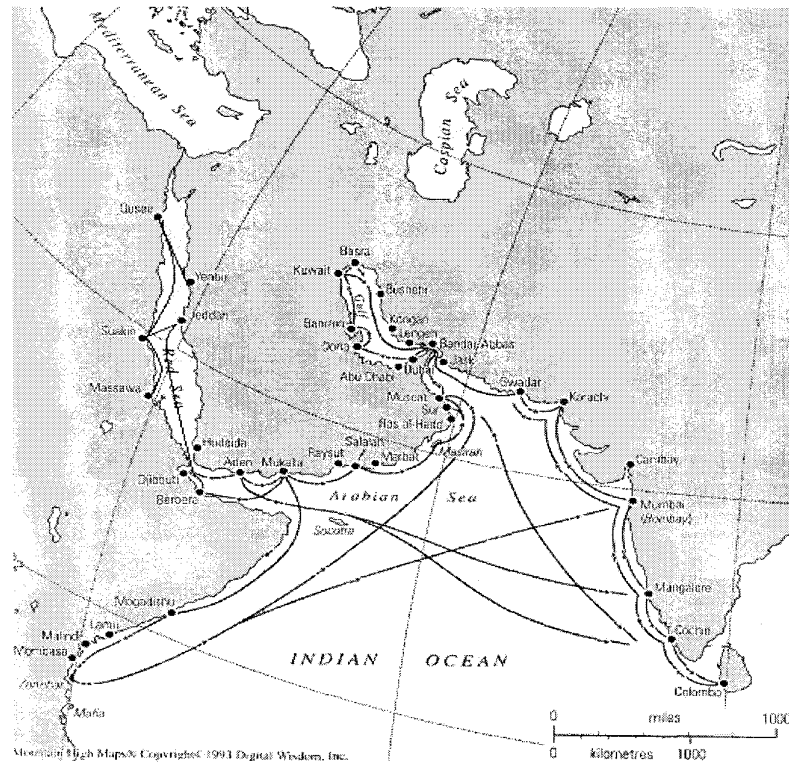


Decorative Motifs on Arabian Boats: Meaning and Identity

Dionisius A. Agius

الزخارف ما زين من السفن

Ornamentation adorns the ship.¹



Map 9:1 Main ports and routes of dhow activities based on interviews with mariners, 1985–2004

Ornamentation of boats is a practice found within disparate communities of the Red Sea, the southern Arabian coast and the Arabian Gulf and Oman. Their boats have a variety of decorative motifs: the *oculus* on the stem or sternposts; circular conventionalized forms carved or painted on the stem-heads; tassels, flags, umbrellas and cowrie shells decorating stem- or sternposts; goatskin decoration covering the stem-head, and textual painting or carving on the sides of the aft deck or the transom.

This paper is concerned with the design and evolution of boat decoration and raises a number of questions: What is the symbolism behind boat decoration? Do decorative motifs express a cultural message typical of one region or are they representative of a wider community? How many of these motifs can be said to be Islamic? How much have foreign influences dictated

the pattern process? What is the significance of the colours in these motifs? In response to these questions and others a number of possibilities will be considered.

Introduction

During the course of my work on dhows I became intrigued by their ornamentation. I noticed that in the Arabian Gulf and Oman boats were often decorated, albeit sparingly, contrasting with the colourful fishing boats of the Red Sea. I found over the years that this subject of ornamentation on boats is more complicated than I first thought when I started to research into the different types of motif. What appears to be simple turns out to have many layers of meaning. As is to be expected, there are regional differences in the type and use of ornamentation but the question is how different are they and what, if anything, can they tell us about the people who build, own and man the dhows on which they appear?

¹ *al-Zakhārifu mā ziyina min al-sufun*. Ibn Sīda. 1898 1903. I: 26.

Ornamentation on boats is a practice found within disparate Arabian communities. The boats have a variety of decorative motifs consisting of embellishment with objects or the use of carving, embossing and writing and the application of colour; their history goes back to antiquity. With the exception of Hornell 1923 and 1938, LeBaron Bowen 1955 and 1957, Prins 1970 and Shihāb 1983, decorative motifs on Arabian boats remain a much under-studied theme; much of their concern was on the ‘eye’ (the *oculus*), its meaning in maritime art, and its provenance. I would like to go further and explore if this art is homogenous within the whole region (the Red Sea, southern Arabian coast, Arabian Gulf and Oman) and how far decorative motifs are an outward expression of a unity of culture. Further, how far can we claim that ornamentation on Arabian boats of the Red Sea, the southern Arabian coast and the Arabian Gulf are part of Islamic art? This paper attempts to answer these questions.

The subject of ornamentation on boats is a universal one but my focus in this study is based on field work conducted in the African Red Sea ports and those of the Arabian Gulf and Oman, interviewing over two hundred mariners, shipwrights and merchants. The majority of my interviewees were over sixty years old; one sea captain in Sawakin (Sudan) was 120 years old and a pearl diver in Muharraq (Bahrain Island) was 112 years old (see map above).²



Figure 9:1 Dilmun seal with goat headstem (after Al-Khalifa and Hamar 1982: 31)

² Muhammad Yaqoob of Bahrain (born 1879) was interviewed on 24 April 1991 and Hussein ‘Abd al-Hamid ‘Abd ‘Allah of Sawakin (born 1884) interviewed on 24 November 2004.

