



CITY OF CAPE TOWN  
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA  
STAD KAAPSTAD

# Stories of the South Peninsula

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**Historical research, stories and heritage tourism opportunities in  
the South Peninsula**



SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

*The peninsula from Cape Point Nature Reserve*

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## **Background**

The primary objective of this project was to prepare a series of 'story packages' providing the content for historical interpretive stories of the 'far' South Peninsula. Stories cover the geographical area of Chapman's Peak southwards to include Imhoff, Ocean View, Masiphumelele, Kommetjie, Witsand, Misty Cliffs and Scarborough, Plateau Road, Cape Point, Smitswinkel Bay to Miller's Point, Boulders, Simon's Town, Red Hill, Glencairn and Fish Hoek to Muizenberg.

The purposes for which these stories are to be told are threefold, namely to support tourism development; to stimulate local interest; and to promote appropriate and sustainable protection of heritage resources through education, stimulation of interest and appropriate knowledge.

To this end, the linking of historical stories and tourism development requires an approach to story-telling that goes beyond the mere recording of historic events. The use of accessible language has been a focus. Moreover, it requires an approach that both recognises the iconic, picture-postcard image of parts of Cape Town (to which tourists are drawn initially), but extends it further to address the particular genius loci that is Cape Town's 'Deep South', in all its complexity and coloured by memory, ambivalences and contradictory experiences. We believe there is a need to balance the more conventional approach, which selects people or events deemed worthy of commemoration (for example, the Battle of Muizenberg) to tell the story of places, by interweaving popular memory and culture into these recordings (for example, the rich Muslim culture that existed in Simon's Town before the removal under the Group Areas Act).

Thus, these are stories, familiar and unfamiliar, that link intangible heritage with (largely) material forms and are about real-life characters and events that have shaped our past. The tone of these stories is conversational in order to engage local residents and tourists alike, and can be utilised in story-telling mode (by tour guides for example) or to fulfil on-site interpretive requirements.

Stories have been selected to balance historical themes from prehistory, through pre-colonial to colonial settlement, apartheid and democratic South Africa. The history of Cape Town's South Peninsula has been very ably and comprehensively recorded by many of its residents, and we wish to acknowledge and give thanks to all those cited as references.

## **Referencing**

The stories are intended for popular consumption. Therefore, the traditionally detailed referencing that would be expected of historical research was not regarded as appropriate in this instance, although full accuracy in terms of content and referencing has been sought. All references utilised have been listed. In respect of images, reference sources have been provided, which are open-source as far as possible.

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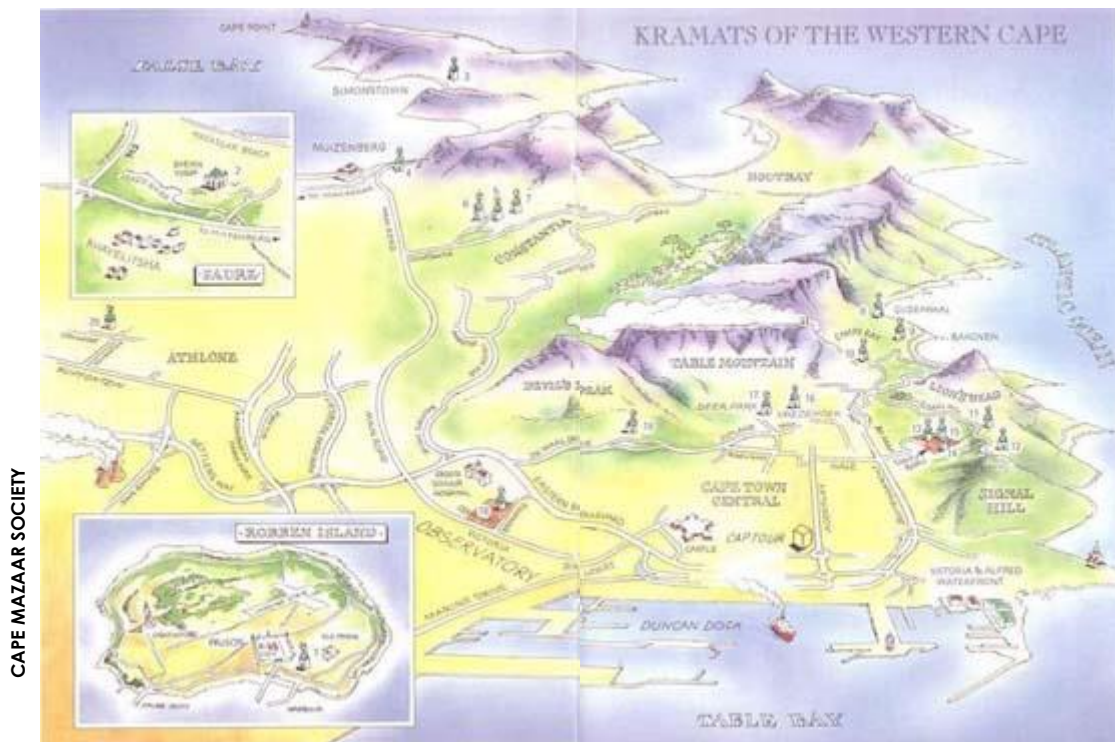
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### 3. Sultans and slaves: The Muslim community of the Deep South

