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# Articles

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## On Some Ichthyonyms in the Jibbali/Shehret Dialect of al-Ḥallānīya (Kuria Muria Archipelago) with Dhofari Arabic Equivalents

**Abstract** This paper presents some ichthyonyms (fish names) in the Jibbali/Shehret dialect spoken on the island of al-Ḥallānīya in the Kuria Muria archipelago (Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman), with equivalents in the variety of Dhofari Arabic spoken by the inhabitants of the island. Most of these ichthyonyms correspond to sea creatures that can be found in the waters around the island. The analysis of this lexical material reveals its mixed origin: although most of the tokens analysed are either of Modern South Arabian or Arabic origin, a significant number of the ichthyonyms in question seems to find no parallel in the local languages. This offers an opportunity to look at the wider Indian ocean and its historically prominent trade network as a possible source for these lexical items.

**Keywords** Ichthyonymy, fish names, Kuria Muria, Jibbali, Shahri, Modern South Arabian

## 1 Introduction

The study of the Jibbali/Shehret dialect of al-Ḥallānīya, the only currently inhabited island of the Kuria Muria archipelago in the Dhofar governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, officially called Ǧuzur al-Ḥallānīyāt, has received sparse attention to date: the first report of this variety was made by the British naval officer J.G. Hulton, who published a description of the island and a word list containing 103 terms that he elicited personally from the islanders. He conclud-

ed that the language was essentially a form of 'Shahree' (Hulton 1840). It was not until a century later that this language variety stirred some interest, when Wolf Leslau re-analysed Hulton's materials and confirmed his conclusions (Leslau 1947). However, subsequent mentions of the Kuria Muria dialect are scanty: in the introduction of the *Jibbāli Lexicon*, Johnstone introduces the epithet 'baby Jibbali' by which the Kuria Muria dialect was (and still is) known by mainland speakers, as 'they pronounce the letters ś and ź as ṯ and ḏ, etc' (1981: xii).

The first systematic analysis of Hulton's wordlist is found in one of Rubin's 2014 papers (Rubin 2014b). In this study, the author traces a series of convincing etymological parallels between the Kuria Muria dialect, mainland Jibbali/Shehret dialects and other Modern South Arabian languages. He also attempts, based on Hulton's transcription, to ascertain whether the shift of lateral sibilants to interdentals actually is a distinguishing trait of this dialect, and concludes that '*ṯ* was a free variant of *ś* at this time. It is just as likely, however, that *th* was another attempt to write the sound *ś*. So, if Johnstone's statement is true for the dialect as spoken in the 1970s, it was not true—at least not completely—in 1836' (2014b: 483).

However, more recent studies (Castagna 2018; 2022a; 2022b) showed that this much-discussed (but seldom directly documented) shift actually is a general (but non-universal) tendency of speakers from al-Ḥallānīya to realise all sibilants, lateral and non-lateral alike, as interdentals (Castagna 2018: 233), so that, even within the same utterance, a speaker may (and, indeed, frequently does) utter the same word twice, with and without an etymological lateral sound.[1] In this work,additional phonological, morphological and syntactical peculiarities of this variety are described, but a full-fledged description of this and other Jibbali/Shehret dialects[2] is still a *desideratum*. Because of this *lacuna*, many aspects of the culture, uses and customs of al-Ḥallānīya are still completely undocumented.

Fishing is a prominent activity on the island, and whilst this is not surprising, one must stress the abundance of sea creatures in the waters around al-Ḥallānīya, which in the last decade has resulted in the emergence of a thriving tourist activity in the area, with specialised agencies catering to expert and amateur fishermen looking to catch large game-fish. However, fishing traditions on the island are much older than this recent development, as the livelihood of Kuria Muria islanders historically depended on their daily catches.

