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Seven Gravestones at the Muslim Tana Baru Cemetery in Cape Town: A Descriptive Note

Abstract: The present paper deals with a small corpus of seven funerary inscriptions in Arabic and in mixed Arabic/Malay found in the Tana Baru Islamic cemetery in Cape Town. The article contains a description of the gravestones, as well as a translation and critical analysis of the text of the epitaphs. The items are studied from both a linguistic and a historical perspective with the aim of improving our knowledge of Islamic epigraphy in South Africa. At the same time, the inscriptions offer new information on the prosopography of the Muslim community of the Western Cape region, information which, it is hoped, will trigger further research on Islamic culture and history in South Africa.

1 Introduction

Tana Baru (Malay: *Tanah Baru*, lit. 'the new ground') is the historical cemetery of the Muslim community of Cape Town.[1] It is located in the Bo Kaap quarter,[2] on the slopes of the Signal Hill, at the end of Longmarket Street and it has been the first and main Islamic burial place in Cape Town since around 1805 until its official closure by government decree on sanitary grounds on January 15 1886.[3] The act of closure provoked wide and deep dissatisfaction among local Muslims: on January 17 1886, only two days after the decree had been issued, 3000 Muslims buried a child there defying the law. Clashes followed and lasted for three days; 12 people were arrested in the aftermath of the violent confrontations. However,

1 The history of Islam in Cape Town, in particular of its early presence and diffusion, still presents many unstudied or understudied aspects. However, for the reconstruction of the general historical, cultural and linguistic development of Cape Muslim community (especially of the so-called Malay Muslims) there is already substantial literature. See, amongst others Du Plessis 1972.

2 Bo Kaap (Over the Cape, also formerly known as Malay quarter) is the historical centre of the so-called Kaap Malay community. See Du Plessis 1945, 1953, 1972.

3 On the background of the closure of Tana Baru, see Davids 1985, 95–112.

the presence of tombstones indicating the burial places of people who died in the early 1900s (for instance, an eighteen-month old girl named Waradea, buried in 1916), indicates that, with all likelihood, the cemetery continued to be used. During the following decades, the cemetery passed through a period of inexorable decadence. However, in 1978 the Committee for the Preservation of the Tana Baru was established, under the leadership of Imam Manie Bassier. Thanks to the public initiatives of many representatives of the Muslim Malay community and in particular, to the cultural and academic activities of the late Achmat Davids,[4] the Tana Baru Trust was eventually registered as a legal entity in 1998 to ensure 'the protection, preservation, and conservation of the historic Tana Baru cemetery'.[5]

Tana Baru occupies a position of primary importance in the sacred geography of the Muslims of the Cape region because it hosts the shrines (Malay: *k[a]ramat*)[6] of some of the most eminent representatives of the early Muslim community and directly mirrors the history of the Islamic presence in the area.[7] In particular, the cemetery contains the mausoleum of *imām* ʿAbdallāh b. *qāḍī* ʿAbd al-Salām (popularly known under the nickname of Tuan Guru, 'Mister Teacher'; d. 1807), originally a prince from Tidore (Maluku/Moluccas archipelago), who for unknown reasons was arrested by the Dutch in around 1780 and banished to the notorious Robben Island (Afrikaans *Robbeneiland*) in Table Bay (Cape Town). Once released from prison in 1783, Tuan Guru was able to establish the first Islamic school in Cape Town and in 1795, he became the first imam of the first mosque in Cape Town (indeed in the whole of South Africa): the Auwal Masjid in Dorp Street.[8] Tuan Guru is especially remembered among Cape Muslims for his conscientious teaching which was probably the earliest diffusion of Islamic learning in

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4 Achmat Davids (1939–1998) was a linguist and historian, a social educator and a respected representative of the Kaap Malay community. His numerous publications are a crucial contribution to the study of Islamic literature in Afrikaans in the Arabic script and to the history of the Muslims of Cape Town.

5 For more information, see the website of the Tana Baru Trust: http://www.tanabaru.co.za (last accessed 19/07/2016).

6 The Malay-Indonesian word *kramat* is a loanword from Arabic *karāma(t)* 'prodigy, divine gift'. The meaning 'holy place, shrine', is apparently an extension of the semantic range of the Arabic word. Several *kramat*-s are scattered in the Cape region (for a list of the *kramat*-s of the area see *Guide* 2010).