Zoomorphic motifs: their significance

From the Bronze Age, right through the Islamic period, zoomorphic motifs such as the animal headstems are recurring features in boat models and graffiti. Mesopotamian seals show animal or bird heads on both raised prows and sterns;³ consider the Dilmun seal (1800 BCE) with a headstem of a goat (Figure 9:1).

The theme occurs in the *Maqāmāt* illustration of al-Ḥarīrī (d. AH 516 /AD 1122)⁴ and the Persian miniatures, copies of which portray animal-shaped prows as in a British Library manuscript,⁵ or bird-shape stem heads in a Chester Beatty Library manuscript.⁶ The parrot-shaped stemhead on a Kuwaiti cargo *baghlah* is a good example of this kind (Figure 9:2).

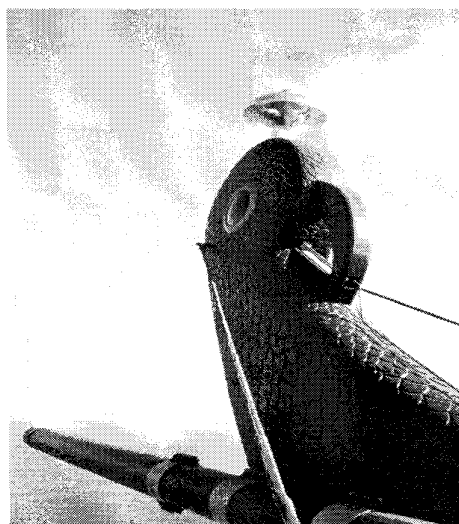


Figure 9:2 The parrot-shaped stemhead of a Kuwaiti baghlah, 1999 (photograph by author)

It has been suggested that these motifs are an echo of human sacrifice when the severed head was fixed to the prow. Sacrificing humans was well known in pre-Islamic Arabia.⁷ Human sacrifice was then replaced by animal sacrifice and it is still the custom today in the Red Sea, the southern Arabian

³ LeBaron Bowen 1955: 32.

⁴ BN Ms Arabe 3929, fol. 155v.

⁵ BL Add 15531, fol. 012a. I am grateful to Charles Melville who drew my attention to this illustration (communication 18 June 2004).

⁶ CBL Sa’dī Gulistān Herat 1427. My thanks go to Robert Hillenbrand who alerted me to this manuscript (communication 11 May 1998).

⁷ It is said that al-Mundhir, King of Hira, sacrificed the poet ‘Abīd b. al-Abraṣ (d. ca. AD 554) after a vow he made to kill any person that approached him on a certain day. The poet happened to be that person, see Lyall 1981: xxvii–xxviii. It is also known that prisoners were offered as sacrifice and it is these that were stuck to the stempost of the ship.

coast and the Arabian Gulf to sacrifice a sheep or goat at the launching of a boat or ship; a custom also prevalent in the Mediterranean until fairly recent times.⁸ The flayed goat skin is dressed on the stemhead — such as the stempost of a *battīl kārib* at Kumzar, Musandam Peninsula (Figure 9:3a) and the *zārūk* at the Mina, Sawakin (Figure 9:3b).



Figure 9:3a A goat-skin on a *battīl kārib* stemhead, Kumzar, 1996 (photograph by the author)

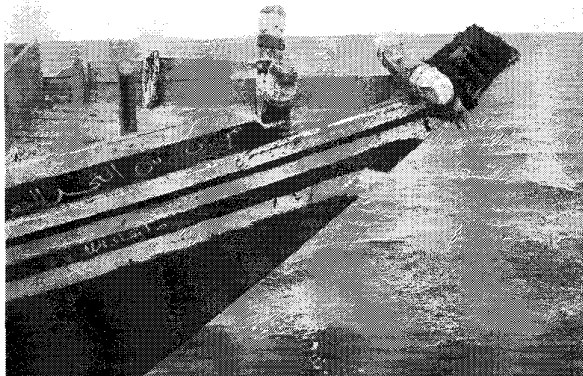


Figure 9:3b The *zārūk* stemhead decorated with a goat-skin, Sawakin, 2004 (photograph by the author)

It is interesting that the two ox-like horns at the stemhead on both dhows could be part of the ritual of the animal sacrifice. It seems that the horns are for the purpose of decoration and not, as I was told, designed originally for holding the rigging or anchor rope.⁹

Ornaments: protection and security

Ornaments are typical of decorative motifs on boats and ships. Bronze Age or Late Neolithic vessels hang tassels from their stern (Figure 9:4); the practice of hanging decoration is seen on graffiti from the Egyptian Eastern Desert and Dilmun seals.

