



Khasab Castle

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THE CASTLE

For more than four centuries, the Castle at Khasab has cast its strong shadow over the sands of the khawr. This beautifully stationed Castle may not have been the first fortification to command the bay and protect the fertile valley beyond, for there is evidence to suggest that it was built on the ruins of an earlier indigenous fort.

The Portuguese constructed the present fortress at the beginning of the 17th Century with ambitious plans for dominion over the strait of Hormuz. However, their hopes were dashed when, in 1624, they failed to recapture Hormuz. A quarter of a century later the Portuguese were expelled from Oman and the Castle was modified by Omani forces to suit their own military needs.

This Castle, which housed the Wali and his family in recent centuries, and which once held prisoners, has been restored and transformed into a regional museum.

THE EXHIBITS

In the courtyard of the Castle are boats and houses representative of the unique heritage of Musandam. As if beached on shore, there are three traditional boats from Kumzar, the most northerly part of Musandam.

Beyond the boats, a summer house made of palm fronds ('Aresh) and elevated on pillars of stone catches breezes from the sea. 'Aresh houses were occupied by mountain dwellers and inhabitants of remote coastal settlements who came to Khasab in the summers to fish and harvest dates.

Nearby is a reconstructed Bait al Qufi or 'House of the Lock'. Built of heavy stone and extending partially below ground, the Bait al Qufi evolved as a means of safeguarding vital supplies during periods of seasonal migration. On the upper level of the castle are room tableaus featuring traditional medicine, costume and jewelry together with a women's majlis, a wedding room and a Qur'an school.

Museum-style exhibits in the central tower provide in-depth information on rock art, geology, wildlife, architecture and other aspects of Musandam culture. Documentary film footage and a treasury of artefacts accompany the exhibits. Of particular note is a splendid collection of antique jirz, the small, long-handled axe that has become a central symbol in the heritage of Musandam.

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MUSANDAM IN HISTORY

PRIMACY OF PLACE

Musandam is one of the great landmarks of the world, separating the Arabian Gulf from the Oman Sea. Its spear-like peninsula points in the direction of Iran, only a short distance away and once the centre of the powerful Persian Empire.

SILENT WITNESS TO HISTORY

Since the days of the ancient Mesopotamian and Indus Valley civilisations, from the 3rd Millennium BCE, and possibly earlier, the narrow channel between the lands of Oman and those of Iran has been a busy ocean thoroughfare.

Standing high over this strategic passage at the hinge of the trading routes between the Middle East, the Orient and Africa, Musandam has borne witness to important journeys of history for more than five thousand years – from the passage of the reed boats of Magan (ancient Oman), carrying copper to Mesopotamia – to present day oil tankers taking fuel from the Gulf to other parts of the world.

However, Musandam has been a silent observer. There are few records from the travellers of antiquity with direct mention of Musandam and, despite its strategic location, little is known of the history of the peninsula prior to the advent of Islam.



THE ANCIENT WORLD SAILS PAST

In the year 323 BCE a contingent of Alexander the Great's fleet under the command of Admiral Nearchus sailed from the Indus, rounding the Cape of Musandam to Babylon where the great King awaited him.

Alexander's plan was to conquer both sides of the Gulf and unite them with Europe and Asia in order to fulfill his dream of a Universal Empire. One by one, at different times, three of Alexander's vessels had been sent down the coast of Arabia for reconnaissance in preparation for the conquest, which was to be by sea under the command of Nearchus, perhaps in conjunction with a land operation.

This unprecedented ambition was thwarted by the sudden and untimely death of Alexander after feasting with Nearchus, virtually on the eve of the expedition to Arabia. Thus Alexander's dream of a Universal Empire vanished.¹

Another early mention of Musandam is by the Roman Naturalist, Pliny, who refers to its dangerous rocks in his famous work, *Historia Naturalis*, written in the 1st Century AD.

