

What Was Nomical in the Astro Navigation of Early Modern Arab Pilots?

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The celestial navigation skills of early modern Arab pilots in the Indian Ocean are as legendary as vaguely and partially known. In this talk I will draw directly from the two known late medieval sources, Ahmad ibn Mājid and particularly Sulaymān al-Mahrī —who remains mostly untranslated—to paint a fuller picture, including their astronomical framework, the techniques they used and their relation to scholarly astronomy. Working on an initial question, “What could be tabulated from their works?”, I expect to be able to delineate with some precision their craft, and so to furnish interested astronomers with clear elements for comparison and reflection.

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