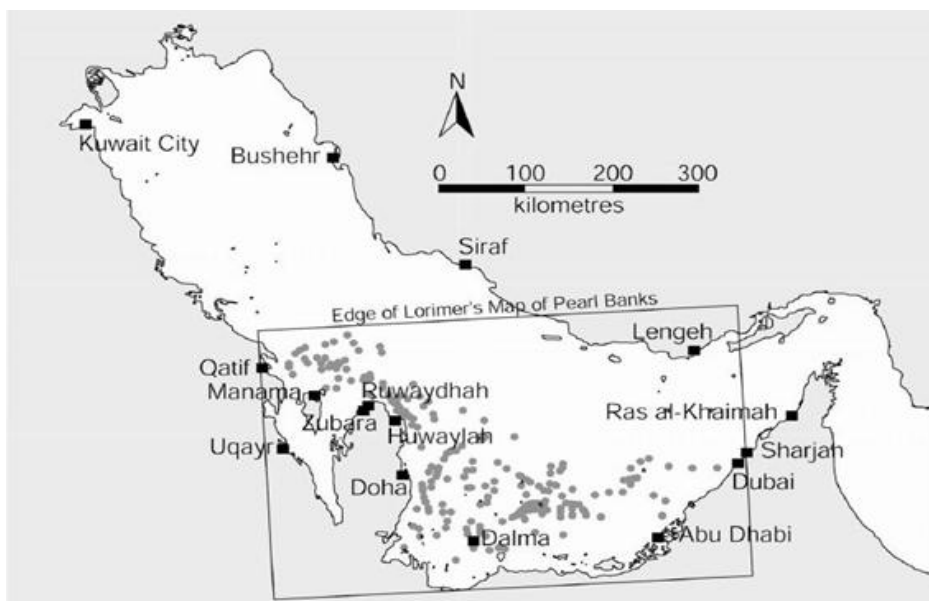


The Town of Muharraq

2.1 Introduction

Muharraq was Bahrain's capital in the 19th Century and still has much of the charm of an old-world Arab city, with its low-rise buildings, narrow streets and tiny alleyways, and fine historic buildings with their traditional Arab-Gulf style of architecture. Muharraq used to be a very small town in Bahrain, which gained significance only after the ruling family settled there in 1810. At that time, Bahrain was the major pearling centre and port in international trade route between the Far East, India and Europe (Map 2.1). This had a profound effect on the culture and heritage of the country in general, and more so of Muharraq in particular.



Map 2.1 Pearl banks and towns in the Middle East in the 20th century (Lorimer 1915).

This chapter provides an insight into the history of Muharraq, outlining some of the facts hitherto unknown, from manuscripts documents about Muharraq, its significance as heritage in the Gulf, and its state of conservation of various heritage elements. The

documents have been obtained from Bahrain government archives, British libraries, and online resources and supplemented with interviews of senior citizens of Bahrain. The literature has provided significant insight into the history and heritage of Muharraq hitherto unknown, which could be attributed to the fact that not many records of the town's history exist in Bahrain and what remains is getting lost as the old population vanishes with time. Some of the historical facts have been known by the local senior citizens, the population of which is fast dwindling with time and who have become difficult to trace due to fast urbanization and loss of old urban heritage and neighbourhoods. Furthermore, searching through the archives to find information relevant to this study area has been extremely difficult due to the different names associated with this town in the past, as discovered during this process, such as – Maharag, Bu Maher, Samaheej and Aradous, some of which were hitherto unknown prior to this study. This posed a complexity in correlating texts and maps for reconstructing the historical past of the town. Notwithstanding, significant information has been gathered pertinent for understanding the heritage values of Muharraq and assessing its loss over time.

The information thus compiled from historical accounts of travellers and maps created in the past, provides insight into the urbanization pattern in the past and the various elements of the urban fabric and the tribes which settled there. All this information has been compiled into a simple historical narrative of the economic, social and political development of Muharraq, identifying the different periods of external domination and discussing the cycles of urban growth and renewal. After a brief overview of the historical context of Bahrain, the literature review will consider the history of Muharraq and later describes the current state of conservation of the ancient urban fabric and settlements and proposes some priorities for conservation based on the information gathered.

An important fact revealed from the literature survey indicates that Muharraq has been referred to by three different names in the past – Aradous during the Tylos era about 2000 years ago, Samaheej from 200 BC to the 17th century and Arad from the 17th century till 1817. Since 1817 it has been known by its present name of Muharraq.

Location of Muharraq

Muharraq is the smaller of Bahrain's two main islands. The name Muharraq is of comparatively recent origin because, from the study of the literature it has been determined that 'Muharraq' was not applied to the present day island of Muharraq, until after Sheikh Abdullah Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa founded the city of Muharraq in the year 1225 HI or 1810 A.D. Just as Awal was the former name for the largest of the Bahrain islands, Arad was the name given to the island known today as Muharraq (Lorimer, 1915).

Present day Muharraq Island was known to the Greeks as Aradous and was thereafter commonly called Arad and Muharraq used to be part of Arad. From the historical accounts it has been observed that discrepancies exist concerning the location of Muharraq within the island of Arad. Many of these accounts came from the travelogues and a close observation reveals at least two different descriptions of the location of Muharraq within Arad in the past.

The first description by Captain James, in 1818, describes Arad Island made up of two parts which, at low tide appear joined by the emergence of a narrow isthmus. The northern part was called Sommahee (Samaheej as is known today) and the southern end was called Maharag. Even though Muharraq was not as populous as Manama, it was nevertheless surrounded by a matchlock defence to protect it from foreign invasion and intruders (James, 1818).

The second description is in Brucks (Brucks, 1828), in which he has very accurately mapped the islands of Bahrain. This cartographic work depicts Muharraq as a curved left hand with the town of Muharraq at the wrist and present day Arad as the thumb extending downward into the sea. Qal'at Abu Mahir or Bu Maher, in this conceptualisation (Map 2.2), can be imagined as a drop of sweat below the wrist (Ward, 1983).

2.2 The History of Muharraq

Muharraq has long been considered as the second town of Bahrain, whereas the history of Bahrain and the literature strongly describes evidences that Muharraq might have been one of the first settlements in Bahrain. The literature suggests, that Muharraq has existed since the Dilmun era, some 5000 years ago, but it only came to prominence in the historical records during the era of Tylos. At that time, Bahrain was dominated by the Seleucid Greeks, an event which has been recorded (Larsen, 1984).



