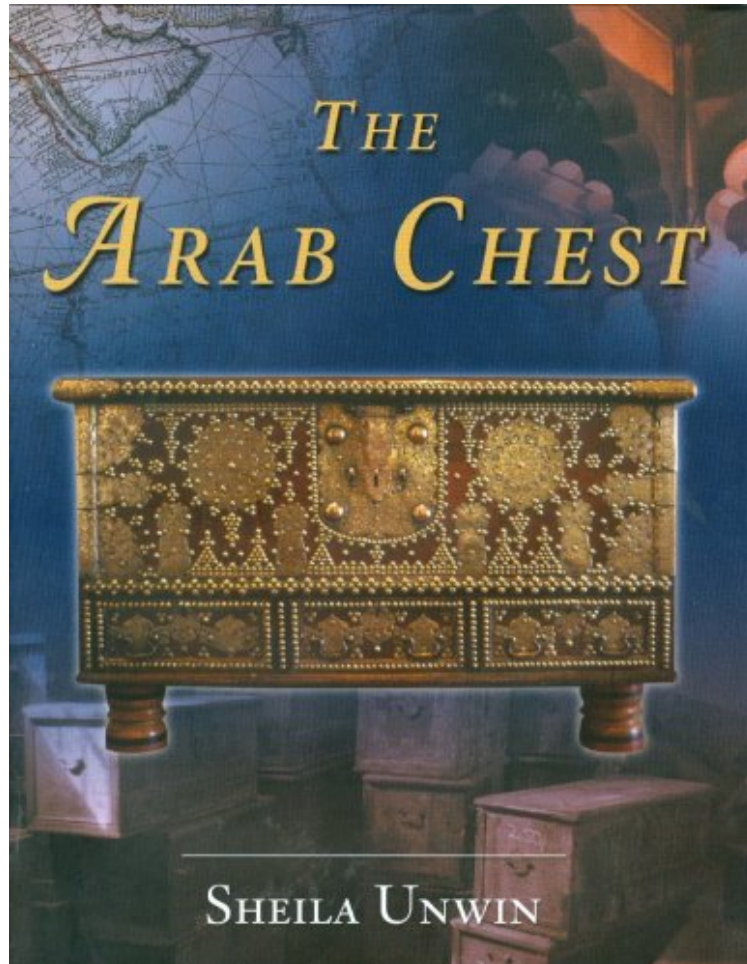


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The Arab Chest

Sheila Unwin

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This is the first exhaustive study of a piece of furniture that has been used in the Arab world for centuries, and on the East African coast since the early 1800s. The Arab chest caught the attention of expatriates and travellers throughout these regions, and by the mid-20th century it had become a collector's item in the West. The author, Sheila Unwin,

first came across the chests in East Africa in the early 1950s. Since then she has been determined to discover their provenance and unravel their stylistic origins. This journey of detection is reflected in her historical overviews, which cover the early Arab trading networks, Arabs and Persians in East Africa, the Gulf and Oman, the Mughals in India, and the early explorations and trading expeditions of the Portuguese, Dutch and British from East Africa to the Far East. Her study of these enables her to trace the cultural influences that have combined to produce the chests, and to chart their complex origins. More than a historical survey, the book is also a guide to the classification, care and cleaning of chests. It is lavishly illustrated with archive and contemporary photographs and maps, while line drawings demonstrate the differences in classification and type of chests and fittings. Owners of these fine pieces will find this an invaluable companion and resource. Sheila Unwin greatly enriches our appreciation of an artefact which can now be seen, in the light of her research, as a fascinating embodiment of the old Indian Ocean trading network.

"This volume fills a critical gap in the understanding of the many varieties of brass-bound and decorated chest made in the lands that border the Indian Ocean...Unwin's book is the result of life-long research that for the first time allows collectors and scholars alike to understand both the features of the individual schools of production as well as the broader context for the manufacture and use of such pieces...Written in an engaging and lucid manner and richly illustrated...this book is essential [for] anyone interested in furniture and in the material culture of the Indian Ocean world. --Asian Affairs