Journal of Al-Tamaddun, Vol. 18 (2), 2023, 87-104
https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no2.7

Three Early Islamic Stelae Found in the Malay Archipelago and Its Artistic Relation with the Eastern Islamic World

Muhammad Uzair Ismail,* Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria** & Zuliskandar Ramli***

Abstract

This study examined the decorative elements present on three early Islamic stelae – the Champa Pillar (1035CE), Putri Makhdarah's tombstone (1048CE) and Fatimah's tombstone (1082CE) – which were found in the Malay Archipelago and dated to the eleventh century CE. These objects are of tremendous significance as they are the earliest Islamic evidence in Southeast Asia that indicates Muslim presence in the region. Regrettably, although is it acknowledged that one of the earliest cultural influences that spread towards the Malay Archipelago is Persian, the artistic dimensions of the stelae are rarely discussed in terms of its influence and connection with the eastern Islamic lands after the Muslim conquest in the seventh century CE. This is because previous studies are more concerned with the inscription and material from the archaeological, historical and palaeographic approach rather than art history. Therefore, this study adopted the art historical method where the analysis concerned the development and influence of the Islamic art in the region. Based on the analysis, it was discovered that these stelae have connections in terms of their artistic repertoire, format, type and context of certain motifs used with the ones found in the eastern Islamic lands, namely Iran and Transoxiana. This connection is particularly evident in the type of calligraphy used, involving round script and foliated Kufic, as well as the use of lamp motif *(misbah)* in *mihrab* images. Both have been found to be extensively used in Iran and Transoxiana for tombstones, gravestones, mausoleums, commemorative texts and Quranic manuscripts, contemporary with the development of Islamic art in the region. Hence, the findings from this analysis indicate that the source of Islamic decorative elements used by the Malays in their Islamic art stemmed from Iran and Transoxiana and was heavily rooted in the Turco-Persian influence since the coming of Islam to Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Malay Archipelago, Islamic art, Turco-Persian, Eastern Islamic land, Iran

Introduction

The Malay Archipelago which is located in Southeast Asia is rich and diverse in its history as it was the main sea trading route – known as the *'Spice Route'* – that connects east and west by sea. Due to its strategic location and role in bridging civilisation by trade, religious and diplomatic convoys, the region was exposed to multiple cultural and religious influences even before the advent of Islam. It is believed that the Malay Archipelago had already established relations with the Persians or Iranian lands since the third century CE as Persian traders and merchants from the Parthian Empire (247BC – 224CE) had been frequenting ports in the Malay Archipelago. After the fall of the Parthian Empire, the relation with the Iranian lands had continued under the new rule of the Sasanian Empire (224CE – 651CE/30AH) which is considered the longest-lived Persian dynasty and the last imperial dynasty before the Muslim conquest of Iran by the Rashidun Caliphate from 633 CE/12 AH to 654 CE/34 AH.[1] Due to the vastness of the Sasanian Empire, the Persian culture had become the basis for much of the Islamic culture, particularly in architecture, art, literature, philosophy and music, where Islamic art was treated as the true heir of Sasanian art.[2] With the fall of the Sasanian Empire, the sons of Yazdegered III – the last

* Muhammad Uzair Ismail (PhD), Lecturer, School of the Arts, Fine Art Department, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. Email: uzairismail@usm.my.
** Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria (PhD) (corresponding author), Research Fellow and Head of the Malay Manuscript Research Centre, Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. Email: rosmahwati@ukm.edu.my.
*** Zuliskandar Ramli (PhD), Senior Research Fellow, Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. Email: ziskandar@ukm.edu.my.

[1] Parvaneh Pourshariati (2008), *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, p. 469; Robert L. Canfield (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-5.

[2] 'Abd Al-Husain Zarrinkūb (1999), *Ruzgaran: tarikh-i Iran az aghz ta saqut saltnat Pahlvi*. Tehran: Sukhan, p. 305; Oleg Grabar (1967), "The Visual Arts," in R. N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, p. 362; Katy Kianush (1999), "Persian Art throughout the Centuries: The Sasanians contd.," accessed on 3rd June 2021, http://www.artarena.force9.co.uk/sass2.htm.

Sasanian King (632-651CE/11-30AH) – Peroz and Bahram fled to Tang, China, while some of the Persian nobles settled in Central Asia and contributed greatly towards spreading the Persian culture and language in the regions. Their exodus then helped to establish the Samanid dynasty which was the first native Iranian Islamic dynasty that sought to revive the Sassanid traditions into the fold of the Islamic world and the formation of the Turco-Persian culture.[3]

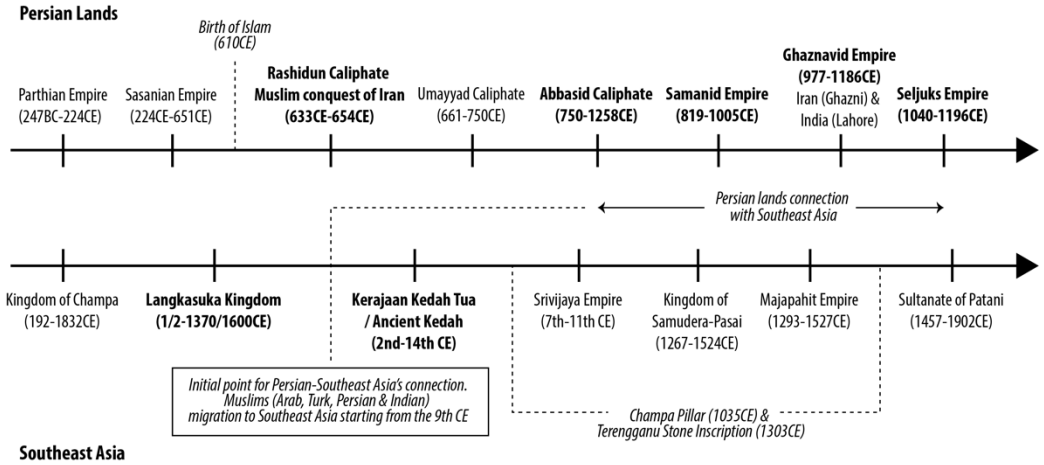
The Turco-Persian culture (or also known as Turco-Persian tradition) is defined by Canfield[4] as an Islamicate culture that was an ecumenical mix of Arabic, Persian and Turkic elements. The "Persianate" attribute underscores its intellectual lineage to a lettered tradition of Iranian origin, while its Turkish (or Turkic) attribute signifies the sustained patronage it received for many generations from rulers of Turkic ancestry, and the "Islamicate" attribute embodies the Islamic quality integrated through the principles of virtue, permanence, and excellence which were infused into the broader societal discourse as well as the religious affairs of the Muslims, who were the presiding elite. This Islamicate culture melded in the ninth and tenth centuries CE in eastern Iranian regions, namely Khurasan and Transoxiana. However, in terms of artistic tradition, the Turco-Persian culture is a mixture of Arabic and Persian (Sasanian) motifs with several other local influences (depending on region and local religion), which was transformed in terms of shape, characteristics and meaning in accordance with the teachings of Islam. The term "Islamicate" was preferred by Canfield[5] to define the Turco-Persian culture as the eastern Islamic lands of the caliphate in the early seventh to eleventh centuries CE were ethnically and religiously very diverse, where Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians still existed in fair numbers along with several minority Islamic sects. This means that even though the Muslims were culturally dominant, and the other inhabitants of the region were heavily influenced by Islam, they were not specifically adherents of the religion of Islam. This is also evident in the use of the term *'Ta-shi'* or *'Dashi'* in Chinese records – particularly the *Song shi* – which is now understood as referring to people from all countries that were conquered by the Muslim Arabs and not limited solely to the Arabs.[6] This would include Lahore as it had become the capital for the Muslim Ghaznavid Dynasty by the twelfth century CE. The Ghaznavid Dynasty, who originated from Central Asia and practised the Turco-Persian culture, was of Turkic origins. Consequently, the term would also be referring to Turkic Muslims or even the non-Muslims living in the lands ruled by Muslims and geographically, this includes parts of what is now known as Pakistan and even north-west India.[7]

