

Instructor Use

Overview

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References

Jeopardy Answer Key

Oman: A Multicultural Nation Serves students ages 14+

Author Olivia

Overview and Purpose of Lesson

The Indian Ocean is grounds for rich trade of religion, culture, and knowledge. This lesson introduces one of the hubs in the region, Oman, a multicultural “character” in geography and world history. This lesson will show students that traditionally Omani attire, places, and goods tell a diverse story. Omanis are traditionally seafaring people, so ties to West India, East Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula are vital parts of Omani history. These relations have continued to the present day and are still expanding. Using a selection of Omani cultural artifacts from seven key epochs from the ancient era to the present day, students will see evidence of Oman’s multiculturalism throughout the ages. To help students make connections between artifacts, the full list of historical and cultural icons are divided into subtopics that form smaller, more digestible narratives.

- 1. A history of seafaring: from its origin, Oman has been a seafaring nation. Take a look at some of the technologies they used to get around their region and the Indian Ocean at large**
 - a. Magan Boat (ancient era)
 - b. Arab dhow (medieval era)
 - c. Kamal (classical era)
- 2. Trading Frankincense: Frankincense was (and is) an important commodity in Arabia and beyond, take a look at an artifact and a city that were a product of its trade.**
 - a. Incense Burner of Arabia (medieval era)
 - b. Lost Caravan city of Ubar (classical era)
- 3. Muscat: The present day capital of Oman, Muscat has always been an important place in Omani history. Visit the city through the ages.**
 - a. Muscat in First global era
 - b. Muscat in Industrial and Imperial Era
 - c. Muscat in Present day
- 4. Going Global: These two 20th century artifacts have taken Omanis and their culture not just across the Indian Ocean, but across the world.**
 - a. Shabab Oman (20th Century and Globalization)
 - b. Movies and Film Animation (20th Century and Globalization)
- 5. Music: Music that is now seen as characteristically Omani has been influenced through the ages by many styles of music. Learn about a few traditional types of Omani music and note their multi-cultural influences.**
 - a. Qatar Digital Library on traditional Omani music (modern): “Sea Meets Desert: Reflections on Traditional Music In Oman”
 - b. Reuters (modern): “African Swahili music lives on in Oman”

6. **Architecture: These buildings are important Omani landmarks and share common threads with other cultures in style and function.**
 - a. Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque Carpet and Chandelier (20th Century and Globalization, modern)
 - b. Royal Opera House in Muscat (modern)
7. **Part of the Arab world: Oman is the oldest independent Arab state, and has unique takes on common Arab World icons.**
 - a. Traditional dress (modern)
 - b. Camels (modern)

The lesson is broken into two parts. The first explores Oman's multiculturalism through a full-class and independent exploration of several cultural artifacts from the IOWH website and some provided supplementary material.

The second part is an interactive activity designed to reinforce the knowledge gained during the research and presentations. During a jeopardy style quiz game, students will have the chance to cooperate and compete with classmates, getting them excited about applying the information they've learned about Oman's multicultural emblems.

Performance objectives

This lesson plan is designed to help students:

1. Discover how Omani history and culture was influenced by the Islamic religion as well as other cultures in observable, tangible ways. (This hopefully will prompt thought about how their own society's artifacts are influenced by multiple factors.)
2. Begin a positive, fact-based relationship with education about cultures other than their own.

Required Material

- Projector or whiteboard and printed papers that have the point values on one side and questions on the other
- 7+ computers/tablets with internet access for research on [*The Indian Ocean in World History*](#) (IOWH) as well as supplementary links
- Printed Worksheets
- A "buzzer" of some kind to signal which team wants to answer the question, even if it's a phone sound app or flashlight.
- Some kind of prize to incentivize friendly but competitive participation (e.g. bonus points on the next exam, candy)

Time Needed

Three 50 minute class periods

- 20 minutes introduction, first reading and example artifact
- 25 minutes independent/small group research, handed in at the end of class
- 5 minutes receive notes on artifact findings from instructor
- 30 minutes complete the list with the class
- 5 minutes submit student Jeopardy questions
- Divide the teams
- 5 minutes to prepare and review material
- 40 minutes playing Jeopardy

Procedure

1. Ask if anyone knows anything about Oman.
2. Introduction to Oman via map, fast facts, and photographs.
3. Read independently or as a class: “Art and Architecture in Oman” (attached PDF)
4. Fill out the square for Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque on the worksheet as a class
 - a. Use the example below as a guide to emphasizing the relevant information, including showing them the photos of Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque that are included in the student use section.

Example Worksheet			
Artifact	Description / Uses	Cultural Crossover	Source Material
Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque	Place of worship Commissioned by Sultan Qaboos and built in Muscat in 2001 Uses international styles and local materials	Flowers from Turkey and India, medieval Cairo geometry, Bedouin patterns, Byzantine mosaics, carpet from Iran	“Art and Architecture in Oman” <i>Oman</i> , Luitgard Mols

5. Break students into individual or small groups assigned to each subtopic and distribute the list of artifacts (most of which are on IOWH). The class will have the rest of the class period to research their artifacts; encourage students to be detailed to help with the Jeopardy game later. The sheets will be handed in at the end of class to be checked by the teacher.

6. The following class, the students will receive their sheets back, with any relevant notes attached or verbally relayed.
7. The class will then go through the sheet, box by box. Students will then present their information to the class, filling in their individual sheets with other teams' information as they go along.
 - a. Encourage active participation in this section of the lesson.
 - i. Have the students come up to write the answers on the board or share their information in small, rotating groups.
 - ii. Another option is for students to meet each other individually and at random to fill in their sheets during the allotted time, so the students have to talk to one another and find other classmates with the relevant information.
8. At the end of class, each student should submit a question of his or her own creation related to their subtopic, from which the teacher will select 7 to be added to the game (one from each category).
9. The following class will begin with dividing the class into 2 or 3 large teams. Afterwards, teams will have a few minutes to discuss their strategy and review the information.
10. Game on!
 - a. One student begins by choosing an Omani Rial (OMR) amount and category then all students have a chance to buzz in first with their answer. If the first team answers wrong, the remaining teams get another chance to answer.
 - b. Whoever answers the question correctly is allowed to choose the next OMR amount / category.

