



Exploring the differences between an Omani traditional and renaissance jewelry from the perspective of an old generation of Omani women

Amal Salim Khlafan Al-Ismaili ^{al}

^a Sultan Qaboos University

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ABSTRACT

This paper will attempt to explore the history of women jewelry in Oman and to know the differences between traditional and contemporary jewelry from old generation women. The paper discovers the hidden stories of old jewelry piece that owned by Omani women. Although jewelry has moving into trends and fashion styles throughout the centuries, women keep their old jewelries because of its uniqueness. By using methodology of semi-structures interviews, it classifies them under four main categories which are jewelry maker, weight versus cost, places to wear and traditional designs and inspirations. Understanding the historical context and provenance of a jewelry piece in a particular era can provide valuable context for Omani cultural and traditions. Moreover, gathering information about the previous owners of antique jewelry can offer valuable clues about the jewelry's age and reflect so much more to us than just being ornamental items..

¹Corresponding author.

E-mail address: alismaili@squ.edu.om



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معرفة الاختلافات بين المجوهرات التقليدية العمانية ومجوهرات عصر النهضة من وجهة نظر المرأة العمانية من الجيل القديم

أمل سالم خلفان الإسماعيلية¹

الملخص:

يحاول البحث اكتشاف تاريخ المجوهرات النسائية في عمان ومعرفة الاختلافات بين المجوهرات التقليدية والمعاصرة من وجهة نظر نساء الجيل القديم. اعتمد البحث في الوصول إلى النتائج على المقابلات الميدانية لنساء عمان من مختلف المناطق والمحافظات، تم التعرف على القصص الخفية وراء اقتناء قطع معينة من المجوهرات القديمة التي كانت تمتلكها المرأة العمانية، وعلى الرغم من أن المجوهرات قد انتقلت إلى اتجاهات وأنماط الموضة الحديثة على مر القرون، إلا أن النساء يحتفظن بمجوهراتهن القديمة بسبب تفرداها وتميزها. تم تصنيف الاختلافات بين المجوهرات القديمة والحديثة تحت أربع فئات رئيسية هي الاختلاف في صانع المجوهرات، والوزن مقابل التكلفة، وأماكن ارتداء بعض القطع، والإلهام في التصميمات التقليدية. إن فهم السياق التاريخي ومصدر قطعة المجوهرات في عصر معين يوفر سياقاً مميزاً للتعرف على الثقافة والتقاليد العمانية. إضافة على ذلك فإن جمع المعلومات عن المالكين السابقين للمجوهرات العتيقة يمكن أن يقدم أدلة قيمة حول عمر المجوهرات ويعكس قيمة هذه القطع التي تتعدى من كونها عناصر جمالية لزيينة المرأة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحرف، تصاميم المجوهرات، القيمة القديمة، التفرد، مجوهرات عصر النهضة.

¹ جامعة السلطان قابوس

1- General Introduction and Study Purpose

What better way to go back through generations by one or two pieces from your jewelry collection? The history of jewelry is important because it reflects on the cultural forms of country. Omani metalsmiths and jewelers frequently specialized in the creation of silver and gold jewelry, which was distinguished by their exceptional skill and craftsmanship. Traditional Jewelry is known as an integral part of Omani culture, and it is distinguished by its precise craftsmanship and quality. These items were highly valued because technology was not catch up with the skill of exquisite jewelry manufacturing. These jewelries are often handcrafted by Omani skilled artisans and their designs passed through generations. Omanis are usually proud of the adornment that they wear on holidays and occasions, both men and women for the sake of individuality and beauty. These traditional jewelries have deep symbolic and steeped in meaning. While silver industry has played an important role in Oman's history richness of its traditional designs, but also by the uniqueness of its craftsmanship, women kept their golden jewelry for years. There are many well-known and widely used popular proverbs, which are: "Gold is an adornment and a treasury," it means gold was not just a piece of jewelry that women used to adorn themselves with, but rather it is a certain sense of financial security.