Map 2.2 Islands of Bahrain (Brucks, 1828).

Bahrain, prior to its political division in the late 19th century, stretched from Basrah, in present day Iraq, to the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. Then it was known as Iqlīm al-Bahrayn, or the Province of Bahrain. The inhabitants of this province were descendants of the Arab tribe Bani Abd al-Qais of Iranian origin. The province of Bahrain comprised of three regions: Hajar (present day Al-Hasa in Saudi Arabia), Al-Khatt (present day Al-Qatif in Saudi Arabia) and Awal (present day Bahrain). The geographical position, abundant underground water supplies and easy anchorages for ships made present day Muharraq island an ideal staging post for long-distance trade, making it a gateway to Bahrain. For many centuries during the Dilmun era, Bahrain provided a natural distribution centre for the trans-shipment of the raw materials vital to Sumer's economy (Larsen, 1983).

In 1783, when Al Khalifa and his allies conquered the island of Bahrain they made it one of their political centres. Sheikh Ahmed Al Khalifa became the ruler of the island and he gave a piece of land to each of his generals who had helped him conquer the islands. After Sheikh Ahmed died in 1796, the throne went to Sheikh Salman bin Ahmed assisted by his brother Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed. Sheikh Salman chose Riffa for his seat while Sheikh Abdullah chose Muharraq, thereby gaining power and authority over the tribes in the region. Consequently, this moment in history in 1796 is considered as the beginning of the re-establishment of Muharraq and the centre of political power by Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed. This event was symbolized by the construction of Bu Maher Fort (also known as Muharraq Fort) upon the ruins of a much older fort which commanded the entrance of the harbour and the principal fresh water source offshore (Onley, 2004).

Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed chose present day Bu Maher, then known as Maharaq at the southernmost tip of Arad Island, to be his headquarters owing to its fresh air and pure water supply. This island was an ideal fortress, just off the shore of Arad but connected to it at low tide by a sand bar. The island was considered better than

Manama which had swamps, breeding grounds for diseases caused by mosquitoes (Billecocq, 2001). The location of Muharraq was also politically and strategically expedient (Wali, 1990).

Political reasons were the main motives of urbanization in Muharraq; the location has been chosen to start the town on strategic bases..... Sheikh Abdulla bin Ahmed put the tower's foundation at the same time in which his brother Sheikh Salman as a rolling associate started Riffa town on Bahrain main land. Muharraq gained its urban significance because of its military importance. The starting point of the urbanization of Muharraq can be traced back to the building of Abu Maher Fort in 1810. (Wali, 1990, p 122)

In 1830 Muharraq was described by James (1830) as:

in the centre or narrowest part of the island there is another village but the principal town which is called Maharad or Maharag is seated on the southern extreme and is nearly as large as Minawah or Manama. This town is defended by two forts with bastions one at each end of the town and a wall surrounding the whole from this last end over to the island of Bahrain. (James, 1830, p 296).

In 1843, the French traveller, Page, described the island of Muharraq as a pile of sand with clusters of palm trees and villages scattered here and there (Billecocq, 2001). The town of Muharraq was inhabited by the most important people of the islands of Bahrain. Page described that the north of the island was picturesque, with a mosque built on a rock overhanging the sea and a garden. The building was described as resting on columns whose bases were located in the sea and with a simple roof which was held up by a colonnade, providing open arcades that served to give the entire structure an airy feeling (Billecocq, 2001).

Whish (1862) described the town of Muharraq as occupying the south-west point, and it was large and populous as Manama with an area of about a half a mile square. The southern end of the town lay on a small low piece of ground which at high water was separated from the town. And on that small piece of land stood a square Fort with four towers, called Muharraq (Whish, 1862). Near the fort there were springs alongside the walls of the fort called Boo-Mahur which produced fresh water that was warm and which was obtained by means of a length of bamboo with a hose attached to it (Whish, 1862). Several other travellers have left detail descriptions of the island of Muharraq in their travelogues. Palgrave (1866) described a vivid picture of the island of Muharraq and its inhabitants.

The town of Moharrek, situated on the southern side of the islet to which it gives its name, lies like a long white strip on the shore of the channel which separates it from Menamah, whose buildings occupy a corresponding position on the margin of the larger island. Moharrek is far prettier of the two to the eye, its white houses set off darker palm huts, the larger low palaces of the Khalifa family much resembling the better sort of bungalows at Malabar Point or Breach Candy, two or three imposing forts close to the sea shore, a long coast battery good for show at a certain distance; all these form an ensemble worthy of a sketch, if not a picture, I much regretted that evening my want of drawing implements. (Palgrave, 1866, pp. 204)

Further he wrote:

As a whole Moharrek is curious and worth seeing from its Perso - Arabic appearance, its small snug houses, its paved market place, and its high raised benches everywhere along the walls, announcing an out-of-doors life; besides owns a degree of close-packing and agglomeration different from the straggling style of most Arab cities. (Palgrave, 1866, p. 225)

Another traveller J. Theodore Bent, 1889, who visited Bahrain, wrote

The second island in point of size is Muharraq, north of Bahrain and separated from it by a strait one mile broad; it is of horseshoe form, seldom more than half a mile broad, and is about five miles in length. The rest of the group are mere rocks: (Rice, 1984, p.43).

From 1783 to 1810, a number of conflicts occurred between Bahrain and the other Gulf States, which culminated in the battle of Akhkikira, in which Al-Khalifa emerged victorious. The victory of Al-Khalifa re-established security and stability in Bahrain and the Al Khalifas regained control over the islands. At that time a landmark declaration was made, which established the new town of Muharraq. The fort in the south of Muharraq Bu Maher was then rebuilt and named Bu Maher Fort (Wali, 1989). The two forts on Muharraq Island can be seen on a 1636 map of Bahrain produced by the Portuguese (Map 2.3). These forts were strategically placed on the island of Muharraq, giving it a strategic importance along the navigation route leading to the island of Bahrain. When Al Khalifa conquered the island, his prime objective target was to take hold of Manama and Muharraq because of these forts (Abu Hakima, 1965).

