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**A History of Omani-British Relations, with Special
Reference to the Period 1888-1920**

By

Hussain Ben-Al-Seyed-Yousuf Hashim Al-Mousawi

**A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Modern History, University of Glasgow**

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For Friends

Friends!

*In the world and our life there are two
directions.*

To pursue our satisfaction.

One construction, other destruction.

But few are builders; while there...

Evil forces for destruction.

While building is exhaustion, and

Nothing easier than destruction, So...

For our joys and relaxation

With temptation for construction

Let us seek the difficult.

Hussain Al-Mousawi

DEDICATION

To my grandmother *Mahfoodha Muhammed bin Nasser Al-Hamadani* (died in 1977; her grave is in Jabroo cemetery in Mutrah, Oman) for teaching me reading and writing, and training me to copy religious documents since I was child. Her stories about the past engendered in me a love of history, and her encouragement acted as a spur to concentrate on my studies. Her fingerprint on my life was enormous.

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I thank the staff of the Modern History Department through whom I received assistance needed, especially Drs. Thomas Munck and Evan Mawdsley, whose computer knowledge was essential to the technical side of this work. Miss Patricia Ferguson and Mrs Barbara Beggs, the Secretaries of the Department, aided by answering my telephone calls, writing letters, providing me with stationery and looking after my mail. Thanks to the staff of the D. I. S. H Lab., to Mr John Wood, Mr Gavin Sinclair, who helped throughout the research period to the final version.

In the University Library, I must acknowledge the help given by Mrs Inez McIntyre, Head of the History Division, Miss McParland, Dr Gordon Anderson, Head of the Law Division, and Mr Roger Hickman. Thanks to Mrs Jane N. Ferguson head of the Social Science Division for her computer search, and to Mrs Irene Kennedy for her help for the inter-library-loans, Mrs Wilma Hughes photocopied a number of essential documents, and all the library staff who assisted me greatly.

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At Exeter University, Mrs Ruth Butler of the Centre of Arab Gulf Studies photocopied some publications essential for this work.

Dr Barbara Smith, of Birmingham University, helped by sending a photocopy of her Bibliography of Birmingham industrial history and a report about the Birmingham Proof House.

Dr Calvin H. Allen Jr., Professor of History of the The School of the Ozarks, Montivale, Missouri, generously offered copies of the Purshotum private papers, and sent encouraging letters.

I received a number of invaluable publications, including bibliographies of a great number of *Sheeah Bahrany* philosophers, bibliographers, innovative and challenging thinkers, historians, poets, speakers, theologians and other intellects from the 7th century until the present. This helped me to highlight the rich and advanced traditional culture of the *Bahrany* people, and its effect on the Gulf especially during the 16th and the 17th centuries. I must mention these publications, in particular the three volumes of the book, *Al-Kashkool*, and other publications of the *Bahrany* author *Al-Sheikh Yousuf Al-Mahoozy Al-Bahrani* (18th century). Also I am grateful to the present *Bahrany* author, Ali Muhammed Muhsen Aal U,ssfoor, for his bibliography of Aal U,ssfoor family's theologians and intellects, and the author Muhahmmmed Jawad Marhoon for his book about *Ssa,ssa a,h Ibna Ssawhhan's* life, during the early Islamic period, who accompanied most of the Islamic historical events and whose grave is in Bahrain. I am proud to include most of these publications in my bibliography. My gratitude to all friends who offered these books: their generosity is on a scale difficult to appreciate.

My wife Khadyjah-Zainal helped enormously throughout the difficult periods, as did my children, Ahmed, Tarneem and Vinous. I thank my brother-in-law Abdul-Husain Muhsen Al-Eysa and my sister Hashmiya Al-Mousawi for their support and their considerable effort and assistance in looking after my affairs in Oman, and their help in the sale of my house to fund this project, to my sister

Ma'sooma Al-Mousawi for her support, and especially my father Seyed-Yousuf Al-Mousawi for his moral support, and sympathy.

One must not forget to give many thanks to the British Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), especially Linda Todd, Jan Paul and all the volunteers, boys and girls, whose marvellous and loving care of my children after school and during the holidays saved me so much time for my work. This work would not have been possible without all this assistance.

Finally I wish my country, Oman to achieve continuous prosperity and progress, and to Omani people security and peace. I would like to thank my Omani Government who, under His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'eed's leadership during this period of significant historical change in Oman, gave all the courage for the Omanis to obtain higher training and education; thanks to His Majesty for that. A special thanks to His Excellency Seyed Hamad bin Humood, the Minister of Royal *Dywan* Affairs, under whom I had the privilege to serve in His Majesty's Ministry of Royal Affairs and in the Institute of Public Administration, of which His Excellency Seyed Hamad was Council President, for his great encouragement to carry on a historical study relating to Oman's modern history. Under his direction I was assigned to the postgraduate studies which have culminated in this thesis.

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"O ! none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright".
(W. Shakespeare, *Sonnets*)

Hussain Al-Mousawi
Glasgow, August 1990

SUMMARY

This thesis has concentrated on one period of the historical relations which began over three centuries ago. Great Britain, or rather England, during the 1620s when the Portuguese were still the lords of Muscat, was trying to explore the eastern coast of Oman. They made friends in the Maseera Island, but their relationship with the Portuguese was not a friendly one. They were welcomed, indeed, by the local powers as rivals to the Portuguese in India and in Persia as well as in Oman. But despite the generosity of their help, they tried to strike a balance between the ambitions of the local powers and those of the Europeans. The English, for example, were reluctant to assist the Persian projects in Muscat against the Portuguese. In fact, if the Portuguese were expelled from there by the Persians, then it would be too difficult for the Omanis to occupy it. At the same time they offered evacuation for the wounded and the surrendered Portuguese garrison with their women and children. The English observed that, after all the people of South Persia and of Hurmuz, Arabs or Persians alike, revolted against Shah Abbas and wanted the Portuguese back, having discovered them to be the lesser evil. English interest in Oman and the Persian Gulf during the seventeenth century seems to have been purely commercial. For example, during the sixteen thirties and forties stable relations with the Portuguese were maintained, partly no doubt a reflection of the marriage between their two royal families, but also because the English saw commercial value in establishing good relations with both the Omanis and the Portuguese. After the expulsion of the Portuguese, the English witnessed the establishment of the first known Omani sovereign in the modern world, and the establishment of an Omani Afro-Asian Empire. They established good relations with the *Ya,arribeh* family; but for some reason they were reluctant to establish themselves in Muscat. Probably the Dutch were seen to be in a better position while the English were distracted by civil war. But during the first half of the eighteenth century English policy seems to have changed,

probably due to the struggle between various local and European powers which took the form of piratical activities on the seas, in which the Omani Ya,aribeh took part. By the second half of the eighteenth century the English had witnessed the downfall of the Ya,aribeh and Greater Oman, and the establishment of another dynasty in the interior of Oman under Albu Sa,eed, with the Omani Coast in the Gulf ruled by *El-Qawaasem*, highlighting the division of Oman. The English found it in their interest to support Ahmed bin Sa,eed in East Africa, against *El-Mazaree,a*, and to keep East Africa under the *Yal-bu-Sa,eed* rule. They found a mutual interest in challenging the Qawaasem of *Rasel-khaymeh* in the Gulf, and their allies the *El-Wahabyeen* in Arabia, during the first half of the nineteenth century.

There were several sides to British policy in Oman and the Gulf. First, there was the purely commercial interest, though with naval support. Secondly, there was the policy of curbing piracy in the Gulf, until the defeat of the El-Qawaaasem in the 1830s. Thirdly, there was the policy of keeping the French away from the Indian Empire, and safeguarding the sea routes to India, and fourthly the suppression of the slave trade, a policy which irritated the slave-trading Omani businessmen and local people against the British, and which allowed the French to interfere in Oman as protector of Omani interests. Finally, by the end of the nineteenth century the policy which dominated the region was the defence of the North-West Frontier. This is the policy which this thesis has focused on in studying British relations with Oman.

In studying an aspect of that policy, this work has focused on the period of Sultan Faisal's reign 1888-1913, but for technical reasons it was briefly extended to 1920.