7 For a description of the main *kramat*-s of Tana Baru and the most outstanding personalities who are buried there, see Davids 1985, 33–63; for the graves of the famous representatives of the Islamic community that disappeared after the forced closure of the cemetery, see Davids 1985, 64–78.

8 The history of the *masjid al-awwal* in Cape Town is reconstructed in Bradlow-Cairns 1978, 9–39 (see also http://auwalmasjid.co.za/index.html).

Cape Town.[9] In order to instruct his pupils and disciples, he made use of the manuscript texts in Arabic and Malay that he had managed to write or copy during his imprisonment.[10] No complete list of Tuan Guru's manuscripts and works is so far available although some of his Malay manuscript texts have been hastily catalogued;[11] however, except for his *Ma'rifat al-islām wa'l-īmān wa'l-iḥsān*, which has been translated into English,[12] most of his texts still have to be analysed in detail.

Another much revered *kramat* in the Tana Baru cemetery is that of the first official imam of the Cape Muslim community, *sayyid* 'Alawī (locally known as Tuan Said Aloewie, d. 1803).[13] Just as Tuan Guru after him, he too was banished to Robben Island in 1744. After his release, he became a policeman and is believed to have made enormous efforts to teach the tenets of Islam to the local population, despite the prohibition of practicing any religion other than Protestantism, a ruling enforced by the Dutch authorities at that time. Considered to be endowed with supernatural powers, his grave was originally very simple but later an imposing shrine was built on it to enhance the memory of the *walī*.[14] The cemetery also contains the tomb of Abū Bakr Effendi (d. 1880), another influential

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9 Tuan Guru was a follower of the *shāfi'ī* law school and the *ash'arī* theological stream.

10 Davids 1985, 40–48; 2011, 69–75.

11 *Katalog* 1998, 13, 53-60.

12 'Abd al-Salam 2004 (Engl. translation by Auways Rafudeen). An image of the colophon of a manuscript of Tuan Guru is given in Davids 1985, 43. Comparing the text in this image with the description of *Katalog* 1998, 60, it appears that the colophon in the image is the one in the manuscript of the South African Library MSB 683, 1(1) B Restricted access, part (H), 482-600 containing the *Bidāyat al-mubtadi' bi-faḍl Allāh al-Muhdī*, a basic guide to Islamic practice and cult in Jawi (other testimonies of the text: Museum Negeri Banda Aceh 07_00256, catalogued on line http://nusantara.dl.uni-leipzig.de; Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia Jakim Collection IAAM 1998.1.362, IAAM 1998.1.935. catalogued *Handlist* 2010, 80, 173; printed in Singapore in 1861 by Muḥammad Arshad b. Qāsim al-Jāwī). The colophon dates the finishing of the copying of the text as Monday, 14 *rabī' al-thānī* 1201 (the number was written later over the line) at the time of *ẓuhr*; this corresponds to Feb. 3 1787 (it was a Saturday). At that time Tuan Guru was still in detention on Robben Island. It is interesting to note the terminology used in the colophon: *kātibuh imām 'Abdallāh al-maẓlūm b. al-maẓlūm qāḍī 'Abd al-Salām al-tindūrī baladan al-shāfi'ī maḍhaban al-ash'arī 'aqīdatan*, where the epithet *al-maẓlūm* (the oppressed) used by Tuan Guru for both himself and his father points to a family history of injustice and imprisonment.

13 The title *sayyid* and the name 'Alawī could point to a Yemeni 'sharifian' origin. Local tradition makes him a citizen of *Mukhā* where the Dutch had a trading post. It is not clear whether he was arrested by the Dutch in Yemen or in Indonesia.

14 For more information on Tuan Said Aloewie see Davids 1985, 48–52, *Guide* 2010, 42–43, http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/tuan-said-aloewie. For some other *kramat*-s in the cemetery see Davids 1985, 35–39, *Guide* 2010, 44–45, http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/tuan-nuruman

figure in the history of Islam (and of literacy in Arabic script) in the Cape. Sent to the Cape by the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I (d. 1861) at the request of the British Queen Victoria (d. 1901) in order to settle some disputes in the Muslim community of the Cape, he was responsible for the introduction of the *ḥanafī* school of law in Cape Town, as well as for a reform of the Arabic-Afrikaans writing system.[15] The tomb of Abū Bakr Effendi, located in the upper section of the cemetery, has recently been renovated thanks to a project funded by the Turkish government.

