



Oman's Marine Shell Heritage: A Holistic Preservation Model for Transversal Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

This research highlights Sultanate of Oman's holistic model for its marine heritage preservation program that promotes the sustainable impact of its resources, particularly seashells. Integrating a descriptive and qualitative approach, the study explores how prehistoric and archaeological research has pointed out the role of marine heritage in sustaining Oman's cognitive, historical, artistic, cultural, and ecological development. To this end, this study surveys how the cultural memory and environmental function of marine shells have propelled cross-sector collaboration. In particular, this study explores how Omani museums and galleries of marine shell heritage facilitate a transgenerational transmission of marine shells' historical, ecological, and cultural knowledge. The research also posits how the preservation of marine shell heritage is enhanced through Oman's visual practices and digitization initiatives that reflect commitment to cultural continuity. Readings of local modern Omani literature are also integrated to showcase an inclusive project that highlights the cultural sensibility of marine heritage. The study presents a thematic analysis of certain contemporary Omani poems to emphasize the role of seashells in shaping the Omanis' cultural identity and connection to their past. By foregrounding the intertwined campaigns that highlight the consolidating significance of Omani marine shell heritage, this research impels an international awareness of its transversal sustainability.

Keywords: Eastern Arabia; Oman; Marine Heritage; Seashells; Holistic Model; Transversal Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Marine cultural products have always been considered significant cultural capital assets that need to be sustained through various investment plans. Tourism is one of the major investment praxes that contribute to the protection of cultural heritage, including marine environments, from human and natural degrowth and extraction factors. Considering the boosting effect of tourism activities on the growing interest in cultural heritage sites, worldwide calls have promoted a balanced and responsible touristic investment in the sustainability of cultural heritage. These global demands impelled the passing of the International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICOMOS, 1999). For further activation of this balanced role, the United Nations has declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. In the case of marine tourism, the sustainability of such a program necessitates the influx of funds through various measures, such as building facilities and providing the necessary services for tourists. Another globally acknowledged and sustainable touristic policy involves the display and circulation of diverse and renewable marine products in their exact locations or their transference for display in remote exhibits, such as galleries and museums (European Commission, 2018). Such sustainable touristic practices are notably observed in the Sultanate of Oman. In this regard, marine biodiversity is considered a rich heritage and a major marker of the Omani social and cultural identity (Bosch & Bosch, 1982), which is exhibited in various museum praxes and cultural events. Local research particularly highlights how the touristic investment in Omani cultural sites and marine products has promoted accessibility to their varied values. Recognizing the intrinsic connection between the Omani cultural identity and the marine environment has propelled the authorization of the touristic initiatives and their inclusion in the tourism development plans of the Sultanate,

including the Omani Tourism Strategy 2015-2040 (Al Busaidi, 2018).

