



# SEAFARING IN THE ARABIAN GULF AND OMAN

*The People of the Dhow*

DIONISIUS A. AGIUS

# SEAFARING IN THE ARABIAN GULF AND OMAN

This is a study of the seafaring communities of the Arabian Gulf and Oman over the last hundred and fifty years. It focuses on the cultural, material and commercial significance of the *dhow* and its role in the life and interaction of coastal communities with a long tradition of seafaring. Drawn from archival material, extensive field research and interviews that capture the voices and memories of the seamen, the work presents an integrated and dynamic study of *dhow* activity in the area, bringing together history, geography and material culture. The sea, the ships and the people who sailed them are examined within the context of the wider culture of the Indian Ocean, as expressed in boat-building traditions, navigational techniques, crew organization and port towns.

The Arabian Gulf and Oman have traditionally shared a common destiny within the Western Indian Ocean. The seasonal monsoonal winds were fundamental to the physical and human unities of the seafaring communities, producing a way of life in harmony with the natural world, a world which abruptly changed with the discovery of oil. What remains is the memories of a seafaring past, the rich artistic heritage of the region, and the proud history of traditions and customs recorded here in the recollections of a dying generation.

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SEAFARING  
IN THE  
ARABIAN GULF AND OMAN

*The People of the Dhow*

DIONISIUS A. AGIUS

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The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

To my mother Giovanna and father Pietru

*Other books  
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*In the Wake of the Dhow: The Arabian Gulf and Oman*

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## Preface

In January 1985, during my stay in Kuwait, I went to visit the dhowyards in Doha, north-east of the city of Kuwait. There, for the first time, I watched the building of a dhow. My curiosity was soon aroused as the dhowbuilder started to explain how the dhow was constructed and gave me names of some of the parts used. This experience whetted my appetite for more information, especially as I found myself drawn by the sheer beauty of the dhows. On subsequent visits to Doha and the dhowyard, I gradually formed a picture of a world rich in heritage, a vibrant history of maritime activity in the Arabian/Persian Gulf.

I therefore set out on a ten year research tour (1990 to 2000), exploring the world of the dhow, from Kuwait to Oman, mixing with merchants, dhowbuilders, captains and seamen, pearldivers and fishermen. Findings of the first part of this project “Seafaring of the Arabian Gulf and Oman (SFAGO)” were published in *In the Wake of the Dhow* (2002), which entailed an historical and linguistic study of dhow-types and parts of the dhow as well as the art of dhowbuilding in the Arabian Gulf and Oman.

There is a timeless quality to the design of many dhows which makes them seem to be relics of the past. I soon realised, however, that maritime trade responds to new technologies and the needs of the market, and this has led to dhows being altered or modified over time. Over the centuries, before Islam and during the early centuries of the Islamic period, Persians settled all along the Arabian coast from east to west, and some migrated further to the coasts of East Africa and West India. There was also a wave of emigration of Yemenite and Omani shipbuilders, merchants and traders alike, to West India and beyond. Likewise Chinese, Indonesians and Indians settled on the coasts of the Western Indian Ocean. Later in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and English in subsequent centuries, entered the Indian Ocean introducing newer ideas to shipbuilding techniques. Different terms for parts of ship, whether in Arabic, Fārsī, Indian languages, or Portuguese, crept into the repertoire of the Indian Ocean technical vocabulary.

*Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: People of the Dhow* is an attempt to document the world of dhows and the people who sailed on them; the trading activities they were engaged in, the conditions on board ship, the navigational instruments they used and the port towns where they lived, all within the unity of the Indian Ocean civilisation. I have combined linguistic, literary, historical and scientific sources to produce an holistic account of a vanishing world.

This book is a tribute to all the seafaring people of the Arabian Gulf and Oman whose pride in their way of life survived undimmed in spite of the changes wrought by oil money.

