

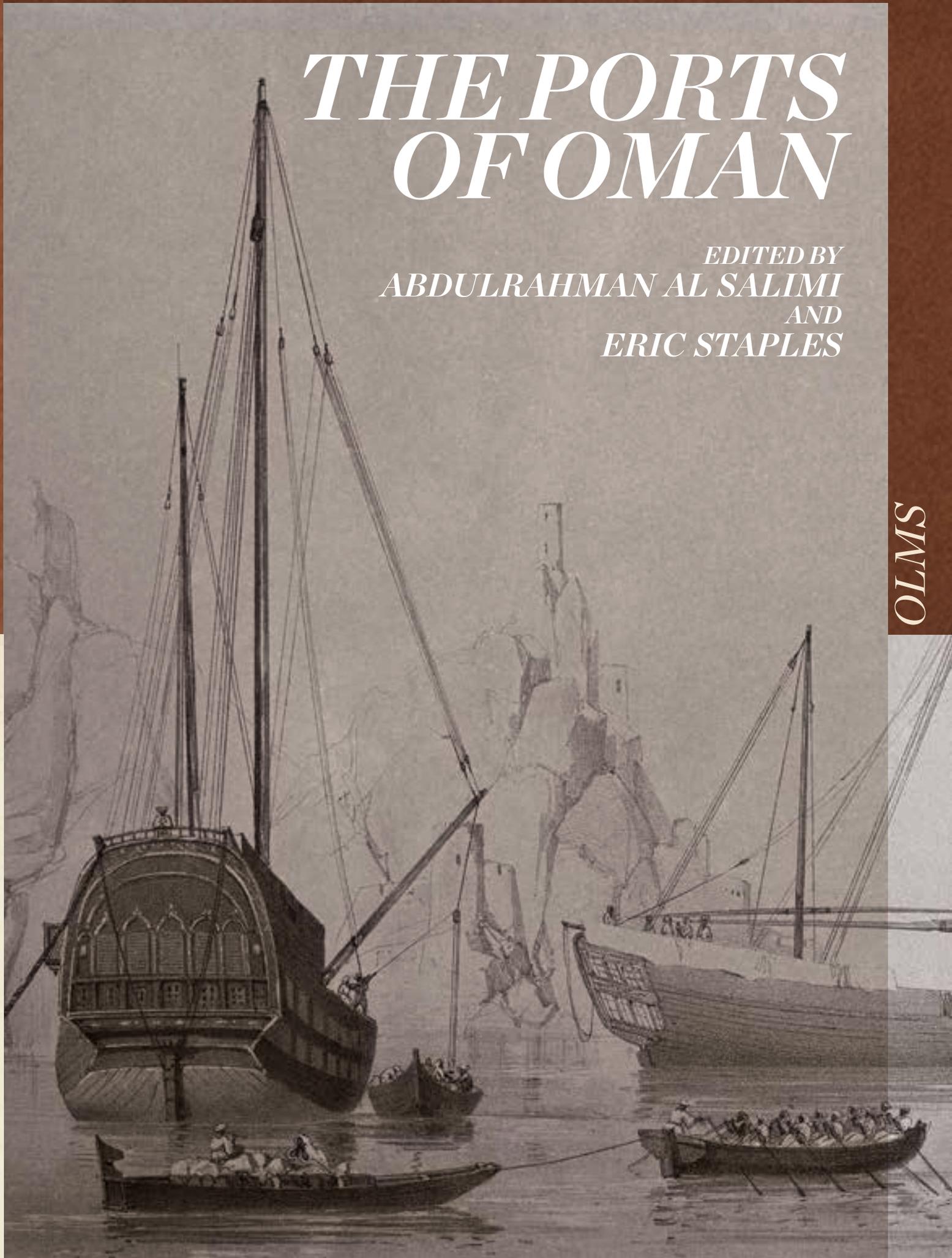
**STUDIES ON IBADISM  
AND OMAN. VOL 10**

*Edited by Abdulrahman Al Salimi and Heinz Gaube.*

# *THE PORTS OF OMAN*

*EDITED BY  
ABDULRAHMAN AL SALIMI  
AND  
ERIC STAPLES*

*OLMS*



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***VOL 10  
THE PORTS OF OMAN***



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Hildesheim · Zürich · New York  
2017

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# Table of contents

Foreword by H.E. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammed Al Salmi . . . . .	7
Introduction by the Editors . . . . .	9
<b>Part One: The Larger Concept of Ports</b>	
Chapter 1	
Michael Pearson: <i>Ports in the Indian Ocean</i> . . . . .	17
<b>Part 2: Ports of Dhofar</b>	
Chapter 2	
Alessandra Avanzini: <i>The Ancient Port of Sumburam</i> . . . . .	33
Chapter 3	
Juris Zarins and Lynne Newton: <i>Northern Indian Ocean Islamic Seaports and the Interior of the Arabian Peninsula</i> . . . . .	57
<b>Part 3: Ports of the Eastern Region</b>	
Chapter 4	
Juris Zarins and Lynne Newton: <i>Islamic Period Maritime Trade and Travel along the Southern Arabian Coasts of the Indian Ocean: The Case for Socotra, the Hallaniyat, Masirah and Mabut Islands</i> . . . . .	89
Chapter 5	
Tom Vosmer: <i>Qalhat and Sur</i> . . . . .	117
<b>Part 4: Ports of Muscat and the Batinah</b>	
Chapter 6	
Heinz Gaube: <i>Muscat and Mutrah</i> . . . . .	141
Chapter 7	
Nasser Said Al-Jahwari: <i>The Southern Batinah Ports</i> . . . . .	159
Chapter 8	
Brian Averbuch: <i>Sohar: Forelands, Umland and Hinterland in the History of an Omani Entrepôt</i> . . . . .	179
<b>Part 5: Ports of Larger Oman</b>	
Chapter 9	
Timothy Power: <i>Julfar and the Ports of Northern Oman</i> . . . . .	215
Chapter 10	
Beatrice Nicolini: <i>The Port of Gwadar and its Relationships with Oman</i> . . . . .	241
Chapter 11	
Mark Horton: <i>East Africa and Oman, c. 600–1856 CE.</i> . . . .	255

## Part 6: Hormuz-Qalhat-Kij: A New Maritime and Mercantile System

### Chapter 12

Valeria Fiorani Piacentini: <i>Hormuz: Bandar and Mulk (Port and Dominion): Eleventh to Early Sixteenth Century CE</i>	
<i>Part 1: Hormuz on Terra Firma: from Bandar to NaḥIya under an Autonomous Native Ruler (Tenth-Eleventh Centuries)</i> . . . . .	283
<i>Part 2: The Political and Economic Inheritance of Siraf: Qays and Hormuz – Two Different Patterns of Mercantile Power (End Eleventh to Thirteenth Century)</i> . . . . .	309
<i>Part 3: New Hormuz and its Maritime Dominion (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century)</i> . . . . .	333
Conclusion: Eric Staples: <i>The Ports of Oman Today</i> . . . . .	357
The Authors . . . . .	367

# The Southern Batinah Ports

Nasser Said Al-Jahwari

This chapter aims to review the most important small coastal ports/harbors (*banādir* or anchorages) along the southern Batinah coast in the area between the two major and well-known ports of Sohar and Muscat/Mutrah. These two ports have been subject to several studies and mentioned by a number of travelers, historians, and archaeologists (see Chapters 6 and 8 in this volume). By contrast, the smaller ports and harbors have not been subject to any study. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to highlight the trade importance of these smaller ports locally and internationally, and to clarify their role in Omani trade exchange.

