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## **A grammar of Kumzari : a mixed Perso-Arabian language of Oman**

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 The Kumzari people

The Kumzari people<sup>1</sup> live on the Musandam peninsula of northern Oman. They number approximately 5000, including 500 living across the Strait of Hormuz on Larak Island, Iran and several families across the border in the United Arab Emirates. Semi-nomadic, they migrate between the winter coastal villages and oasis towns such as Khasab and Dibba in summer. Their geographic focal point is the village of Kumzar, situated at 26.3375° N, 56.4099° E, and is the northernmost settlement in Oman.

Every mention of Musandam in the literature emphasises the extreme isolation of the area and its inhabitants. Musandam's geography makes the reason for its isolation apparent: jagged limestone mountains plunge steeply down into the sea. Thousand-metre cliffs are made slightly less prohibitive by narrow steps carved out of the stone to facilitate seasonal migration of the bedouins. Even now, many Kumzari coastal villages including Kumzar itself are accessible only by boat, overland access to them being too steep to traverse even with modern machinery. There is much travel back-and-forth between Kumzar and Khasab by boat: the voyage takes 45 minutes by speedboat or two hours by motorised dhow. Trips to Khasab are for business, education, shopping, weddings, and funerals. Further afield, it is two hours to Ras al-Khaimah by land, and a six-hour journey between Khasab and Muscat by the catamaran ferry installed in 2008. Kumzar has a primary school, a medical clinic, two mosques, and a few small shops. Other services are accessed in Khasab.

The Kumzari tribe forms part of the Bani Shitayr confederacy of the Shihuh Arabs. Outsiders have generally referred to the Shihuh and the Kumzari as bedouin, but the people of Musandam themselves distinguish between mountain-dwelling 'bedouin' and coastal Arabs. In summer, both groups congregate in the date-palm oases of Khasab and Dibba for the date harvest and wedding season.

In Khasab, Kumzaris have their own quarter named *Ḥārīt Kumzārīan* centrally located around the Kumzari castle, and their own area of the souq. Extended families manage local businesses, date groves, and fishing cooperatives, but most dates and fish are for their own consumption. The economic impact of Oman's oil revenue—about 18 million barrels of oil per day pass through the adjacent Strait of Hormuz—is felt in Musandam in improved roads and infrastructure, water delivery to remote settlements, and social services.

Kumzari people traditionally subsist primarily through fishing and boat-building, as well as raising goats and keeping date orchards in the oasis towns. At present, many are employed by the government of the Sultanate of Oman, whose provincial (*waleyat*) capital is headquartered at Khasab. Many are also involved in business, including local shops and services, and international trade with the UAE and by boat across the Strait of Hormuz. A growing industry is tourism, as foreign workers from the Emirates take holidays in Musandam for its seclusion, natural beauty, and unique culture. Kumzari people are

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<sup>1</sup> Other names given for Kumzari in the literature and by surrounding peoples are Kumazra/Kumāzarah, Kamzareyah, Kamāzareh, Kamzāree, and Komzāri. The first two names are most often Arabian, the latter is Iranian. In the Kumzari language, the adverbial form for the language is Kumzariti, thus 'speaking Kumzari' is *majma tka Kumzārītī*.

employed in the Khasab Museum, local hotels and restaurants, tours of the fjords and mountains, and police and border services.

In the past, ships would stop at Kumzar to replenish their freshwater from the well, and Kumzari men were relied upon both as expert guides through the Strait's rough waters and as sailors on foreign ships, facilitating trade between India, Europe, and eastern Africa. Their finesse in combat operations is commemorated in the traditional Kumzari song "We took the door," about their 16<sup>th</sup>-century raid on Hormuz Island, claiming its wooden city gates for their castle. In the present day, some Kumzaris work for the Oman government patrolling international boat traffic through the Strait.

Local traditional crafts continue to flourish: boat building, various household articles made of woven palm leaves and pottery and wood, embroidered clothing, the traditional *jerz* long-handled small axe, and the *bātil* boat stemheads uniquely decorated with goatskins and cowrie tassels. Material culture including the famous locked Shihuh house is described in Costa 1991.

The village of Kumzar, and the Kumzari people, are split into two moieties: the Aqlī and the Ğōšbānī. Each has its own leader (informally referred to as "sheikh"), mosque, and endogamous practices. There is also a hereditary titled sheikh of the Kumzari and Shihuh, endorsed by the Sultan of Oman.

Other people living in Musandam among the Kumzari are the Shihuh bedouin and the Dhahurī, both Arabic-speaking populations outnumbering the Kumzari. One variety of Shihhi Arabic has been described in Bernabela 2011.

## 1.2 The Kumzari language

### 1.2.1 Classification

Outside observers have variously surmised that Kumzari is a mixture of languages such as Persian, Arabic, Baluchi, Urdu, Portuguese, and even English. However, Bertram Thomas, who wrote a description, transcribed text, and grammar sketch of Kumzari in 1929, reported that it is a compound of Persian and Arabic (Thomas 1929:75). From his vocabulary list, he traced 44% of words to Persian origin, and 34% to Arabic origin (Thomas 1930:786)<sup>2</sup>. Thomas also noted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Persian-origin words in Kumzari were archaic, not like the Persian spoken by Iranian immigrants.

Gordon (2005) and Skjærvø (1989) considered Kumzari to be closely related to the languages of southwestern Iran, and it was classified with the Luri languages as Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Iranian, Western, Southwestern, Luri. However, this estimation seems to have been made on the basis of some lexical similarities (see Skjærvø 1989:364) and perhaps due to their presumed common linguistic heritage in Middle Persian.

Kumzari is the only language with Iranian ancestry indigenous to the Arabian peninsula, and it is geographically surrounded by Arabic language varieties. Yet Kumzari as it is spoken on

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<sup>2</sup> Of a word list with 1090 lexical items collected by the author in 2008, 45% were traceable to Arabian, 37% to Persian, and 17% to Kumzari only (unknown other origin).

Musandam and Larak is unintelligible both to Arabic speakers with no knowledge of Kumzari, and to Persian speakers from the Iranian mainland. This confirms Bertram Thomas' observations of last century that Kumzari "is a compound of Arabic and Persian, but is distinct from them both" (Thomas 1929:75). In modern times, neither of its neighbouring languages accept Kumzari as relating to their own: Persian speakers consider it a form of Arabic and Arabic speakers believe it to be a Persian dialect.

Kumzari is genetically affiliated with both Indo-European and Semitic language families, so that it is not possible to distinguish its genetic heritage as being of purely one or the other. It is a fundamentally mixed language, with profound etymological influence from both of its ancestor language families. Characteristics of both Semitic and South-western Iranian linguistic typologies are to be found in the phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse of Kumzari (van der Wal 2010). Its Arabian traits have been outlined in van der Wal 2013, and linguistic and historical evidence point to its most recognisable origins as being in pre-Islamic Azd and Sasanian communities of Oman. Other languages represented by lexical borrowings in Kumzari are superstrate influences: Baluchi, Portuguese, Hindi-Urdu, Minabi, English, and even modern Arabic of the Gulf or Oman. A non-exhaustive sample of words with traceable potential etymologies is given in Table 1.

Table 1. A sample of Kumzari words with potential source languages

<b>Kumzari lexeme</b>	<b>gloss</b>	<b>potential source language<sup>3</sup></b>
<i>furnō</i>	'the oven'	Portuguese
<i>langal</i>	'anchor'	Portuguese
<i>tōr</i>	'bull'	Portuguese (/Syriac <i>tawrā</i> )
<i>pēsē</i>	'coin'	Portuguese
<i>lamba</i>	'lamp'	Portuguese
<i>dūšin</i>	'yesterday'	Baluchi
<i>čap</i>	'paddle'	Baluchi
<i>čikk</i>	'small'	Hindi <sup>4</sup>
<i>panka</i>	'ceiling fan'	Hindi
<i>nāšta</i>	'breakfast'	Minabi
<i>bay</i>	'thick'	Turkish
<i>pāša</i>	'wealthy person'	Turkish
<i>amba</i>	'mango'	Swahili
<i>jōtī</i>	'shoe'	Urdu
<i>tāwa</i>	'convex metal bread pan'	Urdu
<i>ālō</i>	'potato'	Luri/ Kurdish/ W.Ir. <sup>5</sup>
<i>rōk/kōrk</i>	'boy'	Luri/ Kurdish/ W.Ir.
<i>gap</i>	'big'	Luri/ Kurdish/ W.Ir.
<i>xāyg</i>	'fish egg'	Luri/ Kurdish/ W.Ir.
<i>šērama</i>	'autumn'	Himyaritic
<i>pling</i>	'plank'	English
<i>niglis</i>	'gold necklace'	English
<i>bambō</i>	'bumpy'	English

<sup>3</sup> Some of the English-source words are presumed to be via Gulf Arabic. Middle Persian, Parthian, and Syriac data from Henning 1937. South Arabian data from Simeone-Senelle 1997 and Rubin 2010. Shihhi data from Bernabela 2011 and author's field notes.