Traditionally in Oman, women have ornaments that are worn on specific parts of the body, including beautifully crafted pieces for the head, forehead, ears, nose, neck, chest, hands, arms, fingers, and toes. The different pairs of jewelry are namely, bracelets, armbands, necklaces, headbands, earrings, waistbands, and pretty hair adornments. Each region of Oman had its own unique kind of designs and inspired by the surrounding topography and a country's culture and tradition. Jewelry is numerous in Oman and even among the people of Oman. Nizwa and Matrah are currently regarded the most significant locations for producing and designing silver and gold jewelry.

In contemporary jewelry design, national culture is facing the impact of renaissance, and cultural inheritance is facing a severe test. There are same ways to express how women is connected to their jewelry and how the art of jewelry being change over years according to the fashion and trends. By returning to the heritage of jewelry manufacturing which is necessarily consistent with the values and culture of the person and society to local country, the era of jewelry is crucial to start with. It is important to search in the art of jewelry or the aesthetic taste and preferences of the recipient to acquire or own it. And what is required by the development of the society that designs, manufactures, and wears these ornaments and jewelry, within the educational and social repercussions of wearing them. Today, Omani jewelry has found a balance between tradition and modernity. Contemporary jewelers are merging time-honored techniques with current trends, creating pieces that appeal to a global audience while retaining their Omani essence. During this time, jewelry took on various meanings and styles, helping to define the times, society, and religious belief.

The importance of the research lies in discovering the diversity of Omani jewelry, ancient and modern, with environmental and geographical diversity. In addition, to conveying various experiences by Omani women who lived through the stages of jewelry manufacturing to the present day, and to serve as a cultural reference for studies and research. The paper examines the main question is what the difference between ancient and modern jewelry from an old Omani women perspective are. It assumes that jewelry is not ornamental item, but it reflects the link between the past and the present by uniqueness of jewelry.

2- Materials and Methods

This research used an ethnographic, qualitative methodology to identify the differences between the past and present of jewelry from old Omani generation women. The research used semi-structured interviews of 40 women from north to south governorates of Oman. The participants were 50 years old and above. The reason to choose this range of ages is because this generation paid attention to aesthetics and innovation than current generation(Z). In addition, will identify if generation(X) is accepting the development in fashion and jewelry.

An excellent method to start the interview is to assemble all the information the women already have about the piece. This may include:

When you received the item

Where/who you received it from?

What information or story was first given to you about the item (origin, substance, etc.)

The questions were 12 asked to identify the jewelry that had been keep with her for long time.

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What region and village do you belong to?
4. Do you still have, or do you have some old jewelry?
5. Where did this jewelry come from (did you buy it yourself, as a gift, or did you inherit it from your family...?)
7. How do you wear this jewelry?
8. Where do you keep this piece?
9. Do this jewelry have stories connected to them?
10. Is this all you are keeping, or did you sell some of them?

11. What does this jewelry mean to you, how do the men and girls of the neighborhood wear it in your days, and when is it worn?

12. In your opinion, what is the difference between the old jewelry you wear and contemporary jewelry?

After interviewed all women I gained valuable information about verity of vintage jewelry that may not see it again but by preserving it through long times these pieces are reflecting the cultural Omani jewelry. As the women preferred not to divulge their identities, identification codes (e.g., W1, W2, etc.) were used.

3- Key findings from the semi-structured interviews

3-1 Diversity of Omani jewelry

Silverware is one of the oldest industries in Oman (Al Selimiyah,2023). There are no specific occasions for wearing this silverware jewelry, but rather it is worn at any time. Despite the simplicity of this jewelry and the material it was made of, most often, jewelry designs can be traced back to certain regions and can even determine the identity from which a woman is. Nizwa, which was once the capital of Oman in the 6th and 7th centuries AD, was a renowned center for silver, followed by the wilayat of Rustaq, Ibri and Sur. It was home to skilled silversmiths who designed and melded the metal through traditional handicraft techniques to create high-quality and state-of-the-art ornaments for members of royalty (Salmani, 2023b). Each wilayat in Oman had its own practices and designs, derived from respective cultures to create pieces that were unique to the region and received widespread acclaim.