The use of the term Islamicate is therefore historically accurate as the Turco-Persian Islamicate culture that emerged under the Samanids and the Qarakhanids was carried by succeeding dynasties into western and southern Asia, particularly by the Seljuks (1040-1118CE/431-512AH) and their successor states who presided over Iran, Syria and Anatolia until the thirteenth century CE (597-700AH), and by the Ghaznavids who in the same period dominated Afghanistan and India.[8] As the successors of the Qarakhanid Dynasty in Transoxiana, the Seljuks brought the Turco-Persian culture westwards into Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, Syria and also Khurasan after they won a decisive battle with the Ghaznavids. This turned western Iran (Persia) and eastern Iran (Khurasan and Transoxiana) into the heartland of Persianate language and culture, where it was carried further by the Seljuks beyond the heartland. They also made it the culture of their courts in the region to as far west as the Mediterranean Sea. The Ghaznavids on the other hand were the first to carry the Islamicate culture of Khurasan and Transoxiana to the Indian subcontinent as they moved their capital from Ghazni in Afghanistan to Lahore. Bosworth[9] defined it as the most powerful empire in the east after the Abbasid caliphate and its capital (Ghazni) became second only to Baghdad in cultural elegance. The Ghaznavids transformed the region into another centre of Islamicate culture, where poets and scholars from Kashgar, Bukhara, Samarqand, Baghdad, Nishapur and Ghazni congregated in Lahore.[10] It is also believed that the Ghaznavids were the ones responsible for spreading the Turco-Persian culture deep across India and further towards the

[3] Matteo Compareti (2009), "Chinese-Iranian Relations xv. The last Sasanians in China," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed on 3rd June 2021, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/china-xv-the-last-sasanians-in-china; Robert L. Canfield (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, pp. 6-12
[4] Canfield (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, p. 12
[5] Canfield (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, p. 12
[6] Stephen G. Haw (2018), "Islam in Champa and the Making of Factitious History," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 723
[7] Haw (2018), "Islam in Champa," p. 723
[8] Canfield (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, pp. 13-14
[9] Clifford Edmund Bosworth (1975), "The Early Ghaznavid," in R. N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, p. 180.
[10] Canfield (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, p. 13.

east in the eleventh and thirteenth century CE (391-494AH & 597-700AH) to regions as far as the southern island of the Philippines.[11] Figure 1 shows the initial point of connection for the Persian-Southeast Asian interaction (which began during the Abbasid Caliphate and the Langkasuka Kingdom), where bold letters highlight the related Islamic dynasties in Persia (Iran) and their contemporary kingdoms and empires in Southeast Asia.

Figure 1: Historical timeline for the Persian-Southeast Asia's initial point of connection



Source: Muhammad Uzair Ismail (2023)

Before continuing with the discussion, it is vital to first explain the term 'stelae' that is used to describe the three archaeological objects discussed in this study to avoid confusion. The archaeological term 'stele' (singular) or 'stelae (plural) is used because the objects studied consist of one stone pillar and two tombstones. For this reason, it is not suitable to label the Champa Pillar as a tombstone as it does not function as a memorial for the deceased, but to commemorate an event that happened. Hence, the more suitable term is 'stele', which can be defined as a stone or wooden slab that is often inscribed with text or ornaments (or both) and used for commemorative or funerary purposes.[12] Although it would be more appropriate to label Putri Makhdarah's (1048CE/440AH) and Fatimah's (1082CE/475AH) burial markings as 'tombstones' as the term is more direct and precise, the two terms are closely related where 'tombstones' are the modern equivalent of 'stelae'.[13] Therefore, the term 'stelae is used in this study to refer to the objects (in groups) as it is considered more appropriate.

Interestingly, one of the earliest[14] Islamic stelae that indicates the presence of Turkic people – or Muslims in general – and the spread of Turco-Persian culture in the Malay Archipelago is the Champa Pillar. The Champa Pillar, dated 1035 CE (426AH), was discovered in the Phan Rang region of Champa, which corresponds to modern-day southern Vietnam. The discovery of the pillar highlights the existence of a small Muslim community in the region who had previously served under the most powerful and illustrious ruler of the eleventh century CE in India, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 971-1030CE/360-421AH).[15] The land where the pillar was discovered once belonged to the Chams, an ancient people of the Malayo-Polynesia race, who are mostly Muslims and a matrilineal society that has very close ethnological, linguistic, cultural and historical ties with the Malays of the Peninsula and the Archipelago,[16] where some had fled to Kelantan and Terengganu and brought together with them

[11] Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot (2006), *India Before Europe*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, p. 24; Canfield (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, pp. 13-15

[12] Dominique Collon et al. (2019), "Stele," *Grove Art Online*, accessed on 18 July 2023, https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/display/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000081249.

[13] Collon et al. (2019), "Stele," *Grove Art Online*.

[14] Sayyid Qudratullah Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, pp. 42-44; Pierre-Yves Manguin (1985), "The Introduction of Islam into Campa," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (248), pp. 1-2; Othman Yatim and Abdul Halim Nasir (1990), *Epigrafi Islam Terawal di Nusantara*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka & Kementerian Pendidikan Pendidikan Malaysia, pp. 6-7 & 14-16; Zakaria Ali (1994), *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia, 830 A.D.-1570 A.D.*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka & Ministry of Education Malaysia, pp. 19-26; Othman Yatim (1998), "The Early Islamic Period," in Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Early History*, Singapore: Didier Millet, p. 126; Rie Nakamura (2000), "The Coming of Islam to Champa," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,* Vol. 73, No. 1, p. 58; Yusof Ahmad Talib (2011), "Islam in South-East Asia," in Idris El Hareir and El Hadji Ravane M'Baye (eds.). *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture: The Spread of Islam Throughout the World*, Vol. 3, Paris: UNESCO, p. 701.

[15] Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, pp. 48, 50.

[16] Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, pp. 42-43.

their long artistic tradition.[17] The flight of the Muslims or Chams might have facilitated the spread of Turco-Persian cultural influence further to the east coast region of the Malay Peninsula. It later contributed towards the development of Malay Islamic art through its adoption and merger with the existing traditional Malay art in Kelantan, Terengganu and Patani – the cultural centre for Malay art – which was inherited from Ligor and Langkasuka.[18] This is attributed to the fact that Quranic manuscripts found in the east coast region share similarities in terms of their artistic style, technical attributes and production techniques with the ones from Turkey, India, Iran and Central Asia.[19] Furthermore, although the pillar consists mainly of epitaph, the calligraphy script used is of immense importance as it provides hints towards the artistic development. At the same time, it also narrates the existence of a small community of merchants and craftsmen – led by a leader/representative known as *"Shaikh al-sūq"* (Chief of the Market) and assisted by the *Naqīb* (the Chamberlain) and an individual known only as "Turk Bay 'Ali"[20] – in the region and the initiation ceremony into the minor Arts and Crafts' Guild known as *shadd al-Walad* (the act of binding the apprentice).[21] The Turco-Persian presence in the region is further strengthened by the discovery of Putri Makhdarah (Roqayah) binti Ali's tombstone (1048CE/440AH) in Brunei and the tombstone of Fatimah (1082CE/475AH) in Leran, Jawa. These two tombstones are particularly interesting as they are the earliest tombstones in the Malay Archipelago region adorned with motifs and calligraphy.

Even though these monuments are important towards understanding the historical development of Islamic art in the Malay Archipelago, they are rarely analysed from an art historical perspective and are often neglected as they are treated as stone ballast that were carried from elsewhere.[22] Due to such treatment, these objects were believed to have no connection or significance towards the development of Islamic culture in this region. Fatimi[23] disagreed with this viewpoint and asserted that the full significance of these earlier monuments has not yet been realised, as greater importance has been given to Malik al-Salih tombstone which was dated later by more than two hundred years. The reason behind this neglect is that Islam is often associated with the existence of a Muslim empire; however Islam in Southeast Asia did not give rise to empires like the Umayyad or an Abbasid, Fatimid Caliphate or a Mughal Empire.[24] However, the names engraved on these early objects indicate that the individuals were not local Muslim converts, but Muslims from elsewhere who came to these lands.[25] Despite this, previous analysis have often overlooked the visual information that is available on the monuments that hints towards an artistic relation with the eastern Islamic lands. Even though it is acknowledged that the Arab and Persian languages had a significant impact on and influenced the Malay language in terms of loanwords, philosophical concepts and meaning, royal court culture, politics, and trade, and played a significant role in shaping the culture,[26] the connection of Persian influence to Islamic art in the Malay