Dionisius A. Agius  
Leeds 2005



# *Abbreviations*

## ARCHIVAL

Aanw	Aanwinsten le Afdeling (Dutch General State Archives, The Hague)
AHG	Arquivo Historico de Goa
AHU	Arquivo Historico de Ultramarino
ANTT	Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo
ARA	Algemeen Rijksarchief den Haag (Dutch General State Archives, The Hague)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BL	British Library, London
BLO	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BM	British Museum, London
BM Or	British Museum (Oriental), London
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)
DMM	Dār al-Makhtūtāt li-Masqaṭ (Ministry of National Heritage & Culture, Muscat)
EBD	English Basra Diary (Bombay State Archives)
FR	Factory Records (India Office Library, London)
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
LAS	Library of the Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
SPDD	Secret and Political Department Diary
SRBG	Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government
TI	Topkapı Library, Istanbul
VOC	Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie

## LINGUISTIC

Ad	Adeni
Akk	Akkadian
Amh	Amharic
Ar	Modern Standard Arabic
Aram	Aramaic
CA	Classical Arabic
Chin	Chinese
Dh	Dhofari

## *Abbreviations*

Egy	Egyptian
Em	Emirati
Eng	English
GA	Gulf Arabic
Gr	Greek
Had	Hadhrami
Hin	Hindi
Ir	Iraqi
Jib	Jibbali
Kt	Kuwaiti
Leb	Lebanese
Mal	Malayal
Mar	Marathi
Meh	Mehri
NP	Neo-Persian
Om	Omani
Per	Persian
Port	Portuguese
Qat	Qatari
SA	South Arabian
Skt	Sanskrit
Som	Somali
Soq	Soqotri
Sw	Swahili
Syr	Syriac
Tam	Tamil
Tig	Tigré
Tun	Tunisian
Ur	Urdu
Yem	Yemeni

### LITERARY

AD	<i>Anno Domini</i> (in the year of the Christian era)
adj.	adjective
b. /ibn /bin	son of
Bk	Book
BC	before the Christian era
C	centigrade
c.	<i>circa</i> (about); century
cc	<i>corpo cronológico</i>
cf.	<i>confer</i> (compare)
coll.	collective
d.	died in

## *Abbreviations*

d. c.	died in about
E.	east
ed(s).	editor(s); edited by
E.N.E.	east north-east
E.S.E.	east south-east
et al.	<i>et alii</i> (and others)
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> (and others; and so forth)
F	fahrenheit
ff.	folios
fig(s).	figure(s)
fl.	<i>floruit</i> (flourished)
fn.	footnote
fol.	folio
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> (in the same place)
ie	<i>id est</i> (that is)
illus.	illustration(s)
lib.	<i>liber</i> (book)
lit.	literally
Ms	manuscript
n.	noun
N.	north
nd.	no date
N.E.	north-east
N.N.W.	north north-west
no.	number(s)
ns	new series
N.W.	north-west
p.	page
pass.	<i>passim</i> (here and there)
pl.	plural
pp.	pages
r	<i>recto</i> (on the front of the page)
ref.	reference
rev.	revised by
s.	singular
S.	south
S.E.	south-east
seq.	<i>sequens</i> (the following)
sic.	odd word or expression
S.S.E.	south south-east
S.S.W.	south south-west
sv	<i>subvoce</i> (under the word or heading)
SW	south-west
trans.	translated by; translator

## *Abbreviations*

v	<i>verso</i> (on the back of the page)
vol.	volume(s)
vs.	verse(s)
W.	west
W.N.W.	west north-west
W.S.W.	west south-west

### WEIGHTS, MEASURES & COINAGE

cm	centimetre(s)
ft	foot; feet
g	gram(s)
in	inch(es)
kg(s)	kilogram(s)
km	kilometre(s)
lb(s)	pound(s)
m	metre(s)
Mah	maḥmūdī(s)
mi	mile(s)
oz	ounce(s)
Rs	rupee(s)
sq km	square kilometre(s)
sq ml	square mile(s)

### MEASUREMENTS

1 <i>bā'</i> (pl. <i>abwā'</i> )	= c. 6ft/1.8m
1 <i>dhirā'</i> (pl. <i>adhru'</i> )	= 1.8in/45.72cm
1 <i>mann</i> (pl. <i>amnān</i> )	= 13.12ft/4m
1 <i>ratl</i> (pl. <i>artāl</i> )	= 15.84oz/449.28g
1 <i>shibir</i> (pl. <i>ashbār</i> )	= 9in/22.86cm