Piracy and attacks from other gulf rulers on Bahrain also led Al Khalifa to choose Muharraq as a good place to build their capital, because it already had a well-established defence mechanism in place with forts, walls and the reefs surrounding the island (Brucks, 1828). In 1819, Muharraq became the seat of the government, and Manama was the commercial centre. The towns were originally surrounded by walls, but rapid urbanization extended it beyond the walls into surrounding areas. The Sheikhs and the leading merchants established their houses in the main northern Arad Island abandoning Bu Maher. These were large, low stone houses which were typically painted white and were constructed around one or more courtyards. Coral stone, quarried from the sea shore, was used for building. The houses of merchants and Sheikhs had roof terraces, arched verandas, latticed windows, and handsome

doorways, which were typically decorated with elaborate plaster work. For some time, only the Sheikhs were allowed to build more than one storey in Muharraq.

During his term as Political Resident from 1862 to 1872, Lewis Pelly ordered the destruction of Muharraq Fort and the war dhows as a symbolic destruction of the rule of Sheikh Muhammad. Pelly produced a report in which the location of Muharraq was described: *the Gunboats Clyde and Hugh Rose sailed up the creek which led to Muharraq Fort, and after anchoring those vessels within 300 yards of the walls, destroyed both forts with cannons, and burnt Mahomed's three war crafts lying immediately under the walls of the fort. The fort was of solid stone and required considerable pounding from the 10-inch guns of the Clyde and Hugh Rose. (Onley, 2004)*

During the 16th and 17th centuries the pearling industry was controlled by Hormuz and subsequently Persia, but Bahrain remained the chief pearling centre in the Gulf. Economic data for the 18th to 20th centuries indicates that exports from the pearling industry doubled after 1783, signifying stability in the region which continued to grow until 1905. However, with the discovery of oil in the region this trade suddenly declined. Instead an oil based economy emerged prompting major developmental and modernization activities in the country. This led the rulers to shift from Muharraq to Manama, as pearling was no more the basis for trade, resulting in the decline of heritage characteristics and the significance of the town.

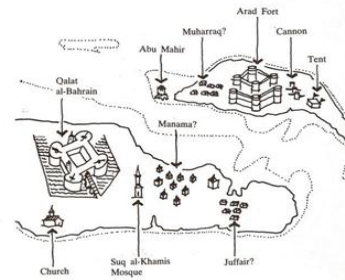
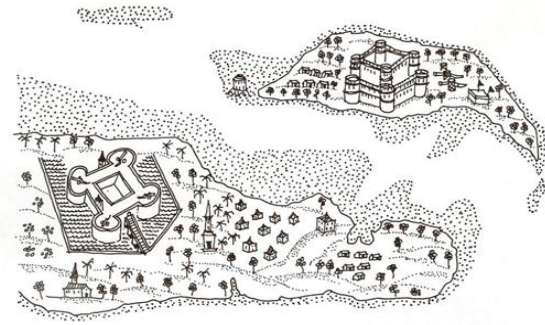
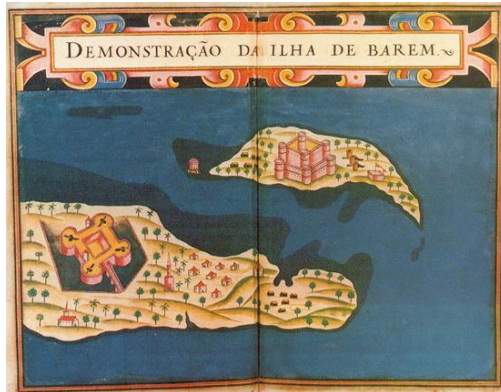


Figure 4: DEMONSTRACAO DA ILHA DE BAREN circa 1635

Map 2.3 Muharraq 1635, shows Arad and Manama fort on mainland Bahrain along with churches and houses (Walls, 1990).

2.2.1 The Emergence of Neighbourhoods

After the establishment of the town of Muharraq in 1810, the tribes and people from different occupations started to settle around the residence of the Sheikhs. These settlements or neighbourhoods were distinctly identified based on their tribal allegiance and occupation. The records gathered during this work could simply classify the settlement areas according to their tribal allegiance or according to their crafts. It was rather difficult to use those records, mainly because of the overlap between the areas, hence, the accurate identification of their actual boundaries remained elusive. Despite the difficulties, the descriptions of old people and the information from Building Permission Records helped in delineating the boundaries of these traditional areas, which in turn helped in understanding the broad social urban fabric of the town.

Numerous parameters shaped the morphology of Muharraq. These included the social structure, the political system, the economic pattern and the physical setting. The Sunni

community seems to have been in the majority, as they were located on both sides of the main artery that subdivided the city into two parts. Shi'a, who were mostly named after their crafts (Hayek: sail makers; al-Hadadah: blacksmiths), were concentrated in the north-east quarter (Fuccaro, 2000).

The origin of tribes in Muharraq remains controversial and historians have never reached agreement on this issue. For example, Taqi has stated that al-Jalahmah, al-bin-Ali, al-Musallam and al-Bakawara are of Utub family and are Sunnis, the followers of the ruling family, al-Khalifa. Whereas Al Tajir (1994) is of the opinion that al-Bakawara are Huwalah Arabs. Others believe that al-Musallam is a Persian family.

Tribal structure goes back to the pre-Islamic era and maintains its strength due to Bedouin life that dominated the desert. The leader of the tribe was called Sheikh, often occupying the centre of the settlement, and was surrounded by his sons and relatives. An outer ring was also formed of slaves, wage-paid workers and allied persons. The same pattern was followed after the ruling family, the Al-Khalifa, established Muharraq as their political centre (Wali, 1990; Mandeel, 1992).

Muharraq, in the beginning, was divided into 19 zones or *furqan* (plural of *fareeq*) named after major tribal groups and another four named after the predominant craft practiced in each area. These areas included - Hayayik (sail makers), Bana'een (builders), Saghas (goldsmiths) and Hadadah (blacksmiths). With the exception of these four tribal Shi'a areas, the Sunni population dominated most of the other areas.

The rank of these neighbourhoods depended on various criteria that were often associated with their religious faction (Sunni and Shi'a), their race and origin (Arabs and Persian), and their occupation (traders, sailors, artisans, farmers, etc.). The family houses were organized into autonomous clusters separated by unoccupied land which gradually expanded until they reached the limits of their individual territory, a

phenomenon observed in other similar Islamic towns such as Old Cairo, Tunis and Fez (Al-Hathloul, 1996; Kubiak, 1997).

