In this monograph, Roberta Morano re-examines Carl Reinhardt’s ‘Ein arabischer Dialekt gesprochen in ‘Oman und Zanzibar’ (1894), a key work in Omani Arabic dialectology until the 1980s, when new linguistic studies on the Arabic varieties spoken in Oman began to appear. The book provides a linguistic analysis of the Omani vernacular spoken in the al-ʿAwābī district (northern Oman), based on the comparison of native inhabitants’ speech with data collected by the author. This comparison reveals a wide diachronic linguistic variation in the region, and the threat that such variation poses to linguistic features specific to the vernacular. Organised in four chapters, the book introduces a sociolinguistic analysis of the Omani language, followed by an in-depth analysis of the al-ʿAwābī vernacular. The appendix includes two sample texts, fourteen proverbs and one traditional song. This study will be of interest to those working in the fields of Omani Arabic, historical and comparative linguistics, translation and interpretation, or those with an interest in how languages develop over time.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found here: www.openbookpublishers.com

Cover image: Wādī Bānī Kharūṣ (2018) by Roberta Morano
Cover design: Anna Gaetanino
CHAPTER 1: OMAN,
CORNERSTONE OF ARABIA

The Sultanate of Oman lies at the south-easternmost corner of the Arabian Peninsula, at the entrance of the Arabian Gulf. With a coastline slightly exceeding 3,000 kilometres in length, the Sultanate’s historical, linguistic, and cultural landscapes have been profoundly forged by its geography.

The country is surrounded by the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman on three sides, whilst the interior is isolated from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula by the vast sand desert of al-Rub‘ al-Khālī (الربع الخالي), also known as the Empty Quarter.¹

Essentially, the geographical structure of the country makes Oman almost an island (cf. Landen 1967; Wilkinson

¹ This is the largest sand desert in the world, extending into four countries (i.e., Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE). The northern border of the Empty Quarter is the mountain range of Jebel Ṭuwayq (جبل طويق in the Najd region, Saudi Arabia); its characteristic linear dunes can reach up to 400 metres in height. The name al-Rub‘ al-Khālī was unknown to the locals, who generally used the term ar-Rimāl ‘the sands’ (cf. Thesiger 2007, 116–54). A term found in Arabic sources referring to al-Rub‘ al-Khālī is al-Aḥqāf (e.g., al-Hamdānī uses it to indicate a valley between the Ḥaḍramawt and al-Mahrah; al-Bakrī associates it specifically with Ḥaḍramawt; and Yāqūt describes it as a district of Arabia, between Yemen and Oman). Almost nothing is known about the inner portion of this huge desert area; some of the tribes living on the borders of the Empty Quarter include al-Murra to the north-east; Banū Yās, Manāṣir, Rāšid, and ‘Awāmir to the east; Sa‘ar and Bayt Kaṭīr to the south; and Yām to the west (cf. King 2012).
1987). The northern core of this island is the chain of the al-Hajar Mountains (جبال الحجر), which extends for 650 kilometres from Ras Musandam (راس مسندم), in the Musandam Peninsula enclave, to Ras al-Hadd (رأس الحد), the easternmost point in the Arabian Peninsula. The peak of this chain is Jabal Akhdar (جبل أخضر, the ‘green mountain’), so called for the luxurious and brightly green landscapes.

Politically, the Sultanate is divided into eleven administrative governorates (مُحافَظَات), each one being further subdivided into provinces (وِلَايَات). However, the most significant social, linguistic, and geographical divide within Oman is between north and south.

Northern Oman includes the fertile coastal strip of al-Batinah, with its major cities, shipbuilding towns, and ports; the capital city Muscat; and the al-Hajar range. In this part of the country, near the Persian Gulf, the mountains, and the coast, the major cities of the Sultanate are located, i.e., Sohar (صحار), Rustaq (رستاق), Khabura (خборة), Sur (صور), Nizwa (نزوى), and ‘Ibrī (عبري).

Southern Oman, on the other hand, consists of three main areas: the coast, with fishing and farming settlements; the mountain range of Jabal al-Qamar (جبل القمر), which benefits

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This are Dakhiliyyah (الداخلية), Sharqiyyah (الشرقية), further divided in 2011 into North and South Sharqiyyah), al-Zāhira (الظاهرة), al-Batinah (الباطنة, further divided in 2011 into North and South al-Batinah), al-Buraymi (البريمي), al-Wusta (الوسطى), Musandam (مسندم), Muscat (مسقط), and Dhofar (ظفار).
from the monsoon weather;\textsuperscript{3} and the inner part, the vast desert of al-Rubʿ al-Khālī.

Linguistically, the southern region of Oman (i.e., Dhofar)—together with parts of Yemen and Saudi Arabia—is home to the group of Semitic languages known as the Modern South Arabian Languages (hereby, MSAL), which includes Mehri, Ḣarsūsi, Baṭḥari, Hobyot, Śḥerēt (aka Jibbali), and Soqotri. Inhabitants of Dhofar often speak Arabic only as a second language, having one of the MSAL as their mother tongue. The north of the country also hosts a great variety of linguistic diversity: for example, the numerous languages spoken by the various ethnolinguistic communities populating this area as well as the abundant Arabic dialects that showcase interesting syntactical, lexical, and morphological features and are yet to be thoroughly investigated.

This linguistic diversity is the result of historical and political processes that Oman has witnessed over the centuries, but also of the waves of external and internal migration that impacted the Sultanate in the last century.

In the next few sections, I will briefly outline the historical phases of Oman, with some remarks on how the social structure of the Sultanate changed before and after the 1970s. No di-

\textsuperscript{3} The monsoon season in Dhofar is known as \textit{harif} ‘autumn’, but effectively ‘monsoon period’, and occurs during the months of late June, July, August, and early September. During this period, the whole regions of Dhofar and eastern Yemen are covered in luxurious green and water flows from mountains and wadis. Moreover, the fog produced by the rapid movement of currents creates a unique ecosystem in this part of the Arabian Peninsula.
achronic analysis of linguistic features of the Omani dialect spoken in the district of al-ʿAwābī (العوابي) can disregard the national events of the twentieth century, whether historical or political. As will be demonstrated in the course of this work, Omani society, politics, and language are tightly linked in their essence, especially after the 1970s and the urgently felt need of building a new national identity.

1.0. A Brief History of the Sultanate

Oman’s presence in history dates back to the third millennium BCE, when the name Magan appeared on Sumerian cuneiform tablets, although human activities were already attested in the Stone Age (ca. 30,000 BCE). There is no doubt that the kingdom of Magan consisted, at least in part, of the territory of present-day Oman (Al-Maamiry 1982).

Cut off from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula by the Empty Quarter, ancient Oman could look only to the sea for its commercial and imperialistic needs. And, indeed, its vocations towards sea trades and explorations go back farther into history: it is well known that Omanis were masters of navigation, being especially able to control the monsoon winds to steer the sails.

The seventh century, coinciding with the rise of Islam, saw the flourishing of maritime trade for Oman and a resultant increase in naval constructions. Thanks to its strategic position at the centre of the Arabian Sea and between the major trade

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4 Tablets of Sargon, king of the Akkadians (2371–2316 BCE), as reported by Ghubash (2006, 16).
routes in the Indian Ocean, it was inevitable that Oman would become a significant hub in the area.

At this point in time, the country also became an asylum for Kharijites and Ibadis, strong opponents of the Umayyad Caliphate (644–750 CE). This split led to a coalition that soon transformed into an Imamate. The first ever experience of an Imamate in Oman was with the election of Julanda bin Masʿūd, soon killed in 752 CE by the Abbasid caliph, who could not tolerate an independent state so close to his borders.

