

Analytical Study: The Influence of the Dilmun Civilization on the Development of Contemporary Arts in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Abstract— The Dilmun civilization, one of the earliest in the Arabian Gulf, holds a rich artistic heritage that continues to influence contemporary Bahraini art. Today's artists reinterpret its symbols and motifs through modern practices, creating a balance between cultural authenticity and innovation. This study examines how Dilmun heritage shapes a distinct artistic identity in Bahrain, reflecting a continuous dialogue between past and present.

Keywords— *Dilmun Civilization, Contemporary Art, Bahrain, Cultural Identity, Visual Heritage, Artistic Influence Introduction*

I. Introduction :Art in Bahrain reflects cultural identity and collective memory, where artists reinterpret heritage within contemporary forms. The Dilmun civilization, as one of the region's earliest civilizations, remains a key source of inspiration through its rich artistic symbols such as seals, pottery, and carvings. This research explores how Dilmun heritage continues to influence contemporary Bahraini art and contribute to shaping a visual identity that connects the past with the present.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM: DESPITE THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF THE DILMUN CIVILIZATION, PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ITS ARTISTIC HERITAGE REMAINS LIMITED AND DOES NOT REFLECT ITS TRUE VALUE. THIS GAP IS REINFORCED BY WEAK CULTURAL PROMOTION, LIMITED ACCESSIBILITY TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES, AND THE INSUFFICIENT VISIBILITY OF DILMUN-INSPIRED CONTEMPORARY ART. AS A RESULT, THERE IS A CLEAR DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE RICHNESS OF DILMUN HERITAGE AND ITS PRESENCE IN BOTH PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND MODERN ARTISTIC PRACTICE.

The research problem lies in identifying this gap, understanding its causes, and examining how it affects the continuity and development of Dilmun-inspired art, while exploring whether it represents a challenge or an opportunity for cultural revival through contemporary artistic approaches.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The template is used to format your paper and style the text. All margins, column widths, line spaces, and text fonts are prescribed; please do not alter them. You may note peculiarities. For example, the head margin in this template measures proportionately more than is customary. This measurement and others are deliberate, using specifications that anticipate your paper as one part of the entire proceedings, and not as an independent document. Please do not revise any of the current designations.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- A. What is the level of public awareness and understanding of the Dilmun civilization and its visual symbols?
- B. To what extent are Dilmun elements incorporated into contemporary Bahraini art, and how are they reinterpreted in innovative ways?
- C. How does the integration of Dilmun heritage influence cultural identity and the sense of belonging?
- D. What challenges limit the visibility of Dilmun-inspired art, and does this gap represent a threat or an opportunity for its revival?
- E. What contemporary artistic models reflect Dilmun heritage, and how do they demonstrate diversity in Bahrain's art scene?

V. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study highlights the significance of the Dilmun civilization as a key historical foundation of art in Bahrain and its continued influence on contemporary artistic practices. It emphasizes the role of heritage in strengthening cultural identity and connecting modern art with the memory of place.

VI. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the influence of the Dilmun civilization on contemporary arts in Bahrain, particularly artworks inspired by its symbols and aesthetic values. It includes Bahraini artists, art students, and individuals interested in visual arts.

The study covers the timeline from the origins of Dilmun (around 3000 BCE) to present-day artistic practices, and is geographically limited to the Kingdom of Bahrain.

VII. DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

A. Art

creative human practice that produces visual expressions; operationally, includes artworks inspired by Dilmun symbols.

B. Dilmun Civilization

An ancient civilization in Bahrain (3rd millennium BCE); operationally, a source of historical and artistic inspiration.

C. Dilmun Art

Traditional artistic forms such as seals, pottery, and carvings; operationally, reinterpreted visually in modern works.

D. Contemporary Art

Modern artistic practices based on innovation; operationally, Bahraini artworks that integrate Dilmun elements in new ways.

VIII. STUDY REFERENCES

The study relies on a range of historical and theoretical sources, including books, artworks, and artistic research, to support analysis and interpretation. These sources help in understanding the artistic identity of the Dilmun civilization through its material culture.

It also incorporates practitioner-based studies by artists, highlighting the importance of artistic experience in interpreting and recontextualizing visual heritage.

