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*A Maritime Lexicon*  
*Arabic Nautical Terminology in the Indian Ocean*

Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2019, 641pp.

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In our times of coffee-table books, it has become a rarity to come across large format publications which actually justify their monumental design. In this *Maritime Lexicon*, printed in large quarto, on glossy paper and full of illustrations, this felicitous coincidence between format and contents is verified at every turn. Being partly a long-awaited summa of Indian Ocean nautical sources, it is in a way the culmination of decades of work by pioneers like Khoury, Tibbetts and Shihāb, and as such it is due to become a standard future reference. I shall mention below a few weaknesses of the book, but first I will give an overview and mention two remarkable improvements on the previous material which make it more than just a compendium.

The *Lexicon* is rather a collection of six tightly complementary glossaries on the following topics: 1) Vessel Types and General Terms, 2) Boat Building, 3) Seafaring, 4) Navigation, 5) Fishing and Pearlery, 6) Currency. This division is a reflection of the complexity of the subject matter, and it is an obvious attempt at establishing boundaries and simplifying the use of so much information, but I have found it to be slightly artificial at times (as avowed in the Introduction, p. 14), and to occasionally complicate rather than help use the book. This is in good measure remedied by the Translation Table and the Index at the end of the volume. The individual entries, all supported by source references, and including rare Arabic sources and a vast range of Western sources, show that this work is at once eminently practical and profoundly philological, providing many fresh translations of texts studied by Tibbetts and Khoury.

One remarkable feature of this *Lexicon* is its being a truly bilingual effort. By this I mean, first, that the parallel Arabic and English texts are not simply ancillary to one another, but that each stands its ground independently; and second, that the whole volume has been conceived as “an effort to combine Arabic and English scholarly discourses,” “to assist Arab and Western scholars.” This aspiration is most appropriate to Indian Ocean studies in general, given that they deal with the most intensely multicultural of the waterways in history; it is also a timely aspiration, being as we are in the midst of an accelerated decolonisation of historical studies towards a concretely multipolar perspective; it is also an aspiration that raises complex practical editorial issues, and these have been in general resolved satisfactorily.

The second outstanding feature of the *Lexicon* is the profusion and the aptness of the illustrations, and quite in particular the contributions by Alessandro Ghidoni. The details of stellar navigation which had remained hitherto, in previous literature, as abstract and difficult notions, are here fleshed out graphically in a thorough way by tailor-made diagrams, making use of the latest astronomical software; the same happens with countless minute details of nautical terminology, which very specific photographs illuminate concretely as no words could ever do. The same effect is achieved by the detailed Drawings appendix, which builds on previous material, adding corrections and expanding the scope.

The typography of the English text stands out as well-balanced, particularly considering the demanding set of diacritics needed, and it is a pity, as mentioned by another reviewer, that the size and style of the Arabic font is not up to the same standard.

To improve the usability of the *Lexicon*, I would make two suggestions: first, the addition of an Arabic alphabet table, which would significantly enhance the experience for non-Arabists; second, expanding the Index into a set of two indices, including one for personal names and perhaps also an English–Arabic glossary. These two additions would in fact be in line with the bilingual intention mentioned above, and they would fulfil its aims. Given the referential tenor of this book, I would go as far as suggesting a discreet inset, perhaps a dozen pages on thin paper stock, which could easily fit inside the bound volume and add dramatically to its usefulness.

In any case, these suggestions are not meant to detract from the merits of a work which is a serious cause for celebration, an empowering tool, and hopefully a springboard for substantial and better grounded future endeavours in the field.

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