Artifact Explanations

1. **Magan boat** (ancient era): used for trade in Arabian (Persian) Gulf and beyond
2. **Kamal** (classical era): navigational tool used for sea travel
3. **Lost Caravan City of Ubar** (classical era): on an important Frankincense trade route (notably in trade with India, where incense was very popular)
4. **Incense Burner of Arabia** (medieval era): burn various kinds of incense from all over the Indian Ocean region (used in Arabia in general)
5. **Arab Dhow** (medieval era): A modern version is still used for coastal trading around Indian Ocean Rim as the medieval version was used for international trade
6. **Muscat (1st global)**: strategic trade post lost/retaken from the Portuguese; lead to travel, trade, and rule in East Africa, giving rise to a lot of cultural exchange
7. **Muscat (Industrial)**: International port: multi-religious, multi-ethnic port between East Africa, East Arabia, and Western India
8. **Muscat (Present)**: capital, hosts large number of expatriates, several cultural icons (Souq Muttrah, Opera House)

9. **Movie and Film Animation** (20th century and globalization): an Omani produced the first 35mm shot in country by a citizen of the Gulf and it debuted in Washington, D.C. in 2007
10. **Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque** (20th century and globalization; modern supplementary): the stunning carpet is from Iran and the masjid is used as an education center. It not only draws Omani Muslims for prayer, it also draws tourists as a major landmark and Oman's tallest building.
11. **Shabab Oman** (20th century and globalization): the tall ship is the only of its kind in the Arab world and it's dispatched as a symbol of friendship. Built in Scotland and delivered to Oman; it's been used in international celebrations all over the world (New York, France, Australia, Djibouti) as well as a naval training vessel
12. **Traditional Omani Clothes**: reflects international influence from East Africa (ex. kumma) and mirrors styles found in most of Arabia due to the climate and cultural/religious norms of modesty and fashion
13. **Camels** (modern supplementary): An important part of the regions history, camel rearing has grown from necessity to a luxury and a tradition.
14. **Traditional Music** (modern supplementary, 2 articles): the main types of traditional Omani music reflect other cultures in the instruments, language, and styling.
15. **Oman opera house** (modern supplementary): built of materials traditionally gathered from Oman's seafaring trade routes and drawing international artists

References

- Al Shuhi, Abdullah. "Camels: A Deep Rooted Kinship." In *Oman: Living Traditions*, 10-19. Mazoon Printing, Publishing & Advertising, LLC, 2011.
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- Mols, Luitgard. "Art and Architecture in Oman: A Blend of Local Traditions and Foreign Influences." In *Oman*, edited by Luitgard Mols and Birgit Boelens, illustrated by Khamis

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Last modified Feb 5, 2018.

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Vogelsang-Eastwood, Gillian. "Omani Dress." In *Oman*, edited by Luitgard Mols and Birgit Boelens, illustrated by Khamis Al-Moharbi Photo Services, Muscat, 119-129.
Amsterdam: Heleen van Ketwich Verschuur for Museumshop De Nieuwe Kerk, 2009.

The World Factbook. "Oman." Last modified June 4, 2018.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>

History of Seafaring	Trading Frankincense	Muscat	Going Global	Music	Architecture	Part of the Arab World
<p>100 OMR</p> <p>This square-sailed boat was made with reeds and coated with bitumen and clay</p> <p>What is the magan boat</p>	<p>100 OMR</p> <p>Also called aloeswood, this highly sought after substance is the wood of a fungus-infested tree.</p> <p>What is Ud (Ood)?</p>	<p>100 OMR</p> <p>Present day Muscat holds what important official title?</p> <p>What is the Capital of Oman?</p>	<p>100 OMR</p> <p>The Shabab Oman was built in and shipped from this nation.</p> <p>What is Scotland?</p>	<p>100 OMR</p> <p>STUDENT QUESTION</p>	<p>100 OMR</p> <p>This Omani Prime Minister commissioned the famous and controversial Royal Opera House Muscat.</p> <p>Who is Sultan Qaboos?</p>	<p>100 OMR</p> <p>Camels were crucial in this geographic region before the 1970s.</p> <p>What is the Arabian Peninsula?</p>
<p>200 OMR</p> <p>This triangle-sailed ship is made of tropical woods, lashed together with coir rope.</p> <p>What is arab dhow?</p>	<p>200 OMR</p> <p>This city, swallowed by a limestone sinkhole, was famous on the frankincense trading route.</p> <p>What is the Lost Caravan City of Ubar</p>	<p>200 OMR</p> <p>Muscat historically linked trade between these three geographic regions.</p> <p>What is Western India, South East China, and Eastern Africa?</p>	<p>200 OMR</p> <p>STUDENT QUESTION</p>	<p>200 OMR</p> <p>Rolf Killius notes traditional Omani music draws from these two environmental influences.</p> <p>What is the desert and the sea?</p>	<p>200 OMR</p> <p>This country provided the massive carpet in the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.</p> <p>What is Iran?</p>	<p>200 OMR</p> <p>These three pieces make up the basic form of traditional clothing for Omani women.</p> <p>What is a pair of trousers, a dress, and head covering?</p>
<p>300 OMR</p> <p>STUDENT QUESTION</p>	<p>300 OMR</p> <p>This system was used to trace converging trade routes to an infamous lost city.</p> <p>What is GPS?</p>	<p>300 OMR</p> <p>Muscat's gets its strategic importance from its location at the bottleneck of this body of water.</p> <p>What is the Arabian (Persian) Gulf?</p>	<p>300 OMR</p> <p>"Shabab Oman" translates to this English phrase.</p> <p>What is the youth of Oman</p>	<p>300 OMR</p> <p>This city is the heart of Swahili music in Oman.</p> <p>What is Sur city?</p>	<p>300 OMR</p> <p>Oman's position on this body of water, as well as the Arabian sea, made it a crossroads of trade.</p> <p>What is the Gulf of Oman?</p>	<p>300 OMR</p> <p>This knitted cap from Zanzibar is Omani men's casual wear.</p> <p>What is a kumma?</p>
<p>400 OMR</p> <p>Using a kamal, the pilot of Indian Ocean trade ships would aim for this measurement of their destination port city.</p> <p>What is latitude?</p>	<p>400 OMR</p> <p>STUDENT QUESTION</p>	<p>400 OMR</p> <p>This dynasty established in Muscat in 1749 still holds power in Oman today.</p> <p>What is the Abu Said dynasty?</p>	<p>400 OMR</p> <p>This film was the first of its kind created by a gulf citizen in their own countries.</p> <p>What is Al Boum?</p>	<p>400 OMR</p> <p>Much of traditional Omani music is inspired by this</p> <p>What is sailing?</p>	<p>400 OMR</p> <p>This giant crystal and gold plated structure weighs 8.5 tons and is one of the world's largest of its kind.</p> <p>What is the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque Chandelier?</p>	<p>400 OMR</p> <p>This tribal Omani subculture was especially dependent on Camels for survival.</p> <p>Who are the Beduoin?</p>
<p>500 OMR</p> <p>Dhows are still used here _____ for coastal trading and historic reconstructions are still popular here _____.</p> <p>What is Western Indian Ocean rim and Arab seacoast countries?</p>	<p>500 OMR</p> <p>This is the main material used for making Omani incense burners (majmar).</p> <p>What is ceramic?</p>	<p>500 OMR</p> <p>STUDENT QUESTION</p>	<p>500 OMR</p> <p>This film festival in Washington D.C. debuted the 35mm Omani film, whose translated title means, The Boat.</p> <p>What is the Arabian Sights Film Festival?</p>	<p>500 OMR</p> <p>This continent's pair dancing likely influenced the pair dancing seen in Mirbat, Oman</p> <p>What is Europe?</p>	<p>500 OMR</p> <p>This is the full name of the man who commissioned the largest building in Oman.</p> <p>Who is Sultan Qaboos bin Said?</p>	<p>500 OMR</p> <p>STUDENT QUESTION</p>

Student Use

Oman Intro

Artifact Example

Subtopics

Supplementary Links

PDF scans of source books

Student Worksheet

Jeopardy Board

Oman Intro

- Government: absolute monarchy
- Leader: Sultan and Prime Minister (Qaboos bin Said has both titles)
- Population: ~ 4 million (40% + of which are expatriates)
- Ethnic Groups: Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), African
- Languages: Arabic (official), English, Swahili, Baluchi
- Currency: Omani Rials (OMR), \$2.60 = 1 OMR

-CIA World Factbook: Oman (June 4, 2018)

DID YOU KNOW?