<sup>4</sup> Hindi, but cf. Middle Persian *cyg'myc* 'a little'.

<sup>5</sup> W.Ir. refers to other Western Iranian languages aside from New Persian.

<i>lawšan</i>	‘perfume’ (from ‘lotion’)	English
<i>apsit</i>	‘upset, angry’	English
<i>daxtar</i>	‘hospital’ (from ‘doctor’)	English
<i>čigāra</i>	‘cigarette’	English
<i>fēzar</i>	‘freezer’	English
<i>šēwil</i>	‘shovel’	English
<i>ḥāšaf</i>	‘dried dates’	Shihhi Arabic
<i>innit</i>	‘goat pen’	Shihhi Arabic
<i>rāy</i>	‘idea’	Shihhi Arabic
<i>krāḥ</i>	‘sandal’	Shihhi Arabic
<i>xumba</i>	‘clay storage jar’	Parthian/Avestan (‘pitcher’)
<i>zangērir</i>	‘slave’	Parthian ( <i>zyncyhr</i> ‘chains’)
<i>črā</i>	‘oil lamp’	Middle Persian ( <i>čirāg</i> ) <sup>6</sup>
<i>ar</i>	‘that which’	Mehri
<i>ḥēriq</i>	‘hot/dry weather’	Mehri ( <i>ḥark</i> ‘hot’)
<i>tā</i>	‘one, a single’	Mehri ( <i>tāt</i> )
<i>xar</i>	‘donkey’	Mehri ( <i>ḥirīt</i> ), W.Ir.
<i>t-/d-</i>	imperfect aspect (verbs)	Hobyot, Mehri, Jibbali
<i>tē</i>	‘until’	Hobyot, Mehri, Harsusi
<i>qarraš</i>	‘mosquito’	Hobyot ( <i>kerçš</i> )
<i>dūš</i>	‘date syrup’	Harsusi ( <i>debš</i> cf. Arabic <i>dibs</i> )
<i>wā-</i>	‘towards’	Harsusi ( <i>wāl</i> )
<i>ka</i>	‘if, when’	Soqotri, W.Ir.
[ʔāʔā]	‘no’	Jibbali (ʔ neg. prohibitive)
<i>naxa, nēxan</i>	‘aboard (vehicle)’	Jibbali ( <i>nxā, nxīn</i> ‘under’)
<i>šawḥaṭ</i>	‘whale’	Jibbali

## 1.2.2 Sociolinguistics

### 1.2.2.1 Dialects

Varieties spoken by the two clans, Ğōšbānī and Aqlī, render slightly different pronunciation of a few lexical items, as noted in the text. The Laraki dialect of Kumzari has several lexical and phonological differences, notably the preservation of /h/ where Kumzari has a glottal stop<sup>8</sup>, preservation of /xw/ where Kumzari has /x/, prevocalised initial consonant clusters, and Laraki’s slightly closer lexical resemblance to Persian rather than Arabian.

### 1.2.2.2 Viability and Bilingualism

Kumzari children learn their own language exclusively until they enter school at age seven. Young people have much less ability to speak fluent Kumzari in narrating elaborate discourse or oral literature, and many revert to the Arabic that is the product of their schooling and television. Although Kumzaris are primarily endogamous, there is some degree of intermarriage with speakers of Arabic varieties, especially with Shihhi in Khasab. Primary school teachers have been known to tell parents to speak to their children only in Arabic to

<sup>6</sup> cf. Shihhi *srūḡih*.

<sup>7</sup> Mehri has a *-t* noun suffix (Rubin 2010:65) that is noted as a salient feature distinguishing Himyaritic from Arabic (Watson 2011).

<sup>8</sup> But note that Kumzari data from the early twentieth century show that Kumzari did retain the /h/ in contexts where it now has glottal stop: *hišk* ‘dry’, *hātiš* ‘fire’, *haw* ‘water’ (Skjærvø 1989:365).

facilitate their accommodation to school, but few families follow this directive. Older people, women, and small children have lower rates of bilingualism due to less contact with Arabic. Those employed in business, government, and tourism sectors have higher rates of bilingualism in Arabic. Most speakers see the advantage of cultivating the Kumzari language and culture, whilst learning Arabic as a second language for interaction with the wider community.

#### 1.2.2.3 Oral traditions

From various accounts, several genres of oral tradition are attested among the Kumzari: many forms of fishing and sailing songs, tribute poems, celebratory chants, wedding songs, proverbs, *qāwals* (short sung poems), festival songs, work songs, lullabies, and folktales. Although a few were audio-recorded by the Oman Studies Centre in Muscat, none has been the subject of scholarly investigation outside of that done by the present author.

#### 1.2.2.4 Writing

Kumzari is an unwritten language; literacy in the region is a product of the educational system in Modern Standard Arabic. Some Kumzari individuals have shown an interest in writing their language; the author is working with them on producing a Kumzari dictionary and folktale collection (both forthcoming) based on the alphabet developed with Kumzari community representatives (Anonby 2009).

#### 1.2.2.5 Endangerment

With its small population, unwritten status, and the encroachment of Arabic in proliferating domains of use, Kumzari is readily identified as an endangered language. UNESCO classifies Kumzari as ‘severely endangered’. The Google Endangered Languages Project lists Kumzari as being on the verge of extinction. The Ethnologue places Kumzari in the ‘moribund’ category of language endangerment. Despite many factors pointing to its imperilled status, several important considerations affect the likelihood of Kumzari’s sustained viability. Its remote geography moderately insulates it from outside influence. Its speakers are proud to identify themselves as Kumzari, they have a positive view toward preserving their language, and significantly, they teach it to their children. Finally, Kumzari’s history of persistence for over one thousand years despite being surrounded and outnumbered by speakers of Arabic on Musandam bodes well for its continued survival.

### 1.2.3 Previous research

Very little research has been carried out on the Kumzari language and culture. Several early explorers, and modern-day visitors to Musandam, mentioned Kumzari in passing, but until the present study only Thomas (1930) and to a lesser extent Jayakar (1902) did fieldwork on the language<sup>9</sup>. A few speculated at Kumzari’s indigenous Arabian origins while others concluded the language must have come from the east side of the Gulf; some made note of both origins (Miles 1994:379,436; Ross 1874:195; Zwemer 1902:57; Jayakar 1902:247, 272; Thomas 1930:785; Bayshak 2002:12).

Thomas’ articles continued the debate about Kumzari origins that had been discussed since the turn of the twentieth century; several theories have been proposed, encompassing ethnicities from Himyar and South Arabia to Sumer, Babylon, Persia, Bahrain, and South

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<sup>9</sup> Captain A.P. Trevor collected some material on Kumzari that was later published in Lorimer’s Gazetteer (1915/1970).

Asia. The following section explores the history of Kumzari, by way of information that is available from literary, traditional, and documentary records. Although due to the time-depth and limited sources it is not possible to definitively state Kumzari's linguistic origins, a broad perspective of its history will account for its potential influences.

### 1.3 A history of Kumzari

Throughout its history, the Musandam peninsula has been a strategic region bridging Arabia and Persia, the borderland of empires, the guardian of shipping in and out of the Gulf, and the setting of the major trading centres of Hormuz and Dibba that received goods from the Arabian Sea and beyond. Consequently, Kumzari's history is intertwined with the envoys which have sailed through the straits in past eras.

#### 1.3.1 *Foreign traveller accounts*

In recent centuries, Europeans travellers have been intrigued by their encounters with Kumzari people, their language, and those of the wider Shihuh community and Arabian peninsula. Despite Kumzari ethnic identity as Arabs and as members of the Shihuh confederacy, as the British officer Bertram Thomas (1929:75) stated, it is only the Kumzari “who speak the strange tongue which has baffled and confused strangers.”

Of the general linguistic situation in Arabia when he visited there in the 1700's, Carsten Niebuhr (1792:254-255) had this to observe: “There is perhaps no other language diversified by so many dialects as that of Arabia. The nation having extended their conquests, and sent out colonies... the different people conquered by them have been obliged to speak the language of their new masters and neighbours; but those people retained at the same time terms and phrases of their former language, which have debased the purity of the Arabic, and formed a diversity of dialects.” Niebuhr also remarked that, even as recently as a quarter-millennium ago, “Although the Arabian conquerors have introduced and established their language in the countries which they conquered, yet their subjects have not always left off the use of their mother tongue” (1792:256).