Mubarak al-Shahri (also known as *e-gzíri* 'the islander' in the town of Sadḥ, in mainland Dhofar, where he has resided for more than 20 years), is the person who provided the data at the core of this study. He is a retired fisherman who was born in al-Ḥallānīya about 75 years ago and plied the waters of the Kuria Muria bay for most of his life. His knowledge of the sea creatures which live in the local

[1] For more details, see below 2.14.

[2] For example, the western dialects.

waters is extensive, as is his ability to steer and repair various types of boats. In 2017, I was lucky enough to spend a two-week period in Mubarak's company, who consented to be interviewed several times about his knowledge of the sea, as well as of the Jibbali/Shehret language as spoken on the island. During one of the above-mentioned sessions, he came up with a number of ichthyonyms in Jibbali/Shehret and Arabic, which are analysed in the present paper: in the following section, the data is presented in a summarising table. Subsequently, the lexical items are grammatically and etymologically analysed one by one. The most evident limitation of this study consists in the difficulty in identifying some of the creatures whose names are listed below, due to the lack of relevant visual stimuli in the elicitation process. In other words, the topic of fish names was brought up by the interviewee unexpectedly during an informal conversation, which means that the lexical materials examined here were mentioned by him in a cursory fashion, and their identification, when possible, was achieved by comparing them with cognate forms in the fish databases and/or in the published literature. Finally, the conclusions section summarises the findings of this study, and attempts to draw some generalisations about the ichthyonymy patterns in the linguistic variety of the island, whilst also taking into account the scant historical record.

## 2 Data and discussion

| | English and/or scientific names | Arabic | Jibbali/Shehret |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Spotted grouper / *epinephelus*, *aethaloperca* and *cephalopholis* genera | *ḥāmúr* | *rétəḳ* |
| 2 | Sky emperor, smalltooth emperor / *lethrinus mahsena* and *lethrinus microdon* | *ḥuḏír* / *šaʕri* | *ʕasét* |
| 3 | Brown-spotted grouper / *epinephelus chlorostigma* | *sammān* | *xɔlxɔ́l* |
| 4 | Shark | (*samak*) *ḳərš* | *ləxím* / *ḏ̄ba* |
| 5 | Bluefish / *Pomatomus saltatrix* | *taḳwa* | *taḳᵊbít* |
| 6 | Tuna / *Thunnus* genera | *tuna* | *gédər* / *šérwi* |
| 7 | Longtail tuna / *Thunnus tonggol* | / | *təbbéna* / *sahwa* |
| 8 | Sole fish | *samak mūsā* | *mix* |
| 9 | Whale | *šaḥūṭa* | *śébḥaṭat* |

| | English and/or scientific names | Arabic | Jibbali/Shehret |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Dolphin | / | *dɔ́xᵊs* |
| 11 | King soldierbream / *Argyrops spinifer* | *ʕarīf / rabāba* | *kəfaʕán* |
| 12 | / | / | *kēlɛ́t* |
| 13 | Turtle | *ṣaḥləfá* | *ḥūs ~ ḥúmᵊs* |
| 14 | Crayfish/Lobster | *šarḥa* | *śirɔ́x ~ ṯirɔ́x* |
| 15 | Sardine | *sardín* | *ʕad* |
| 16 | Golden trevally / *Gnathanodon speciosus* | *buḳs ~ baḳas* | *surumóm* |
| 71 | Mackerel | *kənʕád* | *ṭanníḳ ~ ṭarníḳ* |
| 18 | Barracuda | *ʕaḳám ~ ʕagám* | *ʕaḳəbít ~ ʕaḳəmít* |
| 19 | / | *fakal* | *bedibɛ́ba* |
| 20 | / | *sammāt* | *səmmɛ́ta ~ səmmɑ́ta* |
| 21 | / | *wuld al-ḥamūr* | *məṭərút* |
| 22 | / | *wuld al-xuḏīr (ḥuḏīr)* | *ʕasɛ̄nɔ́t* |
| 23 | Perhaps onespot porgy / *Diplodus sargus kotschyi*. Also others | *abyaḍ / xanāfa* | *mērɛ́t* |
| 24 | / | *samak filipini* | *xɛ̄t* |
| 25 | Manta and/or stingray | / | *ṭəbbɛ́ḳa* |