IX. INDUCTIVE CONTENT

The study draws on books covering the history, daily life, and artistic forms of the Dilmun civilization to establish a research foundation. These sources highlight key visual elements such as seals, pottery, and architectural motifs as early influences on Bahrain's artistic development.

It also includes publications by contemporary artists, demonstrating how Dilmun symbols are reinterpreted into modern visual expressions.

(Introduction to the Ancient History of Bahrain)

A general reference book, published in 1998 AD Written by 'Abd al-Rahman Saud Masameh'

The book summarizes the elements of Dilmun life from all its aspects human, religious, economic, as well as systems, customs, and traditions in addition to archaeological discoveries and their study through temples, tombs, and graves. Figure 1

(Remnants of Paradise: Monuments of Bahrain (500 B.C. - 300 A.D.)

This book was first published in 2002.

It offers a historical and exploratory perspective on the monuments of Bahrain, starting with the Dilmun culture, rooted in its paradisiacal imagery and archaeological settlements, continuing to Bahrain in the mid-second millennium B.C. during the Iron Age, and up to the civilization of Tylos.

It is the first issue in the "Bahrain Cultural Book" series, led by the "Bahrain Cultural" magazine, and published in cooperation with the Arab Center for Studies and Publishing. Figure 2

(Afaaq Dilmuniyya Dilmun Horizons)Book by visual artist "Rashed Al-'Areifi" (1942–2017)One of the most famous artists in the Kingdom of Bahrain whose work was influenced by the Dilmun civilization. The book, first issued in 1985, begins with an introduction on the origins of Dilmun artistic practices and presents the artist's biography and the beginnings of his exposure to Dilmun. It reviews his experience throughout this journey and supplements the text with illustrated images from his childhood and early years and with some of his works that re-style Dilmun motifs in a visual-artistic manner, encouraging the reader to open up to this revived art. Figure 3

(Maziru Sudra in the Garden of Dilmun)Book by the artist "Mahmoud Abdul-Sahib Baqlawa"Published in 2022, the book narrates the story of the flood hero who saved humankind from annihilation — a figure whom the gods granted an immortal life and whose dwelling was set in the sacred land of eternity, which some researchers today associate with the island of Bahrain. The book strengthens cultural awareness and raises understanding of the Dilmun civilization; it addresses researchers' questions and clarifies the nature of human life in that historical period through its material and spatial heritage. The book is supported by twenty-three Arabic references and thirteen foreign references, and it includes nineteen art plates. Figure 4

(Dilmunite Plans)From the writings of the late artist "Rashed Al-'Areifi"A catalogue of an exhibition and a magazine article that introduce us to his artistic works.It is written in a simple, accessible style, yet it stands among pioneering writings in the field of documenting the heritage and contemporary Dilmun culture.It is close to local and folkloric roots while also drawing on scientific and academic knowledge and regional influences, thus providing important indications that the next generation can adopt as a source and driving force for research. Figure 5

(Early Dilmun Seals from Saar)

A book by Harriet Crawford, published in 2000 CE.

It deals with Dilmun seals and the field of research about them, and it includes excavation reports from the Saar area in Bahrain, conducted with the participation of the London–Bahrain archaeological mission. The book also contains a catalog presenting images and descriptions of the seals and Dilmun motifs in sufficient detail.

It falls within the scope of seal studies and presents the characteristics and current classification of Dilmun seals, along with analysis of their styles, contexts, and functions. The book can be used as a reference for examination and research, providing detailed information about Dilmun seals. Figure 6

Theoretical Content:

We visited the National Museum of Bahrain to obtain a general overview of the Dilmun civilization from the artistic aspect, its resources and materials, its artifacts and famous buildings. We examined the ancient artworks it preserves and the craftsmanship found in Dilmun artifacts, and we drew from the past the useful points that can be employed in contemporary artistic works. Figure 7

Bahraini artists have contributed a significant portion to this research by studying and analyzing its hypotheses and results. We found that Bahraini artists produced works that do not fall short of contemporary Dilmun-inspired art; these works employ Dilmun symbols and motifs in inventive and varied formal expressions and plastic artworks. This demonstrates to what extent Dilmun-inspired art has reached contemporary art. Among the most prominent names mentioned are the late artist Rashid Al-‘Areifi and Mahmoud Abdul-Sahib Baqlawa, and we also have contributions from the Dilmun-influenced artist Kaifan Khalil Al-Mahdhoon and ‘Adil Al-‘Abbasi.