An Arab historian writing in 1728 noted that there were some Arabs who did not understand Arabic; Ross, writing in 1874, interprets him to mean “some of the people inhabiting the Ruus el-Jibal from Cape Mussendom [Musandam]. Southward the inhabitants of that location differ in appearance from the other Arabs and speak a different dialect. Some, from their reddish skins and light eyes, have conceived them to have an admixture of European blood. On examination their language will probably be found to be a Himyarite dialect. They may be descendants of a Himyarite people who inhabited ‘Omān before the inflow of Yemenites and others. They are named el-Shehūh or el-Shihiyīn [al-Shihūh]” (Ross 1874:195).

In the mid-1800's, Miles noted that in Khasab lived “a section of the Shihiyeen [Shihhi]; many of the people are of Persian descent and are cloth-weavers” (1994:446); he concluded that they were “of Himyarite descent,... a peculiar race with curious habits and customs, subsisting chiefly on fish and goats' milk” (Miles 1994:436). Miles also noticed that “They are said to have a peculiar dialect and their physical aspect is somewhat different from that of the Arabs, and some writers have even suggested that they are descendants of a European nation, but the people of Koomaz are of Persian descent and they speak a corrupt Persian” (Miles 1994:379). Referring to Goat Island (Jazirat al-Ghanam), he said “the Koomzaries



[Kumzari] use this island for pasturing their flocks” (Miles 1994:448). Of Kumzar itself, Miles observed, “The people being of undoubted Persian origin are very fair, and speak a corrupt Persian with a slight admixture of Arabic” (1994:448).

Visiting the Musandam peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Palgrave (1866) noted that his Arab guide said the Shihuh spoke in the “language of the birds”; Arabic speakers used the same designation for South Arabian languages. However, Jayakar (1902:246) noted of that remark: ‘bird’s speech’ “is more particularly applicable to the language of one small tribe... which speaks in addition to the [Shihhi Arabic] dialect common to the place a peculiar and unintelligible dialect of its own. The Kamāzareh [Kumzari]... are ethnologically and dialectically distinct from the general Shaḥooḥ [Shihuh] group.”

Zwemer described anecdotal reports of the Kumzari in 1900: “There is coffee-house babble in Eastern Oman concerning a mysterious race of light-complexioned people who live somewhere in the mountains, shun strangers, and speak a language of their own... At Khasab, near Ras Musandam, live a tribe whose speech is neither Persian, Arabic, nor Baluchi, but resembles the Himyaritic dialect of the Mahras [Mehri]... This language is used by them in talking to each other, although they speak Arabic with strangers” (Zwemer 1902:57). Shihuh historians contemporary with Zwemer also noted their origins in Sabā in Yemen (Jayakar 1902:247).

It is a long journey to bring together the incongruous strands of Kumzari’s history, from Yemen to Persia and meeting at Musandam. It begins in the middle, where Oman occupies a pivotal, if infrequently-mentioned, place between the Gulf and the Sea.

### 1.3.2 Ancient Oman

For several millennia before the Common Era, the Musandam region where Kumzari is spoken, including the facing coast of Iran, was known as *Makkan*. *Makkan* was involved in the trade of copper to Mesopotamia, and the Oman peninsula is cited in Sumerian tablets by the name *Magan* (Potts 1978, 1985). Shulgi, the king of Ur, received gold from an unnamed “king of Magan” in 2069 BC (Potts 2012:64). On the basis of archaeological evidence, Potts (2012:47) postulates that “immigrants from across the Straits of Hormuz introduced [to Oman] the idea and techniques of pottery manufacture around 2500 BC.” With the introduction of the *falaj* (underground water channel) system in 1000 BC, and subsequent agricultural development, Oman underwent a population expansion.

The word referring to Oman was rendered *Makaa* in Old Persian, *Macae* or *Magi* or *Mykoi* in Greek (Yule 1999:122), *Makkash* in Elamite, and *Makkan* in Akkadian (Potts 2000:56). In Aramaic, Oman was called *Qādām*, the word meaning ‘morning, east’. According to Herodotus, a Greek historian writing in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the *Myci* were a tribal people living in Oman. As early as 536 BC, Cyrus the Great conquered Oman for Persia (Wilson 1928), and it was governed by satraps of Achaemenid Persia during the dynasties of Darius I (r. 522-486 BC) and Xerxes I (r. 486-465 BC) (Potts 2012:104). The Persepolis inscriptions of Xerxes I call the *Maka* or *Mačiya* people those “who dwell by the sea and across the sea.” During Achaemenid times, both southern Persian Gulf coastal areas, Musandam and Hormozgan, were known together as *Maka*; Oman is proposed as having the better claim to that designation (Potts 2010:529). People named ‘Arabs’, as plausibly referring to an ethnic group from Arabia, were included among the inhabitants of the Achaemenid province of *Maka* (Ulrich 2008:64).

Even as lately as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was reported that there was a “distinct tradition among the learned Arabs, with respect to those ancient Kings [Himyarites], which deserves to be taken notice of. They pretend to know, from ancient monuments, that *Tobba* was the family name of those Sovereigns, that they came from the neighbourhood of Samarcand, were worshippers of fire, and conquered and civilized Arabia” (Niebuhr 1792:10). This description accords with, or perhaps conflates the Himyarites with, the Achaemenid founder Darius I, whose father was a satrap of Bactria, and who wrote the Bisotun (Behistun) inscription. Having examined the cuneiform inscriptions in Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian at Bisotun in Iran, Niebuhr (1792:11) claimed that “an inscription, in strange and unknown characters, which he had found in a province remote from the sea coast [of Arabia]” was “distinguished the inscriptions at Persepolis to be in the same alphabet.” He concluded that “both the Arabians and the Persians would appear to have had Sovereigns from the same nation, who spoke the same language, or at least employed the same characters in writing.”

Regarding the language of the Achaemenids, McWhorter points out that “Modern Persian is the descendant of the native language of rulers of the vastest empire ever ruled by speakers of an Iranian variety, this empire documented as having been a vibrantly multiethnic one” (McWhorter 2007:163). However, it was a Semitic language that was used for communication among the Empire’s diverse groups: Potts (2012:114) notes that Aramaic was the lingua franca in Maka during Achaemenid times. McWhorter (2007:155) elaborates, “The standard practice was that documents and missives were dictated in a local language (including Old Persian), written by the scribe in Aramaic, and then read back to the recipient in the local language at the destination.” Such a practice could produce a standard fusion of lexicon and grammar as the basis for the intertwining of languages (Bakker 1997:203). In light of Kumzari’s fundamentally mixed verbal system, it is noteworthy that “the influence from Iranian on the Aramaic verbal system must have had a considerable time depth” (G.Khan 2008:22).

In the same era, a movement of people groups is recorded by Herodotus, in a list of the satrapies bringing tributes to the Persian emperor. Maka is one of them; mentioned alongside Maka are “those who dwell in the islands of the Erythraean Sea, where the king settles those who are called the ‘dispossessed’.” (Potts 2005:9-10).

In 331 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Darius III and Maka ceased to be a Persian satrapy (Potts 2012:107). Nearchus of Crete, a naval admiral of Alexander the Great in 325 BC, recorded passing Musandam, which he called “Cape Maketa of Arabia”, and made note of a market town that was probably Dibba (Thomas 1929:86). Instead of sailing through the strait of Hormuz, Nearchus landed on the Iran coast and travelled inland. A few years later, Hieron of Soli, another ship’s commander under Alexander, explored the Musandam coast, but probably did not alight in Oman (Briant 2002:761).

The Parthians wrested control of the Oman coast from the Greeks by 250 BC, valuing the Persian Gulf outlet as a sea route. Parthian dynasties ruled northern Oman for the next five centuries.

During the Parthian and Sasanid eras the province of northern Oman came to be known by its Middle Persian name, Mazun. There is again a connection with Yemen, as the name Mazun is said to originate in the “great seafaring race [who] were descended from Mazen bin Azd”

(Miles 1994:4); “the Mazen are of South Arabia and are Azdites” who settled in Musandam “and were succeeded there by the Shihiyeen [Shihuh], a small tribe” (Miles 1994:5).