Musandam was entered as well in the 2nd Century scholarly works of Ptolemy on geography.

For the next several centuries, the known written records are silent on the subject of Musandam; however, there is some archaeological evidence to suggest a Sassanian presence on the peninsula in the 4th to the 6th centuries.



THE ANCIENT WORLD SAILS PAST

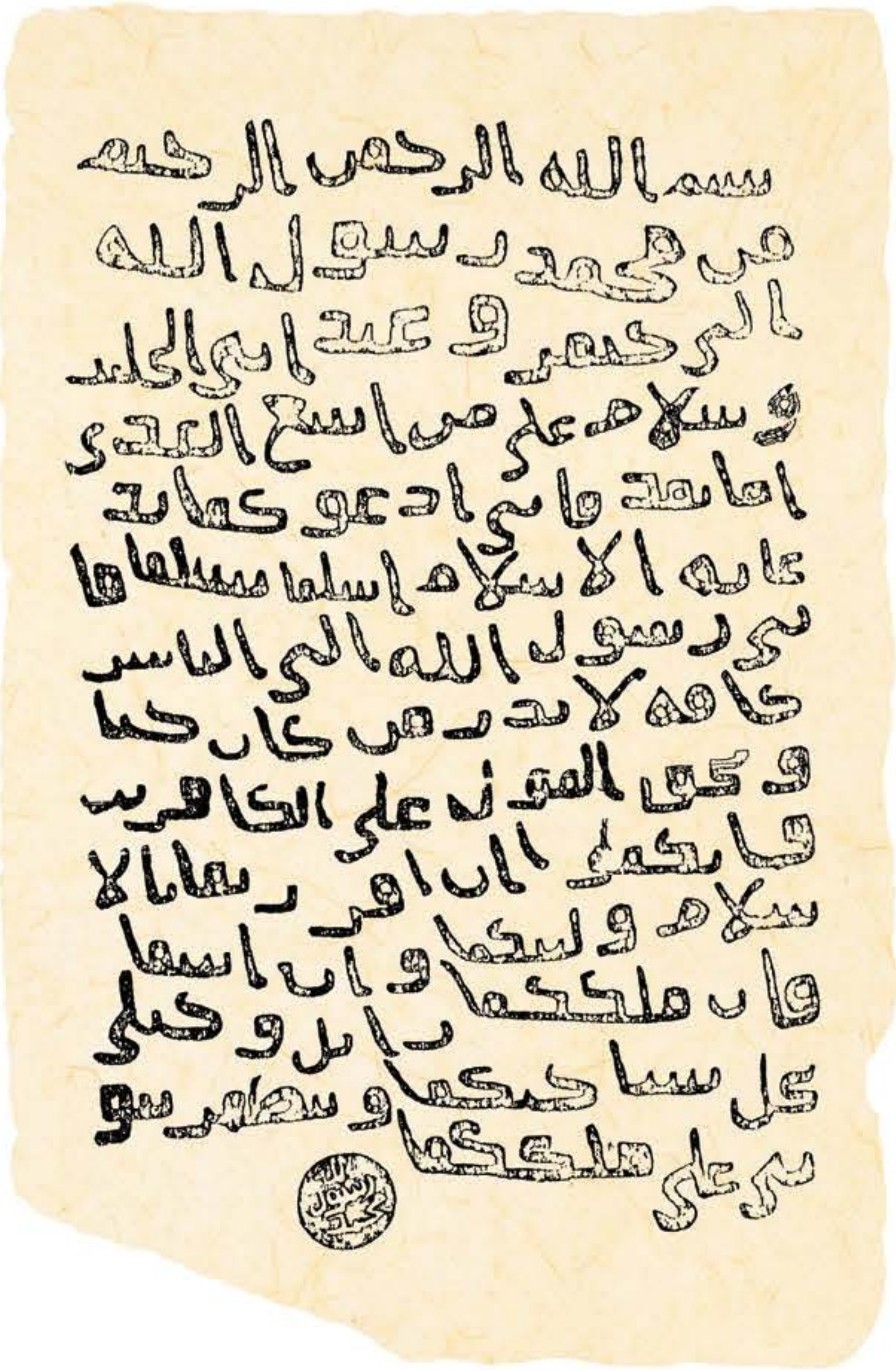
Oman embraced Islam in the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon Him). After their conversion, the tribes of Oman defeated the Sassanians in a battle near Dibba in 633. It was at this time that the people of Musandam also converted to Islam.