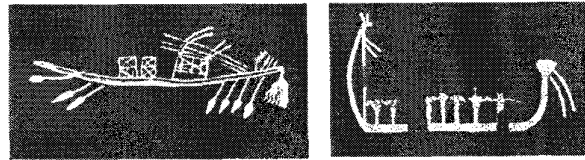


Figure 9:4 Hanging decorations on Dilmun vessels (after Flinders Petrie 1920: pl. XXXII and Winkler 1938: pl. XXXIX)

In modern times tassels (*kasht*) are hung from the *zārūka* stemhead in Kumzar or a *shū'ī*'s stempost at Ras al-Hadd (Figure 9:5):

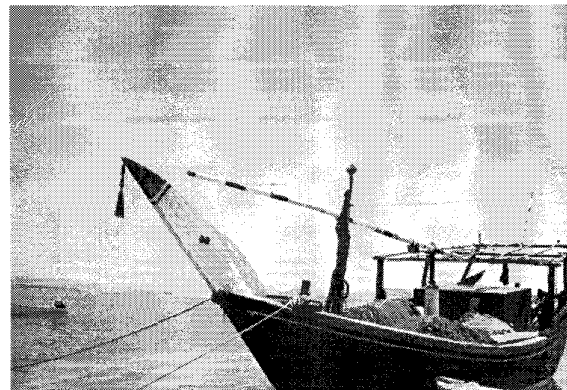


Figure 9:5 A tassel hanging from the tip of a *shū'ī* stemhead, Ras al-Hadd, 1998 (photograph by the author)

Tassels and palm fronds were suspended from the bow of the East African *mtepe* and in more recent times the *battīls* and *zārūkas* of the Musandam Peninsula. Bands of cowrie shells (*zanzūls*) decorate the *fashīn* (false sternpost) of a *battīl* in Kumzar (Figure 9:6).

⁸ Information from Ġuzeppi Maniscalco, Marsaxlokk, Malta (interviewed on 30 January 1996) and Ġrizi Muscat, Malta (10 September 2000).

⁹ Interview with Salih Zaid Muhammad Jumaa al-

Kumzari on 25 November 1996; for further details see Agius 2002: 112.

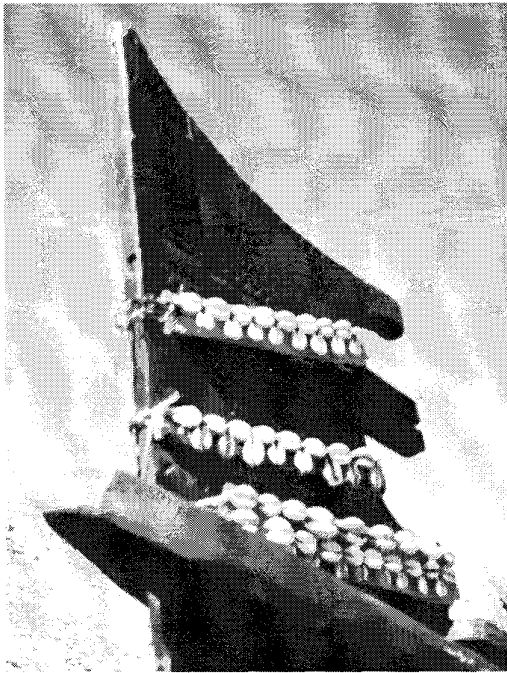


Figure 9:6 Decorating the fashin of a battil, Kumzar, 1996 (photograph by the author)

I was told by my informants in Kumzar that the decoration of cowrie shells around the tall stern fins of a *battil bahwi* is to commemorate a wedding in the village.¹⁰ It is difficult to establish the original meaning of these decorative motifs, but it is generally understood that pendulous decorations such as tassels, flags umbrellas, shells, ostrich eggs and feathers¹¹ serve as amulets to guard the boat against the evil eye. One perhaps might compare this custom with the bridle ornaments of the Arabian camels which are hung around their noses, also to confer protection.

The *oculus*

Painting eyes is well known in different cultures and its cult is widespread from the Mediterranean to China. Red Sea vessels reported by LeBaron Bowen, such as the *huris*, *zaimahs*, *jalbahs* and the Adeni *sanbuqs* were decorated with *oculi* on the transom;¹² the now extinct East African double-ended *mtepe* had *oculi* carved and painted on each side of the stem and sternposts.¹³ Rarely is the eye represented in the Arabian Gulf dhows; an exception is this Kuwaiti deep-sea *baghlah* which is striking with a painted eye on the transom (Figure 9:7).

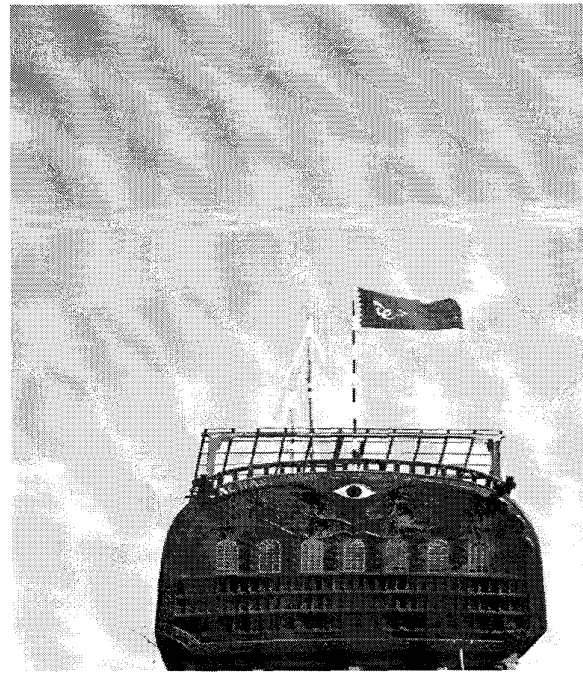


Figure 9:7 A painted eye on the baghlah transom stern, 1998 (photograph by the author)