Table 1. List of ichthyonyms analysed

### 2.1 *rétəḳ*

According to the interviewee, this is a rather big fish called *ḥāmúr* in the local Arabic variety, but he does not add other details regarding its appearance. The Arabic name is comparable with the *Mahriyōt* term for the spotted grouper, genus *epinephelus*, *ḥāmūr* (Geva Kleinberger 2009: 56). The same name is used in the

Arabic vernaculars of the Yemeni shores of the Arabian sea to designate various species of grouper in the *epinephelus*, *aethaloperca* and *cephalopholis* genera (Froese and Pauly 2024). The root √*rtḳ* is attested in Jibbali/Shehret as the Ga-stem verb *retɔ́ḳ* 'to quickly put what one is carrying on the ground' (MLZ: 362),[3] although in actuality this verb seems to have no relevant semantic connection to the ichthyonym in question. See also below 2.21.

### 2.2 *ʕasɛ́t*

The interviewee only mentions the Arabic and Jibbali/Shehret names of this fish, without providing any indication as to its appearance: Arabic *ḥuḏír* and *šaʕri*, and Jibbali/Shehret *ʕasɛ́t*. The Arabic name *šaʕri* designates the sky emperor (*lethrinus mahsena*) and the smalltooth emperor (*lethrinus microdon*) in the vernaculars of the Arabian sea (Froese and Pauly 2024). Compare also شعور for the same species in the Red Sea dialects (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 232). Arabic *ḥuḏír* and Jibbali/Shehret *ʕasɛ́t* find no parallel in the literature.

### 2.3 *xɔlxɔ́l*

The Arabic name *sammān* points to the brown-spotted grouper (*epinephelus chlorostigma*) in the dialects of the Red Sea (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 231). The Jibbali/Shehret name *xɔlxɔ́l* is unreported in the literature, although the Soqotri colour adjective *ḥálḥal* (F. *ḥálḥel*) 'gris' can be formally compared with it (LS: 175; Lonnet 2008: 130). This adjective is also reported in the first volume of the *Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature* as *ḥáḷḥaḷ* 'dark-brown (goat)' (Naumkin et al. 2014: 557).

### 2.4 *ləxím / ḏība*

Names derived from the root √*lxm* for several shark species are well attested throughout Modern South Arabian (ML: 259; JL: 167; LS: 232; Geva Kleinberger 2009: 54; Morris and Gasparini forthcoming; Rubin 2012) and are not unheard of in Yemeni Arabic dialects (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 211), although the most widespread term for shark in Arabic is (*samaka*) *qirš* often followed by a specific descriptor of a species: in this context, one encounters what appears to be a parallel to the otherwise unreported ichthyonym *ḏība*, namely قرش ديبا *gursh diba* 'mackerel sharks or white shark' in the Saudi waters of the Red Sea (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 215). One must note, however, that the latter term exhibits a [d] in the place of [ð] in the Jibbali/Shehret term, which renders the connection uncertain.

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[3] وضع ما يحمله سريعا الى الارض.

### 2.5 *taḳʿbít*

This term (and its cognate form *taḳwa* in the local Arabic variety) designate the bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*) (Froese and Pauly 2024). A popular etymology derives both names from the Arabic form II verbal noun < √*ḳwy*, *taḳwiya* 'strengthening' (Wehr 1976: 803). However, this is dubious in view of the lack of a *tāʔ marbūṭa* in the Arabic ichthyonym *vis-á-vis* the pattern of III-weak form II verbal nouns تفعية. Compare Baṭḥari *tāḳa* 'bluefish' (Morris and Gasparini forthcoming) without /w/. A hypothesis not to rule out is a borrowing from a language from the larger cultural sphere of the Indian ocean trade.