The history of the Imamate in Oman is well researched in Wilkinson (1987) and marks an important stage for the future of the country. The Imamate tradition—which is nothing more than a dynastic institution—would, indeed, survive until the 1950s. More than on history, this tradition had a strong impact on the Omani sense of identity and belonging, as will be explained later in this chapter, in §2.0. To trace the importance of the Banū Kharūṣ tribe—the main subject of this study—it must be mentioned that the Imamate had only five long-lasting tribal dynasties which played a prominent role: the Julanda, the Yahmad-Kharūṣ, the Nabahina, the Yaʿrūbī, and the Al Bū Saʿīd (Wilkinson 1987, 9).

The country was de facto starting to develop its double character: on the one hand, the Imamate tradition in the interior, with Nizwa as capital, mainly isolated and tribal; on the other hand, Muscat and the coastal plateau, its maritime power, the great ship-building cities, and trade centres (Wilkinson 1987; Owtram 2004). This duality had significant historical and
social impact, among them the linguistic change that this study details.

In the tenth century, one of the major ports in Oman was Sohar. The main goods traded by Omanis were aloes, wood, bamboo, camphor, sandalwood, ivory, tin, spices, and frankincense. By this point in time, Omanis were among the first to reach the shores of eastern African and China, importing linen, cotton, wool, and metal works (al-Maamiry 1982, 3).

Oman’s strategic position, as one might expect, attracted the expansionist aims of various foreign populations over the centuries. The sixteenth century marks the beginning of the golden age for Portugal, after Vasco da Gama managed to round the Cape of Good Hope and sail up the coast of east Africa towards the Indian Ocean. The interests of the Portuguese in that area were, though, mainly economic. They had no colonial aims and did not interfere in the local affairs of the countries they were in contact with. The Portuguese presence in Oman lasted for about a century. Alfonso de Albuquerque, who had been Viceroy of India since 1506, conquered the cities of Muscat and Qalhat in 1507 to better control the area between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese remained there to dominate the area until ca. 1650, when the Yaʿrūbī dynasty came to power and defeated the foreign invaders.

The election of Imam Nāṣir bin Muršid al-Yaʿrūbī marks the start of a very important historical phase for Oman: under his dynasty, the country rebuilt its prominence in the Indian Ocean and started to expand westward towards the eastern African coast and eastward towards the Persian shores. During
this time, Muscat became the most important port in the Indian Ocean. The Omanis could count on the largest merchant fleet in the region, and managed to establish an Omani authority on Zanzibar, Kilwa, and Pemba that lasted for about 250 years.

In 1775, the Yaʿrūbī dynasty was replaced by a new one, the Āl Bū Saʿīd. With the Āl Bū Saʿīd—the current ruling family of Oman—the country saw incredible growth, but also strong British influence in internal and foreign affairs and the first real political division: this was the era of the imāma and the sayyid (cf. Ghubash 2006).

The British presence in Oman—initiated in 1645 after the expulsion of the Portuguese and the Omani interests in the English East India Company—became increasingly prominent over the centuries, until the whole area of Muscat and the coastal plateau became de facto a British Protectorate in 1871 (Owtram 2004), with the British controlling most of the Sultan’s foreign relations.\(^6\)

At this point, it is important to understand the historical, political, and social path that made Oman the country we know today, by highlighting the events at the turn of the twentieth century.

Until the 1970s, the official name of the country was the ‘Sultanate of Oman and Muscat’, which once again emphasises the inherent dichotomy of Oman: the interior versus the coast,

\(^5\) This refers to the coastal strip that now belongs to Tanzania.
\(^6\) Owtram (2004, 48) reports that the first use of the term ‘Sultan’ to indicate the Muscat ruler was by the British, the term being “an anathema to Ibadhis with its negative association with secular tyranny”.
Diachronic Variation in the al-ʿAwābī Omani Arabic Vernacular

the Imamate versus the Sultanate, tradition versus maritime power.

The Imamate of the interior had its headquarters in the cities of Nizwa and Rustaq, perpetuating a ruling policy based on Ibadhi precepts, which essentially reject both Sunni and Shiʿa Islam conceptions of leadership of the Islamic community (Owtram 2004, 42). The main characteristic of the Imamate was its autonomy, which was officially established with the Sib Agreement on 25 September 1920. If, on the one hand, the Agreement—sought by the British—did not officially recognise the Imamate as a separate political entity, on the other hand, it left it de facto isolated in the interior of Oman (Joyce 1995, 28).

2.0. The Path to the Seventies: The Omani nahḍa and the Building of a New Nation

The decades between the Sib Agreement and the ascension to the throne of Sultan Qaboos (i.e., 1970) are pivotal for understanding the state of Omani society today, and especially the extent to which the linguistic landscape of Oman has changed.

Saʿīd bin Taymūr became Sultan of Muscat and Oman in 1932, after his father’s abdication. His reign was characterised by strict closure to the outside world, which was deemed even more urgent after western interest in the area due to the discovery of oil in 1930s.

Saʿīd bin Taymūr’s main concern was that western influence and interference might undermine his reign, bringing “foreign and modern ideas” which, in turn, would compromise the
traditional values and social structures of Oman (Valeri 2017, 62).

Nonetheless, the British presence in Oman was still strong, such that the Sultan needed their intervention to placate the Jabal Akhdar revolt in the late 1950s. The famous British explorer Wilfred Thesiger, who spent several months touring Oman, reported that “the tribes in both the southwest and the northwest of the Jabal Akhdar had no loyalty to the sultan: they followed their imam, whose territory likely contained oil” (Joyce 1995, 53). The discovery of oil and concessions to western countries for oil exploration probably fuelled the long-standing rivalry between the Imamate and the Sultanate.

The Imamate was a strong opponent of western powers and could also count on the support of the Saudis, with whom, however, the Americans and British were in negotiations for oil exploration. Moreover, the interior regions of Oman suffered from even more significant isolation due to the lack of infrastructure, which severely limited the mobility of the mountain populations. The rebellion of the Jabal Akhdar was, therefore, just a matter of time.

The uprising was resolved by the British, who decided to intervene in 1959 on condition that the Sultan reform his kingdom. They occupied the mountains in a surprise operation, find-

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7 The Saudis granted a concession to the American company Aramco in 1933, which was of particular concern for the British in Oman, given the proximity to the Buraimi Oasis. The question of borders was then posed for the first time, with the Saudis stating that they would negotiate them only with the Imamate and not with the Sultanate (Joyce 1995, 54).
ing a way through Wādī Banī Kharūṣ (وادي بني خروص). No longer able to compete, the Imam fled to Saudi Arabia, leaving the country to the Sultan. Soon after, Saʿīd bin Taymūr retired to Salalah, never to return to Muscat.

Valeri (2017, 60) calls the 1960s “the decade of remoteness,” and for good reason. The promise made by Saʿīd bin Taymūr to the British went unfulfilled. In fact, when the Sultan moved to Dhofar, he lost any interest in administering the country, leaving this duty to a subordinate with the support of British advisers.

At this point in time, the social and political picture of Oman was as follows: no infrastructure, no form of education, primitive health care, numerous expatriates working for private oil companies, no diplomatic relations, and no international network.

As one can imagine, the only possible outcome of such a situation was economic, political, and social stagnation, which was exacerbated by the country’s extreme isolation. Wealthy Omanis moved abroad, starting one of the largest displacements in the modern history of Oman. In the 1960s,

owning a car or projecting a film, importing newspapers, books or even medicine [...] had to be submitted strictly to the Sultan’s agreement. [...] Similarly, entry permits for the country, even for journalists or diplomatic missions, were stopped after 1965. (Valeri 2017, 62)

Education was a particularly sore subject. For example, Sultan Saʿīd bin Taymūr considered a western-style education the main cause that led to India’s independence in 1947:
The teachers would come from Cairo and spread Nasser’s seditious ideas among other pupils. And what is there for a young man with education? He would go to university in Cairo or to the London School of Economics, finish in Moscow and come back here to foment trouble (Joyce 1995, 58).

As a result of this policy, in 1961, the country counted only three western schools, but about fifty Quranic schools. Omanis who had the means to support their children sent them to schools abroad, to Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar.