Throughout the nineteenth century, in pursuit of all these policies, Muscat's position remained crucial as the nearest port to India and for the sea route between India and England. But towards the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries came an extension of the North-West Frontier policy

to the Gulf, with regard to arms trading, and the rivalry of tribes living between British India and Southern Persia. In trying to keep control of both the North-West Frontier and the Persian Gulf, Muscat became a key point which necessitated more influence over the rulers of the place. In addition to that, Muscat was associated with the arms trade which turned the port into a centre for arms supply to the rebel tribes on the North-West Frontiers of India. In this study the first issue focused on was the acknowledgment of the Sultan Faisal by the British Government. Faisal succeeded his father Turkey after his death in 1888, but he was only recognized by the British Government in 1890. The reason was that there was fear that Faisal would not be able to resist his uncle's challenge. Abdul Aziz bin Sa'eed was himself a very close friend of the British and was well qualified and educated, but despite a British policy of non-interference in the succession of Sultan Faisal, in practice the opposition to Faisal was weakened by the presence of British ships-of-war which on several occasions, during the rule of his father Turkey, had interfered in favour of the Sultan. The opposition parties themselves became weak during Faisal's reign. Sheikh Saleh bin Ali, the head of the El-Sharkyeh coalition, father of Sheikh E,yseh, the chieftain of the 1913 revolution, found that his interests at that moment were to remain on the side of the Sultan Faisal and to give up opposition to him in so far as that brought him benefits and acknowledgment of his leadership over the tribal coalition. He therefore, did not support Abdul Aziz as he did before during the reign of Turkey. This would allow him to hold a neutral position to benefit from the differences within the Al-bu-Sa'eed's house. This gave the Sultan an air of legitimacy, through the support of his people, at least for a while. It also gave the British the chance to show that they acknowledged the Sultan according to the wish of his people, despite their knowledge about his real position, which was in fact weak as he scarcely exercised power beyond the area of Muscat and Mutrah. But their acknowledgment did not prevent them from exploiting that weakness; at the same time emerged the idea of 'putting Muscat on a definite footing'.

This was only too easily arranged. The excessive willingness of the Sultan to bind himself completely to Britain caused the British Political Resident, Colonel Ross, not to lose that chance to anticipate events, and, without authority being given to him, to conclude a treaty with Faisal. That caused conflict with France, which jointly with Great Britain had declared its respect for Muscat's independence. The French complained about the British steps, which were regarded as a violation of the 1862 treaty. But the British tried to get around that commitment by combining the Treaty of Commerce of 1890, which was modified in 1891, with a secret declaration, that the Sultan pledge himself, his heirs and successors never to cede, to sell, to mortgage or otherwise give for occupation, save to the British Government, the dominions of Muscat. The French reacted quickly, and appointed a vice-consul at Muscat in 1894. The appointment was political and aimed to undermine the British desire to put Muscat under their protection, but the British decided to anticipate French moves in this direction.

If one of the British excuses for keeping Muscat under their protection was the British Indian subjects and their interests; the French might offer the same excuse. They did not have Indians but there were Omani Arabs, from Oman itself, Sur and El-Batneh to whom France had granted its flag as protection for their dhows. This practice had, in fact, been initiated in the 1830s, but what was new and alarmed the British was the apparent intention of the French representative in Muscat to use his influence over those Omani subjects whose dhows were protected as a means of bringing pressure on the Sultan himself. So questions concerning the French flag were for British officials a serious matter, which had to be solved, but the Sultan himself was not in a position to take issue with France, without alienating the people of el Sharkyeh. Their use of the French flag was valued by them and for the Sultan. To resist its use would drive people who were his supporters into the opposition camp. The British, of course, raised the flag issue primarily to give the French a hard time in Muscat, and to ensure their exclusive influence over the place. The French aim was no less imperial, but

they realised that the declaration of a British Protectorate could not be prevented. So if the British game was to protect the Sultan they would play on the other side. They would offer protection to his subjects, hopefully to the detriment of British policy on the north-west frontiers of its Indian empire as well as in Oman. The French flag might, for example, seriously undermine British policy over the arms traffic, a question in which the sultan himself took a great interest.

Eight years before Faisal's succession in 1880, and in an effort to suppress the arms trafficking to tribes north of India, the Government of India took measures to prevent the granting of licenses for the export of arms to the Persian Gulf ports. These measures were supported by the Persian Government, but it soon became clear that their support was limited to exploiting the British measures as an excuse for increasing the duty paid on arms and hence their income, rather than stopping the arms traffic to the Muscat dominions of Baluchistan (Gawader) altogether. That necessitated Sultan Faisal's co-operation in suppressing the trade there in 1891 after his succession. But the Sultan was really in no position to suppress the trade, given his treaty obligations to other countries such as France, the U. S. A., Holland and, indeed, Great Britain itself. These treaties required freedom of all trade, and arms and ammunition were even mentioned in the American treaty. Unless these treaties could be amended nothing could be done to suppress the trade. But the Sultan in any case preferred to adopt the Persian practice of increasing his income by raising duties on arms rather than suppressing the trade in them. That, too, roused opposition from the treaty states.

British Indian officials long debated this problem and came up with the idea of putting the Sultan's customs under British direct control. But this idea brought out the contrasting British and French interpretation of the 1862 declaration with respect to Muscat's independence, as well as misunderstanding between the Sultan and the British. The Sultan was only too willing to allow the British to confiscate arms at sea on board ships flying Omani, Persian and British

flags on the assumption that the confiscated arms would then be handed over to him. When the arms were confiscated on board the 'Baluchistan' in 1898 by British ships, they were, however handed over to British agents and not to the Sultan. The Sultan, angry and feeling that he had been misled, decided to compensate himself by raising the local customs duties which afflicted British subjects and by negotiating with the French to lease to them the cove of Bander Jes-sah. The latter move strained British tolerance to its limits. They decided to threaten the Sultan with bombardment of his town and palace if the Jes-sah session was not cancelled, thus inflicting open humiliation on the Sultan. They also interfered in the Sultan's administration, by insisting that he should appoint no person friendly to the French and hostile the British. A notable case was that of Abdul Aziz er Ruwahi, who had been the French dragoman, and then became the Sultan's adviser. But the main obstacle to the British policy of arms suppression remained France. British ships of war could never tackle native boats flying French colours.

The case of the *Baluchistan* undermined British policy in Muscat as Britain not only weakened its own friends, but gave France's supporters the opportunity to influence the Sultan. This necessitated fresh British diplomatic moves and opened a new page of relations between them and the Sultan. For example there was a change to a new kind of British representative in Muscat, using wise and less rigid diplomatic methods. At the same time, an effort was made to improve Anglo-French relations.

France felt that in the case of the Jessah Coaling Station it had been mistreated by Britain, a resentment which might cause severe damage to Britain in the long run if not alleviated. A policy of soothing the French without losing control over the Sultan to France presented Sir Percy Cox with a complex task. In effect he had to ensure that gains of the kind sought by France, like a coaling station, were manifestly the result of the British having approved of them and not engineered by French influence over the Sultan. So the coaling station was

negotiated between France and Britain by the opening of the century, rather than France being granted it simply by the Sultan of Muscat. The French were satisfied, and the British were happy with their diplomatic success in the matter.

To reconcile the Sultan required only the resumption to His Highness of the subsidy. As soon as that was done, the Sultan expressed his readiness to follow British advice, and do his best to convince his people not to fly the French colours, as this was a question which remained unresolved between the two powers, Britain and France. Good relations were, however, restored with the Sultan of Muscat.

The Sultan failed to convince his subjects not to fly the French flags. Moreover His Highness and the British authorities were embarrassed before the international, Arab and Omani public opinion by an unexpected item in the Arabic newspaper *Fathul-Bassaer*, which brought the news of the Jessah affair. British fingers pointed to the French as being behind that, but the newspaper also informed its Arabic readers of the emergence of Germany as a major power in the region.