In the 10th Century, the region, including Hormuz, came under the control of the Buwayhid Dynasty of the

Baghdad Caliphate; and, it is probable that this encompassed Musandam.

Toward the end of his life, The Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon Him) sent a letter to Jaifar and Abd – sons of Al Julanda, rulers of Oman.

The letter read: 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Peace be upon those who follow the right guidance. I call thee for Islam. If you embrace Islam you will be safe and secure. I am the Messenger of Allah to all people, to warn all those alive that the case will be proved against the disbelievers. If you embrace Islam, I will empower you to rule; and, if not, your reign will be over and my horses will tread on your territories and my prophecy will supersede there.'



MUSANDAM IN THE PAST MILLENIUM

The inaccessibility of Musandam meant that its inhabitants did not always enjoy the riches that came from involvement in the trade of the times. At the same time it was strategically advantageous, enabling the peninsula to maintain its relative independence through the repeated pattern of invasion and counterattack that plagued the region until the expulsion of the last of the invaders in 1650.

THE RISE AND FALL OF HORMUZ

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THE RISE AND FALL OF HORMUZ

From the 13th to the 15th Centuries Hormuz came to prominence as an economic power and it is reasonable to assume that Musandam shared in some of the material benefits. So legendary was the wealth of Hormuz that it gave rise to a widespread saying, "Were the world a ring, Hormuz would be the jewel in it".² Renowned 13th century Italian adventurer Marco Polo mentions a predominance of Arabs in Hormuz. "Upon the island of Ormus (Hormuz), there is a handsome and large city, built close by the sea ...the inhabitants are Saracens (Arabs), all of them professing the faith of Mahomet (Peace be upon Him)". He also describes the rich commerce of the city: "...the port is frequented by traders from all parts of India, who bring spices and medicines, precious stones, pearls, gold tissues, elephants' teeth, and various other articles of merchandise. These they dispose of to a different set of traders, by whom they are dispersed throughout the world".³ This happy state of affairs came to an end when the Portuguese conquered Hormuz in 1515 and established a stronghold on the island, which remained until the Persians ousted the Portuguese from Hormuz, a little over a century later, in 1622.

The Rise of Oman's Modern Dynasties

After the final defeat of the Portuguese in 1650, under the leadership of the Imams of the Ya'ruha dynasty, Oman became a united force and began its rise to prominence as the greatest naval power in the Indian Ocean.

A little over a hundred years later, in 1756, Imam Ahmed bin Said, founder of the Al bu Said dynasty, sent a great fleet of ships through the Strait of Hormuz to rescue the city of Basra from a year-long siege by the Persians. The Omani fleet famously broke through a heavy iron chain that barred access to the Shatt Al Arab waterway, at the mouth of the Euphrates, and sailed up the river to liberate their Arab brethren.

By the early 18th Century Oman ruled over a vast dominion, but Musandam, still isolated, shared only tangentially in the fruits of empire. Life for the inhabitants of the peninsula continued to be based upon age-old patterns of resourceful, but difficult, subsistence until the accession of Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970.

MUSANDAM TODAY

With a modern infrastructure and regular air and sea links, Musandam is now joined to greater Oman as an integral part of the nation, sharing equally in the benefits of the new economy, and adding to the unique heritage of a remarkable people.



Incense burner, Lima, 20th Century.



