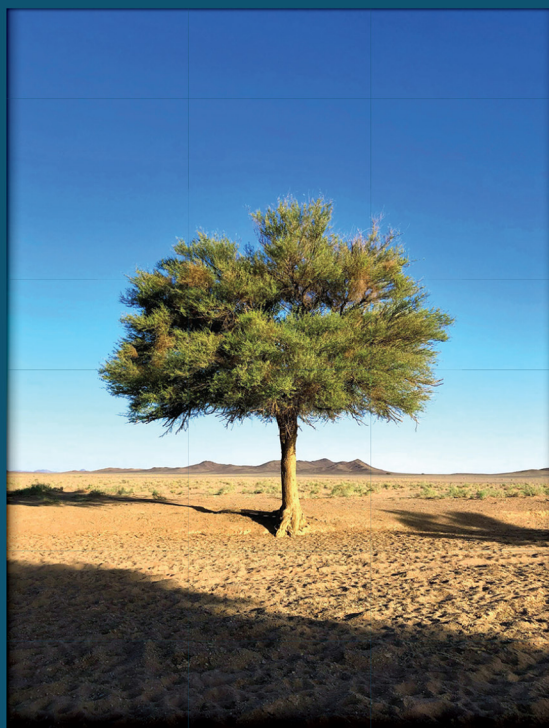


# Diversity across the Arabian Peninsula Language, Culture, Nature

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# THE DHAID OASIS: ONOMASTIC INVESTIGATIONS IN NORTHERN EMIRATI VILLAGES

*Mark Shockley*

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## 1.0. Introduction

The eastern Arabian peninsula had two primary sources of influence in antiquity: Mesopotamia and South Arabia (Holes 2016, 12; Rohmer et al. 2018, 300). This study presents evidence of linguistic contact with both regions from primary and secondary data from the northern United Arab Emirates and the adjoining areas of Oman. This chapter is also a first attempt at elucidating the origins of several unique proper names found in the northern UAE, using an onomastic database comprising more than nine-thousand eastern Arabian proper names, including toponyms, family names, and personal names. While most Emirati names are transparently Arabic, a few names have their origins in Akkadian, Aramaic, and Persian. Other names resemble those of Ancient South Arabian onomastics, corroborating traditional accounts that link certain Emirati tribes with southwestern Arabia. In particular, this paper focuses on the name of the oasis town Dhaid (*il-dēd*), in Sharjah Emirate, and the Bani Kitab (*banī kitab*) tribe, for whom Dhaid is a historic centre.

### 1.1. Data Sources

While living in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the author compiled a lexical database with over 11,000 stems in Arabian dialects, from primary and secondary data (Shockley 2020). The author has digitised and coded 6,650 toponyms and 2,557 family names from J. G. Lorimer's (1908) *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Shockley 2024). Primary data also includes over five-hundred personal names used in the United Arab Emirates. The author is conducting linguistic fieldwork in the northern Emirates and is gathering lexical and onomastic data from public media and local Arabic-language cultural publications, as well as field interviews.

### 1.2. Linguistic Situation in Ancient Eastern Arabia

Evidence pertaining to the linguistic situation of eastern Arabia in antiquity is not easy to come by (Holes 2016, 10; Al-Jallad 2018, 10). Bilingual inscriptions in Aramaic and Hasaitic scripts have been found in Thāj (eastern Saudi Arabia) and Mleiḥa (Sharjah, UAE), some dating back to the third century BCE, showing that in some areas Aramaic co-existed with another poorly documented Arabian language (Rohmer et al. 2018; Multhoff and Stein 2018).<sup>1</sup> Mleiḥa was inhabited from the third century BCE to the third century CE.

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<sup>1</sup> Though the Hasaitic script is closely related to monumental Ancient South Arabian script, the language recorded is currently classified as an Ancient North Arabian language. The paucity of data and some peculiarities in the inscriptions have led to several speculations; see Al-Jallad 2018, 30–33 for a helpful summary of the issues.

Recent Syriac studies on the communities of Beth Qaṭraye (‘region of the Qataris’, corresponding roughly to northeastern Arabia, including Qatar, Bahrain, and parts of the UAE) have enriched our knowledge considerably for the period from the fourth to ninth centuries CE. During this time period, the churches and monasteries of the Gulf region wrote, corresponded, and performed liturgy in Syriac. Persian and Arabic were also certainly in use during this period (Kozah et al. 2021, 9). In a helpful new book, Kozah et al. (2021) give lexical evidence that by the eighth century the spoken language of Beth Qaṭraye (called *Qaṭrāyīth* in Syriac sources) was substantially Arabic in its lexicon. Of fifty *Qaṭrāyīth* vocabulary words recorded in Syriac sources, forty are found in Arabic, six derive from Syriac, three from Pahlavi, and one from Aramaic.