### SYMBOLIC

*	hypothetical origin
(?)	doubtful origin; possible meaning
[?]	possible year or place
>	becoming
<	resulting from
=	equivalent to
/	alternative to
//	phonetic transcription

# Transliteration System

## Consonants

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

## Vowels

Long	ā	ا	Short	a	اَ
	ū	و		u	وْ
	ī	ي		i	يَ
	ō			o	
	ē			e	
Doubled	iiy (final form = /ī/)			يِّ	
	uww (final form = /ū/)			وِّ	
Diphthongs	ay	اَيَّ			
	aw	اَوْ			



## *NOTE*

With the exception of names of interviewees, consultants and officials, I have adopted the Library of Congress transliteration system for names of Arab(ian)/Muslim rulers (medieval and modern), dynasties, religious and political movements and technical terms. All bibliographical Arabic entries and citation of Arabic sources (ie names of authors, titles of works etc.) 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. Volume and page number(s) of citations from primary sources are bracketed preceded by a bibliographical reference of the translation of the source text eg al-Rāmhurmuzī 1883-1886:111[190]. I have maintained the Arabic script where technical terms in dialectal Arabic, cited in Arabic sources, had no vocalisation. In the text and bibliographical references, the word Ibn “son” occurs at 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 ‘Īsā Āl-Khalīfa. The article “al-” was used with all Arab(ian) authors and “Āl” (family) for names of sheikhs or tribal families. Otherwise, I followed the country’s method 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), eg Sheikh Nasser Hamad al Makheini, Yousef Al Majid, Khalid al-Sindi, and Salim Mubarak Al-Furi. No diacritics have been adopted for Arabic place-names, such as Abu Dhabi for Abū Zabī, Marbat for Mirbāt, Sharjah for Shāriqa, Ras al Khaimah for Ra’s al-Khayma.



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# 1 - The Present Study

على يا لي نويت تسفر  
تسفر و توكل  
الله يا سيدي  
هو لو توكل على الله  
مسافرين متوكلين  
متوكلين على الله

You desire to go on a journey;  
depart and trust in  
Allāh our Lord;  
depart and trust in Him.  
On board the ship we trust  
Allāh to guide us.<sup>1</sup>

The present study is the second part of a ten-year project (1990-2000), “Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman” (SFAGO). It presents my findings on the dhow and its activity from the Gulf ports to West India, Southern Arabia and East Africa. It was my intention in this study to look in particular at the people associated with the dhow in the past one hundred and fifty years; it is not within the scope of the book to give a comprehensive account of dhow-types and shipbuilding techniques (see Chapter 2). Readers who wish to explore this subject in greater depth should refer to my early work *In the Wake of the Dhow* (2002), the first part of the SFAGO project. My focus in this present book has been to understand the role the Arabian Gulf and Omani dhow has played in unifying the littoral regions of the Arabian/Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean in general and to this purpose my research has examined the differences in the domain of the Arabian dhow activity, the relations between regional communities of the Northern Gulf and Oman, and finally, the conditions of dhow navigation and its operation feasibility; the monsoons, sailing seasons, routes and crew.

It is difficult to write about the Arabian/ Persian Gulf without including the Iranian coast. But at the time I was collecting data for this project it was almost impossible to conduct field work on the Iranian coast. I have therefore narrowed my field to include the Arabian littoral of the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Oman. “The people of the dhow” in the present study are the “Arabians”, a term chosen to represent the people of the Arabian Peninsula in particular while “Arabs” is a more generic term.

I had previously conducted a pilot study in the Arabian Gulf and Oman through generous research grants by the British Council and the Ministry of Information, visiting Kuwait in 1990, Bahrain in 1991, Qatar in 1992 and the Emirates in 1994. The results of my findings were the basis of a two-year Leverhulme research fellowship from 1996 to 1998 which focused on the maritime activity and the people of the dhow.