X. RESEARCHES AND ART REPORTS

This study draws on a comprehensive range of previous research and artistic reports that examine the Dilmun civilization from both archaeological and artistic perspectives. These sources cover key aspects such as architecture, burial mounds, seals, pottery, and decorative motifs, allowing for a deeper understanding of Dilmun’s material culture and its visual language. Such studies play a crucial role in linking archaeological evidence with contemporary artistic interpretation, offering insights into how ancient forms and symbols can be recontextualized within modern artistic practices.

Key academic works, including *Qal’at al-Bahrain* by Pierre Lombard and *Seals in Dilmun Society* by K. D. Ur, provide detailed analyses of archaeological sites, artifacts, and symbolic systems. These studies rely on excavation reports, archival materials, and visual documentation, while also examining stylistic developments and cultural continuity across historical periods. They contribute to understanding the functional, social, and ritual meanings of Dilmun objects,

particularly seals, which represent a central element of its visual identity.

In addition to academic research, the study incorporates reports and articles published in Bahraini cultural periodicals and newspapers, as well as exhibition reviews. These sources highlight the growing presence of Dilmun-inspired motifs in contemporary Bahraini art and document how artists reinterpret these symbols through painting, mixed media, and conceptual practices. Exhibitions such as *Dilmun Symbols* by Mahmoud Baqlawa demonstrate how traditional elements are not merely reproduced, but reimagined as dynamic visual forms that carry both historical depth and contemporary relevance.

Furthermore, these reports emphasize the role of critics, curators, and cultural institutions in reviving awareness of Dilmun heritage and promoting its integration into modern artistic discourse. They also address broader cultural discussions surrounding the historical marginalization of the Dilmun civilization and the need to reintroduce it as an active source of inspiration within the local and regional art scene.

Overall, these research studies and artistic reports provide a rich and diverse body of material for analysis and comparison. They reveal how Dilmun heritage continues to influence contemporary artistic practices in Bahrain, supporting both the preservation of cultural identity and the development of innovative visual expressions that bridge the past with the present.

XI. PREVIOUS STUDIES

This study reviews the research “Visual Symbols of the Dilmun Civilization for Expressing Cultural Identity in Contemporary Imaging Art” conducted by Dr. Ghorob Al-Jabri (2021), which explores the use of Dilmun symbols as a source for innovation in contemporary imaging art. The study emphasizes the importance of reinterpreting Dilmun motifs to affirm cultural identity while developing new artistic formulations that combine heritage with modern visual language.

The research focuses on extracting the artistic and aesthetic values of Dilmun symbols and transforming them through contemporary design principles such as repetition, balance, movement, and unity. It also investigates the historical and environmental factors that shaped these symbols, providing a deeper understanding of their visual structure and meaning.

An applied experiment was conducted using digital tools (Photoshop and Wacom), resulting in twelve artworks that demonstrate the potential of integrating Dilmun elements into contemporary practices. The outcomes highlight how traditional symbols can be reimagined through experimentation and technology, reinforcing the role of heritage as a dynamic source for artistic innovation.

XII. STUDY HYPOTHESES

The study assumes that the Dilmun civilization possesses rich artistic forms characterized by simplicity and strong visual identity, which have influenced Bahraini art historically and continue to appear in contemporary practices. It is hypothesized that this influence is more evident among Bahraini artists, who reinterpret Dilmun elements in innovative ways across various artistic fields.

The study also suggests that, despite this influence, the presence of Dilmun heritage remains limited in some aspects due to insufficient awareness and promotion. Therefore, it is assumed that greater efforts by both individuals and institutions are needed to preserve, reinterpret, and promote Dilmun heritage as a foundation for strengthening cultural identity in Bahrain.