Contemporary Aramaic borrowings are sufficiently numerous enough to say that it was probably the spoken language of several communities along the Gulf at the time of Arabisation, though scholars disagree somewhat. Stein (2018) argues that Aramaic in the first millennium BCE in the eastern Arabian Peninsula was not a language of wider communication, but was circumscribed to administrative use. Holes (2001) presents evidence from medieval Arabic geographies that ancient Bahrainis were “settled, Aramaic-speaking agriculturalists” (referred to as ‘Nabataeans’; see Holes 2001, xxiv). In another study, the same author clarifies that ancient northeastern Arabians were “probably polyglot in language,” noting the use of Persian in religious music in Beth Qaṭraye in the fifth century (Holes 2002, 270).

The semantic range of localised Aramaic loanwords does not justify Stein's contention as the ongoing situation (cf. Holes 2016, 14–15). Several Aramaic borrowings were observed in the northern Emirates (primary data) and in the wider Gulf region (secondary data), and there is a notable commonality with Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (JBA).<sup>2</sup>

- (1) *ōgiyānūs* 'ocean' (Hasa, Aramco 1958, 270); cf. JBA *ūqīa'nāws* 'ocean';
- (2) *glūla* 'cannonball' (Khorfakkan, UAE); cf. Syriac *glōlā* 'globe, ball',<sup>3</sup> cf. MSA *qulla*;
- (3) *čīša* 'small palm-tree' (Holes 2001, 81); cf. JBA *kyš* 'a bunch of vegetables or reeds';
- (4) *rāz* (i/u) 'to estimate the weight of s.th.' (Qafisheh 1997, 284); cf. JBA *ryz* 'a rare measure of volume';<sup>4</sup>
- (5) *kārūk* 'cradle' (Qafisheh 1997, 484; Khorfakkan, UAE); cf. JBA *kārōk* 'bundle'.

Toponyms also provide evidence of contact with Persian, Aramaic, and Ancient South Arabian languages. Potts and Blau (1998, 33) note in Ptolemy's *Geography* the presence of Aramaic toponyms, none of them now in use. With modern data, Holes identifies several toponyms of Persian origin and others with

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<sup>2</sup> The reference used for Jewish Babylonian Aramaic is Sokoloff (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Payne-Smith (1902, 70). This is probably also the origin of Persian *galūla* 'ball, pellet' (Steingass 1892, 986).

<sup>4</sup> Holes (2001) gives the origin as Persian *razn* 'balancing anything in the hand to try its weight' (Steingass 1892, 574). Morano (2019, 289) gives *rēze rēze* 'gradually, particularly' in northern Oman. Apparently, *rēze* was a measure and the verb was derived from this measure.

Persian elements (Holes 2002, 273; Holes 2016, 12, n. 29). He also identifies two village names that he considers Aramaic in origin (*dēr*, cf. Syriac *dēr* ‘monastery’; *samāhīg*, cf. JBA *mašmāhīg* ‘a bishopric’).

In this review of northern Emirati toponyms and anthroponyms, there are few names with Aramaic or Persian origins. In ancient eastern Arabia, language contact was likely spotty.

### 1.3. South Arabian Origins in Tradition and Dialectology

The northern Emirates was for centuries on an ancient trade route that transferred goods between South Arabia and Mesopotamia (Sedov 1995; Stein 2017, 119–20; Rohmer et al. 2018, 300). Today, the northern UAE is the meeting point for several Arabic varieties: Gulf Arabic, Omani Arabic (sedentary and Bedouin varieties), and Šiḥḥi Arabic. The ruling families of Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE are Gulf Arabic speakers with a relatively recent Najdi provenance. The Qāsimī family, which rules Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, claims to be descended from ‘Adnān, which would mean they have traditional associations with northern Arabia (Lorimer 1908, 1547).

Omani tradition recorded in the work *Kašf al-Ġumma* states that the Azd tribe emigrated from Sirāt in southwestern Arabia in the first or second century CE (Groom 1994). The Azd tribe is considered the earliest Arab tribe of Oman, with certain later groups coming from northern Arabia (Lorimer 1908, 1389). In past generations, the Šiḥḥi tribe and the Kumzari people were frequently regarded as being of ancient South Arabian

‘Himyarite’ origin (for references, see van der Wal Anonby 2014; 2015, 12–14).