The *oculus* is represented in two forms: the anthropomorphic eye design related to the Egyptian eye often associated with Ra, the Sun god and the eyes of Horus depicted on mummy coffins (Figure 9:8a); the other form, the stylized eye, a persistent recurring motif, having evolved into a patterned circle such as on the fourth century (BCE) Greek *bireme* (Figure 9:8b) and the crude eye on a modern stempiece of a *sanbuq*, at Mirbat (Figure 9:9).

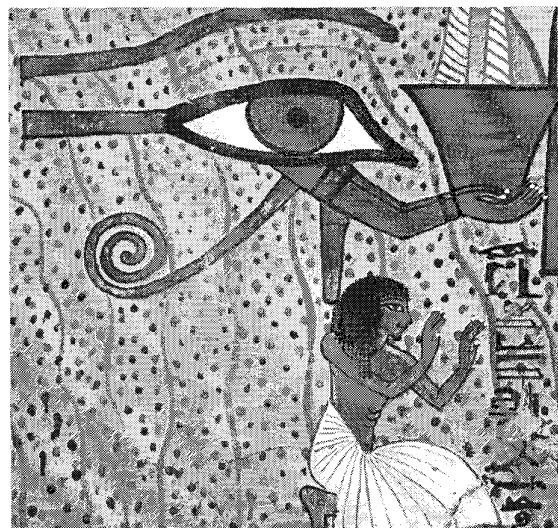


Figure 9:8a The eye of Horus on a mummy coffin (after Lee Davis 1978: 155)

¹⁰ Interview with 'Abdallah bin Muhammad al-Kumzari on 24 November 1996.

¹¹ Morton Nance 1914: Figure 7; 1920: 36, Figs. 14, 15; Foster 1949: 19.

¹² LeBaron Bowen 1955: 6, 12; see also Prins 1970: 327–9.

¹³ Burton 1872: 74.

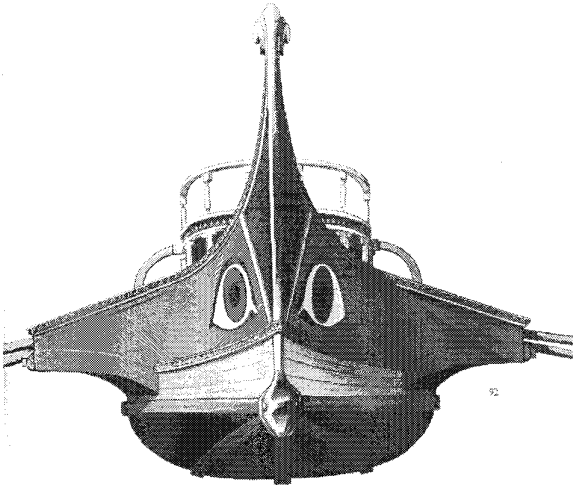


Figure 9:8b Stylized eyes on a Greek bireme (after Landström 1961: 42–3)

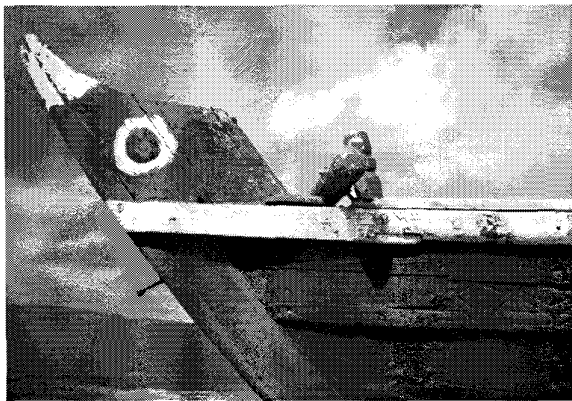


Figure 9:9 A crude circled eye on a sanbūq stempiece, Mirbat, 1996 (photograph by the author)

The *oculus* is perhaps the most ubiquitous motif. Symbolically, it is said to guard ‘the soul of the boat’¹⁴ and to drive off any malignant spirits which endanger the vessel. Its shape is particularly appropriate in this context as it harmonizes with the shape of the boat and waves of the sea. That the *oculus* is of an early Egyptian provenance is possible but its presence in the Eastern Indian Ocean makes the search for its origin more difficult. However, it must be said that there is an uncanny resemblance to the way the eye is depicted in Pharaonic Egyptian painting.