[17] Mubin Sheppard (1972), *Taman Indera: Malay Decorative Arts and Pastimes*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, p. 14.
[18] Annabel Teh Gallop (2005), "The Spirit of Langkasuka? Illuminated Manuscripts from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 33, No. 96, pp. 113-182; Farish Noor and Eddin Khoo (2003), *Spirit of Wood: The Art of Malay Woodcarving*, Singapore: Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd, pp. 11, 154-160; Sheppard (1972), *Taman Indera*, p. 15.
[19] Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria and Zuliskandar Ramli (2018), "The Study of the Nineteenth-Century AD East Coast Red Qur'an Bindings," in Mohd Rohaizat Abdul Wahab et al. (eds.), *Selected Topics on Archaeology, History and Culture in the Malay World*, Singapore: Springer, pp. 189-200; Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria and Zuliskandar Ramli (2018), "Nondestructive Analysis Tests to Evaluate the Property of Quran Bindings," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 425-446; Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria (2018), "Cotton Binding of the Quran from the East Coast Malay Peninsula before 20th Century: A Historical Study," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 112-120; Annabel Teh Gallop (2018), ""Meandering Clouds": The Arabesque in Malay Manuscript Art," in Dr. Muhammad Isa Waley (ed.), *The Arabesque: An Introduction*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, pp. 97-104; Annabel Teh Gallop (2005) "The Spirit of Langkasuka?"; Ali Akbar (2015), "The Influence of Ottoman Qur'ans in Southeast Asia Through the Ages," in A. C. S. Peacock and Annabel Teh Gallop (eds.), *From Anatolia to Aceh: Ottomans, Turks and Southeast Asia*, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, pp. 311-334; Dzul Haimi Md. Zain (2007), *Ragam Hias al-Qur'an di Alam Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications; Dzul Haimi Md. Zain (1997), "Safavid Qur'ans: Style and Illumination," Doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh; Huism Tan (2003), "Qur'anic Inscriptions on woodcarvings from the Malay Peninsula," in F. Suleman (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and Its Creative Expressions. Selected Proceedings from the International Colloquium*, London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, pp. 205-215.
[20] Ravaisse as cited by Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, pp. 43 & 45. *'Bay'* or *'Bey/Beg'* is a Turkic honorific tittle for a chieftain traditionally used for people with lineages that connects them with leaders or rulers of various Turkic kingdoms, emirates, sultanates and empire in Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Other than this, it also means 'sir' or mister', see Mehmet Fuad Köprülü (1992), *The Origins of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. Gary Leiser, USA: State University of New York Press; Orhan F. Köprülü (1992), "Bey" *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed on 3rd June 2021, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/bey.
[21] Ravaisse as cited by Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, p. 48.
[22] Haw (2018), "Islam in Champa," p. 726 (see footnote 64); Ludvik Kalus and Claude Guillot (2004), "Réinterprétation des plus anciennes stèles funéraires islamiques nousantariennes: II. La stèle de Leran (Java) datée de 475/1082 et les stèles associées," *Archipel*, Vol. 67, No. 1, pp. 17-36.
[23] Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, p. 38.
[24] Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, p. 38.
[25] Othman and Abdul Halim (1990), *Epigrafi Islam Terawal di Nusantara*, p. 8.
[26] Syed Farid Alatas and Abdolreza Alami (eds.) (2018), *The Civilisational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and the Malay World: A Cultural Discourse*, Kuala Lumpur: Gerakbudaya Enterprise & Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Syed Muhammad Naquib

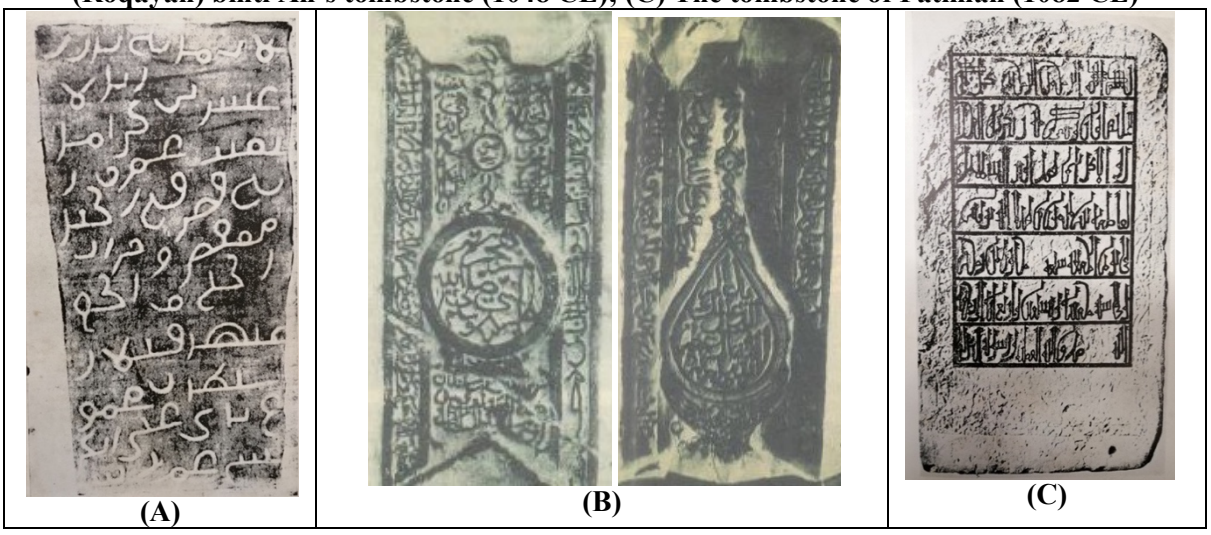
Archipelago has never been investigated to the researcher's knowledge. Therefore, this study aimed to fill that gap by analysing the early Islamic monuments in the Malay Archipelago to determine whether or not these objects have artistic ties with the eastern Islamic lands.

Methodology

The art history method was adopted to analyse the decorative elements of the early stelae in this study. These elements range from calligraphy script, motif, format, type of text and the stylisation of letters and its characteristics. This method is suitable as it has been used by many Islamic art scholars who studied Islamic art in a specified region, dynasty and period – often chronologically – in order to understand its development, influence and dissemination to other parts of the Islamic world in a detailed manner.[27] Grabar[28] provided a more comprehensive definition of the method, where he defined it as a method that analyses the different qualitative variations of man-made objects which can be measured in terms of the manufacturing techniques and other connotations; including style that encompasses composition, proportion, and colour, and mode which is a complex combination of both style and subject matter. For this reason, the art historical method is favoured by Islamic scholars including Whelan[29] who pioneered this method in her study on Islamic manuscript where she sought to distinguish two groups of early Quranic manuscripts written in angular scripts. The method was then furthered by Blair[30] in her analysis of the development of scripts text – angular script, round script and broken cursive – used for scribing the Holy Quran and other non-religious texts. Additionally, Blair also applied this method for her analysis of the historical text, religious inscriptions, language and style for the corpus of the architectural and commemorative inscriptions from Iran and Transoxiana that survived the first five centuries of the Muslim Era (622-1106CE/1-499AH) where the regions spanned from the Mesopotamia to Transoxiana, and extended from the Persian Gulf to the Caucasus.[31] In light of this, the art historical approach is considered suitable for this present study which sought to analyse the decorative elements of three early monuments in the Malay Archipelago region through stylistic comparison, with the aim of determining the source of their influence.

The Pillar and the Two Tombstones

Figure 2: (A) The Champa Pillar (1035 CE); (B) The front and back view of Putri Makhdarah (Roqayah) binti Ali's tombstone (1048 CE); (C) The tombstone of Fatimah (1082 CE)



Source: Islamic Art in Southeast Asia, 830AD – 1570AD (1994) & Islām Comes to Malaysia (1963)

Al-Attas (2011), *Historical Fact and Fiction*, Kuala Lumpur: UTM Press; Hamilton Alexander Rossken Gibb (2010), *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, Vol. 4, England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman and Zuliskandar Ramli (2010), "Hubungan Asia Barat dengan Alam Melayu Berdasarkan Bukti Arkeologi Abad ke-9 hingga ke-14M," *Sari-International Journal of the Malay World and Civilisation*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 403-426.

[27] Sheila S. Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 105-115; Peter Delius and Markus Hattstein (2004) *Islam: Art and Architecture*, Italy: Könemann, p. 9.

[28] Oleg Grabar (2006), *Islamic Art and Beyond*, Vol. 3, England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, p. 255.

[29] Estelle Whelan (1990), *Writing the Word of God: Some Early Qur'an Manuscripts and Their Milieux, Part 1,* Ars Orientalis, pp. 113-147.

[30] Sheila S. Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy,* pp. 105-115.

[31] Sheila S. Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, Vol. 5, Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp. 3-14.

Prior to this present study, both the tombstones and the Champa Pillar have been studied and elaborated thoroughly by previous scholars. Therefore, aspects such as originality, doubts, translation of the epitaph, and its historical background would not be discussed further in this study as these topics have already been dealt with.[32] The focus of this study would primarily be on the decorative elements of the monuments in terms of the calligraphy script used, its characteristics, format, type of text, and the motifs used. The decorative elements of each monument are simplified in Table 1.