These ports, as shall be seen later, were mediators and formed a link between the two big ports on one hand, and between the coast and the interior on the other. They supplied larger ports, especially the port of Mus-

cat (Mutrah), with labor used in cargo and load transfer, as well as sailors and others who had a role in navigation, maritime transport, and trade on both local and international levels. They also supplied them with the most important domestic goods, coming either from the coast or the interior. Some of these goods were traded in the local markets near Muscat, while the rest were for international export. Furthermore, these smaller ports received imported goods from the major ports and served as mediators in transferring and redistributing them to the neighboring coastal or inland areas.

Among the small ports that will be presented here are those located in the areas of Seeb (old port of Dimma), Barka, Musna'ah, Suwaiq, Khaburah, and Saham, all of which have a number of small ports/harbors that were exploited by large sailing ships. It should be noted that



Figure 1: The Southern Batinah Ports. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

there is only very limited information about these smaller ports in historic sources. These indications are to be found in the nineteenth and twentieth century accounts of travelers and historians such as J. R. Wellsted (1840), Lieutenant W. M. Pengelley (1860–62), Lorimer (1908), Bertram Thomas (1931), the Kuwaiti captain ‘Isa al-Qitami (1976), S. M. Zwemer (1986), and Philip Ward (1987).’ (Unless otherwise indicated, all dates in this chapter are Common Era [CE].) Although these are very few and brief, they are important in that they confirm the existence of such ports in this part of Oman. In addition, there is no archaeological evidence that can be used in studying these smaller ports, with the exception of the archaeological survey and excavation conducted recently on the ancient port of Dimma (Seeb: see below).

Therefore, this study will be based on such simple indications and the data from the interviews conducted with men who formerly engaged in the overseas maritime trade. One to three elderly men were interviewed in four of the areas that have ports. This was done in order to identify the role of these ports/harbors and their function as ports for fishing, transport, navigation, and local and regional trade. It is important to note that this chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive and detailed survey of the role of these ports and their historical function, but aims to be the first step in an attempt to bridge the gap in our knowledge of these small but important ports in terms of function and role.

### Interviews

The objective of interviewing people who took part in the navigation and trade might be stated broadly as a search for ways of defining the role and function of small ports along the Batinah coast, and to learn about issues related to past maritime activities such as trade and navigation, which they experienced and practiced.

Interviews were conducted during December 2014, and included one to three elderly men in each area (see Table 1). The author prepared a number of questions that serve the research aims and questions. Because of the interviewees’ age, the author preferred to ask questions without interrupting them. So the interviews were open, and whenever a point needed to be further clarified, the author would ask questions. All interviewees were voice-recorded. The ethnographic data collected from these interviews was then combined with the rarely available historic data from the literature.

Before going into a discussion of the smaller Batinah ports and the results of the interviews, it is important to provide a brief overview of the natural characteristics and

No.	Area	No. Interviewees
1	Saham	1
2	Khaburah	1
3	Suwaiq	3
4	Musna’ah	2

Table 1: Total number of interviewees in each area

their impact on the role played by these ports over time. Our understanding of these characteristics will help in answering some questions about the geographical factors affecting the establishment of these ports, their development, and their potential to facilitate not only the commercial but also the social, economic, and cultural communication process of the areas’ population living close to the ports, or those living in the hinterland areas.

### Geographical Characteristics of the Southern Batinah Coast

This section attempts to briefly explore the most important natural and geographic characteristics of the Batinah coast. This will help in understanding the geographic factors affecting the establishment and development of the Batinah harbors/ports, as well as defining the nature of trade links that existed between these small ports and their larger counterparts along the Sea of Oman. Ultimately, this will help in highlighting the important role of these smaller ports not only in the subsistence economy of the people of Batinah but in the social and cultural impacts and changes that happened to them.

The extent of the Batinah plain ranges between 15 and 80 km in width, and more than 300 km in length.<sup>2</sup> Out of this length, the study area between Saham and Seeb covers around 160 km. The Batinah coast is long and straight and has very few natural harbors. Most fishing boats were, and still are, winched up onto the beach. Therefore, the locations where ports might grow up are quite limited.

However, there are a number of places along the Batinah coast that form natural harbors, representing a sector of the sea surface that is protected in a natural or artificial way and can be used as an anchorage for ships and a place to load and unload goods. Additionally,

among the distinct characteristics of the Batinah coast is the presence of a number of small islands in the vicinity of its coastline. These include, for example, the islands of Daymaniyat and Sawadi. These islands offer a safe port/anchorage for ships and have depths that are greater than other coastal ports.<sup>3</sup>

As will be seen below, all of these factors and characteristics allowed the emergence of a series of active trade ports along the Batinah coast, each with its own vital geographic realm and continental hinterland associated with it. These ports enabled the establishment of prominent trade contacts in the international shipping network throughout ancient and medieval times.

### The Southern Batinah Ports

This section will present the smaller coastal ports/harbors along the coast of the southern Batinah, including Seeb (the old port of Dimma), Barka, Musna'ah, Suwaiq, Khaburah, and Saham. A synthesis will be made using the few available historic data and the ethnographic data collected from interviews conducted with elderly Omanis who took part in the operation of trade and navigation between Oman and neighboring countries, such as India, East Africa, Persia, Iraq, and the Gulf.

Some historic sources indicate that Omani ships used to stop at ports and harbors, known locally as *banādir* (singular *bandar*), that were often in big cities or small towns where the inhabitants practiced trade. These ports and harbors were sources of supply for the ships or transit points for trade goods moving through them. Therefore, Omanis working in the marine profession had strong relations with the inhabitants of those ports and harbors based on mutual respect and confidence in doing business. It is known nowadays that some tribes from Sur, which is one of the important ports along the eastern Omani coast, used to sail to the Batinah ports to load goods and hire sailors. Our interviewees informed us that some of them used to live, and still do, on the Batinah coast, where they have houses and some date palm groves. For instance, they are found nowadays in Barka, Musna'ah, and Suwaiq.

These ports are mentioned by some sea captains and historians, such as the Kuwaiti captain 'Isa al-Qitami,<sup>4</sup> who gave detailed accounts of the ports and harbors that are known to Arabian Gulf vessels that traveled in the Batinah area. These include, for example, Bandar Saham, al-Dail, Bandar Khaburah, Bandar Khadhra, Bandar Suwaiq, Bandar Musana'ah, Sawadi and Barka, Daymaniyat Barka, and the southern Seeb Daymaniyat. These ports will be presented below, working from west to east (from Saham to Seeb).



Figure 2: The Southern Batinah Ports and their important *banādir*. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