### 2.6 *gɛ́dər / šérwi*

Various types of tuna fish are said by the informant to be called *tuna* in local Arabic, and *gɛ́dər* or *šérwi* in Jibbali/Shehret. With regard to *gɛ́dər*, it clearly finds correspondences in Mahriyōt *ǧayḍär* '*Thunnus* genera' (Geva Kleinberger 2009: 55) and Omani Arabic *Jaydher* 'bigeye tuna' (Froese and Pauly 2024), although Jibbali/Shehret [d] for Mehri and Arabic [ð] is perplexing. The phonotactics of the term *šérwi*, which is said by the informant to be the Jibbali/Shehret counterpart of local Arabic *tuna*, betray a non-Jibbali/Shehret origin,[4] and this very ichthyonym is found in the Arabic dialect spoken by Eritrean fishermen in the Red Sea for the longtail tuna (*Thunnus tonggol*) (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 222).

### 2.7 *təbbɛ́na / sahwa*

The interviewee does not provide a description of this fish. At first glance, both names look Arabic, and *sahwa* is indeed found in the record as the Omani Arabic name of the longtail tuna (*Thunnus tonggol*) (Froese and Pauly 2024). As for *təbbɛ́na*, few clues can be found in the literature: the Modern South Arabian lexical sources do not report √*tbn*, and a number of local consultants, some of whom are into professional fishing, are not aware of the origin of this term. All that can be safely stated about this ichthyonym is that it resembles the Arabic name of the milky way درب التبانة.

### 2.8 *mix*

The sole fish (*samak mūsā* [coll.] in Arabic) is translated by the informant into Jibbali/Shehret with the term *mix*, which is not reported by any lexical source. In attempting to trace an etymology for this term, one might want to bear in mind

[4] /w/ does not appear as [w] in a post-consonantal environment and is realised as [b] (Rubin 2014: 34).

the existence of an areal phenomenon encompassing Jibbali/Shehret, the Mehri dialects of Dhofar, and possibly Hobyot, whereby /m/ and /b/ are interchangeable in many instances.

### 2.9 *śébḥaṭat*

The term for whale *śébḥaṭat* appears to be a variant specific to the dialect of al-Ḥallānīya, corresponding to mainland Jibbali/Shehret *śēḥṭót* (MLZ: 505)[5] and local Arabic *šaḥūṭa*. The cognate terms *śóḥawṭat* and *śōḥáṭət* are found in respectively in Mahriyōt (Geva Kleinberger 2009: 59), and Baṭḥari (Morris and Gasparini forthcoming). A derivation from Arabic √*šḥṭ* 'to strand, be stranded, run aground (ship); to ground on sandbank' (Wehr 1976: 457) is not to rule out, although it is equally possible that this term derives from *ḥut* 'fish' preceded by a **św* element, the meaning of which is currently not understood. Also compare the attestation of terms derived from **ḥut* to indicate 'big fish' in Ḥarsusi *ḥat*, Baṭḥari *ḥūt* pl. *aḥwāt*, Soqotri *ḥot*, Hobyot *ḥōt* pl. *aḥwėtət* (Morris et al. 2019: 38, 54, 93, 124).

### 2.10 *dɔ́xᵊs*

The interviewee provides the term *dɔ́xᵊs* for Arabic *dalfīn* (dolphin), and this is confirmed by a number of speakers of eastern Jibbali/Shehret. However, the general term for dolphin in the Modern South Arabian languages (with the possible exception of Soqotri) is known to derive from √*ġbr* (MLZ: 657; ML: 131; Geva Kleinberger 2009: 59; Morris and Gasparini forthcoming; Nakano 2013: 216). The term *dɔ́xᵊs* finds a parallel in standard Arabic دُخَس 'dolphin' (Wehr 1976: 273), and, according to some informants from eastern and central Dhofar, also in Dhofari Arabic.