Table 1: The distinctive features of each monument studied

The Champa Pillar (1035CE/426AH) (A)	**Putri Makhdarah's Tombstone (1048CE/440AH) (B)**	**Fatimah's Tombstone (1082CE/475AH) (C)**
Vertical format stela	Vertical format stela	Vertical format stela
Kufic	Round script	Foliated & Interlaced Kufic
Has 10 lines (even number) of horizontal paragraph.	**Front view:** Two vertical paragraphs on the left and right, several horizontal paragraphs in the middle and one inside the round shaped object. **Back view:** Four vertical paragraphs, and one horizontal paragraph in the teardrop- shaped object.	Has 7 lines (odd number) of horizontal paragraph which are separated by lines.
Fairly spaced and uniform big letters with thick strokes.	Tightly cramped and uniform letters with medium-thin strokes.	Proportioned and uniform letters but with thinner strokes.
The scripts are rounded, and the tails are shorter.	Elongated end tails for *yā, lām, kāf, wāw* and *ra'*	Vertical letters are angled at 45□ degrees. The tails of end letters are short and slightly curved. Certain letters in the first and second paragraphs are interlaced with other letters to have swan-like appearance.
The tails of *ra',yā'* and *nun* are in the form of small *dāl/dhāl.*	The tail of *yā* has a longer stroke that returns to the right.	The initial and end of *alif* and *lām* have a diamond or bifurcating terminal shape on the top left and right. The end tails of certain letters are interlaced vertically and continuously at the same height with *alif,* while some are separated. Certain interlaced vertical letters are curved towards the left and right. The end tails of *ra'* and *wāu* are shallow like small *dāl/dhāl,* but the end tail of *yā* is raised vertically at the same height as *alif* and *lām.*

[32] Muhammad Uzair Ismail, Zuliskandar Ramli and Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria (2021), "The Champa Pillar (1035 CE) and its Possible Connection with the Turkic Dynasties," *Islāmiyyāt*, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 93-104; Haw (2018), "Islam in Champa," ; Abdeljaouad Lotfi (2012), "Nouvelles considérations sur les deux inscriptions arabes dites du «Champa»," *Archipel*, Vol. 83, No. 1, pp. 53-71; Ludvik Kalus (2003), "Réinterprétation des plus anciennes stèles funéraires islamiques nousantariennes: I. Les deux inscriptions du «Champa,"" *Archipel*, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp. 63-90; Zakaria (1994), *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia*; Othman and Abdul Halim (1990), *Epigrafi Islam Terawal di Nusantara*; Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*.

Mainly epitaph	Main decorative element consists of a round and a teardrop-shaped object hanging from a chain. A sculptured lotus bud adorns the top of the stela.	Decorative elements consist of a night lamp *(misbah)* with a round band, neck strangled, flared office and suspended by three chains at the top of the niche. These elements are protected within the framework of the inscription. The lamp is engraved between the words *bismi Allah al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim kulli man*. A faintly visible arabesque foliage surrounds the epitaph.

Based on Table 1, the distinctive feature of each stele was achieved through a combination of visual analysis and reference to previous studies. This is because the whereabouts of these objects today are not known, with some having been lost. Consequently, images and photogravure from previous studies serve as the sole reference for these early Islamic stelae. It is essential that reference is made to previous studies as they offer several additional information and characteristics of the monuments which are not apparent in either the photographs or photogravure. These details are only known and visible through direct physical analysis and observation of the monuments themselves. For example, the motifs on Fatimah's tombstone in Leran, Jawa have only been described in detail by Ravaisse, but his account has been contested by Kalus and Guillot[33] who considered the description unreliable, citing that the motifs were only visible and accessible to Ravaisse. However unfortunate, Ravaisse's description should not be disregarded as without importance since evidence supporting his claim could potentially be achieved by cross-examining other Islamic objects or monuments that have actual confirmed dates that align with the period of Fatimah's tombstone. Hence, in this study, Fatimah's tombstone was examined and compared with the early Islamic stelae tombstones or objects found in the eastern Islamic lands where the area involved spanned from the Mesopotamian valley and the eastern Anatolian or Caucasian mountains to the Tarim basin in western China or the valleys of northern India. Occasionally, specific individual provinces of interest such as Fars or Jibal in western Iran or the Bukhara oasis in the east within the aforementioned area[34] were considered as the connection between the Malay Archipelago and the Persian land has been previously established. To accomplish this, Ravaisse's description as presented below should be cited for the analysis:

> Exactly in the middle of the first register, a vaguely ovoid-shaped flat, which is wider at the base than at the top and whose two diameters measure 9cm in height and 7cm in width, is clearly visible on the moulding, not on the photogravure. The surface of this flat surface shows only muddled remnants of protrusions in which it is impossible to recognize any features recalling anything from a letter or an ornament. Considering only the contours of what seems to have contained a figurative thing, one gets the impression that, in the field of this surface which surprises by its geometric aspect, was engraved – like what one sometimes meets in the upper part of a funerary inscription – a night lamp known as misbah, with a round band, neck strangled, flared orifice and pile of more or less height and attitude, suspended by three chains at the top of a niche protected within the framework of the inscription. This lamp, brushing at the same time on the upper register, cuts through the middle the line inscribed, between the words bismi allah al-Rahman on the one hand, and al-rahim kulli man on the other, leaving it a space sufficient with 13cm on the left and as many on the right for a number of characters almost equal on equal side.[35]

[33] Ravaisse as cited by Kalus and Guillot (2004), "Réinterprétation des plus anciennes," pp. 17-36.
[34] Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina (2001), *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, p. 105.
[35] Ravaisse as cited by Kalus and Guillot (2004), "Réinterprétation des plus anciennes," pp. 24-26. English translation from French is ours.

In reference to Ravaisse's description above, the night lamp *(misbah)* which he referred to as a *"vaguely ovoid-shaped flat object, which is wider at the base than at the top"* and *"like what one sometimes meets in the upper part of a funerary inscription"* might be referring to the lamp motif often found on funerary inscription known as *"mihrab* image."[36] The *mihrab* image should not be confused with the niche *mihrab* in mosques which is defined as a functional space and an orientational device that points towards the *qibla*, the sacred focal point of the faith for Muslims which they face during prayers. In contrast, the *mihrab* image serves as a commemoration sign that indicates different types of commemorative acts through the variations in their own forms, inscriptions and motifs. These *mihrab* images consist of a composition that usually incorporates depictions of lamps often flanked by candlesticks and suspended beneath an arch where the composition is usually framed with inscriptions and verses of the holy Quran, such as Surah Al-Nur (the Light Verse, 24:35) and the *Ayat al-Kursī* (the Throne Verse, 2:255) – although it is not standard – to name a few.[37] It is commonly found in many parts of the Islamic world, where variations of this composition can be found in Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Yemen from the late eleventh century CE onwards.[38] These flat *mihrab* images which are also referred to as *'shakl mihrāb'* (*mihrab* shape) and *sūrat mihrāb* (*mihrab* image) in medieval description are primarily illustrations that often appear in mausoleum, tombstones, cenotaphs and a variety of shrine-related objects. This suggests that the *mihrab* image relates to death and eschatology, which is further confirmed by the texts that codify rules pertaining to death, burial and commemoration.[39]

Intriguingly, Ravaisse made no mention of the candlestick motif while discussing the hanging lamp, despite it occasionally being found accompanying the hanging lamp. Although the inclusion of candlesticks with the hanging lamp is not obligatory, this absence in Ravaisse's account indicates a possible relationship in terms of the artistic repertoires as different regions have a certain variation that is linked with it. Hence, according to Khoury,[40] *mihrab* images that are devoid of candlesticks come from thirteenth-century CE Iran, where one of the examples can be seen on the two lustre *mihrabs* of Imam Riza at Mashdad of which one is dated 1215CE/612AH.

Figure 3: Tile panel of the *mihrab* image from the tomb of Sufi Shaikh 'Abd al-Samad in Natanz (First half of the 14th century)

Source:https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/445953?where=Kashan&ao=on&ft=*&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=20 (Public domain)

[36] Nuha N. N. Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image: Commemorative Themes in Medieval Islamic Architecture," *Muqarnas Online*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 11-12.
[37] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," pp. 11-12.
[38] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 11.
[39] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 12.
[40] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 14.

These *mihrab* images are commonly composed of several inscribed rectangular frames within which are a series of inscribed and slightly recessed arches. The smallest and innermost of these arches is a trefoil inside a slightly keel-shaped arch beneath a stepped *muqarnas* arch. In the innermost point of this architectural composition lies the image of a small hanging lamp suspended by chain, situated beneath the trefoil arch, and the Throne Verse is inscribed around the lamp.[41] In addition, a similar example can also be found in the thirteenth-century CE *mihrabs* from Qum and Nejef (Iran and Iraq, respectively) but with different variations in terms of the innermost arch and the suspended lamp. The same arrangement can also be seen on a lustre *mihrab* – which is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection – dated to the first half of the fourteenth century CE that was used to adorn the tomb of Sufi Shaikh 'Abd al-Samad in Natanz (Figure 3). The Throne Verse which is inscribed on the wide margin framing the composition is completed in the space below the lamp. There are also several smaller *mihrab* images and plaques that bear close resemblance with the ones aforementioned in terms of the lamp motif hanging by a chain (often three) and inscriptions surrounding the framing composition. These smaller *mihrab* images and plaques are believed to be a part of a larger composition. This indicates that a smaller version of the *mihrab* image on tiles exists and can be easily transported from one place to another.