- Oman is the Arab World's oldest independent state.
- Omani workers do not pay income tax, only a small amount of the paycheck is taken for social security.
- The Omani weekend is Friday and Saturday.
- Sultan Qaboos University is the only public university in Oman.

Subtopics - Reproduced for student use

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 - b. Arab dhow (medieval era)
 - c. Kamal (classical era)
- 2. Trading Frankincense: Frankincense was (and is) an important commodity in Arabia and beyond, take a look at an artifact and a city that were a product of its trade.**
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 - b. Lost Caravan city of Ubar (classical era)
- 3. Muscat: The present day capital of Oman, Muscat has always been an important place in Omani history. Visit the city through the ages.**
 - a. Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
 - i. First global era
 - ii. Industrial and Imperial Era
 - iii. Present day
- 4. Going Global: These two 20th century artifacts have taken Omanis and their culture not just across the Indian Ocean, but across the world.**
 - a. Shabab Oman (20th Century and Globalization)
 - b. Movies and Film Animation (20th Century and Globalization)
- 5. Music: Music that is now seen as characteristically Omani has been influenced through the ages by many styles of music. Learn about a few traditional types of Omani music and note their multi-cultural influences.**
 - a. Qatar Digital Library on traditional Omani music (modern): "Sea Meets Desert: Reflections on Traditional Music In Oman"

- b. Reuters: “African Swahili music lives on in Oman”
- 6. **Architecture: These buildings are important Omani landmarks and share common threads with other cultures both in their materials and their functions.**
 - a. Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque Carpet and Chandelier (20th Century and Globalization, modern supplementary)
 - b. Royal Opera House in Muscat (modern supplementary)
- 7. **Part of the Arab world: Oman is the oldest independent Arab state, and has unique takes on common Arab World icons.**
 - a. Traditional dress (PDF)
 - b. Camels (PDF)

Student Supplementary Material

Traditional Omani Music

British Library on Omani Music: article and video

<https://www.qdl.qa/en/sea-meets-desert-reflections-traditional-music-oman>

Reuters on Omani/Swahili music

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oman-music/african-swahili-music-lives-on-in-oman-idUSTR E7942XI20111005>

Royal Opera House Muscat

BBC on Oman’s Opera House

<http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20140417-omans-operatic-shift-in-sound-and-sin>

Traditional Dress

Omani Dress PDF from *Oman*

Vogelsang-Eastwood, Gillian. Omani Dress. *Oman*, edited by Luitgard Mols and Birgit Boelens, illustrated by Khamis Al-Moharbi Photo Services, Muscat, Heleen van Ketwisch Verschuur for Museumshop De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam, 2009, pp. 119-29.

Sultan Qaboos Grand Masjid

Omani Art and Architecture PDF from *Oman*

Mols, Luitgard. “Art and Architecture in Oman: A Blend of Local Traditions and Foreign Influences.” In *Oman*, edited by Luitgard Mols and Birgit Boelens, illustrated by Khamis Al-Moharbi Photo Services, Muscat, 18-23. Amsterdam: Heleen van Ketwisch Verschuur for Museumshop De Nieuwe Kerk, 2009.

Camels

Oman Living Traditions - Camels: A deep rooted kinship (PDF)

“Camels: A Deep Rooted Kinship.” *Oman: Living Traditions*, by Abdullah al Shuhi, Mazoon Printing, Publishing & Advertising, LLC, 2011.



Name _____ Date _____

Subtopic / Description _____

Artifact	Description / Uses	Cultural Crossover	Source Material
Magan boat (ancient era)			
Kamal (classical era)			
Lost Caravan City of Ubar (classical era)			

Majmar (medieval era)			
Arab Dhow (medieval era)			
Muscat (first global era)			
Muscat (industrial and imperial era)			

Shabab Oman (20th century)			
Movie and Film Animation (20th century and globalization)			
Sultan Qaboos Grand Masjid (20th century globalization, modern)			
Muscat (modern)			

Traditional Omani Clothes (modern)			
Camels (modern)			
Traditional Music (modern)			
Oman opera house (modern)			



ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN OMAN

*A Blend of Local Traditions and Foreign Influences*¹ Luitgard Mols

Oman's artistic tradition is one of apparent opposites. These are reflected in the country's mosques: the Great Mosque in Muscat, with its exuberant quotations from international styles, forms a sharp contrast with the austerity of traditional mosques in the interior. The Great Mosque was commissioned by Sultan Qaboos and opened in 2001. In the galleries on all sides, visitors will see niches decorated in a variety of international styles: alongside Turkish Iznik tulips, pharaonic lotuses and flowers from the Indian Mogul repertoire there are geometrical shapes from mediaeval Cairo, Bedouin patterns from the Arabian Peninsula and arches in the style of the seventh-century Byzantine mosaic art of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The shape of the minaret and the geometrical grid on the outside of the dome allude to mediaeval Cairo, while in the interior, the hand-knotted carpet and tiled prayer niche or *mihrab* radiate an Iranian ambience. This mix of international styles is a modern continuation of Oman's traditional receptivity to external influences. Contrasting with this is the use of simple local materials – such as mud-bricks and the wood and leaves of palm trees – and the restrained decorative patterns in traditional mosques in

the interior. The al-Shawadhinah mosque in Nizwa (1529) is a case in point. Its plastered outer walls are undecorated, with the exception of the lunettes above the doors. The interior too is dominated by the plainness of the plaster-clad columns and gently sloping recesses for Korans in the walls. The only exception is the mihrab, the stucco of which is elaborately decorated with geometrical, calligraphic and floral patterns.

This duality of local and international traditions is reflected in the exhibition on Oman in De Nieuwe Kerk. Not only the archaeological objects, but also the far more recent clothes, wooden door-sections and illuminated Korans display conspicuous evidence of foreign influences. This is a direct consequence of Oman's past as a seafaring nation, which stimulated imports of foreign merchandise and art, and encouraged foreign craftsmen to settle here. In the more isolated interior, on the other hand, mainly local art forms have developed, such as jewellery, rugs and brass utensils, the central feature of which is a love of surface decorations. Beautifully shaped arabesques, cylindrical motifs, zigzag patterns and calligraphies are all characteristic of this local Omani pictorial language.