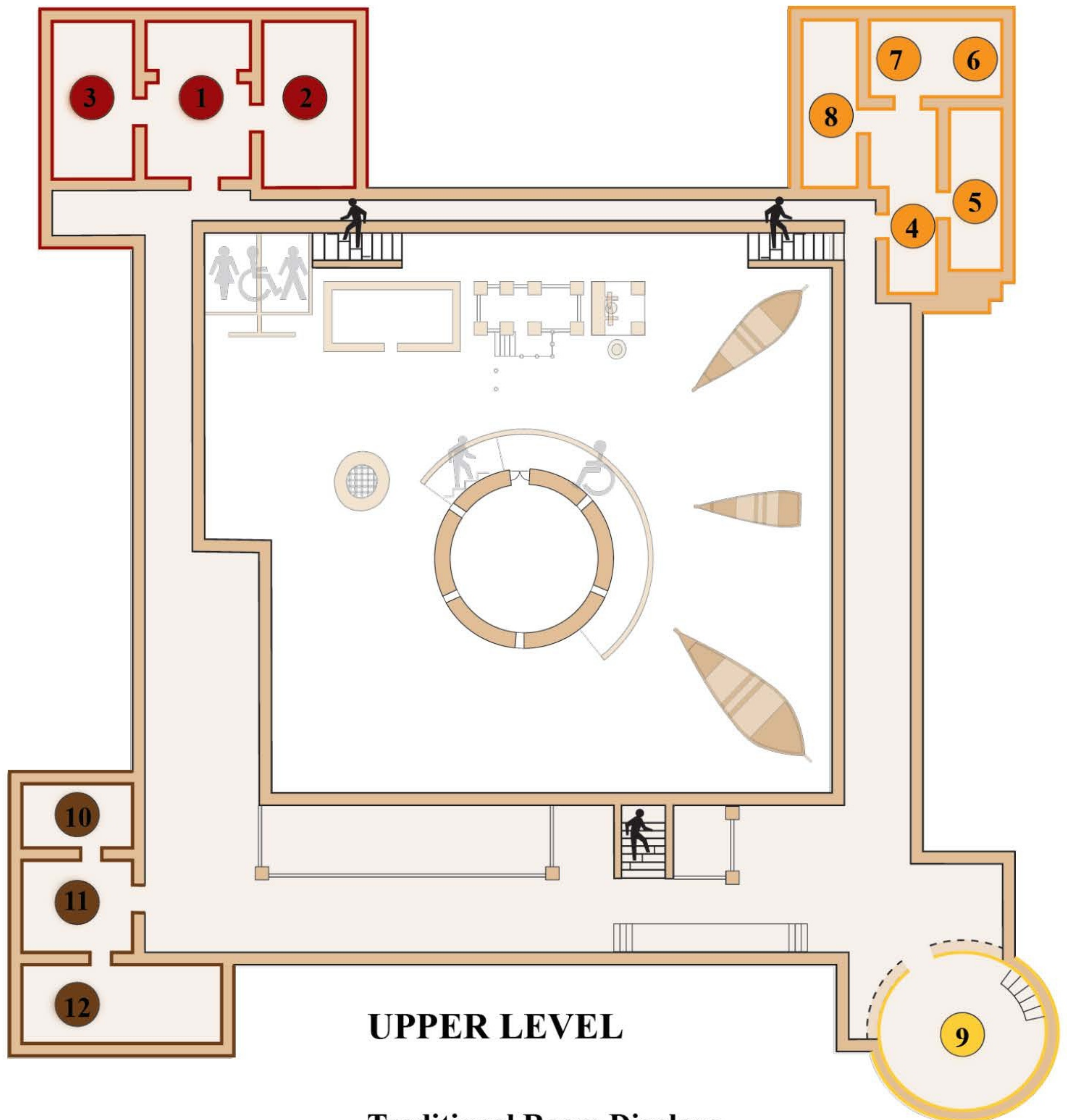
Coin with profile of Alexander the Great.