Fig. 1: The entrance gate of the Tana Baru cemetery. The funerary inscriptions studied in this note are visible on the wall behind the gate. © Amir Golabi.

(the grave of Paay Schaapie de Oude, also known as Imam Norman and Tuan Nuruman), Davids 1985, 53–63, http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/abubakr-effendi (the grave of Abū Bakr effendi) and http://www.tanabaru.co.za/sites/ibn-amaldien/ (the grave of Ibn Amal al-Dīn; the child who was buried in Tana Baru after the authorities had shut it down).
15 On Abu Bakr Effendi, see Versteegh 2015.

Fig. 2: The *kramat*-s of Tuan Guru (right) and Tuan Said Aloewie. In the background, the city of Cape Town. © Amir Golabi.

2 Funerary inscriptions at Tana Baru

During a recent visit to the cemetery,[16] my attention was drawn to some Arabic funerary inscriptions on the wall just behind the main gate. As no previous description of these epigraphic documents is available, I decided (in agreement with my South African colleagues) to devote a very short note to a first analysis of this small corpus of texts which I think can be of interest in different fields of research. Firstly, for Islamic epigraphy in general (in particular for the funerary epigraphy and the typological study of gravestones),[17] the items from Tana Baru are remarkable specimens of the inscriptional practises of the Muslims of the

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16 The visit took place within the framework of the project 'The Islamic literary tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa: a new academic network' supported for the year 2016 by the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation.

17 It seems that funerary inscriptions, gravestones and tombstones have received less attention than monumental inscriptions or inscriptions on artefacts (for example in the otherwise wonderful handbook by Blair 1998).

Western Cape region which have so far remained unstudied.[18] In particular it can be hoped that a comparative analysis of the structural and graphic features of these Cape Town inscriptions can highlight similarities with and differences from Islamic epigraphic material in Southeast Asia.[19] Secondly, for the general history of the Islamic community of Cape Town, the inscriptions I present here yield information which can further our knowledge of the prosopography of the city's Muslims, especially of the local intellectual elite, which is still only partially known. Finally, linguistically the texts of the inscriptions represent an interesting mixture of Arabic and Malay[20] and can shed new light on the relationships between these two languages among the Western Cape Muslims, possibly opening a perspective of research on the use of Arabic in the southernmost part of the African continent.

I was able to photograph seven Tana Baru inscriptions, four complete and three fragmentary. In this paper, I number them from one to seven, in random order. Two of them (nos 1 and 6) are clearly dated, two other (nos 5 and 7) contain an incomplete chronological reference, and three (nos 2, 3, 4) are not datable. The chronological range covered by my small corpus stretches from the first half of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century covering a period of time which partially postdates the official closure of the cemetery. The twentieth-century inscriptions were thus taken to their present location in Tana Baru quite recently or perhaps, as suggested above, the cemetery continued to be used by the local Muslim community after its official closure.

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18 So far, the only available contribution to Islamic funerary epigraphy in South Africa (Harijadi 2014) is a brief survey of 65 tombstones of three sites located in the Eastern Cape province: the South End Valley Cemetery (Port Elisabeth; 26 tombstones), the Saabireen Islamic Library (Port Elizabeth; two tombstones coming from the Jubilee Park Cemetery in Uitenhage) and Jubilee Park Cemetery (Uitenhage; 37 tombstones).
19 On early Islamic epigraphy in the Indonesian archipelago see the general volume Yatim/Nasir/Kassim 1990.
20 The general issue of linguistic usage (Arabic, Arabic mixed with local languages – as in Tana Baru – or only local languages) in Islamic funerary epigraphy has not been addressed so far. On this point see the very interesting scheme for Tatarstan in Yusupov 1960, 38–41 and a quite marginal observation in Prokosch 1993. Among the 65 tombstones of the Eastern Cape published in Harijadi 2014 five inscriptions in the South End Valley Cemetery of Port Elizabeth, one in the Saabireen Islamic Library of Port Elizabeth and 24 in the Jubilee Park Cemetery of Uitenhage are in Arabic; the rest are in a mix of Arabic and Indonesian.

Fig. 3: Inscription 1. © Amir Golabi.

Fig. 4: Inscription 2. © Amir Golabi.