Geographical Context

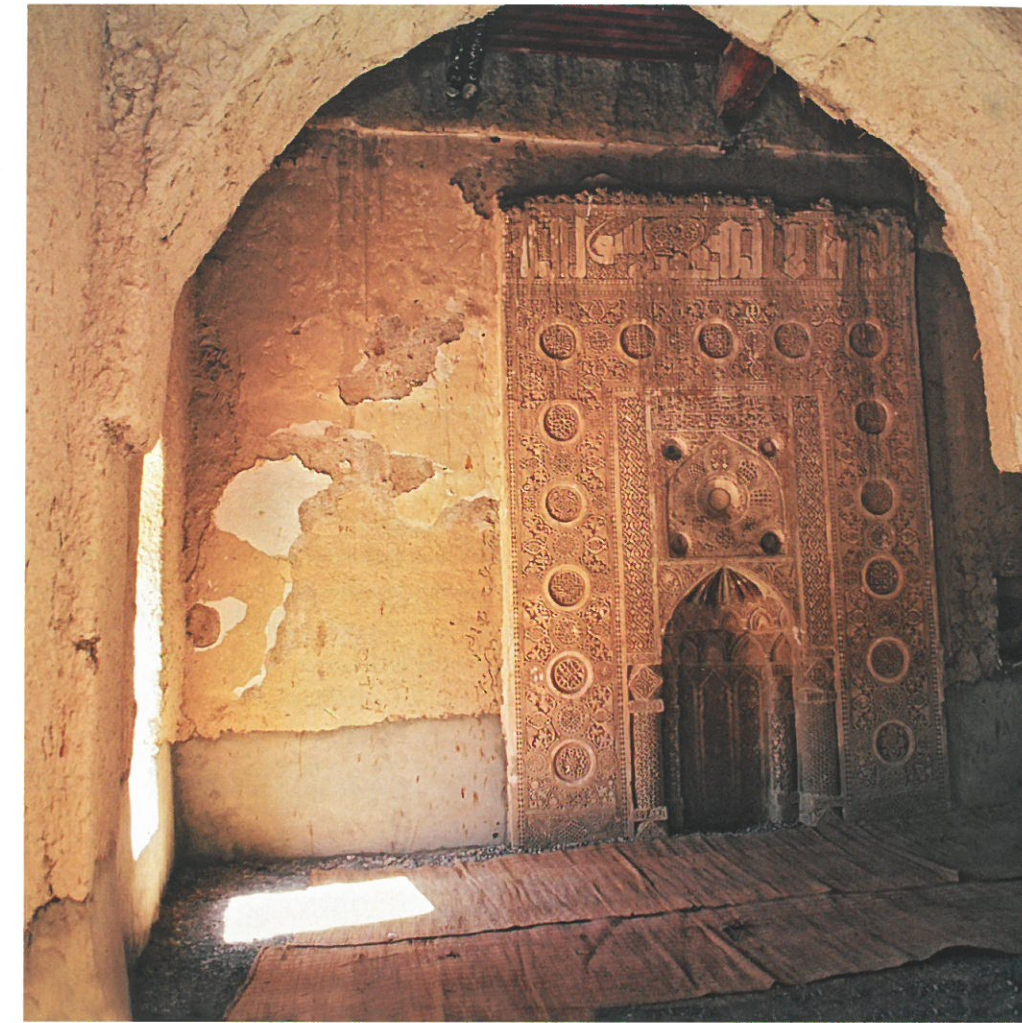
Oman's location in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula has been the determining factor in its history. The sea has always loomed large in Omani life, first and foremost in relation to fishing. Such was the abundance of fish that Western travellers noted in astonishment that even horses were fed with dried fish in Oman. But the sea also had other things to offer. Because of its location on the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, Oman lies at the crossroads of maritime trade with Iran, India, the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. The long coastline (some 3,000 kilometres) was ideally situated for regional and international trade, especially since the regional overland routes, for instance those leading to Bahrain and Mecca, presented harsh desert conditions and intertribal conflicts that placed travellers and their merchandise in peril.² Omani merchants built a variety of ships, which had one striking feature in common: their planks were attached with strands of coconut fibre instead of nails. The busy trade led to a cosmopolitan world with an ethnically mixed population, especially in the coastal region, since Indians, Persians and Baluchis (from the area that is now Pakistan) settled there as well as Omanis. In addition, trade yielded exotic goods, from

Mihrab in the Sultan Qaboos Mosque (detail)

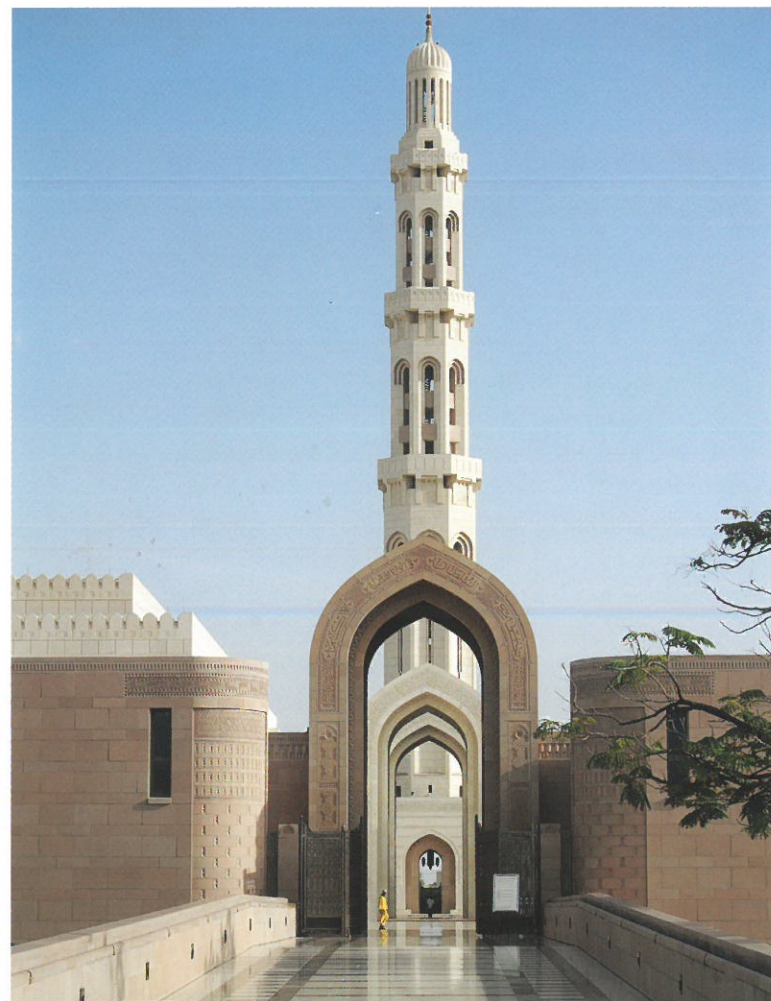


Chinese porcelain and Iranian glazed pottery to Indian fabrics, which were purchased for the Omani market or as transit goods. Wilmson, a merchant of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), noted in 1673 that out of 800 bales of textiles imported from Sindh, only a quarter remained in Oman, the rest being shipped to Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq and Iran.³ All these contacts with other cultures and foreign objects were sources of inspiration for Oman's arts and crafts. In addition, travellers from as far afield as China, North Africa, the Netherlands and Britain visited the country over the centuries, from merchants and soldiers to geographers, jurists and diplomats. Their accounts and books are a storehouse of useful information about – and atmospheric pictures of – local customs. It should be added that parts of the country were conquered by foreign armies from Iran and Portugal, for instance, at various times in history. They left tangible traces of their presence in Oman, such as the Portuguese extension to the fortifications in Muscat.