### 2.11 *kəfaʕán*

The Jibbali/Shehret name *kəfaʕán* is provided alongside the local Arabic equivalents *ʕarīf* and *rabāba*, but the informant does not provide further details as to the identification of the creature in question. However, it is to be noted that the name *rabāba*[6] is used in Omani Arabic to designate the king soldierbream (*Argyrops spinifer*) (Froese and Pauly 2024). As for the Jibbali/Shehret *kəfaʕán*, the absence

[5] شحطت.

[6] The Arabic term *rabāba* designates 'a stringed instrument of the Arabs resembling the fiddle, with one to three strings' (Wehr 1976: 320), which might point to a resemblance of this fish to the body of this instrument.

of the so-called 'idle glottis' effect[7] points to a non-Modern South Arabian origin, and Arabic *ʕarīf* can be safely derived from the very productive Arabic root √*ʕrf*, although little else can be inferred about it from the available data.

### 2.12 *kēlét*

The informant provides neither a description nor an Arabic equivalent of the ichthyonym *kēlét*. *Prima facie*, it is morphologically a diminutive on the pattern $C_1\bar{e}C_2\acute{e}C_3$ (Johnstone 1973; Dufour 2016 *passim*). One must note that the non-diminutive form *kelét* (JL: 131; MLZ: 807) is the name of a widespread tree in Dhofar, *Euclea schimperi* (Miller and Morris 1988: 126), used for its medicinal properties as well as camel fodder.

### 2.13 *ḥũs* ~ *ḥúmᵊs*

The term for sea turtle in the Modern South Arabian languages generally derives from √*ḥms* (JL: 112; ML: 182; Geva Kleinberger 2009: Morris and Gasparini forthcoming; Nakano 2013: 382; LS: 181), also found in coastal Dhofari Arabic (Davey 2016: 271), and the term used in al-Ḥallānīya is no exception to this rule. Interestingly, the informant provides both the expected form *ḥúmᵊs* and *ḥũs*, which points to an underlying **ḥúməs*, that is, with a full vowel between $C_2$ and $C_3$ instead of an ultra-short non-phonological vowel, which is transcribed here as <ᵊ>.[8]

### 2.14 *śirɔ́x* ~ *t̪irɔ́x*

The term *śirɔ́x* and its cognates for crayfish/lobster are found throughout Modern South Arabian (ML: 386; LS: 434; Nakano 2013: 348), as well as in the local Arabic variety as *šarḥa*.[9] The speaker's first choice for this name is *śirɔ́x*, but he subsequently corrects himself by uttering *t̪irɔ́x*, hence attesting the much-discussed

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[7] In the Modern South Arabian languages, no unstressed vowel can stand between two voiceless and non-glottalic consonants (Bendjaballah and Ségéral 2014). A native-like Modern South Arabian rendition of this term would then be **kfəʕán*. It must, however, be pointed out that there are exceptions to this rule, especially in verbal morphology: for example, the perfect 1 c.sg./2 m.sg. form of the T1-stem verb *śɔtēm(ə)k* 'I/you (m.sg.) bought'.

[8] This vowel is phonetically identical to /ə/. However, it does not trigger any phonological phenomena (Dufour 2016: 79, *passim*). This phenomenon is known in all Jibbali/Shehret dialects but is markedly prominent in the variety of al-Ḥallānīya (Castagna 2018: 114): For example, compare the realisation *dɔ́xᵊs* 'dolphin' in al-Ḥallānīya (see above 2.10.) vs. *dɔ́xs* in mainland Dhofar.

[9] The speakers from al-Ḥallānīya tend to realise /x/ as [ḥ] (Castagna 2018: 126). This ichthyonym is found also in the Arabic dialect of Eritrean fishermen (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 217).

shift of laterals to interdentals, described by Johnstone with the use of the moniker *baby jibbali* (JL: xii). In actuality, this shift is non-universal, as the speakers of al-Ḥallānīya can (and do) articulate the lateral sounds of Jibbali/Shehret. They do, however, show a tendency to articulate all sibilants (that is, not only laterals) as interdentals (Castagna 2018: 120–126).

