488CE), who was a Sultan of the Malacca Sultanate from 1477 to 1488 which indicate that the deceased was also a royalty but hide his identity as he chose piety over kingship. This is similar to the three un-identified grave in Makam Lubuk Pelang, Bukit Ketupat, Jerantut, Pahang which bares no inscription but one of them is known to be the grave of Sultan Abdul Jamil, the third Sultan of Pahang who reigned from 1495 CE to 1512 CE known as *"Marḥūm Shaikh"* based on the Malay Annals (Ahmad 1996: 234).

However, even though Yatim and Ali had discarded this gravestone in their typology sequence and analysis (most probably because there is no valid information regarding the deceased and concerns that Yatim's system of classification would collapse), it is however surprising that this gravestone has the same decorative elements as al-Saleh's but is less refined in terms of quality and craftsmanship's. This might indicate that this gravestone was done by a local artisan whom, in his efforts, tried to replicate al-Saleh's gravestone but failed to achieve the same artistic level of craftsmanship. This proves my idea of al-Saleh's gravestone as being "the first example" where local artisans had failed to reproduce the design exactly as the decorative elements were new to them. Due to this, the later *Batu Aceh* production had to improvise, adapt, and combine the Islamic artistic repertoires with the pre-Islamic local decorative elements and influences. It is for this reason we can see in the *Batu Aceh* production from the 15th until 18th century that the curly shoulders or wings of the gravestone is either shorten, less elaborate, removed or it became bigger and more complicated as it combines other local and pre-Islamic influences in terms of design and motif that has different connotations (such as the Othman Type C, H & N). Let us now analyse several unique *Batu Aceh* in the Malay Peninsular.

The *Batu Aceh* in Pahang and Johor

One of the earliest and interesting *Batu Aceh* in the Malay Peninsular is the unnamed gravestone found in Kampung Permatang Pasir, Pekan, Pahang dated 1028 CE and the gravestone of Sultan Muhammad Shah I of Pahang dated 1475 CE (Ali 1994; Yatim 1985). This un-named gravestone in Pahang is remarkably interesting as the date is much earlier than al-Saleh's and is similar in shape, but less decorated and is without the wings or curly shoulders. According to Ali (1994), the head and footstone measures 40cm high, 26cm wide and 10cm thick and consists mainly of epitaph such as of Quran quotations (surah al-Imran verse 185 & surah Yunus verse 62), poems, names of Allah and the date that reads *"the death occurred on Wednesday, the fourteenth day of the month of Rabie in the year four and nineteen"* (1994: 67). The name was probably not inscribed in order to hide the true identity of the deceased but maintained his status as royalty and mystic by use of the *Batu Aceh* gravestone as it was only intended by the ruling elites in Aceh and the Malay Peninsular (Yatim 1985).

At first, Yatim (1985) had included this gravestone in his thesis but did not mention the date nor acknowledge it as the earliest *Batu Aceh* found in the Malay Peninsular. This is due to the reason that he had claimed the gravestone of Sultan Muhammad Shah 1 of Pahang as the earliest *Batu Aceh* in the Malay Peninsular, and it would have disrupted his system of classification if he had said otherwise. However, he had corrected his statement and claimed it as the earliest Muslim gravestone in the Malay Peninsular, where the deceased is identified as a male based on the design of the gravestone (Yatim & Nasir 1990: 54-59). In addition to this, Ali (1994) had disregarded the inscribed date in the inscription and mentioned that the script belonged to the period of the end of the 15th century (1994: 67). Even so, Ali had failed to mention and recognize the calligraphy script used for the inscription but relentlessly pushing his argument that the script belonged to the 15th century period, thus claiming it as a "pious fraud" (1994: 67, 71). However, Ali had failed to provide evidence to support his argument, making his claim without basis and invalid. Despite this, Zakaria Hitam (1982) mentioned that the Officials of the Pahang Royal Museum had defended the date of the gravestone as being 1028 CE. Based on this, let us now analyse the gravestone.

Figure 7: *(from left to middle)* Plate 32-34; the un-named gravestone in Pahang, headstone, and footstone of the south side and also the headstone east side (From Yatim 1985) *(right)* the general view of the un-named gravestone (From Hitam 1982)

