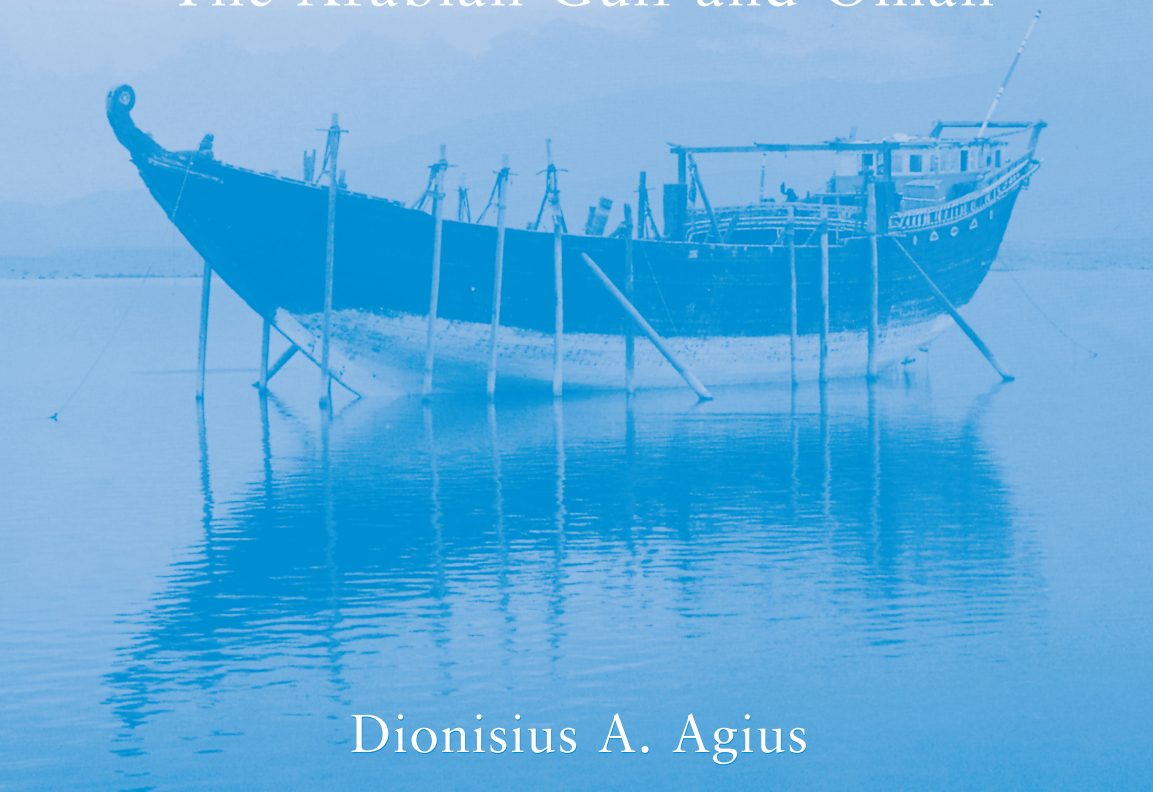
In the Wake of the Dhow

The Arabian Gulf and Oman



Dionisius A. Agius

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARCHIVAL

Aan	Aanwinsten le Afdeling (Dutch General State Archives, The Hague)
AGSFC	The Arab Gulf States Folklore Centre (Doha, Qatar)
AHG	Arquivo Historico de Goa
AHU	Arquivo Historico de Ultramarino
ANTT	Arquivos Nacionais da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon
ARA	Algemeen Rijksarchief den Haag (Dutch General State Archives, The Hague)
BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
BM Or	British Museum Oriental
BMp	British Maps
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
CDRAD	Centre for Documentation and Research in Abu Dhabi
DLH	Directeuren van de Levantse Handel (Archives of the Board of Directors of the Dutch Levant-Trade – Dutch General State Archives, The Hague)
DM	Dutch Maps
DMM	Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt li-Masqaṭ (Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Muscat)
EBD	English Basra Diary (Bombay State Archives)
FRPPG	Factory Records, Persia and the Persian Gulf (English East India Company)
GD	The Gombroon Diaries (English East India Company)
IOL	India Office Library
IOR	India Office Records
KLI	Khudābukhsh Library, India (Archives of the University of Alexandria, Faculty of Arts)
LAS	Library of the Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg
SPDD	Secret and Political Department Diaries (Bombay Archives)
SRBG	Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government
UAFAL	Archives of the University of Alexandria, Faculty of Arts Library
VOC	Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie

LINGUISTIC

Ad	Adeni
Ak	Akkadian
Ar	Modern Standard Arabic
Aram	Aramaic
CA	Classical Arabic
Dh	Dhofari
Egy	Egyptian
Eng	English
GA	Gulf Arabic
Gr	Greek
Had	Hadrami
Hin	Hindi
Ir	Iraqi
Kt	Kuwaiti
Lat	Latin
Leb	Lebanese
Mal	Malay
Meh	Mehri
NP	Neo-Persian
Per	Persian (Fārsī)
Port	Portuguese
SA	South Arabian
Skt	Sanskrit
Som	Somali
Sw	Swahili
Syr	Syriac
Tig	Tigré
Tun	Tunisian
Ur	Urdu
Yem	Yemeni

LITERARY

AD	Anno Domini
AH	Anno Hegirae
b/bin/Ibn	son of
c	circa
cc	corpo cronológico
cf	confer (compare)
coll	collective

d	died in/dates
ed	edited
EI2	Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition)
fl	floruit (flourished)
fn	footnote
fol(s)	folio(s)
Ibn	son of
lit	literally
MS	manuscript
nd	no date
NE	north-east
np	no publisher's name
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
pl	plural
r	recto
s	singular
sv	sub voce (under the word or heading)
SW	south-west
trans	translated
v	verso
vol(s)	volume(s)
vs	verse

SYMBOLIC

*	hypothetical origin
>	becoming
<	resulting from
=	equivalent to
/ /	phonetic transcription
[?]	doubtful origin

TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

CONSONANTS

’	ء	r	ر	f	ف
b	ب	z	ز	q	ق
t	ت	s	س	g	گ
th	ث	sh	ش	k	ك
ch	چ	ṣ	ص	l	ل
j	ج	ḍ	ض	m	م
ḥ	ح	ṭ	ط	n	ن
kh	خ	ẓ	ظ	h	ه
d	د	c	ع	w	و
dh	ذ	gh	غ	y	ي

VOWELS

Long		Short	
ā	ا	a	ـَ
ū	و	u	ـُ
ī	ي	i	ـِ
ō		o	
ē		e	

Doubled

iyy (final form = /i/)	ـِيّ
uww (final form = /u/)	ـُوّ

Diphthongs

ay	ـَيْ
aw	ـَوْ

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Note

With the exception of names of interviewees, consultants and officials I have adopted the Library of Congress transliteration system for names of Arab/Muslim rulers, dynasties, religious and political movements and technical terms. All bibliographical Arabic entries (ie names of authors, titles of works) follow the Library of Congress system. Christian dates are normally preceded by Islamic dates if the subject concerns the Islamic period; in other instances only the date of the Christian era is inserted. I have maintained the Arabic script where technical terms quoted from Arabic sources relating to parts of a dhow had no vocalisation. In the text and bibliographical references the word Ibn, 'son', occurs at the initial position with classical Muslim writers, eg Ibn Ḥawqal, but an abbreviated 'b' is employed in the middle of a name, eg Abū Bakr Muḥammad b Ḥusayn. When, however, referring to names of sheikhs or other personalities in documents or historical texts of the modern period I used the conventional 'bin' in the middle of the name, eg Ḥamad bin ʿĪsā Āl-Khalīfa. The article 'al-' was used with all authors and 'Āl' (family) for tribal names of sheikhs. Otherwise, I followed the country's official transliteration system of recording names: in this case no diacritic points were used and names may appear with 'al'/'Al' (without a hyphen) or 'al-'/'Al-' (with a hyphen).

Foreword to the Second Edition

In the seven years since the publication of the first edition of this book, the rate of decline of the wooden dhow has accelerated in the Arabian Gulf and Oman. The al-Butteen dhowyard at Abu Dhabi which provided me with so much of my research in 1997 has been bulldozed. For many years skilful carpenters built several types of dhows there that served the Emirati community and the neighbouring states, while right up to its demise al-Butteen produced the finest racing dhows in the Emirates. Another yard in Doha, Kuwait, where state-of-the-art dhows were constructed by master builders, was razed to the ground by Iraqi forces in 1990. A few dhowyards in Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Umm al Quwain, al-Ashkharah and Sur are still building traditional wooden vessels because of the fishing industry, but more and more these are being replaced by fibre-glass vessels, albeit modelled on the traditional dhow. The continuance of the fishing industry links the past with the present but the dhow is no longer the mainstay of the Gulf's shipping activities; every year more and more dhows are abandoned and left as rotting hulks, such as the stitched-planked vessels in Taqa, Dhofar on the southern Arabian coast which I myself witnessed in 1996.