### 2.15 *ʕad*

The interviewee translates *sardín* with the pan-Modern South Arabian term *ʕad*, which designates several species of sardines. This is found throughout the group (JL: 20; ML: 37; Morris and Gasparini forthcoming; LS: 307; Nakano 2013: 216), As well as in coastal Dhofari Arabic (Davey 2016: 298). This term is also found with the fishermen in the waters of Eritrea and Yemen (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 234).

### 2.16 *surumóm*

This name is provided by the informant together with its local Arabic equivalent *buḳs* ~ *baḳas*. Thanks to the latter, it is possible to identify it with the golden trevally (*Gnathanodon speciosus*) (Froese and Pauly 2024). Jibbali/Shehret *surumóm* is hitherto unrecorded, and its origin unclear.

### 2.17 *ṭanníḳ* ~ *ṭarníḳ*

This ichthyonym is vigorously attested throughout Modern South Arabian: it is reported to designate the various species of mackerel in Mehri (ML: 412;[10] Geva Kleinberger 2009: 55), Baṭḥari (Morris and Gasparini forthcoming), as well as in coastal Dhofari Arabic (Davey 2016: 283). However, rather surprisingly given its wide attestation, this term is found neither in the *Jibbāli Lexicon* nor in the *Muʕğam lisān Ẓufār*. Its Arabic equivalent *kənʕád* is attested in Omani Arabic (Froese and Pauly 2024).

### 2.18 *ʕaḳəbít* ~ *ʕaḳəmít*

The Arabic equivalents of this ichthyonym *ʕaḳám* ~ *ʕagám* designate several species of barracuda in the Arabic dialects of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 233). The Modern South Arabian nouns deriving from √*ʕḳb*[11] usually designate birds (JL: 11; ML: 19; Nakano 2013: 212) and no fish is reported in the literature to have this name. Moreover, the Jibbali/Shehret cog-

[10] The *Mehri Lexicon* also reports Soqotri *ṭarniḳ* and *taniḳ*, which is not found, to the best of my knowledge, anywhere else in the published lexical sources.

[11] /b/ ~ /m/ (see above 2.8.).

nate term *ʕeʃ̣yét* specifically means ‘pigeon’ (JL: 11; MLZ: 641[12]) and exhibits the regular deletion of intervocalic /b/ (Rubin 2014a: 28–30) and the palatalisation of /ḳ/ (Rubin 2014a: 26) *vis-á-vis* the underlying form **ʕaḳəbét*. Therefore, the terms *ʕaḳəbít* ~ *ʕaḳəmít*, as provided by the interviewee, would appear to derive from a Mehri (or another Modern South Arabian language) loanword.

### 2.19 *bedibḗba*

Both the Jibbali/Shehret term *bedibḗba* and its Arabic equivalent *fakal* are provided by the informant without any further explanation, which makes the identification of this species problematic. The attestation of a fish species called *bedbódi* in Soqotri might look encouraging from a comparative perspective, but its identification with the plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) (Naumkin and Porkhomovskij 1981: 52), is controversial due to the northerly habitat of this species. Moreover, the phonotactics of both terms suggests that they might be loanwords from a different (i.e. non-Modern South Arabian) language. In a similar fashion, the Arabic ichthyonym *fakal* is of uncertain origin.

### 2.20 *səmmɛ́ta* ~ *səmmā́ta*

The names *səmmɛ́ta* ~ *səmmā́ta*, along with their local Arabic counterpart *sammāt* are said by the informant to designate an electric fish. However, the absence of further indication as to its appearance and the lack of attestation of a similar ichthyonym in previous studies, make its identification problematic. From a phonological viewpoint, the intervocalic geminate /m/ points either to a geminate root √*smm*, or a borrowing. It must be noted that in Mehri and Jibbali/Shehret the term *səmmɛ́t* means ‘rush mat’ (ML: 350; MLZ: 458[13]), and the naming of a fish through such a simile is not far-fetched.