These differences shows that Oman has diversity in women jewelry, and there are many pieces that women owned and still wear but it belongs to specific governates. For example, I choose two women one from governorate of South Al Batinah from Al Rustaq identified by (W4) and the other women from Dhofar in the South of Oman identified by (W8). I found that there are many differences in each of them jewelries and most of them is not found and wear in current time.



Figure1-1: Collection of silver jewelry belong to a woman from Al Rustaq (South Al Batinah governate) dating back to 1963.



Figure 1-2: Called "Selselah" and worn around the neck to hang on the chest and sometimes on the forehead.



Figure 1-3: Called "Natel", its circular rings are carved with decorations worn in the feet.



Figure 1-4: Called "Hajola", A semi-circular ring with no decorations. It is one of the simplest pieces of silver. It is worn on children's feet.



Figure 1-5: called "Shwahed", its rings with a sharp triangular shape, with a variety of decorations and are worn on the index finger only.



Figure 1-6: "Rings": It is worn on the middle and ring fingers, and its shapes vary with a variety of decorations and shapes.



Figure 1-7: Called "Aqam" it is a decorative hook on which the wool is sewn onto the lower loops to be tied together on the hijab.



Figure 1-8: Called " al haraz" is a chain connected to a small decorative box, hollow on the inside, it contains money and ruqyahs from the Holy Qur'an. It is worn for the sake of preservation and protection from evil and envy.



Figure 1-9: Called " Panjri Mashuk" (wide). They are circular rings worn on the hands, and the word "mashauk" means the silver thorns on the outside.



Figure 1-10: Called “Banjari Mashuk” (narrow). They are circular rings worn on the hands, and one of the conditions for wearing this type is that they be worn in an even number.



Figure 1-11: A silver earring worn above the ear.

Women from Dhofar (W8) own different pieces of jewelry. She keeps some pieces that went back to 130 years old.



Figure 2-1: Called "Athkool", an ornament used as a silver hair decoration.



Figure 2-2: Called "Selselah", a silver ornament that Dhofari women put on the tip of the scarf



Figure 2-3: Silver necklace

3-2 Differences between old and renaissance Jewelry

During the fourteen interviews, in response to the question of, in your point of view what is the difference between the old jewelry and the jewelry in the present time? I collected all the responses and classified them into four main differences on which the responses agreed, which are the jewelry makers, weight versus cost, places of wearing, and designs by inspirations.

Jewelry Makers

Jewelry has historically been linked with exclusivity, which is achieved via customization and craftsmanship. More than simply a distinctive design, a piece of jewelry tells us a story of makers and wearers. In the past, the jeweler did all process of crafting from cutting into last result by using the simplest methods and skills in the local market. According to the words of the elderly, the jewelry in the past was composed of the same manufacturing material, there was no other materials were mixed, so it is considered stronger and more solid than the jewelry of our time.

The crafting of jewelry includes who's the makers, the quality of the metal and its purity from impurities, and final product in its color and shine. Making jewelry is an ancient art (Denise,2023b). Every society leaves its symbolic on this craft and the final form in which the jewelry appears (Porter, 2023). The jeweler always puts his touch on the jewelry he creates with his skilled hands. Omani goldsmiths inherited it from previous generations, and Omani women preserved it from generation to generation by using it on special occasions and holidays. Several Omani families were famous for crafting gold and silver as well, and presenting the most beautiful shapes and designs, which only increased in luster and brilliance with the passage of time, despite the emergence of the latest designs and trends of the finest international brands in this field, and given its material value throughout the ages, the sparkle of this yellow metal has never faded. And he remained true to the saying (gold is an adornment and a treasury).