One important development which has occurred in the last decade, certainly since I began the research for the book, is the keen interest shown by the Gulf States and Oman in preserving their maritime heritage by setting up museums and centres devoted to maritime culture. Not only that, but displayed beside roads and in shopping malls we see murals and dhow images prominently displayed. They may be images of a dying tradition but they also reflect a growing appreciation of the past. Today, it is a pleasure to see several life-size replicas of the dhows not just in museums but in various places; they demonstrate a work of art by a people whose life was the sea. The memories of a seafaring past, a history of traditions and customs are here embodied in art and are the expression of national identity and pride.

Studying the maritime past of this part of the world is now on the increase; but with it comes a critical need for oral historians, ethnographers and archaeologists to research the dhow and the seafaring communities. There are still many gaps in our knowledge of the wooden traditional vessel and we need to see it in the light of a much wider Western Indian Ocean context, for the Arabian Gulf and Oman have traditionally shared one common destiny.

PREFACE

I have long been fascinated by the works of writers on medieval travel and geography and it was here that I found interesting and valuable information on Arab seafaring, ship types and nautical terms. The fourth/tenth-century geographer al-Muqaddasī (d 378/988) in particular triggered my interest in the nomenclature of ship types and this became the focus of my present research on the dhow in the Arabian Gulf and Oman.

This book represents the first part of my ongoing research: Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman (SFAGO), which entails both a study of the nomenclature of dhow types and of parts of the dhow. The sail, sailing techniques and navigational instruments are dealt with in a subsequent publication. The aim of this work, the first part of the project, has been to establish an historical and linguistic link between the present traditional seagoing vessels and coastal boats of the Gulf and Oman, and those of the medieval Islamic period. I had conducted several field trips to the Arabian Gulf, visiting Kuwait in 1990, then Bahrain in 1991 and Qatar in 1992; for these trips I was sponsored by the British Council and the Ministry of Information and then visited the Emirates in 1994 for which I was awarded a travel grant by the British Council. My next plan was to visit Oman, a vast country with a long tradition of dhow-building and seafaring. The work in Oman was made possible by a two year Leverhulme Research Fellowship from 1996 to 1998. The grant came in time to see the project coming to its fruition. In addition to the fieldwork, I consulted manuscripts at the National Heritage Museum in Muscat, the Bodleian Library in Oxford and several documents at the Centre for Documentation and Research at Abu Dhabi, the Centre for Gulf Folklore Studies in Doha (Qatar), the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research, and the Centre for Research and Studies on Kuwait.

This volume spans the period from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Historically, the taking of India and the Persian Gulf by the Portuguese is very significant because of the political and cultural influence they had in the area; most important from the point of view of my research is their contribution to shipbuilding techniques. The Dutch and the English, on the other hand, both played an important role in the commercial activity between the East and the West, but particularly important was the British involvement in controlling piratical and slave-trading activities. They also helped the Gulf Arabs in the making of the present states. My main focus

however, was to find historical and linguistic links between the nomenclature of ships in the Gulf and Oman. The Portuguese, Dutch and English documents pertaining to the area provided a wealth of information on the history of the Arabian/Persian Gulf and India but were also a rich source on the nomenclature of ships. All the sources which I consulted were copies deposited in the Centre for Documentation and Research in Abu Dhabi: i) Portuguese – Arquivo Historico de Goa, Arquivo Historico de Ultramarino, and Arquivos Nacionais da Torre do Tombo (Portuguese National Archives), ii) Dutch – the Directeuren van de Levantse Handel (Archives of the Board of Directors of the Dutch-Levant Trade in the Dutch General State Archives) and the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Archives of the Dutch East India Company), and iii) British documents – extensive use has been made of the factory records containing the Gombroon Diaries (India Office Library), English Basra Diary (Bombay State Archives) and Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government.

One of the difficulties I experienced in my field trips was in finding good reliable guides who could act as interpreters when needed. When I succeeded it was worth every minute of the interview, though only a crazy researcher is determined to drive a Toyota truck around in temperatures as high as 122°F in the shade, particularly when I once had to jump from my truck as it plunged into quicksand. I waited for hours in the middle of nowhere under a scorching sun until two Bedouins picked me up to get help from a nearby village. Another unfortunate occurrence entailed the loss of some of my field-notes when my tent blew away. Fortunately some of the notes were retrieved with the help of the team members, but it still entailed some reconstruction from memory. The Omanis attributed this misfortune to the local *jinn*s (or genies), which were supposed to haunt the area, and insisted on performing ceremonies (with frankincense and myrrh) to drive out the demons. I am pleased to report that the *jinn*s did not come back!

