

This is an accepted version of an article that went on to be published in the *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* in 2015. The reference for the published version is:

Cooper, J.P., Agius, D.A., Collie, T. and al-Naimi, F., 2015 "Boat and ship engravings at al-Zubārah, Qatar: the *dāw* exposed?" *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 45: 35-48.

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## **Boat and ship engravings at Al Zubārah, Qatar: the *dāw* exposed?**

**John P. Cooper, Dionisius A. Agius, Tom Collie & Faisal al-Naimi**

### **Summary**

Ongoing excavations at the site of Al Zubārah, Qatar have revealed a number of images of boats and ships engraved into plaster on walls at the site. The images offer a new insight into the vessels used and encountered by the inhabitants of the settlement, which was occupied chiefly in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This paper presents the vessels within their archaeological contexts, describes their iconographic features, and proposes identifications of their types based on typological comparison with other iconographic evidence. It considers the functions of these craft within the maritime economy of Al Zubārah, and their meaning within the social and cultural life of the settlement.

Indigenous depictions of pre-twentieth-century regional watercraft are relatively rare, making the Al Zubārah images a welcome addition to the field of nautical studies in and of the Gulf region. The images have also highlighted tension between iconography and written historical sources. Do some of these images depict an elusive and specific vessel type referred to as the *dāw*, as some sources suggest? Or should we accept that the familiar but etic term ‘dhow’ is an orientalist placeholder for a rich variety of regional craft? The problem is investigated through British colonial records and historical accounts and iconography.

## **Introduction**

Ongoing excavations at the site of the eighteenth–nineteenth-century walled town of Al Zubārah, Qatar, have uncovered a number of engravings of seagoing craft etched into the dry plasterwork of buildings within the settlement. The engravings are essentially graffiti, carved into the interiors of rooms without aesthetic reference to the original decorative schema of their settings. The resulting images are of varying sophistication and detail — dependent, no doubt, on the skill and inclination of their executors. While the crudest images are rudimentary outlines of hulls, others show detail that demonstrates the familiarity of their creators with boat construction and type — not surprising in a settlement whose *raison d'être* was the living to be made from the sea. This iconographic vestige provides an insight into the types of vessel their creators used and encountered, and allows us to venture our own identifications of them. It also prompts us to reflect on the nature of the relationship between Al Zubārah's sometime residents and the sea: the vessels depicted are, for the most part, a mixture of ocean-going types built within the Gulf or western Indian Ocean region. One, however, is of a European naval vessel, perhaps suggesting the shadow of British imperial power in the Gulf. Finally, the process of identification of these watercraft inspires renewed reflection on the word 'dhow' and its variants, from both a typological and an etymological perspective; these new reflections are presented at the end of this paper.

## **The site and its chronology**

The Al Zubārah archaeological site lies on the north-west coast of the Qatar peninsula. The most complete remnant of an Arabian pearling and trading town — and an early manifestation of an independent Gulf polity — it was inscribed to the UNESCO World Heritage List in June 2013 (UNESCO 2013). It encompasses the remains of a 60 ha settlement surrounded by a 2.5 km town wall (Fig. 1). The settlement was formed in the 1760s by elements of the ʿUtūb.



Figure 1. (A) Plan of the site of al-Zubarah, showing areas ZUEP01 and ZUEP04, where the boat engravings are located. (B) Plan of the excavated areas of Precinct Sections 7 and 8, where all but one of the engravings were found (C) Plan of the domestic compound within ZUEP01 in which the first of the dhow engravings was discovered. (Image © QMIH/QM).

federation migrating from Kuwait, followed by others from Basrah and elsewhere (Walmsley, Barnes & Macumber 2010: 56). It expanded rapidly over half a century amid a boom in pearling and associated international trade (Carter 2012: 115–118). Its permanent population perhaps reached 5000–6000, augmented seasonally by pearling migrants (Fromhertz 2012: 47; Walmsley & Naimi 2014: 14).

This rapid expansion did not occur without challenging the interests of other regional polities that were forming and expanding throughout the Gulf at this time. Political upheaval and military attacks from several fronts, together with famine episodes, ultimately prompted the mercantile Al Khalifa to relocate to Bahrain, which they had taken in 1783. Al Zubārah was

captured by the Saudis in 1795, and devastated during a retaliation by forces of the Sultan of Muscat in 1811 (Rahman 2005: 21–24; Carter 2012: 118; Fromhertz 2012: 47–48; Richter, Wordsworth & Walmsley 2011: 320); the subsequent period, at least from the 1820s, can be characterized as an attempt to resettle the site, albeit on a much smaller scale, and without the direct patronage of the mercantile elite. A much-reduced urban area near the beach was occupied and surrounded by a new perimeter wall. The new buildings were less sophisticated in construction and largely ignored the original town plan. This second period of significant settlement activity ended in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (Richter, Wordsworth & Walmsley 2011: 321). A British bombardment of the Al Zubārah fleet in 1895 on behalf of Bahrain, suggests that occupation was ongoing at least until that time (Rahman 2005: 125–144).

Archaeological excavations began at Al Zubārah in 2009 under the banner of the Qatar Islamic Archaeology and Heritage project (QIAH), partnering Qatar Museums (QM) and the University of Copenhagen. Excavation has focused on two main areas. Work began in the central district at area ZUEP01, straddling the inner town wall, yielding the first, and so far most elaborate, boat engraving (Figs 1/A and 10; Walmsley, Barnes & Macumber 2010: 62–64). Nearby, ZUEP02 yielded a storage and production district with extensive harbour-side date-processing facilities (Fig. 1/A). The second main area of work has been in the south, at ZUEP04, centred on a high-status compound comprising several units, each accessed by internal corridors; it is here that the remaining discoveries of boat graffiti were made (Fig. 1/A,B).

QIAHP's investigations have classified the occupation of Al Zubārah into six main phases. Phase 6 comprises occupational features from before the main settlement of the town. Phase 5 reflects the first major phase of occupation following the ʿUtūb migration, and includes large-



scale buildings as well as the outer town wall. All of the boat graffiti discussed in this paper are etched onto walls belonging to this phase, providing a *terminus post quem* for their creation. Phase 4 included temporary building structures that appeared after the sack of the town in 1811. Phase 3 comprises features related to the second occupation of Al Zubārah from the 1820s onward. Phase 2 is marked by sparse, small-scale, and temporary structures from after the town's abandonment in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, while Phase 1 includes post-1950s infrastructure (Richter, Wordsworth & Walmsley 2011: 320–321).

The boat engraving found in ZUEP01 was etched into the plaster of the wall of a small room (space 102) within a domestic compound (Figs 1/C and 10). The others were found in a large, high-status compound building at ZUEP04 (Fig. 1/A,B). This fortified structure is large (100 x 110 m) and was defended at each corner by a tower. The compound was divided into eight sections surrounding an open central area; all were linked by internal passages. These sections are interpreted as separate, probably domestic, units. Current excavations are examining the archaeology of two such units, labelled Precinct Sections 7 (PS7) and 8 (PS8). It is in two rooms of the former (spaces 3033 and 3036) that the engravings are located.

Excavation at PS8 revealed a courtyard house for a high-status family (Fig. 1/B). The rooms on the southern and eastern wings display evidence of luxury: walls and floors were smoothly rendered and showed signs of intricate decorative plasterwork. Several rooms contained washing facilities. The northern and western rooms contained cooking and storage facilities. Stairs at both the southern wing and the tower indicate that it had upper floors.

Excavations at neighbouring PS7 have uncovered only the southern wing of that structure to date, but similarities with PS8 can already be seen: the structure was built around a central courtyard and had a staircase, and rooms were decorated with smooth plastered walls, some having large decorative entrance arches. The boat etchings found in spaces 3033 and 3036

were inscribed on the interior plasterwork (Fig. 1/B). In the former, nine etchings were revealed, of which seven (D1, D2, D5, D10, D11, D12, D14; Figs 2–6) are interpreted as boats. In the latter, five etchings were discovered, of which three (D4, D6, D8; Figs 7–9) are interpreted as such. This concentration surely signals a clear connection between the sometime users of these particular rooms and the maritime economy.