Health was another big issue. In the 1960s, there were only five hospitals and about forty rudimentary health centres scattered around the country. The population’s health conditions were dreadful: “malaria, trachoma, leprosy were common diseases, as well as malnutrition and anaemia” (Valeri 2017, 63).

Moreover, there was no infrastructure. Communications between regions in Oman were very difficult, there were no paved roads, cars belonged only to British and Americans who worked for private oil companies, and Omanis had to travel long distances on donkeys and camels, often through mountains and deserts.

All this was due to end in 1970, when Qaboos bin Sa‘íd overthrew his father in a coup on 23 July.

Since the very beginning, Sultan Qaboos’s aim was to build a modern nation, positioning it within the international context of the Peninsula and beyond, using revenues derived from the oil industry to give Omanis the welfare they deserved.
As Joyce (1995, 103) puts it, “the task was formidable, the obstacles numerous.”

The era of Sultan Qaboos is renowned as the Omani *nahḍa* ‘renaissance’ (cf. Owtram 2004; Valeri 2017): a country and a people reborn to a new nation, with a new shared identity, and a new name, i.e., ‘Sultanate of Oman’.

One of the first pledges of the newly established Sultan was the modernisation of the education, health, and infrastructure fields, deemed vital for the construction of a unified and solid state. In order to do so, the Sultan recalled Omanis who had fled abroad during his father’s reign and encouraged them to participate in the efforts in building a new, strong, and independent nation.

In education, a massive literacy campaign was initiated: numerous teaching staff were recruited from Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and, at a later stage, from Tunisia and Algeria. Between 1970 and 1976, at least 200 new schools were built (Valeri 2017, 78–79) all over the country; in 1986 the Sultan Qaboos University was opened in Muscat, with no fees and free housing for female students. The illiteracy levels of the Omani population went from 41.2 percent in 1993, to 21.9 percent in 2003, to 14 percent in 2010, with females constituting 60 percent of the overall number, the vast majority being over forty years old (Valeri 2017, 79).^8

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^8 These statistics are deemed appropriate, as they give a clear picture of the overall Omani situation in terms of literacy and illiteracy in the last few decades and have been used as one of the criteria for the recruitment of informants in this study (see §8.1 in the present chapter).
In the health sector, twelve hospitals and thirty-two clinics were already up and running by 1975 and by the end of the 2010s, Valeri (2017, 80) reports sixty-six hospitals and 195 health centres scattered all over the Sultanate, in addition to about a thousand others in the private sector. These advances brought an end to many endemic diseases and led to an increase in life expectancy.

In terms of infrastructure and facilitation of mobility for the Omani population, the new government pledged to improve the almost non-existent networks of paved roads, especially to connect those inner parts of Oman that were isolated and accessible only by donkey or camel. Soon after taking his position, the Sultan decreed that “every Omani inhabitant must be reachable by a road suitable for motor vehicles” (Valeri 2017, 77). The first asphalted road was built to connect Muscat and Sohar; by the end of the decade, cities like Nizwa, Rustaq and Sur were also accessible by car.

Sultan Qaboos also launched radio and TV channels, as well as national and international newspapers. In the span of a few decades, Oman had become a strong presence in the Arabian Peninsula and at a global level.

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9 Before the 1970s, only ten kilometres of paved roads in the entire Sultanate were available (Joyce 1995, 113).
3.0. Tribalism, Language, and Identity in Modern Oman

A fundamental consequence of this process of modernisation and unification of the country is the posing of questions regarding national identity.

As already mentioned, modern Oman is the result of great bio-cultural diversity developed over centuries of internal and external displacement, maritime trade, and foreign incursions, but also very deep indigenous dichotomy, i.e., Imamate versus Sultanate, tribal versus settled communities, tradition versus modernity.

Sultan Qaboos was well aware of this split and of the newly born state’s need of a strong and enduring national ideology to overcome the local solidarities of tribes and ethnolinguistic communities scattered over the country.

The idea of a people paying allegiance to a nation-state unity is very European and was unknown to the Arabs of Arabia, whose loyalty was often based on tribal and blood affiliation (Riphenburg 1998). Oman, like many other polities in the Arabian Peninsula, has been a country fragmented into numerous tribal groups, individually governed by local sheiks or tamimah. These tribes were connected by “a group feeling, a solidarity,” known as ‘asabiyya. Originally introduced by Ibn Khaldun in the Muqaddimah (ca. fourteenth century), the concept of ‘asabiyya has long been debated in the literature.10 Valeri (2017, 10 For more details on this, the reader is referred to Ibn Khaldun (1980), Wilkinson (1987), and Kayapinar (2008).
15) defines it as “a solidarity based on personal relations (genealogical, matrimonial, nepotistic, etc.) and acts as a group or thinks of itself as such.” It translates as a sort of tribal vigour that can only be channelled by a sheikh. Sultan Qaboos’s strategy was to give a new shape to the ‘asabiyya in Oman, integrating it into his own national ideology discourse and political legitimisation. In the new Sultan’s socio-political vision, the tribe as a political entity did not receive any official recognition or role to play. Acknowledging any position for the tribe would mean accepting a past where Oman was not united, but torn by antagonistic factions.

Nevertheless, tribal affiliation still plays a role in Omanis’ sense of belonging and cultural identity. The numerous ethno-linguistic communities in the territory often find a distinctiveness in the cultural heritage and traditional values that result from these affiliations. This is the reason why heritage held a key position not only in Sultan Qaboos’s politics, but also in the discourse on national identity. A “timeless Omani national identity” (Valeri 2017, 109) became the purpose of Sultan Qaboos’s process of legitimisation and was built on the individual solidarities among the Omani population.

As far as linguistic diachrony—the focus of this work—is concerned, it is pivotal to understand the role played by language in the construction of this new rhetoric of national identity and the impact that the opening and modernisation of the country had on local vernaculars.

Sultan Qaboos’s language policy defined Standard Omani Arabic (i.e., the one spoken in Muscat) as the official language
of the Sultanate, because “if all Omanis were able to speak Arabic, they were more likely to be reached by the regime’s ideology” (Valeri 2017, 110). This variety of Omani Arabic soon became the one employed by the government for official communications, by the media (e.g., radio, TV, newspapers), and, most importantly, as the main language for primary and secondary education. At university level, most of the instruction is conducted in English, whereas teachers vary widely in terms of linguistic background. As mentioned earlier, in the initial stages of the literacy programme, the governments had to recruit teachers from abroad, since Omanis lacked the skills required.

In more recent years, the Gulf countries have witnessed a process of linguistic ‘homogeneisation’ towards a koineised form of Arabic, which includes various Gulf traits at the expense of more characteristic regional traits (cf. Holes 2011b).

Despite the linguistic switch, a process of ‘Omanisation’ of various professions, including teachers, has started. In 1970, foreigners represented 7 percent of the total workforce (in both the public and private sectors), and ten years later this number jumped to 65 percent (Valeri 2017, 178). This process—initiated by Sultan Qaboos and continuing now under Sultan Haitham bin Tariq (who succeeded Qaboos following his death in January 2020)—was part of a more extensive plan that sought to push Omanis into the labour market. From 1987 to this day, a series of official decrees—the last one dating to July
2021—have forbidden the hiring of foreigners in specific job categories.¹¹

The linguistic landscape of Oman has consequently been shaped by these policies over the years, as well as by its geography, history, and population displacement. Local vernaculars—especially those spoken in the inner part of the country—are slowly being replaced by Muscat Arabic or other Arabic varieties perceived as more prestigious,¹² e.g., Gulf Arabic. The influence of Levantine and North-African varieties of Arabic also impacted on these vernaculars, because of the employment of foreign teachers in education. Crucial in this context is also the influence generated on the indigenous vernaculars by Omanis who returned to the country after the 1970s after spending many years in countries like Egypt, Tanzania, Yemen, and Zanzibar. In more recent times, Indian and Pakistani workers employed in the mazrʿa ‘palm gardens’ around the Sultanate have also played a part in reshaping the linguistic landscape. Finally, social networks and global communications have contributed to the widening of Omanis’ linguistic borders.