According to Yarwood (1988), Ibn Abbas in 1873 described the neighbourhoods in Muharraq according to their occupation and their size. For example al-Manan'ah contained 350 persons; they were mainly pearl divers, ship owners and traders. Al-Jalahmah contained 80 persons; they were mostly ship owners and traders. Al-Hayayik contained 80 persons and were sail-makers. According to Rumaihi (1975), the role of pearl divers was largely monopolised by the Sunnis. A number of these families became goldsmiths, however, and moved to Manama. In Muharraq, a Goldsmith's quarter was set up in the Saghah area. Tribal and craft structures are, however, still expressed in the physical pattern of the city. The communities according to Wali (1990) were:

Sh. Abdulla	Ebrahim	Al Gamra
Ali Bin Ali	Al Amamra	Al Usfur
Al Ghousar	Bu Khamis	Al Heyak
Al Sheikh	Al Bu Kuwara	Al Kharo
Al Yousuf bin	Al Muawada	Ziyayina

The quarter of the ruling family (Al-Khalifa) dominated the central part of the town. This was surrounded by other tribal quarters. Normally, the tribe Majlis (or reception halls) formed the socio-political focus for each quarter. These Majlis played a very important role in forming the residential quarters in Muharraq. The Majlis also served as a political and social forum for the family. The Al-Khalifa tribal Majlis was considered to be the most politically and socially powerful meeting point in Muharraq and was known as a focus or forum for the whole city.

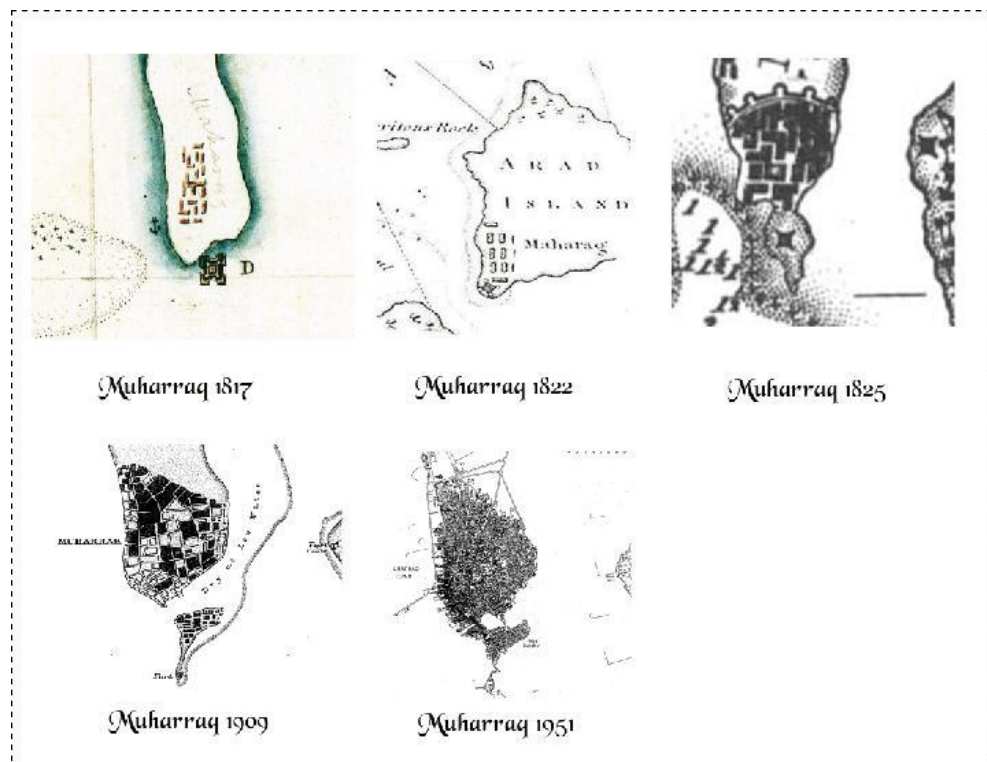
The rulers or Al Khalifa's lived at the top of the hillock. The house built by Sheikh Isa bin Ali was at the core and was surrounded by the houses of his sons. Towards the south of the Sheikh's house was Sheikh Hamad bin Isa's house (who was the crown prince at that time), and towards the east was Sheikh Hamad Mosque or the old Friday Mosque (formerly called as Sheikh Abdulla Mosque) (Wali, 1990).

Adjacent to Sheikh Isa house was Sheikh Isa Mosque founded by Sheikh Muhammad Bin Juman around 1820. This mosque was abandoned for a long time but when Sheikh Sharaf Ali Omani became a judge during Sheikh Isa's rule, he rebuilt the mosque next to his house in 1870. Since then it has been called Sheikh Isa Mosque or the Grand Mosque (Wali, 1990).

The second focal point on the city level was the congregational mosque, known as the Jami', which was the juridical and social centre of the community. Congregational mosques were provided for the entire community to worship at once a week. Other smaller mosques were spatially distributed in Muharraq as socio-cultural centres for each quarter. There were 42 daily mosques, one in each quarter and two congregational mosques. The first main mosque was located near the ruler's palace (which was built in 1870) and the second was located to the west of Sheikh Hamad's palace, who was the crown prince at that time. This mosque was founded by Sheikh Abdulla bin Ahmed al Fateh. Residential areas were clustered around these two main institutions and the houses of wealthy families were normally built of stone. This was the situation until the 1930s but with the discovery of oil, many socio-economic and physical changes were introduced (Mandeel, 1992).

2.2.2 The Evolution of the Street Pattern

During the literature review several maps depicting the urban fabric of Muharraq town have been discovered. The oldest is 1635 (Map 2.3) which shows the two forts and churches in Muharraq, however, a more realistic topographic map was first drawn in 1817 which was significantly improved by 1825 (Map 2.4). Close observation of these maps shows a significant degree of preservation of the ancient streetscape within the current urban fabric. The street pattern is one of the important elements to be considered when assessing the historic character of the town. Although no specific or detailed descriptions have been available from the ancient literature, however, it has provided significant insight into the urban characteristics.



Map 2.4 Ancient Maps of Muharraq from 1817 to 1951, showing urban fabric, forts and growth of the town (Jarman, 1996).