XIII. INTERVIEW WITH DR. ZAINAB SUWAR

The interview with Dr. Zainab Suwar provides important insights into the presence of Dilmun heritage in Bahraini society and its influence on contemporary art. She explained that while general awareness of Dilmun exists, detailed knowledge remains limited due to restricted access to archaeological sites and insufficient cultural and media promotion. However, the use of Dilmun symbols in tourism and public spaces helps enhance visual recognition and cultural understanding.

Dr. Suwar noted that despite growing interest, the integration of Dilmun elements in contemporary design is still limited, as many institutions use the name “Dilmun” without applying its visual symbols. Through her research, she demonstrated how Dilmun motifs, particularly seals, can be reinterpreted in modern design while preserving their original identity. She also highlighted the contributions of Bahraini artists who have incorporated Dilmun symbols into their works using innovative approaches.

The interview further emphasized that integrating Dilmun heritage into art, education, and media strengthens cultural identity and belonging, while correcting public misconceptions. Although there is a lack of comprehensive studies, this gap is seen as an opportunity for further research and creative exploration. Overall, the diversity of contemporary artistic practices reflects the adaptability of Dilmun heritage and its continued relevance in modern Bahraini art.

XIV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS (INTERVIEW)

The analysis reveals that public awareness of the Dilmun civilization remains limited despite general recognition, mainly due to restricted access to archaeological sites and weak media promotion. However, integrating Dilmun symbols into public spaces and tourism enhances visual awareness and connects heritage with everyday life.

The findings also show that the use of Dilmun elements in contemporary design is still limited and often lacks authenticity. Nevertheless, research and artistic practices demonstrate that these symbols can be effectively reinterpreted while preserving their original identity. Contemporary Bahraini artists increasingly engage with Dilmun heritage, reflecting a growing interest in cultural preservation through modern artistic expression.

Moreover, integrating Dilmun heritage into art, education, and cultural initiatives strengthens national identity and belonging. The study highlights that the current lack of research represents an opportunity for further exploration, while the diversity of contemporary artistic approaches confirms the adaptability and continued relevance of Dilmun heritage in Bahrain.

XV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS (SURVEY)

The survey results indicate a moderate level of awareness of the Dilmun civilization, with 46.2% of participants reporting some knowledge, while 23.2% had no prior knowledge, revealing a noticeable cultural gap. Despite this, 92.9% agreed that learning about Dilmun is highly beneficial, highlighting its importance in strengthening cultural identity and belonging.

In terms of information delivery, 64.3% of participants were satisfied with current presentation methods, although 20% expressed dissatisfaction, indicating a need for improvement. Similarly, while most participants evaluated the quality of information positively, 25.8% rated it as average, suggesting the need for more comprehensive and engaging content.

Overall, the findings show that although awareness exists, it remains limited and requires further enhancement through improved educational efforts and more effective communication strategies.

Recommendations

- Enhance educational programs related to Dilmun
- Increase cultural awareness through digital platforms
- Provide interactive and accessible learning resources

XVI. STUDY RESULTS

The findings indicate a high level of awareness of the Dilmun civilization among participants, with the majority confirming that they have heard about it and recognize its presence in contemporary Bahraini art. Most respondents reported having seen modern artworks inspired by Dilmun, while only a small minority had not.

The results also show that a large proportion of artists, art students, and citizens believe that contemporary art in Bahrain has been influenced by the Dilmun civilization, particularly among Bahraini artists. However, some participants expressed differing views, noting that the level of influence varies between artists.

Furthermore, most participants demonstrated a positive outlook toward the future of Dilmun-inspired art, expecting greater openness and engagement with this artistic direction in Bahrain.

XVII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Bahraini artists play a key role in highlighting Dilmun heritage by transforming its symbols into contemporary artistic expressions that balance tradition and modernity. Their work reflects the spirit of the civilization and serves as a creative link between the past and present.

However, the broader public impact remains limited, indicating the need for greater efforts to enhance awareness and engagement. Overall, Dilmun-inspired art contributes to strengthening Bahrain's cultural identity through meaningful and innovative visual expression.

XVIII. FUTURE STUDIES

Comparison Between Artistic Cultures:

Conduct a study comparing the influence of Bahraini artists with artists from other cultures on the representation of the Dilmun civilization.

Impact of Arts on Tourism:

Investigate how art can contribute to attracting tourists and enhancing their knowledge of the Dilmun civilization.