During my stay in Oman I joined an underwater archaeology expedition at Qalhat, a harbour town, south-east of the country between 23 March and 21 April 1998. The Qalhat expedition was led by Tom Vosmer

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<sup>1</sup> “ ‘alā yā li nawayt tasfar/ tasfar wa tawakkal/ Allāh yā sīdī/ huwa law tawakkal ‘alā Allāh/ msāfirīn mutawakkilīn/ mutawakkilīn ‘alā Allāh”; Introductory verses of a *mawwāl* “poem” sung in one of the working songs of the sea known as *khatfa* (see Chapter 8 ), words taken from al-Rifā’ī 1985:140.

## *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: People of the Dhow*

under the auspices of the Oman Maritime Heritage Project. It consisted of a diving team of the Omani Navy, underwater archaeologists of the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Fremantle, members from different organisations and institutes, and Earthwatch volunteers (see Vosmer *et al.*, 1999). I was involved in this expedition in my capacity as an oral historian, the aim was to corroborate the information I collected from locals of neighbouring fishing villages with the sea artefacts found on the sea bed at Qalhat. A survey was to include mapping of marine artefacts as well as a general survey of the ruins of medieval Qalhat which was destroyed by the Portuguese, followed possibly by an earthquake (see Chapter 4).

I have drawn my information from archival and published works, both technical and non-technical but my research could not be completed without collecting empirical evidence. I therefore interviewed 215 members of seafaring communities and a number of historians and folklorists. Being in the Gulf, meeting shipwrights and talking with seamen in *dīwāniyyas* (informal meeting places), cafés and outside mosque gatherings was essential to see the rapport these seafaring people have with their past history (map 1). I gained invaluable information as to the environment they lived in, the port towns and anchorages they sailed from and their contacts with merchantmen and sailors of other countries. Their evidence stretched far beyond their own recollections to include things that were told to them by previous generations, now dead. Roughly a third of my interviewees were still actively engaged in fishing or on the sea while the rest were now retired. I have met a few seamen on board an Iranian *būm* (double-ended cargo vessel) and an Arabian *sanbūq* (square-sterned cargo boat) in Dubai and Sharjah but I have never myself been on an ocean voyage.

For my field trips I was often accompanied by a guide, who facilitated permits with local *wālīs* (governors), talked to people in advance about my intended interviews and secured in general my travel to difficult areas. My standard Arabic was enough to conduct interviews with the locals but the guides were immensely helpful in translating from the regional dialect to standard Arabic when it became difficult to follow. On occasion my informants, through politeness, told me things they thought I wanted to hear. I tactfully rephrased my questions and, if still in doubt about their responses, I went back to them and asked them a set of new questions, using figures and designs, a technique that always worked and got better results. Needless to say the memory of my older informants often failed and unintentionally gave me questionable information that could not be checked. Sifting through my field notes was not straightforward: difficulties arose as to the intelligibility of some things that the subjects said with sometimes conflicting and incorrect information. The criteria for structuring and interpreting the results were based on: a) checking any dubious information by further field visits to confirm or re-confirm the data, b) discussing data with boat researchers, and finally c) consulting primary and secondary sources.

The dhow is still part of the traditional way of life. For me, a visitor and researcher, it was a pleasure to sit and listen to mariners talking of their past. They reminisced about the days of sail, the harbours from where they set off on their long voyages and the difficult years when the whole region suffered economically until the oil fields started to develop soon after the second world war, and modern port facilities were constructed. Long-distance trade continued through the 1960s and 1970s but as the motorized dhows gradually took over, sailing through the monsoon winds with all it entailed became a thing of the past.

The seamen are an important link between the present Gulf and its rich historic past. Their impressions, together with what has been written of coastal towns, past and present, are vital in the making of the maritime and cultural history of the Arabian/Persian Gulf. The traditions of seafaring and shipbuilding have long been a means of cultural as well as commercial exchange among the diverse linguistic and ethnic communities of the region as well as West India and East Africa. Much has been written on the Indian seafaring tradition though little has been said of Arabian Indian Ocean seafaring either in the past or more recent times.