In addition to the identified similarities between Fatimah's tombstone in Leran, Jawa with the ones found in Iran and Iraq, the link between the two is further strengthened by Fatimah's epitaph which mentioned that Fatimah is a martyr *(al-syahid)*.[42] Although Ravaisse challenged Moquette's translation by interpreting the word *'al-syahid'* as *'al-Mutawaqqiya'* (meaning the protected or the deceased),[43] Al-Attas defended Moquette's translation by clarifying that it is a well-known tradition of the Holy Prophet that mentions one who dies away from home or in a foreign land in the cause of Islam dies a martyr.[44] It is for this reason that Fatimah's tombstone is adorned with the *mihrab* image which is usually used to indicate the presence of some special quality of sanctity associated to a person or to commemorate an identifiable person, while the lamp motif is a respectful gesture to honour her status as a martyr, where their soul is transported to the highest sphere of Heaven immediately upon death on judgement day and spends the interval between death and final resurrection *(barzakh)* in a state of bliss in proximity to Allah.[45] Khoury further elaborated that this idea is expressed in Surah Ali 'Imran in the verse that mentioned *"and never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allāh as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision"* (Quran 3:169), which was revealed following the battle of Uhud, and also echoed in a Hadith narrated by Abu Dawud as follows: "When your brothers were killed in the battle of Uhud, God deposited their souls inside green bird that drink of the rivers of paradise and eat of its fruits, then take shelter in gold lamps (qanadil) that hang in the shadow of (God's) Throne."[46]

According to Khoury, *'qanadil'* refers to a special object, a vessel of light or reliquaries, or a container or images of souls which derive their luminosity from their content, not from external factors. Due to this, the *qanadil* is often associated with mystical light, a reflection of the *baraka* of saints – that can be represented but cannot be seen – which makes the *qanadil* (or the lamp motif) a fundamental motif to represent the miraculous phenomena that occur in tombs and shrines.[47] She also concluded that these motifs originated from the Islamic artistic traditional as other motifs, for instance Coptic, appeared relatively late and did not affect the initial development of the Islamic iconography of death.[48] Another indicator that relates Fatimah's tombstone with the eastern Islamic lands is the similarity in the style or format of the commemorative text and the use of specific Quranic inscriptions related to death on tombs or tombstones in the lands. According to Blair, almost all commemorative texts found in the eastern Islamic lands usually begin with the full form of the Basmala "In the name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate" or the shortened form "In the name of God" if space was limited, while the most used Quranic verse about death on tombs is from surah Ar-Rahman, verse twenty-six to twenty-seven (Quran 55:26-27) which was found, among other places, at the tomb tower at Radkan West, Iran, dated 1016-21 CE (407-412AH) and on the mausoleum of Mir Sayyid Bahram at Kermine/Karmana near Navoiy,

[41] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 14.
[42] Moquette as cited by Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, p. 40.
[43] Ravaisse as cited by Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, p. 41.
[44] Al-Attas (2011), *Historical Fact and Fiction*, p. 27.
[45] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 18.
[46] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 18.
[47] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 19.
[48] Khoury (1991), "The Mihrab Image," p. 19.

Uzkebistan, dated 1106 CE (499AH) for the latter.[49] The same format is seen on Fatimah's tombstone, where the epitaph begins with the full form of the Basmala followed by Surah Ar-Rahman 55:26-27 and proceeds to her honorary title as a martyr and full name together with the name of her father and grandfather as follows: "In the name of God Most Gracious, Most Merciful. All that is on earth will perish. But will abide forever the Face of thy Lord, full of majesty, bounty and honour. This is the grave of the martyr Fātimah binti Maimūn bin Hibat Allāh…"[50]

The short lineage inscribed together with Fatimah's name on the epitaphs – which, according to Blair is useful in charting ethic and social history – shares the same format with a restoration inscription written in Arabic found in Bahmandiz, Iran by Khazim b. Muhammad b. Khazim, dated 878-879 CE (264-265AH). Blair suggested that the way the inscription was written evidently indicates that the individual is a third generation Muslim, and his family must have been among the early converts to Islam,[51] and this same treatment could have also been given to Fatimah. Although the full name of Fatimah and Khazim suggests that both were Muslims and not Persians (at least for Khazim), there is the probability that Fatimah's ethnicity is either Arab, Kurdish, Iranian or Turkic. In addition, the artistic repertoires and format of the epitaphs suggest an intimate relation with the lands. However, the calligraphy script of Khazim's inscription is different than Fatimah's as the latter is dated much earlier. This corresponds with a shift in the calligraphy script used for monuments in Iran and Transoxiana from an angular to a round and cursive script in the early eleventh century CE, marked by the lead plaque from the minaret at Gurganj/Konye-Urgench, Turkmenistan, dated 1010-1011 CE (400-401AH).

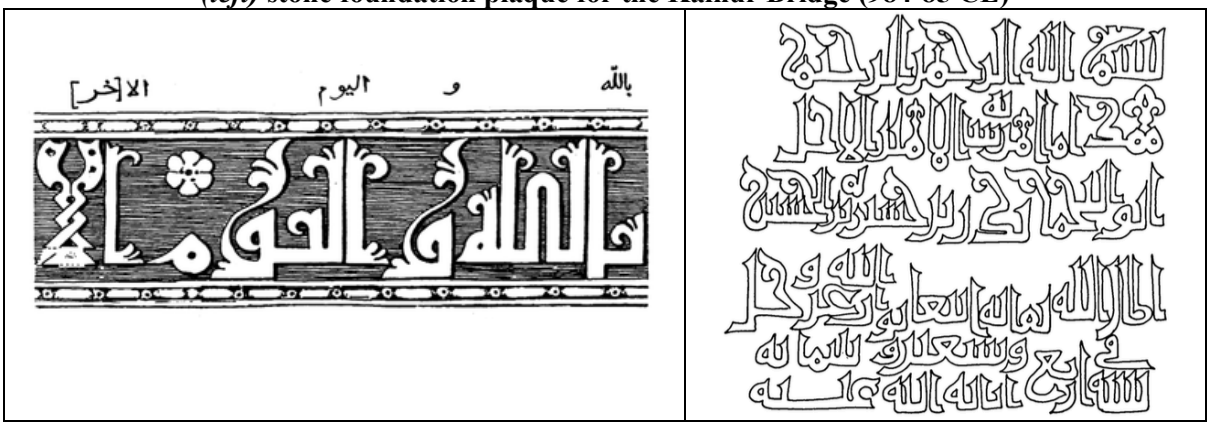
The change to the round script was also highlighted by Ravaisse when he studied Fatimah's inscription; he mentioned that although the epitaph is written in Kufic, the script was later abandoned in the thirteenth century CE as the round script had emerged, evident by the Pasai and Gresik tombstones of the thirteenth (597-700AH) and fifteenth centuries CE (803-906AH).[52] He further argued that the script used for the Terengganu monument *(Batu Bersurat Terengganu)* showed similarities with *Ta'liq* but was fast developing into *Nasta'liq* in the fourteenth century CE (700-803AH). This script was favoured by the Persians as their own distinctive way of employing the Arabic script. Ravaisse believed that the Persian influence had spread from the Indian subcontinent towards Malaysia during this time, which, he suggested, accounts for the similarities between the scripts used in the two lands. Ravaisse based his claim on B. Moritz's study where the latter mentioned that: "the Malay Archipelago like India first received Islam from the Persians, whose place was later taken by Southern Arabs…"[53] Unfortunately, Ravaisse, Fatimi and Ali did not elaborate further on the calligraphy script of Fatimah's epitaph even though they had noticed the Persian or Iranian connection.