The interviewers' women believed that the difference in the jewelry between the past and the present is the difference in the jeweler of the jewelry, as W7 said, "The Omanis were the ones who crafted the jewelry, and its manufacture was original, and its fastening was secure". W30 believed that "The sincerity of the jeweler and the amount of effort he put into decorating this piece of silver, even if it was small in size". "As old jewelry is distinguished by its quality and purity from impurities, and it has maintained its material and cultural value, unlike jewelry at the present time, where it has lost some of the features" W18 said. Therefore, "we find that some people are looking for old jewelry to buy and acquire". "Old jewelry is heavier and thicker, and has its weight and quality, but now its quality decreases and it is light and thinner, and it may suit the tastes of some people, so this is excellent, but it is not like the old one", this is what W31 agrees with, as she continues by saying, "In the past, jewelry was clear and beautiful, and women were content to wear Al Hirz, (shows figure 3-1) which is sufficient and clear, gold pieces in the bracelet are hand-cut, and metal coins (Saudi riyals) were used, which we do not find in this jewelry today".



Figure 3-1: Al Hirz (owner of W31)

"This is what I noticed in my mother's jewelry collection, and there is another collection that I bought myself that does not resemble it, but I always like to buy silver from old markets such as Nizwa Souq, but one day a man told me that there are Omani types and others that are not Omani made. There are types now, unlike in the past, all jewelry were made by Omani hands" W15 said.

W6 and W9 both believed that the quality of the gold and the workmanship in the past were better than in the present. W6 described the color of gold previously as being red in color, and she describes one of the jewelries she owns (Al-Maria) that she previously bought for 250 Omani riyals, and if she sold at present time it will cost for more than 700 riyals. Omani considers this to be proof that gold in the past was better and purer," W9 says. W13 clarified this by saying "because old gold is guaranteed and not adulterated, and that old gold is pure gold." "Old

gold is more beautiful than today in terms of quality and is not easily broken because of its weight." Heavy and antique in shape, it indicates authenticity." W15 said.

"Old jewelry is better and has a distinctive shine, as it is not affected or broken easily" W21 said and W24 emphasized its shine by saying, "old jewelry is still distinguished by the quality of its manufacture, as it does not change and remains strong and cohesive, maintaining its luster and shine". W25 said in same point that "Our people were right when they said (the old is unsexist). W21 believed that "Jewelry in our time was high value and something sacred to women, it had a heavy weight, which suggested that it was authentic, characterized by remaining for years under many different conditions without losing its aesthetic elements".

Women in Z generation had different process of purchasing silver pieces (Al Selimiyah, 2023). Women would choose a piece of solid silver, that is, without any engravings, that they wanted to wear. They choose the engravings that they wanted to apply, or through a drawing on paper that had been selected in advance to be given to the jeweler to turn it into a very finely engraved surface. With very precise details, including lines, shapes, letters, names, and dates. It was common to write the names on the pieces in a very small font, as well as the date for some rare silver pieces or those that make them valuable, such as a wedding ring, pieces of gifts from a husband to his wife, or gifts for special occasions.

Weight versus Cost

W11 agree about the difference of jewelry in the past according to its weight and cost. She said "In the past gold and even silver jewelry were heavy and cheaper, while now are light and more expensive". "Gold in the past is heavy and cheaper compared to gold today, which is light and expensive, it has a different character in terms of design and maintains its material value even after a long period of time" W11 says. W16 agreed in same pint she said that " although it has its own attractive luster and beauty, it is considered light in weight, easily damaged, and also expensive compared to old jewelry." Furthermore, W6 noticed that "The price of gold has become more expensive compared to the past, and small quantities are produced with lower quality although the modern shapes become more beautiful". Omani purchasers still see gold and silver jewelry as a financial investment. Prices are determined on weight rather than craftsmanship (Zacharias, 2023). Moreover, jewelry demand and designs have been influenced by numerous things. One reason is that cost of gold, it traded and kept to ward against currency deflations.

Places to wear

Jewelry differs in ancient and modern times in the places of wearing it, as it was worn in many and varied places, "The places of wearing it vary, as some are designed for the hair and some for the head and face, such as the balagha, which is worn on the nose, and some of it is in the hand and foot, such as the arms, which are worn on the top of the hand."W7 says.