Holes (2016, 18–32) and Wilmsen (2020) have studied dialectological commonalities within Arabic that specifically link Yemen with the northern Emirates and Bahrain. This study looks at modern names and their possible links with languages other than Arabic, including Aramaic, Persian, and the languages of Ancient South Arabian inscriptions.

#### 1.4. The Dhaid Oasis

Dhaid (Omani Bedouin Arabic, *il-Dēd*) is an important oasis town in inland Sharjah emirate (Qafisheh 1997, 247). Heard-Bey writes that Dhaid is the most important village in the interior of the Emirates because of its strategic position and access to water (Heard-Bey 1996, 95). Dhaid is 20 km north of Mleiha, an important archaeological site already mentioned. The name *Dēd* (*d̥-y-d̥*?) does not have any clear Arabic meaning, and fieldwork has not uncovered any folk etymologies.

The etymon *dyd* does appear in multiple Hasaitic and Qatabanic inscriptions, but the name has been the subject of dispute. In Beeston’s (1962, 13) grammar of Ancient South Arabian, he takes note of a few names where *d̥* is written where *z* is expected. One of these is *dyd*. Beeston here assumes that *dyd* is an unattested form and that the plain reading of the name is, therefore, highly unlikely.

Prioletta et al. (2019, 252–53) present an alabaster fragment with the name *dydʿl*. According to Prioletta, Hayajneh



(1998, 142–43, as cited by Prioletta) interprets the root *dyd* in relation to Arabic *dwd*, meaning ‘protect’.

In analysing the two Hasaitic instances, Rohmer et al. (2018, 299) propose a “global re-reading” of the Hasaitic glyph that would otherwise be recognisable as *d*. This was based on a lack of attestation: “No such root exists in Semitic and this name is not known in Arabic or any other Semitic language” (Rohmer et al. 2018, 299; cf. Al-Jallad 2018, 32). As has already been shown, this root *dyd* is attested in Arabic and Qatabanic, and is included in a Qatabanic onomasticon.

In one Qatabanic inscription, RES 3878, *dyd* and *zyd* appear together. Such a close collocation would imply free variation, which is not what is observed in other Qatabanic data. Because both Thāj and Dhaid are on the ancient trade route between South Arabia and Mesopotamia, it is possible, though unproven, that all these instances of the root *d-y-d* relate to a common (South Arabian?) root. With four attestations of *dyd* in two Arabian scripts as well as a modern Emirati toponym, the burden of proof now rests on those who want to prove that all four ancient uses of *dyd* were in fact intended to be *zyd*.

### 1.5. Banī Kitāb

Banī Kitāb (Omani Bedouin Arabic, *Kitāb*; singular *Kitbī*) are one of the most prominent and influential tribes in the northern Emirates and Oman. Banī Kitāb are found today in an inland corridor stretching from Ras al-Khaimah in the northern UAE, south through al-Ain and Buraimi into the Dhahirah region of Oman (Lorimer 1908, 1559). Their name has several phonetic variants,

partly depending on the dialect: Lorimer (1908, 1558) prefers the spellings *Qītab* and *Qatab*, probably as back-formations for two phonetic rules ( $*q > k$ , and short vowel raising in open syllables). In the northern Emirates, the pronunciation *Kitab*, singular *Kitbī*, is most typical; the spelling with *qāf* appears to be more frequent in Oman. Among Gulf Arabic speakers, the old pronunciation was *Banī Ġītab*, singular *Iġtibī*.

Though their current area of influence extends through much of the Dhahirah region, local tradition in the northern Emirates states that the Bani Kitab are the remains of the Ancient South Arabian kingdom of Qataban. Ptolemy's *Geography* includes the name 'Cottabani' in southeastern Arabia, which may attest a transition between ancient, southwestern Qataban and modern, northeastern Bani Kitab. 'Cottabani' has long been thought to resemble *Qatabān*, the problem being that Qataban is in southwestern Arabia and the Cottabani were in southeastern Arabia (Sprenger 1874). For chronological reasons, Groom (1994, 206–7) suggests that the Cottabani in southeastern Arabia may have been refugees from Qataban. Hawley (1970, 61, 294) points out the possible connection between Ptolemy's Cottabani and the modern Bani Kitab.