Fig. 5: Inscription 3. © Amir Golabi.

Fig. 6: Inscription 4. © Amir Golabi.

Fig. 7: Inscription 5. © Amir Golabi.
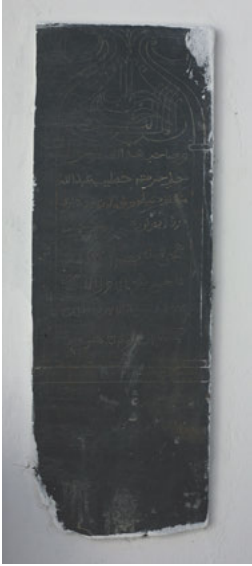

Fig. 8: Inscription 6. © Amir Golabi.

Fig. 9: Inscription 7. © Amir Golabi.

Inscription 1

Text and transliteration[21]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم/ انا لله وانا اليه رجعون/ وصاحب هده القبور/ سيخ عبد الجبر تد/
قُولغْ كرحمة الله تعالي د/و قُول ليم هاري/ درڨُد بولن سوال هار/ سبت هجرة النبي ص
م/ سريب دو رتس انم قُو [ل]و تاهن ه اب

Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm/Innā li-llāh wa-innā ilayh r[ā]ji'ūn/wa-ṣāḥib
hā[dh]ihi al-qubūr/[sh]aykh 'Abd al-Jabbār tadi/pulang keraḥmat Allāh ta'ālī d/ua

pul[uh] lima hari/daripada bulan [sh]awwāl har[i]/sabt hijrat al-nabī ṣād mīm/seribu diu ratus enam pu/[l]u[h] tahun hāʾ alif nūn.[22]

Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/ We surely belong to God and to Him we shall return (Quran, 2:156)/the one who is buried in this grave is *shaykh ʿAbd al-Jabbār*/he just moved to the mercy of God the Highest/on the 25/of the month of *shawwāl* the day/of Saturday on the hijra of the Prophet (PBUH)/one thousand two hundred sixty/year h a n.

Commentary

The rectangular inscription is thus datable to the 25 *shawwāl* 1260 (7.11.1844) which however was a Thursday and not a Saturday. The text is carved on slate. The opening *basmala* is written in a kind of geometric style showing prolonged superior strokes of the *alif*-s and *lām*-s, of the initial *bāʾ* and of the final *mīm*-s and *nūn* which intermingle. This shape partially resembles the graphic forms appearing in some sixteenth century gravestones from Pahang and in many of the tombstones of the Eastern Cape.[23] Apart from some common misspellings, there is repeated splitting of the words at the end of the line, a practice which is relatively well attested in epigraphy but is rare in manuscripts.[24] Textually, the epitaph contains verse 156 of *sūrat al-baqara* which is a very appropriate Quranic passage for gravestones.[25] From a linguistic point of view, the use of the Arabic

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22 The meaning of these three letters is not clear: similar detached letters also appear in some of the inscriptions published in Harijadi 2014 (see below note 32).

23 Yatim/Nasir/Kassim 1990, 78–82; Harijadi 2014, *passim*.

24 The manuscripts of the Horn of Africa are an exception in this respect, as division of the words at the end of the line is very widespread.

25 A comparative study of the Quranic passages appearing on Islamic funerary inscriptions is still a desideratum. It is interesting to note that Quran 2:156 does not appear in the texts of the funerary inscriptions of the Malay-Indonesian area analyzed in Yatim/Nasir/Kassim 1990, passim. Nor is it found in the material collected by Yusupov 1960 in Tatarstan or by Moaz-Ory 1977 in Damascus. Nor is any study of Quranic quotations on Ottoman gravestones to be found in the very good handbook, Prokosch 1993. In contrast this passage from *sūrat al-baqara* is very well attested in the tombstones of the Eastern Cape (Harijadi 2014) where it appears 16 times in the tombstones of the South End Valley Cemetery, once in those kept in the Saabireen Islamic Library and 14 times in those of the Jubilee Park Cemetery. In the inscriptions on the Islamic architectural structures studied by Dodd/Khairallah 1981 the verse is only attested twice: in Sivas on the inscription on the lintel of the doorway of the mausoleum of Kaykāwūs I, dated 1220, and in

word *qubūr* as a singular (instead of *qabr*) is almost certainly caused by the interference of Malay *kubur* ('grave', where the Arabic plural has been borrowed and used as a singular).[26]

Inscription 2 (fragment)

Text and transliteration

الله الرحم[ن] /ال/ان لله/اليه ر /وحنا /القبوران [ت]/ وفيت د/ه

Allāh al-Raḥmā[n] /inna li-llāh[wa-innā] ilayh r[āji'ūn]/wa-ḥa[y]ā/al-qubūr an [tu]/wuffiyat dar/h

Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/ We surely belong to God and to Him we shall return (Quran, 2:156)/and the life/this is the grave of/she passed away on/of the hijra.