The Arabesque motif

Another common motif is the Arabesque design, characterized by its stylized floral forms, which is

found on many dhows of the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Kuwaiti *baghlah*, the Omani *ghanjah* and the Indian *kotia*.¹⁵ The Arabesque motif may be found as purely geometric forms such as the ‘rosette’ made of interlaced lines. One finds arabesque floral and geometric carved decoration carved on fairly recent dhows, such as the stempost of a *jālbūt* in Kuwait (Figure 9:10a) or a modern racing *hūrī* at al-Bateen, Abu Dhabi (Figure 9:10b).



Figure 9:10a A floral design carved on a Kuwaiti *jālbūt* stempost, 1998 (photograph by the author)



Figure 9:10b A floral motif on a racing *hūrī*, Abu Dhabi, 1997 (photograph by the author)

¹⁴ Hornell 1938: 348.

¹⁵ Agius 2002: 49–58; 2005: 13–6.

Hawkins noted three typical ornamental rosettes on the Arabian *būm* sternpost (Figure 9:11):

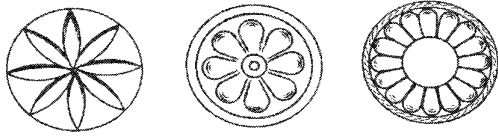
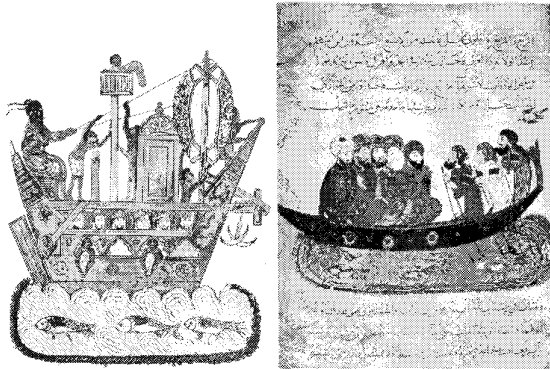


Figure 9:11 Ornamental rosettes on an Arabian *būm* sternpost (after Hawkins 1977: 74)

Its form is ancient; consider its presence on the hull sides of two thirteenth-century *Maqāmāt* illustrations of al-Ḥarīrī (d. AH 516 / AD 1122); one represents a cargo ship (Figure 9:12a) and the second is a river boat (Figure 9:12b).¹⁶



Figures 9:12a and 9:12b Rosettes carved or painted on thirteenth-century vessels (after al-Rāmḥurmuzī 1883–1886: 91, 167)

Such patterns are well known in architectural art; they decorate the walls of mosques such as the Divriği mosque, Turkey AH 626–627 / AD 1228–1229 and the Alhambra palace, al-Andalus (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD).¹⁷ The tradition of floral design is found on doors like the ones at Dar‘iyyah in Saudi Arabia, which are well preserved in spite of the ruined town.¹⁸ Although it is a design found throughout the world and clearly ancient, it is found in abundance in Persian art and can be traced back from there to the ancient civilizations of the Near East: for example, carved rosettes are found on Iron Age shell ‘buttons’ (or medallions) at Sharm, Fujairah¹⁹ and a ‘rosette’ of cup marks appears in the Jabal Jusassiyah petroglyph in

Qatar.²⁰ Also, though not common, one finds the Arabesque expressed by motifs of half a palmette leaf of a palm tree in a scroll of flower patterns along the bulwarks of a Mutrah *sanbūq* (Figure 9:13).²¹

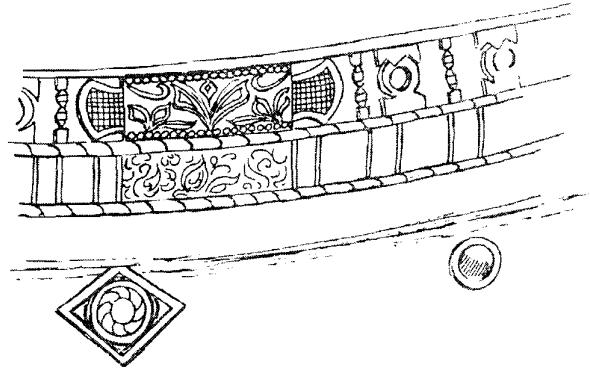


Figure 9:13 Palmette leaf motif with flower patterns on an Omani *sanbūq* (after Sassoon 1970: 194, Figure 9)

Geometrical designs

Geometric designs are usually rectilinear, such as circles, zigzags, triangles, and so on. The star motif is formed by intersecting quadrants of a circle: it can be seen in the Musandam Peninsula on the foredeck of a *battīl* in Qadah (Figure 9:14a), also found on the aft side of a *zārūk* in Sawakin (Figure 9:14b).

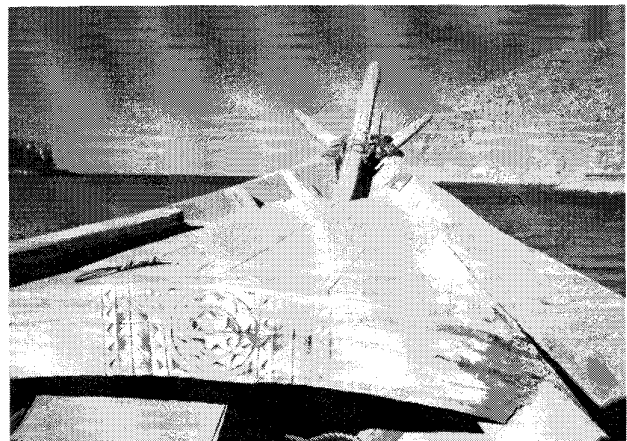


Figure 9:14a A star on a Qadah *battīl*, Musandam, 1996 (photograph by the author)

¹⁶ BN Ms Arabe 5487 (dated AH 634/ AD 1237).