The dating of these images is problematic. They could have been present from the very beginning of Al Zubārah's Phase 5 occupation. It may be considered peculiar for such a well-decorated building as that of ZUEP04 to have been adorned by relatively crude etchings at the outset, but the stratigraphy of shell-floor surfaces and renewals of the wall render indicate that engravings were being made during this main occupation phase. The building-collapse debris associated with the end of occupation at ZUEP04 provides a *terminus ante quem* for the etchings.

### **The engravings**

The images depicted in the Al Zubārah engravings represent a broad range of seagoing ships. Five identifications of type are proposed with varying degrees of confidence, based largely on the level of detail of the image, but also on the availability of comparators. Rather than address according to typology, we consider them here according to where they were found. Since most appear in the high-status compound at ZUEP04, let us begin there.

### **Room 3033**

Of the ten images identified as boats at ZUEP04, seven appeared within a single room (space 3033), and represent at least four vessel types. These were often etched in the corners of the room, or in recesses within it.

## Graffito D1

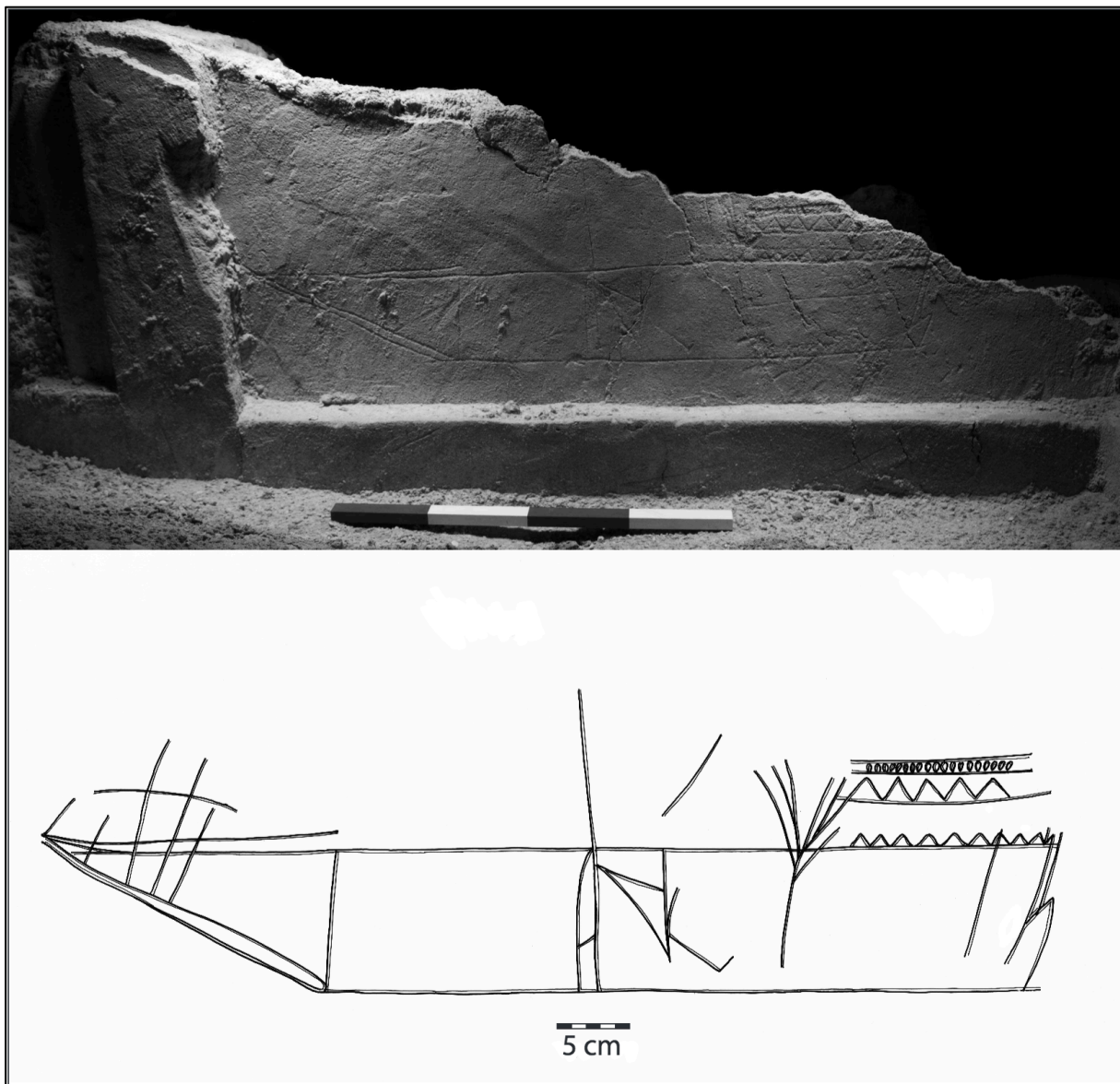


Figure 2. Graffito D1, photographed in-situ (top) and drawn (bottom). The vessel is interpreted as an ocean-going baghlahor similar. (Photo: Dan Britton; Drawing: Caroline Hebron).

The engraving known as D1 (Fig. 2) is a 70 cm-long profile of the port side of a seagoing vessel, with the almost complete hull, a single mast, and some rigging surviving. The proportions of the hull and short rudder blade suggest that the illustrator has depicted the vessel only above the waterline. The following features are salient to its identification: the image depicts a sharply raking prow rising at  $27^\circ$  to the horizontal, with both the stem post and sternpost (at  $73^\circ$ ) individuuated; the stem post is straight, breaking into a slight curve as it

approaches the top; no stem head adornment is depicted — a vital identifier for many regional vessels — but this may simply reflect the scale and detail of the depiction. Given the profile view, it is difficult to conclude whether this was a transom-sterned vessel, or double-ended. Nevertheless, the vessel is depicted with a rudder comprising a lower blade that transitions abruptly to a much narrower stock. That is redolent of rudders seen on several transom-sterned types in the region, but given that the upper stern is missing from the image, we cannot know whether it disappeared into a counter, as it would on a typical transom-sterned vessel, or remained exposed to the top of the stern-post, as it would for a double-ended hull.

The sheer line of the hull of D1 is very flat. An additional line running back from the prow suggests a wash strake. At the stern, a poop is depicted with zigzag and ovoid patterning on the quarter planking. Such decoration is common on several regional vessel types, both double-ended and transom-sterned. Meanwhile, the slight forward rake of the mast suggests a lateen rig or the unsteady hand of the engraver. The three oblique lines rising forward of the poop might be interpreted as a halyard running from the *'ubaydar* (fixed pulley block) to the masthead.

Given that this image resembles a much more rudimentary version of the ship found at ZUEP01 (see below), we suggest that this is an ocean-going vessel of the *baghlah* or *ghanjah* type, although the lacuna around the upper stern area makes this a tentative identification.

### **Graffiti D2 and D1**

The boat image known as D2 (Fig. 3) appears to be an altogether more rudimentary representation of a similar craft to the D1 and ZUEP01 images. The hull itself is again represented in profile, but this time viewing the starboard side and almost only in outline, although vertical lines within the hull might be interpreted as framing timbers. About 64 cm

long, the hull, like D1, is characterized by a straight, raking prow (at  $30^\circ$ ), and a more obtuse ( $67^\circ$ ) sternpost. A main mast and a mizzen are shown, with rigging rising to meet them both.