Spread of Dilmun Art:

Examine the dissemination of the artistic influence of the Dilmun civilization beyond the borders of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

XIX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance and expand Dilmun-inspired exhibitions to increase visibility and cultural engagement.

Encourage the integration of Dilmun elements in public art, architecture, and design projects.

Promote Dilmun heritage through tourism and innovative presentation methods.

Support local and emerging artists by providing resources and opportunities for creative development.

Foster heritage awareness from an early age through educational and interactive programs.

Explore new artistic fields, especially digital and contemporary media, inspired by Dilmun.

Expand participation and outreach to involve wider audiences and artistic communities.

Develop innovative creative practices such as graphic design, 3D art, storytelling, and workshops inspired by Dilmun heritage.

Figures

Figure No.	Title
Figure 1	A Book <i>Introduction to the Ancient History of Bahrain</i>
Figure 2	<i>Remnants of Paradise: Monuments of Bahrain</i>
Figure 3	<i>Dilmun Horizons Book</i>
Figure 4	<i>Maziru Sudra in the Garden of Dilmun</i>
Figure 5	<i>Dilmunite Plans Book</i>
Figure 6	<i>Early Dilmun Seals from Saar</i>
Figure 7	Bahrain National Museum
Figure 8	Ancient Dilmun pottery (clay & glazed)
Figure 9	Ancient Dilmun seals
Figure 10	Ancient Dilmun pottery
Figure 11	Artworks by Rashid Al-Arefi
Figure 12	Artworks by Mahmoud Abdel-Sahib
Figure 13	Dilmun works by Khalil Al-Madhhoon
Figure 14	Dilmun works by Adil Al-Abbasi
Figure 15	Dilmun sculpture by Rashid Suwar
Figure 16	<i>Harmony Panel</i>
Figure 17	<i>Dilmun Bull's Head Plaque</i>
Figure 18	<i>Dilmun, the Other Life</i>
Figure 19	<i>Delmon Paradise Panel</i>

References

First: Arabic References

الأُنصاري، م. (2018). حضارة دلمون: الجذور التاريخية والتحول الثقافي. هيئة البحرين للثقافة والآثار.

آل خليفة، م. (2020). الفن البحرين المعاصر بين التراث والحداثة. مركز البحوث الفنية.

بوجيري، إ. (2019). الرموز الدلمونية في الفنون التشكيلية البحرينية. مجلة التراث (12). العربي،

لوري، ع. (2017). الآثار الدلمونية ودلالاتها الفنية. جامعة البحرين – كلية الآداب.

وزارة الثقافة البحرينية. (2016). دلمون بين الماضي والحاضر. وزارة الثقافة.

حسن، هـ. (2021). التوظيف البصري للتراث في الفن التشكيلي الخليجي. دار طويق.

Second: Foreign References

Crawford, H. (2005). Dilmun and its Gulf neighbors. Cambridge University Press.

Potts, D. (2012). The archaeology of the Arabian Gulf. Routledge.

Rice, M. (2004). The archaeology of the Arabian Gulf: From prehistory to the Islamic period. Routledge.

Third: Websites

هيئة البحرين للثقافة والآثار. (2022). حضارة دلمون. <https://culture.gov.bh>

متحف البحرين الوطني. (2021). الفنون الدلمونية.

Google Arts & Culture. (2023). Dilmun Civilization.

XX. APPENDICES

Appendix (1): Questionnaire Measuring Community Awareness of Dilmun Heritage

- General information about the participants.
- Level of knowledge about the Dilmun civilization.
- Awareness of Dilmun arts.
- Evaluation of the presence of heritage in contemporary artworks.
- Suggestions to enhance the use of Dilmun heritage in the arts.

Appendix (2): Selected Images of Dilmun Art Models

- Images of Dilmun seals discovered in Bahrain.
- Samples of Dilmun carvings and motifs.
- Contemporary artworks by Bahraini artists inspired by Dilmun symbols.

Appendix (3): Interviews with Bahraini Artists

- Presence of Dilmun heritage in their artistic practice.
- Methods of employing Dilmun symbols in their artworks.
- Challenges they face in re-presenting heritage.
- Vision for the future of contemporary Dilmun-inspired art in Bahrain.