The sustainable role of marine resources, particularly seashells, has been highlighted in prehistoric and archeological research that archives their dietary, medical, artistic, and cultural values. In this regard, researcher Sulaiman (2023) demonstrates how findings of handmade pieces of seashell jewelry that date back to the Stone Age in off-shore locations, especially archeological sites, suggest their use in trade exchange. Human interest in the aesthetic values of marine materials, such as seashells, started during the Renaissance era. As a major example, samples of seashells, which feature diversity and solidity, were collected and stored in the Cabinets of Curiosity (Sulaiman, 2023). Throughout history, seashells have projected worldwide significance that extends their economic and artistic values. In the case of Omani shores, local excavations have revealed the extensive presence and significance of marine and mangrove-dwelling species, particularly marine shells. Existing research on the Sultanate's coast reveals its abundance with varied invertebrate marine organisms, particularly mollusks that are considered of high sustainable economic value. Moreover, local studies on these sea creatures promote the circulation of important information and data necessary to realize sustainable development of the fisheries of these species, to improve food security, and to enhance economic diversification. The number of shell plates presents a major factor for classifying the mollusks, available in the Omani coast, into three categories. They are single-shelled mollusks, such as snails, bivalve mollusks, which have two-part hinged shells, such as pearl oysters, and multi-shelled mollusks, distinguished by segmented and overlapped plates, such as the chiton (Al Watan Newspaper, 2020). Mollusks are considered an important resource for Oman's economic diversification and its initiation into industrialization and biotechnology (See Figure 1; "Classifying 252 Species," 2020). To reposition their value as an inexhaustible heritage, Omani authorities have conducted field surveys of mollusks, which archive explicit records of their types and environments in the Omani coastal areas. The surveys also document the geographical distribution of important commercial types of mollusks. The content of the surveys advanced the publication of a field guide that covers all classified species in the Sultanate and functions as a reference source for interesting researchers (Al Watan Newspaper, 2020). Apart from field surveys, interviews with specialists from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries highlight 252 species of mollusks in the three seas of the Sultanate (the Arabian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Arabian Sea). One interview with research K. Al Rashdi points out the extensive availability of bivalve "Al Dook" mollusks on the sandy coasts of the Sultanate, which are carefully collected on the beaches of the Al Batinah and Muscat governorates (Al Watan Newspaper, 2020). Al Rashdi reports on the Al Wusta Governorate, which is particularly known for "Al RaHS" mollusks that encompass several types of marine snails, spread between rocks and sand, and have a substantial value for meditative and therapeutic practices. Al RaHS coverings that shelter the animal inside are locally used to extract Al Zafran, which is dried and mixed with frankincense to give peculiar soothing scents (Al Watan Newspaper, 2020). The Sultanate is also distinguished by the peculiar presence of a mollusk species that is the abalone shell type. It is locally known as "Safileh," which is considered the only species in the world that is located in the Sultanate. "Safileh" shells enclose expensive meat, one of the most luxurious foods in the Asian region (Ghadi News, 2012). So, the existing scholarship implies that Omani marine heritage transcends its economic significance to mediate social, cultural, and ecological values.



Figure 1. From right to left: Al Safileh, Al Zooka, Al Dook, Al RaHS, and Al Muwaina Shells (known as dietary and therapeutic sources that distinguish different geographical areas in Oman) [Source: "Classifying," Al Watan Newspaper, alwatan.om, 2020]

To expand these scholarly findings, my research centralizes Oman's marine heritage as a conflation of historical and socio-cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability. The objective of my study entails surveying Sultanate of Oman's holistic model of preservation, which has effectively facilitated the protection of the nation's marine heritage, the display of its permeation and adaptation in various contexts, and the emphasis on its historical significance. Ultimately, addressing Oman's holistic marine heritage preservation model will contribute a shift from earlier research that has delinked the varied dimensions of Omani marine heritage and effaced its transversal sustainability. Thus, the objective of this study is to impel scholarly attention to Sultanate of Oman's holistic model for its marine heritage preservation program that promotes the transversal sustainability of its marine resources.

HISTORICAL EXCAVATIONS OF SEASHELLS IN OMAN

Prehistoric and archaeological research on Omani seashells highlights their sustainable contribution as tangible records of the country's historical and demographic memory. For instance, the identified use and adaptation of seashells in many important Omani sites transmit knowledge about the impact of colonization in terms of ecological injustice. In this context, researchers Lidour and Solana (2023) reveal how these seashell resources have been extracted by the advanced colonial technologies of seafaring during the Neolithic period (c. 6500–3300 BCE). According to Lidour and Solana, the Omani areas of Suwayh and Ruways along the coast of the Arabian sea, in the Sharqiyah governorate, have been the most researched sites as most of their seashells were exploited by explorers for staple food and for obtaining hard animal materials used for both symbolic and technological productions. In this regard, Lidour and Solana (2023) note the use of seashells for a variety of purposes, such as “butchering activities, including fish scaling, the processing of animal skins and woodworking.” Omani seashells are also reported to be used respectively in the form of personal adornments and tooling, for advanced seafaring, and for colonization of offshore islands (Lidour et al., 2021; Lidour & Solana, 2023). Marcucci (2021) also demonstrates how recent excavations of marine collectibles and human diet at RH-6 offered the opportunity to redate this important site in order to precisely determine its occupation history and later use as a graveyard, and establish the marine reservoir effect for this period. Other research projects interpret Omani seashells as demographic records on population and mobility registers and statistics. For instance, Zazzo (2016) notes that this finding confirms previous observations regarding the overwhelming presence of marine and mangrove-dwelling species in the faunal and charcoal assemblage, and implies a low mobility, or mobility restricted to the coast for this population during the 4th millennium B.C. In the same context, Omani researcher Busaidi (2018) describes the Omani marine environment as a foundational source for preserving specific cultural products that interpret historical and cultural heritage. Most of these resources include turtle bones, seashells, snails, and coral rocks that are excavated from the sites of Ras al-Jinz, Ras al-Hamra, Samahram, and Qalhat. So, the historical excavations of Omani seashells anticipate their role in preserving marine cultural heritage, interpreting the sociocultural developments in Oman, and raising awareness about cultural identity and colonial impact. Ultimately, the preservation of Omani marine heritage secures the regeneration of the cultural and social identity on the land of Oman.