As language is the reflection of what we are and how we are perceived by others, it is undeniable that these changes have impacted Omani identity. A great effort has been made to record and preserve, for example, indigenous plant names, especially thanks to the creation of the Oman Botanic Gardens in ¹¹ Accessible online at https://www.omanobserver.om/article/201103106/oman/labour/omanisation-of-several-professions-from-july-20.
²² I use here the term ‘prestige’ as employed in sociolinguistic studies, i.e., the level of regard attributed by a speech community to other languages or dialects.
Al Khawd (الخوض, Muscat). Holes (2011b) reports some of these changes in other Peninsular countries as well as in Oman, and the speed of variation and change is striking.

4.0. Linguistic Landscape of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula

The 1967 work of T. M. Johnstone, *Eastern Arabian Dialect Studies*, is one of the pioneering attempts to describe the linguistic situation in the Arabian Peninsula and an unparalleled account of the “eastern Arabian dialects” spoken in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial Coast (i.e., Dubai). In this work, Johnstone (1967) classifies Omani Arabic as a variety separate from all the others. His sources, at that time, were Jayakar (1889) and Reinhardt (1894), who describe two sedentary dialects spoken in the northern part of the country.13 Johnstone’s decision, in fact, is not surprising: years later, Holes (1990, xii) would mention in the introduction to his Gulf Arabic grammar that “the sultanate of Oman is excluded from the main body of the description, since the Arabic spoken in the settled areas of this country [...] is considerably different from that spoken in the Gulf states proper.”

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13 The Sedentary/Bedouin labels applied to Arabic dialects belong to the set of traditional tools long employed by Arabists for the synchronic classification of these dialects—not only in the Peninsula. The distinction is based on phonological and morphological features, rather than on the lifestyle of speech communities. Nowadays, the line between the two is much more blurred, especially after the introduction of social media and the flourishing of various global communication means.
We still do not know exactly to what extent this ‘difference’ ranges, as Eades and Persson (2013, 343) state,

most studies reporting on this divide have dealt with the phonology, morphology and, to some extent, lexis. Little is known, however, about the degree to which these dialectal groups differ from or correspond to one another in grammatical structure.

Investigating the reasons behind this marked difference is beyond the scope of this work, but still deserves scholarly attention. However, we will try to provide some analysis in regards to Oman.

Admittedly, the Arabian Peninsula has long proven difficult to access for foreign researchers, and the tough geographical environment did not facilitate exploration.14 This partial isolation of the Peninsula from external influence ensured the retention in its dialects of more ‘conservative’ linguistic features “that distinguish them, as a group, from non-Arabian Arabic dialects” (Holes 2006, 25).15 These traits are the ones most in danger of disappearance for the reasons explained in previous sections.

14 Cf. Watson (2011a, 855): “The Arabian Peninsula has for various political, social and administrative reasons held on to its secrets for far longer than dialects spoken around the Mediterranean.”

15 Cf. also Watson (2011a, 852):

The dialects spoken in the Arabian Peninsula are by far the most archaic. The depth of their history can only be guessed.... Isolated from the innovations caused elsewhere by population movement and contact, their ancient features were mostly preserved....
Geographically akin to an island, Oman also constitutes a linguistic enclave within the Arabian Peninsula. According to Holes (2017, 292), the Baḥārna, Omani, and south-Yemeni vernaculars share some features that represent “an older type than the Bedouin ‘Anazī type which,... has gradually spread to the Gulf coast from central Arabia via Bedouin migrations.” The historical and socio-political reasons discussed above, in §§1.0–2.0, brought Oman to further isolate from the rest of the Peninsula, sparking the curiosity of researchers.16

In 1889, Jayakar wrote:

In Oman learning has never flourished to the same extent as in other parts of Arabia, which may be observed by the almost total absence of any local literature, and although at one time a school of some eminence existed in Nezwa, the province has not produced any great poets or authors. The masses as a rule, as in other countries, are uneducated, but even the educated few are so regardless of the rules of Grammar, that they are constantly in the habit of using, both colloquially and in writing, forms and expressions which strike as strange to an outsider (Jayakar 1889, 649).


The fact that Oman is a large country, about the size of France, with a varied topography which includes vast deserts, impassable mountain ranges and fertile coastal plains, with until recently no modern roads or communications to link them, makes it prima facie likely that a considerable degree of dialectal diversity would be found there. (italics in the original)
The isolation imposed by the geographical shape of the country and by the autocratic rule of Sultan Saʿīd bin Taymūr had at least one advantage from a dialectological point of view: the preservation of morpho-syntactic and phonological features which have disappeared elsewhere.\(^\text{17}\)

One of the pioneering works on dialectal geography in Oman is Holes (1989), which analyses the features shared by all Omani dialects, with the exception of the Muscat area, Dhofar and Bedouin dialects spoken in central Oman. These features are:

- The 2FSG possessive/object suffix is -/š/, except in some Bedouin dialects of the North-East, where it is realised as -/č/, and the al-Wahība dialect, where it is not affricated and is realised as -/k/.
- An -/in(n)/- infix is obligatorily inserted between an active participle with verbal force and a following object pronoun. Some Omani speakers, in particular on al-Batinah coast, also insert this infix between the imperfect verb and the suffix object (Holes 1989, 448).
- The absence of the ‘ghawa syndrome’, particular to some central, northern, and eastern Arabic dialects—exceptions are some Bedouin vernaculars spoken in the areas on the UAE border (e.g., Buraymi).

\(^{17}\text{ Cf. Holes (1998, 348): “The isolation of Oman from outside influences until twenty-five years ago probably explains the survival in its dialects of features, both morpho-syntactic and lexical, which have disappeared in virtually all non-Arabian dialects (and in many Arabian ones too).”}\)
• Feminine plural verbal, adjectival and pronominal forms occur regularly.\textsuperscript{18}

• The internal passive of verb forms I and II is of common occurrence.

In addition to this, Holes (1989) provides a detailed list of how the three OA\textsuperscript{19} consonants *q, *k, and *ǧ—usually adopted as discriminants in the Sedentary/Bedouin divide—are realised in various dialects of Oman:\textsuperscript{20}

• The OA *q is realised as: (a) [k] in some villages of the western and southern sides of Jabal Akhdar; (b) [ğ] in some dialects of al-Batinah coast (including Rustaq), but it is affricated in /ǧ/ in the dialects spoken in villages on the UAE border; (c) [g] in all other Bedouin dialects spoken in the western and southern part of the country, including Sur and Salalah; and finally, (d) it is retained as /q/ in sedentary dialects of Capital City, of the al-Batinah coast, and large mountain villages (including the al-‘Awābī district).

\textsuperscript{18} This feature is shared with some dialects of central and southern Arabia, distinguishing them from other Gulf dialects, where the gender distinction has been neutralised.

\textsuperscript{19} The label OA (i.e., Old Arabic) is used by Holes (1989) to refer to the features which are supposedly the ancestors of the ones found today in spoken Arabic.

\textsuperscript{20} We have already mentioned how these labels do not reflect any longer the lifestyle and/or the community type as it probably was 30 years ago, when Clive Holes wrote this article. Nevertheless, the list gives a general idea of the phonological features shared by some Omani dialects.
The OA *k is: (a) a velar occlusive in the Capital area and on the al-Batinah coast; (b) palatalised in some mountain dialects and affricated in /č/ in some others; (c) consistently affricated as /č/ with protruded vowels only in some Bedouin dialects spoken on the UAE border.

The OA *ǧ is realised in all sedentary dialects as a velar occlusive [g]; in Bedouin dialects of the western and southern parts of the country it can be realised as [y] (as in Rustaq), or as an alveolar [ǧ] in the Sharqiyyah region and in some areas of al-Rubʿ al-Khālī.