An Admiralty Pattern anchor is seen suspended from the bow, in contrast to the non-European hull shape. Immediately below D2, another hull (D11) is crudely depicted: about 30 cm long, its raking prow and flat sheer line echo D2 above it — and also D1 — but we can say little more with regard to its type or construction.

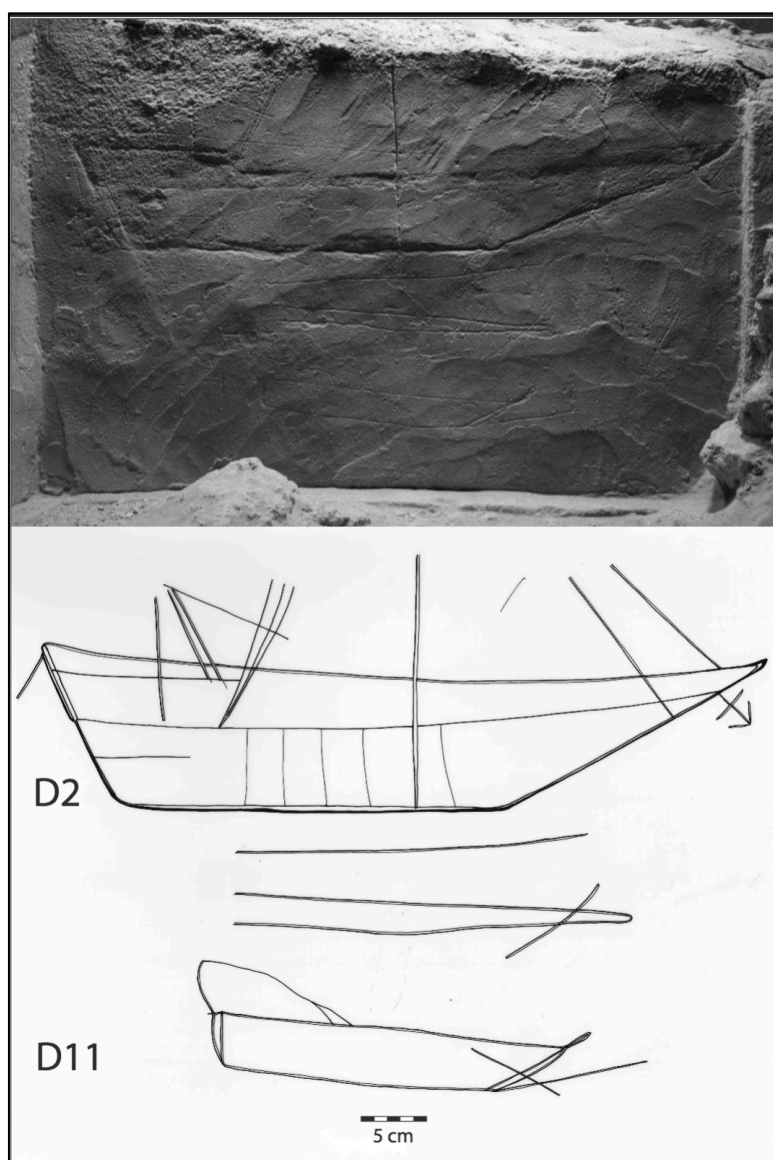


Figure 3. Graffiti D2 and D11, photographed in-situ (top) and drawn (bottom). D2 is interpreted as an ocean-going baghlah or similar. (Photo: Dan Britton; Drawing: Caroline Hebron)

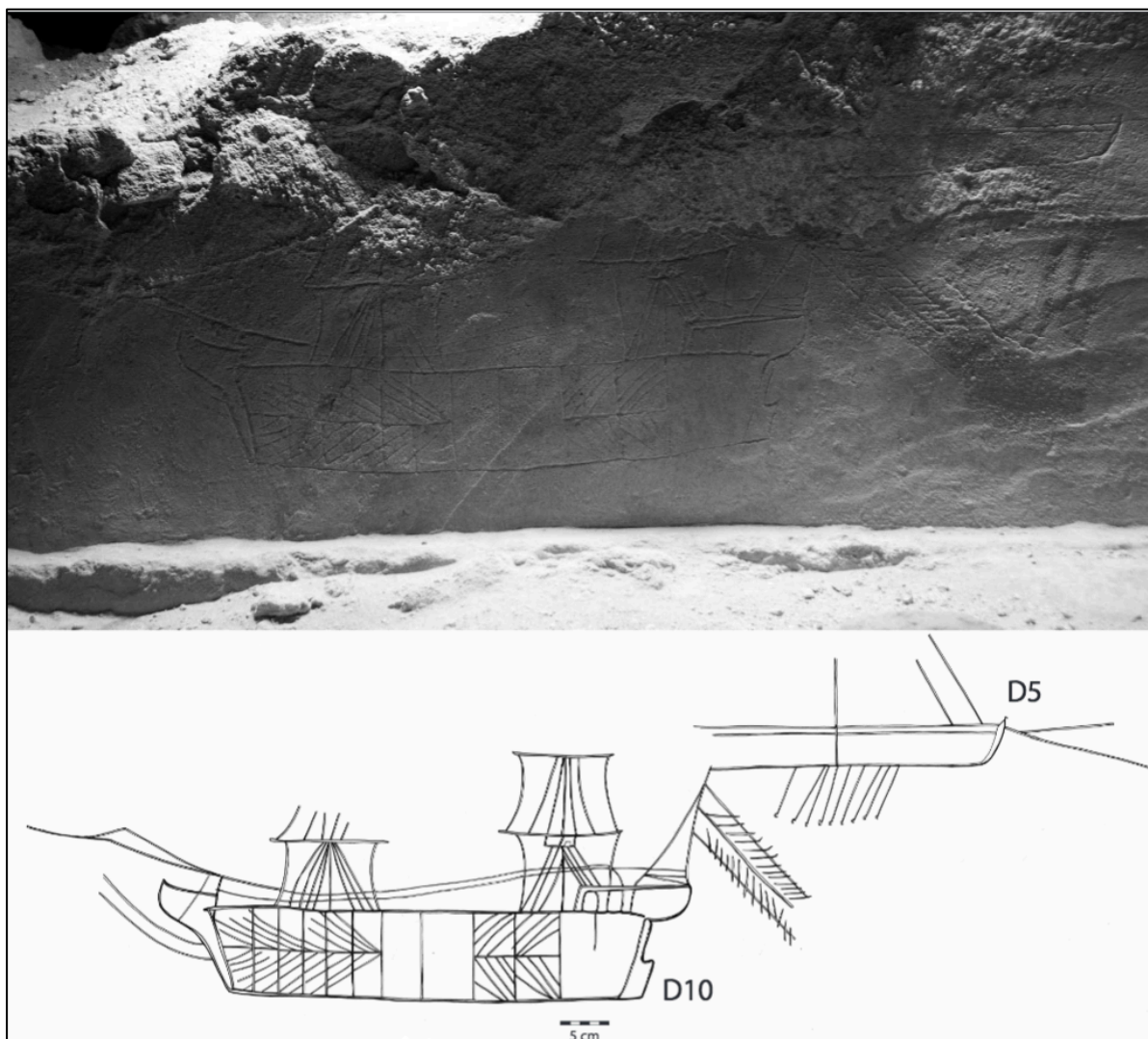


Figure 4. Graffiti D5 and D10, photographed in-situ (top) and drawn (bottom). D5 is interpreted as a possible sanbūq, and D10 as a European brig. (Photo: Dan Britton; Drawing: Caroline Hebron)

### **Graffito D10**

One of the most remarkable boat engravings found at Al Zubārah appears in the same corner of room 3033 as images D2 and D11, but on the return wall. D10 (Fig. 4) is striking not only for its relative detail, but also for what it depicts. This 54 cm-long graffito is not of a regional vessel, but of a European ship, and while no weaponry is depicted, it is hard not to see this image in the light of British Royal Naval involvement in the region, although its nationality cannot be known. The rigging comprises two masts and square sails, a configuration pointing

to a man-of-war brig (Anderson & Anderson 1926: 173; MacGregor 1980: 72–81).<sup>1</sup> The rigging detail includes shrouds, the main and mizzen topsails, and their sheets. The lack of an obvious third mast argues against this being an East Indiaman. The obtuse rake of the stem (70°) and stern (72°) are typical of a European naval vessel of the period, while the explicit depiction of a beak-headed prow makes a European identification unambiguous. The stern of the vessel shows a clear poop deck and counter, into which the stock of the rudder is seen to pass. There may be a flag flying astern. The rectilinear subdivisions of the hull and their associated chevrons are difficult to interpret: these may make reference to the internal structure of the hull, or otherwise be abstract.