Judging from the calligraphy script used for the inscription, the script has similar characteristics with the *Muḥaqqaq* or the bold *Thuluth* script attributed to the Ibn al-Bawwāb's style of writing, which can be seen in the combined *yā'* and *alif* and the combined *ghayn, fā* and *rā* of *yā ghafūr* in the upper top part of the headstone, the *lām alif, nūn, qāf* of *qāla Allahu ta'ālā* in the first register, the *kāf,* individual *dhāl* and the conjoined *sīn* of *kullu nafsin dhā'iqa* in the second register, the individual *alif* and also the individual and combined *ha* in the east side inscription of the headstone. However, it is interesting to note that the tail of *wāw* is smaller than the usual *Muḥaqqaq* or *Rayḥān but* is similar with the bold *Thuluth* script. This similarity can be seen if we were to compare this inscription with the bold *Thuluth* script used in the final page of the *diwan* (poems) of Salama ibn Jandal which was copied by Ibn al-Bawwāb in Ramadhan 408/January-February 1018 (Rice 1955:19), where Blair (2006) stated that it was written in bold *Thuluth* with shallow bowls and pointed tails below the baseline, balanced by the bold strokes and is juxtaposed to shorter lines in a smaller *Rayḥan* with similar forms. In addition to this, Ibn al-Bawwāb had written Salama ibn Jandal's name in the middle of the page using the elegant *Muḥaqqaq* script which is notable for its strokes of uniform thickness, tall straight *alifs,* rounded bowls and open eyes (Blair 2006: 171). According to

Blair, *Muḥaqqaq* is said to have been the first script systematized and geometrically defined by Ibn Muqla (2006: 171).
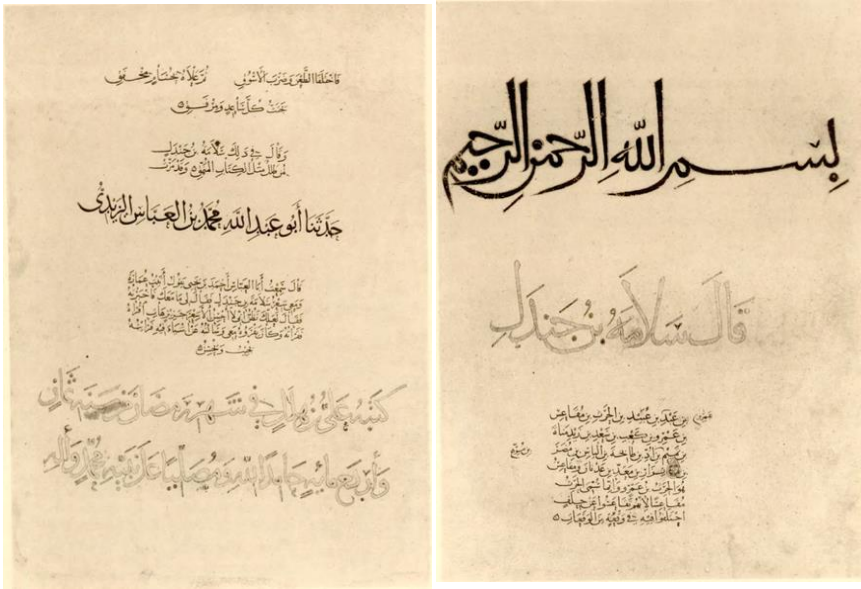

Figure 8: the opening and final page of the *diwān* of Salāma ibn Jandal copied by Ibn al-Bawwāb in 1018 CE (From Rice 1955)

Other than Salama's *diwan,* the *Muḥaqqaq* script used for the unnamed gravestone has similarities with the part 8 of a 30-part Quran found in North-west Iran, circa 1175-1225 CE (Folio 5), Quran fragments found in Iran, circa 1250-1350 CE (Folio 10), part 15 of a 30-part Quran found in Iraq, probably Baghdad circa 1282-3 CE (Folio 11), the single folio found in Iraq, probably Baghdad dated circa 1313-1325 CE (Folio 24) and the Quran fragments found in Iran, circa 1420-1430 CE (Folio 14) in the Nasser D. Khalili collection of Islamic art to name a few (Nasser D. Khalili & James 1992). Both scripts, *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth* along with others (*Thuluth/Naskh* and *Tawqī'/Riqā'*) has similar characteristics and belongs to the same round script group amongst the 'six calligraphy styles' or *al-aqlām al-sitta* developed by Muhammad ibn Muqla (died 940 CE) but later refined and canonized by Ibn al-Bawwāb during the 10th century. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *Muḥaqqaq* script was already used in the 11th century in Pahang, as Arab and Persian traders had already frequented the Malay Archipelago region before the arrival of Islam, where

the relationship was maintained and strengthened until the birth of Islam in the 7th century (Ramli & Shuhaimi 2009; Hassan 1980). According to Zuliskandar Ramli and Nik Hassan Shuhaimi (2009), this relationship had started during the period of the Parthian Empire in the 3rd century and continued in the 4th century with the Sasanians as the Persians had to sail through the Malay Archipelago in order to reach Vietnam and South China (2009: 157).