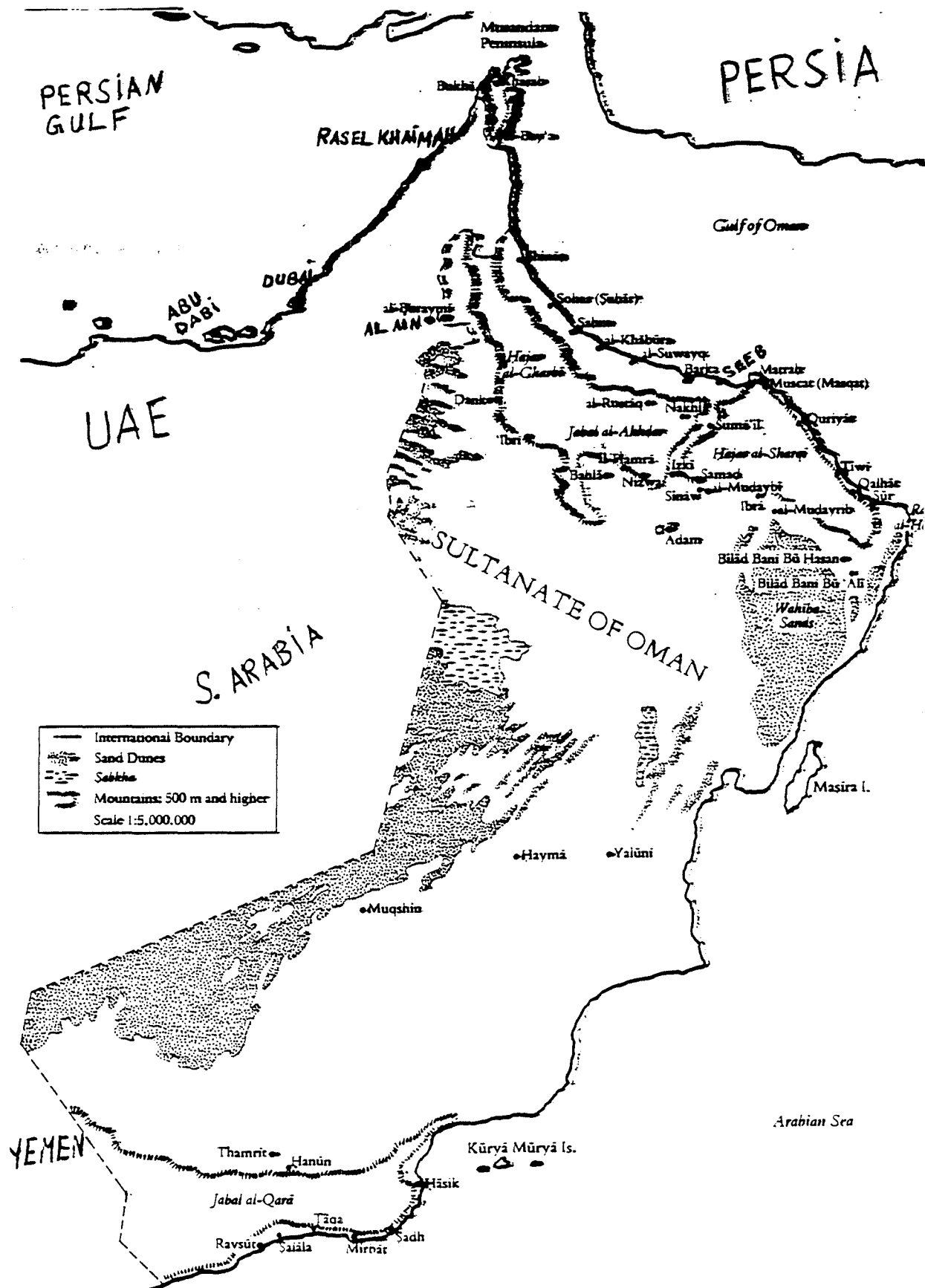
The French flag question eventually was taken to arbitration before King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy, whose decision at the Hague on August 1905 was that France did not have the right to grant Omanis French flags, unless they had been protected by France before 1863. But that did not solve the problem completely. French Somali dhows became involved in the smuggling of arms into Italian and German territories in Africa.

At the same time, arms smuggling in the Gulf intensified, and became a big business, not just for the locals but even for the English officers of steamers, belonging to the British Indian Navigation Company. By 1908 most major European powers had become interested in suppressing the arms trade. They raised the question in the Brussels Arms conference in 1909. But Britain disliked any international bodies interfering in Gulf affairs even for the purpose of suppressing the traffic. They adhered to the idea that freedom should be given to

the Sultan of Muscat to suppress the trade in his country. The French stand was also that any question with respect to Muscat should be dealt with only by the two treaty powers and should not involve any other states. This caused the failure of the Brussels Arms Conference. But negotiations between France and Britain did not arrive at any conclusion before 1914 when France agreed to join Britain in suppressing the arms trade in Muscat.

Britain, however, did not wait for that to be achieved. The British managed to persuade the sultan to agree to establish a warehouse for arms in Muscat in 1912. This was the immediate reason for the Omanis to revolt against the Sultan in 1913, in order to elect a ruler sympathetic to Omani needs, the Imam Salem El-Kharussy. The revolution went on from 1913 to 1920. Oman was virtually partitioned between two governments, one led by the Sultan in Muscat and on the sea coast, the other under the Imam whose capital was Nezwa in the interior of Oman proper.

MAP OF OMAN



CHAPTER ONE
A GENERAL HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO
BRITISH-OMANI RELATIONS
1620–1744

Introduction

Portugal was the first European power to assert its influence in the East after Alexander the Great. During the 16th and the first half of the 17th century the Portuguese were the masters of Muscat and the Persian Gulf. Throughout that period they controlled trade in the area, particularly the valuable trade in silk, although they were challenged unsuccessfully from time to time by the Turks and the Persians.

From the second half of the 16th century England had both domestic and European reasons, together with reasons arising from administrative and economic developments during the reign of Elizabeth 1 (1558-1603), for opening trade with the East. First, there was the loss of Calais in 1557 to the French, which followed the closing of other markets in Europe and which caused the collapse of the English wool trade, thus creating unemployment in the clothing industry. Secondly, there was a growing number of merchant ships with a capacity of 50,000 tons by 1560, while the appointment of John Hawkins in 1578 by Elizabeth 1 to be in charge of her ships led to the development of ship building in a highly progressive way to compete with England's rivals. Thirdly, the appointment of William Cecil (Lord Burghley), who became the administrative centre of the government, its economic regulator, the architect and designer of a new coinage, and promoter of a number of industries which laid the foundations of England's overseas power. Fourthly, Francis Bacon, the philosopher, also served Elizabeth 1 with his theory that the English were natural traders. Fifthly, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 by the English reduced the Spanish superiority on the seas, and marked the rise of English sea power. Finally, there

was the rapidly growing population of England, reaching nearly five million by 1603.

By the end of the century, one of the English aims was to share in the rich silk trade between India and Persia. In 1581, the Levant Company was formed in England, and carried on its operations to India past the Persian Gulf. In 1583 two Englishmen, John Newbery and Ralf Fitch, were sent by Queen Elizabeth 1 to make a land journey passing through Persia and the Persian Gulf on their way to India. In 1591 George Raymond made his first journey to the East round the Cape of Good Hope. In 1600 the East India Company was founded, and took over the monopoly of the East Indies and India trade. In 1601 the Company initiated its first voyage to the East, and the first contact with India was in 1607 after a voyage led by William Hawkins¹.

On the Indian sub-continent the English met the Portuguese, who had had an old stronghold there for more than a century (1505). Their interests soon came into growing conflict with the newcomers, who challenged their monopoly. This caused several confrontations in 1615 and 1621, in which the Portuguese were defeated. These events offered the English a wonderful opportunity because naturally they were welcomed by the natives of the Indian Ocean, Indians, Persians and Arabs, especially those with ambitious attitudes. All those who opposed the Portuguese policy saw the English presence in the area as a relief, and hoped their interests could be protected. This made the English natural allies of

1. For this account see K. R. Andrews, *English Privateering Voyages to the East Indies, 1588-1595* (Hakluyt Society, 1959), pp. 155, 159; W. Foster, *English Factories in India, 1618-1621* (1906), p. 181; M. Ashley, *The People of England*, (1982), pp. 75-76, 79, 81-82, 156; Pierre Vidal Naquet (ed.), *The Collins Atlas of World History*, (1987), p.156; G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (1944), pp. 197, 201; A. G. R. Smith, Anonymous *Life of William Cecil, Lord Burghley*, Research Seminar 1987-88 for Studying a Source (Modern History Department, University of Glasgow); P. J. Boden, *The Wool Trade in Tudor England*, (1962), p. 127; M. D. D. Newitt, 'The East India Company in Western India', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14 (1985-6), pt.2, p.8; Capt. R.St. P. Parry, 'The navy in the Persian Gulf', *J. R. Un. Serv. Inst.* 75 (1930) pp. 314-331. For shipbuilding development in England and naval competition with France during the late 17th century and the 18th century, see Douglas Johnson, et al (eds.), *Britain and France: Ten Centuries*, (Folkestone, 1980), pp.140-172.

the ambitious leaders of the region and gave them a logical position against the Portuguese².

In 1615, Thomas Roy was the first English Ambassador appointed in India. He laid down the policy which guided the actions of his countrymen in the East for more than three centuries to come. In the same year, 1615, the English initiated political and trade links with Shah Abbas of Persia³.

Section Two

The Portuguese of Muscat and the English

Naturally, the English relationship with the Portuguese of Muscat was not a friendly one and was similar to that in India. By the 1620s the English were engaged in a kind of piracy against the Portuguese vessels of Muscat. For example, six vessels between 1620-1621 were seized, among them the ship *Nestura Senhora* under Captain Francisco Mirando of Muscat, and the ship *S. Antonio* which the English renamed *Mayflower*⁴.