As described above in §2.0, recent political events and the acceleration of Oman’s social transformation and development have brought about numerous phonological variations that can be traced everywhere in the Sultanate (cf. Davey 2016, 45). Furthermore, the greater freedom of movement fostered by the opening of the country in the 1980s has had significant impact on the linguistic landscape of Oman, affecting some of the traits that have been traced so far. In the course of this work, the diachronic variations in the Omani vernacular of the al-ʿAwābī district will be presented, taking into consideration the traits exemplified in this section. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate the fast pace at which the dialects of Oman (and possibly of the whole Peninsula) are changing and the urgency of documentation.

5.0. Bibliographical Sources on Omani Arabic

On 23 July 1970, when Qaboos bin Saʿid bin Taymūr ascended the throne of the Sultanate of Oman, a new policy course was
initiated. It was characterised by, among other things, opening to the West and to rest of the Arab world. Thus, when we talk about the state of the art in Omani dialectology, we cannot ignore this specific phase in the country’s history, especially as it bore upon access to sources, which is necessary for thorough and accurate linguistic study.

The main studies on the languages and vernaculars spoken in Oman were the pioneering ones carried out between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Particularly, the Indian surgeon Atmaram Sadashiv Jayakar—who lived in Muscat between 1868 and 1900—with his 1889 *The O’manee Dialect of Arabic*, analysed the dialect spoken by the sedentary population in the Muscat area. In his 1900 *Omani Proverbs*, he also worked on maxims and proverbs, which he described as,

> essential to the philologist, to whom they are invaluable as a storehouse of the dialectical and linguistic peculiarities exhibited in the expression of thoughts, while yet the nation was only in an early condition of civilization, as to philosopher who can often trace in them the inner springs of human action. (Jayakar 1900, 9)

The distinguished Semitist Nicolaus Rhodokanakis (1876–1945), professor in Graz for decades and specialist in Ancient South Arabian, focused his studies on the Arabic lexicon used as a poetic vernacular in Dhofar, contributing to Omani studies with his monumental two-volume *Der vulgärarabische Dialekt im Đofâr (Ẓfâr)*, consisting of the 1908 *Prosaische und poetische Texte, Uebersetzung und Indices* and the 1911 *Einleitung, Glossar und Grammatik*. 
For a long time, Rhodokanakis’s monumental work was one of the very few studies carried out in this area of the country, which is still considered remote and resistant to foreigners. Its proximity to Yemen makes Dhofar isolated, in terms of both lifestyle and language. Here one of more of the MSAL are spoken as main languages, and in the past the area experienced violent rebellions, which were harshly repressed. However, in more recent years, Dhofari Arabic has been documented by Richard Davey in his 2016 *Coastal Dhofari Arabic: A Sketch Grammar*. In this work, the author analyses the phonology, morphology, local and temporal relations, adverbs and particles, and syntax of present-day coastal Dhofari Arabic. The book also presents a final chapter on the lexicon, following the semantic categories presented by Behnsted and Woidich (2011), although it does not aim to analyse it exhaustively.

Finally, Carl Reinhardt’s 1894 work, *Ein arabischer Dialekt gesprochen in ‘Oman und Zanzibar*, also belongs to the late nineteenth century. He focused on the grammar, particularly phonology and morphology, of the Banū Kharūṣī vernacular, spoken around Nizwa and Rustaq, but also among the elite of Zanzibar Island. The main purpose of his work was to provide a linguistic guide for the German soldiers quartered on the island and in the Tanganyka region, which were at that time briefly an imperial German colony. The material supplied by Reinhardt

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21 In 1965, a revolt supported by Southern Yemen and Russia erupted, lasting until 1975, when Great Britain and Iran intervened. The subsequent peace agreement was designed to promote economic and social growth in the region.
still plays an essential role for neo-Arabic linguistics and dialectology, since it constitutes the richest available description of Omani Arabic, although lacking a lexical repertoire.

More recent studies—i.e., those carried out between the 1950s and the 2000s—have emphasised either the dialectal variety of a specific town or population or have outlined an overall classification and organisation of those vernacular dialects.

Particularly relevant is Adrian Brockett’s 1985 *The Spoken Arabic of Khābūra on the Bāṭina of Oman*, essential for technical rural and agricultural terminology used by the Khabura population in al-Batinah and which also includes discussion of some phonological and morphological traits.

Clive Holes, emeritus professor at the Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, is one of the major scholars of Arabic dialectology. Although he focused the majority of his studies on Arabic dialects of the Gulf and Bahrain, some of his works also dealt with Omani Arabic varieties. In the already cited ‘Towards a Dialect Geography of Oman’ (1989), Holes suggests a first and clear framework of features shared by all Omani dialects, from the perspective of dialectal geography. Relevant works by Clive Holes also include ‘‘Uman: Modern Arabic dialects’ (2000), mainly on the morphology of these vernaculars; ‘Quadriliteral verbs in the Arabic Dialects of Eastern Arabia’ (2004), on this specific feature shared by Gulf and Omani dialects; and finally, ‘Form X of the Verb in the Arabic Dialects of Eastern Arabia’ (2005), on the behaviour of derived form X not only in Omani Arabic, but also in Gulf and Bahraini dialects. He also analysed some texts recorded in Sur in ‘An Ar-
abic Text from Ṣūr, Oman’ (2013). Lastly, particularly valuable is the glossary based on his collection of ethnotexts in Bahraini Arabic in *Dialect, Culture, and Society in Eastern Arabia I: Glossary* (2000), accompanied by a clear explanation of methodology and by a discussion on the major languages of contact for that specific vernacular, some of which (Persian, Portuguese, Hindi, English) also left their mark on the Omani lexicon.

Domenyk Eades, during his teaching position at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, studied the dialectal variety of the Šawāwi community, in northern Oman, publishing ‘The Arabic Dialect of Šawawi Community of Northern Oman’ (2009), and some varieties of the Sharqiyyah region, stressing the distinction, far from clear, between Bedouin and Sedentary varieties in Oman.

Janet Watson, in collaboration with Domenyk Eades, published in 2013 the paper ‘Camel Culture and Camel Terminology among the Omani Bedouin’, which analyses the specific camel-related lexicon among the Bedouin population of Oman, comparing Omani camel terminology with the Mehri terminology used in Dhofar.

Although they have not been strictly considered for the present study, the works of Roger Webster and Dionisius Agius filled a substantial lexical gap in Omani dialectological studies. Roger Webster contributed to the study of Omani Arabic varieties with his 1991 ‘Notes on the Dialect and Way of Life of the al-Wahība Bedouin’, providing a detailed analysis of the lifestyle of this Bedouin population, but also of a part of its lexicon specifically related to their pastoral way of life. Webster’s work
compares specific semantic fields of the Omani Bedouin lexicon with the same semantic field in the al-Murra tribe’s vernacular (Saudi Arabia and Qatar).

Finally, Dionisius Agius’s works, the 2002 *In the Wake of the Dhow: The Arabian Gulf and Oman* and 2005 *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: The People of the Dhow*, researched a lexical area, little studied so far in this macro-region: nautical terminology. Ships and the sea have always been a fundamental feature in the history of Oman, for both the commercial and economic development of the country, and for shipping routes and geographical discoveries. Even nowadays, these two elements play an important role, since fishing remains a major source of incomes for Omanis. Furthermore, Agius’s monographs show the strong influence of English and Portuguese on the Omani nautical terminology. On the maritime lexicon of Oman, a new work was published in 2019 by Abdul Rahman Al Salimi and Eric Staples: *A Maritime Lexicon: Nautical Terminology in the Indian Ocean*. Their contribution to Omani literature is fundamental for the advancement of lexical research in Oman and in the Indian Ocean region as a whole.

A work co-written by Dionisius Agius and Harriet Nash, the 2011 ‘The Use of Stars in Agriculture in Oman’, is also particularly important and innovative, although once again not strictly used for the present study. It focuses on the traditional use of stars in the *falağ* system of Omani agriculture.

In the past few years, new research conducted by early-career scholars have added fundamental insights into the field of Omani dialectology. This is the case of Bettega (2019a),
which analyses in meticulous detail the categories of tense, aspect, and mood in Omani Arabic, the first monograph on this long-neglected subject in the field. Morano (2020; 2022) also contributed to the uncovering of interesting linguistic features in northern Oman.