¹⁷ Written communication Sharon Laor-Sirak 24 May 2006.

¹⁸ Agius 2005: 206.

¹⁹ Hellyer 1998: 22.

²⁰ Kapel 1983: 37 (others are shown, see Figs. 18, 21 Site 72, 307, 401, 525).

²¹ Sassoon 1970: 194, Figure 9.

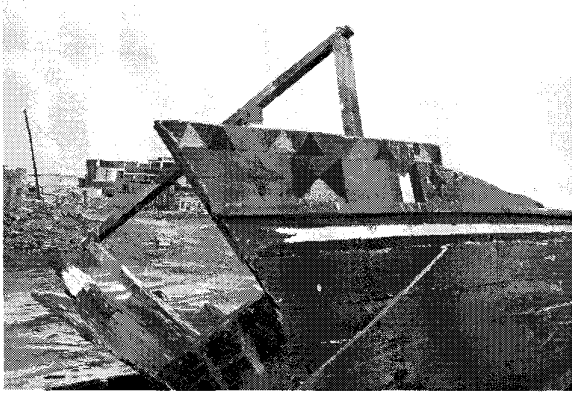


Figure 9:14b Star and intersecting quadrants on a Sawakin zārūk stern fin, 2004 (photograph by the author)

One recurrent design is the triangle. Smaller triangles are elaborately decorated on the stern fins of the Sawakin zārūk illustrated above and on the upper sides of the hull of the Mirbat sanbūq (Figure 9:15).

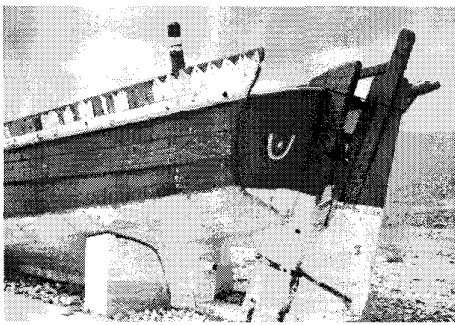


Figure 9:15 Triangles depicted on a sanbūq stern fin, Mirbat, 1996 (photograph by the author)

Such triangles are also typically found on Persian carpets. Prins reports seeing an *mtepe* in the 1950s that had geometrical designs carved and painted on the sides of bow, stern and rudder, like the border of a Shirazi carpet.²² Double-ended *jalbahs* of Aden, Mukalla and Yemen and sewn boats at Shihr are reported to have had green triangles; *sanbūqs* from East African ports, invariably, are said to carry green triangles with eyes painted blue on the stemhead.²³ This triangle-*oculus* complex is common today with Maltese and Sicilian fishing boats. *Ilīrīs* in the Aden harbour, LeBaron Bowen noted in the 1950s, had green triangles with *oculi*, fore and aft. He also observed *oculi* in triangular areas on tarred hulls of Adeni dugouts.²⁴ On small *būts* and *za'imahs*, he reports that the green triangle had gradually started to disappear.

²² Prins 1959: 213.

²³ LeBaron Bowen 1955: 8–10; see Figure 6.

²⁴ LeBaron Bowen 1952: 200.

Abstractness in maritime art

Although geometric designs are, by definition, precise, one finds in maritime art that each motif is individually drawn freehand so that not one motif is exactly the same as another. The process of decorating in its different forms is controlled by the eye and this is also true of the art of building a dhow; no dhow-type is similar to its model. No plans are required but the accuracy of eye provides the stability and seaworthiness of the structure of the vessel. The patterns of boat decorating are not rigidly stylized: they are an informal form of personal expression and one is struck by their simplicity and beauty.

From what has been said there is a mixture of anthropomorphic images and pure geometric designs on boats. This raises an intriguing question: why do anthropomorphic motifs occur in an Islamic culture where figurative art is prohibited? Figurative art only exists on the periphery, such as the Persian miniatures which portray images of persons and objects; and in this art the face of a sacred personage is always blurred and painted white. Islamic art dictates that nature is not allowed to be reproduced: no work of God the Creator should be imitated; thus, no Muslim is allowed to reproduce nature in other words, it is prohibited 'to transform nature into an imagery so as to make it visibly unreal'.²⁵ It can be transformed into something which is not represented by an object but by a feature which is an abstract.

Abstract designs are the purest forms of Islamic art and calligraphy is the quintessence of the abstract form, being both beautiful yet devoid of any object of creation. The art of writing, Burckhardt explains, 'awakens in the Muslim a sensitivity to the interplay of abstract lines, an interplay which is both geometric and rhythmic'.²⁶ Examples of textual painting and carving are found among Arabian boats; all examples I found are in the *naskhī* form, a simplified style of writing.