As early as the summer of 1621, during the monsoon, the English made their first attempt to explore the Omani coast and for that task they used the renamed Portuguese ship without declaring their purpose for this exploration. However, their hope was to reach the coast of Dufar. Unfortunately they missed their target, as they thought that they had reached one of the Kuria Muria islands facing the Dufary coast, but in fact it was Ras Madraka (Cape of Madraka), near Macera island on the east coast. They "anchored off the island of Macera and obtained abundance of water from some pits three quarters of a mile inland. The natives were verie tractable and traded goats for rice and calico". They decided to

2 J. A. Williamson, *A Note Book of Empire History*, (1942), p.57; J. B. Trend, *Portugal* (1957) pp. 136-37; H. V. Livermore, *A New History of Portugal*, (1963), p.140; C.R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1825*, (1963), p. 41; S. Bradford, *Portugal* (1912); H. H. Dodwell (ed.), *Cambridge History of the British Empire* (1929); J. Frayers, *A New Account of East India and Persia 1672-1681*, (1912), pp. 26-30; R. K. Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* (1974), pp. 93-101.

3 Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall*, pp.93-101.

4 Foster, *English Factories, 1618-1621*, pp. 220, 226-27,285.

stay on the island for the rest of the monsoon, but news came to them from the rest of the fleet at Sohar that trouble had broken out in Tyvy against the English, and an English Roebuck skiff was sunk and the crew drowned. Accordingly, they set sail to rejoin the admiral. They anchored near Ras El Hadd for a week and then left for Chaul on the west coast of India⁵.

In another attempt, they sailed from Sohar, this time along the Batinah coast heading for Sur Masira, Raselhadd and Tyvy, again, on the eastern coast. But the Muscat Portuguese were aware of the plan, and were watching the situation carefully. They followed the English and warned them against using the place. Robert Jeffries reported to the Company the following: "the London, Andrew, Mayflower, and Primerose went within Cape Rosalgate [Ras-al-hadd], and the 7th of June anchored at Tewee [Tywee], where wee had all sortes of refreshments untill certayne Portingalls (sent from Mascatte) forbid and defended the watering-place; but wee toke yt without asking leave, and thereof had our pleasures, and for their dishonestie wee burned the towne and spoyled many their date trees"⁶. It is significant to note that efforts to explore the Omani coast by the English took place before the Portuguese expulsion from Hurmuz in 1621-2, a matter which indicates the early English interest there. However the Portuguese undermined the English by provoking the local people against them: "by reason the portengall[s] came and tooke our surgeon and our boye and incensed the cuntry people against us, and so wee wayed this daye and went for Soar [Suhar], because that Shackalee [Sheikh A,li] hadd promised to be our friende, who is the king of Soar and the cuntrye about" . It is the first recorded friendship between the English and an Omani chief, and it seems that Suhar despite the Portuguese influence was independent and had its own Sheikh who could form relations with others than the Portuguese. However the English did not give up exploring the

5 Foster, *English Factories*, 1618-1621, p. 284.

6 Foster, *English Factories*, 1618-1621, p. 288

Eastern provinces of Oman, and in the same month (27 June) they sailed again to Sur⁷.

But in 1622, after the Persians besieged Hurmuz, the English offered the Portuguese a human gesture. They helped in evacuating the wounded Portuguese, transporting the surrendering garrison with their women and children, numbering 3000, to Muscat and Sohar⁸.

Section Three

Muscat's Portuguese Challenge to the Anglo-Persian-Dutch alliance

In 1623 the Persians decided to go ahead and expel the Portuguese from Muscat. They asked for English help but they were reluctant to meet the Persian demand⁹. Even so, the Persians kept on trying to persuade the English to join them against Muscat, but were unsuccessful. The English seemed not to be interested in the Persian project. Observers at that time noticed that if the English did agree to join with the Persians in laying siege to Muscat they would need better assurances of performance than had been the case at Hurmuz¹⁰. It was obvious that the English were too aware of Muscat's power. The Portuguese there recruited 7000 men, a galleon and many frigates and boats, on the alert against any assault, showing that, unlike Hurmuz, the taking of Muscat would not be easy and might be impossible. Having understood the Persian desire, the Portuguese determined to defend Muscat. The English turned down another Persian request to attack the place in 1624. They preferred that their fleet should remain taking defensive action against the Portuguese in the Gulf instead of offensive action, but that did not prevent them carrying on hunting the Portuguese ships off Muscat. However, the Persians did not give up their demand, and they still desired to drag the English into their plans. They succeeded in attracting them by promising 900 Tumans, to

7 Foster, *English Factories*, 1618-1621, pp. 285-6.

8 Foster, *English Factories*, 1622-1623, (1908) pp. ix-x, 34.

9 E. Prestage, *Chapters in Anglo-Portuguese Relations*, (1981), pp. 101,109,112.

10 Foster, *English Factories*, 1622-1623, pp. xx, 14-15, 166, 181, 186, 188-189; Foster, *English Factories*, 1630-33, (1910), pp. 105, 109, 207n, 208, 241, 278-279, 288, 295n.

be paid in instalments of 300 and then 600, payable if they agreed to cooperate. The Dutch soon replied positively to the Persian request for their assistance against Muscat. In what seems to have been the first test of Muscat's power and the first confrontation of its kind at sea in Gulf history, the alliance suffered severe damage and loss of life. But that was not enough to dissuade them. They carried out a second attack, but the Muscat fleet showed a great performance in dealing with the situation and was able to carry out a counter-attack, showing a high level of seamanship in warfare. In further heavy fighting with the Muscat fleet, the English lost their commander, Albert Backer, who was killed on his command ship. The alliance in general suffered further heavy losses and great damage to their fleet¹¹. The Great Governor of Muscat, Ruy Freire, who returned in May 1623 from his English captivity during the Hurmuz campaign, encouraged his forces to go ahead and counter-attack. He occupied Larak island and re-established Portuguese influence in the Straits of Hurmuz. This time he received help from local resident Arabs and Persians who were in revolt against the Persian government and in favour of the Portuguese, something which it is of the utmost significance to note. The Portuguese recaptured Sohar as well when a flotilla under Captain Goncalo de Siqueira de Sousa sailed there to expel the Persians who had taken further advantage of the Portuguese expulsion from Hurmuz to occupy Sohar and Khor Fukkan in the Gulf of Oman¹².

Section Four

The Portuguese Control of Muscat strengthened

At Muscat in 1625 a council of war was founded, the first of its kind in Muscat's history, to face the threat from the allies. During this period Muscat received large supplies of money, timber and munitions for the armada, provisions on a scale never seen before. During the whole of the year 1626 the Lord of Muscat, Ruy Freire, was busily employed in strengthening the fortifications of his city.

11 Foster, *English Factories*, 1634-1636, (1911), pp. 62, 120, 123, 127-128, 132, 329.

12 Foster, *English Factories*, 1624-1629, (1909), pp.x, xxi, 22, 42.

The purpose was not only to defend Muscat but to carry out attacks to recapture Hurmuz in 1627 and in 1635. According to Prestage, Freire prepared for an expedition sufficient to recapture Hurmuz, and there was every likelihood that he would be successful, but something went wrong: Botelho's squadron was shattered and partially destroyed by a terrible storm, something which gave the allies great help, and brought bad luck to the Portuguese. This made any further attempt to recapture Hurmuz impossible¹³. But the English Company sources reported that "Ruy Freire has besieged Ormus for ten months with 18 frigates, cutting off all supplies. He wrote to the King [of Persia], offering to buy it, but the latter replied 'hee had wonn it with the sword and he would defend it'". It was also reported that Ruy Freire was "supported by the Arabs and some revolted Persians, and has ruined many of the ports between Jask and Gomboron. He reported to the governor of the latter place that the English commanders who took Ormus had had their heads cut off"¹⁴. If this was true then the disaster which occurred to the Portuguese fleet by the storm came after these events, and the Portuguese were expelled again in 1625, having reoccupied Hurmuz for eight months.

Back to the allies. In 1626 several proposals were made for an occupation of Muscat by the English; "if a joint attack may be arranged, a stipulation must be made that the English are to be allowed sole possession of the castle after its capture, leaving the rest for the Persians". But they hesitated in carrying out their own proposals as their attempt seemed too hazardous until the Portuguese galleons had been destroyed. It was "not desirable to interest the Dutch in such an understanding as they would claim to share the profit". So the idea was abandoned and the English fleet, which had been prepared for the business, was sent back. In 1628 the Persians made another attempt, but the English refused completely because they began to think that the Persian king was seeking his own ends and never intended any division of the spoils, despite what had been

13 Prestage, *Chapters*, pp.109, 148, ch 3 passim.

14 Foster, *English Factories*, 1624-1629, p. 84.

contracted in Persia. He might add all that was gained by English assistance to his own Persian territory, and it seemed that his ambition was not limited only to Muscat but included all Arabia. Secondly: there was nothing great to be gained from occupying Muscat. The town was very poor. This English stand benefited the Dutch and opened the way for them to come close to the Persians¹⁵.