In the course of my fieldwork, the guides had to be prepared to translate from the regional dialects into standard Arabic. They also had to make the necessary contacts with the people I needed to interview and get all the official papers organized for me. Only twice was I refused entry to a place because of sensitive military installations or political instability. Much time was wasted before the real work could start. After obtaining the appropriate permission from the *wālī*s (governors) or sheikhs (heads) of towns or villages I set off, taking with me all that was needed: camera, tape recorder and field notes.

The fieldwork consisted of interviews, of which I conducted 204. The results obtained from each were checked against those from other sources, technical or non-technical, thus producing a reasonably accurate study. At

the outset I made a decision that my work would be a linguistic inquiry drawing on different historical, literary and technical sources. There was no doubt in my mind that this would be a difficult task to accomplish. My subjects were shipwrights, captains, merchantmen, seamen, pearl-divers and fishermen, not to mention boat researchers, archaeologists, maritime historians and *rāwī*s (storytellers). Handling interviews with some seamen was at times delicate, for the moment they became microphone conscious they tended to withhold information. Occasionally, it was hard to convince interviewees that I was not a government agent and that they could talk freely of what they knew about dhows and their experiences on board the dhows, sailing, for example, to south-west India and East Africa. I conducted open interviews giving interviewees the freedom to participate in an informal talk rather than rigid structured interviews with specific questions. With the open-interview method I could gather detailed information, with each question leading to another. An advantage of this was that when answers were ambiguous I could clarify things there and then without worrying whether or not I would complete a set of questions. It was not easy to establish dates. For example in Oman, the modern age starts when Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, before which, the towns and villages had hardly any roads, electricity or running water. When I asked old seamen when was the last time they saw a certain dhow I got as vague an answer as when I asked them about their age. Most of my subjects were over fifty years old as the aim of my research was to record the end of the days of the sail which came about in the early 1970s. The oldest man I interviewed was 114 years old, a former pearl-diver from Bahrain. He was born during the times of Isa bin Khalifa Al Khalifa (1869–1932), the great-great-grandfather of the present ruler, Hamed bin Isa Al Khalifa (1999–). I also included some of the younger generation in my survey, as I wanted to know how much they were informed about dhows, and dhow-building in general. There I found much of the seafaring heritage gradually disappearing, dying with the previous generation.

Difficulties did occur with some of the elderly informants (in their late eighties) who could not remember facts clearly, and allowances have been made for this. Other problems were to do with establishing a consensus of fact from at least three or more interviewees. The process of weeding out statements that were contradictory and exaggerated was essential and crucial to my study. At Fins, south-east of Oman, I was talking to a gathering of about 18 fishermen when, after posing a question about some parts of a dhow, all of them started to talk at the same time and argue about who would answer my question. The answer was simple but it only became clear after one of them pushed himself forward and drew the boat with his finger in the sand. But generally speaking most of the interviewing went smoothly. Some

just talked, gesticulating with their hands, pointing at parts of the vessel as if they were talking to an expert. With this latter category of interviewees it was difficult to coordinate interviewing and simultaneously taking notes, let alone photographing. There was no solution to this and sometimes I had to rely on my memory when I sat down in the evenings at the hotel (or in the tent when no hotel was available), going over the recorded tapes and field notes. This exercise was essential on a daily basis. The Gulf people are wonderful people and helpful in all imaginable ways and they never minded me going back to ask them over and over again the same questions, in order to verify what I had tape-recorded or written in my field notes. Back home I checked their results against those from other sources in order to ensure a reasonable accuracy.

The time spent in the largest Gulf state of Oman was very worthwhile as I managed to gain a great deal of the technical information not previously found. Admittedly some of the data on the nomenclature of ship types did conflict with the notes made on my earlier field trips to other Gulf states. The fishermen I interviewed though, were absolutely clear on what seemed to me a complex matter. Most of my day trips relied on the guides who drove me around and acted as interpreters. Their help was quite often indispensable, particularly on one or two occasions as we could only reach some fishing villages by boat and by no other means. But also being on my own visiting ports where Iranian, Indian, Pakistani and African cargo dhows lay at anchor, was extremely fruitful and rewarding. Talking to captains and merchant sailors was an added experience and their information on sea-trade links between the Gulf and the Indian Ocean and East Africa, did not seem to change much from what has been described by western travellers during the past hundred years, nor did it in some ways alter from what Muslim travellers reported in the medieval period.