The art of writing on Arabian boats

Textual painting is typical of the Sawakin zārūk in Sudan while the Southern Arabian *sanbūq* has an elaborate carved transom embellished with writing in high relief. Textual carving is almost extinct today. I have classified these writings into three categories: (a) names of boats, (b) poetic lines, and (c) invocatory prayers.

(a) Names of fishing boats painted on the sides of the bows and stern of the Sawakin boats express words of hope, luck, livelihood and blessing of Allāh, others are place-names: الجاموس *bashā'ir* (good omens), بغداد *Baghdād*, *الرجاء* *al-jāmūs* (buffalo), حماس *hamās* (fervour), رجاء *rajā'* (hope), الرحال *al-raḥḥāl* (the wanderer), ساحلي *sāhili*

²⁵ Burckhardt 1976: 32.

²⁶ Ibid.

(coastal), طالب الله *tālib Allāh* (seeker of Allāh), مواهب *mawāhib* (talents), العسيري النجد *al-Najd al-‘Asīrī* (al-‘Asīr),²⁷ المهاجر *al-muhājir* (the emigrant),²⁸ نوره *nūruhu* (His light).²⁹

(b) Poetic verses painted on the aft side of a *zārūk* at the Mina in Sawakin show a very personal message (Figure 9:16).³⁰

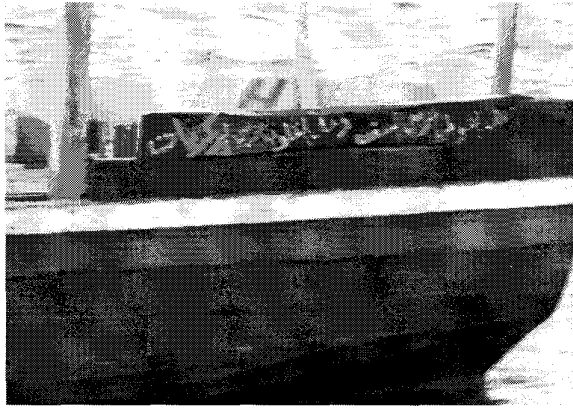


Figure 9:16 Writing on the *zārūk* aft-side, Sawakin, 2004 (photograph by the author)

على الشواطئ ترسى السفن
وعلى القلوب ترسى الذكريات

Off the coast the boats anchor in the hearts lie memories

One *zārūk* gave the title of a song by the Saudi ‘Abd al-Majīd ‘Abdallāh

رحيب والله رحيب

Amazing! O Allāh, it is wonderful!

(c) Invocatory prayers occur carved on the stern of a *sanbūq* in Sadh, Dhofar; the date and year and the name of the carver are included at the end of the prayers (Figure 9:17).³¹

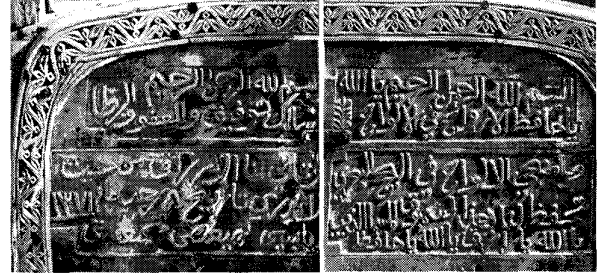


Figure 9:17 Invocatory prayers on a *Sadh sanbūq*, Dhofar, 1996 (photograph by the author)

right side top

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم يا الله
يا حافظ الارواح في الالواح

In the Name of Allāh, Most Gracious, Most Merciful
O You who preserve life on board ship.

right side bottom

و يا منجي الالواح في اللجج البحري
تحفظ لنا هذا السنبوق المسمى الذيب
يا الله يا رازق يا الله يا حافظ

O You who rescue ships on the deep ocean³²
Save and guard this *sanbūq* called *The Wolf*
O Allāh, O Provider, O Allāh, O Saviour.

left side top

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
نسالك التوفيق والغفور والرضا

In the Name of Allāh, Most Gracious, Most Merciful
We ask for mediation, forgiveness and favour

left side bottom

واتي لنا الارزاق من حيث
لا تدري تاريخ ٨ رجب عام ١٣٧١
ياس كهيعص----

Provide us with livelihood, knowingly or
without your knowledge. Dated 8 Rajab 1371 (1951)
Yā-Sīn; Kāf-Hā'-Yā'-‘Ayn-Šād³³ (----)³⁴

²⁷ South-west Saudi Arabia: the Najd mountainous district between al-Hijaz and Yemen.

²⁸ May be a reference to the *muhājirūn* - the Makkans who, in the early years of Islam, emigrated to Medina.

²⁹ Recorded by author 4 December 2004.

³⁰ Recorded by author 28 November 2004.

³¹ Recorded by author 17 November 1996.

³² The end of the first line in Arabic should read اللجج البحرية, the adjective following the plural noun is feminine singular.