Muscat during the 30s of the 17th century saw an extensive increase in its strategic position for the first time in history. This period is of great significance for the whole history of Muscat and Oman. The second siege of Hurmuz transformed Muscat into a key point in the area for the Portuguese (and from 1650 onwards for the Omanis). In addition to changing the city into a naval and military fort, Muscat lords played a significant historical role in defending toughly the Portuguese interest in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. They succeeded in challenging three powers, the English, Dutch and the Persians. The great leader Ruy Freire, the Chaun of Muscat, a military and navigation expert, made the most of it. In 1632 Freire showed diplomatic expertise as well when he offered the Persians some 600 Tumans, and a trade contract with the English signed by himself and the English Captain Waddle. By this move he managed to ease tension with his enemies, and to spoil all their efforts and split them, probably for a while. One of the allies, the Dutch, was angry since Freire did not make any offer to please them, and the benefits went to the English instead. Though the Persians got some benefit, it seems that they were encouraged by the Dutch not to give up their Muscat occupation project. And here Freire started to gain from his diplomatic move. The English in 1632 refused to participate for the reasons given above regarding the Persian attitude. The English did not have any special aim at that time which necessitated their participation in war operations against Muscat. At the same time, they were convinced that Portuguese power was generally in decline, and that sooner or later "to join issue with those people and settle a trade may prove very beneficial" instead of fighting them. But it is interesting that the

15 Foster, *English Factories*, 1624-29, pp. 80-81, 99, 107, 163-64, 198-99, 214, 237, 311.

English did not remain of that opinion. In 1633 they reevaluated the situation and found that their stand had proved wrong, and that if they insisted on holding to their previous principle, it might lose them ground with the Persians, and the Dutch would take over. Finally they decided to join the alliance against Muscat. But during this period the Georgians in the north of Persia coincidentally spoiled the whole question of Muscat. The Georgians revolted against Persian rule in their country and the Persians decided to despatch an expedition against the Georgians to restore order. In an engagement with the Georgians in 1633 the Duke of Shiraz and his brother were captured and executed, and the Persian army was badly defeated in Georgia. This occasion caused troubles and disorder in Persia itself. This coincidence was to save Muscat for the Portuguese for another seventeen years. The project of attacking Muscat was given up after the collapse of the Persian army in front of the Georgians. Perhaps that was welcomed by the English; at least they could feel independent in carrying out their own policy without the Persian influence. It might allow them to fill the gap which was left by the Persian withdrawal for some time¹⁶.

In 1633, the great leader of Muscat, Ruy Freire had died, and thus another period began in Muscat's relations with the English. After this period the English gave up any hostile attitude towards Muscat. They decided to maintain relations with the Portuguese in 1635, and trade regulation and co-operation went on between the two parties. Letters had been exchanged despite the fact that the Dutch had not stopped hostilities against Muscat. The English ships started to sail and to shelter safely in Muscat harbour (and the relations even went better during 1637)¹⁷. The English acknowledged that the East India Company had been well treated by the Muscat authorities, and soon the English started to gain benefits from their good relations with Muscat. The ports of Arabia, Persia and India

16 Foster, *English Factories, 1630-1633*, (1910), pp. 141, 207-208, 211, 240-241, 247, 253, 256, 278, 279, 288, 295.

17 Foster, *English Factories, 1634-36* (1911), pp. 120, 123, 128, 132, 147, 185; Foster, *English Factories, 1637-1641*, (1912), pp. 24-25, 135, 247, 250; Badger, *Imams and Seyyeds*, p. xxiv, 64.

became open to them. From their side the English even suggested that the Portuguese could use their ships for voyages to China. Through all the period from 1637 to 1645 the English relations with Muscat were absolutely normal in respect to the Portuguese. From now on, English relations over the coming five years with Muscat and (Oman) were to move in a parallel direction with the Omanis on one hand and the Portuguese on the other¹⁸.

Section Five

First official English-Omani Relations 1646-1660

The period between 1646 and 1650 is of great significance. It marks the first official communication between an Omani government and the English. Imam Nasser Ben Murshid Al-Ya, ruby¹⁹ the first Ya, ruby Imam, The King of Euman after his general campaign in Oman and after he had taken Sohar from the Portuguese, invited the English to Swares, (Sohar) where quantities of several sorts of merchandise were available. For example, there were reported to be plenty of horses of very good quality which attracted the English. In a report dated 19 February 1646, sent to the President of the East India Company at Surat in India, Philip Wydle and Samuel Wilton submitted draft articles of an agreement with the Imam Nasser of Oman. "Sailed from Gombaron (Bander Abbas) on January 13, (1646) and six days later reached Bunder Swar (Sohar). Their draft articles of agreement were forwarded to the King, who replied that he was sending down merchants to buy their goods and his Visseer (Wazir, Prime Minister) with full power to conclude an agreement. These duly arrived, and the articles were sealed". But the Imam delegates came without cash in their hands, and it seems that the deal was not accomplished so "the Wazir expressed great regret and hoped that the next monsoon we would send a ship to Bunder Seep

18 Foster, *English Factories*, 1642-45, (1913), p.20, 299, 308.

19 Maclurin, E. C. B. 'Oman and the Trucial-Coast' *Australian Q.*, Vol. 30 pp. 65-76; on p. 72 identifies Imam Nasser as 'Said bin Khalifa, Imam of Oman'.

(Seeb or, Es-seeb), being one of the Kings ports neere his residence Emaun (Oman)"²⁰.

While the English and the Omanis were trying to establish their relations and create mutual understanding officially for the first time in history, Anglo-Portuguese relations in Muscat were not affected. They went on normally both in commerce and political relations ²¹. And about the period 1647-48, a peace was concluded between the Imam Nasser and the Portuguese to settle matters between the Arabs of Oman and the Portuguese of Muscat²². In this agreement the Portuguese agreed to surrender Duba and Mussandam on the Strait of Hurmuz to the Imam Nasser. The Imam for his part acknowledged the Portuguese sovereignty over Muscat on the condition of freeing the Omanis of all customs duties. If the Portuguese could hold on to this agreement they probably would stay a long time in Muscat. It proved that their surrendering Duba and Mussandum to the Imam was wise, whether they meant it or not, because by that, they put the Omanis face to face with the Persians in the Straits of Hurmuz. This action lost the Persians and their allies any legality in claiming that area, and the Portuguese were saved a lot of effort in defending the Straits. If the Portuguese were farsighted and kept on dealing with the Omanis positively in that way they might gain a great benefit going beyond their legal position in Muscat. Those powers, especially the Persians, who opposed the Portuguese in the region could now be challenged by the growing new strength of the Omanis. This would have a great impact on future events and might give the Portuguese a lengthy existence in Muscat.

Giving the Portuguese the right of sovereignty by Imam Nasser over Muscat was very important. First, it gave them a legal protection against any foreign power. Second, Nasser seemed to prefer to keep the city under the Portuguese than to let it be taken by the Persians. He had considerable knowledge

20 Foster, *English Factories*, 1646-1650 (1914), pp. 16, 27-28.

21 Foster, *English Factories*, 1646-1650, p.45.

22 Foster, *English Factories*, 1646-1650, p.223.

of Persian desires in Muscat. Although they became weak after their defeat in Georgia, the Persians soon recovered and did not give up their ambitions. The Persians might justify their claim over the place on several grounds. Muscat and all the sea coast, before the Portuguese takeover in 1505, had represented a great and valuable part of Southern-Persian-based kingdoms, since the ninth century (the last was the kingdom of Elkoosyeen of Hurmuz and, before Islam, the whole of Oman 'Mazon' was part of a great Persian Empire). Thus from the Persian side, Portugal should be replaced by Persia if at all possible. They never gave up this feeling until they achieved their policy in the first half of the next century, as we will see later. The important thing in this is that Imam Nasser for his part undermined the Persian claim or at least delayed it for some time until Oman would be ready and could challenge the Persians.

Section Six

The last year of the Portuguese in Muscat, 1650

However, the Portuguese violated the agreement which was made between them and the Imam Nasser²³. This unwise action and misjudgement contributed to the end of the Portuguese in Muscat. It opened an opportunity for their enemies to exploit. The Dutch interfered and encouraged the Omanis against the Portuguese, offering them arms for attacking Muscat. Accordingly Nasser decided to bring the Portuguese existence there to an end. He launched his attack in 1649, in what was described by East India Company sources as a most bloody and dismal war, which lasted about one year. But Nasser did not live to see the final victory. He died during his campaign, and was soon replaced by his cousin Sultan bin Saif who took over the lead and became the second Ya'rub Imam of Oman and first of Muscat. It does not seem that any peace attempt was made by either of the two parties. Finally in January 1650 a major attack was launched under his leadership and the Portuguese were severely defeated although the Omanis suffered heavy

23 Ibid.

losses²⁴. An important factor in the war had been the shift in support by the Indian merchant community from the Portuguese to the Omanis²⁵.