I often set off walking on the shores of the Emirates and Oman searching for fishing or pearling boats left abandoned on the beach. It was a remarkable experience to find relics of a not too distant past lying there before your eyes. I spent hours sketching and photographing these boats. The fact that some of the boats have their stem and sternposts stitched to the hull is evidence of a technique that served its purposes well. I found out later that because these parts tended to break with the frequent pulling of the boat ashore and pushing it to the sea, they were easier for fishermen to repair by stitching rather than nailing them to the hull. Up until the 1940s, the planks of a vessel were stitched together. No nails were ever used. This information is corroborated by that found in the travellers' accounts written in the medieval period and diaries and reports in the Portuguese, Dutch and English documents up to the nineteenth century. It was a pitiful sight to see the

abandoned boats on the beach but even more sad to find out that Arab dhows are increasingly becoming relics of the past. My study came at the right time, before these traditional boats finally disappear. They are gradually being replaced by the fibreglass fishing dhows which, from the locals' perspective, are economical to maintain, lighter, and swifter on the sea. But there is now an increasing demand to build wooden racing boats styled after the traditional dhows. Shipbuilders all over the Gulf have once more adapted to creating a craft type that will perhaps save the proud heritage of an Arab seafaring community.

As the research progressed I came across some information which was worth pursuing: it was about the lack of sunken ships found in the Gulf and Oman and there was word of an underwater expedition which was about to search for sea artefacts in waters adjacent to the ruins of Qalhat in south-east Oman, eight miles north of Sur. The expedition would be sponsored by the Oman Maritime Heritage Project, Earthwatch and the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Fremantle. The expedition's director, Tom Vosmer, told me that his team was hopeful of finding a wreck, after an earlier survey in the area discovered a number of stone anchors lying on the seabed near Qalhat harbour. I was very excited about the idea of finding a sunken ship, an Arab or Indian dhow (or for that matter a Portuguese ship), because there are so few of them about. The information that can be extracted from a shipwreck is immense; this could be the link between the fragmented data found in medieval documents, and data collected from locals and the present traditional dhows. The underwater archaeology team chose Qalhat for diving because it was for many centuries the gateway to the Gulf and the Indian Ocean; it was the entrepôt of the monsoon trade and was much frequented by merchant ships as pointed out in the diaries of Pliny the Elder (d 79 AD), Marco Polo (d 1323), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d 770/1368) and Alfonso d'Alboquerque (d 1515). Also, the many fine examples of broken pottery and glass shards littered amongst the ruins suggest that Qalhat was once a thriving port town. I therefore joined the team not in the capacity of a diver (much as I would love to have done so) but as an oral historian, travelling a distance of 373 miles, and gathering information from local seamen, fishermen and storytellers on their present and past activities. I wanted to establish how much of the information given to me on names of ship types and hull shapes could be corroborated by the findings of written technical and non-technical sources and, in the case of anchors, how much of the information corresponded with the discoveries of the underwater archaeology team. The experience added a wider dimension to my research and it was evident at the end of the expedition that the archeologist, the historian and the linguist get better results if they work as a team.

My fieldwork took me as far as the borders of Dhofar with Hadhramaut. I decided that this would be the cut-off point, firstly because Dhofar is politically part of Oman and secondly the dhows beyond the west of Dhofar are a study on their own. This second reason is important because the dhows of East Africa, the Yemen and Hadhramaut form a typology together, different in many ways to the Arabian Gulf and Oman, though an attempt has been made to discuss their features comparatively. The present research does not include the Iranian littoral of the Gulf even though many dhows there share similar features with the Arabian Gulf. Nonetheless, I have classified some types as Perso-Arab dhows when there has been evidence of this being so.

One of the most innovative aspects of this book is the oral history, which has enabled me to comment on all the sources I consulted, with much more accuracy than would have been possible without the fieldwork data. Nautical jargon remains relatively untapped. Names of ship types, and technical terms for parts of a dhow, have been discussed by non-Arabists but certainly not historical linguisticians. The traditions of seafaring and shipbuilding form part of a network of cultural and trade exchange that exists among the diverse linguistic and ethnic communities of the Arabian/Persian Gulf, Southern Arabia, East Africa and Western India. A linguistic inquiry into this subject area would shed new light on material that has already been examined from a more conventional historical perspective.

Essentially, this is a study of what the mariners had to say about their knowledge of dhows and nautical terms, rather than a study relying on written sources. You will find in this book the geographical conditions of each dhow type, the historical background to the life pattern of the dhows in their roles as cargo, pearl-diving, fishing, pirate and slaving vessels. It has been the aim to document the dhow as part of a seafaring community, and its contribution to the prosperity of the area before the discovery of oil.