One of piece that is not wearing in current time is called "bulagha", it is a traditional silver ornament that women, especially married women, wear in the nose for decoration. It consists of a ring that is inserted into one or two holes in the lower half of the tip of the nose, and a part in the shape of a rose, or any other shape, is attached to this ring, from which it hangs. Short chains. Bulagha is made of both silver and gold.



Figure 3-2: Shows "Buladha" (source: Al Selimiyah,2023)

The reason is that women no longer need to wear them in all places due to the change in lifestyle, and because wearing them in places such as the head or face is impractical, as W18 said "The jewelry was very heavy, some of which we cannot wear on all days". In the past, she used to wear it most of the time, but nowadays women wear jewelry mostly on special occasions. "Now, we hardly see girls wearing any obvious jewelry to adorn themselves with, as it is small and expensive" W40.

Traditional designs and inspirations

Jewelry design is a dynamic art form that evolves with the passage of time and fashion. Many women agree that the engravings found in old jewelry are often inspired by the Omani environment. W10 remember that the necklace she keeps has an engraving of " dallah", which symbolizes something of the Omani culture (Figure

3-4) she said, " We may not find many of these inscriptions today". They differ in terms of jewelry designs and their various shapes. In the past, they contained shapes that seemed familiar to everyone and were manufactured in specific quantities. W13 confirmed that gold in the past is more luxurious, and its designs are better and express the Omani heritage.



Figure 3-4: Al dallah decoration (owner of W10)

W14 believed the differences between old and present jewelry is in the inspiration of designers. She said "The jewelry took certain shapes, which were popular, such as the shapes of triangles, rhombuses, squares, and circles, and they often contained thorns or prominent, sharp protrusions, and their designs were inspired by the Omani environment".

W28 said "There was a very big difference. In the past, the jewelry was very few and rare, as well as the variety and design of the jewelry is rare and distinctive, and it contains shapes and was formulated without prior planning or design, sometimes relying on mental visualization and inspiration from nature around it and the community with handmade techniques, designs, and shapes inspired by the Omani heritage. They also include silver coins and dangling chains in abundance, and this depends on the skill of the jeweler. As for the inscriptions and decorations, they are inspired by the Omani environment and are either floral or geometric decorations and are also decorated with coins from different countries".



Figure 3-5: Omani decoration environment (owner of W28)

Some women believe that the design of jewelry has now become simpler, and it is rare to see anyone wearing this silver jewelry, as most people have begun to buy gold jewelry. This generation has also moved towards different types of jewelry, as they prefer modern and simple shapes. Jewelry is now manufactured precisely due to the development of machines, and there are no new products. Many women agree that jewelry now is light and soft and contains many details and small, delicate decorations. Jewelry is often distinguished by its lightness, but it does not express the Omani heritage. W14 says "Jewelry has taken many diverse forms and cannot be enumerated and counted, and the Western character has taken control of it, but from the other hand, there are some designs that combine the present and the past together".

W28 stated that "jewelry has now become aesthetic and not traditional". W29 said "Jewelry has been introduced by different cultures and contain diverse, precise and detailed decorations with more diverse, prominent and recessed textures". The designs of traditional pieces are inspired by nature and the global community, not only by

what surrounds it, as it has become a standard. The beauty is the delicacy, precision, and smallness of the piece instead of its large size, and its heaviness, influenced by the ornaments of foreign culture. How different colors and drawings and more diverse stones were introduced into these pieces than in the past. W33 mentioned her opinion "The shapes and designs have varied and there are new and different designs, but the jewelry in the past has a distinctive and attractive style and is worn with gold. In various ways, up to the leg, nose, and head, while today jewelry is worn in more specific ways as a necklace, earring, and bracelet. W34 confirms "It can be viewed from an aesthetic perspective in the first place, whether in its shapes, weight, how it is used, and its quantities". It is a secondary component of the Omani individual's uniform at the present and is often associated with a specific occasion.