OMANI SEASHELLS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

It is self-evident that environmental sustainability protects cultural knowledge. So, if the ecosystem is destroyed, cultural heritage will be displaced and lost. In this regard, seashells have a considerable impact on the balance of Oman's coastal ecosystem, which will definitely preserve the stories, histories, and traditions attached to them. Thus, the preservation of seashells' ecological balance entails a historical and cultural responsibility. It is globally proven that a major sign of marine justice anywhere in the world is to provide an inclusive space that maintains oceanic diversity and a safe seashore that permits sea creatures' constant growth and movement. According to experts, “shells provide a diverse swath of environmental functions: they help to stabilize beaches and anchor sea grass. They provide homes for creatures such as hermit crabs and hiding places for small fish; they are used by shorebirds to build nests; and when they break down, they provide nutrients for the organisms and for those that build their own shells” (Al Salmani, 2023). Relevant research on Oman's marine ecology indicates that the Sultanate's shores, “which have zero percentage of pollutants and industrial wastes, are homes to several marine creatures that navigate the sandy beaches with the help of the waves. The shells that serve as home to these mollusks play a vital role in protecting their lives” (Das, 2017). So, the existing research highlights the level of equilibrium that these shells maintain, “making them hard to reach for some of their preys thus maintaining the ecological cycle running” (Das, 2017).

The investment in the ecological function of Omani seashells has considered possible threats of seashell

depletion. In this regard, Das demonstrates how the peak tourist seasons mark a decrease in shell density. Das (2017) cites marine scientists who reiterate that “Tourism and even collecting shells do lead to a decrease in their numbers. Beaches like Al Sawadi and shell beach in Masirah Island were found to be the shell collectors’ favourite [spot] due to the variety and unique structure and form of the calcium carbonate mantle of the mollusks species.” On the other hand, Al Salmani (2023) explains that “shells are a source of income for people in some countries. If the shells become scarce, they will threaten the sources of livelihood for those who live on collecting them.” Al Salmani (2023) contends that the removal of shells from beaches could damage ecosystems and endanger organisms that rely on shells for their survival. To rationalize the danger of such removal, the reason given is that “various species of sea snails leave their shells temporarily; a shell being empty does not mean that it is uninhabited coast” (Arabia Felix, 2025). This standpoint is supported by a Muscat-based marine scientist who indicates that empty shells “provide homes for creatures such as crabs and hiding places for small fish. So we should also preserve the shells by leaving them on the beach than picking them up for the living décor” (Das, 2017).

Following the investment in the seashells’ ecological balance, many Omani projects on environmental sustainability call for activating local initiatives to protect seashells. In response, several programs that regulate the procurement and export industries of seashells are activated in Oman. Based on that, policymakers and specialists in the field of marine sciences have also called for preventive measures that ban collecting seashells in order to prevent their depletion. One major example is the seashell collecting permit service that is issued by the Omani Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The permit presents an intervention step that conforms to Article 19 of the Executive Regulations of the Marine Fishing Law and regulates the selection of seashells. However, various experts contend that it is difficult to completely ban the collection of shells in Oman and certain countries. This challenge is economically driven as many countries located on the coasts of the Indian Ocean rely heavily on the export of pearls (Al Salmani, 2023). Yet, as a balancing measure, collecting shells, corals and starfish along the Omani coasts becomes particularly regulated, and almost banned for some shell sizes (as is their purchase and export).