Dionisius Albertus Agius
Leeds 2002

MAP 1
The Northern Arabian Gulf States and East Oman

MAP 2

The Arabian Gulf States and the Southern Arabian Coast

1
THE FIELDWORK

يالله يالله يالله
قلنا يالله
هو لو يا سيدي
هو لو يا فزعة الله

Let us sail !
Let us go forth !
O Lord, we proceed
in thy fear, O Allāh.

(Songs of the Sea – the raising of the sails)[1]

Dhows are very much a part of the material culture of the Arab world and Indian Ocean. In this book the reader will find many references to the term material culture which is normally taken to refer to objects such as articles of clothing, cooking utensils, building materials etc. Here, however, the term material culture represents both the inanimate object – the dhow – and the animate – the people associated with the dhow and their interaction with it. The names given and the way in which objects are used, peculiar to one society, may be adopted by other societies through cultural contact. Thus, material culture can be defined in terms of the transmission of the ideas and attitudes shared by one community, which make up its culture, from one generation to the next. Language is the chief agent of cultural transmission and although my primary interest is in the nomenclature, many of the objects which make up the material culture are fascinating in themselves and often of great aesthetic value as examples of visual art.

The present research is a study of the nomenclature of dhow types and parts of a dhow in the Arabian Gulf and Oman with the aim of establishing an historical and linguistic link from the medieval Islamic period to the present time. The book focuses on: a) technical and non-technical information from Arabic and western sources (though it is not my intention to present an in-depth study of boat architecture because this falls beyond my expertise), b) written and pictorial references to ship types in medieval and post-medieval sources and, c) fieldwork based on interviews with various people among the

1 'Yāllāh, yāllāh, yāllāh/gulnā yāllāh/huwa law yā sīd-ī/huwa law fazʿat Allāh' (al-Rifāʿī 1985: 140).

seafaring communities and with researchers in the field. The archival work included references to names of ship types, maritime ethnography and maps, the results of which have been of great value to my research. Thus by integrating the data available I applied a holistic approach, bringing together a variety of sources on boat typology, shipbuilding and sea activity.

At the outset I made a decision that in order to present a unified picture of traditional dhows in the Gulf and Oman and their origins and connections with the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea, I would need a fair amount of oral history, not only to corroborate the findings of earlier maritime historians and boat researchers as well as references to Muslim ships in medieval and post-medieval sources, but also to fill gaps not covered by the spoken word and documentary evidence. Of course there are always doubts about the legitimacy of oral history, the reliability of memory, and whether a person's account is representative of a period or community. However, what people do not say can be just as telling in certain circumstances as what they do say.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century studies of Wüstenfeld (1880), al-Dujaylī (1912, 1913), Ritter (1919), Kindermann's monograph (1934) and Zayyāt (1949) are indispensable sources on ship types. Kindermann based his research into Muslim ship types on classical and medieval Arabic sources and contemporary oral and written histories, and his studies are fundamental for the boat researcher albeit sometimes information is lacking or inaccurate. Māhir (1967) and al-Nakhīlī (1974) discuss the different types of Muslim craft in Classical Islam but with little or no information on the modern period. Shihāb (1987) studies ship types from the Indian Ocean, namely East Africa, the Southern Arabian Coast and the Red Sea; his work is based on earlier studies of Arab craft and includes some useful line drawings. Also of interest is the social and cultural data on communities, settlements and sea trade provided by western travellers to the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Oman: Niebuhr (1774), Burckhardt (1829), Chesney (1850), Hunter (1877), Burton (1893), Miles (1919), Dickson (1949), Thesiger (1967) and others are of great importance. Mention is required of Lorimer's *Gazetteer* (1986), in which Lorimer, together with his assistants, collected a mass of detailed information during their numerous field trips. The bulk of the work was conducted between 1908 and 1915 and it was checked by locals appointed by various offices of the British administration in India and the Gulf. Some of the descriptive and statistical information on tribal and coastal communities is remarkable for the time, though one wonders about the accuracy of some reports in spite of them having been checked and revised by local officials.