The possibility of continuity from *Bani Kitab* to *Qatabān* is linguistically tenable. (1) The initial vowel is raised from *a* to *i* by a well-known regular sound change found in many Arabian dialects (blocked by the presence of the pharyngeal in *Ka'ab*) (Johnstone 1967, 27–28). (2) The sound alternation  $q \sim k$  is found in certain sedentary dialects (Holes 2016, 31) and is attested in several names, such as *Maskat*  $\sim$  *Masqaṭ* 'Muscat, the

capital of Oman'. (3) In certain Arabic names the suffix *-ān* may be used in one form and not another, i.e., *Qumzān* 'clan name' > *Qamzi* 'member of the *Qumzān* clan'; *Āl Bu Kalbī* 'tribal name' > *Kalbāni* 'member of the *Āl Bu Kalbī* tribe'; etc. The shift from *Qatabān* to *Bani Qatab* has a close parallel in the tribe known as either *Ka'abān* or *Bani Ka'ab* (singular *Ka'bī* or *Ča'bī*), who also inhabit the area around Dhaid.

The sections that follow survey some interesting names of non-Arabic origin and their features.

## 2.0. Names of Non-Arabic Origin

### 2.1. Mesopotamian Influence

(i) The term *šīr* or *ṣayr* appears in several Emirati toponyms. In Lorimer (1908, 1825–26), *Šīr* is a cultivated tract of northern Ras al-Khaimah (south of Rams), with 2,500 inhabitants; but he writes that the name once referred to the entire area of Ras al-Khaimah. Though the origin is obscure, it seems to be related to Old Babylonian *šēru* 'hinterland, fields, plain, steppeland' (CAD 1962, XVI:138). 'Ubayd (2016, 46) records *iṣ-ṣayr* (?) as referring to a coastal hill in this area, apparently by association. *Šīr* is also found in the name of several islands, such as *Šīr Banī Yās* in Abu Dhabi emirate. The use of this word as a generic to refer to islands appears to be a semantic innovation.

(ii) Shees (*Šīš*) is a verdant, historic village, now a tourist area, equipped with a *falağ* irrigation system for cultivation of palm and fruit trees. The word *šīš* is recorded by Arabic lexicographers with the meaning 'inferior quality dates', and Holes (2016, 13) has already pointed out that this is most likely a

borrowing from Aramaic *šišā*, ultimately from Akkadian *šusu* (same meaning).

(iii) The same Aramaic borrowing gives its name to a harbour in Musandam, *Šīṣih* (n.b., the vowel of the feminine singular suffix is raised unconditionally in Šiḥḥi Arabic, known as short *imāla*; see Bernabela 2011). These names probably came indirectly through the borrowed lexical item *šiš*.

(iv) Dubai (Gulf Arabic, *Dibay*) is today the most populous city in the UAE and one of the seven emirates. Its name has several proposed origins: (a) *Dibay* is possibly a diminutive of the name of the nearby town *Diba*. ‘Ubayd even cites a proverb that says “From Diba came Dubai.” This suggests it is a secondary or derived toponym (Shockley 2024). (b) The name *Dibay* may also be a diminutive of *diba*, meaning ‘locust’. According to ‘Ubayd (2016, 69), thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī notes the presence of locust there, but this is perhaps only a folk etymology. (c) Thirdly, *Dubayyī* also appears as a location on the Tigris (Lorimer 1908, 1893). For this reason, Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah, concludes that *Dibay*, along with several other important Emirati names, has its origin in Mesopotamia (Al-Qasimi 2014).

(v) Ras al-Khaimah (Gulf Arabic, *Rās il-Ḥēmah*; var., *Rās Ḥimah* or *Rās Ḥimih*) is a town as well as the name of the northernmost emirate in the UAE. There are various folk etymologies in Emirati culture, usually stating that the name means ‘head of the tent’; *rās*, as used in place names, means ‘cape’ or ‘headland’. Another possibility is Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi’s

(2014) proposal that this name is related to *al-Ḥaymah*, the name of a settlement near Baghdad (Lorimer 1908, 100).

(vi) Sharjah (Modern Standard Arabic, *al-Šāriqah*) is the third most populous city in the UAE and one of the seven emirates. Al-Qasimi (2014) also links *il-Šarḡih*—this is his pronunciation, and he specifies that the vowels are short—to a quarter (*ḥārah*) in Baghdad by that name, thus linking the names of three emirates to the Baghdad area. Indeed, Al-Qasimi himself claims north Arabian roots. The name of the quarter in Baghdad is today spelled Shorja; it is adjacent to the eastern gate of the city (*il-Bāb il-Šarqī*) which is likely the origin of the name, by affrication (\*q > g > ḡ).