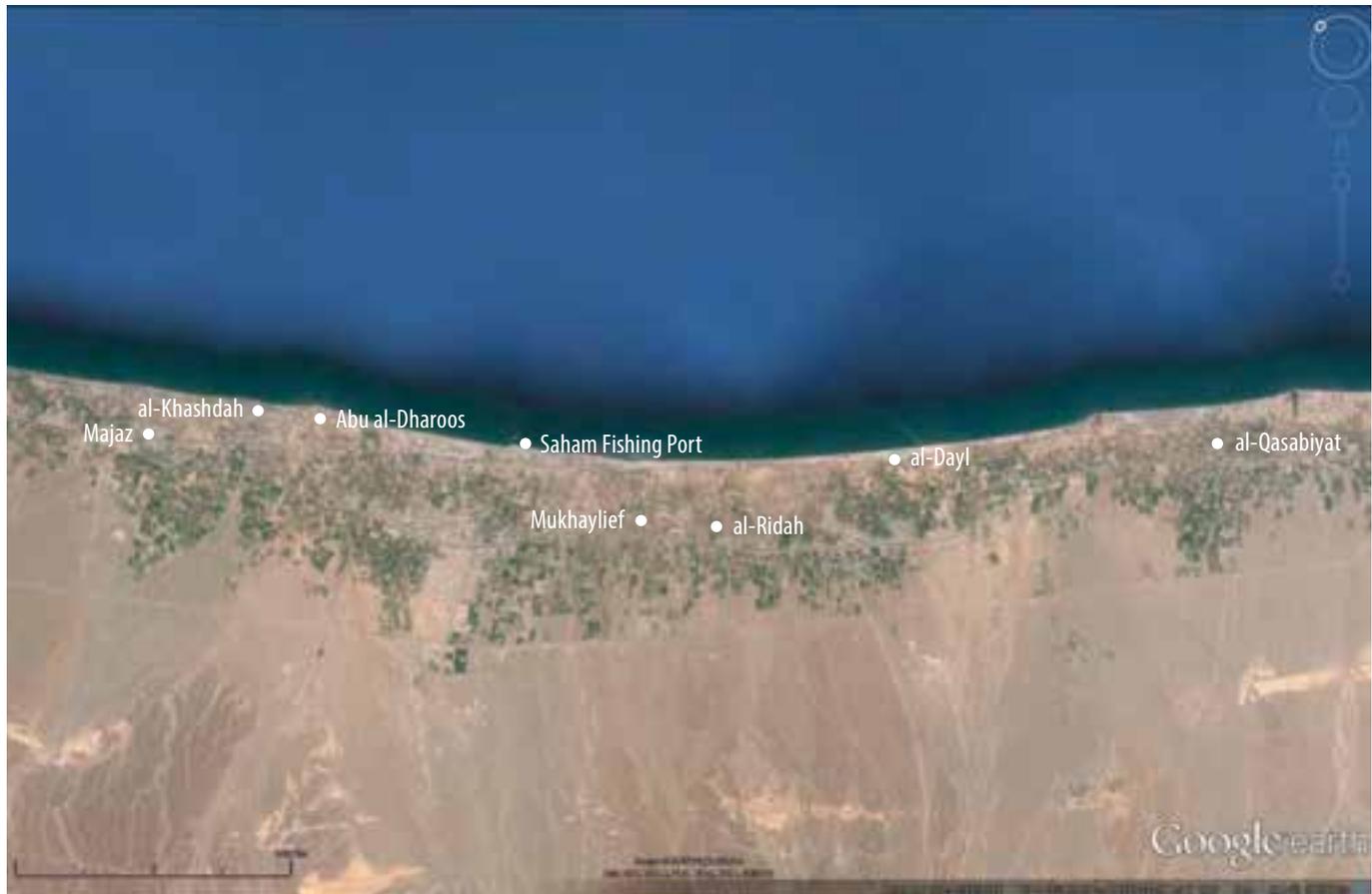


Figure 3: Saham port and its main banadir. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

## Saham Port

Saham is part of the Northern Batinah Governorate. It is one of the most important ports along the Batinah coast. Lorimer<sup>7</sup> describes it thus: “It is the largest port next to Sohar... serving Wadis Sarrami and Shafan and to some extent Wadi ‘Ahin, and to it belong some 30 *badan* running to Masqat, Shinas, and the Persian Gulf, also 30 fishing-boats, and 40 *shasha*.” The only elderly man from Saham who was interviewed indicated that its port was very active and there were several captains from Saham who owned big vessels traveling from there to Muscat and Sur and vice versa carrying dates and dried lemons. He also indicated that sailors and traders from neighboring towns also came to Saham in order to join these vessels.

Apart from Lorimer’s account of the number of vessels that existed in the Saham port, the Durham University Project<sup>6</sup> counted a number of small and large vessels in some villages that belong to Saham (Table 2). The total number of boats was 250, of which only 6.4% were large *badan*.

The port of Saham serves the inland areas of Wadi ‘Ahin, Wadi Sarrami, and Wadi Shafan. Dates and other crops, including wheat and lucerne (alfalfa), are among the products brought from these wadis to be sold or exchanged in the market of Saham.<sup>8</sup> Lorimer<sup>9</sup> mentions that the people of Saham were fishermen, sailors, and farmers, who cultivate dates and own livestock. Ruwailah (I) is one of the villages that belong to Saham, which Lorimer indicated consists of 100 houses of the Yal Braik tribe, who are sailors and fishermen. Moreover, it seems that trade was also practiced in Saham, but mainly by non-Omanis. This can be seen in Lorimer’s account<sup>10</sup> that “there are at this place six Hindu traders and one Muhammadan trader who is under British protection.” Among the villages that belong to Saham, he mentions Hillat-as-Suq, which consisted of a bazaar with 50 shops and was home to around ten or twelve Hindu traders.<sup>11</sup> It should, however, be mentioned that our interviewee emphasized that trade was mainly practiced by Omanis. He indicated that local inland inhabitants would travel by camel to Saham in order to sell their products there and buy items, both local and imported, that they need-

Settlement	Shāsha	All Wooden Boats	Large Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Small Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Badan and Shāhūf	Total/Settlement
Saham, south of fort and al-Ruwayla		9	7	1	1	18
Khawr at Hamam		5	3	1	1	10
Al Mukhaylif		3	2	0	1	6
Umm al Ja'arif		4	2	0	2	8
Raddat al Dil		20	15	0	5	40
Al-Dil	37	19	17	1	1	75
Muqa'isa	47	8	5	3	0	64
Hafit		5	3	0	2	10
Muntayfa		5	3	1	1	10
Hallat al Qahlil		3	2	0	1	6
al Qarha		2	1	0	1	4
Total/type		83	60	7	16	250

Table 2: Numbers of boats recorded in Saham by boat-type?

ed. Their main purchase was fish in different states of preservation.

Archaeologically speaking, there is no direct evidence showing that there was an ancient port in Saham. No archaeological sites have so far been identified along the coast of Saham that indicate the existence of such a port. It should, however, be mentioned that a recent survey and excavation carried out by the author in a third millennium BCE settlement site in the area of Dahwa (c. 24 km from the sea) yielded a large number of pottery sherds of the Indus black-slipped jars (representing around 28% of the total collected pottery sherds), a few Baluchistan sherds, and a few possible grey Iranian sherds.<sup>12</sup> It is suggested that this large amount of imported pottery may indicate local and international cultural connections. The Dahwa site seems to have played an important role during the Umm an-Nar period in the northern part of Oman. This can be seen clearly from its location close

to the traditional third millennium BCE trade routes in Oman. The first of these, the inland trade road, connected the northern and western settlements of Oman to those located inland. The second, the coastal trade route, is not far from the Dahwa site (c. 24 km), which enabled the inhabitants of the settlement to take advantage of coastal trade. Moreover, it seems that Dahwa had trade connections with overseas cultures, which can be attested by the recovery of a large number of pottery sherds of the typical Indus black-slipped ware. It should, however, be indicated that we did not at the moment understand how they reached such a site. Were they brought through the port of Saham or the larger port of Sohar, which is located not far from the site of Dahwa (c. 32 km)? It is possible that the site of Dahwa played a role in the redistribution of local and imported goods, that is to say, that it was a “redistribution center” between the coast and the inland sites.

### Khaburah Port

Khaburah is part of the Northern Batinah Governorate. Lorimer<sup>13</sup> reported that its port had 5 *badan*, 30 *shāsha*, and 15 small boats. The larger *badan* would run to Muscat and to the ports of Trucial Oman (modern UAE) with dates. Our interviewee informed us that the inhabitants of Khaburah owned a number of vessels and that big vessels (e.g., *badan* and *sambūq*) used to come from Muscat, Sur, and other Batinah ports to load dates, water, wood, and fish. He also stated that there was a customs point near Khaburah fort where taxes were paid for shipment. Lorimer<sup>14</sup> stated that the revenue of Khaburah port was only around \$2,000 annually, which was collected as *zakat*, and all of this was used for the local administration.