VISUAL SCAPES AND OMANI SEASHELLS’ HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, AND FOLKLORIC SUSTAINABILITY

The visual exhibits in the museums and galleries of Oman have boosted the community’s cognizance of the historical memory, the environmental impact, and the urgent conservation of seashells. To this effect, Oman’s Natural History Museum has initiated organized campaigns to preserve and index varied types of shells in special catalogues. Most notable campaign is represented by the National Collections of Natural History Museum, established in 1982, which houses the National Herbarium, National Collection of Animal and Skeletons, National Collection of Shells, National Collection of Insects and National Collection of Fossils. These collections function as archives for Oman’s natural heritage and sustained biodiversity as they encompass more than 40,000 varied samples curated from different regions of the Sultanate of Oman and exemplify different historical periods. The Natural History Museum’s catalogue describes how these collections are “scientifically classified to include the best models of Oman Biodiversity collections, and become the reference basis dedicated to studies and scientific research. The Natural History Museum, through its national collections, also participates in national efforts and scientific research to document and classify the unique diversity of Oman’s Natural Heritage and Biodiversity” (Natural History Museum, 2023). The National Collection of Shells, established in 1984, is one of the largest scientifically classified and preserved collections. It houses more than 8,000 specimens, representing more than 500 species of marine, terrestrial and freshwater shells found in the Sultanate of Oman (Al Ajmi, 2023). Researchers find this collection a valuable record for the Sultanate’s mollusks and most cited source on Omani shells. The collection includes more than 5,000 samples of spiral mollusks and shelled mollusks. These specimens are classified into various categories that include Gastropods, Bivalves, and Cephalopods (Fana, 2020). A conducted interview with H. Al- Nabhani reveals that these mollusks serve a sustainable source for ecological and historical information about Oman. To maintain their transmission of knowledge, Al-Nabhani explains how mollusks are conserved through drying, housed in special cabinets, organized and sorted by index cards (See Figure 2), and annotated in special databases (Al Ajmi, 2023). It is worth mentioning that Omani museums have displayed an increased public engagement and accessibility to the seashell collections. In this regard, Oman’s Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has reported a peak in the total number of visitors to the Natural History Museum. According to the ministry’s statistics, the total number of visitors reached 16.957 in 2023 (Oman Joins World , 2024).



Figure 2. Seashells Cabinets, the National Collection of Shells, Oman's Natural History Museum [Source: Al Ajmi, omannews.gov, 2023]

The Omani galleries of marine heritage also contribute to the consolidation of seashells' transversal sustainability. One significant example is the Intangible Heritage Hall in the National Museum in Muscat area, which houses the vocabulary of traditional Omani music circulated through advanced audio and visual media technologies (Omani Traditional Music, 2017). The hall displays the "Gim or Yim," the oldest musical instrument designed from an old seashell collected from the Ras Al Hamra area in Al Wattayah, Muscat and dates back to the Late Stone Age (5000 - 4000 BC). Al Gim's source is a large seashell whose length is 30 to 40 cm, and whose center has a radius of about 28 cm. The instrument is manufactured by drilling a hole about 2 cm in diameter in Al Gim's spiral side or from its upper end, which forms the opening through which the player blows by pressing the lips (Al Gim, 2023; see Figure 3). The importance of the Al Gim instrument correlates with the prioritization of percussion in Omani musical practices that usually require the Omani artist to use his voice without the help of melodic and tone instruments (Omani Traditional Music, 2017). In this regard, the interview with M. Al Kathiri, director of Oman Center for Traditional Music, reiterates how most traditional Omani arts feature dances that are performed along percussive instruments rather than tone or melodic instruments ("Omani Traditional Music," 2017). In this context, it is reported that even the number of percussive instruments surpasses the number of the tone instruments used in traditional Omani music. Al Kathiri refers that among the self-sounding percussive instruments are the Sajjat and the Qirhaf, which are used by women while singing the art of (um bam), and the Al Ru'boub instrument, which is made of small spiral seashells (Hajaj, 2023). The shells of Al Ru'boub instrument are particularly used and played by children for particular Omani festivities (Rida, 2018). The use of Al Gim is ubiquitous in all of Oman. It produces one or two melodic sounds in most cases, but most of its routines are percussive and highly functional in consolidating the Omani musical arts. In this regard, Al Gim collectible is used in many styles of Omani traditional music, such as Liwa, Sawt Al Zanj, the voice of the Negroes, Al Maydan, the field, Al Shubani, and Al Mudaimah. AL Gim shell was also traditionally played to call people to important meetings announced by the state or the governors, or to invite them to crush the wheat and sell the palm immature fruit, or what's called "Palm Tanaa" (AL Gim, 2023).