### 2.3. Persian Influence

(i) Limah (*Līmih*) is the name of a village with a harbour in Musandam, as well as an island opposite (Lorimer 1908, 1609). The words *lūmī* and *līm* are apparently doublets, both derived from Persian or Urdu *līmū*, all meaning ‘lime’ (Holes 2016, 122). The pattern *CīCū* is quite uncommon in Arabic and is resisted in borrowings: in *līm*, by elision of the final vowel, and in *lūmī*, by non-adjacent metathesis. Leem (*Līm*) is also the name of a park in Hatta.

(ii) Khor Fakkan (*Ḥōrfakkān* or *Ḥōrfukkān*) is a significant coastal town on the Gulf of Oman in the northern UAE. In both English and Arabic, the name is frequently spelled as one word. Though the typical English spelling is Khorfakkan or Khor Fakkan, ‘Ubayd (2016, 38) records this word as *Ḥōrfukkān*. The vowel change \*a > u is possibly caused by the adjacent labial f,

but this usually occurs in open syllables (Johnstone 1967, 28). The folk etymology given is that this name derives from Classical Arabic *Ḥawr Fakkān* ‘the bay of two jaws’, which, ‘Ubayd points out, is not even the expected use of the oblique dual suffix (it would be *Fakkayn*, not *Fakkān*). Lorimer (1908, 516) notes a significant presence of “Arabicised Persians” there.

The endings *-akān* and *-akkān* appear in numerous toponyms in Bahrain and Persia, most of them coastal locations, e.g., *Karzakkān* ‘hamlet in Bahrain’, *Dastakān* ‘the southwestern point of Qishm island, Iran’, *Rās Rākān* ‘northernmost point in Qatar’, *Gisakān* ‘mountain near Bushehr’, among others. This suffix is likely related to the Persian adjectival suffix *-gān*, but it is unclear why devoicing has occurred in all examples, unless *-akkān* is composed of the diminutive suffix *-ak*, with the adjectival suffix *-gān*, with voicing assimilation.

(iii) *Zirku* (*Zar-koh* in Steingass 1892, 615; *Zirko* in Lorimer 1908, 1945) is the name of an island belonging to Abu Dhabi; *koh* is a Persian word for ‘mountain’. Lorimer (1908, 1652) lists two other islands in the Strait of Hormuz with the same suffix: *Šanaku* and *Fanaku*, called in Kumzari *Mūmar* and *Dīdāmar*, respectively.

## 2.4. South Arabian Influence

(i) *Banī Ḥaḍram* (singular *Ḥaḍarmī*) appears in Lorimer (1908, 887) as a section of the Banī Jābir tribe, historically the rivals of the Banī Kitab tribe. Today, members of the Banī Jābir are met frequently in the northern Emirates.

(ii) *Banī Ḥaḍram* is also the name of a separate tribe in Oman (Lorimer 1908, 1393). As recorded by Lorimer, both these tribes (*Banī Ḥaḍram* and *Banī Jābir*) are Ghafiri politically and Ibadhi Muslims.

(iii) *Ḥaẓrūm* and *Ḥuẓayrim* are male personal names found in inland Sharjah. Both names are diminutives from the root *ḥ-ḍ-r-m*, which transparently refers to *Ḥaḍramawt*. It is uncommon for Arabic personal names to be derived from toponyms, except for the names of a few places with religious significance (*Yatrib*, *Zamzam*). These names are possibly derived from the tribal name *Ḥaḍram*, which itself more likely came from the toponym *Ḥaḍramawt*.

(iv) *Maḡāyil Ḥaẓrūm* is the name of a well in Abu Dhabi emirate (south of the study area), as recorded by Lorimer (1908, 1032). The well likely received its name by transonymisation from the personal name *Ḥaẓrūm*. Several wells and other man-made structures in the database are named after men; otherwise, personal names do not usually appear as toponyms in the Gulf region.

(v) *Maḡāyil Balqahais* is the name of a well near *Maḡāyil Ḥaẓrūm* (Lorimer 1908, 1032). The anthroponymic prefix *ba(l)-* is characteristic of South Arabia and is not found anywhere else in the data.

(vi) *Āl Bū Muhair* (singular, *Muhayrī*) is a numerous and widespread tribe in the Emirates, associated with the *Banī Yās*. Older sources disagree whether they are part of the *Banī Yās*; however, today, they are clearly adopted as part of the confederation. Lorimer (1908, 1121) records local tradition: “they are

said to be of Mahra origin and to have come originally from Hadhramaut.”