The first-century navigational guide, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, recalls the “great mountains” of Musandam called Asabon (§36). Ptolemy’s map of Arabia of circa 150 AD labels the Musandam peninsula as ‘Asaborum’. Cape Musandam is called Asabon Promontory, and the indigenous people ‘Asabi’ who were noted as *ichthyophagi*, ‘fish-eaters.’ The appellation may recall the Sabaeans, who were dispersed from Yemen throughout the Arabian peninsula as early as the second pre-Christian century. South Arabian sources record that the first major breach of the Ma’rib dam in Yemen took place in 145 BC during the war between Raydan people and the Sabaean Kingdom, and the subsequent flood and mass emigration of Sabaeans. Jayakar noted the tradition of Sabaean origin of the Shihuh (1902:247), and Bayshak (2002:12) also remarks on many linguistic similarities between Shihhi and Sabaean. The modern capital of Musandam, Khasab, bears in its Kumzari pronunciation the conceivable meaning *xa-sab*, ‘house of the Sab.’ The 16<sup>th</sup>-century Portuguese name for the town, *Casapo*, also includes the definite suffix *-ō* commonly used for names in Kumzari. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century British political agent S.B. Miles concurs, commenting on Ptolemy, “He gives the name of Cape Mussendom [Musandam] not incorrectly as ‘Asabon Promontorium,’ a name which has survived in Khasab, a hamlet in a small valley, probably the residence in former times of a tribe so called” (Miles 1994:10). Schoff’s translation of the Periplus (1912:148) notes that ‘Asabi’ is the tribal name of the Beni Assab, “a people very different from the other tribes of Oman, living in exclusion in their mountains; and whom Zwemer (*Oman and Eastern Arabia*, in the Bulletin of the American Geographical Society, 1907; pp. 597-606) considers a remnant of the aboriginal race of South Arabia, their speech being allied to the Mahri [Mehri] and both to the ancient Himyaritic; who were probably not as Zwemer thinks, “driven northward by Semitic migration,” but represent rather a relic of that pre-Joktanite southward migration around this very coast” (Schoff 1912:148). Thomas (1929:73) further observes that the name of the Sabaeans is preserved in the mountain village of Sibi of Musandam.

Writing in the first century, the author of *The Periplus* states “Sailing through the mouth of the Gulf after a six-days’ course there is another market town of Persia called Ommana” (§36). Northern Oman was part of the Persian empire in the first century; thus Ommana is a reference to a municipality under Persian rule, rather than exclusively the north coast of the Gulf. Ommana possibly indicates Dibba (Potts 2012:132), as the mouth of the Gulf is likely a reference to the Strait of Hormuz, and after six days’ sailing one would reach Dibba. Dibba was a major market town, and excavations there have yielded Parthian glazed pottery in gravesites from the same era (Potts 2012:133). Pliny (23-79 AD; Pliny, Book VI:xxxii, 150) also mentions both Batrasave (probably Ras al-Khaimah) and Dabenegoris Regio (probably Dibba, Hawley 1984:15-16).

### 1.3.3 Arrival of the Azd

The inhabitants of Dibba in the first few centuries of the common era were potentially both Azd and Persian. Kumzari traditions assert as their ancestor Malik bin Fahm (r. 196-231 AD), a chief of the Qahtani tribe of Azd of Yemen (Jayakar 1902:247). In the latter half of the second century AD, the Ma’rib dam in Yemen broke again, and Malik bin Fahm led a group of Azdi refugees to look for land in Parthian-ruled Oman. The Azdis first stationed at al-Jowf (an interior town in the valley between Adam and Bahila) and challenged the

Persians in Sohar (the Persians' coastal capital city) to prepare for war (Ross 1874:114). A battle was fought on the desert plain of Salut near Nizwa. Eventually the Azdis prevailed, and the Persians agreed to a truce to go to Persia within one year (Ross 1874:114) (however, at that time "Persia" included northern Oman). Instead, they wrote letters to the Shah of Persia, who sent military reinforcements in time for another battle at the conclusion of the truce. The Azd under Malik bin Fahm won, and this time the Persians who escaped capture "left Sohar with their families and sailed to Fars" (al-Rawas 2000:29). Malik bin Fahm sent out Azdis to occupy various regions of Oman (Ross 1874:116), expelling Persians in the coastal cities of Oman and eventually gaining ground throughout the country (Ulrich 2008:64). However, Azdite control of Oman only lasted during the lifetime of Malak bin Fahm; after his death the Persians returned, this time under Sasanian rule.

Malik bin Fahm was killed accidentally by the arrow of his youngest and favourite son, Sulayma. Fearing the wrath of his brothers, Sulayma fled to Jashk Island and then to Carmania (modern Fars, Makran, Kerman, and the eastern Arabian peninsula) where he overthrew a local ruler and reigned in his place (Ulrich 2008:83). The *Annals of Oman* record that Sulayma married a Persian woman and had ten sons, but after his death, "his sons were disunited, and the Persians expelled them, and some went to 'Omān" (Ross 1874:118). His descendants, the Banu Salima, came to rest on the Island of Kish, where they were called the Julanda bin Karkar dynasty (Wilkinson 2010:44); the Banu Salima were the basis of Yaqut's reference to Kish as the residence of the prince of Oman.

#### 1.3.4 *Sasanian era*

The first Sasanian king, Ardashir I (r. 224-241), wished to divert the lucrative Indian ocean trade dealing in silk, spices, pearls, and frankincense from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf. In order to do this "it was essential to secure a base in northern Oman" (al-Rawas 2000:27). Dibba became known as a Sasanian garrison town along with Sohar, and the Persians founded agricultural colonies in Oman organised around a system of *qanat* / *falaj* irrigation channels, still of cultural importance today (Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:44). Archaeological evidence of Sasanian occupation near Khasab, and in villages on the west coast of Musandam, and on Goat Island (*Jazirat al-Ghanam*, Kumzari: *Jēzurtō*) on the north coast of Musandam, dates to the early 4<sup>th</sup> century (de Cardi 1972, 2013, Costa 1991:43-44, King 2001:74). Both Goat Island and Julfar (now Ras al-Khaimah) remained as Sasanian-era garrisons well into the early Islamic period, used to watch over trade routes to Fars (Ulrich 2008:77, 2011:381). Sasanian market towns were established all along the southeastern coast of Arabia, and maritime trade flourished in the third to seventh centuries.

In the same era, conflicts developed between Christian confessions of the Byzantines and the Church of the East, each suspecting the other of collusion with imperial politics amid the Roman-Sasanian wars. The Byzantines counted Ethiopia and south Arabia within their sphere of influence, while Persian and Arab Christians were found all around the Gulf. Prominent among mentions of the Musandam area in historical documents are Yohannon, Bishop of Mazun in 424 AD, Gabriel, Bishop of Hormuz in 540, David, Bishop of Mazun in 544, Bishop Samuel in 576, and Stephen, Bishop of Mazun in 676 (King 2001:59-61). Bishops of Mazun are referred to as attending synods in the Gulf as late as 840 (Ross 1874:75-79). The seat of the bishopric, Bet Mazunaye, was at Sohar. Numerous sites of former Eastern churches and religious communities have been discovered in the region, and Dibba may have been the place at "the mouth of the Persian Gulf" (Neale 1873:132) or "at the chief maritime town on the Persian gulph" (de Perceval 1853:14) where the Himyari king

Hassan Tobba established a third church in 356. Dibba remained an important city into the 7<sup>th</sup> century, according to Ibn Habib, possessing a large market that drew people from India and China, as well as points west. Yaqut noted that Dibba was called the capital of Oman at that time (Yaqut vol. II, p.435-439 in Hawley 1970:63).

#### 1.3.4.1 Dibba and Malik

Dibba was a vital port for centuries because it provided access for the monsoon trade of the Arabian Sea to the towns of the Persian Gulf, whilst avoiding the rocky waters of the Strait of Hormuz. The mountains encompassing the Strait were considered sacred because they seemed to have the power of death. Sailors thus relied on rituals to ensure their protection through the Musandam route, such as throwing dates into the sea, sacrificing goats, or releasing small model boats as ransom for the safe passage of their own. Epithets of the Strait, both historical and persisting to the present: ‘the lion’s jaws’, the ‘father of hell’, ‘the whirlpool’, attest to difficult navigation through sea-facing mountains and dangerous narrow passages (Casey-Vine 1995:376; Rowland 2006). Cape Musandam “has always been regarded with dread by Arab navigators passing in and out of the Gulf on account of the gales of wind and the strong currents that prevail here” (Miles 1994:449).

Caravans from Dibba avoided the dangerous sailing conditions of Hormuz. Recalling even the past century, a Shihhi observes, “When the merchants had brought their goods, these goods were loaded onto our camels and donkeys and we took the laden animals across to the towns of the Gulf coast; it took three days and nights from here to Dubai. This was quicker and easier for the merchants than the sailing boats making their way round Cape Musandam” (Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:265). Another Shihhi from Dibba explained that “The seas at Musandam are choppy, there are whirlpools and strong currents, and the winds change quickly. No one liked sailing there. That was the reason for boats to use this coast” (Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:55). An elderly boatbuilder from Khasab concurred, “People really didn’t like sailing through Bab Musandam, that was the reason for Dibba’s success, they could unload there and the goods were carried across” (Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:423).