### 2.21 *məṯərút*

This fish is called *wuld al-ḥamūr* (son of *ḥamūr*) in the local Arabic vernacular. This device either points to a physical similarity of the two species, the ‘son’ species being smaller, or it is an ironical way to designate a much bigger creature than the ‘mother’ species.[14] The ichthyonym *ḥamūr* seems to point to the spotted grouper in the genus *epinephelus* (see above 2.1.), a rather big fish attaining an adult length of up to 120 cm (Froese and Pauly 2024). Therefore, one might reasonably believe its

[12] الحمامة.

[13] بساط من الخوص.

[14] Compare Mahriyōt *bär ḏ-ʕayd*, literally ‘the son of the sardine’, pointing to the Queensland shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchoides*) (Geva Kleinberger 2009: 54).

'son' to actually be a small fish. However, due to the lack of further description of the species and the impossibility to gather any indication as to the semantics of the term, no fish can be identified with the Jibbali/Shehret ichthyonym *məṭərút*.

### 2.22 *ʕasēnɔ́t*

By the same token, the Arabic counterpart of this Jibbali/Shehret ichthyonym is *wuld al-xuḍīr*, and the name *ḥuḍīr*,[15] as has been discussed above (2.2.), designates the sky emperor (*Lethrinus mahsena*) and the smalltooth emperor (*Lethrinus microdon*). The term *ʕasēnɔ́t* is morphologically a diminutive (Johnstone 1973), but nothing else can currently be inferred, as the fish databases and the lexica provide no further clue about this term.

### 2.23 *mērɛ́t*

This ichthyonym presents itself as semantically problematic, as the tokens provided by the interviewee seem to point to separate species: on the one hand, the local Arabic terms *abyaḍ* and *xanāfa* correspond, respectively, to several species of porgies (*Sparidae*) (Tesfamichael and Saeed 2016: 221), and batfish (*Platax*) or goldsilk bream (*Acanthopagrus berda*) (Froese and Pauly 2024). On the other hand, *mērɛ́t*, a morphologically diminutive term, can be compared to Mahriyōt *miriyēt* designating the onespot porgy (*Diplodus sargus kotschyi*) (Geva Kleinberger 2009: 56). Although the informant does not provide any description of the species in question, it is possible, at least with regard to *mērɛ́t*, to infer that its colour might be a deep red on the basis of the semantics of the root √*mrt*, which points to 'being/becoming red-hot' (ML: 270–271; JL: 174; LS: 251–252), and, in fact, some species of batfish and porgies do exhibit such a colour. In any case, the great number of species indicated by these ichthyonyms, coupled with the presence of Arabic *abyaḍ* 'white' in apparent contradiction with Jibbali/Shehret √*mrt* 'red-hot', suggests that we might be dealing with multiple species.

### 2.24 *xɛ̄t*

The name of this species, having the composite Arabic equivalent *samak filipini* (coll.) 'Filipino fish', is curiously synonymous with the Jibbali/Shehret term for 'thirst' *xɛ̄t* < √*xbt* (JL: 296; MLZ: 273[16]). Additionally, the moniker 'Filipino fish' might point to a non-native fish. However, little else can be inferred from the available data, so that this species cannot currently be identified.

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[15] The speaker corrects into *ḥuḍīr*, showing the above-mentioned (2.14.) tendency to realise /x/ as [ḥ].

[16] العطش.