Model of a 3rd Millennium Reed Vessel.



Musandam axe heads with incised decoration.



UPPER LEVEL

Library Wing

- 1 Document Room**
- 2 Film Viewing Room**
- 3 Library**

Traditional Room Displays

- 4 Women's Majlis**
- 5 Qur'an Study Room**
- 6 Traditional Medicine**
- 7 Costume & Jewellery**
- 8 Wedding Room**

Northwest Tower

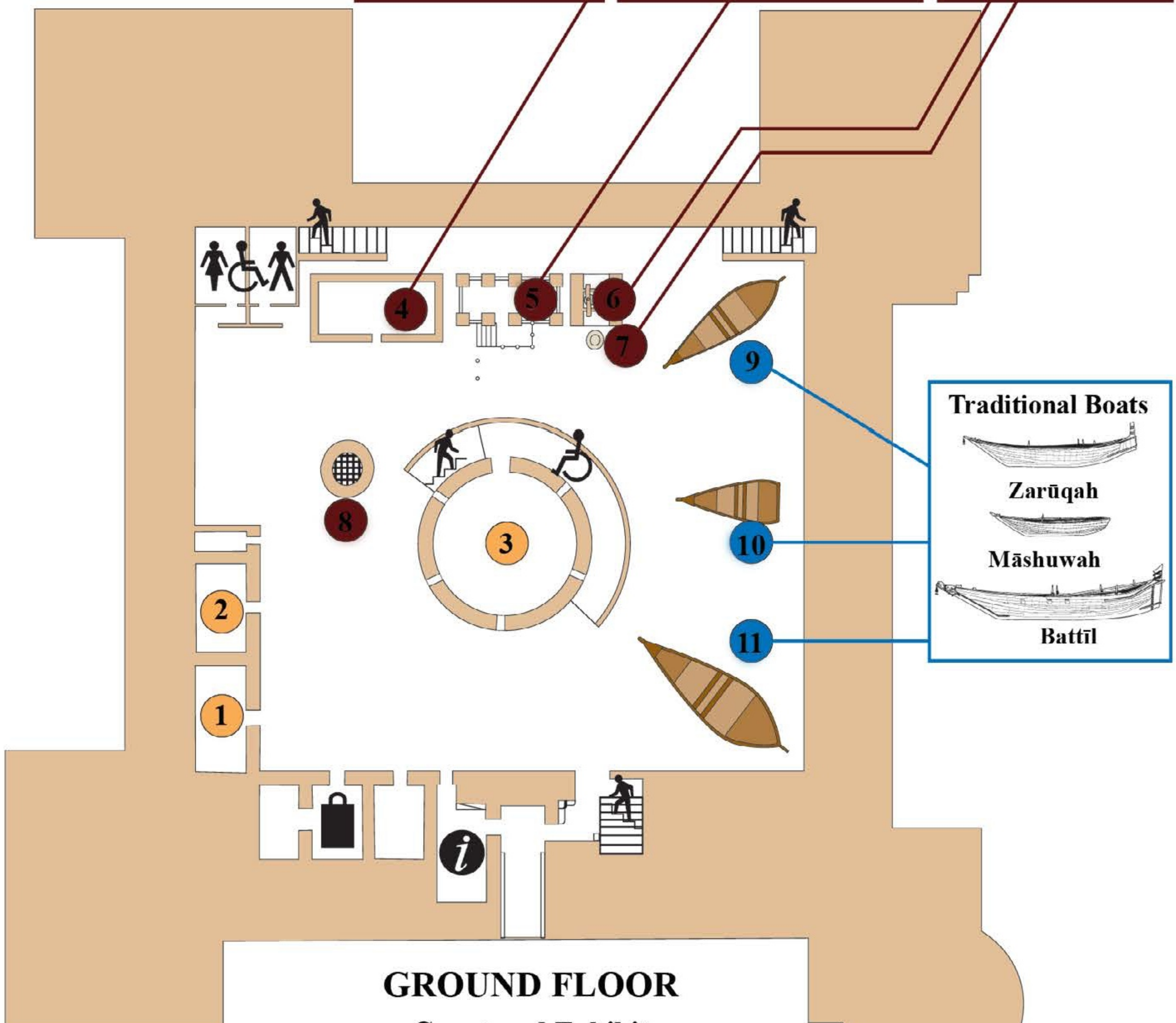
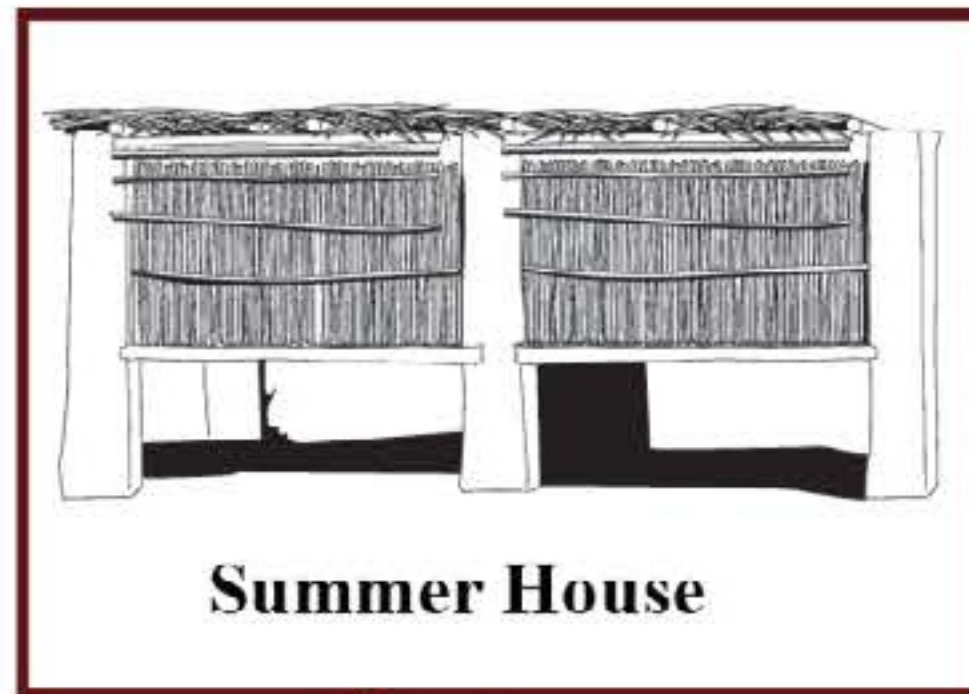
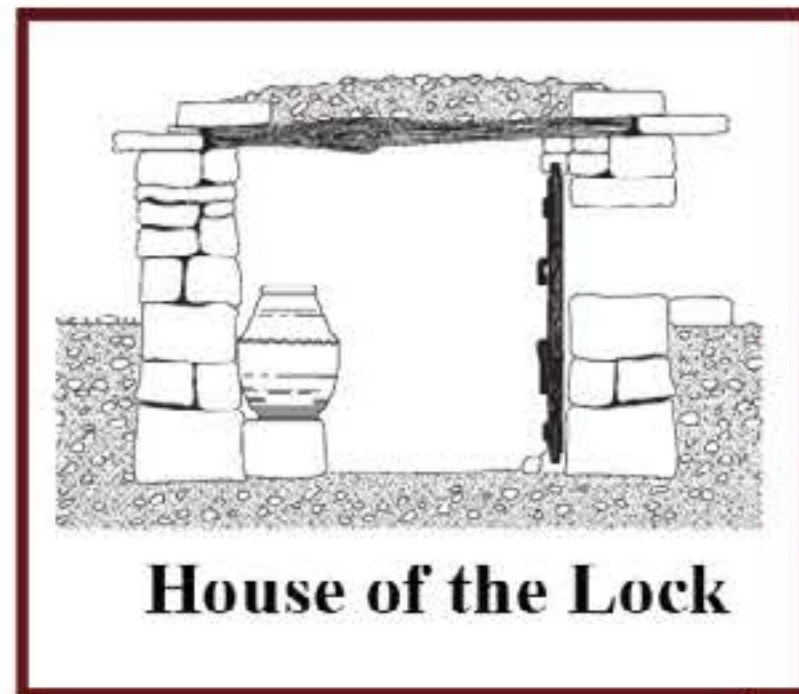
- 9 Viewing Parapet**