In addition to this, early writings of the Arabs such as the *"Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa al-Hind"* compiled by Abu Zayd and believed to be in the 9th century mentioned about several ports visited by them in their voyage to China, such as *Kalah* (Kedah) and Pulau Tioman in Pahang where they stopped to replenish their fresh water supply (Tibbets 1957: 14). Other than this, Ibn Khurdādhabah in his *"kitāb al-masālik wa'l mamālik"* written in 846-847 CE gives us a route from the Persian Gulf to China round the east coast of Arabia and across the Arabian Sea to *al-Daybul* at the mouth of the Indus, and then to Sirandīb (Ceylon) round the coast of India to the mouth of the Ganges. The route to the Malay Archipelago from Ceylon is to the Andamans and the Nicobars. The north of Sumatera is close by to the south. Then to Kedah and from Kedah through the Straights of Malacca to Tioman (in Pahang), Cambodia, and Champa and on to Canton in China (Tibbets as cited by al-Attas 2011: 36). Therefore, it is undeniable that the Islamic faith had spread towards the Malay Peninsular, specifically Pahang in the early years as *the History of the Sung Dynasty* (960-1276 CE) mentions that the Islamic faith had spread throughout the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsular facing the China Sea which includes Phan-rang, Patani, Terengganu, Pahang, and Leran as early as 977 CE (Fatimi 1963: 67). This implies that the Islamic faith was brought to the Malay Peninsular mainly by Arab or Arab-Persian traders, merchants, *ulamas* and *Sufis* who purposely came to spread the Islamic faith (al-Attas 2011, 1969; Fatimi 1963).

As discussed earlier, al-Saleh's inscription had also used the same *Muḥaqqaq* script but is heavily decorated compared to the un-named gravestone in Pahang. The only similarities between the two is marked by the arabesque motif shaped like a flower bud or winged palmettes located at the base of the gravestones along with the overall shape, but again without the curly shoulders or wings. Nonetheless, it is still a complicated matter to determine which one is truly earlier, as the shape is commonly used for gravestones both in Aceh and Pahang and the decorative elements

could just be a matter of personal preferences. Despite this, analysis done on the calligraphy script confirms that the date of death, which is 1028 CE as inscribed on the gravestone to be true and accurate, thus rejecting Ali's conjecture as being a "pious fraud".

In addition to this, the unnamed gravestone in Pahang was probably crafted by the Arab or Arab-Persian artisans under the guidance of *ulama* who came to Pahang to trade and also the spread the Islamic faith as the execution quality of calligraphy script and craftsmanship is more refined and elegant, indicating that it was not done locally. These differences can be seen if we were to compare this un-named Pahang gravestone with other early ones found in the Malay Archipelago, namely the Champa Pillar (1035 CE), the gravestone of Abu Kamil (1039 CE) in Champa, the gravestone of Putri Makhdarah binti Ali (1048 CE) in Brunei and also the Leran inscription (1082 CE) in Java; where the quality of the inscription is crude, not refined and uses a different calligraphy script which is the foliated Kufic, interlaced Kufic and also the *Muḥaqqaq* script, all of which belongs to the "Six Pens" group.

Other than this, the quality of craftsmanship either being done locally or by international artisans can be judged if we were to compare this unnamed gravestone with the gravestone of Sultan Muhammad Shah I (1475 CE), where both are found in Pahang. The differences in quality, size, spacing and style of execution is obviously apparent as the inscription of Sultan Muhammad Shah I is nowhere near the quality and refined as the un-named gravestone, even though the basic characteristics of the script would allow us to recognise that the script is *Muḥaqqaq* based on the *nūn, lām alif, dhāl* or *rā'* and the individual *alif.* However, the *wāw* has shorter tail like *Thuluth*, similar to unnamed gravestone discussed earlier. Furthermore, the shape of Sultan Muhammad Shah I gravestone is in between al-Saleh's and the unnamed gravestone, as the shape is similar, but the wings or curled shoulders are shorter and the top head has a cap, something which is not found on the unnamed gravestone nor al-Saleh's. In addition to this, Sultan Muhammad Shah I gravestone has the same decorative elements as al-Saleh's and the unnamed gravestone especially the arabesque motif located at the bottom band, but the inscription is in one frame rather than in three panels.

Figure 9: *(from left)* The gravestone of Sultan Muhammad Shah I of Pahang (1475 CE), the gravestone of Raja Fatimah binti Sultan ʿAlā Uddīn I (1495 CE) and the gravestone of Sultan ʿAbdul Jalil (1511 CE) (From Linehan 1926 & 1936)