*The Present Study*



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Map 1: Coastal towns and villages visited by the author, 1985-1998

### The sources

For the present study, a range of different sources was consulted from classical to modern times. The classical European authors I used were Herodotus (d. c. 430 BC), the earliest historian to write about the Persian Gulf, described by John Gould (1989:2) as “an astonishingly unprejudiced observer of humanity in its variety”, and Pliny the Elder (d. 79 AD), author of *Naturalis Historia* (Natural History) who is credited with information on the physical conditions of the Arabian coast and the Persian Gulf, facts derived from sources that were available to him from some 2000 books. Other important references about the region come from the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Periplus of the Erythraean Sea) written about 60 AD by an anonymous Greek living in Egypt. He was familiar with the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean but whether he actually sailed these seas is not known. Essentially, the *Periplus* is a sailing manual, a title applied to a genre of writing in Roman times with the intention of providing sailing directions for the seamen to the coasts of Africa, Arabia and India.<sup>2</sup> The *Periplus* is perhaps one of the earliest type of manuals that the Roman or Greek mariner would have used to sail across the sea, from Ras al-Hadd (the furthest southern-east point of Oman) to the west coast of India. It is a good example of an ancient guide which was “built from the records of early discoverers, merchants, traders, or sailors like Nearchus [fl. 324 BC]”<sup>3</sup> (Kiernan 1937:32). Besides sailing instructions, the manual is also a record of organized trading with the east, detailing imports and exports of the port town markets, conditions and other information about produce that eastern countries provided at the time. The Erythraean Sea included what is today the Western Indian Ocean and its corridors, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. What is important about this work is that it is the first of its kind that mentions the (monsoon) winds that take a boat directly across from the Arabian coast to West India.

I relied on a number of medieval Muslim works to establish a historical-geographical framework of the Arabian/Persian Gulf and the Western Indian Ocean. Al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956-7) is one author, whose work, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma‘ādin al-jawāhir* (Golden Meadows and Mines of Precious Stones) displays an extraordinary intellectual curiosity which reflects the number of books he read, having had recourse to 165 written sources including translations of Greek and Pahlavi works but also the long journeys he undertook from the Red Sea to the China Sea, thus enhancing his first hand experience (Pellat 1991:784). A prolific writer, whose works are encyclopaedic, dealing with the history of ancient peoples and Islam till 336/947-8, he was frequently quoted by historians. The *Murūj* contains geographic and ethnographic information on the lands al-Mas‘ūdī visited and others that he did not, relying on data given to him by various scholars he contacted.

Ibn Ḥawqal (fl. c. 367/977-8) and his contemporary al-Muqaddasī (d. 378/988-9) are the best exponents of human geography with information gathered from travel and direct observation. Their works, the *Kitāb sūrat al-arḍ* (Book of the Shape of the Earth) and *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma‘rifat al-aqālīm* (The Best of Divisions on the Knowledge of Climes) respectively contain important notes on socio-economic matters of the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Oman. Both geographers wandered in Arabia and its coastal towns, giving a vivid description of the several settlements and the conditions of their inhabitants. Al-Idrīsī’s (d. 548/1154) geographical work, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (The Stroll of One Desirous of Crossing the Horizons of the Globe), commissioned by

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<sup>2</sup> The periplus or periplous was the old Greek term for “coastal voyaging”; it came to mean “sailing directions”. Strabo (d. after 21 AD) who used the periplus of Timosthenes (fl. third century BC) must, in the opinion of Taylor (1971:56), have had a sea-chart in front of him when he was describing the geography of the Mediterranean and its islands. Timosthenes wrote about “sailing directions”; the best known was his *On Ports* (ten books) which was copied word for word by Eratosthenes (d. c. 195 BC) in his work *On Geography*. One of the earliest examples of these manuals is the *Periplus* of the Mediterranean falsely ascribed to Scylax of Caryanda (during the time of the Persian king Darius [521-486 BC]), a seaman’s pilot book written about fourth century BC giving an account of the harbours and landmarks of the Mediterranean Sea, including details of safe anchorages etc.

<sup>3</sup> Nearchus was a Macedonian general, who was appointed by Alexander the Great (d. 323 BC) shortly before he died, to command a fleet that sailed up the Persian coast, see Arrian 1971:326-30.

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the Norman King Roger II of Sicily (1111-1154), is another valuable source, extending its scope to the ethnography of the countries he visited or from information collected from travellers he came in contact with.