Figure 3. Left: Al Gim: The oldest musical instrument in Oman. [Source: Oman National Museum’s Facebook Page, 2020]. Right: Al Gim. S. Al-Alawi (known as Al-Malmaq preserves this traditional marine music. [Source: salim.pho. Sur, Oman, 2022]

Museological collaborations with marine scientists and conservationists have ultimately advanced the effectiveness of contemporary Omani art in raising awareness about marine heritage’s crucial contribution to the preservation of Oman’s cultural history. The preservation of marine musical instruments is an outcome of the national efforts that propel the sustainability of Indigenous culture in Oman. Traditional music comprises a significant component of the Omani heritage, as it is correlated with the initiation of social activity on the land. Omani music is historically rooted and constantly transmitted through various generations. Omani musical compositions feature tuneful dances, rhythms, metrical poems, and songs. The authenticity of each genre derives from a core theme or motif that represents an aspect of the Omanis’ daily stories, whether personal or tribal. These stories foreground the Omanis’ steady connection to their Arabic history and heritage, and their constant pride in their land’s ancient civilizations. These musical genres also present a channel for the Omanis’ continuous interaction and communication with the whole world (*Traditional Arts of Oman* 1990). They feature curated tunes that mix Omani arts with the arts of the Gulf land and the arts of African and Asian environments. This synthesis is a marine product of the Omani trade across the seas for thousands of years along with cases of the migration of Omanis to the coasts of Africa for decades (*Traditional Arts of Oman* 1990). The rootedness of traditional music in the Omani popular culture and identity has mobilized serious initiatives and official orders to retrieve and document such heritage. One major regulation is an authorization by His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Bu Saidi for the “Project of Collecting and Documenting Traditional Omani Music,” which inducted the establishment of the “Oman Center for Traditional Music” in 1983. The center was inaugurated as the first institution in the Gulf and Arab region to become a solid member of the UNESCO’s “International Council for Traditional Music” (Rida, 2018). As a scientific media institution, the Oman Center for Traditional Music is tasked with curating Omani traditional arts, protecting them from both natural and human destruction factors, and supervising these arts on-site, in order to note their changes through time. Since its establishment, the center has housed the largest archive in the Arabian Gulf region. It stores more than fifty thousand documents, including audio, video, blogs, and photographs, of the Omani traditional singing styles, poems and rhythms, Omani performance arts, musical instruments, their notable practitioners, and their significant occasions and practices in most of the Sultanate’s Wilayat (states) and governorates (Rida, 2018). In collaboration with the Natural History Museum and Intangible Heritage Hall of the National Museum, the Oman Center for Traditional Music stores spiral marine shell collectibles that navigate the transgenerational transmission of the traditional genres and rhythms of Omani music.

The visual displays of seashells as intrinsic mediators of marine music illumine their historical connection to Oman’s sustainable musical heritage. Researchers and anthropologists identify eleven components that define the Omanis’ relation with their environment and ancient history. Some of these components are unique; others are shared with their surroundings in the Arabian Peninsula. The recognized eleven elements include: the Islamic religion, the sword, the camel, sea travel, hunting and diving, agriculture, handcrafts and manual work, herding, celebrating social events, recreation and entertainment, and children’s and adults’ games (*Final Report* 1985). Researchers in traditional Omani arts have noted an innate and vital overlap between these elements. This

overlap is evidenced in many art occasions and practices. Existing records reveal that the arts of entertainment, recreation and amusement may be performed for reasons that differ from their original purposes. This is especially discernible in the arts of Al Tanbura, Al Mukawara and the Sharh in Sur, a port city in Eastern Oman, which are occasionally performed to rid a patient from the pathology of possession by a jinn spirit (*Final Report* 1985). Accordingly, Omani arts are classified through their integration of these main eleven components that reflect the Omani reality. So, they are identified as follows: the religious arts, the sword arts, the desert arts, the sea arts, hunting arts, agricultural arts, herding arts, craft arts, social event arts, recreation arts, and games. The final report for the “Project of Collecting and Documenting Traditional Omani Music” identifies the musical styles integrated in these arts. A focal example is the music associated with the sea arts. The sea music is performed on the decks of commercial ships as a routine that complements the daily work of the sailors. One marine routine is Al-Masoubil singing (known as Al-Mahoubil) that sailors perform on the shore while cleaning the hulls of their ships from the drifting and floating plankton, snails and shells (Rida, 2018).