### **Graffito D5**

Immediately above and to the right of D10 — though probably not part of the same scene — is a simpler 32 cm-long depiction of a quite different vessel (D5; Fig. 4). This shows the incomplete starboard profile view of a vessel with some rigging and mooring lines, as well as what appear to be sweeps. The angle of the mooring lines suggests a vessel moored to the shore in shallow water, or perhaps to another vessel. The depiction of nine rows of sweeps is perhaps the closest any of the Al Zubārah engravings come to referencing pearling activity: these were used in manoeuvring vessels precisely over the pearling beds, and also as rest-stations for the divers.

Without the sweeps, the long, low proportions of the hull of D5 give the impression of a small craft, perhaps an inshore fishing vessel. Their presence implies a larger craft, however, capable of carrying at least eighteen divers, their haulers, and other crew. It is a single-masted

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Dr Julian Whitewright for his initial suggested identification of a brig.

<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Charlotte Dixon for this information (personal communication, 2 June 2014).



craft; the image also shows the forward shifting tackle and shifting stay. A curving stem post is significant for diagnostic purposes: this might be the vessel type that in the wider Gulf is referred to as a *sanbūq*, but which in Qatari terminology is more usually a *shūʿī* (Agius 2002: 77–88; Jewel 1969: 37–48).

### Graffiti D12 and D14

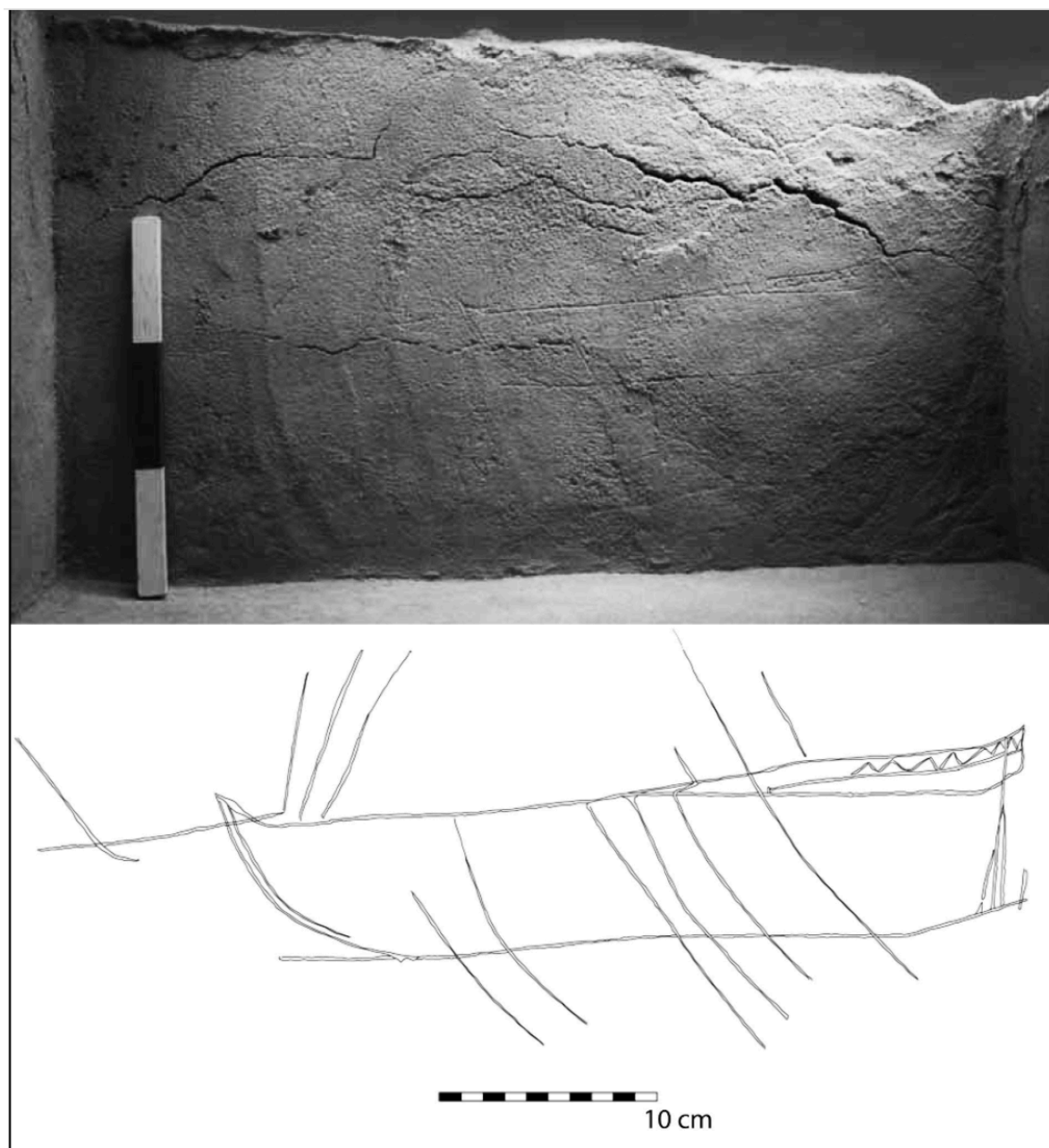


Figure 5. Graffito D12, photographed in situ (top) and drawn (bottom). D12 is interpreted as a possible *sanbūq* (in Qatari terminology, a *shūʿī*). (Photograph: Dan Britton; drawing: Ann Andersson).