Maritime accounts offer interesting information about Indian Ocean navigation. One of the earliest is the *Akḥbār al-Ṣīn wa l-Hind* (News of China and India) which goes back to 235/850, attributed to Sulaymān, the merchant, perhaps an early navigator, who performed several voyages to India and China. There are indications that the author of this work may have had available to him navigational books current in the Indian Ocean following the traditions of *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. Following this work I consulted Buzurg b. Shahriyār's (d. 399/1009) *Kitāb 'ajā'ib al-Hind* (Book of the Marvels of India) written in c. 342/953, a book of many tales of Indian Ocean sailors. Amusing and strange as they are, they cannot be, in S. Maqbul Ahmad's words, "completely brushed aside as untrue and ignored in any serious study of Arab geography and exploration" (1965:583).

For medieval travel I also looked at the works of Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217-8) and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 770/1368). Ibn Jubayr's *Rihla* (A Travel) gives detailed reports on the various towns he visited, discussing their religious, social and cultural conditions. Although his travels do not include the eastern Arabian coastal towns, his observations on maritime conditions in the Red Sea are instructive. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fī gharā'ib al-amṣār wa 'ajā'ib al-asfār* (The Gift of the Observers on the Curiosities of the Countries and the Wonders of Travels), also known as *Rihla*, is the most notable travel book ever written in Arabic, rich in its descriptions of the lands he visited. He travelled for some 30 years, going beyond the Mediterranean and crossing the territories of the Levant, into the Indian Ocean as far as China. His *Rihla* is lively with comments on the characteristics of port towns and the people inhabiting them. His occasional observation on a type of ship is of interest and useful but often puzzling.

Medieval European travellers left interesting notes on their voyages to the Arabian coast and the Indian Ocean coastal centres. One such was Marco Polo (d. 1323), who, like Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, claims to have travelled as far as China. His book, *Divisament dou Monde* is a description of the world, from Venice to China, and though it may be argued that some of his information is based on second-hand material, mixing facts with myth, his ethnographic information on the coastal towns should not be discarded.

For a history of trade routes in the Indian Ocean, George Hourani's *Arab Seafaring* (1963) remains one of the most important reference works for both the medieval and post-medieval periods. Of the post-medieval period, the Portuguese, Dutch and British documents were essential in order to understand the role of the Indian Ocean trade and its impact on the Gulf and Oman. I have, therefore, consulted a number of documentary sources at the Centre for Documentation and Research at Abu Dhabi (CDRAD) which cover the history of European trade with the Arabian/ Persian Gulf and Oman between 1530 to 1820: i) Arquivo Nacional de Torre do Tombo (ANTT), ii) Algemeen Rijksarchief (Dutch General State Archives) in The Hague (ARA), iii) British Library, London (BL), iv) Gombroon Diaries and Bushire Residency Records in the India Office Library, London (GD), v) Factory Records in the India Office Library, London (FR), vi) India Office Library and Records in London (IOL), vii) Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Archives of the Dutch East India Company) (VOC), viii) Dār al-Makḥṭūṭāt li-Masqaṭ (Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Muscat) (DMM), ix) King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, Riyadh and, x) the Bodleian Library in Oxford (BLO).

The coming of the Portuguese to the Indian Ocean in the early sixteenth century opens a new era in the region, in that their arrival marks a political upheaval and a socio-economic instability among the indigenous peoples of the Indian Ocean. Ultimately, the Portuguese were looking eastwards to set up new trade routes across lands and seas. This they did, successfully dotting the coastlines of East Africa, Arabia and the Indies with their fortresses and staging-posts of trade. In my study I refer to Alfonso De Albuquerque (d. 1515), Duarte Barbosa (d. 1521), Vasco Da Gama (d. 1524) and Ludovico di Varthema (fl. sixteenth century); all were voyagers and explorers in the true sense of the word. Of the four, only Di Varthema spoke Arabic.