The museumization praxes have also promoted modern visual seashell art initiatives and programs in Oman. These programs have contributed artistic collaborations with marine conservationists in order to promote seashells’ historical, ecological, and cultural sustainability. For instance, the Public Authority for Craft Industries, represented by the Department of Craft Industries in Muscat, in cooperation with the Omani Maritime Transport Company, has implemented activities that observe marine scientists’ sustainability measures for regulating seashell collecting (Al Roya Newspaper, 2019). In 2019, the Omani Public Authority for Craft Industries authorities implemented a qualification and training program in the field of seashell shape crafting (See Figure 4). The program’s orientation sessions familiarized the trainees with the careful selection and assemblage of shells and their properties and with the safety and security techniques followed during the production process. The training program provided experiential knowledge and a historical overview of the art of inlaying and framing with shells, and the Omani designs and decorations used. The program also recommended the materials and devices for the manufacturing and polishing processes, and explicated the rules and unit types used in the final designs. The investment in the artistic sustainability of the seashells required archival measures, such as indexing the devices used in shaping shells by displaying the name and picture of each tool and device (Al Roya Newspaper, 2019). The Omani Marine Village is another major artistic venue that orients visitors with Oman’s rich marine products. The organizing committee of the 2017 Muscat Festival was keen to recognize this ancient marine scene as a constant presence so that visitors become knowledgeable of the marine products through artistic praxes (Oman Daily, 2017). The exhibits in the Village featured crafts manufactured by trained Omani women, and promoted the initiation of commercial projects for marine products. The Village also displayed fishermen’s rest houses that are made of palm fronds and leaves and designed with geometric shapes that are created by the Omani people. One major exhibit of the Omani Marine Village is conducted by The Seashell Foundation, one of the leading projects that promote marine heritage. The foundation’s first contribution to the Muscat Festival marked the growing interest in the diversity of the seashell products and their distinctive artistry (Oman Daily, 2017).

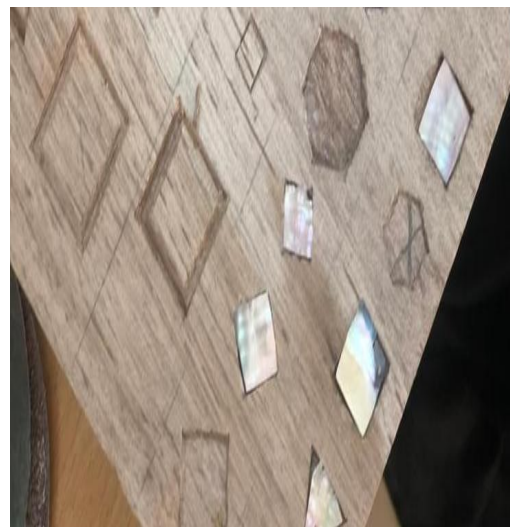


Figure 4. Omani Seashell Crafting, Department of Craft Industries in Muscat [Source: Left: “PACI,” Omanobserver.com, 2019; Right: “Twenty Trainees,” alroya.com, 2019]