The morphological structure of Muharraq was characterized by a continuous and densely built-up pattern, featuring close interdependence between the spatial and functional pattern of the urban fabric to the waterfront. The historical records suggest

that the streets linked the docks, the suq (marketplace) and the commercial districts in Muharraq. Consequently, the traditional fabric had narrow streets with one- and two-storey houses, which became narrow with the expansion of tribal zones. This demonstrates, when considered together with the traditional 'poles' (i.e. the mosques, the rulers' palaces, etc.), the functional and morphological structure of the town fabric along the shore (Wali, 1990).

2.2.3 Development of Architectural Styles

Prior to the arrival of Islam in 630 AD there were already some crude structures in existence in the area, but the development of traditional buildings occurred only in the last 150 to 200 years. There was a significant influence of old civilizations on the development of traditional buildings and architecture in the past two centuries. The Dilmun civilization emerged along the sea; as a result it was under continuous threat from other sea powers. This had an impact on the architecture and urbanization of the towns.

During Dilmun times, houses were made up of stone or wooden frames and walls with room dividers made of date palm fronds, the latter also known as *Barasti* houses (King, 1997). These wooden *Barasti* houses became a common style during 19th and 20th centuries. By the 20th century, the pearl trade in Bahrain became a major industry so many settlers migrated to Bahrain for business purposes and other reasons. The Al-Khalifa arrived in the area along with Utub groups in around 1783. The Al-Khalifa made their capital in Muharraq and played a substantial role in the town's development (Palgrave, 1866).

A wide range of historic and traditional building types can be found in Muharraq. These generally reflect the courtyard house model and display a remarkable variety of spatial

solutions, architectural elements, decorative and constructive details (Map 2.5). However, regardless of typology, many small size traditional buildings did not have a real courtyard. These were based on the principle of separating and protecting the domestic realm from the public realm in order to ensure privacy. The houses display a large array of architectural techniques, from the very simple to the most sophisticated, which regulated the functional aspects of the houses and the visual relationship between the indoor and the outdoor spaces.

In particular, the courtyard (*finā* or *housh*) characterised the large and medium size houses. In these cases, the architecture featured different architectural forms or spatial arrangements. But it always represented the core of the house: the hinge that articulates all the different domestic spaces, ensuring the unity and the consistency of the family living environment. The roof terraces, on the other hand, complemented the courtyard, and served as multi-purpose spaces, visually protected and ventilated by the *badjr* on the high parapet all around the perimeter walls.



Map 2.5 A typical traditional house of famous doctor Badr Ghulum, in Muharraq.

2.2.4 Summarizing Muharraq's Urban Development

The urbanization of Muharraq has been summarized into five phases after the analysis of the literature:

Phase 1 (1810-1869): From the establishment of Muharraq in 1810 to 1869 the urbanisation was slow. During this time Muharraq was just being established as the political and tribal centre of Bahrain. The isolated tribal areas gradually consolidated and merged to increase social and economic interaction among different tribes.

Phase 2 (1869-1951): During this phase, the urbanisation process increased in an organic or informal manner. After 1951, which was considered a turning point in the urban development of Muharraq, town planning schemes were implemented around the traditional areas in a semi-circular formation leading to the filling of the gaps left between the various old quarters of Muharraq.

Phase 3 (1952-1966): Following 1951 the physical development of Muharraq extended towards the Sheikh Salman Road, reclaiming the sea surrounding Halat Abu-Maher Island. During this period, the urban mass started spreading towards the east of the traditional areas. In 1966, Sheikh Hamad Causeway linking Muharraq Island on one side and Bahrain Island on the other side was built; this linked the city of Muharraq with the city of Manama.

Phase 4 (1967-1977): According to the master plan of Muharraq, land reclamation took place in the eastern, western and southern parts of the city. Later, the Khalifa al-Kabir and Ghose Highways were built to link these reclaimed areas. As a result, Abu Maher Fort (which stood on an isolated island) was physically linked to the main land of Muharraq.

Phase 5 (1978-1988): During this phase, several physical developments occurred in the reclaimed areas around the traditional city. For example, a road-widening scheme was implemented according to the urban renewal project programme and a ring road around Muharraq town was completed in 1983.

2.3 Identifying Muharraq's Heritage

The historic cities in the Gulf region primarily constitute the pre-colonial urban structure formed prior to the process of modernisation. In recent years the heritage value of the city has been associated with the modern city instead of the aforementioned pre-modernisation developments.

The historic town may be identified as consisting of those parts of the urban areas that bear testimony to the different phases of development in the elements of their social fabric. This historic town would have existed prior to the modernization processes. The heritage of Muharraq consists of the historical part of the town and the historical urban pattern, both of which were formed prior to the processes of modernization. The historic town of Muharraq includes diverse urban realities, which manifest varying degrees of social, economic and cultural dynamism and which formed the basis of the town since ancient times. The identification of this ancient heritage of Muharraq is the first essential step to be undertaken in order to determine effective strategies and policies for conservation.

The Intangible Heritage

Other than the aforementioned heritage, Muharraq also preserves a great deal of intangible heritage values which have been almost completely lost in any other cities in the Gulf. These include traditional lifestyles, the traditional songs and music played

at various occasions, such as old cultural traditions to mark wedding ceremonies and the traditional festivals associated with pearling. The “House of Musicians” is an old traditional meeting place where people still meet and sing songs that used to be sung by their forefathers during the pearling season when divers returned to the shore, these songs are known as “*fujiri*” or “*naham*”. The singers have preserved the traditional elements in their original form. Another old singing practise which still persists in society is called “Girgaon”. This is when the children sing door to door and collect sweets and gifts during the holy month of Ramadan. Also, at the end of Ramadan people still sing the farewell song called “Al Wida” (Olsen, 2002).

Apart from aforementioned cultural heritage, Bahrain’s pearls have been famous since historic times for their beauty and high quality, and this single product sustained the country’s economy for many centuries. Bahrain was known as the prime location for the collection and trade of pearls and this activity intensely shaped the Kingdom’s identity. In January 2010 Bahrain registered for nomination to the World Heritage List, a pearling heritage site called “Pearling, testimony of an island economy”. The heritage site consists of both marine and urban components. The marine components include three oyster beds in the territorial waters of Bahrain. The oyster beds are located 40 to 70 kilometres off the northern shores of the island of Bahrain. The seashore at the southern tip of Muharraq links these marine parts of the site to its urban components. The seashore with its natural beach is the only remaining authentic location in Muharraq where dhow fleets during the pearling era left and arrived at the beginning and end of the four-month long pearl collection season each summer.