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De Albuquerque, the Portuguese admiral, went to India in 1503 with the main goal of control over the spice routes. His *Commentaries* (1875-1884 in four volumes), written by his son Braz from the dispatches to King Dom Manuel I (1469-1521), were to glorify the heroic military actions performed in the east. This work is vital to the history of the Arabian/Persian Gulf, and though several authors quoted his activities in their work, there still remains some doubt as to the accuracy of the information. The second voyager, Duarte Barbosa, was a Portuguese official who served the Portuguese government in India from 1500 till 1516 or 1517. The value of his work known as the *Book of Duarte Barbosa* (1918-1921 in two volumes) is principally geographical and ethnographical, with descriptions of the Muslim and non-Muslim population. He speaks of the large immigrant population of Muslims from Arabia and Persia in East Africa and West India and a number of Indian and Persian merchants who settled on the Arabian and East African coasts. The third voyager and discoverer, Vasco da Gama, is perhaps the first European to journey by sea to India. He was sent by King Dom Manuel in 1497 to pioneer the Indian Ocean route, and his discovery opened the way for Europe to reach the wealth of India. The account of his voyages is related by Gaspar Correia, a prolific writer, who spent much of his life in India. He went to the east during the viceroyalty of Alfonso de Albuquerque, whom he served as private secretary. He gathered information about Da Gama's voyages from men who had sailed with him, as well as from government archives, but he of course did not accompany Da Gama. Some selections of his work *Lendas da Índia*, dealing with the journeys of Vasco da Gama, are found in the book entitled *The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama* (1869). Correia's account has more details of everyday life than other sixteenth century Portuguese chronicles and differs from them in important ways. The last of these four explorers was an Italian, Ludovico di Varthema, the gentleman of Rome, whose motives in undertaking his journey to the east from 1503 to 1508 was his insatiable desire to discover new countries. Joining the Portuguese army, he delved into the delights and dangers of exploration. His *Travels* (1863) is perhaps the most interesting and detailed narrative. His journeys took him to Egypt, the Levant, Arabia across the Red Sea to Ethiopia, and from there to Persia and the Indies. They are narrated with honesty, wit and humour.

Soon after the Portuguese, the Dutch began to trade in the Indian Ocean, as detailed in B. J. Slot's *The Arabs of the Gulf 1602-1784* (1991). The book focuses on the coastal and seafaring people as well as the Arabians and European (Dutch and English) traders. It revolves around tribes, traders and tollhouses. A second work by Sultan Bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, present ruler of Sharjah, titled *Power Struggles and Trade in the Gulf 1620-1820* (1999) offers an interesting interpretation of the decline in trade and the power struggles played by the Dutch and the British in the region. Both books give varied and substantial reasons for the decline and in many ways explain and correct some of the historical accounts laid in the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Oman and Central Arabia* (1986; first published 1908-1914), compiled by John Gordon Lorimer. The latter, however, remains a fundamental source for historical facts covering the early twentieth century, based on surveys conducted by a number of servicemen and civil servants under the direction of Lorimer.

In addition to Lorimer's *Gazetteer*, we have a scholarly history of the Gulf and Oman in particular by Samuel Barrett Miles. His book, *Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, was first published in 1919 in two volumes (1994). Miles occupied the post of Political Agent in Muscat from 1872 to 1886. His book is a vital reference work and also a good record of flora, fauna, topography and tribal matters. Arnold Wilson's *The Persian Gulf: an Historical Sketch from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (1954; first published 1928) is a useful work based on Arabic and Fārsī texts, covering the latter history of the Gulf's relations with European powers. H. R. P. Dickson is another author whose personal view of the history of tribal life in and around the sheikhdom of Kuwait is well recorded in his monumental work, *The Arab of the Desert* (1949). As a Political Agent he spent twenty years in Iraq and the Gulf from 1929 to 1945. No doubt the reader would find in these European works a wealth of information on the socio-political and cultural aspects of the Arabian/Persian Gulf but to complement this information one should not miss Amīn al-Riḥānī's *Mulūk al-'Arab* (The Arabian

## *The Present Study*

Kings; 1960 in two volumes), written in a vivid and personal style. Al-Rīḥānī (d. 1940) was a Lebanese-American who acted as an advisor in the 1920s and 1930s to the sheikhs and rulers of the Gulf on matters dealing with western powers. This is the only work of its kind in the modern period written in Arabic and is essential reading because of the different perspective it gives of the west from an Arab view point.