Technical information is hard to find in early Arabic sources of the medieval period, while the western literature (Portuguese, Dutch and English in particular), is significantly representative of ship types, functions and hull

design. There has been much discussion on the classification of dhows and the European influence on the design of these ships after the arrival of the Portuguese in the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, which led to a change from stitched to nail construction. Records of experiments in nautical archaeology were very useful in the present research. Heyerdahl's (1971, 1982) construction and fitting-out of replicas of reed boats similar to those of the Egyptians and Sumerian and Akkadian periods, and in the case of Severin (1982) the stitched boat, built on the lines of a medieval Arab trading vessel, may both give clues to some of the gaps in the history of shipbuilding. They may not prove that such ships actually sailed the voyages that both boat architects have tried to emulate, but they certainly prove that the boats could have travelled these distances on the basis of the strength and durability of their construction. These experiments, together with attempts at pictorial reconstructions of the dhow of the Middle Ages (Nicolle 1989: 168–97) in the Arabian/Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, confirm that an unchanging tradition of shipbuilding persisted for a long time even as far as the coastal stitched boat of modern times. European designs in the sixteenth century however, played a decisive role in several practical considerations such as seaworthiness, weight, speed, war strategies, or mere decoration. Such information is hard to find in Muslim historical, geographical and travel accounts of the medieval period and, accordingly, any scattered data was fundamental for reconstructing a picture of ship types of the above areas.

I am not currently aware of any comparative study of seacraft in the Arabian Gulf and Oman. Regional descriptive studies by al-Qinā'ī and al-Khuṣūṣī (1982), 'Abdallāh (1987), Shihāb (1987), al-Ḥijjī (1988), and al-Shamlān (1990), cover classificatory types of Arab dhows, shipbuilding, and navigational techniques; moreover, a lexicographical study by al-Rūmī (1996) includes names of parts of ships and other nautical information. Other works of equal substance are those by western nautical researchers and maritime historians, such as Pâris (1841), Moore (1925), Hornell (1942), LeBaron Bowen (1949, 1952), Villiers (1952), Hourani (1963), Johnstone and Muir (1964), Prins (1972–4), Yajima (1976), Hawkins (1977), Howarth (1977), Facey (1979), and Grosset-Grange's (1993) glossary of classical and modern Arabic nautical terms in the Indian Ocean. I have consulted all these works, referring to them whenever I wanted to corroborate either my findings from fieldwork, or information collected from interviewees.

The linguistic survey will not only look at names of dhow types but at how categories are defined, and how distinctions are perceived and expressed. An examination of the origins of these terms will give us more insight into how the different vessels were classified. These are categorized primarily by hull shape, some cases of which, to the casual observer, show no

apparent difference, whereas European ships and boats are generally classified according to the rig. As a result of regional dialectal differences, similar ship types go by different names. Ambiguity soon arises when synonymous terms and regional variations and modifications over time are added to the picture. Alan Villiers and Clifford Hawkins and other writers have commented on this fact and cite various examples of it. I noticed however, that in spite of their technical knowledge, informative and reliable as it is, they sometimes fail to get a solid grip on the Arabic terminology, leaving a gap in the overall historical and linguistic picture. This is partly due to lack of knowledge of Arabic historical and literary sources and a linguistic knowledge of Arabic, and also, not being able to communicate effectively with local seamen or shipwrights other than through an interpreter.

The study of the origins of the names of dhow types, as well as the terminology of the parts of a vessel, is an area that has been little explored. Some scattered lists are found in the works already referred to (Hawkins, Hourani, Johnstone and Muir etc.) and in some Arabic works (al-Qinā'ī and al-Khuṣūṣī, 'Abdallāh, Shihāb, etc.). It was not my aim merely to collect and catalogue names of ship types in a lexicographical manner. Firstly it was important to discover the exact significance of the terms still in use off the Arabian Gulf and Omani coasts today, then to look them up in dictionaries. My aim in consulting lexica was to clarify, synchronically and diachronically, the term in question in the light of its context as portrayed in historical, geographical and travel accounts. This approach is of significant value to all researchers working in this field. It must be said however, that Arabic lexica (classical and modern) are not the best tools for the boat researcher. Often the term in question has not been included in dictionaries because lexicographers were not bothered with dialectal usages, a general problem which is found with many technical terms of the material culture. The dictionary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words, *Hobson-Jobson*, compiled by Yule and Burnell (1994; first published 1866), is generally good for the meaning and derivation of some names of ship types, but limited and sometimes unreliable. The best sources for tracing technical terms are historical and maritime works, the latter being rare in Arabic. These works may not describe the terms, but may contain information that could help the researcher in understanding their function. The Portuguese, Dutch and English documents were vital for the reconstruction of names of types in their historical context and looking for linguistic clues as to their origins.

An examination of the Arabic technical language brought to light a great many borrowings because Arabic was always flexible enough to borrow from other languages and cultures. The number of terms coming from Fārsī (Persian), Hindi and a few presumably from Portuguese, point to a mixing

of diverse linguistic seafaring communities who introduced shipbuilding techniques together with traditions of seafaring. I found that with some names of dhow types, Arabic absorbed a wealth of foreign linguistic culture to such an extent that it is difficult to get to the roots of words and as Kindermann (1934: viii) rightly observed, it is difficult to establish which language a particular word belongs to in the first place. Arabic has a highly-developed morphology based in principle on a tri-consonantal root varying with a vowel-pattern system. This, unfortunately, is not a sign of strength in the area of technical and scientific terminology, and can in fact be problematic.