### 2.25 *ṭəbbéḳa*

This name, provided without any Arabic equivalent, is said by the informant to designate a stinging fish. It can be formally compared with Mahriyōt *ṭabbōqät* 'Manta' (*Manta birostris*) (Geva Kleinberger 2009: 55), which does not have a sting. However, mantas are closely related to stingrays which, as the name suggests, do have a sting, and abound in the waters of the Indian ocean. Geva Kleinberger (2009: 55) suggests that this ichthyonym may derive from the Modern South Arabian root √*ṭbḳ* 'to fall in the mud; be muddy' (JL: 274; ML: 405–406), perhaps on account of the stingray's habit of hiding beneath the sea floor. However, in view of the Arabic morphological pattern exhibited by this term, a derivation from Arabic *ṭabaḳ* 'lid, cover, plate, dish' (Wehr 1976: 553) as a descriptor of the flat appearance of these creatures, is not to rule out.

## 3 Conclusions

In this paper, a total of 25 fish names in Jibbali/Shehret are examined. For each of these names, one or two Arabic names have been provided by the informant. With regard to the Jibbali/Shehret ichthyonyms, items 7, 10 and 11 are of likely Arabic origin, whilst items 5, 16, 19, 20, 21 and 24 are of uncertain origin. The rest of them exhibit a Modern South Arabian origin. As for the Arabic ichthyonyms, items 4, 5, 9, 19 and 20 are of uncertain origin, whilst the rest either have cognates in other Arabic dialects or exhibit typically Arabic morphological patterns. Synchronically speaking, the Jibbali/Shehret variety of al-Ḥallānīya seems to have a poorer vocabulary for fish species than Arabic, on which it partially relies in the practice of naming sea creatures. This might indicate that despite the presumably very long fishing tradition in the islands, the presence of Jibbali/Shehret speakers might be more recent than the establishment of this tradition. In this respect, it has been suggested by some Dhofaris interviewed on sociological matters, that an interest in fishing on the part of Jibbali/Shehret-speaking people, whose traditional activities are carried out in the monsoon hills, is a relatively new development. Whilst this seems to be confirmed by the etymology of some terms examined in this paper, one should also note that a significant share of these ichthyonyms appears to be of unknown origin, that is, neither Modern South Arabian nor Arabic. Although this should certainly not come as a surprise, the southern shores of Arabia having been exposed to the millennia-old Indian ocean trade, one legitimately wonders where these alien influences might come from. Although it is currently not possible to make any suggestions in these regards, one surely should not disregard the Indian ocean trade as a source of non-Semitic lexemes in Modern South Arabian and the Arabic dialects of southern Arabia. As for the ichthyonyms whose origin can be ascertained, they bear witness to the mainland Dhofari origin of the people of al-Ḥallānīya. It is, however, difficult to

make any statement as to how far back in the past the presence of Jibbali/Shehret speakers on the island goes: the mediaeval geographer al-Idrisī stated in 1154 CE that the inhabitants of a group of islands identified with the Kuria Muria archipelago spoke the ancient Adite tongues (Gallagher 2002: 5),[17] which appears to be at variance with a local belief according to which the ancestors of the current inhabitants of the islands migrated from the mainland as recently as 150–200 years ago. However, these two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive: it is entirely possible that the aforementioned migration was just the most recent influx of people from the mainland into an already inhabited archipelago. Only a comprehensive linguistic, archaeological and anthropological study of the Kuria Muria islands could possibly shed some light on these questions. Regrettably, however, no study of this kind is, to the best of my knowledge, currently underway. In conclusion, the findings of this study point to a mixed Modern South Arabian and Arabic heritage in matters of ichthyonymy, with a conspicuous unidentified (and, at present, unidentifiable) element, which finds a great number of parallels in other semantic fields of the Modern South Arabian lexis.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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## Abbreviations

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| JL | Johnstone 1981 | ML | Johnstone 1987 |
| LS | Leslau 1938 | MLZ | al-Maʕšanī 2014 |

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[17] The Shahri tribe, generally held to represent the original inhabitants of Dhofar, claims descent from the people of *ʕĀd*, an alleged nation located in a territory roughly corresponding to present-day Dhofar (al-Šaḥrī 2000).

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