In order to protect this unique world heritage Bahrain prohibits sale of artificial pearls. Furthermore, it has set up a pearl testing laboratory (Fig 2.6) employing local resident experts to test and approve any pearl traded in the local and international market from Bahrain. This knowledge is transferred from one generation to another and

authorities are making all efforts to revive this abandoned heritage for the benefit of local communities by attracting tourists to these pearling heritage sites and making the historic areas of Muharraq more attractive (MoIC, 2011).



Fig 2.6 Pearl testing laboratory with local experts testing pearls (MoIC, 2011)

Ancient Fabric

Muharraq still preserves most of the urban fabric from before the economy of the country changed to being based on oil. This change resulted in widespread land reclamation and morphological changes to the urban fabric. The pre-oil morphology is characterised by a densely built-up pattern featuring close interdependence between the spatial and functional parts of the urban fabric and the waterfront. The street network depicted a perpendicular criss-cross pattern with the palaces of the rulers situated at the centre of the city on the highest point, surrounded by the tribal neighbourhoods. This kind of urban pattern is typical of traditional Islamic towns and has been observed in some of the still existing Islamic towns in Morocco, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia (Fig 2.7).

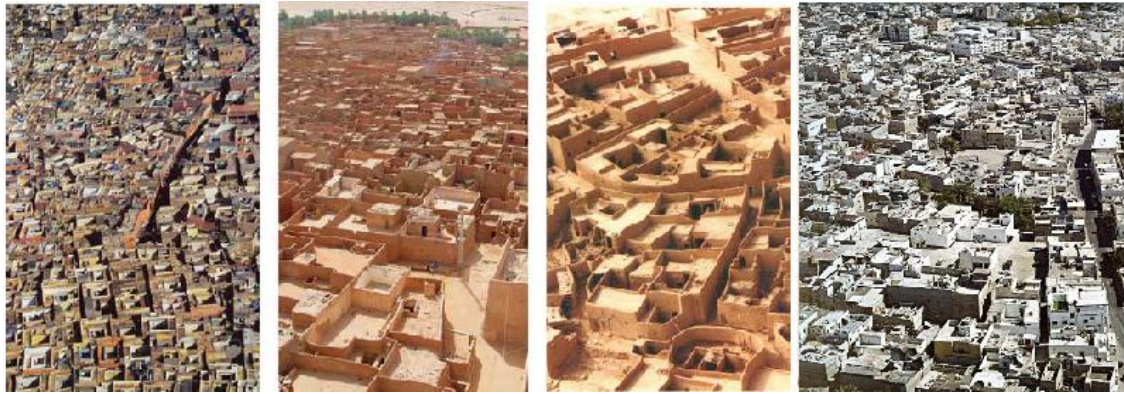


Fig 2.7. An aerial view of the urban fabric in Fez (Morocco), Tamentit (Algeria), a village in Saudi Arabia and Muharraq (Ben-Hamouche, 2009).

This new change in urbanization gradually replaced the ancient perpendicular road fabric with a new waterfront that ran parallel to the former coastline and which formed a main spine along which modern activities were concentrated. Subsequently, new cities started to form, which came to merge with the former fabric (Mandeeel, 1999). Progressively, the traditional fabric became encapsulated by new motorways and urban expansions. The town planning schemes that were implemented around the traditional areas prioritised semi-circular formations, which had the effect of filling the gaps left between the old quarters of Muharraq. The real rupture of traditional fabric occurred in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of new developments on the reclaimed lands beyond the waterfronts, resulting in the development of morphological characteristics on a totally different scale and causing a significant loss of contact between the traditional urban fabrics and the sea front, due to an encapsulation of modern urban structure.

This is supported by an extensive study by Al-Khenaizi (1994), which concluded that despite all modernisation and extensive morphological changes to the Muharraq, it still preserves the typical pattern observed in Islamic towns which is unique in Arab-Islamic towns in the Gulf region.

Architectural Heritage

The architecture of Bahrain in general and Muharraq in particular has links with that of many surrounding countries, but its essential qualities are unique. Forts on the island resemble those of the rest of the Gulf and elsewhere; the mosques bear resemblances to ancient mosques of Arabian, Mesopotamian, and Persian types; however the domestic architecture which evolved is distinctively Bahraini. No one knows how ancient this pattern of secular architecture may be, but it is certain that it has some links with neighbouring countries, especially those to the north of the Gulf such as Qais Island, Linga, and Deyyer in Iran (Lewcock, 1980).

Muharraq's urban structure reveals a high degree of typological diversity that is enriched with a considerable number of buildings of very high architectural significance. Some of these buildings have been restored recently and reused for cultural purposes. This historical building of the courtyard house model has a remarkable variety of architectural elements, decorative and constructive details. There are also many other small traditional buildings without any courtyard whatsoever. Variations in these elements are shown in Fig 2.8 (a – f).

However, the modernization of traditional houses and construction of new buildings to provide low cost housing for the Bahraini lower or middle classes is causing a major serious challenge for the conservation of the historic urban architecture.



Fig 2.8.a House with Islamic architecture door.



Fig 2.8.b Murad house architectural door



Fig 2.8.c House of Salman bin Matar



Fig 2.8.d Sheikh Isa bin Ali House



Fig 2.8.e Abdul Malik Majlis



Fig 2.8.f Siyadi house

2.4 Heritage Sites

Some of the critical heritage sites were identified by conducting a field survey during which people were interviewed. This survey revealed that there is an immense need for cultural heritage conservation of particular examples of heritage structures. These include:

- i. Houses of the rulers (Figure 2.9.a) and native people.
- ii. Ancient mosques (Figure 2.9.b).
- iii. Old suqs, – suq Al Kharo, Al Qaisaria (Figure 2.9.c), Al Taiyara, Tujjar and Meheesh.
- iv. The forts – Muharraq (Figure 2.9.d) and Arad.
- v. Other defense structures, such as the wall of Muharraq
- vi. Fresh water springs
- vii. The Neighbourhoods
- viii. The first school in Muharraq built in 1918, Al Hidayah School.