What is clear from this state of the art, though, is that most of the studies carried out so far, despite some progress in the last fifteen years, are in specific areas of the country, leaving others uninvestigated. Moreover, the studies carried out by Clive Holes on dialectal diversification in Omani Arabic focus on phonological and morphological isoglosses, according to current dialectological practice. However, lexical diversification plays an important role as well, although it is less studied because of the absence of a reliable and comprehensive glossary of Omani Arabic.

6.0. Carl Reinhardt (1894): Strengths and Weaknesses

Carl Reinhardt’s 1894 Ein arabischer Dialekt gesprochen in ‘Oman und Zanzibar still plays a very prominent role in the fields of neo-Arabic linguistics and dialectology. The Omani variety that he describes is different both from the one spoken in the capital area (described by Jayakar, 1889) and the one spoken on the coast.

This subsection explores how the strength of Reinhardt’s work—which lies in its being the only extensive description of
an Omani dialect in the northern part of the country— is partially neutralised by its weaknesses.

Reinhardt’s biography (1856–1945) is interesting. He obtained a degree at a commercial school and then worked for several years in various trading houses as an accountant and correspondent in French, Italian, and English. In 1881, he started studying Egyptology, history, philosophy and Oriental languages in Berlin, Heidelberg, and Strasbourg. In 1885, he obtained his PhD, and then moved to Egypt. In 1888, he was appointed dragoman ‘interpreter’ to the consulate in Zanzibar, where he resided until 1893. It must have been in this period that he collected most of his data and thought about writing his main work (Hoffmann-Ruf 2013). After a short period back in Berlin, he started working at the consulate in Cairo in 1894.

In the introduction, Reinhardt states that it took him five years of hard work to collect all the material presented in the book and that—due to illness—he would have given up if his teacher Professor Theodor Noeldeke, the famous orientalist, had not encouraged him to continue. According to Noeldeke, only Reinhardt’s data provide a clear overview of Omani Arabic, despite the high value of Jayakar’s repertoire.

The dialect described by Reinhardt is the one spoken in Wādī Banī Kharūṣ, today in the al-ʿAwābī district (northern

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22 At present, Davey’s 2016 work on Dhofari Arabic represents the other extensive description of an Omani dialect, though this one is spoken in the southern part of the country.

23 Reinhardt (1894, viii): “Mir kam, es lediglich darauf an, das grosse Material an Sprachstoff, welches ich in fünfjähriger schwerer Tropenarbeit gesammelt hatte.”
Oman). The people he employed as informants (ʿAbdallāh al-Kharūṣī and ʿAlī al-ʿAbrī from al-ʿAwābī) were natives of Oman who had lived in Zanzibar for some time. Reinhardt relates that ʿAbdallāh al-Kharūṣī was an Omani from Rustaq, who worked with him at the consulate in Zanzibar, and knew how to read and write, and that whenever possible he consulted relatives and friends back in Oman. The second informant, ʿAlī al-ʿAbrī, was from al-ʿAwābī and was illiterate. Reinhardt mentions that he was very quiet and that it was therefore very difficult to extrapolate suitable material from his speech (cf. Reinhardt 1894, xii). Besides, the German author states that this vernacular was spoken at his time by the Omani court and by some two-thirds of the Arabs living in Zanzibar. Thus, we can presume that it was sufficiently widespread to require the writing of a practical and quick guide for German soldiers quartered in the East African colonies.

Reinhardt’s work is divided into four parts: 1. Phonology; 2. Morphology; 3. Remarks on the Syntax; and 4. Texts and Stories (including some war songs). The feature that distinguishes this book from other teaching material is the fact that it is almost exclusively written in the Latin alphabet, mainly for space issues (cf. Reinhardt 1894, viii). Reinhardt (1894, viii) admits that he is not an expert Arabist and that his aim is only to present the vernacular in the clearest possible way. Of these sections, however, the one which most detracts from the work’s re-

24 Reinhardt (1894, vii): “…dem Lernenden geordnet vorzuführen und ihn an der Hand einer reichen Sammlung von Beispielen mit den Regeln dieses herrlichen Dialekts bekannt zu machen.”
liability is the lack of reference to syntax. Reinhardt deals only marginally with the syntactic features of the dialect, superficially examining noun phrases and verbal clauses (i.e., interrogative, relative, copulative, conditional, and hypothetical clauses), providing plenty of examples, but not an exhaustive analysis.

One of the weaknesses of Reinhardt’s work—that he himself acknowledges—is the lack of transcription, which was made by the author only afterwards and not during his stay in Oman and Zanzibar. This is one of the reasons why the data reported by Reinhardt are not always reliable from a phonological point of view. Moreover, he clearly states that he expects some criticism because he tried to present examples that would captivate students. His work, therefore, has more of a pedagogical than descriptive intent, which makes the entire monograph weaker for the broader field of Omani Arabic documentation than it could have been.

Another weakness of Reinhardt’s data lies precisely in his informants. The two people he employed were too few in number and they worked for him, thus creating a relationship that is not ideal for a linguistic study. Finally, he had no means of double-checking the data back in Oman, completely relying on the knowledge of his two informants.


26 Reinhardt states that he paid “100 Mark” to ʿAbd Allāh al-Kharūṣī for his services, whereas ʿAlī al-ʿAbrī was more a sort of butler than an actual consultant for him (Reinhardt 1894, xi–xii).
While on the whole voicing appreciation for the usefulness of Reinhardt’s work, the reviews published by experienced Semitic scholars and Arabists, such as Theodor Noeldeke (1895) and Karl Vollers (1895), pointed out a few obscure points in his description. Vollers (1895) devotes the first part of his review of Reinhardt’s work to raising doubts on the reliability of the book because of its educational rather than descriptive purpose. He also reports an indigenous classification of the territory according to which the Banū Kharūṣī vernacular described by Reinhardt is the one spoken in the ‘Omān area by the sedentary rural population. On the contrary, Reinhardt states that his Omani variety is Bedouin and not Sedentary, which is opposite both to the statements of his informants and to Vollers’s (1895, 491) idea of this vernacular being an isolated and conservative Neo-Arabic dialect of Southern Arabia.27

Nevertheless, Reinhardt gives us some interesting information about the Omani social and linguistic environment he worked in: he states that whilst in Egypt, Syria, and Algeria it was sometimes easy to find a local who spoke at least one European language, in Oman—and especially in Zanzibar—this was impossible.

About the work, Reinhardt (1894, viii) states that his grammar was born thanks to the huge amount of material he managed to collect: the texts are translated as literally as possible.

27 On this, Vollers (1895, 491): “Um so weniger kann ich verstehen, warum R. [Reinhardt] im Widerspruche mit der Aussage seiner Gewährsmänner (VII) diese Sprache eher für beduinisch als für ḥaḍari halten will...”
ble into German, and some of these translations are supported by verses extracted from the *diwāns* of Ḥarīrī and Mutanabbī, who were very popular in Oman at that time.

The last section of the book is devoted to folkloristic stories, 200 proverbs and a few war songs. The stories tell about daily routines and common events; the proverbs are, according to Reinhardt, among the commonest in use; the war songs are usually preceded by explanatory comments and all of them come from ‘Alī al-ʿAbrī (Reinhardt 1894, xiv–xv). The only issue with the last section of Reinhardt’s work is the fact that some of the grammatical features he reports are not common at all in the texts (e.g., the use of genitive markers; the use of the bi-prefix).

In conclusion, Reinhardt’s work is an invaluable piece of study for the field of Omani dialectology. However, the premises of the work itself, the time that has passed since its publication, and the issues examined in this section show that the data examined in *Ein arabischer Dialekt gesprochen in ‘Oman und Zanzibar* are in need of reinterpretation in light of a more detailed analysis of the type of Arabic spoken nowadays in the al-ʿAwābī district.