Aside from the cosmopolitan coastal region, Oman is also defined by its more inaccessible mountain and desert regions. The al-Hajar mountains – the country's most important



Qaboos Mosque
the Sultan Qaboos Mosque



Stucco decoration in the mihrab of a traditional mosque

Exterior of the mosque next to Jabrin Castle

Simple *mihrab* in the mosque next to Jabrin Castle



mountain range – are on the east coast, in the north of Oman. This is an agricultural area, as are the interior (al-Dakhiliya) and the low-lying coastal plains in the south. The land is irrigated by water from the valleys, which is transported using a system of irrigation canals (*falaj*, plural *aflaj*) introduced in the fifth century BC, which run both overland and underground. The southern province of Dhofar enjoys the benefits of the southwest monsoon, which makes it extremely fertile. Much of the remainder of the country consists of desert, including arid steppes (in al-Wusta, in the heart of the country) and sand dunes. Some of these dunes attain a height of 200 metres and are part of what is called the ‘Empty Quarter’ (al-Rub’ al-Khali), an inhospitable region that was first explored in the first half of the twentieth century by intrepid Western travellers such as Bertrand Thomas, John Philby and Wilfred

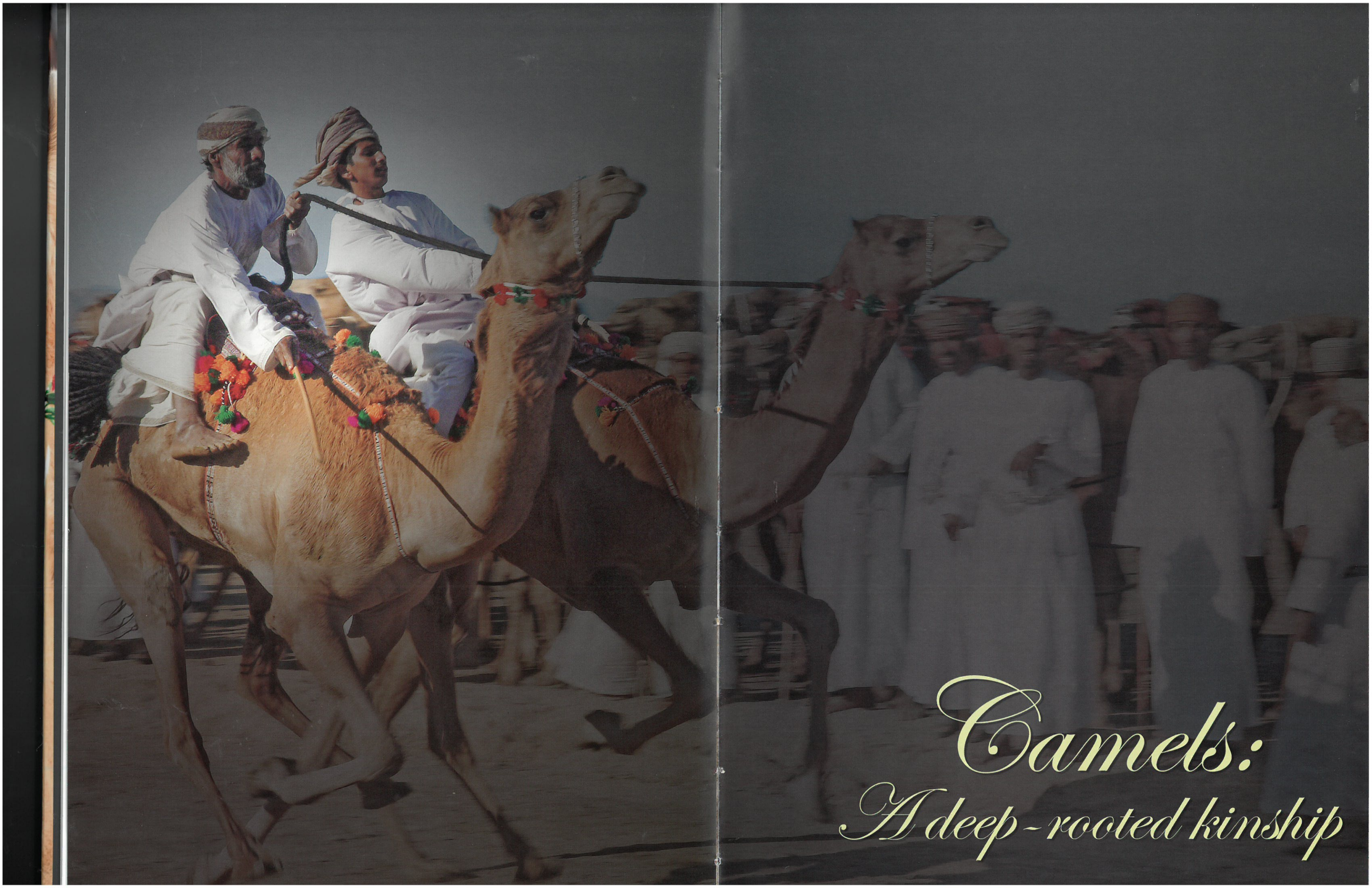
Thesiger. They rode on camels, escorted by Bedouins who knew the terrain, and wrote accounts of their travels. In this part of the interior, both urban craftsmen and Bedouins produced beautifully decorated utensils, generally from material that was available locally. Sheep’s wool, goat’s hair and camel’s hair were all spun, dyed and woven into objects such as rugs and camel bags. These were embellished with geometrical motifs and designs derived from desert life. Weaving was practised primarily by women. Date palm trees, which also grew locally, supplied raw materials for utensils and houses. The trunks were fashioned into ceilings, while the leaves were woven into mats and baskets and the branches used to make fences. These local materials were also used to build the traditional mosques and even defences such as the characteristic Omani fortresses and watchtowers.

Local Customs

Much of the information that has come down to us about Oman’s historical customs derives from travel journals. For instance, in 1715 the British merchant Alexander Hamilton provided the following account of traditional Omani hospitality: ‘For as soon as everyone is seated, a servant brings a pot of coffee, and serves it about in small cups, that contain not a quarter of a gill; but as soon as one cup is out, they fill it again, and perhaps a third time; then a pipe of tobacco is presented, their pipes differing much from ours in Europe, in shape and magnitude; which service lasts till near the time of breaking up company, when comes in a little pot of hot burning coals, on which they throw some chips of agala-wood, or some powder of benjoin, myrrh or frankincense, which produce a thick smoke, that incenses or perfumes the