In pre-Islamic times, Oman was under Sasanian control, and “Dibba served as the east coast point of a ‘Late Pre-Islamic triangle’ which also included ed-Dur on the west coast and Mleiha in the interior” (Ulrich 2008:86). Sasanian governance over the Arabian trade routes was “reinforced by a degree of direct military occupation, notably in Oman” (Wilkinson 2010:55). Sohar was their centre, with its fort at Damsetjerd, well-situated to protect trade into the Gulf from the “pirate lairs in the creeks round the Musandam Peninsula” (Wilkinson 2010:57). Another Persian governor in Rustaq, the *marzban*, watched over provincial affairs of Oman, appointing local tribal leaders called Julanda as his agents in the interior (Wilkinson 2010:61). Julanda collected taxes in Dibba and Tuwam (Al Ain/Buraimi) and reported to the Sasanian marzban (Potts 2012:141; Shoufani 1973:156). The Julanda “was allowed to retain Nezwa as his capital, and to continue to exercise jurisdiction over the Arab tribes, on condition of his acknowledgement of the vassality to Persia and agreeing to pay tribute” (Miles 1994:27). Regional equivalents of Sasanian agents were retained in Bahrain, Yemen, Mazun (northern Oman), and Kerman (Wilkinson 2010:62). The Persians kept peace with “a force of 4000 warriors in Oman and a deputy with the kings of the Al-Azd” (Miles 1994:26-27). On the northeast coast, “both the Julandas and a crowned individual held influence at Dibba, with the former performing administrative functions [i.e. tax collection] and the latter providing military security [i.e. caravan protection]” (Ulrich 2008:86). The

‘crowned individual’, called *Dhu al-Taj*, was the Azd chief appointed by the Persians in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Laqit bin Malik.

The Arabic title *malik* was given to Arab chiefs appointed by the Persians at the borders of the empire (Shoufani 1973:28,36). In Yemen of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the *muluk* were a ruling class brought about by Persian occupation; also known as *abnā*, they were the offspring of Persian fathers and Arab mothers (Shoufani 1973:35). The Kinda tribe of Yemen and Oman also held the traditional appellation *malik*.

It was customary for Persian rulers to invest imperial authority in their provincial agents in Arabia by crowning them (Lecker 2003:61), for which agents were called *Dhu al-Taj*. The *taj*, a jeweled headpiece, had a Persian connotation (Lecker 2003:64), while the equivalent crown of the northern Arabs of Medina was a turban. It is pointed out concerning the north Arabian nomadic societies that “there was a notable hostility towards loyalty to ‘kings’, or ‘possessors of the crown’, in pre-Islamic Arabian culture” because of the crown’s “symbolic subjugation to state power” (Marsham 2009:89, 140). The north Arabians may have also resented the royal status of certain south Arabian dynastic tribes, such as the Kinda (de Perceval 1853:15). This was reflected in an ongoing dispute between the north and south Arabians regarding the role of kingship (Lecker 2003:58-59). Indeed, it may have been primarily this contested role between the Julanda, newly agents of Medina, and the Malik, tribes with south Arabian ties, that later sparked the war in Dibba.

In practical terms, the role of Dhu al-Taj bestowed on Laqit was concerned with protecting the caravan routes (Ulrich 2008:85). Similarly, his contemporary Malik Dhu al-Taj in Yemen was a Christian named Hawdhah, who oversaw the *latimah* royal caravan from Persia to Yemen. Another, mentioned as the Malik of Bahrain, was Nu’man al-Tamimi. It was to these *muluk* whom the prophet wrote letters in 628 AD, calling on them to convert to Islam (Lecker 2003:58).

Laqit was ‘crowned’ for his loyalty to Persia, and he was a Malik through his Kinda tribal heritage. By Laqit’s day, the Kinda had been settled in the region of northern Oman for at least a century. However, they were among “the last of the major Azd migrations, and as such they retained quite genuine attachments with clans in western Arabia.” (Wilkinson 2010:49).

#### 1.3.4.2 South Arabian kinship and migration

In the mid-fifth century, the king of the Himyars and Bani Kinda and also of the Modhar (descendants of Maadd of Mecca), was Hojr Akil al-Morar (de Perceval 1853:15). It was the Dibba (meaning ‘lizard’) tribe of Modhar of Nejd, Yamama, that had founded the town of Dibba (Miles 1994:5). Persia controlled all of Arabia through the Azd dynasty in Hira, the capital of the Lakhmid kingdom. In 525 AD, Hojr Akil al-Morar’s grandson, Harith ibn Amr, conquered and became king of Hira, extending his dominion to Oman. Four years later, Harith and the royal family were killed, the Bani Harith were scattered, and some of them “established a position in the Diba area” (Wilkinson 2010:41). Some of Harith’s remaining relatives stayed in Hira, some went to Yamama, and some went to other shores of the Persian Gulf. Harith’s brother Imr al-Qays went back to Yemen; his descendants were the Bani Amr.

Qays’ grandfather, Hojr Akil al-Morar, had made an alliance with the Byzantines in 500 (Robin 2012:282), and in 540, Qays was under pressure from the Aksumite ruler of Yemen to

side with Constantinople against the Persians (Robin 2012:291). Instead, following the Najran massacre and subsequent wars between Aksum and the Persians, the Kinda in Yemen revolted against the rule of the Byzantine-allied Aksumites under Abraha (Marsham 2009:34-35; Robin 2012:292). Under threat of annihilation by Abraha's armies, the Kinda in 547 were forced to capitulate and swear an oath of allegiance. During the battle, the Ma'rib dam again collapsed, and one of the stipulations of the truce was that Abraha could take Kinda hostages to work on repairing the dam (Marsham 2009:34-35).

The cities of Dibba, Hira, Yamama, and Najran maintained associations through their common South Arabian heritage, in particular their inhabitants belonging to the Bani Harith. Qaryat al-Fāw (300 km north-northeast of Najran), on the trade route between Najran and Hira, is considered to have been the royal seat of the Kinda dynasty from the third century (Beeston 2013, Robin 1988:168-169). The Bani Harith of Hira and the Bani Harith of Najran shared many connections and a common Azd ancestor, Cahlan. Bani Harith of Najran's lineage was Ka'b, 'Amr, 'Ula, Jald, Madhhij, and Cahlan. Bani Harith of Hira's lineage was 'Amr, Hojr Akil al-Morar, Mu'awiyya, Thawr, Kinda, and Cahlan. In the fifth century there were both wars and alliances, and through intermarriage their lineages crossed at various points. The cities had close connections in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries; "Hira was an Arab city which had close relations with Najran... a large section of the population of Hira were South Arabian tribes related to the Arabs of Najran" (Shahid 1989:366). Christians of both confessions, Byzantine and Church of the East, inhabited Najran in the fifth and sixth centuries (Robin 2012:282); after the massacre by Yusuf (Dhu Nawas) of the Bani Harith in Najran in 523, survivors fled to Hira (de Perceval 1853:66), where Harith ibn Amr took the throne the following year. Some stayed or returned later to Najran, as a hadith notes that the delegation from Najran to the prophet of Islam in 630 included a caravan of camels led by nobles of the Bani Harith bin Ka'b, who were Azdi (Shahid 1989:400): the Kinda king of Najran Abdul Masih and the bishop Abdul Harith (M.Z.Khan 1980:247).

When the Sasanian emperor Shah Khosrow I Anushirvan ('Kisra', r. 531-79) defeated the Bani Harith in 529 and restored the Lakhmid successor Mundhir to Hira, he also appointed him "as the king of the Arabs living between 'Umān, Baḥrayn and Yamāma, to al-Ṭā'if and the rest of the Ḥijāz" (Lecker 2002:115). In Oman, Mundhir retained a military governor to reinforce his sovereignty (Wilkinson 2010:49-50), perhaps in recognition of the Kinda connection.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, a 'third wave' of Azd migrants to Oman were the Azd Shanu'ah. They are thought to have been descended from Nadab/Ziyad bin Shams and to be the offspring of Uthman bin Nasr (Ulrich 2008:71, Wilkinson 2010:32-33). The Azd Shanu'ah migrated to the northern mountains and settled in Dibba (Lancaster & Lancaster 2011: 492), where they formed a strong alliance with other immigrant Azd tribes: the Hajr Imran, the Bani Sama, and the Bani Harith Malik bin Fahm (Wilkinson 2010:51). Imran had come to northern Oman via Bahrain, and Sama went to Bahrain after fleeing Mecca. The son of Imran married the daughter of Sama, and their offspring were called the Atik (Wilkinson 2010:47), the tribe that settled at Dibba (King 2001:79). Thus in his own lineage, the Azdite sheikh Laqit bin Malik represented a unity of Dibba residents: the Kinda, the Bani Harith, and the Atik (Miles 1994:34; al-Rawas 2000:48).