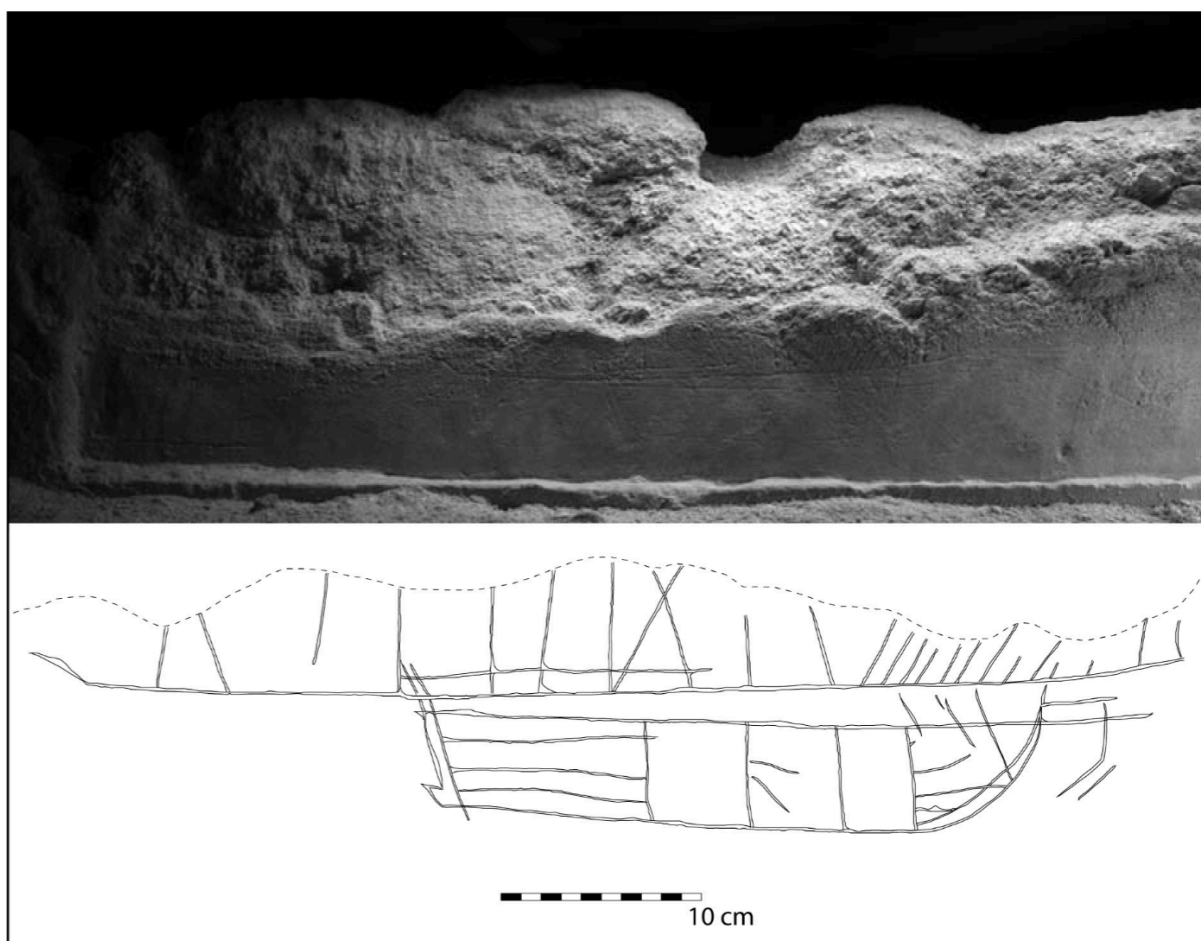


Figure 6. Graffito D14, photographed in situ (top) and drawn (bottom). It is interpreted as a possible *sanbūq* (in Qatari terminology, a *shūʿī*). (Photograph: Dan Britton; drawing: Ann Andersson)

If the curved stem post of the D5 image is not convincingly diagnostic of what is known in Qatari terms as a *shūʿī*, then the depictions of two other vessels in room 3033 are more persuasive in this regard. The boat depictions in graffiti D12 (Fig. 5) and D14 (Fig. 6) are executed in quite different styles, yet show hulls of very similar shape and proportion. D12 is a 36 cm-long representation of the salient external features of a *shūʿī*-type vessel, viewed as a port-side profile. The stem post is curved and rises to a stubby point; the stern shows decorated quarter strakes, indicated by zigzag patterning, which extend aft beyond the transom, forming small ‘wings’. Only the lower part of the rigging survives: while no mast is shown, lines representing stays converge in a way that suggests that there was one mast only. Oblique lines across the hull may or may not suggest sweeps, but unlike the D5 boat, they do not terminate in blades in a way that would confirm this interpretation.

D14, meanwhile, takes a quite different approach to the same hull shape. The size of the depicted hull is, at around 31 cm long, very similar in size to D12. The view is again a profile, but this time of the starboard side. There is little to suggest rigging, but the hull has the same curved stem post as D12. The slightly more raking angle of the stem post ( $72^\circ$  versus D12's  $82^\circ$ ) is not particularly significant given the medium and the level of detail. The stern does not have decorated or protruding quarter strakes like D12, but the rudder is more explicitly represented. Unlike D12 — but like D2 and D10 — the hull is split into rectilinear subdivisions. The horizontal lines could be seen as suggesting planking, while the central rectangles could refer to the hold space immediately below the hatches. Again, however, these could be abstract and not intended as structural features.

### **Room 3036**

Our discussion of the vessels now moves on to the graffiti of room 3036. Two of the graffiti in this room, D7 and D9 (not illustrated), are too abstract and fragmentary to be interpreted as watercraft. Two others, D6 and D8, are extremely crude, and only hint at hull shapes (Figs 8 and 9). D6 imparts nothing of value; D8 perhaps yields a port-side view of a hull with a raking bow, perhaps with another vessel behind, but this is the limit of our interpretation.

### **Graffito D4**

The most impressive boat representation in room 3036 is that of the D4 graffiti (Fig. 7). This is a 64 cm-long stylized depiction of the starboard profile of a relatively large seagoing vessel, depicted in abstract space with its below-waterline elements visible, including an individuated keel timber. Loss of the plaster surface has obliterated the upper bow, obscuring key diagnostic features. The  $55^\circ$  rake of the lower bow is significant, however, being considerably more obtuse than the vessels D1 ( $27^\circ$ ), D2 ( $23^\circ$ ), and that of ZUEP01 ( $27^\circ$ ). At  $76^\circ$ , the stern

profile is again more obtuse. While we must make allowances for the skills and intentions of the illustrator, these differences do imply a different vessel type from others in this dataset.