The oldest datable building in Muharraq is Bait Salman (Figure 2.9.a), originally Bait Sheikh Abdulla, house of a former ruler of Bahrain, which can be dated circa 1800. This has semi-circular arches at the top of the frame, but is not contained within rectangular panels. (The use of the semi-circular arch, which is surprising in an Islamic building, is probably derived from fashions that were current in Turkish buildings in Baghdad and Basra. It is just possible that the fashion may be dated back to the European style introduced into the Gulf by the Portuguese during the 17th century) (Lewcock, 1980).

It is still possible to identify the old neighbourhoods in Muharraq by noting the location of the Mosques. However, while there are some tribes who still live in their neighbourhoods, some have either sold out or rented their houses. This activity has resulted in the rupture of the traditional architectural patterns due to transformation of buildings for making money. An example of the pre-existing neighbourhood includes Sheikh Isa bin Ali neighbourhood, with its preserved houses and traditional fabric.



Figure 2.9.a. Sh. Hamad House



Figure 2.9.b. Siyadi Mosque



Figure 2.9.c. Suq Qaisariya



Figure 2.9.d. Muharraq Fort

The Al Kharo Suq is one of the oldest suqs. The date of its establishment is unknown, but it was established by the Al Kharo community in order to sell dates, baskets, cattle and seeds. The Al Qaisaria suq, which now covers about 20,000 square meters, was established by Sheikh Abdulla bin Ahmed (who ruled from 1825 to 1842). The word 'Qaisaria' refers to a type market or bazaar established by the ruler, the root of the word is Latin and such markets were established by rulers during Roman times. These were typically closed markets with two main doors, one for entry and the other for exit. They would open in the morning and would again close during the evening in order to protect the market from thieves. Examples of Qaisaria can be found in Syria, especially in Damascus, Cairo and Grenada (Royal Central Asian Society, 1940).

Other suqs that existed since ancient times in Muharraq were Al Taiyara, Tujjar and Meheesh, although the dates of their establishment are unknown. From these five ancient suqs only Al Qaisaria still exists and a plan exists in the Municipality of Bahrain to restore it to its ancient architectural condition and to make it a central tourist attraction.

2.5 Current State of Conservation

The commencement of modernization processes in the 1920s initiated the transformation in the existing urban fabric and buildings, and the construction of modern buildings. Major changes occurred with the construction of the corniche roads in the 1930s and the causeway linking the two old cities of Muharraq and Manama with a swing bridge, which was opened in 1942. The real rupture to the linkage between the seafront and the urban fabric developed in the 1950s and 1960s with the reclamation of land around Muharraq town destroying the natural barrier between the original Muharraq town, established in Bu Maher, and the main island to the north. Over the last 50 years, however, the old city has gradually fallen into disrepair as its wealthier residents have moved to new suburban developments in areas with car access and better infrastructure and as 'modern' planning approaches have been introduced to the old town. Early in the 1970s, for example, a new master plan brought major roads into the historic fabric of the old town, causing considerable damage (Whelan, 1983).

Until the 1980s modernization, land reclamation and destruction of old and dilapidated structures continued taking its toll on the old quarters or the core Islamic heritage parts of the town. In late the 80's the municipality realized the significance of heritage in the town and commenced to take preventive measures to protect further loss of important buildings only by abandoning earlier plans of large scale demolitions, and implemented

stricter regulations in the traditional buildings. However, all these measures did not achieve significant success, primarily owing to three main factors – (i) material used, (ii) prevalent attitude towards modernization and (iii) migration of local population and skilled craftsman.

During recent conservation processes, it has been determined why the initial conservation measures failed to protect the buildings and structures, and the cause has been established to be the inferior or improper material used, such as mud-bricks, wood, mud-plaster etc. creating a major discontinuity with traditional urban architecture.

Secondly, the prevailing attitude towards modernization by sacrificing the past and traditional roots was a major setback for the town, since there were no rules and regulations preventing any such alterations or demolitions of heritage buildings or contemporary constructions. Furthermore, the philosophy of conservation conceived it as a mere visual matter rather than a tectonic issue. Thus, restoration of architectural heritage was usually reduced to replication of the outer skin and omitted the underlying structural details. Also, the artificiality of restoration emphasized ostentatious outlook creating a sense of loss of authenticity and temporal significance.

Finally, the migration of the original inhabitants of the town to better and more developed areas in Muharraq and the capital Manama in pursuit of better living conditions, resulted in abandonment of old traditional house to the mercy of low waged expatriate communities, which eventually led to irreversible losses. Another reason for abandoning the old houses has been that - they became difficult, expensive to maintain, and burdensome to upgrade to contemporary comfortable conditions.

Eventually the deterioration of tangible heritage, buildings and urban fabric, triggered a gradual loss of intangible heritage with the migration of native inhabitants who defined the identity of Muharraq based on tradition, customs and cultures. The loss of

intangible cultural heritage was also boosted due to incursion of foreign working class people into the communities causing loss of privacy as mentioned in Islamic urban principles.

Apart from the destruction and abandonment of historical buildings, the new roads isolated whole neighbourhoods, and unsympathetic multi-storey buildings sprang up alongside them. In addition, the lack of investment in the old city meant that its infrastructure deteriorated, leading in turn to the deterioration of living standards.

Since the 1980s the municipality began a search for an effective way to protect the heritage of the old city, whilst at the same time allowing for new developments to take it forward as a living city. Earlier plans for the destruction of large areas were abandoned and new, stricter regulations were developed to limit the demolition of the traditional buildings.

An appraisal of the ancient heritage in Muharraq has been made through literature review and ground surveys during this study. These identified varying degrees of preservation of the various historical elements, which included primarily the architectural heritage and to some extent the ancient urban fabric of the town. These buildings exhibit diverse architectural elements, decorations and construction details. The large and medium size buildings usually have a courtyard. The modern buildings are totally devoid of any ancient architectural elements resulting in discontinuity of old urban fabric. Furthermore, the demolition of several of the ancient buildings in order to pave the way for new and modern buildings is also resulting in the loss of heritage, such as, the first house built in Muharraq, Sheikh Hamad house, was destroyed to pave the way for widening of the road.

The remains of Bū Māher Fort were in a state of dilapidation until the 1970s. Only the remaining southern tower and the south-western wing were restored in the late 70s.