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Azd Shanu'ah were to be found as seafarers working the coastal trade with the Persians, while the Azd 'Uman resided in the interior as the Persians' vassals, the Julanda (Ulrich 2008:90; Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:546). The Atik and Julanda rose to

prominence and were two of the principal Azd families in pre-Islamic Oman (Miles 1994:4; King 2001:79). The Shanu'ah, Atik, and Harith alliance of Azd tribes became the responders to the *Yā al Malik!* war-cry that began the first battle of Dibba against the Julanda a century later.

#### 1.3.4.3 The seventh century

At the time of the Dibba wars, the Sasanians controlled a vast area including Egypt and the kingdom of Yemen to the south (called the Ispabad of Nimruz, Potts 2008:205) and Bahrain and Iraq/Arabia to the north. The Lakhmid kingdom was ruled by the Persians through their governor Azadhbeh from 611-633 AD. The Persians were always wary of Arab uprisings in their territories, but their defeat at the hands of the Byzantines after 622 hindered their ability to give stipends to the Julanda (Shoufani 1973:163). Shah Khosrow II Parviz, son of Hormizd, was assassinated in 628 and the leadership fell into chaos, with a succession of rulers claiming the throne then being deposed by others. Khosrow's daughter Puran, whom the Arabs called Būrān Shahrbanu 'empress', reigned 629-631 (Shoufani 1973:162). "Her rule was a period of consolidation of imperial power and rebuilding of the empire. She attempted to consolidate the empire and relieve the population of heavy taxes" (Daryae 2012:201), and she negotiated a peace treaty with the Byzantines. However, "when the Prophet heard the news that the people of Persia had made the daughter of Khosrau their Queen, he said, 'Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler'" (M.M.Khan 2003:*Bukhari* vol.9 book 88 no.219 p.171). The Prophet's grandson, Hussein, later married Puran and among their offspring were several imams of the Shi'a sect. But the pronouncement against Puran had prompted Arab tribal raids on Persian controlled areas, including Hira (Shoufani 1973:162).

#### 1.3.5 *Oman at war*

Fearing the loss of the active support of the Persians and the impending reduction of tax revenue, the Julanda brothers governing Oman, Abd and Jayfar, found their authority being challenged by locals (Shoufani 1973:157). They were also eyeing the markets and the lucrative maritime trade through Sohar and Dibba, then overseen for the Persians by Laqit bin Malik, whose power in Oman was equal to theirs (Shoufani 1973:88). Indeed, "the expulsion of the Persians from the soil of Oman had long been an object of ambition to the Julanda chiefs" (Miles 1994:33). Laqit bin Malik also noticed the waning power of the Julanda, and his rise personified the unrest of the people of Oman. He is said to have "preached after the manner of the prophet," and supporters flocked to him (Ulrich 2008:94). Most of the tribes in Oman did not support the Julanda, and began to revolt against Jayfar and Abd (Shoufani 1973:98-99). "Most likely these agents, knowing that their authority was deteriorating, turned to Medina in desperate quest of support" as a way to gain control over their rivals (Shoufani 1973:157).

In the year 630, the Prophet sent Amr al-'As to Rustaq, and, as Miles (1994:34) describes, "an ultimatum to the Persians to embrace Islam and to renounce the claim to suzerainty over the country was disdainfully refused." Amr then petitioned the Julanda brothers, who allied with Medina. Jayfar and Abd sent word of their surrender to Medina, to Mahr and Shihr in southern Oman and Dibba in northern Oman (Ross 1874:118-119). "A contest ensued in which the Sasanian Governor Mazkan was killed and his troops worsted" (Miles 1994:34). The remainder fled to Sohar, where their resistance was met with attack by the Julanda. The



Persians were besieged in the castle of Damsetjerd, and finally reached a truce, agreeing to relinquish their gold and silver and property and leave the country (Potts 2012:144).

Some accounts describe the Omani rebels against the Julanda as Persians: “Jeifar sent messengers to Maheyreh, and Shihr in the south, and to Daba [Dibba], and the furthest limits of ‘Omān to the north; and at his invitation all the people accepted el-Islam, save the Persians who dwelt in ‘Omān” (Ross 1874:118-119). However, those who resisted the Julanda and armies from Medina were also Azd. The people of Dibba “may well have resented the fact that it was the Julanda who collected the tax from this *sūq al-‘arab* in pre-Islamic times, and that their authority continued to be recognized under the new regime”, and this despite the traditional authority possessed by the Bani Harith as Kinda *muluk* and the leader of one of its most important clans (Laqit) being crowned by the Sasanians (Wilkinson 2010:85).

While the Bani Harith of Oman were gathering under the leadership of Laqit bin Malik in 631, the Bani Harith of Najran countered an army from Medina by sending a delegation of nobles, government ministers, and the bishop to Medina agreeing to a peace, but declining submission to the Muslims. Included in the delegation were Azd clans from Hira. In the same year, the Kinda of Bani Amr in Yemen, descendants of the brother of Harith, king of Hira, also refused to pay taxes to Medina (Donner 1993:180; al-Mad’aj 1988:50). The Prophet cursed the Kinda kings for their rebellion (Donner 1993:180), and sent Muslim armies to Nujayr under his commander Ziyad to besiege and then slaughter them (Wilkinson 2010:79; Donner 1993:181-182). Some Bani Amr escaped to Oman, where they begged their Kinda relatives, the Bani Harith, to rescue them (al-Mad’aj 1988:50-51).

The death of the Prophet in 632 spurred more independence movements throughout Arabia. Some believed that “Muḥammad was not a true prophet or he would not have died” (Wilkinson 2010:78). In Oman, Laqit bin Malik Dhu at-Taj was proclaimed a prophet and summoned his followers to rise up against the newly-declared caliph of Medina, Abu Bakr (Miles 1994:35). Omanis were “presuming that the disintegration of the new government at Al-Medina had taken place simultaneously with the death of Mohammed” (Miles 1994:36; al-Mad’aj 1988:51). Refusing to pay taxes demanded by Medina through their Julanda agents (al-Rawas 2000:45), Laqit’s followers ejected Jayfar and ‘Abd<sup>10</sup>. Laqit “managed to extend his control over the whole of Oman, forcing the two Julanda brothers and their followers to take refuge in the mountains, from where they wrote to Abu Bakr pleading with him to send help as soon as possible” (al-Rawas 2000:43; Ulrich 2008:94).

The Caliph responded by sending troops to subdue local uprisings. His three commanders met at Jebel Akhdar and then dispersed on their missions: Ḥudhayfa bin Mihsan the Himyarite to Oman, Arfaja to Yemen, and ‘Ikrama to Yamama (Wilkinson 2010:42). The Bani Amr in Ma’rib continued to resist, and Ziyad, the commander of Medina armies there, requested that ‘Ikrama be transferred to Yemen to assist him in crushing the Kinda (Donner 1993:182). Ḥudhayfa demanded that Oman pay taxes to Medina, but the Bani Harith refused with cries of ‘*Yā al Mālik*’ to hail their kin (Wilkinson 2010:83). Omanis led by Laqit bin Malik prevailed in the battles of 632-633. The Julanda retreated to Sohar and Laqit to Dibba (Donner 1993:152; al-Rawas 2000:47).

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<sup>10</sup> The Julanda brothers were exiled either to the red mountain of Rijām on the western border of Oman (Donner 1993:153) or to Jebel al-Akhḍar (Wilkinson 2010:42, 80).

When they received the plea for help from the Bani Amr, the Bani Harith in Oman waged another campaign to prevent Ikrama from attacking their Kinda “blood relatives” (al-Rawas 2000:44; Ulrich 2008:95): “after ‘Ikrama moved on Mārib in his Yemen campaign, the people of Dabā learnt that he was fighting their *bani ‘amm*, the Kinda, and the tribes of al-Yaman. So they drove out Ḥudhayfa who had been appointed ‘āmil by Abū Bakr and he fled and took refuge with ‘Ikramah” (Wilkinson 2010:81).

#### 1.3.5.1 The last battle of Dibba

The final battle of Dibba occurred in 633. Omanis led by Laqit bin Malik Dhu at-Taj were massacred by Ḥudhayfa and the Medina armies in one of the largest battles of the Arabian wars (Rowland 2006). Mohammed ibn Tarir al-Tabari’s history records that 10000 were killed and 4000 were taken prisoner; the market was looted and the town was almost completely destroyed (King 2001:83). A graveyard occupying a plain behind modern-day Dibba is said to be the resting-place of the fallen of this battle.