According to Blair, the angular Kufic script which was used in the ninth (184-288AH) until eleventh century CE (391-494AH) was believed to have developed from the rectilinear script of the chancery hands into the artistic styles of the round script known sometimes as 'bookish script'. This is because the script was used in early Islamic times by copyist for transcribing non-Quranic texts and codices as it was faster and more efficient than the stately Kufic, and over time, this script was gradually stylised and developed into a mannered variant known as 'broken cursive', which represented an independent stylisation from basic rounded handwriting.[54] These scripts are also known as eastern Kufic, Iranian Kufic, Persian Kufic, eastern Persian Kufic or even more distinct names such as late or flowering Kufic, bent Kufic and broken Kufic as they are usually associated with manuscripts transcribed in the eastern Islamic lands and derived from Kufic.[55] The key focus of the round script was ensuring legibility in correspondence. Therefore, the letters were grouped in words, where possible ambiguous or important words like proper names were pointed. Due to this, the round script was used for official purposes in Iran and Central Asia, and at the same time, it was adopted for transcribing the Quran, and slightly later for monumental inscriptions in Iran and several other media in the eastern Islamic lands from the late ninth (184-288AH) or early tenth century CE (288-391AH).[56] Among these scripts, the foliated and interlaced Kufic – which is one of the variants of the broken cursive script – had become popular in

[49] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, p. 85.
[50] Zakaria (1994), *Islamic art in Southeast Asia*, p. 335.
[51] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, p. 7.
[52] Ravaisse as cited by Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, p. 41-42.
[53] Moritz as cited by Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, see footnote (16), p. 42.
[54] Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 144-145.
[55] Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 144.
[56] Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, pp. 144-145.

epigraphy for pious or Quranic inscriptions in Iran, and it was used by artisans to fill the upper void of inscriptions by decorating the tops of stems or tails of letters with bumps, barbs, hooks and bevels that add a pleasing rhythm to the band. As such, the foliated Kufic is characterised by the stems of the letters which were decorated with half-palmettes, double or triple-lobed leaves, and bifurcated terminals.[57]

Figure 4: *(right)* Inscription in the stucco bands of Masjid-i Jāmi at Na'in, Iran (c. 960 CE), and *(left)* stone foundation plaque for the Kalhur Bridge (984-85 CE)



Source: The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana (1992) & A Sāmānid Tombstone from Nīshāpūr (1986)

Several examples of the foliated Kufic script which bare close resemblance with Fatimah's inscription can be seen in the stucco bands found in the Masjid-i Jāmi' at Na'in (dated circa 960CE/349AH) and the two stone foundation plaques found in western Iran for the Kalhur Bridge *(Pul-i Kalhur)* (dated 984-985CE/374-375AH) on the Kashkān River and the other for the Maiden's Bridge *(Pul-i Dukhtar)* (dated 1008-1009CE/398-399AH) in the Chagnī district, both of which are located in the district of Luristān near Khurramābad (Figure 4).[58] In addition, although not visually identical, a fragment of an alabaster tombstone found in Nishapur, eastern Iran that was dated to the second half of the tenth century CE (no. M.73.5.246) – which is believed to be the only known example of foliated Kufic script from the Samanid period that has survived – also shares certain similarities with Fatimah's inscription. This is particularly in relation to the type of script used and the characteristics of the letters that have bifurcating terminal at the top although the height of the letters differs.[59] The similarities between Fatimah's tombstone with the aforementioned examples are vividly apparent, particularly in the stylisation of certain letters that is elongated to have swan-neck like appearance, and the basic characteristic of the broken cursive script where the letters are set closely together with little space between groups. The script is also markedly diagonal, as the body, tails, and upper strokes of many letters are pitched at a 45□ angle to the ruled baseline where the bodies of looped letters are triangular. The letters are also occasionally connected by a notch or 'V' that descends below the flat base line. The final *alif* also ends in a point, where it and many other ascenders have a small triangular serif added at the top left or right and sometimes bifurcated. The strokes also varies in thickness, and the tails of certain letters such as *wāu, ra' and lām* are short like *dāl.*

Interestingly, the stylisation of tall ascending letters which are curved to resemble a swan's neck can be traced back to artistic repertoires of the Iranians (known by some as Iranian animal style in Islamic art), particularly in the Scythian and Luristan metals which were borrowed by the Abbasid, where the use of animal parts in ornaments – such as the neck and head part – is favoured and rendered as a part of the geometrical scrolls.[60] One of the earliest and finest examples of this stylisation can be seen in several bands of the Samanid Nishapur stucco decoration dated to the 10th century CE (288-391AH), where the offshoots – instead of being linear – consist of a notched band ending in birds' heads and a palmette which is a continuation of the beak.[61] Although the Nishapur stucco is said to be an abbreviated representation of the Sasanian motif of birds holding palmettes in their beaks found on silver vessels, the combination of scrollwork and bird – as seen in the Samanid stucco – reached its full height in the

[57] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, pp. 11-15.
[58] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, p. 49-50.
[59] Paul E. Chevedden (1986), "A Sāmānid Tombstone from Nishāpūr," *Ars Orientalis,* Vol. 16, pp. 153-170.
[60] Maurice Sven Dimand (1938), "Samanid Stucco Decoration from Nishapur," *American Oriental Society,* Vol. 58, No. 2, pp. 258-261.
[61] Dimand (1938), "Samanid Stucco Decoration from Nishapur," p. 259.

Seljuk period and was a frequent feature of the Seljuk silver inlaid bronzes from Iran, Mesopotamia and Syria.[62] Additionally, Nishapur was also one of the great artistic centres of the Islamic world before and during the Seljuk's rule. Therefore, the Iranian animal style might have also been adopted in calligraphy, as the broken cursive script is heavily stylised[63] and certain features – particularly the swan-neck like letters in certain foliated Kufic scripts in Iran and Transoxiana – share the same characteristics with the Nishapur stucco, but in a more stylised fashion.

Figure 5: Single band stucco inscription from the congregational mosque at Ardistan (985-1010 CE)

Source: The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana (1992)

The different stylisation of the script and decoration is understandable as Chevedden stated that the main decorative features – the *mihrab* design, *mihrab* with multiple recesses, outer inscription panel containing a Quranic text and foliated Kufic script – found on six early tombstones and gravestones in Nishapur and Yazd in Iran dated from the tenth (288-391AH) to the twelfth centuries CE (494-597AH) of the Samanid period were tremendously vast and varied in scope. It was later used and further developed on tombstones throughout eastern and western Iran, where its artistic creativity produced a number of decorative styles that were later modified and developed in succeeding centuries.[64] This is evident on Fatimah's tombstone as the lamp motif often found in the *mihrab* image has been substituted with a round and teardrop- shaped object. Despite this change, it is still rooted in the Turco-Persian tradition stemming from Iran and Transoxiana, where it further evolved in these regions even as it was spreading towards the Far East, including the Malay Archipelago.

Additionally, there are also certain letters in Fatimah's inscription – particularly in the first and second paragraphs – where the end tail of certain letters ascenders and interlaced at the top. Although some would dismiss it as mere stylisation, the characteristic and the period indicate that there is a probability that Fatimah's script is a combination of foliated and interlaced Kufic. This is because interlaced Kufic is characterised by the interlacing of letters at the body of the letters like *dāl* or *kāf* or in the stems or tails of the letters, and pairs of letters, especially the *lām-alif* combination. Moreover, the interlaced Kufic was found to have been used extensively in a variety of media in eastern Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Examples include the slip-covered earthenware known as 'Nishapur wares' or 'Afrasiyah wares', coins that were minted by the Samanids, Buwayhids, Hasanwayhids, Ghaznavids and Qarakhanids during the 10th and 11th centuries CE (288-391AH & 391-494AH), crested grave covers excavated at Siraf dated to the 10th century CE, and also monumental texts, where the earliest monument with interlacing text can be seen on the limestone plaques from the palace at Sarmaj, attributable to Badr. B. Hasanwayh's restoration (circa 1010CE/400AH), and on the contemporary stucco inscription from the original mosque at Ardistan, both of which are in Iran.[65] Therefore, it is not impossible for Fatimah's inscription to have a combination of foliated and interlaced Kufic. This is evidenced by a single band of stucco inscription from the congregational mosque at Ardistan (dated circa 985-1010CE/375-400AH) (Figure 5), located in the Jibāl/Isfahān province, which had already employed this stylistic combination.[66] It is not surprising that Fatimah's epitaph has the combination of both scripts as it is contemporary with the development of commemorative text in Iran. In addition, the

[62] Dimand (1938), "Samanid Stucco Decoration from Nishapur," p. 260.
[63] Sheila S. Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy,* p. 151.
[64] Chevedden (1986), "A Sāmānid Tombstone from Nishāpūr," p. 158.
[65] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, pp. 67-69 & 72.
[66] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, p. 72.

faintly visible arabesque foliage band that surrounds Fatimah's epitaph is also similar to the one's surrounding the stucco inscription of Ardistan congregational mosque. This further binds the decorative elements of Fatimah's tombstone with Iran.