The Omani visual culture is extended to the inherited Qaranqashouh ritual that reflects the mobilization of seashells as a continued traditional and folkloric praxis. Qaranqashouh refers to children's celebration of Mid-Ramadan night in the states of Al Batina, one of the northern governorates in Oman. Children celebrate this holy night by roaming the streets and alleys and moving around houses to stop at each door. While en route, they perform their drumming for sweets while singing a simple duet rhythm to the phrase: "Qaranqashouh! Qaranqashouh! Give us some sweets" (Anwaar, 2015). The name of the Qaranqashouh ritual is derived from the sound of banging the outer surfaces of two shells. The many protrusions and ribs of the banged shells make a sound that mimics the pronunciation of the word "Qaranqashouh." In Al Batina, the festive children perform the lyrical phrase of Qaranqashouh by banging shells from the seacoast. However, in the Ad Dakhiliyah governorate, children hold this festivity while performing the same song but to the rhythm of banging two pieces of stones against each other. So, their celebration is called "Tawq Tawq" as a reference to the distinct sound produced by repeatedly hitting the two stones. In some places, this celebration is called (Qaranqashouh), which is a variant of the original name. In the states of Al Khaburah governorate, the celebration is called Al Ru'boub, which is inspired by the name of the seashell type that the children use to initiate their rhythms (Anwaar, 2015). The Qaranqashouh folk songs are based on diverse narratives that are passed down through the generations. The diversity of the texts accommodates the possible responses children may get from the sought households. If the response is positive, the households will receive praise poems. On the contrary, rejection of requests may drive the children to satirize and curse the non-cooperative households. The seashell-based Qaranqashouh ritual has a pedagogical message for the children in Oman as they enhance their social communication and appreciate group work system. The festive kids also learn commitment to the principles and values of their true religion in a context of joy and laughter. Qaranqashouh reveals the contribution of seashells and marine heritage as a spiritual practice that has a therapeutic core for its young practitioners. In some states of Oman, Qaranqashouh has become a distinctive touristic scene that attracts visitors and tourists who enjoy taking souvenir photos of this local folk ritual (Anwaar, 2015). In this regard, many social institutions, associations, and commercial centers, distributed in Muscat, annually commemorate the revival of Qaranqashouh activities. For instance, the Wave Muscat project, in Al Seeb state, is known for organizing this event and supervising children's gatherings. The seashore-side location of this commercial promenade, which is crowded with cafes and shopping stores, accommodates the circulation of the Qaranqashouh praxis for a wide international audience. The sustainability of the Qaranqashouh rituals has also been advocated by several academic institutions in Oman. One major example is the Qaranqashouh tales project that has been announced by the Department of Art Education in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University in March 2025. The project aims to transform Qaranqashouh seashell folklore into digital and interactive visuals that propel Omani children's preservation of cultural heritage and national identity (Anwaar, 2025).

THE AESTHETIC AGENCY OF SUSTAINABLE SEASHELL HERITAGE IN OMANI POETICS

The commemorative sustainability of marine heritage in Oman's visual and digital practices is extended to Omani poetic works. Many studies validate the subtextual presence of marine tropes that also shape Omani poetics. In "The Symbolic Use of the Sea in Contemporary Omani Poetry" chapter, Al Ghailani explains how the sea is associated with the Omanis' memory of their glories and heroic achievements of reaching East Africa and founding a large empire. The sea projected the Omanis' travel skills and deep knowledge in marine sciences (Al Ghailani, 2022). The researcher also reveals how this ancient maritime past was a foundation for the contemporary Omani poet's output that displays tropes from the marine environment to celebrate hope and optimism (Al Ghailani, 2022). As such, the sea, as a geographical place, acquires psychological, social, and historical dimensions within the Omani poetic text. For instance, Al Ghailani (2022) reiterates how the use of the coastal city trope in contemporary Omani poetry demonstrates authenticity in experience, specificity of the language, and commitment to the Omani reality that has been jeopardized by modern civilization with all its urban and social expressions that are accepted at times and resisted at other times. Above all, it attests to the sustainability of pristine landmarks that preserve the Omani maritime past (Atieh, 2025). The Omani Society for Writers has also highlighted the profound integration of ancient marine history in Omani poetry. While presiding the society's delegation to Tunisia in 2023, Dr. Faiza Al Blushi has explored the thematic trope of the sea in contemporary Omani poems, published during the period between 1970 and 2000 AD. Al Blushi reiterates how the poems feature the sea as a source of expansion for the Omani poet and his momentum to build realistic and symbolic poetic relationships. In the same context, Al Shaidi's paper on "Sea Singing and its Traditional Rhythms" focuses on the oral circulation of the marine cultural heritage as a collective unconscious that reveals important aspects and characteristics of the Omani society (Nabd, 2023). Al Shaidi's paper aligns with the studies of Omani

poetic texts that highlight Omani ship songs, marine singing genres, and their percussion instruments. Another example is Al Aisari's research paper entitled "The Trope of the Sea in Omani Children's Poetry" that probes the motif of the sea in Arabic poetry as well as in Arabic children's poetry. Al-Aisari's specific analysis of ten Omani poetry collections that included 304 poems and chants for children reveals the substantial presence of the sea as either an explicit or a metaphorical text (Nabd, 2023). Al Aisari's analysis of the Omani poetic texts also illumines the signification of the sea as a source of livelihood and its sanctification as one of God Almighty's blessings to man. Al Aisari demonstrates how the poems also align the sea with other cultural and heritage landmarks of Oman, such as castles, forts, towers, Aflaj, and others. Most importantly, Al Aisari addresses the function of pearls and seashells as historical residues that illumine the glorious past of Oman (Nabd, 2023).