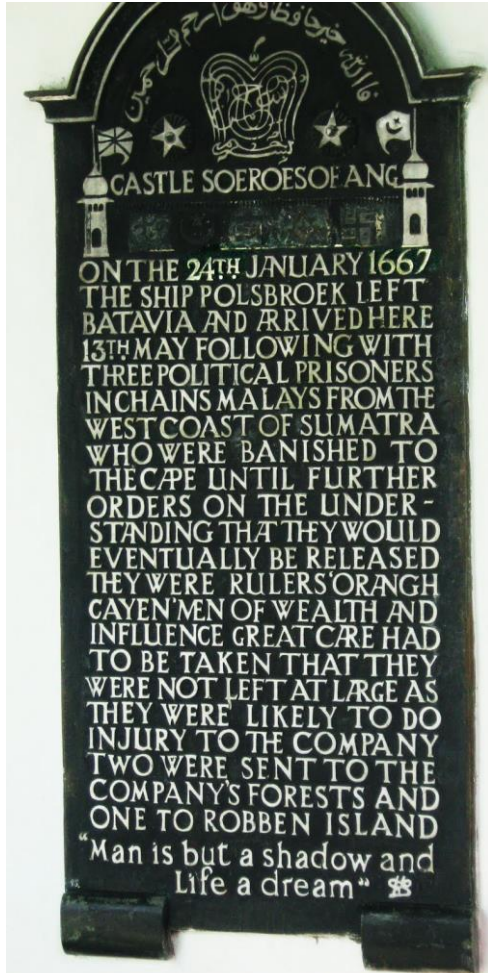
(C. Postlethwayte)

From the mountains of Simon's Town to the slopes of Signal Hill, there is a circle of holy places. These are the kramats, the burial sites of Muslim holy men in Cape Town. Legend has it that it is this circle that protects us from earthquakes and national disasters. Truth, of course, can often be more fascinating than fiction, and the complex history of the Muslim community in the South Peninsula, as in Cape Town, is also in part the history of the descendants of slaves and apartheid. The term 'Cape Malay' in the Cape has become synonymous with the term 'Muslim'. Generally, all those of eastern Muslim origins are referred to as such, despite many Muslims not having roots in Malaya. The probable explanation is a linguistic one: Malay or Malayo was the trading language and lingua franca of a vast geographical area stretching from Madagascar to China in the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And the roots of Islam in Cape Town lies with slaves brought from those very regions.



*The circle of Kramats in Cape Town*

Simon's Town is the historical heart of Islam in the South Peninsula. It has been a town of many nations and cultures from its inception. At first, the settlement remained tiny, with most of its inhabitants resident only in winter – mainly officials of the Dutch East India Company, soldiers and slaves. The slaves' countries of origin were linked to European colonising activities



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in both Asia and Africa, and they were bought to the Cape from China, Indonesia, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, Zanzibar, Angola and other parts of West Africa (although they also included the indigenous Khoisan people). Also included were the 'Mardykers', the Malay servants of Dutch officials on their way back to the Netherlands from the east, many of whom opted to stay in the Cape. Among them were many Muslims. Coming mainly against their will, removed from their families and with nothing but the culture inside them, the religion of Islam allowed many to survive these harsh and inhumane conditions.

Others who contributed to the establishment and development of Islam in the country were Muslim exiles from the East Indies. They were political exiles sent from Ceylon to the colony in an attempt to break resistance to Dutch rule, and reduce their influence on fellow citizens. A number of different religious practices emerged as a result of the influences of various masters exiled to the Cape, and the orders in which they were operating. In addition, Muslim sailors from Zanzibar joined the Royal Navy. They were known as 'Seedies'. Most returned home at the end of their contracts, though a few settled in Simon's Town, marrying local women.

However, practising their religion was severely restricted by the Statutes of India, a set of laws particularly aimed at restricting the religious practices of the Muslims of the Batavian Empire, of which the Cape formed a part. By 1804, the "Vryezwarten" ('free blacks'), the majority of whom were Muslims, had reached such significant numbers that the Dutch rulers changed their policies in order to enlist their support pending the British invasion of the Cape. The Vryezwarten were granted religious freedom. Slaves were not allowed generally to be buried in cemeteries, and there is no record of slaves' graves. However, the slave Abdul Ghaliel served the Muslim community of Simon's Town as their imam. In 1823, a land grant was made in his favour to be used as a burial site by the Muslim community there. And so, Abdul Ghaliel became the first slave to be granted a piece of land in Simon's Town.