During this time, an archaeological team excavated the northern tower and wall foundations and uncovered other important artefacts. However, the execution of past restoration and partial reconstruction work shows deficiencies which impact on the state of conservation today. The use of modern cement and the lack of an appropriate damp proof layer has caused plaster and paint on the wall surfaces to flake. After restoration, the building was not in active use and therefore suffered from a lack of regular maintenance. The rooms are generally in good state of conservation as they remained unused, however the historic doors do not function properly due to the accumulation of dust and sand and the exterior shows signs of decay.

Dilapidated through neglect, Sheikh Isa House narrowly avoided being totally destroyed (it was to have been transformed into a public square) but intervention by the authorities saved this heritage. The ministry took over this house and restoration works were undertaken with a view to transforming it into an ethnographic museum. The restoration work was started in 1976 and today the house is a well-known tourist attraction.

In January 2010 after Bahrain registered the pearling heritage site for nomination to UNESCO's World Heritage List, a Bylaw has been issued to protect and enhance the areas of heritage significance in Muharraq. This bylaw has been developed to protect the traditional architecture, heritage neighbourhoods and the urban fabric. It provides strict rules and guidelines for new construction to protect all aspects of urban heritage elements.

2.5.1. The Impact of Changing Population

The number of inhabitants of the town of Muharraq at the end of the 19th century was estimated to be about 30 000. While Lorimer (1915) determined the population of the city of Muharraq to be about 20 000 people living in 4000 dwellings, the estimate of five members per family in the community was unrealistic. Contemporary indications

suggest that the average family size was not less than six to seven members. Therefore it is likely that the population of the town of Muharraq in the late 1800s was between 28 000 and 30 000 people who were settled in different neighbourhoods (Lorimer, 1915).

The movement of the residential areas of the city Muharraq up to the second and third decades of the 20th century brought about fundamental changes to the community of Bahrain. In particular they affected the political and economic aspects, most notably, firstly, in a transition from tribal organization to tribal rule, and secondly in a transition from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production (Wali, 1990)

As Manama became a business centre, people developed a preference for settling there, largely because the urban fabric and living conditions were far more modernized when compared to the old and congested conditions typical of the old quarters of Muharraq. As a result, people began to rent out the old buildings in Muharraq to expatriate labour. This expatriate labour entered Muharraq for a number of reasons, including:

- i. An oil refinery was opened in 1930 near Jabal Al Dukhan. This is in the middle of mainland Bahrain and the people had to travel a long distance from Muharraq to work in the refinery. As a result, many people started to leave Muharraq and chose instead to settle in the proximity of the refinery (Franklin, 1985).
- ii. During the economic downturn of 1929, the demand for the natural pearls of Bahrain declined in the world market. This affected the substantial diving community, most of which lived in Muharraq at that time.
- iii. The Bahraini pearl trade experienced a further setback by the invention of artificial pearls by the Japanese. This caused merchants and divers to leave the occupation and to find employment at the refinery instead.

2.5.2 The Impact from Changes from Roads Infrastructure

Recent changes in urbanization patterns in Muharraq show an increased deterioration in the urban fabric, a greater loss of architectural heritage and a steady decline in traditional values. This has the net effect of producing a loss of both the historic fabric and the morphology of Muharraq city. Changes in the social structure due to modernization have also led to changes in the needs and preferences displayed by people. These changes are in turn influenced by the morphology of Muharraq. Major problems faced by Muharraq town include the deterioration of its housing stock, the distribution of its traditional fabric and form, and the invasion of non-Bahraini low paid expatriate labourers and users of unplanned land. There are also problems with traffic congestion, a shortage of parking spaces and inadequate services (Buhaimed, 1987).

There is, however, a high degree of integrity that still exists between the traditional and modern fabric. The salient features of the preserved urban fabric include: the ancient pattern of road networks which still persists in the modern fabric; the relationship between the street network and the main structures and open spaces; and the granularity or texture in the historical part of the city that still reflects the ancient fabric.

There are other places in Muharraq where the historic fabric has been transformed by new street networks and by the widening of roads or the opening of new roads. This has resulted in a gradual destruction of the historic fabric. The road pattern is, however, still preserved despite these changes.

2.6 Conclusion

The history of Muharraq gathered during the literature review and interactions with local peoples have helped reveal several important facts about the town. It suggests that

location of the town has played a major role in the growth and development of the town, architecture and culture. However, much has been lost of the pre-Islamic era. Therefore, what remains to salvage is the last two hundred years of its history and heritage, during which it prospered into a well-established business and political centre, and a great human population with diverse cultures and traditions living harmoniously. But all that abruptly began to falter with the advent of an oil based economy. And in the race to modernization, the authorities overlooked the history and culture of the town and embarked on careless expansion and transformation.

It was in the beginning of the 1980s that the municipality realized the need to protect the heritage of the old city whilst allowing it to develop as a 'living city'. Also, the government became cognisant of the need to keep the traditional architectures and stopped demolition of older and traditional buildings. Modern day planning approaches were introduced to the old town in the early 1970s. A new master plan brought major roads into the historic fabric of the old town, causing considerable damage to the traditional buildings. Apart from the destruction and desertion of historical buildings, these new roads cut off whole neighbourhoods within Muharraaq. Many multi-storey buildings were constructed and the infrastructure and living standards of the local people were adversely affected by the absence of adequate investment. These government initiatives had limited success, since they generally meant to protect the important buildings whereas the loss to traditional houses and the intangible heritage, the people and their cultures, continued to disappear as people sought better living conditions elsewhere.

Therefore, considering the sustainable growth and development of Muharraaq along with preservation of ancient heritage, the priorities must focus on conservation of not just the material but also the human heritage. So, some of the priorities for conservation that need to be considered could be:

- i. Establishment and enforcement of criteria for protection of traditional architecture and the heritage character, such as construction material and techniques and the privacy factor in the buildings.
- ii. Preserving the urban fabric of neighbourhoods by respecting appropriate proportions and scale of new buildings in the vicinity of heritage elements.
- iii. Establishment of criteria for re-landscaping of empty plots and vacant lands which have resulted from demolition. This would help recover the continuity and the spatial coherence of the urban fabric.
- iv. Reorganisation of the urban fabric. This will require the provision of well-defined parking areas and pedestrian zones in the areas surrounding the historic cities. Vehicular access to the 'traditional' and 'transitional' fabrics could be provided in association with a programme for an overall upgrading of the open spaces and urban environment for the whole historical pattern.