Modern Omani poetic narratives present seashells as agents in the construction of the Omani cultural identity. Seashells and pearls, along with precious stones, have generally retained a sustainable presence in Arabic poetry that mediates their aesthetic appeal in the varied contexts of nature, praise, and flirtation with women (Sulaiman, 2023). However, contemporary Omani poetry disseminates an extended signification for seashells' tropes. A particular example is a sea poem entitled "In the Presence of the Sea" by Omani poet M. Al Farsi. As a resource text, the poem has won the first place in the Omani song competition "The Golden Nightingale" (Folk Poetry, 2024) that was held in Salalah, the capital of the southern Omani governorate of Dhofar. The poem was sung by the artist O. Al Hasani, and its rhythm was composed by A. Al Jaafari (Folk Poetry, 2024). In this poem, both the seashell and seashell collector engage in a symbiotic connection that projects a transversal relation. They communicate a discreet dialogue (line 2) on shared hardship and mutual tiredness (line 1). The dialogue then reflects maritime sympathy and emphasizes the Omanis' affinity and harmony with the marine environment.

(1) حضرة البحر أغنيات المتعبين

(2) ما وشوش المخار لأصداف البحر

Another example is a short prose poem entitled "Innovation" (Folk Poetry, 2024) by Omani poet A. Al Maamari (Oman Daily, 2024). The text presents the poet's imaginary creation of a woman that reflects a symbiotic relation between seashells and humans:

(1) سأبتكر امرأة من صدف البحر

(2) وأمنحها عطرا وقحا

(3) وأرث على عينيها طنا من أسرار السحرة

(4) ولأني ساموت من العشق

(5) سأمنحها أيضا

(6) قلب نبّي

(7) ولأني أرجع طفلا بين ذراعيها أمنحها

(8) جيلين من العطف

(9) وتلا من قلق العشاق

The conception process in Al Maamari's short poem becomes localized as it is initiated by a native element of the Omani soil. The woman is conceived from seashells (line 1) in a mountainous area (lines 8 and 9) that closely recalls the geography of the mountainous coastal cities of Oman at the same time. As the poem reveals, seashells, though insufficient to breathe life into the inanimate shell creature, are agents and mediators for such creation. So, the poem stages the seashells' spiritual alliance and symbiosis with the poet's own self to enliven the seashell woman (lines 2-9). On the other hand, A. Habib's *Sea Shell: In the Narrative of Some Cling* (1994) features the integration of seashells as motifs of memory and cultural attachment. In particular, the narrative surveys the oceanic origins and sophisticated designs of seashells, which reflect the characters' environmental psychology that redirects their inner journeys and cultural connections. Such poetic output reflects the role of seashells in defining and shaping the Omani cultural identity. Thus, Omani poetry functions as an integral venue in facilitating the holistic sustainability model for Omani marine heritage.

CONCLUSION

The case of the Omani heritage of seashells reflects a holistic vision that fosters marine diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. In collaboration with the national museums' campaigns, Oman has inaugurated orientation programs about marine shells' stabilization function. Such programs have combated seashells' degrowth and regulated their extraction in order to prioritize justice and sustainability for the Sultanate's

ecological, social, aesthetic, and economic environments. The Omani marine sustainability programs have also prompted a growing body of scholarly and literary studies that address seashells' transmedial adaptations. So, Oman's marine heritage preservation program and practices have re-centered the value of seashells as an inexhaustible and transversal resource for building resilient communities of practice and memory. Raising awareness about the holistic significance of Oman's marine heritage will advance further research on the ethics of sustainability responsibility among Omani community members. In this regard, future studies could explore Omani marine galleries/museums' solutions and responses to the recent digital shifts and the tectonic evolution of AI technologies. So, a potential research could read AI authentication, audience engagement, visitor preference tools and analytics as possible challenges for maintaining Oman's holistic marine sustainability model. Such research will impel further commitment to the promotion of Oman's marine resources.

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