A South Arabian origin for this tribe is not implausible. Diminutivisation is extremely common during transonymisation in Arabian names (Shockley 2024), and so the form *Muhayr* may signify that this group separated from a group with a name from the root *m-h-r*.

## 2.5. Names of Likely Arabic Origin

(i) *Diba* (var. *Diba*<sup>◌◌</sup>) is the name of a historic town straddling the Musandam border.<sup>5</sup> The noun *diba* means ‘locust’ in certain Gulf dialects (Qafisheh 1997, 210; see Holes 2001, 169, for references), and Arabic toponyms frequently arise from names for fauna and, especially, flora. However, during fieldwork, Omani Arabic speakers (Bedouins) pronounced this name *Diba*<sup>◌◌</sup>.<sup>6</sup> It is not clear whether this was an innovation (‘*an‘ana*’), as occasionally occurs in words with no emphatic or pharyngeal consonants. Alternatively, *Diba*<sup>◌◌</sup> may be the older pronunciation, and *Diba* the innovation; in Šiḥḥi Arabic, a word-final pharyngeal may be realised as a glottal stop or as compensatory lengthening on a vowel (Bernabela 2011, 95).

(ii) Qidfa (*Gidfa*<sup>◌◌</sup>, var. *Ġidfa*<sup>◌◌</sup>) is a coastal settlement in Fujairah emirate. Lorimer (1908, 1697) records the variant *Ġidfa*<sup>◌◌</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Miles (1919, 5) records that the name was given by the “Dibba, or Lizard tribe” of Najd. Not only does this involve poor transcription (conflating *diba* with *ḍabba* ‘lizard’), but no other reference available to me mentions this tradition or this Najdi tribe.

<sup>6</sup> The name *db*<sup>◌◌</sup> is a lineage name in Sabaic (Avanzini et al. 2022).



The name may be from Arabic *quḍfah* ‘summit’ since it is an area with a dramatic hilltop; or it could be from the root *ḡ-d-f* with meanings related to rowing. In any case, the final pharyngeal is likely an innovation.

(iii) Al-Rams (*il-Rams*) is a village in northern Ras al-Khaimah emirate. (a) The plainest understanding of this word in Gulf Arabic would be that it refers to ‘conversation’, as a noun related to the characteristically Emirati word *rimas* ‘speak’ (cf. Omani *ramis* ‘evening conversation’, Morano 2019, 288). It is not clear why this word would be used as a toponym. In addition, the verbal noun for *rimas* locally is *ramsih*, not *rams*. (b) Since *rams* also means ‘grave site’ in Classical Arabic, ‘Ubayd (2016, 54–55) muses that the name may have referred to some monument now lost, or the area may have been known for its gravesites. However, this meaning has not been recorded in local dialects, and there is no clear evidence that it is or was known as a place of burial. (c) ‘Ubayd also points out that *al-ramṣ* is recorded in classical sources, and states that Old Arabic *ṣ* has as its reflex *s* in certain Emirati dialects, but I have not encountered this sound change. (d) The name *rms*<sup>1</sup> is attested as a lineage name in Sabaic (Avanzini et al. 2022), so the name may be a survival from an Arabian (non-Arabic) substrate.

## 2.6. Names of Obscure Origin

(i) Wadi Bayh or Bih (*Bayḥ* or *Bīh*) is a canyon between Ras al-Khaimah emirate (UAE) and Musandam (Oman), with a road that was in the past a significant border crossing. Bayh has several variant spellings and pronunciations. In Šiḥḥi Arabic, Old Arabic

\*ay is raised to *ī* in this position, and *ḥ* may be realised as [h], [h], or [fi] (see Bernabela 2011, 23, 35). This toponym closely resembles the name of Wādi Bayḥān, the centre of the kingdom of Qataban.

(ii) Sha'am (Gulf Arabic, *Ša'am*; Šiḥḥi Arabic, *Ša'am*) is a historic fishing village in northern Ras al-Khaimah, on the Musandam border. The root *s<sup>2</sup>-ʿ-m* is rare in Arabic. A type of fish is called *šī'im* in Qatar, but typically settlements named after fauna include the inalienable possession marker *bū* (e.g., *Bū Zabī* 'having gazelles'). Onomastic entries based on the root *s<sup>2</sup>-ʿ-m* are found in several ancient Arabian inscriptions and *Ša'am* may be a survival from a non-Arabic substrate. In Safaitic, *s<sup>2</sup>m* appears as a personal name, and in Qatabanic, *s<sup>2</sup>m(m)* is attested as a toponym.