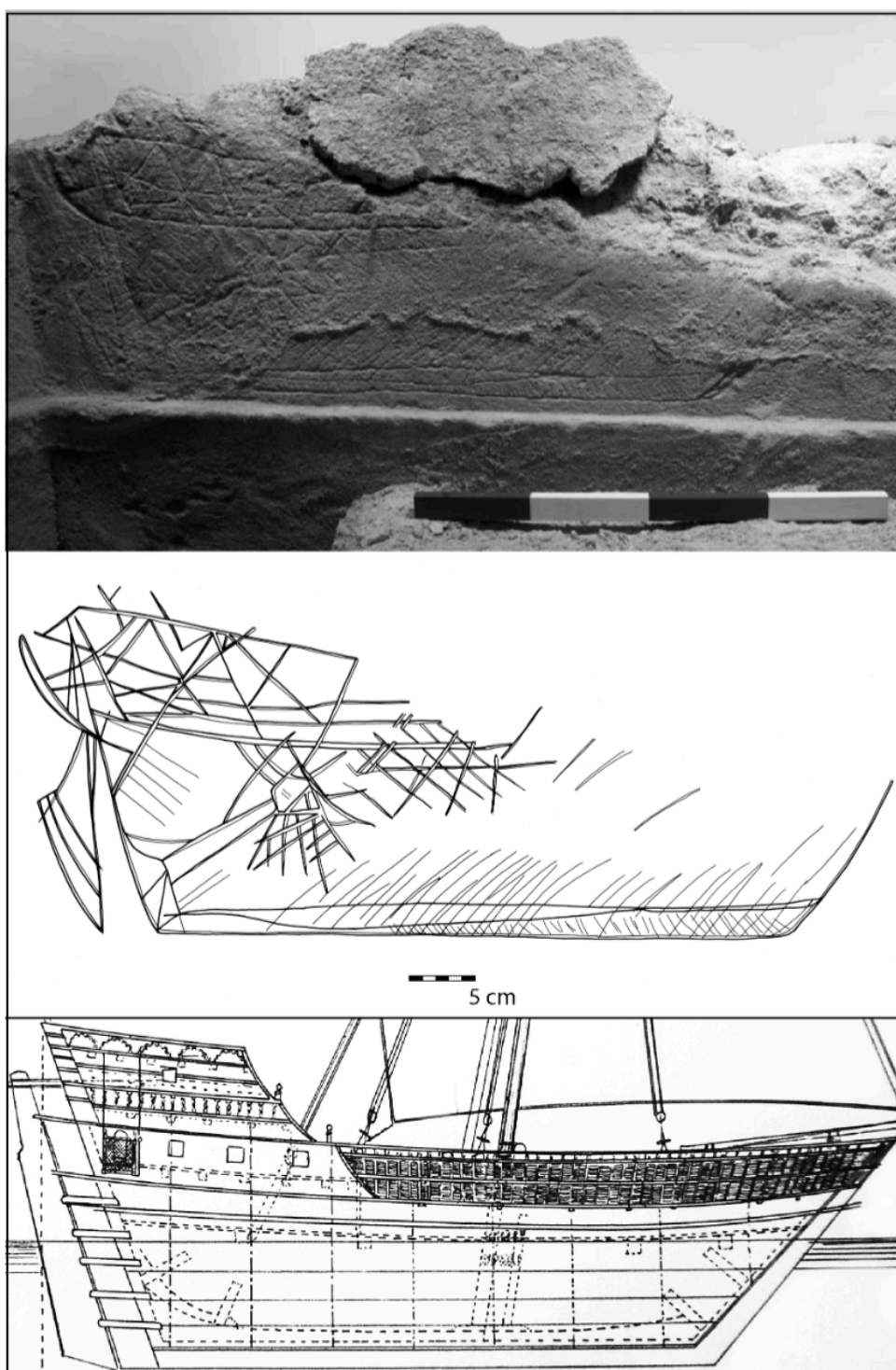


Figure 7. Graffito D4 (top and centre) compared with the Indian *dungiyah* of Pâris (bottom; reflected vertically for ease of comparison; Pâris 1841: pl. 2). Photograph: Dan Britton; drawing (centre): Caroline Hebron; (bottom).

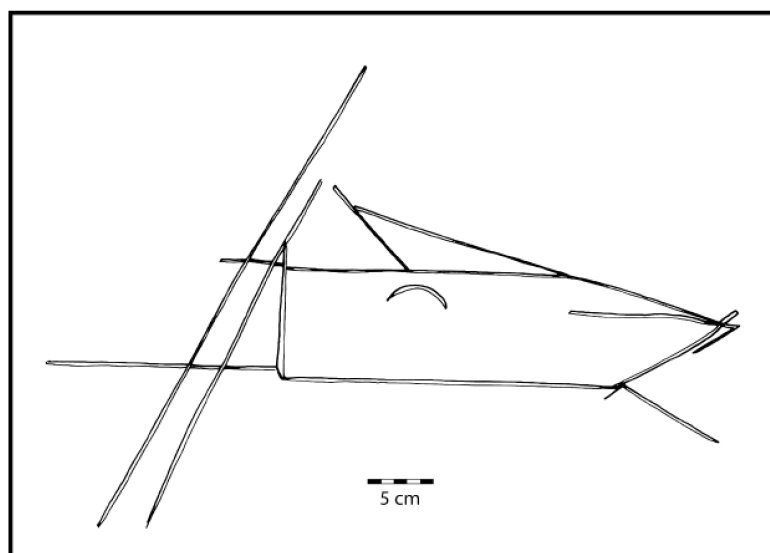


Figure 8. Graffito D6. Interpreted as a rudimentary boat image. (Drawing: Caroline Hebron)



Figure 9. Graffito D8. Rudimentary boat outlines. (Drawing: Caroline Hebron)

The remaining diagnostic features are at the stern. The rudder is highly stylized; its narrowing to a point at the bottom is improbable, since a large below-water surface area is required for effective steering. Nevertheless, the fact that it narrows upwards to stock-width and then disappears into an overhanging counter suggests that this is a transom-sterned vessel. Meanwhile, the elevation of the stern suggests a raised poop. The oblique hatching in the poop and aft portions of the graffito are difficult to interpret as structural elements: they may hint at decoration or serve some other abstract purpose. No rigging is preserved in the engraving.

The D4 vessel is difficult to identify. Setting aside for a moment the divergent profile angles of bow and stern, the stern features might suggest an attempt at a *baghlah*- or *ghanjah*-type vessel. If we are to take the actual angles (and the high poop) as indicative of type, however, we might be inclined to interpret the vessel as something like a *dungiya*, a vessel type made in Kutch, India. The French Admiral Pâris's depiction of this craft shows almost identical bow and stern angles to that of the D4 image (Pâris 1841: pl. 2). That said, the *dungiya* had a small transom stern that does not extend aft of the sternpost, allowing an external rudder to hang along the entire stem post, rather than passing through the counter. Pâris's depiction of a *dungiya* in Muscat harbour shows that this vessel type did cross to Arabia (1841: pl. 4).

### **The graffito of ZUEP01**

The ZUEP01 vessel remains the most accomplished yet found at Al Zubārah, executed by an illustrator with fine drafting skills and a clear knowledge of construction and proportion (Fig. 10). The image is of a transom-sterned seagoing vessel with a sharply raking ( $24^\circ$ ) stem post that rises straight before curving slightly just as it meets the sheer line. In this respect the bow profile resembles the much cruder D1 and D2 images. Unlike these vessels, however, the stem post continues beyond the sheer line to form an extended, though unadorned, prow. The keel comprises just 40% of the hull length, while the stem post runs for 48% of it. The absence of a stem-head decoration may reflect the fact that the vessel did not have one, or simply that the illustrator was disinclined to depict it.

A single line is used to outline the sternpost as it rises at  $65^\circ$  to the keel. In the upper part of the hull, it curves aft, representing the counter, and then up, representing the stern plate. No side galleries are apparent.

The shape of the rudder confirms the vessel as transom-sterned: the broad lower blade gives way to a stock that disappears into the counter.