The women also used "Al mndoos" to preserve their possessions, whether jewelry, clothing, or money. Al Mendos is a medium size wooden chest decorated with brass bushing pins. It comes as part of the dowry that was given on marriage according to Omani tradition.



Figure 3-6: Shows "Al Mndoos", belongs for W4

4- Discussion

There are many purposes of why women have worn jewelry (Denise, 2023c). Firstly, it started as functional pieces. Women used some pieces to hold their clothes together or keep their hair in place. Throughout the time it become more decorative pieces. Secondly, women's nature is to be good in their outfits, so adornment is playing vital role for both men and women. Thirdly, wearing specific items of jewelry in ancient times represented social standing. Moreover, women want to show their assign of attraction and add a touch of elegance. Renaissance via Uniqueness

Silverware in Oman were used shells and melting silver to make jewelry (Observer, 2019). By modernization, tools and process were developed and pieces become more valuable. This is because of cultural influences which play a significant role in shaping Jewelry design trends. Timeless designs frequently take inspiration from historical eras, but contemporary works may include numerous global influences, resulting an aesthetic piece that matches the modern fashion (Jewels, 2023). Many artists in renaissance period started their career in goldsmith workshops and they become trends in the market (Renaissance Jewelry – Antique Jewelry University, n.d.). However, surviving pieces represented exceptional workmanship. The difference between old and renaissance crafting are, the places they are worn, its design and decorations, and their cost compared to their heavy weight. Therefore, Omani women find a comparison between ancient and modern jewelry, it means to them material and subjective values. The material value is represented by its weight and its value in the market, and its subjective value is represented by the fact that it is kept as wealth items. Most of women had values of sustainability, structure, thread and dress-up (Al Ismaili, 2021). It also means to her the fragrance of authentic Omani history and heritage that may not be repeated in contemporary jewelry.

Finally, people often wear jewelry with meaning behind it. It may be a reminder of a loved one who has passed away or a connection to their culture and heritage. These valuable pieces are passed to future generation. The subjective value of traditional Omani silver jewelry, extending beyond its material worth (Al-Ismaili, 2021). It is important to preserve the historical and cultural value to be presented in global Omani context. Oman's culture, heritage and history defines the country's identity and is a way to transfer it to the world. Oman put efforts to maintain this legacy, and long-standing traditions, therefore research for women jewelry helps shape the societal values, beliefs, and aspirations of the Omani people. Moreover, this allows the wealth of knowledge and acquired skills to carry on for generations to come. Integrating these symbols into the greater story reveals that jewelry has always been a mix of art, sentiment, and symbolism (Majliya,2021). Each item is loaded with significance and tells a tale that connects strongly with the user, making it timeless and loved.

Conclusion

Jewelry has been an important part of communities, serving as a symbol of wealth, status, and cultural identity. Throughout history, jewelry has represented far more than just ornamental piece. The style and design of a jewelry piece can be good predictors of its age. Each period has unique trends that reflect the prevalent creative influences of the time. What distinguishes them is the complexity and narrative behind the designs, which are unique to each country's culture and traditions.

The interviews of Omani women of old generation used in this paper help to understand the historical context and provenance of a jewelry piece in Oman. Moreover, it helps to enrich the cultural, social, and historical events that influenced jewelry trends during this a particular era. Additionally, gathering information about the previous owners represent both jewelry's age and history and secret values and stories for each woman. The process of determining age is both an exciting adventure and a tribute to the timeless beauty and charm of jewelry.

In addition to basic forms of personal jewelry such as rings, necklaces, bracelets, and brooches that remain in use today, On the other hand, medieval jewelry often includes a range of other forms less often found in modern jewelry, such as fittings and fasteners for clothes including some decoration pieces worn in nose, decorated pins for holding hairstyles and head-dresses in place.

It is essential to understand and appreciate different cultural and traditional jewelry styles to provides insight into those cultures' history, customs, and values. It also allows us to appreciate the beauty and craftsmanship of traditional jewelry, as well as the progress of jewelry designs in recent years.

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