(iii) Shindagha (*Šindaḡah*, var. *Šandaḡah*) is the name of a neighbourhood of historic importance in Dubai. The name was also applied to a small area in Buraimi, Oman (Lorimer 1908, 264). The only possible cognate discovered is Shandaq (*Bayt Šandaq*), a village near Sana'a, Yemen (*ḡ* ~ *q* in certain Arabian dialects; cf. Shockley 2020, 89).

(iv) *Taryam* is a male personal name recorded in Sharjah. It may bear some relation to the word *tirḡimān* 'interpreter', with the Gulf Arabic sound change *ḡ* > *y*, but *Tarḡam* is not attested as a personal name.

(v) *Al Dhait* (*il-Zayt* or *il-Zēt*) is an area in Ras al-Khaimah. The name has no obvious root or cognates. The *-t* ending here may be the feminine singular ending, which appears in Arabic only in the construct form, but is retained in Modern South

Arabian languages. The word *zyt* is also recorded in Sabaic, where it is translated ‘pure’ (Avanzini et al. 2022).

‘Ubayd (2016, 56) relates *Zayt* to medieval *Ḍawt* (a toponym recorded by Ibn Durayd), but Ibn Durayd is very vague, the vowel alternation *ē/ay* ~ *ō/aw* is quite rare (cf. for instance, *zēbag* ~ *zōbag* ‘mercury’, Qafisheh 1997, 300).

(vi) *Yibir* is the name of a mountain in Ras al-Khaimah emirate. This name may be from Arabic *ḡabr* ‘power’ or may be related to the Banī Jābir tribe. The sound change *ḡ* > *y* is probably not typical of this area of the UAE. *Ybr* is both a toponym and a tribe name in Sabaic.

(vii) Shakhbout (*Šaḥbūt*) is a male personal name found in the Emirati royal family. There is a Gulf Arabic verb with the same root, *šaḥbaṭ* ‘to scribble’. Because uvulars cause emphasis spread in Gulf Arabic, *Šaḥbūt* may come from *šaḥbūt*. The suffix *-ūt* sometimes appears in Arabic loanwords from Syriac (i.e., *malakūt*, *ḡabarūt*); it is also possible that the suffix *-ūt* here is a vestige of a Modern South Arabian borrowing, since *-ūt* is a common feminine ending. In this study, I did not uncover compelling evidence of Modern South Arabian influence on Emirati toponyms, and this is an open question for future research.

### 3.0. Characteristic Morphology

#### 3.1. Non-Arabic Morphology

Despite strong evidence of language contact, very little evidence of non-Arabic morphology appears in Emirati names. In the examples above, three unusual morphemes have been mentioned that appear in northern Emirati toponyms:

- (1) The South Arabian prefix *Ba-* or *Bā-*, used in family names, attested only in the toponym *Maḡāyil Balqahais*;
- (2) The Aramaic suffix *-ūt*, possibly obscured by emphasis spread in the male personal name *Šaḥbūt*;
- (3) The Persian suffix *-(ak)kān* (< \**gān*?), found in coastal settlements throughout the Gulf region.

The first two are unique attestations in data from the Gulf region. The third is attested only three times in the Gulf region, including once in the northern Emirates. It is possible that it was productive in Gulf Arabic in some past period, but it is now only found in frozen forms. The suffix *-(ak)kān* is therefore better considered an idiosyncratic vestige of past Persian speakers, rather than a truly borrowed morpheme.

### 3.2. Diminutives

The morphology of Emirati personal names exhibits unique characteristics among Arabic varieties. Several Omani Bedouin Arabic personal names in the study area are found primarily or exclusively in the diminutive *CCēC* pattern:

- (1) *Hwēšil* (M) < *hāšil* ‘wanderer, vagrant’(?)
- (2) *Ḥlēš* (M) < *ḥalis* ‘brave’(?)
- (3) *Hwēdin* (M) < *hādin* ‘one who makes truces’

Of these, only the first is attested as a name in a non-diminutive form (*Hāšil*). The diminutive pattern *CCēC* may serve to identify an onymic here (cf. Shockley 2024). Interestingly, both *hayšalah* and *hawdanah* are recorded by Ibn Manẓūr as epithets of the camel. It is possible that both *Hwēšil* and *Hwēdin* have some

connection to Bedouin life, since these names are found in a Bedouin area in inland Sharjah.

Other morphologically diminutive male personal names without any non-diminutive form include *Šaḥbūṭ* and *Ṭaḥnūn*, both names found in the Emirati royal family.