Thus Muscat was taken by the Omanis for perhaps the first time after more than seven hundred years²⁶. The English Company in 1650 reported that "The Imam, a petty Arabian Prince, hat taken Muscatt from the Portingalls; soe that now they have not any place of refuge in the Persian Gulfe; and tis to be feared will not long in India"²⁷. If the Portuguese had assisted the ambitions of the Omanis and worked with them, instead of opposing them, they might have remained on friendly terms and very likely become allies against their rivals, the Persians and the Dutch. That might have brought a great benefit for them. The English neutral position might bring them another benefit, and allow them to participate in the region's balance of power. By their international contacts, they could then offer a lot of their experience and knowledge, needed by the Omanis, and which could be obtainable there in Muscat. And if they preserved their friendly terms with them, the English might share many common interests. Thus it seems that the Portuguese failed to read the future, but they had given the Omanis great service; first, from the early sixteenth century they had assisted Persia's independence and kept Oman and all the Gulf region away from the Ottoman Turkish invasion, with all its historical, social and religious consequences. Secondly, because of their international contacts they assisted the Omanis by bringing them the knowledge of this modern interdependent world. Thirdly, though Muscat was known before the siege of Hurmuz for its strategic position, its strong identity indeed was only consolidated after the Portuguese expulsion from Hurmuz. From this point on, maritime powers during that period (the Persians, English, Dutch and the Omanis) focused on that city. For about a quarter of a century between their expulsion from Hurmuz and their expulsion

24 Hamilton, *A New Account*, pp. 43-44.

25 Allen Jr., Calvin H., 'The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat', *Bul. S.O.A.S* 44 (1981), pp.39-53.

26 Foster, *English Factories*, 1646-50, pp. 293, 310-12.

27 *Ibid.*

from Muscat, the Portuguese managed to defend the city against the Persians, and that preserved it for the Omanis instead. If the Portuguese had not defended Muscat and it had been taken by the Persians, (though one can only guess might have happened) certainly it would have altered historical events in Oman through that period and might have turned Oman's history in a different direction. Fourthly, the Portuguese made Oman and the Gulf region members of the first European global Empire, joining them with other different nations separating them from the Ottoman Turks' influence, thus bringing them into a direct link with European interests, and therefore into a broader international context. Anyhow, after about one century and a half of Portuguese mastery over Muscat, a new stage began in its history, and a new stage of relations between the English and Muscat began.

Section Seven

El Ya,aribeh of Oman and the English 1650-1747

The English witnessed the expulsion of the Portuguese from Muscat, and the establishment of the first Omani Government with international links to be known in modern history.

Immediately after his victory, Imam Sultan bin Saif 1 made overtures for commercial intercourse with the English in 1650. The English ship Fellowship was invited to Muscat. Her captain was well and kindly received and was offered the best house in the town. They attempted to set up a factory in the place. In 1651 the English traded in rice for dates and horses. In 1659 Mr Matthew Andrews, President of the council of the Company, originated the idea of an English settlement in Muscat²⁸. The reason was that after the Omani take-over of Muscat from the Portuguese in 1650, its strategic position made it an objective to both the Dutch and the Persians. "In these circumstances the Arabs, conscious of the difficulty of defending the town against attacks from any of these quarters,

28 Foster, *English Factories*, 1655-1660,(1921), pp. 225-226, 230-32.

were not indisposed to enlist the aid of the English. Immediately after they had gained possession, they made overtures for commercial intercourse²⁹. At the same time the English had their own reasons to form relations with the new regime in Muscat. Colonel Rainsford was sent to visit Muscat for an agreement. But also he was chosen for the visit because of his military knowledge which would enable him to make a useful report on the fortifications existing there³⁰. His mission was announced to the Company on 12 April, 1659. It was announced that after explaining the difficulties of acquiring any of the Portuguese strongholds in India, the Company had made "a tryall to treat with Arrabs about Muscat, upon the encouragement wee have received from severall English who have been kindly treated and much desire that wee would settle a factory there; which hath invited us to entertaine, and send upon a jounk, Colonell Henry Rainsford with our letter to the King to treat with him about it". At the same time the position of Muscat became so significant in the eyes of the English that there was no place on the northern seas which could prove so profitable to them as Muscat. Its position not only would enable the English to gain the right to farm the customs in Persia but to command all princes thereabouts to give the English good and fair treatment. Otherwise the English would have the right to stop their vessels from entering the Persian Gulf. "Wee pray the lard to give a blessing to our endovers therin, and hope, if it should not prove succesfull as wee desire, you will not think amiss of our good intents therin, being a place wee apprehend would proove in several respects of very great concernment unto you"³¹. Colonel Rainsford visited Muscat in 1659 and discussed an agreement with "the King [Imam Sultan bin Saif³²] drawn up ready to confirme by each signing the contracts: that a casle should be deliverd unto English, in which should remaine noe more then 100 souldiers at present, and part of the town for other English to live in: the customes

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 As early as this period the English Company's records started to call the Omani Imam 'Sultan of Oman'; *ibid.*

to be shared, augmented as the English please"³³. "A Dutch account (Hague Transcripts, ser. i. vol.xxiii. no.639) says that Rainsford told the Imam that the English intended to transfer their trade from Gomboroon to Muscat and expected a fleet of twenty-two vessels from England to avenge the affronts received from the Persians. It is also declared that they proposed to build a fort on the eastern angle of Muscat bay"³⁴. But, unfortunately, before the agreement was sealed by the Imam, Colonel Rainsford died in Muscat, and his papers were taken by Marke Bossley, a young man who accompanied him. So "the king writt unto the President, and the Shawbunder [Shahbander] of the place, inviting to another treaty, which this monsoon (god willing) we shall endeavour the prosecuting it, if not hindered by the Duthch warr or want of persons to send that will be wise and carefyll in management, as others to take possession"³⁵. It was clear that another treaty was not to be made, and the English held on to the first one with Colonel Rainsford. All that was needed was the sealing of the treaty by the Omani Imam. But the Company's president was optimistic; he wrote on 7 September 1659 to Roger Middleton, the commander of the Madras garrison, that "if you have any comenders or souldiers that can be spared, or others that will be emplyed in the companies service to reside in Muscat, we shall give them entertainment; the King of the place having, at the end of last Monzoon, already graunted us a castle , as by his letter apperars, and would have concluded for more privileidges, had not the death of Collnel Rainsford hindered the sealing of agreement; which this year, if possible we shall finish "³⁶. Cr.R.Middleton accepted the Company president's proposals and prepared himself for the task, but inconvenient news came from Muscat. The president in his letter to the Company on 10 January 1660 reported that a delegate had visited Muscat to work on what had been agreed in the year before. "But in stead of a performance, the King of the place denyed his promis,

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

though hid letter wee have will testifie his falshood. No perswasion that could be used by our side sevant could so much as procure another letter. Only the Shawbander of the port sent a slight one, that wee might trade as merchants and settle a factory, but no possession of fort." The president was disappointed; he said "in this affaire wee shall wait your further order, and only more advice that wee were soe confident of this beneficial place, it being the King first seeking and not ours, that not only some money were expended in treaty with him [the Imam] but timber wee had bought to build two or three small vessles of 70 or 80 tonns, to carry 10 gunns each, that might keep the port and not only force the Persian [King] to pay his due part of customes but also take custome of all jounkes at the mouth of the Gulph [Gulf] (the port lying soe as the Portugall did"³⁷. He thought that it was not a hard thing to command Muscat and asked for the despatch of means to make the Omani Imam keep his promises. "Wee shall wayte your commands concerningit, and in the meane tyme, that wee may execute whay you order, keepe a faire correspondencie". So a means of force was proposed by the president of the Company to be carried on against the Imam Sultan; "we shall waite an opportunitye per force to compell him to the same, wee having his writing tconfirme his promises"³⁸. P. Rosso noted that Imam Saif was dissuaded by the Dutch from going ahead and keeping his agreement with the English. They succeeded in persuading him probably because they had leverage with him by virtue of their limited assistance against the Portuguese. Maybe Imam Saif came also under pressure from the Omani conservatives (Lu-mtaawa,h), the religious party of the interior. It may have been put to him that it would be unwise to hand over one of the Muscat forts, for which the Omani people had fought and died, to another European power, since only about nine years earlier the Portuguese had been expelled from there with great difficulty³⁹. However, using force by the

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 P.Rosso, *Oman and Muscat an early Modern History*, (1986), p.13; R.D.Bathurst, *Yu,ruby Dynasty in Oman*, (unpublished Oxford Ph. D., 1967), pp. 162-163, 167, 170-175.