Of the Dibba rebellion, the poet ‘Abbad al-Naji said,

“By my life, Laqit b. Malik was met by an evil that would make foxes shamefaced. He challenged in battle Abu Bakr and those who praise [God], whereupon there were thrown down two strands of his mighty torrent. The first one did not thwart him, and the enemies were not defeated; but then his cavalry took away the straying camels.” (Donner 1993:155)

#### 1.3.5.2 Dibba refugees

After their defeat in 633, the survivors of the battle of Dibba who were not captured became *shihhi*, seeking refuge in the mountains or across the sea. Shihuh people of the present day recall that they were termed “shihhi” by Arabs who settled in Dibba after the 633 war because they refused to pay taxes to Abu Bakr (Dostal 1972:2; Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:178,546). A local historian in Dibba Bai’ah confirms this in the oral history of the Shihuh of Dibba Bai’ah: “The story of people here refusing to pay *zakat* to Abu Bakr is right. That was why those people became known as Shihuh, they had *shahha*-ed, they withheld the *zakat*. These people owned the land here then and before then, and they were Shanuah ‘Azd” (Lancaster & Lancaster 2011: 492). Several visitors have noted the presence of pre-Islamic shrines in Musandam in place of mosques, even to modern times (Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:39,166; Costa 1991:235).

After 633, as instructed by Abu Bakr, the captives were taken from Dibba to Medina, and Ḥudhayfa stayed in Dibba to quell any further rebellion there (Miles 1994:38). Thus it was not safe for the *Shihhi* to return to Dibba for many years.

#### 1.3.6 *Beyond Dibba*

Khasab and the Hormuz region on the opposite coast, areas currently inhabited by Kumzaris, were not taken by Islamic forces until 650-651 AD when the governor of Basra, Abdallah bin Amir, had already attacked much of southern Iran (including Shiraz and Bam) from Bahrain (Rowland 2006).

In centuries subsequent to the Dibba war, there was much traversing the Gulf and Persians sometimes occupied Oman; by those times they were speaking New Persian, leaving Kumzari behind with its mixture of Arabian and Middle Persian anachronisms.

The mountains of Musandam would have provided a linguistic safe haven for Azd and Persian refugees from Oman; similar remote mountainous regions that were conquered by Muslim armies did not experience Arab mass migration and consequent language displacement: “the same thing applied until recently to parts of the heartland areas of the present-day Arab world that for topographical reasons were less attractive to tribal migrants from Arabia and hence never became settled by them and arabicized” (Holes 2004:36).

Several other factors confirm the languages spoken in Musandam as being elusive. The difficult geography of Musandam makes it an ideal refuge. In later ages its inhabitants were accused of piracy as their boats hid in the deep fjords, evading British and Dutch patrols. The remote coasts of Musandam did not become major centres due to their lack of both a hospitable port and connections to the interior (Costa 1991:44). Observers throughout the centuries have noted that no one would go there, especially to the mountaintops, unless they had no choice but to live in such inhospitable circumstances. The traditional locked houses (*beit qufl*) of the Shihuh themselves are testaments: “Some of these houses have underground rooms that were refuges, and one is said to have a tunnel going down to the sea” ((Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:89). Even in the present day, Kumzar and other Shihuh villages are only accessible by boat; traversing the terrain is too arduous, despite attempts at road-building.

Such circumstances of isolation have forced the Shihuh to be pragmatic in their economy; “Musandam stands out as a distinct enclave both physically and socio-economically, where a small population developed remarkable skills for a combined use of the limited available resources” (Costa 1991:222). Azd brought with them agricultural techniques they practised in Yemen, based on monsoon rains (MacDonald 2009:3) and irrigation involving “elaborate and extensive systems of catchment, conservation, and distribution of water” (Costa 1991:123; Lancaster & Lancaster 2011:124). Likewise, for practical reasons they incorporated foreign terminology to their social and economic advantage: Hindi and Baluchi for maritime trade, Portuguese for sailing, English for pearling and oil, Gulf Arabic for fishing, and Omani Arabic for politics and government work (Slot 1993:46; Rowland 2006). In Kumzari, these languages were overlaid on a substrate of both Middle Persian and Arabian structures.

### *1.3.7 Looking back and looking forward: The mixed language*

A discussion of the history of the Kumzari language must account for the languages that were in overlapping use from the time the Azdites settled in Oman until the Persian empire in Oman declined. The battle of Dibba thus signifies a pivotal incident in Musandam’s linguistic record (cf. Holes 2006:1932). The Shihuh, as refugees from that war, had dual identities to contend with: the likely intense pressure to incorporate the language of Dibba’s occupiers, and the perhaps equally fervent intention to keep their identity as rebels distinct from the northern Arabs of Medina. Geographical isolation combined with the ‘negative identification’ of Kumzari with outside groups would explain its persistence as a mixed language for so long (Bakker 1997:209).

Which languages were spoken in Musandam and its population sources in the seventh century? A.F.L. Beeston, in his 1981 article on languages of pre-Islamic Arabia says that “the area roughly coinciding with the modern Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates south of Bahrayn is virtually a blank for the purposes of this study” (p. 178). Holes agrees with regard to Arabicisation, that “In the specific case of the Arabian peninsula, the historical details of this process are extremely sparse” (Holes 2006:1933). However, many circumstantial clues may be gleaned both from the language itself and from the historical context.

Although the lingua franca of 6<sup>th</sup>-century Hira may have been Arabic or an Arabian language, its literary language was Syriac (Bosworth 1983:598)<sup>11</sup>. In pre-Islamic Mazun, the lingua franca was Aramaic or Syriac (Holes 2006:1934) and Aramaic represented “the mother tongue of part of the population” (Robin 2012:252) and “the local language of prestige” in northern Oman before the conquest (MacDonald 2000:36). In the first few centuries AD, the Kinda in their capital city of Qaryat traditionally spoke Minaic, Saba’ic, and Old Arabic, based on inscriptions written in the Sabaean alphabet (Robin 2012:252), and Saba’ic was also the language of the Himyarite kingdom (Robin 2012:248). In later centuries yet before the Islamic conquest, the Kinda spoke a transitional variety, considering that “the inscriptions show a blend, in varying degrees, of South Arabian terminology, grammar, and orthography, with a local language” (Robin 1988:169).

Based on a tradition of Mohammed instructing the Himyaris to translate from their own language into Arabic, Muir (1861:II) contends that the Himyarites of the 7<sup>th</sup> century spoke their own language that was not Arabic. This would have meant a South Arabian language, according to the customary label “Himyarī” in Arabic sources to refer to non-Arabic languages of the Peninsula.

Alongside the South Arabian languages, Middle Persian may have been spoken as well in Hira, Najran, and in Yemen by the ethnic Persian-Himyarite *abnā’* ruling classes, as it had been in Oman during the Sasanian era and earlier. What became of the Persians exiled from Oman after the 631 siege of Damsetjerd may be surmised from their history. Out of Sohar, the Julanda forced the Persians northward, as well as pushing Laqit and his Omani followers north to Dibba. The Persians had two choices: either to flee to Persia, or to integrate with the local population to ensure that their residence in Musandam would not be questioned. In the years before the war, with the Julanda as their vassals, the Persians had been in control of the maritime trade of the entire South Arabian coast, from Dibba to Yemen, which thrived on the silk trade from Ceylon. Of the region, Dibba was “the chief town (*miṣr*) and the most important marketplace” (Donner 1993:154). Meanwhile, the Persian heartland was in the throes of a succession crisis; in such a climate Fars may not have welcomed, and may even have been suspicious or hostile toward erstwhile colonials. It is not unreasonable then to suggest that these Persians, who had been living in Oman for their entire lives as had their Sasanian and Parthian ancestors before them, may have retreated only to Musandam and not all the way to Fars. They may have continued fighting the Julanda alongside the Azd in Dibba, particularly if Laqit bin Malik Dhu al-Taj held any loyalty toward the Persians who had bestowed on him his crown and title (Ulrich 2008:96).

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<sup>11</sup> “The population of Hira comprised its townspeople, the *‘Ibād* “devotees”, who were Nestorian Christians using Syriac as their liturgical and cultural language, though Arabic was probably the language of daily intercourse.” (Bosworth 1983:598)

The linguistic facts of Kumzari speak to its evolution from both Middle Persian and Arabian. It is thus more likely that the Persian-like traits of the language were inherited from the Sasanians and Azdites who fled from the Dibba wars, rather than from Persians coming from Persia directly in centuries since then. In the latter case, Kumzari would have had more influence from New Persian, which was beginning to be spoken on the Iran side of the Gulf from the 8<sup>th</sup> century. On the contrary, Kumzari has both innovations not attested in the New Persian spoken on the Iranian mainland (e.g. Kumzari has developed penultimate-syllable stress; *b* has been replaced with *w* in contexts; all cases of *z* have become emphatic *z̤*), and conservatisms from Middle Persian where New Persian later diverged (e.g. Kumzari retains the *ē-ī* distinction, lacks *ezāfe* to link noun with adjective, preserves *w* where other varieties diversify into allophones, and has kept initial consonant clusters and the nominal suffix *-ag > -aḡ*). In modern New Persian, about 8% of core vocabulary (from the Swadesh 100 wordlist) is of Arabic origin, compared to 22% of Semitic core vocabulary in Kumzari; the proportion of Semitic-origin words rises to 60% when all items in the 4500 lexicon are included. As well, Kumzari's Semitic lexicon and structures are incorporated differently from those taken into New Persian. The study of other mixed languages provides a clue as to why this may have come about: "lexical manipulation is most effective precisely in the core vocabulary when its function is to express identity or to be secretive" (Mous 2003:91).