Wali Wing

- 10 Wali's Waiting Room**
- 11 Judge's Chambers**
- 12 Wali's Barza**

Opening Hours:

Saturday - Thursday (9:00AM - 4 pm), Friday (8:00AM - 11:00AM)



GROUND FLOOR

Courtyard Exhibits

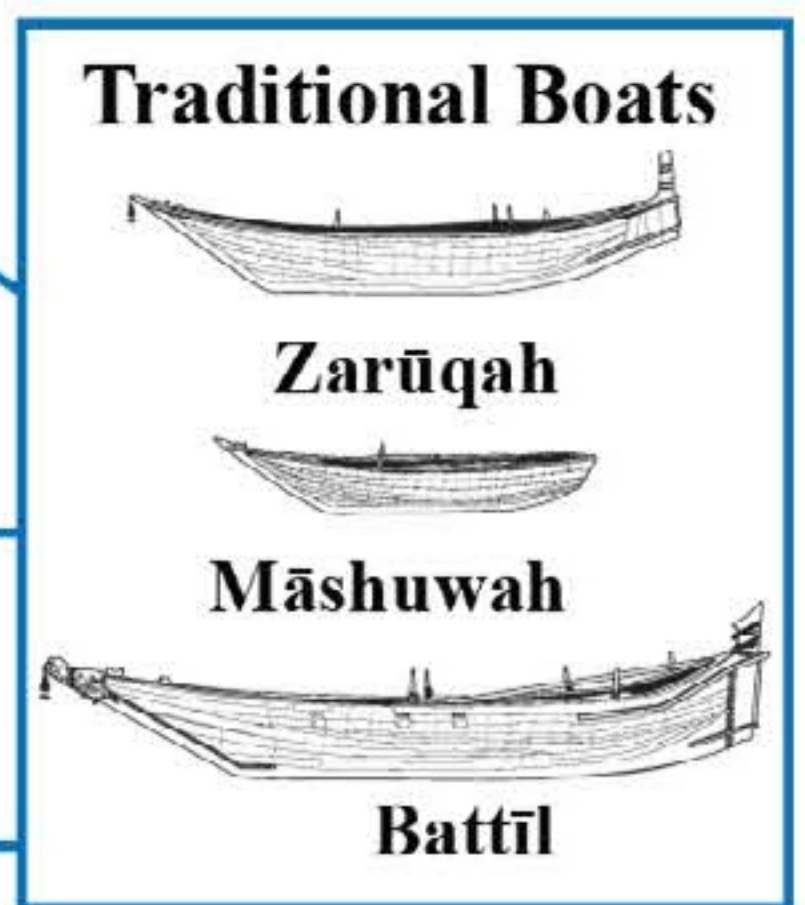
Museum Exhibits

- 1** Coffee-making Room
- 2** Kitchen
- 3** Central Tower

- 4** House of the Lock
- 5** Summer House
- 6** Grinding Shed
- 7** Bread Oven
- 8** Well

Traditional Boats

- 9** Zarūqah
- 10** Māshuwah
- 11** Battīl



Toilets		Information and Tickets	
Disabled Access		Stairs	
		Gift Shop	