The available data<sup>15</sup> also mention more boats in different towns and villages that belonged to the administrative boundaries of the current Khaburah province (*wilaya*). Lorimer,<sup>16</sup> for example, indicates that Sur Haiyan is located to the east between Khaburah and Suwaiq and had 40 “baqarahs,” “batils,” and “ghunchahs,” which run to the Persian Gulf, India, and Yemen. Moreover, the Durham University Project<sup>17</sup> counted the number of small and large vessels in these areas (see Table 3). According to the table, the total number of boats in all of Khaburah’s towns was 746, of which around 60% were small fishing *shāsha* and around 23% large *badan*.

Lorimer<sup>19</sup> states that Khaburah is the port of Wadi al-Hawasinah and its tributaries, which reach the coast at this point and pass by the eastern side of the Khaburah bazaar. The port also partly serves Wadi ‘Ahin. Both wadis provide products to be sold in the Khaburah bazaar. These include dates and crops such as wheat, barley, lucerne, sweet potatoes, maize, millet, beans, and various grasses as animal fodder. They also provide fruits like mangoes, pomegranates, grapes, limes, olives, plums, figs, quinces, and almonds.<sup>20</sup>

During the course of three field seasons carried out by the Durham University along the Batinah coast, interviews took place with the inhabitants and traveling fish traders of Khaburah Suq and its hinterland. Around 100 edible fish species were recorded on sale in Khaburah fish market.<sup>21</sup> The data collected indicate that fish from the Khaburah area were sold inland at Ghayzayn in Wadi al-Hawasina, or even further in Rustaq and Ibri.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, as was mentioned earlier, larger vessels from Khaburah ran to Trucial Oman, the Persian Gulf, India, and Yemen. Thus, several imported items made their way to the market of Khaburah and were then sold within the town itself and in neighboring areas, both coastal and inland. Harrison stated that Bombay traded by boat with Khaburah.<sup>23</sup>

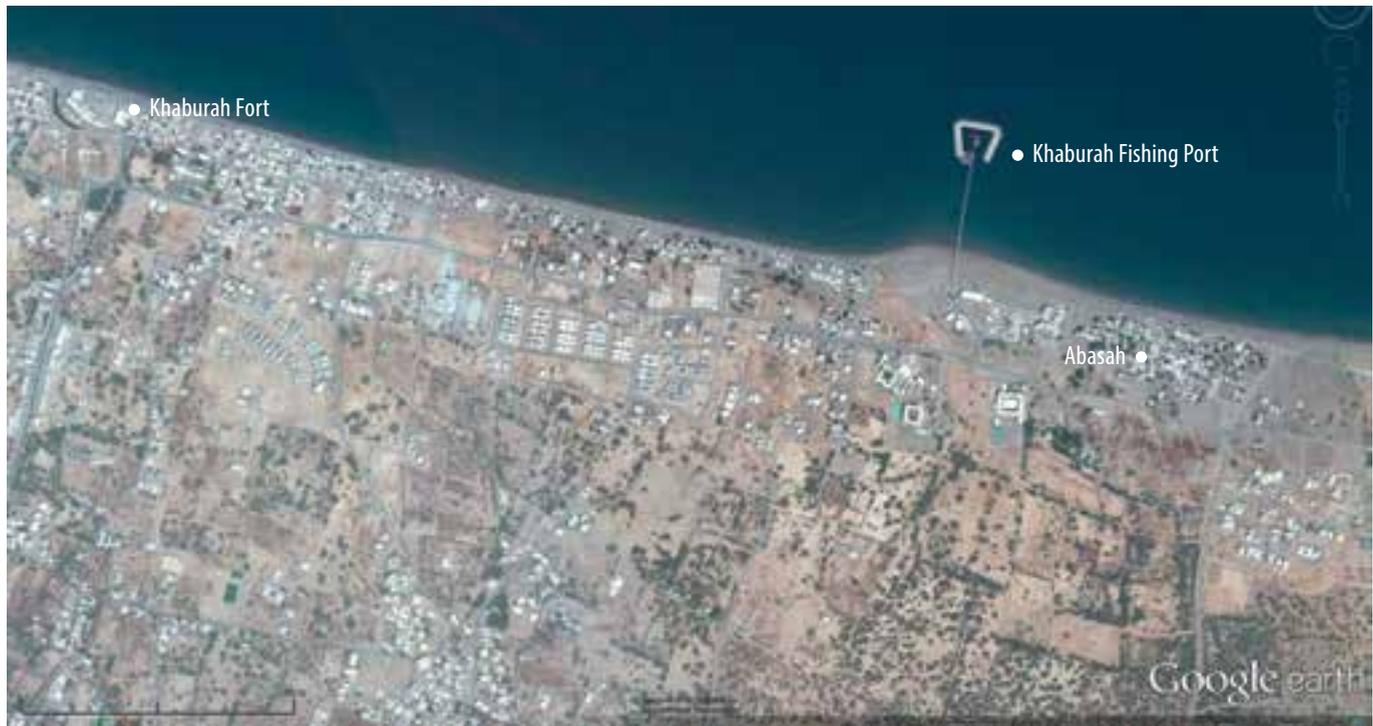


Figure 4: Khaburah port and its main banadir. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

Settlement	Shāsha	All Wooden Boats	Large Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Small Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Badan and Shāhūf	Total/Settlement
Khawr al Milh	27	4	1	0	1	33
Qasbiyat Yal Burayk	9	1	1	0	0	11
Qasbiyat al Busa'id	47	7	5	1	163	223
Qasbiyat al Hawasina	63	18	13	1	4	99
Qasbiyat al Za'ab and Harat al Ju'	60	4	3	1	0	68
Khawr Rasal	35	7	5	2	0	49
Al Rudayda	80	3	2	1	0	86
Muhaydhīb	21	3	1	2	0	27
Khawr al Hind	19	2	2	0	0	23
'Abbasa	45	12	3	6	3	69
Al Khuwayrat	40	9	5	4	0	58
Total/type	446	70	41	18	171	746

Table 3: Numbers of boats recorded in Khaburah by boat-type<sup>8</sup>

### Suwaiq Port

Suwaiq is part of the Northern Batinah Governorate and is the largest wilayah in Oman. Lorimer<sup>24</sup> described its inhabitants as “Suwaliah, Baluchis, and Persians: they live by sea-faring occupations and the cultivation of dates.”

Three elderly men from Suwaiq who used to sail were interviewed. They mentioned that Suwaiq was not a major port, but there was a small offshore roadstead, in addition to other *banādir*, where the larger ships would anchor to receive sailors and various items from the shore that were transported in smaller boats like the *hūrī*, *shāsha*, and small *sambūq*. These harbors are briefly mentioned in the literature.<sup>25</sup> The Durham University Project<sup>26</sup> counted the number of small and large vessels in these areas (see Table 4).