It is also not the case that Kumzari is a creole of Persian and Arabic, with simplified vocabulary and grammar tending to one or the other parent languages. Instead, Kumzari has developed a more elaborate integration and a completely enmeshed system in which neither parent language can be distinguished as pre-eminent.

An insight by Clive Holes (2004:29) regarding the situation of Arabic contact<sup>12</sup> at the time of the Muslim conquests applies equally to Musandam:

"A more plausible explanation [than Versteegh's creolisation hypothesis of Arabic dialectology] of the linguistic facts we have is simply to assume that the indigenous population learned Arabic from the conquerors *as a foreign language*, without the need to break down its structure. What we know about the immediate aftermath of the conquests is that the initial need was to set up an administrative and fiscal system in the abandoned towns, a task that the Arabs initially seem to have been content to leave to what remained of the local government after the Byzantines and Persians had left. This class of clerks was obviously literate and, in Egypt and Iraq, bilingual in the local language and either Greek or Persian; in Syria, Greek was the language of government. Such people, already accomplished language learners, were now facing a need to learn to communicate in speech (if not for some while yet in writing) with their Arab masters: why could they not have learned to do this directly, perhaps with the help of local bilinguals who knew Arabic? After all, as we have already noted, the circumstances were propitious: there had been contact with Arabic-speaking visitors and settlers for many centuries in all the conquered areas, although mainly outside the cities. It may well be that, immediately after the conquests, ephemeral forms of "kitchen" or "pidgin" Arabic arose as monolingual tradesmen and farmers struggled to do business with the new arrivals in the circumscribed contexts of buying, selling, and the daily round; but, in the towns at least, which is where the Arabs in Egypt and Syria were mainly concentrated and rapidly became settled in considerable

<sup>12</sup> See also the discussion of evolving Arabic dialects in Al-Jallad 2009:529-530 and 2013.

numbers, there is every reason to suppose that, out of sheer self-interest if nothing else, the local townsmen would have set about learning to speak Arabic back to Arabs as it was spoken to them.”

Besides the possibility of a mixed language community before the Dibba wars, the Kumzari language may have arisen in the years immediately following 633 out of necessity among two surviving language communities isolated on Musandam. Despite it being “virtually impossible to chart the historical development of diglossia with any certainty in any area of the Arabic-speaking world” (Holes 2006:1935), in the case of Kumzari, at some point a situation of balanced bilingualism (Aikhenvald 2006:52) must have emerged. Mixed languages are known to arise in such contexts: either a mixed linguistic group in northern Oman before Islam “with mixed households accompanying the formation of new ethnic identities” (Matras & Bakker 2003:14), or upon the flight of the Shihhi after the Dibba wars: “through rapid acculturation leading to the adoption of a hybrid group identity” (Matras & Bakker 2003:14). The new mixture subsequently becomes “used as a native language, independently of speakers’ knowledge of any of its source or ancestor languages” (Matras & Bakker 2003:2). For Kumzari people today, language persists as a large part of their identity as a separate ethnic group; elders are steadfast in pointing out that their language is neither Persian nor Arabic. The majority of the population, including women, children, and older people, do not speak any other language.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike other mixed languages (Bakker 1997: 8-10,133; Mous 2003:10,86), Kumzari does not use code-switching or parallel lexicon with source languages. There is not a lesser or greater degree of mixing among the speech of different groups; rather, the language is uniformly mixed in a standard across the community of speakers.

In mixed languages, despite it being counter-intuitive to the outside observer, borrowed patterns are as common as borrowed forms (Aikhenvald 2006:40). Often both grammar and lexicon are split between the two etymological sources. In fact, this distinguishes mixed languages from creoles: while phonological similarities and loan words indicate language contact, mixed languages bear the traces of intense interaction in fundamental morphological changes and whole lexical categories being overtaken (Bakker 1997:11,194). In Kumzari this is certainly the case, with post-verbal and ‘double’ negation,<sup>14</sup> emphatic phonemes, adjectives, and deverbs resembling Arabian (Arabic or South Arabian), and SOV constituent order and simple verbs and pronouns following Middle Persian forms (Simeone-Senelle 1997:406).

The survival of Kumzari as a language over many centuries points to a balance of influence from its source languages in a bilingual or multilingual environment (Aikhenvald 2006:49),

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<sup>13</sup> That is, until children go to school, a system that has been in place for only two generations.

<sup>14</sup> Structures such as the post-constituent negative demonstrate the probability that certain information has been integrated from Iranian vocabulary into Semitic grammar, not vice versa, due to the tendency of mixed languages to utilise “the most ‘natural’ way of combining lexicon and grammar from two different source languages, i.e. in such a way that the subcomponents do not require much adaptation compared to their parent languages” (van Gijn 2009:93). van Gijn explains that mixed elements of ‘intertwined’ languages have “unit-meaning correspondence, i.e.: if a unit (noun root, verb root, etc.) functions in a relatively independent way in both parent languages in the sense that it is not highly dependent on or requires grammatical information in order to be interpretable, it can more easily be integrated into a foreign grammatical structure” (van Gijn 2009:93; see Post-constituent negation §10.1.1).

at least in its formative period; later, its persistence may be understood in light of the relative geographical isolation and challenging habitat of Musandam, among other factors.

The hypothesis that best explains the known facts of Kumzari, both historically and in the present context, and from both external and internal sources, is that the community represents some mixture of people that fled the battles of Dibba in 633 AD. With the shift of power in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century from a balance of Azdi and Sasanian to northern Arab, refugees from Oman would have had to leave or go into hiding. In any event, adapting to their new geographic and social context would have been essential to their vitality.

#### 1.4 The present study

The purpose of the present study is to examine the grammar of this little-known language and to discover its internal structure, with the ultimate aim of clarifying its position with regard to surrounding languages. By including Kumzari discourse and the poetics of oral literature, this study was also meant to be a state of the art for grammar writing, particularly for the description of the languages of oral societies. The object of this work is a reference grammar of the Kumzari language, including more detailed description of those properties of the language that are rarer or less understood. The present analysis has value for comparative studies, with Iranian languages, especially those of Middle Persian provenance, or in the Southwestern family, or geographically adjacent languages of the Gulf; as well as with the South Arabian languages and adjacent Semitic languages and dialects of northern Oman, about which much is being learned through current research.<sup>15</sup>

Field research was purposefully carried out according to ethnographic principles, in order to situate the grammatical analysis in its proper cultural environment. This entailed that fieldwork took place in situ, with native speakers, and using natural texts rather than elicitation as far as possible. Informants were of all ages, occupations, genders, and residences. Hypotheses were subjected to verificational grammatical tests (slot sentences, back-translation, clause correction, open-ended questions, context scenaria) and analyses were confirmed with native speakers.

Following a two-week field trip in 2006, fieldwork was carried out by the author during extended periods of residence in the fishing village of Kumzar and the date oasis town of Khasab in 2007-2010. Initial research yielded evidence that Kumzari has preserved a tradition of folktales, thus the *tiskan* genre was chosen as the subject of study for the basis of the grammar. Tiskans were chosen as a focus because of their status as a universal and prototypically Kumzari-language oral tradition, their elaborate and well-preserved nature among an expert class of elder storytellers, and their pervasive natural occurrence in informal social settings. Language data and examples in this study are taken from recorded and transcribed folktales and from field notes.

Since fieldwork was carried out primarily in Oman, the present study refers to Kumzari and not to the Laraki variety spoken in Iran. Most facts apply to Laraki; known divergences as observed during the author's short period of fieldwork on Larak Island are noted in the text.

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<sup>15</sup> See the Special Session on South Arabian Languages of the *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 2013, forthcoming.

Methodologically, this research follows Hymes' model of the ethnography of communication, using anthropological field methods in the study of language: "The essential method... is simply persistence in seeking systematic co-variation of form and meaning. The spirit of the method is 'structural' in the sense of Sapir's linguistics, 'emic' and 'ethnographic' in the sense of concern for valid description of the individual case" (Hymes 2004:10).