### 7.0. The al-ʿAwābī District: In Geographical and Historical Perspective

The al-ʿAwābī district is located in South al-Batinah and consists of al-ʿAwābī town—with a population of about 11,000—28—and twenty-four small villages spread between it and Wādī Banī

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28 According to the 2020 census.
Kharūṣ. The district is 150 kilometres from Muscat, 36 kilometres from Nakhal (نخل), and 16 kilometres from Rustaq.

The ancient name of al-ʿAwābī town was Sūni. People in al-ʿAwābī say that Sūni is the name of the mountain at the entrance to Wādī Banī Kharūṣ. Wilkinson (1987, 14) identifies the ‘Hisn al-Sawni’, the fort which controls the access to Wādī Banī Kharūṣ as being the main objective for the ‘Abriyin tribe in the fight for control over the whole region. This also shows how strategic Wādī Banī Kharūṣ was, as one of the main access points to the interior of the country. The name of the town, then, changed to al-ʿAwābī at the time of the Imam Sayf bin Sulṭān al-Yaʿrubī, and its origin may lie in the word ʿawābi (SG ʿābye), which is used in the district to mean ‘cultivated soil, plot’.

The Wādī Banī Kharūṣ is a valley that goes deep into al-Hajar Mountains for about 26 kilometres, ending at Jabal Akhdar, and its main town is Stāl.29 The population of the wadi is generally older than that of the town. Some of the villages are also populated by only one or two families, and people live mainly on agriculture and farming. Those villages are: al-Ẓāhir, al-Ẓahra, al-ʿAlya (the very last accessible village in the Wādī), al-Hawdiniyya, al-Hijā, al-Mahḍūṭ, al-Maḥṣana, al-Marḥ, al-Wilayga, al-Ramī, al-Sahal, al-Ṣibayḥa, Dakum, Misfāt al-

29 “…Wādī B. ʿAwf offers fairly easy access into Wādī B. Kharūṣ, an otherwise isolated wadi system belonging to the B. Kharūṣ, with their capital as Istal (var. Stal, not to be confused with Mistal) and its exit commanded by the important town of ʿAwābi” (Wilkinson 1987, 113).
Haṭṭāṭla, Misfāt al-Širayqīn, Šhū, Stāl, ʿṢunaybʿ, Ṭawī al-Sayḥ, ar-Rajmah, Wādī Ṣufūn, al-Manẓūr, and Taqub.30

The district is well known in Oman because of its historical heritage:31 the Banū Kharūṣ played an important role throughout Omani history, and primarily in Ibadism. Descendants of the Yaḥmad tribe—a branch of ʿAzd—they moved to Oman during the pre-Islamic period, settling in a valley named after them as Wādī Banī Kharūṣ. The Yaḥmad provided most of the Ibadī imams of Oman until the arrival of the Yaʿrūbī dynasty in the seventeenth century (cf. Wilkinson 1987 and Rentz 2012). Wilkinson (1987, 206) mentions the Kharūṣ as “one of the major shaikhly clan” in the area, controlling a “strategic tribal position running from the major settlement of Sawni on to the Jabal al-Akhdar via the Wadi B. Kharus.”

In the Wādī it is still possible to find inscriptions that testify to the lives and the deeds of these Imams. One of the best remembered still today is al-Warith bin Kaʿab, who “has been virtually sanctified in popular belief,” and the only Imam carrying a shade of mythology (Wilkinson 1978, 211).32 Finally, the al-Kharūṣī tribe played a fundamental role in the Omani nahda, by providing religious scholars throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In this area, the tribe of al-ʿAbrī also found its strength: at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the most power-

30 Source: Sultanate of Oman, National Centre for Statistics and Information: https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Pages/NCSI.aspx.
31 The symbol of the district is an inkpot and a quill, to signify that it is a place of knowledge.
32 This is the Imam mentioned by S2 in ch. 4, example (64).
ful tribe in Oman, and its Imam was Salīm bin Rāšid al-Kharūṣī. The influence of the ulema from this tribe revitalised the Ibadi doctrine in all northern Oman.

Nowadays, al-ʿAwābī town is inhabited by two main tribes, namely the al-Kharūṣī and the al-ʿAbrī, which are native and are the same tribes found by Carl Reinhardt at the end of the nineteenth century. However, a few smaller tribes moved to al-ʿAwābī in more recent times from other regions of Oman. A custom of this district was to marry people from the same tribe, so that eventually it would have been the only tribe populating the area. In more recent years, however, this practice has been gradually abandoned by the younger population, because of inter-regional weddings among Omani people. The population of the town differs slightly from that of the Wādī more broadly, especially in terms of lifestyle and level of education: nowadays, many inhabitants go to college or university or work in the capital city, usually returning during weekends and festivities. Only a small percentage of them remain in the town, cultivating palm gardens and breeding goats. These cultural traits have been taken into consideration in the analysis of the data presented in this work, as will be explained in the next section on methodology.

8.0. Participants, Metadata, and Methodology

8.1. The Participants

Since Carl Reinhardt (1894) relied on just two speakers, who were natives of Oman, but had spent most of their life abroad and were working for him in Cairo, the present research is
based on a wider range of speakers in order to gain a better picture of the dialect spoken and more suitable material for comparison. Hence, this research is based on the vernacular spoken by fifteen people who were all born and bred in the district. Table 1.1 provides a list of these fifteen participants, detailing their gender, age at the time of recording, provenance, level of education, and tribe of origin. These were not only crucial factors in the recruitment process, but also features of interest in the selection of examples in this work.

Table 1.1: Participant metadata

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Tribe</th>
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<td>al-Kharūṣi</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>80–90</td>
<td>al-ʿAwābī</td>
<td>illiterate</td>
<td>al-ʿAbrī</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1.1 shows, three main criteria guided the choice of participants: age, provenance, and level of education. These criteria were chosen for two main reasons: firstly, since one of the
scapes of this study is the analysis of diachronic variation in the district of al-ʿAwābī in comparison to Reinhardt’s (1894) work, the criterion of age was deemed appropriate for comparison with the dialect he describes; secondly, level of education and provenance were chosen to see if the sociological factors mentioned above in §§3.0 and 7.0 had any impact on the variety spoken nowadays in the district, especially in the light of the process of ‘Gulfinisation’ that the Arabic varieties of this area are currently undergoing, and the increased use of social networks and the Internet in general, which put the younger generation in contact with the wider Arab world.

The first criterion is further divided into age groups to individuate three generations of speakers.

Table 1.2: Speaker age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Age span</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>YS</td>
<td>28–40</td>
<td>3, 5, 6, 9, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>AS</td>
<td>41–59</td>
<td>1, 2, 7, 10, 11, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>OS</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>4, 8, 13, 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This choice was made to have a clearer picture of diachronic variation in this dialect, expecting OS to have a type of speech closer to the one described by Reinhardt (1894) and YS to have a vernacular influenced by other neighbouring Arabic varieties or Standard Omani Arabic, social networks, and the language of broadcasting. Moreover, this age division was made while bearing in mind the historical phases of the Sultanate, as briefly traced above in §1.0–2.0: participants aged between 40 and 60 are people that lived their early years at the beginning of the new era established by Sultan Qaboos, and were able to witness
the changes Oman went through afterwards; by contrast, participants aged 60+ have a better memory of the time prior to the rise of Sultan Qaboos, when Sa‘īd bin Taymūr ruled Oman; younger speakers, finally, will potentially show the latest developments of the language, influenced by the media, by the type of Arabic used in education, and by the influence of supposedly more prestigious forms of Arabic. As Table 1.1 shows, for some of the speakers a possible age span is provided: that is because for the older generation—i.e., the generation born before the 1970s—it was not possible to give a precise age in terms of dates, since the registration of births started only later, with Sultan Qaboos.

The second criterion, provenance, is straightforward: it serves for examination of the geographical distribution of linguistic features, and it helps to check the differences in the speech of Wādī Banī Kharūṣ and al-ʿAwābī town inhabitants.