al-Rub' al-Khali



*Camels:
A deep-rooted kinship*

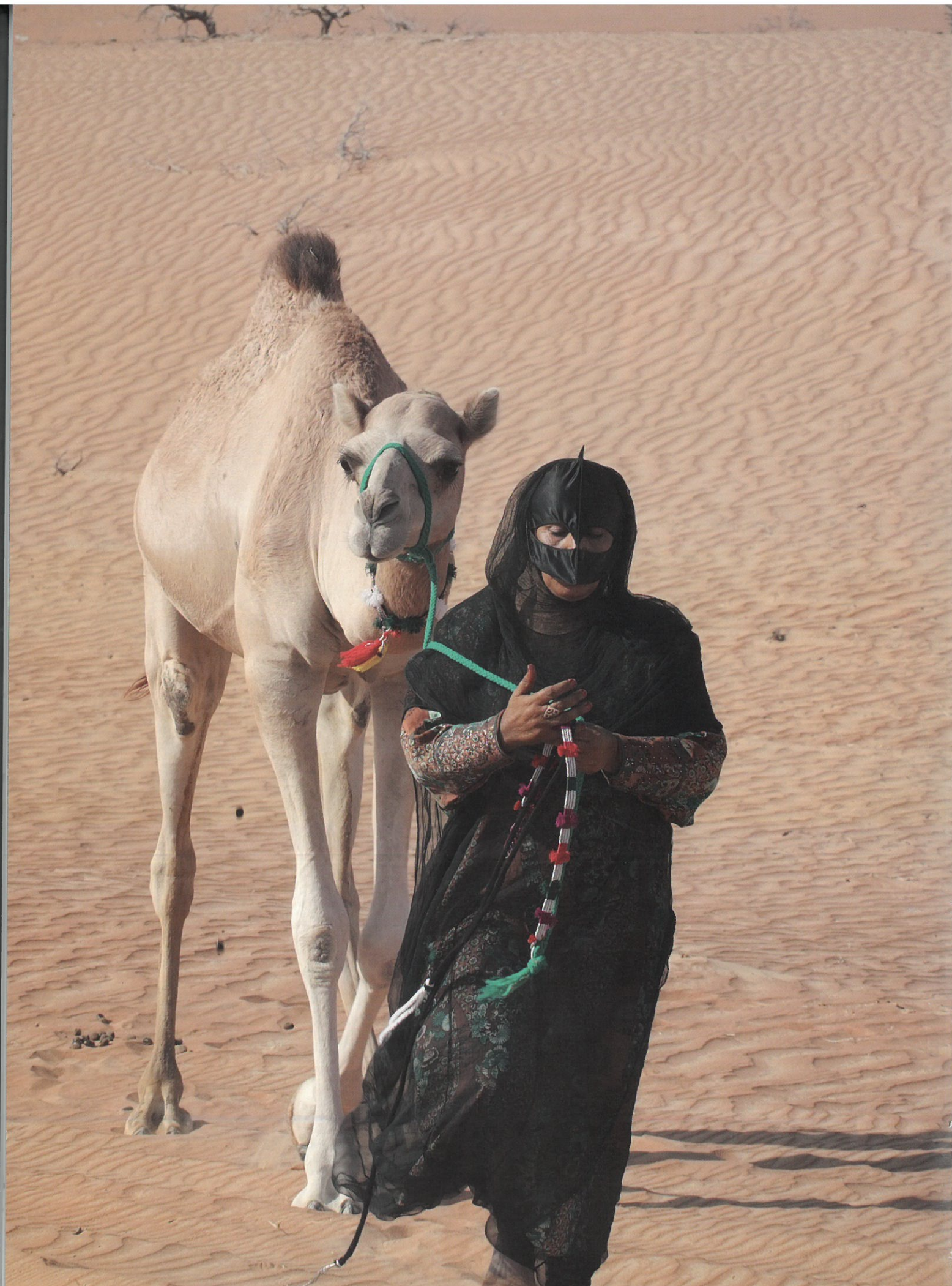
Introduction

Camels have played a crucial role in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries. They have provided transport, milk, meat and leather to the people of the desert, oases, towns and coastal settlements alike for at least 3,000 years. The camel has been more than just a supplier of human needs. It has been a companion through hard times of drought, and celebrated with in times of prosperity. For the Bedu especially, it has been a relationship of mutual dependence for survival. The Bedu gave their camels extra food, water and care, and the camels reciprocated by providing mobility and a vital source of food. All this changed in the 1970s with the discovery and exploitation of oil. Vehicles replaced camels as a means of transportation, but the culture and traditions associated with camels remained. Life became easier and food more plentiful, and the role of the camel declined in some areas. In Oman and the Gulf generally though, the camel is still paramount in many people's lives. Often, camels are treated as part of the family.

Oman has long been famed for breeding the best camels, and the traditions associated with it have been preserved and in some cases developed and strengthened. Camel races and beauty contests are good examples of this, and government policy in Oman has encouraged the trend. This selection of photographs concentrates on the older traditional customs, such as *al ardha*, which displays both the skill of the riders and the beauty of their camels. Such events mark special occasions: weddings, circumcisions, the two Eid festivals and other local and national celebrations. Only the best camels are selected to take part. These occasions are also an opportunity to sell handicrafts such as camel tack. Other sections highlight the care, feeding, breeding and marketing of camels. These traditions are also evolving and taking more modern forms. For example, camel races as

▷ *Caring for camels is a family-centred tradition that passes on from one generation to the next. It is not uncommon to see family members of all ages play their respective parts in caring for the family herd.*





△ A youngster pictured at the annual camel show at Al Fulaij – one of the biggest camel fixtures organised by the Royal Camel Corp

◁ Womenfolk too play their part in caring for camels

such only began in the 1980s, as did camel beauty contests and ‘milking’ competitions.

I have chosen these photographs to illustrate these developments and the special relationship between man and camels. As befits the role of camels, this is the largest of the six sections in this book, which takes the reader on a pictorial tour through the living world of Omani traditions.

For enquiries about the times and locations of specific events, an annual programme is obtainable from the Camel Race Federation and the Royal Camel Corp.