³³ These letters known as the ‘abbreviated letters’ are believed

These writings demonstrate a mental process which, when combined with the visual experience, creates something of unique beauty, but its function is clear: to convey a poetic or spiritual meaning. By writing on its planks, the *nakhoda* (sea captain) and/or the owner invoke God to protect the boat from wreckage or piracy. Not only would Arabic writing represent the values of an artistic creativity but it conforms to an Islamic life and the precepts of the faith. Consider the writing on the door lintel, examples of which I saw in al-Quşayr, Sawakin and Sadh on the southern Arabian coast. The doorway is the symbol of the family just as the boat is another family (the owner and the crew). In both cases the writing demonstrates a sense of belonging.

Attitudes to decorative motifs

Let me now turn to the attitudes of seafaring communities towards their own decorative motifs. One of the most striking features of the boats in the Red Sea is the bright colours used on the outside. What is the significance of these colours? Table 1 shows that the most common colours in the two harbour towns of al-Quşayr and Sawakin are red, blue and green. Turquoise blue is, of course, associated with protection against the evil eye, that is, protection against someone who is envious.

Ettinghausen's explanation that colour is a response to environment makes sense up to a point. He argues that the desert and the barren landscape of the Arabian shores and the Red Sea, the scarcity of water, the fierce sun and damp nights are elements that render life monotonous. The psychological relief from this 'unrelieved monotony' led to the use of colour in clothing and in the objects that are used.³⁵ But then how can one explain that the dhows of the Arabian Gulf and the Oman region are almost devoid of colour? The painting of the sharp-pointed stem-head of a *būm* in black and white, or white and blue on the stem-head of *sanbūqs* in the Gulf is all that we have. In general, most of the Arabian Gulf dhows look brown, though with fish oil rubbed into the planks, they contrast very well with the green-blue sea.

Final remarks

It may be said in general that the themes of decorative motifs can be symbolic or representational; some may be following in a tradition from late classical and Byzantine prototypes. The rosette is a Persian influence and this is visible on the Arabian Gulf boats because of the Shī'ite dominance in the communities there. Of the

to have a mystic meaning; the first group relates to the Prophet Muḥammad, see Sūrat Yāsīn 37: 1; the second group of letters is found in the first *āya* (verse) of Sūrat Maryam 19: 1.

³⁴ The owner or carver's name is not readable.

³⁵ Ettinghausen 1976: 68.

150 mariners I interviewed in the Arabian Gulf, seventy percent told me they were Shī'ites; the figure may be higher as some were reluctant to give such information due to political and religious sensitivities. In contrast to the more flowing lines of the rosette are the triangles and star motifs which seem to belong more to the Sunni communities who settled on the coast, influenced as they are by Bedu tribal art. This is not a clear-cut divide but there is evidence to support nomadic influences. Tellingly, no sign of the rosette occurs on the Red Sea fishing boats owned by the Rashāyida, a Saudi (Sunni) tribe who have been settled on the African coast for at least one hundred years.

The desert and the sea have space in common. When it comes to forms, Burckhardt comments, nomads simplify them and render them as symbols while sedentary people develop nomadic art with forms reminiscent of nature.³⁶ Thus, nomadic art enjoys rhythm and space while sedentary art has melody but limits space.³⁷ Maritime culture lies at a crossroads between two polarities: nomadic and sedentary. Nomads were in contact with the merchants and traders who came with their goods at the harbour front to trade goods and fish when the ship anchored. Others came to the shore for seasonal work in October as mariners and returned to their pasture land in May. Artistic motifs on objects that are traded produce ideas that are borrowed and become part of the maritime art repertoire. Its adaptation is a balance between motifs developed by the town and the desert settlers.

To return to the questions raised at the beginning of this article: maritime art cannot be said to be completely homogenous within the region of the Red Sea, southern Arabian coast and the Arabian Gulf and Oman because one or more motifs can predominate in one area of the region but not another. For example, although the *oculus* is common to the whole Arabian Peninsula, the rosette is typical of the Arabian Gulf states but not of the Red Sea. How far is maritime art an expression of a unity of culture? Some motifs such as pendulous decorations and the *oculus* pre-date Islam as we have seen, but nevertheless seem to have originated across the whole region. There is no doubt that they do demonstrate a unity and stability over the centuries. It is only when it comes down to individual motifs that one sees the regional differences. The greatest expression of unity is, of course, Islam and it is calligraphy in maritime art that distinguishes this region from the western Indian Ocean boats.

When one considers the ornamental intricacy of buildings such as the Alhambra in Spain and the high degree of detail and colour susceptibility in Persian miniature painting, Islamic maritime art is relatively simple. However, it gives us a unique glimpse into the customs and folklore traditions of a pre-Islamic society as well as reflecting customs and beliefs of modern Arabian and African communities.

³⁶ Burckhardt 1976: 37.

³⁷ Ibid.

Table 9:1 Colours of dhows Sawakin and al-Quşayr (2001–2004)

	red / red ochre	black	green	blue/turquoise blue	yellow	white
<i>zārūk</i>	√	√	√	√	√	
<i>shattīyya</i>	√			√	√	√
<i>ramaş</i>	√			√		
<i>falūka</i>	√		√			
<i>gaṭīra</i>	√		√	√		
<i>hūrī</i>	√			√		

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- BL British Library, London
 BN Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
 CBL Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

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