### 3.3. Form IX

A number of common female personal names are of the ninth form:

- (1) *Mayṭa* (F) (< Arabic *Mayṭā*’, for which no origin or meaning is given; *myṭ* is attested as a name of unknown gender in Qatabanic, Avanzini et al. 2004)
- (2) *Šamma* < Arabic *šammā*’ ‘most honourable’
- (3) *Šayma* < Arabic *šaymā*’ ‘having a mole’

### 3.4. Reduplication

Saqamqam (*Saqamqam*, var. *Sakamkam*) is a wadi in Fujairah emirate. This morphological form, with reduplication of the second and third consonants, is uncommon in Arabic and Gulf Arabic, but is more productive in other Semitic languages, including Ethiopic languages. This is the only such occurrence in the entire dataset of east Arabian toponyms.

### 3.5. Quadriliteral Roots

Two male personal names appear to derive from quadriliteral roots beginning with *y-*, e.g., *Yaʿrūf* (< \**uḡrūf* ‘carpenter ant?’), *Yaʿrūb* (probably from *Yaʿrub* ‘name of a famed South Arabian king; also applied to an Omani tribe’). The same phenomenon is

seen in three toponyms in inland Sharjah emirate: *Yaʿakal* ‘an inland village’ (Lorimer 1908, 1478); *Yahfar Muṣayfī* ‘a single well’, and *Yahfar il-Fāyih* ‘a single well’ (Lorimer 1908, 1442–43; cf. *ḡaʿfar* ‘creek’). *Yanqul* in northern Oman and *Yatrib* (= Medina) are two similar examples outside the study area.

#### 4.0. Conclusion

The vast majority of place names, family names, and personal names along the eastern littoral of the Arabian Peninsula are of Arabic origin (cf. Kozah 2021), but there are certain areas that betray the presence of substrates (Aramaic, Persian, and perhaps others). Documentary and archaeological evidence corroborates the presence of Aramaic, Persian, and the poorly known Arabian language known by its Hasaitic script. Non-Arabic names are concentrated in areas with agriculture or influential ports, e.g., Khor Fakkan, Ras al-Khaimah, and Bahrain.

As Holes (2001; 2002) has pointed out, there are traces of Akkadian influence in Gulf Arabic. Loanwords may have been taken directly from Akkadian, or by way of Aramaic. A few Aramaic loanwords relate strongly to local sedentary culture (types of palms, weighing items for trade, ornamental cradles). Shared vocabulary with Jewish Babylonian Aramaic may strengthen a previous proposal that a southeastern variety of Aramaic was used as a vernacular in the Gulf (Contini 2003). Mesopotamian influence is noticeable in areas linked to palm cultivation and agriculture (*Šiṣ*, *Šir*).

Though Persian loanwords are abundant in the Gulf Arabic lexicon, Persian forms in the onomasticon are rather uncommon,

localised to the names of islands and coastal settlements. The toponymic suffix *-(ak)kān* may be derived from Persian *-gān*. It is not surprising that several islands under Emirati control retain Persian names.

This paper has explored some evidence of South Arabian names in the northern Emirates. As already noted, Arabic dialectology has established links between Yemen and sedentary Gulf societies (i.e., Bahrain and the northern Emirates; see Holes 2016; Wilmsen 2020). These dialects skirt the coast of the Arabian Peninsula, supporting the hypothesis of an ancient pattern of northward migration that had already been suggested by local traditions. This pattern may extend to both Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking South Arabian groups. Hasaitic inscriptions already attest to a poorly known Arabian language. The modern toponym Dhaid (*il-Dēd*) has no Arabic cognates, but the root *dyd* is attested in Hasaitic (East Arabian) and Qatabanic (South Arabian) inscriptions. Local names from the root *ḥ-ḏ-r-m* are found repeatedly in the inland Emirates. A few Emirati toponyms and anthroponyms, though lacking compelling Arabic etymologia, correspond well to Sabaic and Qatabanic names (*Ša'am*, *il-Zēt*, *Yibir*). This may be evidence of an Arabian substrate, related to both Ancient North Arabian and Ancient South Arabian languages, and which naturally shared numerous onomastic features with these languages.

Data is sorely lacking on Šiḥḥi Arabic, and there are still many toponyms of unclear origin in northern Ras al-Khaimah and Musandam. The confluence of three dialects obscures root identification through an abundance of segmental processes (\*ǧ > g,

ğ, y; \*q > g, ğ, y; etc.). There is much more work to be done, but I hope that this paper has advanced our understanding of the linguistic situation of ancient Arabia through the names of its modern people and places.

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