Commentary

The rectangular inscription on slate is inserted into a frame representing a gate between columns and surmounted by a fronton: in particular, the *basmala* is contained in a triangular pediment above which is a palm. Graphically, the letters are not so different from those in Inscription 1. The text is too fragmentary to allow any assessment: again, in this gravestone verse Quran 2:156 is quoted. The tentative reading *tuwuffiyat* hints that the grave is that of a woman.

Delhi above the central *miḥrāb* inside the mausoleum of Iltutmish [Altamash], 1233 (see Dodd/Khairallah 1981, vol. 1, 6).

26 *Qubūr* instead of *qabr* is commonly used in the tombstones discussed in Harijadi 2014 where it is attested not only in mixed Arabic Indonesian inscriptions but also in many purely Arabic texts (Harijadi 2014, 62, 65, 81, 89, 99, 102, 103, 105).

Inscription 3

Text and transliteration

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم / لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله صلي الله عليه وسلم ايند / قبورت
رأسودين / ابن هبان تمت / والله اعلم

*Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm/lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh/ṣallī
Allāh 'alayh wa-sallam inidi/qubūrt Ra'sūddīn ibn Hibbān tammat/wa-Allāh 'al-
ima.*

Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/There is no god but God.
Muḥammad is the messenger of God/may God's peace and blessings be upon him
this here/is the grave of Ra'sūddīn ibn Hibbān it is finished/and God knows best.

Commentary

The rectangular inscription on slate does not present any graphic peculiarity (fi-
nal *yā'* for *alif maqṣūra* is a very common feature; see here also Inscription 1) but
it is interesting that the shape of the *'ayn* in the final line *Allāh 'alima* (line 5) is
curved to resemble a crescent. The reading of the text offers the following three
difficulties: 1) I tend to the interpretation that the final *tā'* in *qubūrt* is a mis-
spelling for a final *nūn* with three dots (ݩ) to be read as -*nya* (suffix pronoun third
person singular);[27] 2) I read the name of the buried person as Ra's al-Dīn b.
Ḥibbān; the *wāw* in Ra'sū and the *hā'* in Ḥibbān could be mistakes;[28] 3) the phrase
Allāh 'alima (God knows) on line 5 could be a miswriting of the very common for-
mula *Allāh a'lam*.[29]

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27 A spelling (*tā* for *nya*) is attested in three funerary inscriptions in Jubilee Park in Uitenhage
(Harijadi 2014, 96, 104, 107).
28 Other possible readings could be Ra'īs al-Dīn for the personal name and Nu'mān for the pat-
ronymic.
29 The formula could sound somewhat clumsy in this context, as if the lapicide was not sure
about the identity of the person buried in the grave for which he was writing the gravestone. As
a matter of fact, however, the phrase can be found very often in the funerary inscriptions of the
Eastern Cape (Harijadi 2014, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 51, 52, 54, 55, 58, 57, 60, 61, 71, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79,
80, 83, 84, 102, 103, 105) where the uncertainty of the lapicide about the year of the death of the
buried person is mentioned (not his identity like here). As far as the text is concerned, the pres-
ence of the verb *tammat* is noticeable: the verb is very commonly used in the closing formulas of

Inscription 4

Text and transliteration

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم/لا اله الا الله محمد/رسول الله صلي الله عليه وسلم/انا لله وانا اليه
رجعون/هده القبر صاحب حلفه/سلم ابن امام عبد الرحمن/وكان وفته في ايام السبت/اثن
ايام من شهر دالقعيدة/وكان عمر اربع وعشرين سنه/وفي سنه خ والله علم هجرة النبي صم
تم/ ٢١ ت

Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm//lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad/rasūl Allāh ṣallī
Allāh ‘alayhi wa-sallam/innā li-llāh wa-innā ilayh r[ā]ji‘ūn/ hā[dh]ihi al-qabr ṣāḥib
ḥalfah/Salām ibn imām ‘Abd al-Raḥmān/wa-kāna wafatuh fī ayyām al-sabt/ithn
ayyām min shahr [dh]ū al-qa‘īda/wa kāna ‘umr arba‘ wa-‘ishrīna sana/wa-fī sana
tsim wa-allāh ‘alima hijrat al-nabī ṣm tamma/21 t.

Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/There is no god but God
Muḥammad/ is the messenger of God may God's peace and blessings be upon
him/We surely belong to God and to Him we shall return (Quran, 2:156)/This
grave is of the one of good character/Salām ibn *imām* ‘Abd al-Raḥmān/his de-
cease was on the day of Saturday/two days passed of the month of *dhū al-*
qa‘da/his age was 24 years/and in the year *tsim* and God knows best of the hegira
of the Prophet (PBUH) it is finished/21 t.

Commentary

The rectangular inscription is on slate. Graphically it looks very similar to the pre-
vious three steles. The opening *basmala* is written in an embellished form where
the final *mīm*-s of *ism* and *al-Raḥīm*, the final *nūn* of *al-Raḥmān* and the *rā'* of *al-*
Raḥīm are connected together. The text of the inscription is in Arabic without Ma-
lay but with some morphological mistakes (feminine used instead of masculine
and vice versa) and some banal misspellings. The gravestone also presents some
reading difficulties: 1) on line five I tend to interpret *ḥalfah* as a misspelling for
khilqa ([good] character, quality); 2) the presence of a *ḥā'* with three dots above
(typically used in Pashto) is remarkable but I think that in this case the three dots

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manuscript texts. In the inscriptions of the Eastern Cape it is also sporadically attested (Harijadi
2014, 44, 88, 96).

simply indicate that the letter has to be considered as an abbreviation, possibly of the word *ta'rīkh* (date); 3) also on this inscription (as in inscription 3) the phrase *Allāh 'alima* (God knows) could be read as *Allāh a'lam*; 4) the presence in the text of the verb *tamma* should also be noticed, similar to but different from inscription 3 where *tammat* was used; 5) unfortunately the date given in the inscription is incomplete and imprecise. The final numbers seem to hint at [12]21 (1807 when 2 of *dhū al-qa'da* was November 11, a Sunday) or [13]21 (1904, when 2 of *dhū al-qa'da* was January 20, a Wednesday). However, the dating problem cannot be solved, as no information is available on the person mentioned on the gravestone.

Inscription 5 (fragment)

Text and transliteration

<div dir="rtl">

ابو عبد الخلق/والله علم

</div>

Abū 'Abd al-Khaliq/wa-Allāh 'alima

Translation

Abū 'Abd al-Khāliq /and God knows best.

Commentary

This fragmentary text is written on a rectangular stele. The form of the *'ayn* in *Allāh 'alima* (line 2) is curved to resemble a crescent and is almost identical to the one found in inscription 3 line 5. It could be that the two inscriptions were written by the same lapicide. No information is available on the identity of the Abū 'Abd al-Khāliq mentioned on the gravestone.

Inscription 6 (fragment)

Text and transliteration

<div dir="rtl">

ـبة حبيبة /زوجة الحاج عبد/المجبد المتوفية/١٨ رمضان المكرم/سنه ١٣١٩

</div>

biya Ḥabība/zawjat al-ḥājj 'Abd/al-Majbd al-mutawaffiya/18 ramaḍān al-mukar-ram/sana 1319

Translation

[Ḥājj]iya Ḥabība/wife of al-ḥājj ʿAbd/al-Majīd who passed away/on the 18ᵗʰ of the venerable month of *ramaḍān* /of the year 1319.

Commentary

The text is written on a fragmented marble plate and it is inserted into a frame which ends in the shape of a domed triangle embellished by fleurons. Graphically this stele differs from the others in the corpus because of the wide and rounded, well carved letters. I read the first word on line 1 as *ḥājjiya*, relating it to the title *ḥājj* carried by her husband, hypothesizing that the couple performed the pilgrimage to Mecca together. The hijra date corresponds to the Gregorian 29.12.1901 (it was a Sunday)[30] when the cemetery of Tana Baru was already closed. The gravestone could thus have been carried to its present location from another place. No information is available on the two personages mentioned in the epitaph.