The same analysis can be given to the Champa Pillar, as the script used for the pillar is obviously rounded. Although the script is identified as Kufic, traditional/plain Kufic[67] or even 'crude Kufic',[68] the format and style it was written bare resemblance with the commemorative inscriptions found in Iran, where unlike foundation inscriptions that were probably planned as part of the long campaign of construction and decoration of a building, commemorative texts were carved faster as its purpose is to record someone's presence at – or passage by – a site.[69] Although the format and purpose of the commemorative text of the Champa Pillar (1035CE/426AH) is similar to the two commemorative texts carved at Naqsh-i Rustam dated 959-60 CE (348-349AH) and 1062 CE (454AH) which record the presence of a relatively unimportant soldier – thus inscribed with a 'scratchy hand' that lacks even an introductory basmala – the carving of the script is slightly different. Even though this difference could be attributed to the type of rock or the skill of the carver, the Champa Pillar's inscription bares more similarities to the commemorative text carved at Darius's palace in Persepolis which documents the visit of the Buwayhid 'Adud al-Dawla in June 955 CE (344AH).[70] Even so, the commemorative texts of 'Adud al-Dawla is more refined in terms of the way the letters are carved as compared to the Champa Pillar where the letters are more rounded, and the end tails are shorter. This difference might suggest that the carver for the Champa Pillar was more concerned with his speed of carving and detail of the event rather than aesthetics.

Putri Makdarah's tombstone further binds the Malay Archipelago's connection to the Iranian lands. As shown in Figure 2, the decorative element of Putri's tombstone consists of a round and teardrop-shaped object that is hanging from a chain in the centre of both the front and back sides of the tombstones. This hanging object on Putri's tombstone provides confirmation and visual evidence that the lamp motif in Fatimah's tombstone is certainly one of the decorative elements often found in the *mihrab* image in Iran (discussed earlier) as Putri's tombstone bares the same decorative elements. In addition, the hanging objects on Putri's tombstone are bigger and larger in size, thus enabling us to analyse the decorative elements clearer and further identifying it as another variation of the *mihrab* image based on its characteristics. Although the replacement of the lamp motif with round and teardrop-shaped objects is intriguing, the phenomenon is not strange as lozenge shapes have been used as decorative elements – particularly for borders – since the Sasanian periods, where several examples can be found on the stucco panels and tombstones from Nīshāpūr dating from the tenth and eleventh century CE (288-391AH & 391-494AH).[71] Hence, the minimal use of decorative elements on Putri's tombstone could suggest that the carver wanted to emphasise the status of the deceased and commemorate her as an identifiable person. This is further supported by the readable inscription, which reveals that Putri Makdarah is the daughter of Ali bin Sultān 'Abdul Mājid bin Muhammad Shāh al Sultān,[72] signifying that her noble bloodline or potential relation to royalty. Individuals of noble and royal blood from Islamic dynasties who came to the Malay Archipelago region might have later married native women or local rulers.[73] An example can be seen in the genealogy of the Malacca Bendahara recorded in the Malay Annals *(Sulalatus Salatin)*, where Mani Purindan is believed to be a descendent[74] of the Persian Nizam-al Mulk (1018-1092CE/409-485AH) who held the post of vizier in the Seljuk realms (1064-1092CE/456-485AH) during the reigns of Alp Arslan (1063-72CE/455-464AH) and Malik Shah (1072-92CE/455-485AH), following a brief service of three to four years at the Ghaznavid court in Ghazni.[75] It is worth noting that based on the context of the text, the ancestor is identified as Nizam-al Mulk, the

[67] Othman and Abdul Halim (1990), *Epigrafi Islam Terawal di Nusantara*, p. 5-7; Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, pp. 43, 48-50.
[68] Zakaria (1994), *Islamic art in Southeast Asia*, p. 22.
[69] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, p. 13.
[70] Blair (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, p. 13.
[71] Chevedden (1986), "A Sāmānid Tombstone from Nishāpūr," pp. 153-170; Maurice Sven Dimand (1938), "Samanid Stucco Decoration from Nishapur," *American Oriental Society*, Vol. 58, No. 2, pp. 258-261.
[72] Zakaria (1994), *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia*, p. 371; Othman and Abdul Halim (1990), *Epigrafi Islam Terawal di Nusantara*, p. 14.
[73] Ravaisse as cited Fatimi (1963), *Islām comes to Malaysia*, p. 43; Al-Attas (2011), *Historical Fact and Fiction,* p. 17.
[74] Mehmet Özey (2020), "Rum(i) as the Reference to the Turks and Perceptions in the Malay World," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 39.
[75] Harold Bowen and Cliff Edmund Bosworth (1995), "Nizām al-Mulk," in Bosworth, C. E (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Volume VIII: Ned-Sam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill pp. 69-73.

Seljuk vizier and not Nizam-ul Mulk who is also known as Asaf Jah I, the first Nizam of Hyderabad (1671-1748CE/1082-1161AH),[76] as confused by Özey.[77]

This analysis is further supported by the use of the round script where focus was given to ambiguous and important words, such as the date of death which was carved in the round shaped object hanging from a chain for Putri's tombstone. This is befitting as Putri's tombstone uses the same decorative elements of the *mihrab* image – in essence, not in its entirety – which further proves that the deceased is someone of importance but not from amongst the locals as the name, format, decorative elements, and the calligraphy script of the tombstone suggest that she could have originated from Iran or the eastern Islamic lands before migrating to this region.

Although Ali suggested that the script used for Putri's tombstone is *Thuluth*, which he assumed to have emerged in the 15th century CE (803-906AH) in order to align his analysis with the second date inscribed on Putri's tombstone, he claimed that this date is questionable as the carvings are not clear and that it appears to represent words instead of numbers; nonetheless Ali still proceeded with his analysis under this assumption. However, a detailed stylistic analysis of certain letters in Putri's inscription reveals that it was carved using a round script which had emerged in the ninth century CE, where this script was primarily used to transcribe non-Quranic texts as it was faster despite being less efficient; however, it was sometimes awkwardly adopted for transcribing the Quran.[78] While the script on Putri's tombstone is not entirely a round script as it displays certain elements of foliated Kufic, the distinguishing characteristics of the round script – which is different from the stately Kufic used for monumental inscriptions and Quranic manuscripts – are evident in Putri's inscription in the form of the minimal spacing between the letter groups and the variations in the thickness of the strokes.

Figure 6: *(left)* A double page Quran that was corrected by Ahmad ibn Abu'l-Qasim al-Khayqani, Iran (905 CE); *(right)* Marble *mihrab* by 'Ali Ahmad b. Abi'l-Qāsim al-Kharrāt in Yazd, Iran (1135-45 CE)

Source: Islamic Calligraphy (2006) & A Sāmānid Tombstone from Nīshāpūr (1986)

In addition, the end tails of letters such *lām, kāf, nūn* and *ya'* are elongated and have resemblance with the letters of a Quranic manuscript that was corrected by Ahmad ibn Abu'l-Qasim al-Khayqani in June 905 CE (292AH) – the earliest surviving Quran that uses the round script in vertical format on parchment (Figure 6) – where the use of Persian for the corrector's note links the manuscript with the eastern Islamic lands.[79] Even so, the round script in Ahmad's manuscript and Putri's is similar to the commemorative text of 'Adud al-Dawla, which is only fifty years apart. Another indicator that links

[76] Munis D. Faruqui (2013), "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-century India," in Richard M. Eaton e al. (eds.), *Expanding Frontiers in South Asian and World History: Essays in Honour of John F. Richards*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-38.

[77] Özey (2020), "Rum(i) as the Reference," p. 39. This confusion occurred as the name written in the *Malay Annals* is 'Nizam-ul Mulk Akar Shah', in which the spelling refers to another historical figure but is attributed in the text as the famous Seljuk vizier.

[78] Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 144.

[79] Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 148.

the similarity of Putri's tombstone to Ahmad's Quranic manuscript is the use of dots for certain letters, particularly *'ya*. The letter *'ya* in Putri's inscription has two dots but is placed on top, inside the bowl of the letter, while the two dots of the letter '*ya* in the Quranic manuscript is situated sometimes at the bottom bowl of the letter or above, like Putri's. This could be due to insufficient space rather than anything else. On the other hand, the traces of Kufic are evident based on the arrangement and format of the inscription on Putri's tombstone which are similar to the marble tombstone carved by Abu'l-Qasim al-Kharrāt dated 1138 CE (532AH), and a marble *mihrab* image which was carved by his son, 'Alī Ahmad b. Abi'l-Qāsim al-Kharrāt, dated 1135-45 CE (529-540AH).[80] Both the tombstones and the *mihrab* image which were discovered in the region of Yazd, Iran have four elaborated outer panels that contain verses of the Holy Quran. These verses were carved both vertically and horizontally, with the letters packed tightly together.