Gathering information about dhows has traditionally been a frustrating experience because of the difficulty of language, although this was not primarily a problem I came across in my own interviews and I rarely needed an interpreter. My educated spoken Arabic was sufficient to communicate with the coastal communities. Taking notes on the different parts of the dhow however, turned out to be more complicated than I originally thought as their nomenclature varied from Kuwait down to the Dhofari coast on the Arabian Sea. Some of the information I unearthed through my reading did not correspond with that given by my informants. This does not suggest that what I read was wrong; after all, some authors had, like me, recorded their findings from interviews. Lt Commander Vaughan and many others who gained first-hand information were often disappointed with their findings on dhow types and their sources of information often conflicted with one another. It was only after travelling to different shipyards and maritime centres that I discovered that one type of dhow might have different regional names and in other instances the same name might apply to other types of dhow. The same was true with names of the parts of a dhow. Technical terms varied regionally and this detail was not well recorded by previous researchers. I spent a lot of time sorting out discrepancies with my informants and had many headaches listening to the tapes, trying to figure out which was which. I was wrong to think that shipbuilders and ship owners necessarily provide accurate information on the nomenclature of ship types. Travelling to south-west India, East Africa and other maritime centres in the Gulf and the Arabian Sea, brought these builders and owners in contact with different types of ships, and new ideas led to alterations even though the hull design remained traditionally the same. Local fishermen, unlike the builders, are sedentary. Their knowledge on types of local boats, though not technical, relies on what their ancestors handed down to them. It is this dichotomy of adaptation versus tradition which I found intriguing and interesting.

Studying the names of ship types and hull designs entailed understanding the background of the builders, captains, sailors and fishermen. When I started my present project I believed that boat-building was not essentially

ethnic in character and that there were no barriers to seafaring activity. Now, at the end of my project, the question of ethnicity has become crucial to my theory that the Fārsī content (some Indian) found in a ship's part names and to a lesser extent the nomenclature of ship types, indicates a strong Iranian element among settlers on the Arabian littoral. The way to test this was to establish from my interviewees their ancestral background and, even though some of their tribal names were easily detectable as being Iranian, I wanted to hear the story through their own words. This was not an easy task, basically because of the long historical and political rupture between Sunnī and Shīʿite Muslims, Iran of course being mainly Shīʿite and the rest of the Arabian Gulf mainly Sunnī. From medieval documents I learnt that historically among seafaring communities living on the Arabian coast, there had been an association with the Shīʿite belief, so I specifically asked locals about their religious and cultural background. Only a few were prepared to talk and then they were not happy that I was recording their conversations. From these recordings, and the silence of others, it does tend to confirm my hypothesis of a strong traditional Persian maritime heritage in the Gulf and Oman over the centuries. In Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman on the coast, there is evidence of a number of Shīʿite mosques which at one time served settlers who were engaged in seafaring. Many of the older generation still live in the neighbourhood of these mosques. The reference to Fārsī–Arabic speaking groups known as the Baḥārna in Bahrain (a minority in Kuwait), does suggest an active ethnic presence linked to Iran. The tradition of carving floral and geometric designs on the dhow's stem or sternposts could have its origins in Iran. This tradition extended to many towns and villages in the Gulf. They are also found on small and larger doors and in Sur I noticed that some doors had palm tree patterns. The tradition of carving doors is now becoming limited to wealthy families.

Indian Ocean seafaring has at times been dominated by Arabs and Persians, many of whom were shipbuilders and traders who had settled on the west Indian coast. Historically, maritime Muslim accounts, for example *Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa l-Hind*, compiled some time in 235/850, illustrate the importance of Indian navigation and its influence on Muslim navigation. Mention of Muslim captains and seamen mainly from Oman and Siraf, are found in sea adventures compiled by Buzurg b Shahriyār (d 399/1009) in the *Kitāb ʿajāʾib al-Hind*. The stories are of voyages made in India and China, similar to another collection of stories found in the *Silsalat al-tawārīkh* by al-Sīrāfī (fl third/ninth century) and 'The Voyages of Sindbād the Sailor' in the *One Thousand and One Nights*. The Muslim seafaring communities, linguistically diverse as they were, belonged to an Indian Ocean civilization of which the Arabian/Persian Gulf formed part. It is not surprising that