According to the table, the total number of boats in all of Suwaiq's towns was 646, of which 65.5% were small

fishing *shāsha*. Although the figures clearly show that no larger vessels existed in the mid-1970s, our interviewees who sailed in the 1940s and 1950s reported that there were larger ships, such as *sambūq* and *badan*, in Suwaiq, in addition to the smaller boats like *hūrī*, *shāsha*, and smaller versions of *sambūq*. This fact was also confirmed by Lorimer,<sup>28</sup> who indicated that the port of Suwaiq consisted of 10 *baqqāra*, 5 *badan*, and 20 small boats; the *baqqāra* and *badan* ran from this port to Muscat in the east and to the Persian Gulf in the west. Moreover, unlike the situation in Musna'ah, the larger boats were not owned by the people of Suwaiq or Batinah but by the *nawākhidha* (captains) of Sur, who came to Batinah to load goods and hire sailors. The interviewees also reported that a number of Sur inhabitants settled in the Batinah coast, including Suwaiq, like those in Ghalil. Their families are nowadays considered residents of the Batinah coast. The interviewees indicated, too, that they trave-

Settlement	Shāsha	All Wooden Boats	Large Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Small Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Badan and Shāhūf	Total/ Settlement
al Hujayra	51	18	7	11	0	87
al Ghalil	74	14	0	14	0	102
al Khuwayr	65	8	0	8	0	81
al Naqtha	29	2	0	2	0	33
al Mukhtarij	0	4	0	4	0	8
al ‘Uwaydat	0	5	0	5	0	10
Dhayan	0	9	0	9	0	18
al Buwarih	19	5	0	5	0	29
Khabbat al Ma‘awil	45	10	0	5	0	60
Ghurfat Al Sharif & al Suraymi	15	1	0	1	0	17
al Faw	0	2	0	2	0	4
Fariq Al Bu Rushayd	0	1	0	1	0	2
al Rundayda	0	1	0	1	0	2
Harat al Sawli & al Ghulayla	0	6	3	3	0	12
Harat al Ju’, Birughwa, & Jizmi	0	3	1	2	0	6
al Radda	0	2	0	2	0	4
al Batha	0	4	0	4	0	8
al Qarha	0	17	9	8	0	34
al Harat al Qadima	0	2	1	1	0	4
Harat al Suq	0	4	1	3	0	8
al Sharisa	10	5	0	5	0	20
al Bad‘a	c. 20	2	0	2	0	4

Khabbat al Ma'awil	45	10	0	10	0	65
Khabbat Yal Khamis	c. 20	3	0	3	0	6
Bady 'Ud	c. 30	26	0	26	0	52
Total/type	423	164	22	187	0	646

Table 4: Numbers of boats recorded in Suwaiq by boat-type<sup>27</sup>



Figure 5: Suwaiq port and its main banadir. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

led from the harbors of Suwaiq to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Iran, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Basra, Mumbai, and East Africa (mainly Zanzibar, Mombasa, Tanka, Socotra, and Bandar al-Salam).

Another important point, made by one of the respondents, is that there was a small place (*farḍa*) in the port near Suwaiq Fort for paying taxes on fish and other items brought by ships. He reported that there was also a similar one in Khaburah port. This fact was also stated by Lorimer:<sup>29</sup> “Since 1901–02 the collection of taxes has

been directly managed instead of being farmed; but as yet there is no revenue from customs proper and Zakat brings in about \$2,000 per annum only, the whole of which is still locally in salaries, etc.”

In terms of trade, the residents of Suwaiq engaged in the local trade and exchange network with the interior areas. Suwaiq is one of the ports and market-towns that serve Wadi Bani Ghafir.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the trade of Wadi al-Hawasinah is partly with Suwaiq, and the villages of this wadi grow dates and other crops that are described by



Figure 6: Musna'ah port and its main banadir. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

Lorimer:<sup>31</sup> “... the crops besides dates are wheat, barley, bajri, maize, millet, lucerne, beans, sweet potatoes, and various grasses which are cultivated as fodder for animals; the people keep camels, cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys. Fruits are limes, mangoes, grapes, olives, plums, pomegranates, figs, quinces, and almonds.” These crops must have made their way to the markets of Suwaiq. Additionally, Ward<sup>32</sup> described the local products displayed in the Suwaiq market: “... the suq tempted me with okra, onions, lemons, oranges, coconuts, apples, bananas, green peppers, lettuce ...” The interviewees reported that the inhabitants of these wadis traveled on camels and/or donkeys to the coast to sell their agricultural and animal products in the markets of Suwaiq. They exchanged their products for coastal products, mainly fish, either fresh, dried, salted, or smoked (*‘awāl*, *‘ūmah*, *qāshī‘a*, *mālih*), as well as other necessary items.

The Suwaiq products were also sent to Muscat, including fish in different states of preservation, dates, and vegetables. There was also firewood, which was collected in the village of Ghalil located at the western end of Suwaiq and exported to Muscat.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, our three respondents stated that they traveled in large ships to the Arabian Gulf countries, including Iran, Iraq (Basra), India (Mumbai), and East Africa. They reported that

some local products were shipped to these destinations, including boiled dates (*bisur* or *fāghūr*), dried dates, and lemons to Mumbai, and dates to East Africa (Zanzibar). In exchange, they picked up rice, coffee, condiments, oregano, garments, flour, and margarine from Mumbai; dates from Basra; and mangrove wood and coconuts from East Africa. Some of these items were sold in the ports where the ships stopped. One respondent indicated that they picked up dates in Basra and sold them in Mumbai and Zanzibar. He also reported that mangrove wood was brought from Zanzibar and sold in Basra and Dubai. The rest of the exported items reached the Omani ports from Sur to the Batinah, and then found their way to local coastal and inland markets.

#### Musna'ah and Wudam al-Sahil Ports

Musna'ah is part of the Southern Batinah Governorate. Lorimer<sup>34</sup> describes Musna'ah as “a port on the coast of the Batinah district in the Oman Sultanate, 17 miles west-north-west of Barkah and 17 miles east-south-east of Suwaiq ...” According to Lorimer,<sup>35</sup> the port of Musna'ah contained 4 *baqqāra*, 12 *badan*, and 20 *shāsha*. The *baqqāra* ran from this port to the coast of Trucial

Oman in the west, while the *badan* ran to Muscat in the east. The interviewees reported that there was a customs point (*farḍa*) in Musna‘ah. They indicated that the people of Musna‘ah, especially Yal Sa‘ad, did not allow Sultan Sa‘id to establish a large customs point from Wadi Jasim to Hujairah, but after a serious debate he was allowed to establish it within a smaller area (50 m by 50 m) that he was planning, where ships would be charged for their goods. Lorimer<sup>36</sup> indicated the existence of customs in the port by stating that “the customs duties produce about \$3,000 and Zakat \$2,000 a year ... the customs of this port have been under the direct management of the Sultan’s officials.”

Ethnographic data collected from the interviews and sparse literature<sup>37</sup> give an account of the number of boats in the towns (some are *banādir*) that belonged to the administrative boundaries of the current Musna‘ah *wilāya*. These include Wudam al-Sahil, Khabah, al ‘Uwayd, Shurs, Quraym, Musna‘ah (north of the fort), and Abu ‘Abali. The Durham University Project counted the number of small and large vessels in these areas (see Table 5).<sup>38</sup>

Wudam al-Sahil, which is a town located at the western end of Musna‘ah separating it from the western limit of Suwaiq, has a port that is bigger than the port of Musna‘ah itself. One of the interviewees indicated that the port of Wudam consisted of 75 large vessels, while another reported the existence of more than 30, including *sambūq*, *badan*, *jalbūt*, *sama‘a*, *baghla*, and *būm*. There were also smaller vessels, like *hūrī*, *shāsha*, and smaller versions of *sambūq*, which were used for local travel and

some short voyages to neighboring areas such as Dubai and Makran. The interviewees indicated that they worked as sailors and traveled from this port to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Iran (mainly Makran), Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq (Basra), Yemen (mainly Mukalla, Hudaidah, Mukha), India (Mumbai), Pakistan (Karachi), and East Africa (mainly Zanzibar, Mombasa, and Tanka). Lorimer indicates that Wudam, besides fishing boats, also had 40 “baqarahs,” “batils,” and “ghunchahs,” which all ran from Wudam port to the Persian Gulf, Bandar ‘Abbas, Lingeh, the Makran ports, India, Karachi, and Yemen.<sup>40</sup>

Musna‘ah is one of the major markets for inland products. Lorimer describes its market by stating that “there is an Arab bazaar of about 50 shops, and the fort contains about 10 shops kept by Hindus; there are also a few Khojah traders.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, he noted that Muladda, which is in the hinterland of Musna‘ah, has “a bazaar of 50 shops ...”<sup>42</sup> By contrast, there were no shops in Wudam and business was done in private houses.<sup>43</sup>

The interviewees indicated that people from inland areas (e.g., Wadi Bani Kharus, Wadi Fara‘, Wadi Bani Ghafir, etc.) traveled by camel to the coastal areas of Musna‘ah and Wudam in order to exchange their agricultural and animal products for coastal products, mainly fish in different states of preservation. They also bought items imported from abroad. Dates were the most common product from the inland areas that were transported to the markets of Musna‘ah, Wudam, and Muladda and either sold to local coastal communities or shipped to the port of Mutrah for export.