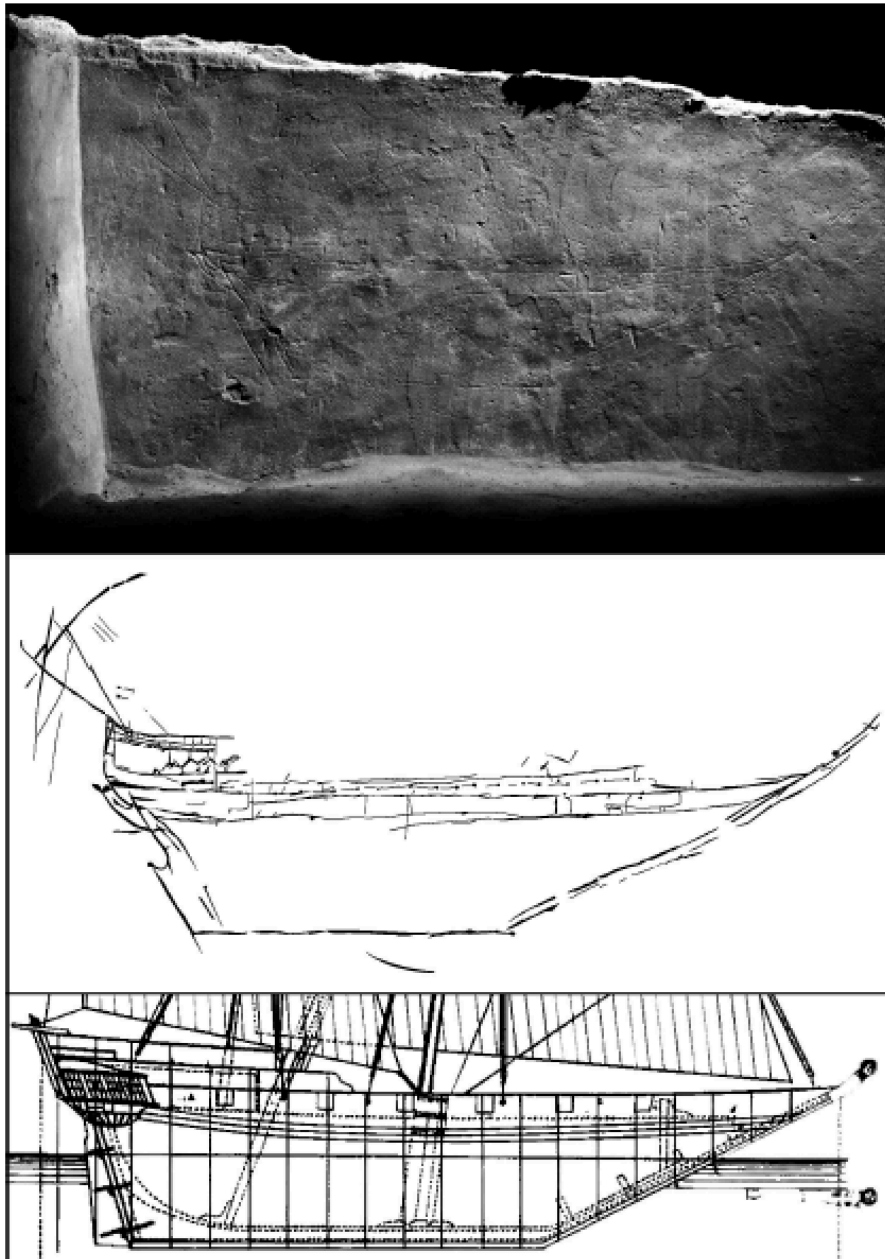


Figure 10. The ship graffito found at ZUEP01 photographed in situ (top) and drawn (centre), compared with the baghlah of Admiral Pâris (*bottom*). (Photograph: Alexis Pantos; drawing (centre): Mette Low-Sorenson; drawing (bottom): Pâris 1841: pl. 2).

The sheer line of the hull is flat forward of a small, elevated poop section. A cutaway in the sheer line towards the bow suggests a practice of loading and unloading via a gangplank between the bow and a wharf.

The etching is unique among those in this report in showing two rows of strakes along the upper edge of the hull, apparently divided into individual planks with butted, rather than scarf,

joints. A dot-and-line motif along the sheer strake implies decoration, while the poop shows a decorated rail, below which is a honeycomb-style infill. The image shows no rigging.

For identification of the ZUEP01 vessel, we turn again to Admiral Pâris (1841: pl. 2). His illustration of an ocean-going '*baggala*' (*baghlah*) is striking in its similarity: the long, raking stem post upturning at the top; the flat sheer line; the rudder disappearing into the counter of the transom stern. Only the *baghlah*'s side galleries are missing in the Al Zubārah graffito.

The *baghlah* was a large ocean-going vessel of 200–400 t known from the seventeenth century onwards, built on the Malabar coast and later in Kuwait and Bahrain, and used in trade between the Gulf and India (Agius 2002: 49; Pâris 1841: 9; Stocqueler 1832, i: 1–3). An alternative interpretation might be the often smaller *ghanjah*, associated with Sur in Oman, but this had a slightly more curving sheer line and stem post, and a characteristic 'parrot-head' to its stem post (Jewel 1969: 48–53; Dziamski & Weismann 2010: 28–29, 135).

### **The *dhow* in light of the Al Zubārah graffiti**

Pâris (1841: 9) cites the British shipwright John Edye (1834: 11–13 & pl. 11) as the basis for his '*baggala*' illustration, acknowledging him as better placed, given his residence in Sri Lanka, to record the vessel accurately. Yet Edye calls the individual vessel not a '*baggala*' but an 'Arab dow', and this in a typology of southern Indian and Sri Lankan watercraft. Edye describes these *dows* as Cochin-built vessels used by Arabs in the monsoon trade and as armed naval craft. There seems little doubt that he has in mind a particular ship type, and also that it closely resembles what we see in the ZUEP01 etching. On the basis of Edye's image, therefore, has the Al Zubārah excavation uncovered the image of a 'true' dhow? The answer is perhaps 'yes' but also 'no', depending on one's perspective.

In contemporary Anglophone usage, the term 'dhow' has come to refer generically and exonymically to traditional wooden vessels of the western Indian Ocean, whatever their

particular forms or emic classification. From that perspective, the watercraft of the Al Zubārah graffiti, at least the non-European majority, might indeed be termed dhows. But this acceptance of the generic neither enters us into the perspective of Al Zubārah’s graffiti-makers nor allows us to build a typology of our own.

The etymology of the word ‘dhow’ has been widely discussed. It does not appear to be Arabic, since it lacks a tri-radical root. Moreover, there are variants used in Farsi (*daw(h)*), Sanskrit or Hindi (*tava*), and Marathi (*dāo* and *dāva*), all meaning ‘ship’ (Agius 2002: 60). Arguments that the term has a Swahili origin lack chronological depth: the use of the term *dau* to prefix the names of regional boat types — as in the *dau la mtepe*, *dau la mataruma*, and *dau la msomari* — probably reflects an adoption from Indian languages, either via monsoon-based trading contact or colonial influence (Prins 1965: 79; Jewel 1969: 86–89).

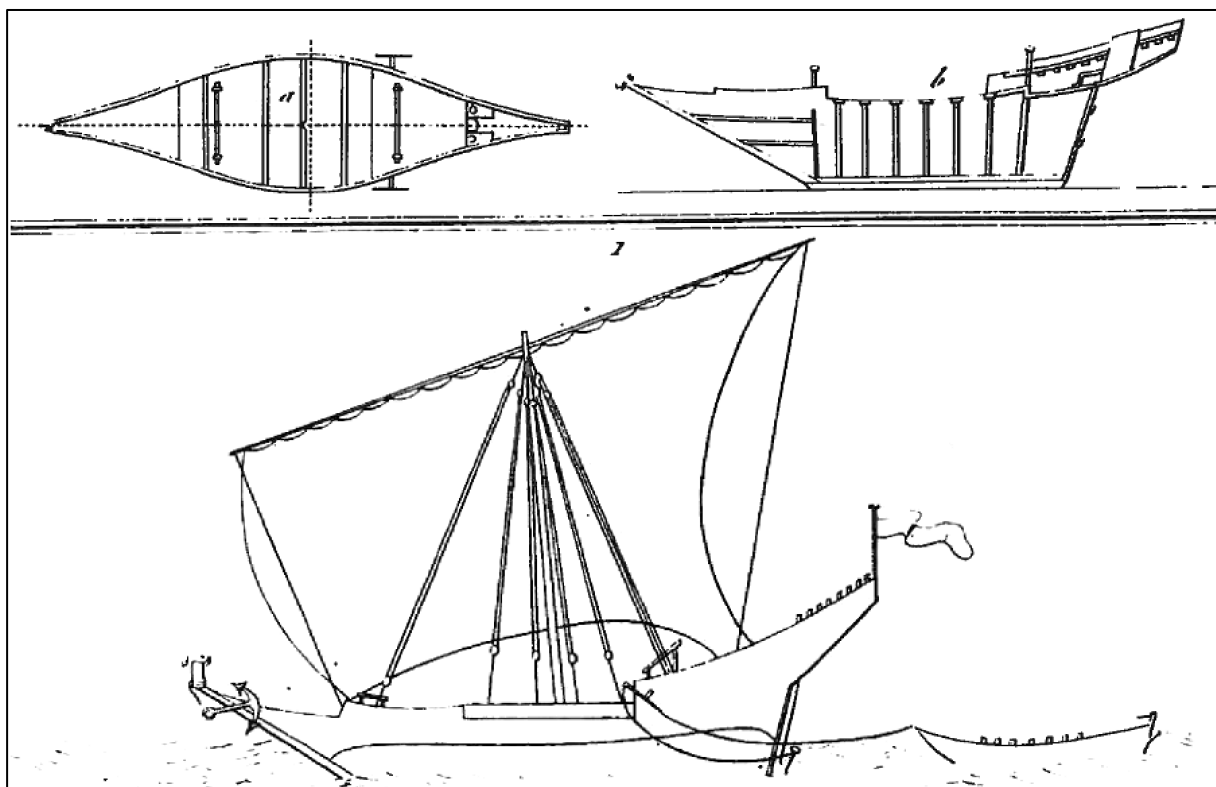


Figure 11. A Red Sea ‘dao’, illustrated by Ali Bey in 1806 (Ali Bey 1816, ii: pl. 47)



# Copyright Image

Figure 12. A model of an ‘Arab pirate “Dhow”’ in the London Science Museum collection, created in Bombay in 1850. The projecting counter identifies it as the specific type known by that name (see Figs 11 and 12)(Image: Science Museum/Science and Society Picture Library).