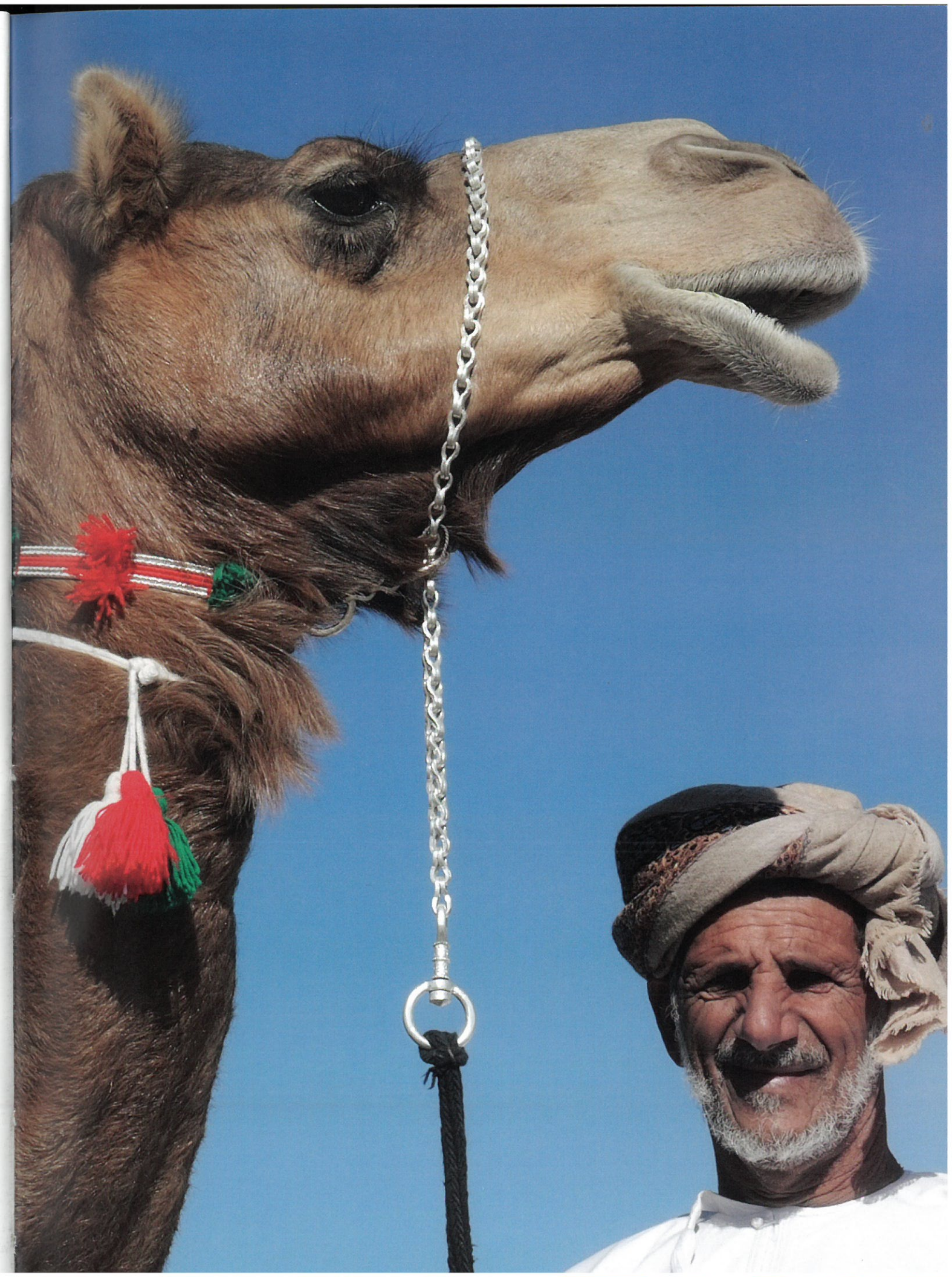
Al Ardha

The *al ardha* is a truly old tradition in Oman, held to celebrate special occasions in Northern Oman, especially in the Batinah and Sharqiyah regions. It is not a race, but a carefully controlled event run over a distance of between 600 and 800 metres. It's designed to show the level of control the riders have over their camels, and the camels' obedience. The object is not to see which one wins, but if they can run neck and neck, in other words, run as a pair. In the past, the track was simply a broad pathway through the old quarter of a town or village, or somewhere nearby, so that everyone, including women and children, could watch. This has now changed, as roads have been surfaced and the area is more built-up, so the event is now held at a track outside the town. *Al ardha* is the best time to see the most beautiful camels in their best trappings and gear. The event is for camels aged two years and above, and almost all are females. Several events take place early in the morning and late in the afternoon during the cooler season between October and March.

Outlined in this section are the types of *al ardha* events held in different places around Oman, most notably at Al Fulaij near Barka. Indeed, the *al ardha* at Al Fulaij is the premier camel event of the year and takes place over five days around the end of February. Organising this huge event is a government initiative by royal directive, and His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said takes a personal interest in preserving the tradition. In 2010, 1,313 camels took part in this exciting and colourful spectacle. Every day, different regions take part. As they collect for the big day, groups of riders chanting patriotic and other songs in praise of their camels come streaming in to the area. The songs themselves, called *hambal al bush*, sometimes date from the days of the old camel caravans. The best camel is chosen on the final day from the winners from each day's events, and prizes are awarded.

Previous pages :
The kinship between man and beast is clearly reflected in this photograph of a young boy nuzzling against his camel's face

Overleaf: Riders sing the hambal al bush as they prepare to take part in the final day's proceedings of the al ardha (camel show) at Al Fulaij





OMANI DRESS

¹Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood

For thousands of years, Oman has been at the crossroads of international trade with India, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. There are various references, for example, in the first century AD shipping manual, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, to the region around what is now Oman and its trade in frankincense, tortoise shells, pearls, as well as textiles, clothing, such as 'Indian cloth' and how local officials exchanged 'their cloth and wheat and sesame oil for frankincense'.² Omani items also moved beyond the Indian Ocean and Arab world and could be found in the Eastern Mediterranean and eventually throughout Europe, and vice versa. More recently, from the eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, there were very close political links between Oman and East Africa, notably Zanzibar, and the Omani court had two sultans, one in Muscat, the capital of Oman, and the other in Zanzibar. It is not surprising, therefore, that the type of dress worn in Oman, especially that of women, reflects these historical trading, economic, and political links.

Woman wearing an *Ibri outfit* for married women

Twentieth-century Omani dress

The following description of Omani dress has been divided into two sections. First, there is a general description of the characteristics of male and female dress. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of the regional variations, especially in women's clothing, and some of the many influences on traditional Omani dress.

Many of the garments nowadays worn in Oman are made by local tailors to fit specifically regional tastes and desires, or imported from countries such as India and Africa. The number of outfits a person has depends on personal and family status and wealth, but most people try to have a new outfit for the festival of Eid that follows the month-long fast of Ramadan.

The prevailing desert conditions of heat and sand, and, in some areas, high summer humidity, mean that certain types of clothing are more suitable for Omani dress than others. Cottons from India and Africa, for instance, have long been popular for both men's and women's garments. As in many Arab countries, it is not uncommon for men's clothing to be plain and light coloured. However, traditional

Omani women's clothing has never had the 'black image' of their Saudi neighbours. On the contrary, Omani women are well known for their love of diverse materials, colours and embroidery, creating a colourful appearance in public, albeit always within the Islamic norms of personal modesty by not revealing the body, apart from the face and hands.

Jewellery plays an important part of the dress identity for women. Quite simply, a woman is not completely dressed without her jewellery. Omani jewellery was traditionally made of silver. Very popular were large, bulky, heavy, highly ornate necklaces threaded on thick rope, earrings suspended by chains, and a ring for every finger. Nowadays, however, more and more women prefer gold jewellery, which is lighter and comes in a wider variety of designs. This jewellery is frequently made in countries such as India and Italy. More details about Omani jewellery can be found in the article *Art in Silver* by Luitgard Mols.

Personal ornaments for men can be seen in their elaborate turban-like headgear, which is unique within the Gulf region, and in the wearing of curved daggers (*khanjars*) tucked into a sash or belt at the waist.



Map of Oman showing the regions and cities mentioned

Children normally wear garments similar to those of their same-sex parents, although with some variations. Boys, for example, are dressed to look like men from a very young age. As infants they sometimes wear a bonnet-like cap, but as soon as they are able to walk unaided, the bonnet is discarded and the *kuma* adopted. The *kuma*, which is a flat cap, remains part of male attire and is only traded for a turban (*massar*) when formal or business dress is required.

There is a greater difference in the clothing worn by girls as they grow up. Baby girls, for example, often wear a gown with a bonnet-like cap, which usually has a long tassel that hangs from the back. From the age of two every girl will wear a child's version of a *waqaya* or head covering. Unlike the adult version, however,

the child's *waqaya* is kept in place by a chin strap made of cloth or elastic rather than being wrapped around the head and face. Omani culture tends to dictate that at about the age of seven a girl should start wearing an adult's *waqaya* in an adult manner rather than being draped over the head. In contrast however, in the south of Oman, young girls traditionally did not wear any garment on their heads until nearing the age of puberty.