Settlement	Shāsha	All Wooden Boats	Large Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Small Plank Hūrī and Dugouts	Badan and Shāhūf	Total/Settlement
Wudam al Sahil	20	23	0	23	0	66
al ‘Uwayd	2	55	3	52	0	112
Shurs	20	7	0	7	0	34
Quraym	10	5	0	5	0	20
Musna‘ah (north of fort)	10	0	0	0	0	10
Total/type	62	90	3	87	0	242

Table 5: Numbers of boats recorded in Musna‘ah by boat-type<sup>39</sup>

Lorimer indicates that the port of Musna'ah served Wadis Bani Kharus and Fara' (Rustaq area) in the inland area. He mentioned a number of villages in Wadi Fara' in which the majority grow wheat, barley, and millet, hundreds of thousands of date palms, and grain.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Wudam is the port that serves a number of villages such as Muladda, Gharaifa, Qarat, and Tharmad, as well as Wadi Bani Ghafir in the inland. Their agricultural and animal products must have made their way to the coast through inland merchants using camels and/or donkeys. Lorimer mentions that some of the inhabitants of these wadi villages (e.g., Bait-al-Qarn, Qasra) were traders.<sup>45</sup>

Fish from Musna'ah is the major product bought by communities from the above-mentioned wadis. Thomas gives an account about the fish exported from Musna'ah to the interior: "Sharks' meat, red and rank, is eaten ... fresh on the coast and salted for sale in the interior."<sup>46</sup> Sardines also have their local uses, as manure for the gardens, and fodder for men, oxen, and camels." Additionally, during field seasons carried out by Durham University, it was noted that "in the Wudam al-'Uwayd area ... probably most of the fish caught is not sold locally on the coast but is taken inland to al Muladda, Tharmad, Manfash, and Rustaq in this way."<sup>47</sup>

As was mentioned above, the larger vessels would run from the ports of Musna'ah and Wudam to the coast of Trucial Oman, the Persian Gulf, Bandar 'Abbas, Lingeh, the Makran ports, India, Karachi, Yemen, Basra, and East Africa. The interviewees confirmed that a number of local products were shipped to these destinations, and others were imported from them. Among the exported items were donkeys to Makran; boiled dates (*bisur* or *fāghūr*), dried dates, and lemons to Mumbai and Karachi; and dates and pomegranates to East Africa (Zanzibar). By contrast, imported items included goats and salt from Makran; rice, coffee, condiments and oregano, garments, flour, and margarine from Mumbai and Karachi; dates from Basra; mangrove wood and coconuts from East Africa; and shark from Yemen. Moreover, Thomas mentions that sardines were exported from Musna'ah to India.<sup>48</sup> Part of these exported items was sold in the ports where the ships stopped. These included, for example, mangrove wood from East Africa, which was sold in Basra and Dubai. The rest of the exported items reached the Omani ports and then found their way to local markets such as Musna'ah and Muladda.

## Barka and Sawadi Ports

Barka is located within the Southern Batinah Governorate. Lorimer reported that its port contained 20 large *badan* and 20 small boats, and the *badan* ran to Muscat only.<sup>49</sup> Ward describes the port at Barka as:

*... an open roadstead, affording no protection against the prevailing breezes.<sup>50</sup> The same remark applies to nearly every town on the coast, and they have, in consequence, few bagala of any burthen trading along it. Merchandise is brought from or conveyed to Maskat in small boats, of them thirty to fifty tons burthen. Vessels of this size upon the approach of bad weather are hauled up on shore beyond the action of the sea with little difficulty.*

Moreover, the port of Barka played an important role in trade and revenue. This fact was clearly reported by a number of travelers. In the early twentieth century, Lorimer, for example, indicated the existence of customs in the port by stating that:

*... the customs of the port produce about \$3,000 a year and \$1,800 is realized as Zakat; the former amount is locally expended, and of the latter only \$1,200 reaches the Sultan's treasury. The customs here have been under direct managements, instead of being farmed, since 1901-1902.<sup>51</sup>*

Almost one century later, Ward mentioned that:

*... a revenue of from three hundred to four hundred dollars is annually drawn from Barka. It arises principally from dates on which, as well as on all other exports or imports, a duty of ten per cent is levied. The Imam (then Said ibn Sultan, Ph.Ward) maintains a small force of about two hundred men here: their wages are partly paid out of this impost ...<sup>52</sup>*

The importance of Barka port was also mentioned by the Omani historian Al-Siyabi,<sup>53</sup> who stated that the Imam Ahmad b. Sa'id moved from Muscat to Barka because the al-'Ajam in Muscat were causing him much trouble. He thought that he could humiliate them by colonizing Barka as a rival capital and port to Muscat, so that the trade of Oman would abandon Muscat and gravitate to the market of Barka.

Moreover, part of the Daymaniyat Islands belongs to Barka. It is perhaps one of the ancient islands mentioned in Ptolemy's map as "Kalaiou Islands," which were identified as possibly the islands of Daymaniyat, close to Muscat.<sup>54</sup> Lorimer describes the Daymaniyat as:



Figure 7: Barka port and its main banadir. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

... a chain of islets and rocks, 12 miles in length, at a distance of nine miles from the Batinah coast of the Oman Sultanate between Sib and Barkah and nearly parallel to it. The chain may be divided into three sections . . . . The western section is divided by a channel 3.5 miles wide from the central; it consist of one islet, Jazirat Jun . . . . The main islet of this section is three quarters of a mile long, very narrow, and 107 feet high near its west end: it has a tolerable anchorage in eight fathoms on its south side.<sup>55</sup>

The Kuwaiti captain ‘Isa al-Qitami mentioned these islands as one of the harbors (*banadir*) that are passed and used by Arabian Gulf vessels while traveling in the region and beyond. He gives details of Barka’s harbors and islands in terms of names, longitude, and latitude, including the Sawadi Islands, Bandar Barka, Haradi, Daymaniyat Islands, and Northern and Southern Jun Islands.<sup>56</sup>

During his visit to Sawadi, Bertram Thomas mentioned its “cavernous harbor,” which was located “behind the island where a dhow and many fishing craft were hauled up on the beach. Here is the only shelter along the exposed Batinah shores where refuge may be sought from the howling north-easters of the winter months.”<sup>57</sup>

The Durham University Project counted 67 wooden boats in Sawadi.<sup>58</sup>

These harbors facilitated trade and economic activities in the Barka bazaar, which was briefly described in the literature. Lieutenant W. M. Pengelley in 1861 gives an account of the daily business conducted in the Barka bazaar:

*The ready cash is all in the hands of the Banyans, who ostensibly keep small shops for the sale of piece-goods, grain &c. I am informed, however, it is not to trade that the majority of these people look for their returns; but in advancing money on arms, ornaments, wearing apparel, &c., or in other words, as ‘pawnbrokers’, and those who enter Oman penniless, after three or four years’ residence, either return to Cutch with a fair competency or set up as merchants in a regular way.”<sup>59</sup> The existence of Banyans (Hindus) as traders in the Barka bazaar was also stressed by Lorimer<sup>60</sup> and Zwemer.<sup>61</sup> Lorimer, for instance, states that “a few Khojas also are found, and there are 11 Hindus, the latter representing 6 commercial concerns and enjoying British protection . . . The bazaar contains over 100 shops dealing in ordinary wares.”<sup>62</sup>*