The adoption of the term dhow (and its graphemic variants) by the British is apparent from the eighteenth century onwards. It occurs regularly, for instance in the British East India Company’s Gambroon Diaries. For example, a company report from 15 March 1787 records the capture of a trading dhow in the Persian Gulf (CDRAD, IOR-GD, G 29/22). The term is applied to vessels as far west as the Red Sea: John Budgin refers to ‘dhows’ carrying coffee between Arabia and Egypt at the turn of the nineteenth century (BL, T. Machell IOR/MS EUR B369/1 fol. 75).

It is also clear from several British records that their authors are, in these cases at least, using the term ‘dhow’ to refer to a specific, usually armed, type. These are frequently associated with Persians and Gulf Arabs. A British East India Company letter dated October 1761 reports that a Qawāsīmī fleet comprised ‘... 30 *gallivats*, *dhows* and *trankeys*’ (CDRAD, IOR-GD, G 29/13, 14–20 October 1761). Another, written on 16 January 1774, reports that the Sultan of Muscat’s forces were well equipped with war dhows, but that ‘... the Commander of the Persian fleet alleged that, having only *gallivats*, he was not fit to engage the Muscat fleet, which consisted of three large ships, three *dhows* besides several *gallivats* and *dingeys*’ (CDRAD, IOR-GD, G 29/21). The distinction is also made by Arab rulers: a letter from Maṭar bin Raḥma bin Rashīd al-Qāsīmī to his brother Rashīd in November 1808 describes an

expeditionary fleet from Ras al-Khaima against Sur as comprising ‘22 *dows*, 2 *baghlas* and a number of *battils*’ (Davies 1997: 229, 373).

Knowing that ‘dhow’ can mean a specific vessel type, however, does not necessarily allow us to know its form in any given textual instance. At least two specific types present themselves as candidates. One is the *baghlah*-like vessel illustrated by Edye. From his etic perspective as a British colonial shipwright based in Sri Lanka, the term ‘Arab dow’ was sufficient for his own typology of southern Indian and Sri Lankan watercraft, but whether the ‘Arabs’ in question gave the vessels the same name we do not know. It is possible that Edye was using the term ‘Arab dow’ generically as it was used in British-ruled southern India, meaning an Arab-owned ocean-going ship. In fact, Pâris’s nomenclature for what seems to be the same vessel reflects our wider understanding of the type as a *baghlah*. Hence, the ZUEP01 graffito vessel might have sailed from Al Zubārah as a *baghlah*, or indeed some other type-name, only to arrive in India as an ‘Arab dow’, at least to Indian or Colonial observers.

To date, no graffiti have been found at Al Zubārah suggesting the second candidate for the ‘dhow’ as a specific type: this has a raking bow profile similar to the *baghlah* — and therefore Edye’s ‘Arab dow’ — but is distinguished by its extraordinarily long counter, used, apparently, for aggressive boarding. It was illustrated in some detail (Fig. 11) by the Catalan convert to Islam Ali Bey, who travelled on such a vessel — his ‘dao’ — in the Red Sea in 1806 (Ali Bey 1816, ii: 30–31). A model of this same type, explicitly catalogued as an ‘Arab pirate “Dhow”’, was also made in a Bombay shipyard in 1850 for the Great Exhibition held in London the following year (Fig. 12): it is now in the Science Museum in London (cat. number 1926-575<sup>2</sup>). Meanwhile, the British diplomat James Morier (1812: pl. 2) depicts just such a

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<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Charlotte Dixon for this information (personal communication, 2 June 2014).

vessel in a watercolour seascape around Cape Arubah in Baluchistan in 1808 (Fig. 13).

Although Morier does not name its type, it is clear that this is another example of the long-countered dhow.

Thus, while the Al Zubārah excavations have indeed revealed the ‘dhow’ in the contemporary generic sense, and perhaps also from the perspective of a nineteenth-century British shipwright familiar with Indian and Sri Lankan ‘native vessels’, we cannot, from the evidence at hand, be confident that an inhabitant of Al Zubārah would have used the term for any of the vessels depicted in the graffiti revealed to date.



Figure 13. A model of an ‘Arab pirate “Dhow”’ in the London Science Museum collection, created in Bombay in 1850. The projecting counter identifies it as the specific type known by that name (see Figs 11 and 12)(Image: Science Museum/Science and Society Picture Library).

## Conclusion

The Al Zubārah ship graffiti are etched into the dry plaster of the interiors of buildings that were erected during the great expansion of the town in the late eighteenth century, and appear to have been created before the devastations of the early nineteenth century.

We can say something about their creators: they clearly had no reservations about etching into the fine plasterwork of a prestige compound; and as a collective they had sufficient familiarity with ship forms to be able to represent several types, although the crudest representations are child-like in their execution. The images are also interesting in terms of what they do not represent. In their choice of vessels to depict, the carvers favour the momentous — the seasonal coming and going of the ocean-going *baghlahs* and other ocean-going craft; the unwelcome incursion of the British into the life of the town; and perhaps, the annual pearling season. In contrast, there are none of the small fishing craft that once dotted Al Zubārah's shores. Moreover, there is no *battīl*, a type today regarded as emblematic of Qatar — although both may yet be found.

A comparison with the rock-art depictions of vessels at Jabal Jassasiyah in north-east Qatar shows little commonality, although they too have been dated to the modern period (Hassiba et al. 2012: 12–14). None of the Al Zubārah graffiti ships are in plan view, unlike most at Jassasiyah (Kapel 1983: 15–39, 45–51; Facey 1987: 201–202). Meanwhile the most detailed of the profile views at Jassasiyah have been interpreted as the *batīl* and *baggārah* (Facey 1987: 200–201), and in any case they do not resemble types depicted at Al Zubārah. Only two simple boat carvings at Jabal Jassasiyah appear to resemble an Al Zubārah image, with raking prows and elevated sterns similar to a *baghlah*-type vessel — but they are simple depictions, and could equally represent other craft (Kapel 1983: 25, carving 204; 47, carving 560).

As interpreted, all the Al Zubārah images are of vessels that played a crucial role for Al Zubārah's inhabitants: ocean-going vessels that took men folk as crew for months; pearling vessels on which hopes of economic security lay; imperial gunships that curtailed and controlled activity on land and sea.

The etchings often occur close to the corners of the rooms in which they are etched: might they have had some sort of talismanic, religious, or symbolic meaning, seeking protection for ship or home? Perhaps they simply created a visual bond between absent seafarers and families at home, or more directly represent the basis of the community's prosperity within a landscape. As the excavations progress, we look forward to more engravings and a richer perspective of their meaning in the social lives of the people of Al Zubārah.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors extend their deep appreciation to HE Shaykha Al Mayassa Bint Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, and HE Shaykh Hassan Bin Mohammed Bin Ali Al Thani, Vice-Chairman, for the opportunity to work on Al Zubārah's archaeological and cultural heritage. In addition, Dr Cooper and Professor Agius wish to thank colleagues in the Qatar Islamic Archaeology and Heritage Project for graciously inviting them to research the Al Zubārah dhow engravings.

### **Abbreviations**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| BL     | British Library                                  |
| CDRAD  | Centre for Documentation and Research, Abu Dhabi |
| GD     | Gambroon Diaries                                 |
| IOR-GD | India Office Records                             |
| MS EUR | European Reports (in the IOR)                    |

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