Finally, the third criterion, level of education, was deemed particularly appropriate from a sociolinguistic point of view: as classes are taught in Standard Omani Arabic, usually by Egyptian teachers, does this have any impact on the dialect spoken? And if yes, to what extent?

Gender could not be a criterion for informants’ recruitment, since, with very few exceptions, access to male informants proved to be difficult for the author once in the field. Therefore, it has been excluded as a measure of analysis of the data.

One more factor deemed appropriate for the decision on informants’ participation was tribe of origin. This was not
counted as a main criterion; however, it was important to take tribal origin into consideration. Reinhardt’s informants were from the al-Kharūṣī tribe and the al-ʿAbrī tribe, which were the only two that inhabited the al-ʿAwābī district at his time. At the present time, both tribes still live in the district, and, at least according to the consultants, remain the only two that live there, despite the recent tendency to marry people from other tribes or regions of Oman.

8.2. The Fieldwork

The data presented in this work were collected during two fieldwork trips conducted by the author: the first was made between February and April 2017, and the second in June 2018.

The transcription and translation of the texts, proverbs, and examples throughout this work were done in situ with the tireless help and diligent support of İlkāṣ Raṣīd al-Kharūṣī, who patiently listened to several hours of recordings. In these sessions, I also added field-notes on linguistic structures of interest, and other local practices.

The second fieldwork trip was shorter and carried out during the month of Ramadan (i.e., June) in 2018. This trip had two main aims: first, a final check on some phonological and morphological features collected during the previous trip; and second, to collect stories, lexicon, and any other material related specifically to Ramadan and Eid celebrations in the district.

Both fieldwork trips were spent in the house of speakers 1 and 6, a house which was always overcrowded during the weekends, offering the opportunity talk to their relatives, sib-
lings, and neighbours—some of whom became active participants in the research and are included in the list of participants.

8.3. The Data

The corpus of data presented in this work is divided into three main groups, depending on the source of the material: the first group stands as the primary source for this monograph, and includes new data gathered during fieldwork (hereby called ‘primary data’); the second group consists of secondary literature for comparative purposes; and, finally, the third group comprises sources related to neighbouring Arabic varieties, also for comparative purposes.

8.3.1. Group 1. Primary Data

The primary basis of this study consists of fifteen hours of recorded material I collected during the fieldwork trips in the al-ʿAwābī district. These fifteen hours also include four hours of WhatsApp vocal messages, exchanged with participants both during fieldwork and at a distance. The WhatsApp vocal messages contain spontaneous speech from a group of seven women (i.e., speakers 1, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 12) from the al-Kharūšī tribe, whereas the rest of the audio material is mainly the result of free-speech recordings.

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33 The term “corpus” is here intended as the collection of primary data presented in the course of this work and as it is employed in general linguistics, not in the specific meaning it has in the field of corpus linguistics.

34 WhatsApp is a popular phone application that allows customers to chat via the Internet.
The free speech recordings were carried out in a variety of contexts and environments: of the remaining eleven hours, about five were recorded during the afternoon gatherings of women, usually in indoor places, where they exchange coffee, sweets, and stories; about four hours were recorded during Eid gatherings, usually outdoors, and weddings; finally, four more hours contain accounts of local stories, legends related to spiritual entities in the Wādī (i.e., jinn), changes in the local environment, and tribe-related events. The five hours recorded during the afternoon gatherings were not initiated by the author; rather, after asking for consent to record, the recorder was positioned at the centre of the circle of women and their conversation recorded. This was then analysed afterwards with the help of a native speaker. The same happened with the Eid celebrations and partly with local stories: once the participants acknowledged the scope of the research, they were always very keen to provide me with material for recording.

The remaining two hours are the result of elicitation of lexical items: these were partly collected in the Wādī with speaker 11, especially for plant names and medical terminology, and partly with speakers 2, 6, 7, and 12, especially for household terminology.

The recordings were conducted using an Olympus LS-12 Linear PCM Recorder, and all the files were saved in .WAV format at a sample rate of 16bit 44.100 kHz. The files were also
stored on my personal laptop and on an external hard drive and analysed using the annotation programme ELAN.\textsuperscript{35}

The other methodology employed in the collection of primary data was elicitation of samples that are not part of the audio material, but constitute a core of written notes. WhatsApp text messages were also useful in the elicitation of some syntactic features, such as negation structures, genitive markers, and different types of complex clauses: these WhatsApp examples are reported in their original Arabic script throughout this work, alongside transcription and glossing. In this elicitation process, three main methodologies have been used: first, submitting the sentence in English and asking informants to translate it—this worked especially well with university-educated speakers who knew English; second, sending the sentences in MSA and asking for differences with the dialect—this was helpful with people who did not have a full higher education, but had attended school for a few years at least; finally, employing the author’s own knowledge of the dialect to write samples and asking informants for correctness judgements.

8.3.2. Group 2. Secondary Data

The second group includes the material presented by Carl Reinhardt (1894), which has been studied in detail and used for comparison purposes. If we take into consideration the importance of Reinhardt’s material, as well as all the issues with his work—discussed in detail above in §6.0—the comparison

\textsuperscript{35} ELAN is computer software used to annotate and transcribe audio and video recordings.
attains even more relevance. Since Reinhardt (1894) lacks an extensive analysis of the syntax of the Banū Kharūṣī dialect—with only marginal exceptions (e.g., genitive markers, sone clauses, and negation)—the material he presents will be displayed mainly in the morphology section (both nominal and verbal), where a few remarks regarding diachronic comparison are provided. In addition to Reinhardt’s work, this group includes material presented by Brockett (1985) and Nakano (1995).

8.3.3. Group 3. Secondary Data from Other Arabic Dialects

The third group consists of samples taken from secondary sources on other Arabic varieties (i.e., Moroccan, Egyptian, Syrian, Najdi, Saudi, Gulf, Yemeni) used in the argument either to support a statement or, again, for comparison purposes.36

8.4. The Methodology

Taking into consideration these three groups of data and the methodology adopted, each chapter of this work is predominantly based on one or more of them: chapter two examines phonological features of the al-ʿAwābī district vernacular, reporting primary data elicited from the audio files, whilst Rein-
hardt’s material is used only in specific instances for comparison purposes; chapter three, on morphology, uses as sources both primary data and Reinhardt’s data, clearly divided and signposted, in order to visibly show the diachronic variation between them. Finally, chapter four, on syntax, is entirely based on primary data, since Reinhardt (1894) lacks an extensive syntactic description, with only a few exceptions; however, the chapter also takes into consideration syntactic features from neighbouring dialects for comparative or supportive purposes.

It is necessary to address a few limitations that this methodology and the range of participants pose to the research. First, the description presented has to be considered as based mainly on the speech of a limited number of women, of different ages and levels of education. Admittedly, having a wider range of speakers, including men, would have given a fuller picture of the linguistic and sociolinguistic situation of the district under investigation. Nevertheless, since male researchers in the past have suffered from the opposite problem—i.e., the difficulty of working with women, especially in Arab contexts—many linguistic studies carried out in Oman in the last century have considered dialectological material only from male speakers. Hence, one of the limitations of this study might also be considered a strength and the starting point for a future widening of the description to include other variables.

Some may argue that another limitation of this work consists in the number of informants used. However, in recruiting

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37 See, for example, the work of Davey (2016), who had access to only three women out of a total of fourteen informants.
them, I tried to assemble a range of people as wide as possible vis-à-vis the criteria mentioned earlier in the section.

A recent tendency in Oman in general and, hence, in the al-ʿAwābī district, more specifically, is to marry people from outside one’s tribe or one’s region, whereas, up until a few decades ago, this practice was rare. This might pose another issue: to what extent do inter-regional or inter-tribal marriages impact on the dialect spoken today?

The extent of influence of other Omani varieties on this dialect, as a result of inter-tribal or inter-regional marriages and relocation of residents, is something that may be of interest to future researchers, but will not be addressed in this work. Here, the consultants’ speech is described while taking into account the fact that all of them, if married, have local husbands, either al-Kharūṣi or al-ʿAbrī.