The inhabitants of Barka are generally farmers and fishermen. Trade was also practiced, mainly at a local level. Wellsted visited Barka in February 1836 and stated that the majority of its population practiced fishing as a major economic activity, and the rest were date cultivators.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Lorimer states:

*Many of the Arabs are Bedouins, still owning cattle, sheep and camels, who have settled down and acquired date-plantations . . . . In the date season the population of Barkah is swelled by immigrants from Masqat Town and elsewhere who come to work as harvesters. Barkah is celebrated chiefly for its dates. The groves extend continuously from Wadi Manumah, 6 miles east of the town, to Wadi al-Qasim, some 10 miles to westward of it, and the trees number 40,000 or more. There is also some ordinary cultivation.*<sup>64</sup>

In addition to their agricultural products, Barka's inhabitants practiced fishing and to some extent pearl-diving. Lorimer indicated that all Daymaniyat islets are frequently visited by fishermen using *badan* and *shāsha*, and sometimes they practice some pearl-diving round them but on a small scale.<sup>65</sup> Fish and shellfish are normally dried and carried out to the interior. This process was noted in Barka by a number of authors. For instance, Zwemer states that "large quantities of shell fish are collected and sent inland."<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Lorimer indicates that "... in the month of August large quantities of a shell-fish called Dok, resembling a cockle, are collected and dried in the sun for export to the interior."<sup>67</sup>

These kinds of products were normally sold or exchanged with interior communities, who traveled to the coast to obtain them. Ward states that Barka's bazaar is very extensive and that several Bedouins from the adjacent areas come to buy grain and cloth and can find nearly any article that is procurable in Muscat. He indicates that the bazaar of Barka consisted of goods and products from all over the world, such as India, Pakistan, Taiwan, Spain, Italy, Hong Kong, and China.<sup>68</sup> Scales and weights were brought from India to Barka to weigh luggage and goods.<sup>69</sup> These goods found their way to the neighboring coastal and inland settlements. In fact, Barka's port is the market that serves the villages in Wadi Lajal and Ma'awal and partly those in Wadi Tau and Wadi Bani Kharus and Nakhal.<sup>70</sup>

### Dimma (Seeb) Port

Seeb is located east of Barka and, geographically speaking, is part of the Batinah coast where it forms its easternmost end. Currently it is part of the Muscat Governorate. It is

believed that Batrasava (Batrasavae) is among the famous Omani cities and ports in the era of Pliny (23–79 CE). Pliny mentioned in his *Natural History* that Batrasava is an Omani city. Springer and Miles identified it as Seeb, which is the well-known city located north of Muscat.<sup>71</sup>

Dimma is another ancient name for Seeb. Wilkinson described Dimma as "a major fortified center from Sasanid times until Oman's Dark Ages (although it was badly damaged in a flood in the middle of the ninth century)."<sup>72</sup> He argues that the Arabs had control of their own port at Diba as well as Sohar at the northern end and Dimma at the southern end of the Batinah coast. These ports "formed part of the network of periodic trade fairs which covered the Arabian peninsula (*suq al-'arab*), but at Diba the Julanda had the right to the tithe, whereas in the other two ports it was the Persians who collected it."<sup>73</sup>

Recently, an archaeological campaign (survey and excavation) was conducted in order to define the importance of the ancient medieval town of Dimma.<sup>74</sup> The results of this work permitted the investigators to define the limits of the key archaeological areas, as well as their history of occupation and type of settlements. Three main archaeological areas were defined and investigated over an area extending a total of 5 km:

**Sector A:** A military fortress was identified along the southeast course of the Wadi Kharis. The pottery collected from this sector is more or less a common ware and used for daily life activities such as for cooking, food consumption, and food storage. Very few rare decorated sherds of Late Islamic glazed ware and imitations of Chinese porcelain were found. The pottery suggests a period of occupation between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries CE. Other finds include one piece of glass of possibly Portuguese style, as well as a coin of an Indian Company quarter anna dated 1833. There are also two Islamic enamel paste bracelets from a type well-known across the entire Arabian Peninsula. The collected pottery assemblage of Late Islamic glazed ware (sixteenth century) suggests that the fort was constructed during the seventeenth century. Moreover, the Indian Company coin suggests that the fort was abandoned during the first half of the eighteenth century. Thus, it is suggested that the fort was the last occupational phase of the Early to Middle Islamic Dimma town.

**Sector B:** A large quantity of pottery was collected around the al-Rawdha roundabout, in which the most ancient identified sherds are those turquoise-blue alkaline-glazed pottery of Early Islamic period



Figure 8: Seeb port and its main banādir. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

(eighth and ninth centuries). They are imported from Iran and were also found in Sohar. Another Early Islamic pottery type is represented by one sherd of plain white opaque-glazed-ware bowls imported from Iraq (Samarra) and dated to between the eighth and ninth centuries. Moreover, sgraffiato decoration ware (clear lead-glazed ware and green lead-glazed ware) is the most abundant within the pottery-collected assemblage and dated to between the tenth and eleventh centuries. Other undefined sherds were also collected in large quantities, some of which can be of an Indian tradition. Moreover, other collected finds include a group of Portuguese glasses, including a long-neck bottle dated to the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. This type of glass bowl was in existence during the Portuguese occupation and vanished after the Portuguese departure from the region. The recovered material in Sector B indicates that the area was used as a dump for a long period between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Middle Islamic sgraffiato ware) and the sixteenth century (Portuguese glasses, Late Islamic ware). This material suggests that the ancient

center of Dimma could have been situated in the neighborhood of al-Rawdha roundabout, where materials from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries were found.

Sector C: A second military fort was identified along the southeastern course of the Wadi Luwami. The investigation here was able to define the imported wares from the ancient Seeb, ranging from south Iraq (Samarra) to India, passing through the top commercial areas at Siraf in south Iran and Sohar. This material collection demonstrates that the site in which the ancient fort stands was the ancient port of Dimma.

The archaeological remains found in all three defined areas suggest that the ancient town of Dimma was situated in an ideal position. It is well protected by two military fortresses, rising at the entrance of the two major wadi courses of Wadi Kharis and Wadi Luwami, where the archaeological remains lie within the alluvial portion of these wadis, thus providing the town with protected harbors and freshwater. It is also suggested that these

archaeological sites could be grouped to be related to the ancient Dimma, which is a main town and harbor mentioned in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portuguese sources. The collected pottery shows a long period of occupation, spanning all periods from the start of Islam, with peaks in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries obviously associated with the major road linking Siraf and Sohar with the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. Moreover, the pottery indicates occupation during the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries at the ancient Dimma.<sup>75</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Lorimer estimated the number of boats in Seeb's port as 30 *shāsha* and 40 small boats that traveled to and from Muscat only.<sup>76</sup> However, Thomas stated that the people of Seeb "have crossed the seas to Iraq, India, or Zanzibar."<sup>77</sup> Seeb's port had a customs point, where money was taken as a tax for shipment. Lorimer states that "the customs duty on goods imported into Sib is payable at Masqat, but Zakat to the amount of \$1,000 a year is collected locally at Sib and remitted to Masqat."<sup>78</sup>

The port of Seeb serves not only the coastal people of Seeb and its surroundings but also the inland communities, such as those in Wadi Sama'il and Wadi Tau. Lorimer stated that Seeb had a bazaar that "consists of about 50 Arab and Persian shops, besides 8 which are kept by Hindu traders."<sup>79</sup> Both local and imported goods could be found in this bazaar. Seeb is characterized by its extensive date palm groves.<sup>80</sup> Lorimer indicated that "extensive date groves and many gardens producing lucerne, mangoes, limes, and almonds surround the town; the chief resources of the people are date and fruit-growing and fishing."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Thomas states that:

*... the custom for Muscat merchant of standing to invest in a Sib garden—whether for the state of the soul that goes with ownership of landed property, or whether as a summer residence for his family—matters little. The result has been good, for at least the gardens have not been devoted purely to commercial ends, and their owners, men who have crossed the seas to Iraq, India, or Zanzibar, have introduced plants and flowers they have met on their journeyings. These gardens are a tangle of tropical growth ... The air is heavy with scent of jasmine, henna, and roses; fruit-trees are borne down with such leaf and fruit ...*<sup>82</sup>

These accounts clearly show that local trade took place at the port of Seeb and that dates and fish were among the products that were sold and exchanged.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The natural characteristics of the Batinah coast contributed significantly to the emergence of a series of coastal fishing and trade ports/harbors. They have played an active local and international role in terms of trade exchanges with ports at local and regional levels. Furthermore, they have become trade centers and markets for local and imported goods, and they partially participated in the regional trade transit between India on the one hand, and the Gulf countries, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa on the other. No doubt these ports' activities have to some extent participated in enhancing the country's prominent place in world trade, particularly maritime trade. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these ports represented the backbone of Oman's economy, particularly during the Islamic periods, and facilitated contacts between the Omanis and a number of cultures and civilizations.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, these ports were the first that anyone entering the Arabian Gulf encounters and the last they see on departing. This has given them their importance and wide fame at the regional level.

These ports were mediators and formed a link between the larger local ports on the one hand, and between the coast and the interior on the other. They supplied the larger ports, especially the port of Muscat/Mutrah, with a labor force used in cargo and load transfer, as well as sailors and others who had a role in navigation, maritime transport, and trade on a local and international level. They also supplied them with the most important domestic goods, coming either from the coast or the interior. Some of these goods were traded in the local markets near Muscat, while the rest were for export. Furthermore, these smaller ports received imported goods from the major ports and played a role in transshipping and distributing them to the neighboring coastal or inland areas.

It has been noted that all the ports investigated in this study had in the past small boats (e.g. *shāsha*, *hūrī*, small *sambūq*) and large boats (e.g. *sambūq*, *badan*, *jalbūt*, *sama'a*, *baghla*, *baqqāra*, *battīl*, *ghanja*, and *būm*). The smaller ones were used for fishing and short-distance journeys, while the largest ones were used for major shipping and long-distance navigation. The little historic data available in the literature and the ethnographic collected data indicate that the Batinah coastal inhabitants took part in the long-distance trade, in which they were either sailors or traders, traveling from the Batinah ports to other regional ports such as those located in the Arabian Gulf, Persia (e.g., Bandar 'Abbas, Lingeh, Makran), Iraq (Basra), Yemen (e.g., Mukla, Hudaidah, Mukha), India (Mumbai), Pakistan (Karachi), and East Africa (e.g., Zanzibar, Mombasa, Tanka).

All the interviews clearly showed that fishing, navigation, and trade represented, and still represent, an important economy on the Batinah coast. It was clear that many of the Batinah population, including all interviewees, had engaged in these activities. The Batinah coast had several sea captains and sailors who either owned their own vessels or worked on other captains' vessels. Some of those captains and sailors are still alive, including all interviewees who participated in the regional trade to other Arabian ports, India, and East Africa. The little available data from the literature and the data collected from the interviews clearly demonstrate that the Batinah ports were frequently visited by Omani sailing ships during their journey from Muscat and Sur to other regional and international ports. They were loaded with goods passing through the ports of the Strait of Hormuz to the ports of India and the Arabian coast ports, through ports of the coast of Oman and Yemen to the ports of the African coast. The Omani ships sailed across the oceans and stopped at those ports for water and food for themselves, as well as goods to be transported to other ports, and on their return for the markets of Oman. This fact was also confirmed by an ethnographic study carried out in Masirah Island. One of the interviewees in Masirah was a captain of a large vessel called *al-Khammam* that, during the summer months, sailed to the Batinah coast in order to gather dates, date palm ribs (*du'un*), and other important items, which were then taken to East Africa in the autumn.<sup>84</sup> Another well-known *sambūq*, called *Tawila*, from Khawr Jarama in Sur "worked the round trip from Khawr Jarama to Basra, to Khawr Jarama, to Gwadar, Karachi, Bombay, and Calicut, back to Khawr Jarama, and then westwards along the Arabian coast to Somalia and East Africa, and home again."<sup>85</sup> It was reported that its major shipments were dates, salted and dried fish, wood, clothes, drugs, spices, cosmetics, rice, cotton, and hemp from India and East Africa.<sup>86</sup>

Locally, these ports serve both coastal and inland communities. They are major markets for goods exchanged between the coast and inland. Inland products (mainly fruits and vegetables, as well as animal products) are exchanged with coastal products (mainly dates, dried lemons, fish [fresh, dried, salted, smoked], and some other agricultural products). Moreover, these coastal markets provide imported goods to both coastal and inland communities. The results of the interviews indicate that people from inland areas traveled on camels to the coast in order to sell their agricultural and animal products and exchange them with products of the coast. Transporters and/or traders from the interior normally transport charcoal, dates, and other inland agricultural products (e.g. grains, fruits, and vegetables) and animal products

(e.g. butter, cheese, meat, wool, leather, etc.) to the coast, and dried or salted fish from the coast to the interior of Oman. This practice is not just limited to the Batinah coast but other Omani coasts like the eastern coast where the people of Ja'alan practice herding and cultivation and trade with the coastal areas. They transport dates from Bilad Bani Bu Hassan to the ports of Sur or Khawr Jarama.<sup>87</sup> This part of Oman has over time played a significant role in the international trade through which Omani products and goods, including those from the Batinah coast, are shipped and transported via Sur port to other international ports like India and East Africa. Almost all the interviewees reported that ships from Batinah transported goods to the port of Sur, where they unloaded them or the ships stopped for supplies before continuing to their overseas destinations.

Internationally, our ethnographic data confirms that a number of local products were shipped to some regional destinations, and others were imported from them. The exported items included boiled dates, dried dates, lemons, pomegranates, and sometimes dried and salted fish. By contrast, imported items included goats and salt from Makran; rice, coffee, condiments and oregano, garments, flour, and margarine from Mumbai and Karachi; dates from Basra; and mangrove wood and coconuts from East Africa. Some of these exported items were sold in the ports where the ships stopped. For example, the mangrove wood from East Africa was sold in Basra and Dubai. The rest of the exported items reached the Omani ports and then found their way to the local markets.

Such conclusions are, for the moment, based on the historical references and ethnographic data, and no solid archaeological evidence can be found for the Batinah maritime trade within these smaller ports. As mentioned earlier, the only archaeological evidence came from the recent excavations at the Early to Middle Islamic port of Dimma (Seeb), as well as the excavation at the third-millennium-BCE site of Dahwa in Saham. In fact, we know that there were maritime trade and cultural connections between the Batinah coast and the outside world over the passage of time, but we have no clue where the exact locations of the ports are that played a role in such trade along this coast. There is some prehistoric archaeological evidence indicating international cultural contact with, for example, the Indus, as is evidenced by the site of Dahwa in Saham, which dates back to the third millennium BCE.

To conclude, due to their excellent location, the Batinah ports participated widely in navigation routes crossing the Indian Ocean towards Arabia, Africa, or other Asian directions, as they continue to do today. They enjoy several features that enable them to control and su-

pervise transport and trade activities between the Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf ports, so that they have become a mediator in both local and regional trade, as well as being a channel for Omani goods and products. This has resulted in an increased role in the prosperity of trade exchange with various countries, especially India.

## Notes

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