Other than this, the mihrab image is also apparent on Sultan Muhammad Shah I gravestone but is less elaborate and much simpler than al-Saleh's. This adaptation or combination of al-Saleh's gravestone in Aceh with the unnamed gravestone in Pahang can be seen in the later *Batu Aceh* production in Pahang, such as the gravestone of Raja Fatimah binti Sultan ʿAlā Uddīn I (1495 CE), the gravestone of Sultan ʿAbdul Jalil (1511 CE) and several unidentified gravestones at the *Ziarat Raja Raden* (Plate XI & XII) and *Makam Nibong* (Plate XIII & XIV) burial site in Pahang (Linehan 1936). However, these later productions had alternately switched between the *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth* script or sometimes are not even recognizable, while the decorative elements are in between or combination of al-Saleh's and the un-named gravestone in Pahang. This can also be seen in the *Batu Aceh* gravestone in Johor such as the gravestone of Sultan ʿAlā Uddīn Shah, the Sultan of Malacca from 1477 to 1488 and the un-named gravestone found at Sayong Pinang tagged by Winstedt (1932) as Plate XI (3), Plate XXXIII and Plate XXXIV; and also plate XIV, plate XXIII and plate XXIV that have their own distinct and unique artistic alterations but maintaining the same decorative elements as discussed above. In addition to this, there are several unique gravestones in Johor that are worth discussing.

For example, the unnamed gravestone in Sayong Pinang which Winstedt (1932: 163) claim belonging to a mystic (Plate XIV) based on the inscribed *shahādah "there is no God but Allah"* which is repeated eight times over, while the rest of the inscription is unreadable. Although this gravestone bears no name nor date, the decorative elements are seemingly similar with al-Saleh's but with is own artistic preferences or alterations, as there are no wings/curly shoulders at the side, the top head is flattened without a cap nor tapered like the flower bud motif, and the knot motif above the *shahādah* panel is nowhere to be seen.

Figure 10: *(left)* The un-named mystic gravestone (Plate XIV)
(middle & right) the un-named gravestone (Plate XXIX & XXX)
(From Winstedt 1932)

Furthermore, the mihrab image, the arabesque motif at the bottom band, the shape and the calligraphy script style all match with al-Saleh's but probably bigger and wider in size. This gravestone is similar to the ones in Makam Tok Halus, Perlis (Plate 11, C), gravestone at Kampung Meurassa, Bandar Aceh (Plate 11, D), Makam Che Rial, Pekan, Pahang (Plate 30), Makam Raja Beruas, Perak (Plate 52), Makam Tok Halus, Perlis (Plate 73) and Makam Tok Jaya, Perlis (Plate 74) to name a few; all of which belongs to the Othman Type E attributed to the 15th century production (Yatim 1985). Another gravestone found in Sayong Pinang which is tagged by Winstedt (1932: 166) as Plate XXIX, XXX, XXII and XXXII also has no date of death or name of the deceased but has the same calligraphy script as discussed above (a combination of *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth*). However, this gravestone is unique as the decorative elements located at the top and

bottom band of the gravestone is similar with al-Saleh's, but the shape is different as there are no wings/curly shoulders, and the size is bigger and wider, like the un-named mystic (Plate XIV) discussed earlier. It is unfortunate that the top of the gravestone is damaged and fallen apart which makes it hard to determine the overall design of the gravestone but judging from the inscription which consists mainly of poems and Quran quotations, suggests that it is also a grave of a mystic. Several un-named decorated *Batu Aceh* gravestones are also found in the royal burial site in Bukit Chandan, Perak, where some of them are not included in Yatim's system of classification (Ahmad Helmi et al 2013)

Conclusion

The Islamic artistic repertoires in the Malay Archipelago truly have connections with their Iran, Iraq, Anatolian, and Egypt counterparts which is apparent in their decorative elements, style of design, motif and especially the calligraphy scripts *Muḥaqqaq* and *Thuluth*. Although there are other calligraphy scripts used in the Malay Archipelago during the 11th century, namely floriated, interlaced Kufic and *Thuluth* for gravestone inscriptions in Champa, Brunei, and Java; the decorative elements maintain the same and is evidently used in the *Batu Aceh* gravestones in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular during the 13th but was later altered and combined with local influences for the later *Batu Aceh* productions of the 15th and 18th century. This indicates that the early Islamic decorative elements in the Malay Peninsular before the 15th century was probably crafted by the Arab or Arab-Persian Muslims who were artisans who taught the Islamic artistic repertoire together with the Islamic faith by using the Quran, as is it well-known that the Quran was the holy book for the Muslim, therefore it was decorated beautifully as it contained the word of Allah. However, it is truly unfortunate that none of these early Quran manuscripts were ever found as it would probably be damaged, stolen, kept by families or even in private collections where hopefully in the future, these early Quran would be discovered to help us better understand the development of Islamic art in the Malay Archipelago.

Endnote

[1.] For the terminology and naming of several sections of the Batu Aceh gravestone, we followed Yatim's classifications in which he divided the whole gravestone into three parts, namely the head, body, and foot; and highlighted several key areas such as the top, head, shoulder, body, foot or base and shaft. Refer to Yatim's Fig. 2 & 3 for further clarification (Yatim 1988: 65-68). See also ibid pp. 156

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