Conclusion

The stylistic analysis of the decorative elements found on the three early Islamic monuments in the Malay Archipelago regions shows strong influence and ties with the Islamic artistic repertoires found in the eastern Islamic lands, particularly Iran. This provided answers to the fundamental question of the source of Islamic art that spread towards this region. The findings from this study revealed that much of the influence is rooted in the Turco-Persian traditions and was probably brought by Muslims who formerly served the Turkic or Iranian Islamic Dynasties or a part of it, such as the Samanids, Ghaznavids and Seljuks. These influences and decorative elements were then later incorporated into the existing Malay culture and traditional arts to create their own artistic vocabulary that represents this region, known later as the 'Langkasuka motif' which can be found primarily in the east coast region of the Malay Peninsular and other parts of the archipelago in varying degrees. Although only three early monuments were analysed in this study, the researcher personally believes that there are many other monuments in the form of gravestones, tombstones, commemorative texts or objects that might have survived the test of time, but are yet to be discovered. However, these three monuments are sufficient to indicate the strong artistic relation between the Malay Archipelago and Iran, as the absence of evidence does not necessarily equate to evidence of absence.[81]

References

Asher, Catherine B. and Talbot, Cynthia (2006), *India before Europe*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib (2011), *Historical Fact and Fiction*, Kuala Lumpur: UTM Press.

Ahmad Talib, Yusof (2011), "Islam in South-East Asia," in Idris El Hareir and El Hadji Ravane M'Baye (eds.). *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture: The Spread of Islam Throughout the World*, Vol. 3, Paris: UNESCO, 693-709.

Akbar, Ali (2015), "The Influence of Ottoman Qur'ans in Southeast Asia through the Ages," in A. C. S. Peacock and Annabel Teh Gallop (eds.), *From Anatolia to Aceh: Ottomans, Turks and Southeast Asia*, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 311-334.

Alatas, Syed Farid and Alami, Abdolreza (eds.) (2018), *The Civilisational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and the Malay World: A Cultural Discourse*, Kuala Lumpur: Gerakbudaya Enterprise & Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Bosworth, Clifford Edmund (1975), "The Early Ghaznavid," in R. N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 162-197.

Blair, Sheila S. (1992), *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, Vol. 5, Leiden: E. J. Brill.

[80] Chevedden (1986), "A Sāmānid Tombstone from Nishāpūr," pp. 167-168.
[81] Blair (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 175.

Bowen, Harold and Bosworth, Cliff Edmund (1995), "Nizām al-Mulk," in Bosworth, C. E (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Volume VIII: Ned-Sam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 69-73.

Blair, Sheila S. (2006), *Islamic Calligraphy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Chevedden, Paul E. (1986), "A Sāmānid Tombstone from Nishāpūr," *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 16, 153-170.

Canfield, Robert L. (2002), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Compareti, Matteo (2009), "Chinese-Iranian Relations xv. The last Sasanians in China," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, accessed on 3rd June 2021, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/china-xv-the-last-sasanians-in-china.

Dimand, Maurice Sven (1938), "Samanid Stucco Decoration from Nishapur," *American Oriental Society*, Vol. 58, No. 2, 258-261.

Dzul Haimi Md. Zain (1997), "Safavid Qur'ans: Style and Illumination," Doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

Delius, Peter and Hattstein, Markus (2004), *Islam: Art and Architecture*, Italy: Könemann.

Dzul Haimi Md. Zain (2007), *Ragam Hias al-Qur'an di Alam Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications.

Collon, Dominique, Strudwick, Nigel, Lyttleton, Margaret, Wiedehega, Peter, Balir, Sheila S., Elizabeth, Benson P. and Mcleod, Madeline (2019), "Stele," *Grove Art Online*, accessed on 18 July 2023, https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/display/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000081249.

Ettinghausen, Richard, Grabar, Oleg and Madina, Marilyn Jenkins (2001), *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Fatimi, Sayyid Qudratullah (1963), *Islām Comes to Malaysia*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute.

Farish Noor and Khoo, Eddin (2003), *Spirit of Wood: The Art of Malay Woodcarving*, Singapore: Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd.

Faruqui, Munis D. (2013), "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-century India," in Richard M. Eaton e al. (eds.), *Expanding Frontiers in South Asian and World History: Essays in Honour of John F. Richards*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-38.

Gallop, Annabel Teh (2005), "The spirit of Langkasuka? Illuminated manuscripts from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 33, No. 96, 113-182.

Grabar, Oleg (1967), "The Visual Arts," in R. N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 4, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 329-363.

Grabar, Oleg (2006), *Islamic Art and Beyond*, Vol. 3, England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Gibb, Hamilton Alexander Rossken (2010), *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325-1354*, Vol. 4, England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Gallop, Annabel Teh (2018), ""Meandering Clouds": The Arabesque in Malay Manuscript Art," in Dr. Muhammad Isa Waley (ed.), *The Arabesque: An Introduction*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 97-104.

Haw, Stephen G (2018), "Islam in Champa and the Making of Factitious History," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol 28, No. 4, 717-747.

Khoury, Nuha N. N. (1991), "The Mihrab Image: Commemorative Themes in Medieval Islamic Architecture," *Muqarnas Online*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 11-28

Köprülü, Mehmet Fuad (1992), *The Origins of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. Gary Leiser, USA: State University of New York Press.

Köprülü, Orhan F. (1992), "Bey" *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed on 3rd June 2021, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/bey.

Kianush, Katy (1999), "Persian Art throughout the Centuries: The Sasanians contd.," accessed on 3rd June 2021, http://www.artarena.force9.co.uk/sass2.htm.

Kalus, Ludvik (2003), "Réinterprétation des plus anciennes stèles funéraires islamiques nousantariennes: I. Les deux inscriptions du «Champa»," *Archipel*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 63-90.

Kalus, Ludvik & Guillot, Claude (2004), "Réinterprétation des plus anciennes stèles funéraires islamiques nousantariennes: II. La stèle de Leran (Java) datée de 475/1082 et les stèles associées," *Archipel*, Vol. 67, 17-36.

Lotfi, Abdeljaouad (2012), "Nouvelles considérations sur les deux inscriptions arabes dites du «Champa»," *Archipel*, Vol. 83, No. 1, 53-71.

Muhammad Uzair Ismail, Zuliskandar Ramli and Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria (2021), "The Champa Pillar (1035 CE) and its Possible Connection with the Turkic Dynasties,"*Islāmiyyāt*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 93-104.

Manguin, Pierre-Yves (1985), "The Introduction of Islam into Campa," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 1-28.

Nakamura, Rie (2000), "The Coming of Islam to Champa," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 73, No. 1, 55-66.

Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman and Zuliskandar Ramli (2010), "Hubungan Asia Barat dengan Alam Melayu Berdasarkan Bukti Arkeologi Abad ke-9 hingga ke-14M," *Sari-International Journal of the Malay World and Civilisation*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 403-426.

Othman Yatim and Abdul Halim Nasr (1990), *Epigrafi Islam Terawal di Nusantara*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka & Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia.

Othman Yatim (1998), "The Early Islamic Period," in Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Early History*, Singapore: Didier Millet.

Özey, Mehmet (2020), "Rum(i) as the Reference to the Turks and Perceptions in the Malay World," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 31-58.

Pourshariati, Parvaneh (2008), *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris.

Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria (2018), "Cotton Binding of the Quran from the East Coast Malay Peninsula before 20th Century: A Historical Study," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 112-120.

Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria and Zuliskandar Ramli (2018), "The Study of the Nineteenth-Century AD East Coast Red Qur'an Bindings," in Mohd Rohaizat Abdul Wahab et al. (eds.), *Selected Topics on Archaeology, History and Culture in the Malay World*, Singapore: Springer, 189-200.

Ros Mahwati Ahmad Zakaria and Zuliskandar Ramli (2018), "Nondestructive Analysis Tests to Evaluate the Property of Quran Bindings," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 425-446.

Sheppard, Mubin (1972), *Taman Indera: Malay Decorative Arts and Pastimes*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Tan, Huism (2003), "Qur'anic Inscriptions on woodcarvings from the Malay Peninsula," in F. Suleman (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and Its Creative Expressions. Selected Proceedings from the International Colloquium*, London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 205-215.

Whelan, Estelle (1990), *Writing the Word of God: Some Early Qur'an Manuscripts and Their Milieux, Part 1,* Ars Orientalis, 113-147.

Zakaria Ali (1994), *Islamic Art in Southeast Asia, 830 AD-1570 AD*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Zarrinkūb, 'Abd Al-Husain (1999), *Ruzgaran: tarikh-i Iran az aghz ta saqut saltnat Pahlvi*, Tehran: Sukhan.