Initially, the Simon's Town Muslim community probably worshipped in the various homes of the free blacks, or must have had some sort of langgar (prayer room) where congregational prayers were conducted. What is known is that there was a langgar in Hospital Lane prior to the establishment of the Noorul Islam Mosque (Light of Peace) in Thomas Street in 1888. It was originally a private house, and a wooden minaret was added in 1904. The old mosque



was demolished in 1924, and a new building with schoolrooms was erected on the site in 1926. It would appear that the mosque also acted as a seat of Islamic learning in the area, for, in 1913, there appeared to have been some problem with 'Malay' children attending a local secular school, where they were discriminated against because they were Muslim. According to records, a religious school for 'Malay' children was run at the mosque.

Simon's Town was declared a White Group Area on 1 September 1967, and the subsequent forced removal of most of the people of colour irrevocably destroyed the multi-cultural fabric of Simon's Town society. The school at the mosque had to be closed down in compliance with the Group Areas Act. Families were literally split apart, as some were removed and some were able to stay in the town – all based on the colour of their skins. The removal of the Muslim community from Simon's Town in terms of the Group Areas Act was in fact a destruction of a community with deep roots in that area. However, two symbols of their historical occupancy remained intact – the mosque and a kramat.

The kramat on the lower mountain slopes above the naval base in Simon's Town is one of those making up the Holy Circle. Discovered among the trees on a terrace in Goede Gift, above Runciman Drive, it has been difficult to find evidence as to who is buried there. One story indicates that the kramat is where Sultan Mogamat Abdul Kaharuddin is buried with his son and other ancestors. The sultan was an important religious leader from the island of Sunwaba, Indonesia, in the mid to late 1700s. He was also an activist against the colonial Dutch power, and he and his son, Ismael, were captured in an uprising, and banished to the Cape for life. The story goes that he was possibly imprisoned in the cells of the residency (now the Simon's Town Museum), given the name 'Antonie', and endured terrible conditions. Eventually, he and his son managed to escape, got into two boats on the beach below, and made a dash for freedom in the direction of Cape Point. Followed by the Dutch, he hid in a cave until they eventually gave up the search. To this day, the cave is known as 'Antonie's Gat', and he is known as the Tuang of Antonie's Gat. He lived on Cape Point for the remainder of his life, aided by a farmer. Well known for his intense spirituality and pious life, he is considered a saint by the Muslim community. One may still see Muslim worshippers praying on the cliffs of Cape Point in his honour. Later, his son was allowed to return to Simon's Town.

It is said that a distinct spiritual aura also surrounds the kramat. Other stories tell of a raging fire in the 1940s, which spread from Cape Point along the mountain ranges in Simon's Town. However, amazingly, the area of the kramat remained completely untouched by the fire. Muslims still hold the site as "moestajap", a word used to denote inexplicable spiritual happenings. Whilst sometimes the subject of fierce debate, stories such as these allow for the possibility of reconstructing a more balanced history of our past. It is well known that some of the Cape's Muslim community have their roots in the slaves, but others may possibly find their origins in sultans, exiles and imams.



*The Runciman Drive Kramat.*

There is another kramat, in Muizenberg, but again, very little is known about it. It is reported that this holy man's grave was originally discovered on the Muizenberg beachfront by a woman who was directed to it in a dream. The grave did not remain there long, however, but was relocated after a while. There is no clarity about the name and history of the person buried here. Was he possibly one of the runaway slaves of the Steenberg mine who were hunted on the False Bay coast, as reported by Simon van der Stel in 1687?



*The Kramat at Muizenberg*

Another historical link specifically with the Muslim community of the Cape is their role in the development of Afrikaans. The Dutch East India Company, in its early settlement of the Cape, established a strict language policy, insisting that all citizens learn and use Dutch. This policy also applied to local Khoi groups and slaves imported from Africa and the East. The resultant dialect was a kind of inter-language, with Dutch as its target. By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Afrikaans was established as a new language with an identity of its own. Research has shown that the Malay slaves contributed certain Malay words such as “piesang” (banana), “baie” (many/very) and “baadjie” (jacket) to the Afrikaans language. But significantly, Muslims were the first to write Afrikaans as a new language into a literary existence. There are 74 known Arabic-Afrikaans texts. The earliest, *Hidyat al-Islam*, is dated 1845. One of the most well-known examples of this literature was *Uiteensetting van die Godsdiens* ('Exposition of the Religion' or 'Bayaanud Deen'), written in 1862 by Sheikh Abu Bakr Effendi, who came from the Ottoman Empire. It was written in the language spoken by the Cape Malays in their everyday lives, which in itself was unusual. But even more unusual, it was written in Arabic script, hence the term Arabic Afrikaans.

The Muslim community have contributed greatly to the richness of Simon's Town's history. The dispersal of the community by the Group Areas Act still reverberates painfully today, and we should remember this contribution with respect and interest.



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Simon's Town Museum

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