English against Muscat was ruled out. The Company found that Muscat was "extremely hot and unhealthy; its occupation would require a garrison of soldiers, which would be both expensive and difficult to maintain; and the local trade was of no great value"⁴⁰. So the project of an English settlement in Muscat had vanished and the project received the Company's condemnation⁴¹.

The second half of the 17th century witnessed the birth of Oman. A new political state in the modern history of the Persian Gulf region was established, the first of its kind in the Indian Ocean, and the first and only Arabic independent state in the whole Arab world. It was a sea power and as such was to join other sea powers in the region. England's position during this period will be examined in the next section.

Section Eight

The European challenges

The French made their first anchoring at Muscat harbour in 1647 before the end of the Portuguese era. A French ship was seen in Muscat on her way to Basra loading coffee⁴². Sixty-four years after the establishment of the English East India Company, the French founded their own company. In 1664 Colbert, the Controller-General of the French Treasury, formally established the French East India Company. During this period England became engaged in a naval war in Europe with Holland. Trade was disrupted and the activities of the factories radically reduced. While the English and the Dutch were engaged in fighting, France was to take advantage. It did not take her too long to occupy the Coromandel coast from the English in 1672. By 1665 the French showed a commercial interest in the Gulf. In 1678 England and Holland signed the treaty of Breda to form an alliance between them against France, a treaty, however, which was not to exist for long. The Gulf, this ancient waterway, was to become the

40 Foster, *English Factories*, 1655-1660, p. 331.

41 Foster, *English Factories*, 1655-1660, pp. 333, 336.

42 Foster, *English Factories*, 1646-1650, (1914), p.171.

scene for an international commercial armed ships competition during the second half of the century. During the 18th century the struggle concentrated on the Indian sub-continent, as will be shown in the next chapter.

The Dutch had taken advantage of their friendly relations with the Omanis. But the Omani Imam preferred to open negotiations with the English and not with the Dutch, when a threat was raised against him by the Persians, as shown above. The Dutch position in the Gulf region had arisen because their Company "received substantial support from the home government while the English were left to fend for themselves"⁴³. The English civil wars in the 1640s, which disturbed the British Isles as a whole, landed the English factors in heavy debt owing to lack of funds. By contrast, the Dutch were sufficiently wealthy to be able to offer the English loans. Accordingly the Dutch were free to trade in the Indies under the terms of the Munster treaty with the English in 1648. This gave the Dutch freedom to concentrate on their relations with Asian powers. But this English-Dutch honeymoon soon came to an end when the English came to realize that the Dutch commercial appetite would only be satisfied at their expense. This may be the reason for another war which broke out between Holland and Cromwell's England in 1652-3 in Europe. But the war drums in Europe sounded heavily in the Gulf. An Anglo-Dutch naval engagement took place in which the Dutch decisively defeated the English, and gave warning to all others concerned not to deal with English ships⁴⁴. By this action the Dutch gained total control of the Gulf during the greater part of 1653. But in Europe the situation was different. The English fleet ruined the Dutch trade and brought it to collapse. This forced them to sign a treaty at Westminster on 5 April 1654. But it does not seem that things were finally settled. English trade itself was not to recover before 1667 when they were left free to pursue trading prosperity after the peace treaty of Breda. That treaty was concluded in order to meet the French threat. But that was

43 Donald Hawley, *The Trucial States* (1970), pp.76, 77

44 *Ibid.*

too late. France became one of the major maritime powers in the Gulf by the end of the 17th century alongside others⁴⁵.

The Dutch in the Gulf became weaker by the end of the 17th and during the 18th century. Their influence ended in 1766 when their last factories and a settlement on Kharj Island were captured by Arabs⁴⁶.

However, by the end of the 17th century, Muscat had turned into a trading centre in the Arabian Sea as well as a local place for provisions. Muscat in fact symbolises the change in Omani maritime activity which affected the character of the Omani people of the interior. Despite the fact that the old Omanis of Magan or Mazon seem to have had ancient seafaring experience along with other Gulf and Indian Ocean people for over 2000 years, Europeans only now started to regard them as seafarers rather than a sedentary mountain community of Arab tribes. From now onwards, Muscat would extend its attraction for the Omanis, socially, commercially, and politically. This city would play in the next century and after the most decisive role in modern Omani history. The Sultans of Oman became obliged to take the title of Sultan of Muscat and Oman.

There is still very little available regarding the relations between Omanis and the English during this period except that piracy started to grow in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean and the Omanis were involved in it. However, in an attempt to occupy Kung Island and Bander Abbas, the English opposed Saif I's action in a joint stand with the Persians and the Dutch. In fact the Omanis as well as the people of the Gulf even during the Portuguese rule, never did experience piracy. The Europeans were on several occasions engaged in war against each other in Europe first, and then overseas. In addition to that, the people of the Gulf did not know previously a system of commercial monopoly. Thus piracy was started in the Gulf because of the struggle for monopolies and competition between the Europeans, each of which encouraged other citizens of the Gulf to

45 Hawley, *Trucial States*, pp.76-77.

46 Phillips, *Oman, A History*, p. 91; for the Dutch supremacy in the Gulf, see A. J. Cotrell (ed.). *The Persian Gulf States (1981)* pp.31-33.

hold passes issued with their authority in order to monopolise trade between ports and to offer security to the vessels of their own passholders⁴⁷. Those who were carrying passes from another country could be subject to attack and confiscation. Whether it was liked or not, piracy became an aspect of exercising power and monopoly and a matter of gaining more political influence in the Gulf. It seems that Imam Saif I was part and parcel of this development.

The Imam Sultan Bin Saif died in 1679/80 and was succeeded by his son Bal Arab (1679/80-1692/93)⁴⁸. In 1681 more Englishmen visited Muscat and made valuable notes about it, while in 1684 some shipwrecked English were rescued by the residents of Maseera Island⁴⁹. After Bal Arab's death he was succeeded by his brother Saif I (1692/93-1711/12). Saif I died in 1711/12 and was succeeded by his son Sultan II (1711-1718). He inherited a very strong navy, and was aggressive. He captured Bahrain Island in 1717 and carried out a policy of piracy at sea. Sultan II died in 1718 and was succeeded by his son Saif II whose period was one of the most confused in Oman's history. This Imam ruled three times! First, he ruled two years from 1720 (when he was still *twelve years old*) to 1722. Secondly, he ruled from 1722 to 1724-25, and, thirdly, from 1727 to 1744. In between and during all these periods Oman was in total confusion and was sinking into a most terrible dispute among the influential tribes. No one could state who exactly was governing the country. During his third reign, lasting about sixteen years, he invited the Persians in 1737 to assist him against his opponents in a very long civil war which lasted more than ten years between the main two Omani factions (the Hinawis and the Ghafiris). An opportunity to occupy Muscat was warmly welcomed by the Persian King Nader-Shah, since it enabled the Persians to achieve their old dream of capturing the city⁵⁰.

47 Hawley, *Trucial States*, p.77.

48 Clements, *Oman*, p. 39; Townsend, *Oman: Making of a Modern state*, (1977), p. 37; Phillips, *Oman: A History*, p. 223. The dates are uncertain.

49 Fryers, *New Account*, pp. 155-157.

50 W. Phillips, *Oman: A History*, pp.52-56; Clements, *Oman*, pp.40-41; Townsend, *Oman*, pp. 36-37.

The El ya,aribeh dynasty lasted for a period of less than one century from the date of the Portuguese expulsion, and less then the period of the Portuguese existence in Muscat. In 1744 Elbu Sa,eed took over the dynasty in Oman and, with the coming of this tribe, the Omanis perhaps stopped fighting each other on land, but contests were not over yet at sea. It seems that the civil war had some kind of extension which remained active in the form of piratical action amongst these Omani rival factions in the Gulf, which was to translate itself into the struggle between the Elqwasem (Ghafiris) and Elbu Sa,eed (Hinawis) and to involve others, either local or foreigners. The British were to have a great interest in this struggle and it was to shape all British policy in the region during the rest of the 18th and early 19th centuries, as the next chapter will try to highlight.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BACKGROUND TO THE MODERN HISTORY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND OMAN 1744-1856

Introduction

As was shown in the general introduction the English interest in exploring the Omani coast began as early as the twenties of the sixteenth century. Their activities brought them into conflict with the Portuguese of Muscat. Although they entered into alliance with the Persians they generally were reluctant to assist them in their ambitions to take Muscat from the Portuguese. On the other hand the English tried to establish relations with the Omanis directly even during the Portuguese period. However there emerged a new power in Oman which caused a great upheaval in the history of the region during the second part of the seventeenth and the first part of the eighteenth century. That was the power of the El-Ya,aaribeh dynasty. The English were interested in establishing relations with them but for the reasons discussed above they were not in a position to gain a foothold in Oman. After the advent of the El-Ya,aaribeh, and from the second half of the eighteenth century, the English seem to have learnt a lot from the dynasty, and prepared themselves for a new formulation of their policy in Oman, whose purpose was to exclude any other power from influence. During the second half of the nineteenth century the British built up an unchallengable ascendancy, which reached its peak early in the twentieth century. However to highlight this period seems impossible without having understood the background to the direct British interference in Oman, either as a result of their own initiative or by invitation from their new allies, the El-bu,Saeeds, in the period after this family took over in Oman. This acquisition of influence took place in several stages and required hard work for the British in order to establish their power. By the 1860s, however, Great Britain not only interfered in Omani domestic matters but even appointed and acknowledged the Omani Sultans.