Men's dress

Nowadays, the basic form of dress worn by an Omani man includes a hip wrap (*wazzar*), a long gown (*dishdasha*) and some form of headgear. The hip wrap normally consists of a white cotton cloth with colourful stripes along the long edges. Traditionally the *wazzars* were woven in Oman by specialist weavers, and there were various types depending on economic and social status and on the region of Oman in

which it was made. Nowadays, however, most *wazzars* are imported from India (where they are called a *lungi*). Men in the southwest of Saudi Arabia, especially the Asir region, and throughout Yemen, also wear *wazzars*. All these countries have strong and long-standing cultural and economic ties with India.

The main element of an Omani man's wardrobe, however, is his *dishdasha*. This is a very loose-fitting garment, with long sleeves, no collar, and a front slit opening with a decorative tassel hanging down from the neckline. The *dishdasha* is very similar to the long gowns worn by men throughout the Arab world, where it may be known by other names, such as *galabiyeh* or *thob*.

Until comparatively recently, the men's *dishdasha* was dyed with various colours, depending on local plant dye sources and trading patterns. In the south of Oman, for example, dark blue (indigo) was commonly worn; the indigo was normally imported from neighbouring Yemen. Nowadays, however, it is normal for *dishdashas*, especially those worn for official business occasions, ceremonies and



Boy folding a turban

Two Bedouin men, wearing the traditional curved dagger or *khanjar*. The man towards the rear is wearing more urban clothes, with a *dishdasha* and turban





Traditional dance, al-Dhahirah region, performed by men wearing more urban (and white) variants of traditional dress

celebrations, to be white, while those used in leisure time are made in a wide variety of colours, including pale greens, blue, lavenders, earth tones and shades of grey.

The coastal city of Sur shows one of the few exceptions to the general appearance of an Omani *dishdasha*. The Suri *dishdasha* has smocking with embroidered details around the neck region, the upper front and the back, and the shoulders. The many gathers of the smocking gives the *dishdasha* a fuller appearance. This extra width may well be related to Sur's maritime history, as these gathers make the

dishdashas wider and thus easier for the sailors to work in, rather like a traditional European farmer's or shepherd's smock.

Other exceptions include the traditional *dishdashas* worn by Bedouin men that used to be elaborately embroidered (more so than the women's version), with embroidery running around the neck, down both sides of the front opening, across the back between the shoulder blades, and around the sleeve cuffs. This embroidery is quite different from the non-Bedouin styles of embroidery, in that Bedouin forms traditionally used silver thread (*zarrie*) and a narrow range of colours, notably black and red.

The basic headdress as worn by men throughout the Gulf region consists of a small, usually

white cap (*taqiyya*), a headcloth (*ghuttra* or *kaf-fiyeh*) and a headrope (*'aqal*). In Oman, however, men wear special forms of headgear, namely a turban (*massar*) and a cap (*kuma*). The Omani turban is a square of cloth, folded diagonally in half and then wrapped around the head, leaving the neck and ears uncovered. This type of headgear is worn for official business as well as ceremonies and celebrations. Men in Yemen sometimes wear a similar style of *massar*, as do some groups in western India who have trading contacts with Oman.

There are various types of *massars*, depending on the region and social status of the wearer. A boy may wear a loosely woven *massar* with stripes, while a well-to-do young man might wear a large, fine woollen cloth that is embroidered. Superior-quality *massars* usually come



Two girls from Muscat or al-Dakhiliya

from Kashmir and are elaborately embroidered. One will sometimes see a red and white checked cotton cloth (*kaffiyeh*), a garment worn throughout Arabia, but it is still wrapped, turban-wise, around the head.

For casual wear, many urban men wear the *kuma*. These caps are normally heavily embroidered with eyelets, buttonhole stitching and small running stitches. Between the running stitches narrow channels are created, which are sometimes filled with raw cotton, creating a quilted effect. These caps were traditionally made by a girl and given to her fiancé. The holes were made with small, silver awls that became a symbolic part of a girl's sewing equipment. In 2008 a hand-embroidered *kuma* could cost well over US\$300 and as little as US\$10 for a machine-embroidered example. Even cheaper examples are imported from the Philippines. These have eyelet holes burned into them, with some machine embroidery to add a little more decoration.

The *kuma* was brought to Oman from Zanzibar over 200 years ago, when Oman's sultans still ruled. In Zanzibar they are called *kofia* and are slightly different in shape and design layout from the Omani versions. As in Oman, this type of cap remains a popular form of headgear for men in Zanzibar.

Women's Dress

Omani women's dress is much more complicated, with many regional variations, than its male counterpart, so this section emphasizes some of the main styles of traditional dress currently worn in Oman. The basic form of dress for a woman consists of a pair of trousers, a dress and some form of head-covering.

Nowadays many women wear what is simply called the 'Omani style' or sometimes even Omani national dress. This style originated in the al-Dakhiliya region of Oman and consists of a pair of trousers (*sarwal*), embellished around the ankle cuffs, and a knee to calf-length dress (*dishdasha*), which is usually embroidered around the neck opening, the sleeve cuffs and the bottom of the garment. In addition, there

is often a band in a contrasting colour added to the lower hem of the dress. Traditionally this band was purple, but today any colour is acceptable. Just above the band there is more embellishing in the form of applied braids. The form of these braids is a matter of personal choice, and women are highly creative in the way they combine various bands to make a larger, more complicated design. The outfit is completed by a long length of cloth, which is used to cover the head and hair. Again this has various names depending on the type of cloth used, for example, *lahaf*, *shayla*, *waqaya* and *kanga*. It is quite common for women to wear a *sarwal* and *dishdasha* made from printed cottons for casual wear and colourful satins for festive occasions.

This form of so-called 'national' dress displays *Khaleji* (Gulf) influence, such as the use of an underdress and overgarment (*thob*), and the way in which the head-covering is wrapped around the head, which is why this form of dress is found among Omani women whose lives are more closely linked with their Gulf neighbours. It is not normally worn, for example, by women from the interior or southern parts of Oman.

There are various other styles of traditional women's clothing in Oman, and they often indicate East African, Saudi Arabian, Yemeni, Bedouin, Gulf, Iranian as well as Indian influences. In the Musandam region, which lies in the north of the country, there are two main styles of dress for women. The first is the 'Omani style' described above. The second can be found in the urban regions such as the city of Buraimi, where women tend to wear a long dress with an outer covering. Confusingly, this combination is sometimes called a *thob* (dress) with a *kendora* (outer covering) and on other occasions a *kendora* (dress) and *adela* (outer covering). Similar garments are worn in the southern region of Iran, especially by Arab women living in and around the coastal city of Bandar Abbas, which reflects the cultural and trading relations between these regions due to their close proximity. Some women in northern Oman wear a face veil locally called a *burqa* when in public, which is used to cover part of the face.³ Again this type of face veil is well known from the Bandar Abbas region of Iran.

