



Guy and Brucks 1823

FIGHTING DHOW EXPLAINER

NAUTICAL RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE IN THE PERSIAN GULF

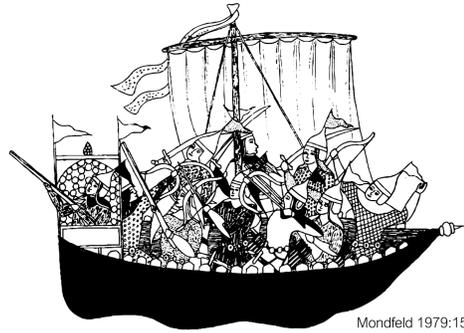


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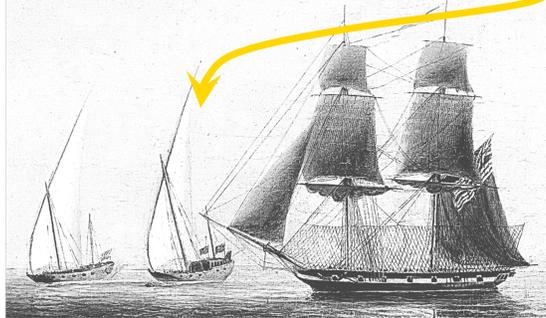
Mick de Ruyter, PhD candidate in Archaeology, Flinders University of South Australia, DOCFEST 8–11 September 2020

1 When the Portuguese attacked Hormuz in the Persian Gulf in 1507 they fought people in merchant ships and small boats that had planks laced together with coconut fibre ...



Mondfeld 1979:15

2 ... but before the British agreed truces with the maritime tribes of the Gulf three hundred years later, they had to fight off 'pirates' in specially built fighting craft.

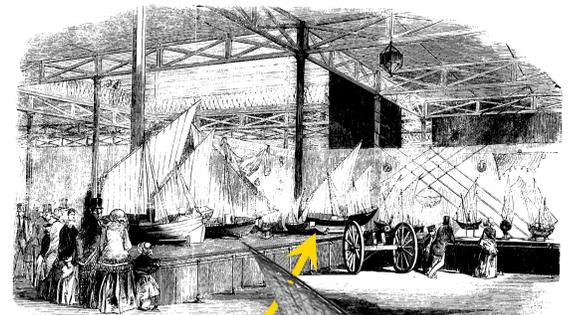


Hornbrook c.1840

3 The traditional ships and boats from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian seas are now known as dhows, but there are many types, most now extinct.



4 While there are few archaeological remains of watercraft from this period, there are hundreds of contemporary images that tell the story of transition from simple craft to complex fighting vessels. Evidence from archaeology and ethnography can be compared to historical images of dhows to see how technology changed over time.



Artakoloro / Alamy Stock Photo

5 The best-known example of a fighting dhow is a model in the Science Museum in London that was built as a display for the Great Exhibition of 1851.



Science Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

6 The fighting dhow is reconstructed in this thesis by using a catalogue of 391 historical images — paintings, drawings, rock art, graffiti, models and Islamic miniatures — of Persian Gulf watercraft from 1200 to 1900 as primary evidence. Together these visual sources depict over 900 individual watercraft.

A LARGE TRAPEZOIDAL 'SETTEE' OR 'ARAB LATEEN' SAIL ON A FORWARD LEANING MAST WAS A SIMPLE YET POWERFUL RIG

A FIGHTING DHOW THIS BIG (NEARLY 40 METRES LONG) COULD CARRY AS MANY AS 200 ARMED PEOPLE, LABELLED 'PIRATES' BY EUROPEANS

ONLY FROM THE 17TH CENTURY WERE GUNS ARRANGED IN BROADSIDE LIKE THIS WHEN HULLS WERE FASTENED WITH METAL AND STRONG ENOUGH TO ABSORB THE TRANSVERSE SHOCK

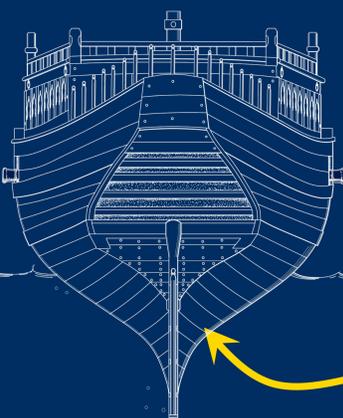
A DISTINCTIVE SHARPLY ANGLED BOW MADE FOR A FAST HULL

A PROJECTING COUNTER STERN WAS USED AS A PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO SHOOT AT OR BOARD OTHER VESSELS

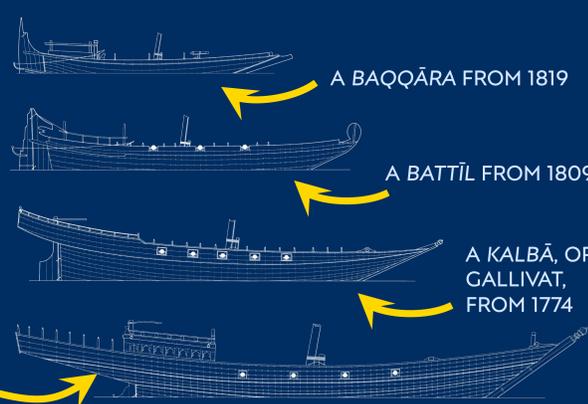
A LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF AN 8-GUN DĀW, A TYPICAL FIGHTING DHOW FROM 1750–1850

BEAMS THAT TOOK THE WEIGHT OF THE GUNS WERE SUPPORTED BY LONG PLANKS (CLAMPS) RATHER THAN CURVED TIMBERS (KNEES) LIKE EUROPEAN SHIPS

7 People in Persian Gulf maritime societies changed the way they built and acquired watercraft to cope with the stress of organised violence in the wake of European intrusions in the western Indian Ocean.



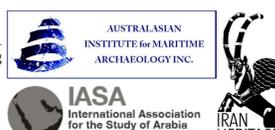
THIS GRAPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF A DĀW FROM THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY IS BASED ON THE SCIENCE MUSEUM MODEL AND OTHER CONTEMPORARY VISUAL SOURCES



8 While the monumental warships of the European traditions absorb much archaeological attention, the vernacular fighting craft of peripheral societies offer alternative insight to the ways people modify their everyday things in response to violence.

Mick de Ruyter is writing his thesis entitled 'The Fighting Dhow: early modern vernacular watercraft and organised maritime violence in the Persian Gulf' for a PhD in archaeology at Flinders University. Check out his profile at Academia here. ✉ mick.deruyter@flinders.edu.au

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INSPIRING ACHIEVEMENT