On the Muslim navigational tradition of the Indian Ocean, Gabriel Ferrand's *Instructions nautiques et routiers arabes et portugais des XVe et XVIe siècles* (1921-1928 in three volumes) was at the time a most up-to-date research but did not include a complete translation of Ibn Mājid's (d. 906/1500) entire text of *Kitāb al-fawā'id fī uṣūl al-baḥr wa l-qawā'id* (Book of Benefits in the Principles of Navigation). The full translation of this work is by G. R. Tibbetts, entitled *An Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese* (1981) which contains an introduction on the history of Arab navigation, notes on the navigational techniques, topography of the Indian Ocean and a glossary of navigational terms. Ibn Mājid's text came in very useful during my interviews where I referred to it frequently, an incredible testament to a work written over 400 years ago.

Other navigational works are those of Sulaymān al-Mahrī (d. 917/1511): his main treatise is the *Kitāb al-'umda l-mahriyya fī ḍabṭ al-'ilm al-baḥriyya* (Book of the Mahri Masterpiece on Exact Maritime Sciences) which includes both theory and practice, though he later revised this work in a treatise entitled *Minhaj al-fākhir fī 'ilm al-baḥr al-zākhir* (The Perfect Method in Navigational Science), giving a new list of compass bearings, latitude measurements and longitudinal distances and other data for coasts of the Indian Ocean.

There is no record of any Arabic navigational works after the death of Ibn Mājid and Sulaymān al-Mahrī. Their poems and treatises, however, became known to Ottoman authors whose interest in maritime history and the science of navigation became evident in the pioneering works of Pīrī Re'īs (d. 1554) and later Sidi Ali Çelebi (fl. sixteenth century). Pīrī Re'īs wrote the *Kitab-i baḥriye* (The Mariners' Guide) in which he produced maps of the world, drawn from Mediterranean portolans; they are detailed and they have long been the subject of study by a number of naval, maritime and geographical scholars. Of interest to our present research are his fourteenth and fifteenth chapters which deal with the Indian Ocean, its seasonal winds and the method of determining one's latitude, information on which is found in Ibn Mājid's work. Pīrī Re'īs' text is not mentioned because of its navigational value, but rather for its rich historical, ethnic and geographical importance. However, on the methods of navigation used in the Indian Ocean, one finds Sidi Ali Çelebi's *al-Muḥiṭ* (The Ocean), following Ibn Mājid's tradition, a very useful book. Interestingly, he was not an Indian Ocean pilot but an Ottoman civil servant. His work is not original, for much of what he wrote was taken from the works of Sulaymān al-Mahrī, the *'Umda*, the *Tuḥfat al-fuḥūl* (The Luminary Gem) and the *Qilādat al-shumūs* (The Necklace of Suns). Nonetheless, his added commentary to *al-Muḥiṭ* makes the book an important source in understanding the navigational works of his predecessors.

There are hardly any navigational guides written after Sidi Ali Çelebi. One manuscript dated 1122/1710 was written by Nāṣir b. 'Alī b. Nāṣir al-Khuḍūrī;<sup>4</sup> it has been edited by Ḥasan Ṣāliḥ Shihāb and published in Muscat by the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture in 1994. We have guides drafted in the twentieth century, all from Sur, found in the Dār al-Makḥṭūṭāt in Muscat. Most of these guides contain tables of latitudes and longitudes; they show the distance of the ship's course and list full tables of the sun's declination. Some are illustrated with the points of the compass or shooting the sun with a sextant (see Chapter 9). Almost all the sea captains I interviewed mentioned the Kuwaiti 'Īsā l-Quṭāmī (d. 1929), whose standard work *al-Mukhtār fī 'ilm al-biḥār* (The Guide of Navigational Science) was originally published in 1915 and re-edited by his son 'Abd al-Wahhāb in Kuwait 1964. Importantly, all these works deal with traditional navigation, its routes and courses of

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<sup>4</sup> "Ma'din al-asrār fī 'ilm al-biḥār" (A Treasure-trove of Secrets in Navigational Science) found at the Dār al-Makḥṭūṭāt in Muscat (DMM-Ms 1833-K16).