Inscription 7

Text and transliteration

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم /وصاحب هدا القبورا/علي حرمت خطيب عبد الله/منغّل دنيا دو
قوله توج هاري/درڤد بولن محرم هرين حمس/هجرة نبي صم ١٢٩ كڤد تاهن خ الاول
الله/يرحمه رحمة الابرار امين/عمرت انم بوله تاهن

Bi-smillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm/wa-ṣāḥib hadā al-qubūrā/ʿalī ḥurmat khaṭīb ʿAbdallāh/meningal dunyā dua puluh tujuh hari/ daripada bulan muḥarram harin ḥamis/hijrat nabī ṣ.m. 129 kepada/tahun jīm al-awwal Allāh/yarḥamahu raḥamat al-abrār amīn/umrunya enam puluh tahun.

Translation

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/the owner of this tomb/which is in honour of *khaṭīb* ʿAbdallāh /departed from this world on the 27/of the month of *muḥarram* a Thursday/of the hijra of the Prophet (PBUH) 129/for the year *jīm*

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30 According to Gacek 2001, 125 the adjective *mukarram* is used in manuscripts as an epithet of the months of *shawwāl* and *shaʿbān* but not of *ramaḍān*.

the first God/be Merciful with him as He does with the pious, amen!/His age was sixty.

Commentary

The eight-line text is written on a rectangular slate and framed within a rectangle ending in a floral ogive, representing a gate between two columns. Graphically, the gravestone is very similar to Inscription 1. In particular, the opening *basmala* shows extended strokes of the *alif*-s and *lām*-s, intermingling final *mīm*-s and *nūn*-s and shows extended strokes on the *ḥā'*-s, which tend to resemble the head of a bird.

Linguistically the inscription is a mixed Arabic-Malay text and presents a few banal misspellings (e.g. *hadā* instead of *haḍā*; *harin* instead of *hārī*), grammatical inconsistencies or interferences between the two languages (*qubūr* for *qabr* as in Inscription 1; *yarḥamuh* rather than the more usual *raḥimahu*[31]) and also some reading difficulties. In particular: 1) the year of the death written in Arab Oriental numbers with three dots above, is incomplete and difficult to ascertain. I surmise that it is 27 *muḥarram* 12[90]–12[99] Anno Hegirae, i.e. a day falling between 27/03/1873 (which was a Thursday as stated in the inscription) and 19/12/1881; 2) the meaning of the phrase '*kepada/tahun jīm al-awwal*' (line 6) is not clear, where reference is made to a 'year *jīm* the first', while the abbreviation *jīm* written with three dots above could easily to be read as *j[umādā] al-awwal*, the fifth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.[32] The facts which the text of the inscription leaves open could be clarified if biographical details of the *khaṭīb* 'Abdallāh mentioned in the gravestone were known; unfortunately, he remains unknown.

I sincerely hope that these few observations can pave the way to further, more profitable research on the Tana Baru gravestones and on the history, language and literature of the Muslim community of Cape Town.

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31 This formula is attested in Ottoman gravestones: Prokosch 1993, 78.

32 A very similar abbreviation (*tahun jīm*) can be found in two inscriptions from the South End Valley Cemetery (Harijadi 2014. 44 [dated 1282 A.H.], 60 [dated 1290 A.H.]). Other abbreviations used in the corpus of inscriptions from the South End Valley Cemetery are: *tahun dāl* (Harijadi 2014, 45; dated 1282 A.H.; Harijadi 2014, 66; no year); *tahun alif* (Harijadi 2014, 50; dated 1288 A.H.); *tahun bā'* (Harijadi 2014. 57; dated 1293 A.H.). In an inscription from Jubilee Park in Uitenhagen the abbreviation used is *tahun hā'* (Harijadi 2014. 82; not dated, possibly the *hā'* stays for hijra and the year is simply missing). Finally, reading the transcription of the text in Arabic script, an isolated *jīm* appears in an inscription from the Jubilee Park Cemetery of Uitenhage (Harijadi 2014, 77) in the phrase *Allāh jīm a'lam*; the same *jīm* is however moved to another line in the translation to again form the string *tahun gim*. See also Harijadi 2014, 112 where the phenomenon of these unclear abbreviations is mentioned with no attempt to explain it.

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