Section Two

Britain and Albu Sa'eed 1744-1807

Ahmed bin Saeed, a famous merchant Waly of Sohar, and one of Imam Sultan bin seif's trusted Officers, took over the throne from his brother-in-law Saif by cheating the Persians¹. He acted as their ally to get their help in consolidating his position. He managed to get their acknowledgement as a new Imam of the country². After he had established himself, however, he decided to get rid of them. In a planned tactic, he invited the Persian military chiefs to a feast. While they settled down to their food he ordered their massacre. After that bloody party he turned to fight their solders and expelled them from Oman. By this he succeeded in establishing his own independence, but at the same time consolidated the dynasty. The Omani civil war practically produced two states, one in Oman-Muscat under El-bu Sa'eed (the contemporary Sultanate of Oman) and another on the Omani coast under the influence of *El-Qawasem* of Ra,sel-Khaymeh on the Gulf: thus the whole administrative and political structure of the country was changed. The Omani rulers and Imam Ahmed himself used to hold the title of Imam. But it is not clear whether the adoption of that title was a reminder of their fellowship to their old master, Imam Ali. The Imamate seems a combination of religious and political leadership developed by the Ibadi of Oman. Ibadism is one of the *Khawarij* wings, dating from the earliest days of Islam. It broke with the main body of Muslims over their insistence that the *Khalyphah* should not be determined in accordance with genealogical considerations but

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1. Townsend, *Oman: the Making* p.37; Phillips, *Oman: a History*, pp. 51-54, 62, 223, 305-7, 651n.
 2. Mohammed ben Abdullah, Al Salmi, and Najy Assaf *U,man Taareekhh yatakallam*, (*Oman Oral History*), (Damascus 1963); D.E. Long, (ed.), *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa* (Colorado, 1980); R. Kumar, 'British Attitudes Towards The Ibadyya Revivalist Movement In East Arabia', *International Studies*, 3 (1962) p. 443. A. Crichton, *History of Arabia and its people* (1852), p. 473; *Sarhan ben Sa'eed Al azkawy Al Omany, Taareekhh Oman Almuktabas min kitab Kashf alghummah Aljame,le akhbaar el ummah* (Muscat: Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Sultanate of Oman, 1986) p. 149. For the Imamate issue see Kumar, 'British attitudes', p. 443; N M.Kaylani, 'Politics and religion in Uman', *Inst. Mid. East.Stds.*, 10 (1979), p. 569; Long, *Government and politics*, p. 157.

should be elected on the basis of merit. Ibadism distinguished itself accordingly by its attitude towards the *Al-Khilaaphah* (the succession) of the prophet, Mohammed Ibna-A, bdullaah Ibna Abd-ul-Muttalib, (born in A.D 570-630)³. In comparison the *Es-sunneh* (Sunnis) recognize the legitimacy of the four successors of Mohammed, namely, the 1st Abu Bakr-es-seddyk (reigned in A.D. 630-633), the 2nd U,mar Ibna-Abil-Khattab (reigned 633-643), the 3rd U,thman-Ibna-A,ffan (reigned in A.D. 643-655), and the 4th A,li Ibna-Aby Talib Ibna-Abd-ul-Muttalib (Muhammed's cousin and son-in-law, reigned in A.D.655-660); while *ish-Shee,ah* (Shee,as) reject all but A,li, as the only *Khalyphah* and the first Imam, and claim, according to their literature, that the succession was taken from him by fraud⁴. They also accused the second Khalyphah U,mar, of being the reason for the death of Faatimah, daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, by squeezing her between the door of her house and the wall when he forced his way with his guards into Ali's house to inforce him paying loyalty. This caused damage to her ribs and aborted her baby, and she was even beaten by Umar's servant by his order. Her death after was said to be because of that⁵. The *Al-Ibadey^eh* (Ibadis), however, accept Abu Bakr and U,mar only, and reject the two others as heretics, despite that Ali was their old master and so was partly accepted. In fact this statement is correct but matters were not quite as simple as that. Briefly, the rule of Mohammed's successors, it seems, was very short and none of them died

3. *Arab World Ministries*, (n.d. Loughborough); this is a news letter founded as North Africa Mission in 1881. A.D.630=10 A.H.
4. Al-Sheikh Yousuf Al-Bahrani, *Al-kashkool*, vol. 1 (n.d.), p. 23. Sheikh Yousuf's (A.H.1107-1186= A.D. 1687-1768) family came from Draz but he was born in Mahooz village, in Bahrain, where he completed his education under supervision of the *Ustadth* teacher Sheikh Sulaiman Al-Mahoozi. Sheikh Yousuf wrote number of books on theology, on *Shareea,h* and on literature during the 18th century. He was a great traveller in Persia and Arabia, and regarded as one of the main authorities on the *Shee'ah*. He was the son of Great Aayatullah, Ahmed bin Ibraheem bin Ahmed b.Saleh b. Ahmed bin Asfoor b. Ahmed b. Abdul-Hussain b. Ateyeh b. Sheibeh Al-Drazi Al-Bahrani: a theological challenger, of the late 17th and early 18th centuries in Bahrain; he died in A.H.1131=A.D 1713. Sheikh Yousuf died in Karbala'a in Iraq, near the Husani shrine and his grave is known there. His book *Al Kashkool* is in three volumes.
5. Muhammed Jawaad Abdul-Aziz Al-Shahabi, (e.d.), *majmoo' Alriwaayaat Al-fakherah* [A Number of precious stories] Vol. 5 (n.d.Bahrain); For the same (e.d.) for Faatima's doughter (Zaynab)'s Mourning see *Al-nawahaat Al-fajeea,h lima'tam-Al-sheea,h* [The sad mournings-Poems of Sheea,h Maatam] (n.d.Bahrain).

naturally except Abu-Bakr, who reigned only two years and three months. Umar was assassinated. He was stabbed by a man called *Abu-Lu,lu,ah*, and there is a contravercy about his assassination and the powers behind that. *U,thman* was killed in a revolt against him arising out of accusations of corruption and fraud, and ruled twelve years⁶. Ali, who ruled four years and about eight months, was blamed for *U,thman's* killing because the rebels decided to select Ali to replace him, a matter which led *Alsay^yede*h (Lady) Aisha, widow of Mohammed, to lead an army against Ali in the battle of *Al-Jamal*. She is definitely not respected by the Shee,es and in any reference to her they condemned her with the words *La,natuullahi-A,layha* (God damn her) while the Sunnis and the Ibadis would say "*Radya-llahu- A,nha*" (God is satisfied with her), regarding her as *Al-Say^yede*h *Umm-el-Muslimeen*, the Lady mother of Muslims, though she did not have any children by Mohammed. The *El-Khawarij* were loyal to Ali at the beginning but they disagreed with him on certain issues, especially the truce arbitration between him and the Governor of Damascus, *Mua,awiyeh*. The ensuing conflicts culminated in Ali's assassination by them, carried out by a man called Abdul-Rahman ibna-Muljam. However the Ibadi claim that succession to the Prophet was dependent upon the will and election of the faithful seems incorrect. The succession to the Prophet was based on selection and not election, nor can it be hereditary. But this also proved incorrect when Ya,ruby Imams passed their power to their family. However after the 4th Kahlypha, Imam Ali-Ibna-Abi-Talib, (of Hashimy family, or *Bani-Haashem*), according to the Shee,h literature of the 18th century, there was a fifth Khalyphah who was Al-Hasan ibna- Ali, the eldest son of Imam Ali, who died mysteriously after six months of his reign. The Shee,ah claim that he was poisoned⁷. *Mua,aawiyeh Ibna-Aby-Sufyan*, (died in A.D. 677) *Wali* of Damascus had refused loyalty to Ali when the latter was Khalyphah; this resulted in a number of engagements until a truce was signed

6. Sheikh Yousuf, *Alkashkool*, pp.276-277.

7. Hasan's Brother, Al-Hussain, was killed by Yazyd's (*Mua,aawiyeh's* son) troops in the battle of Karbalaa' in Iraq. Hasan and Hussain both are sons of Ali and Fatima.

between the two rivals in about A.H.635/36, by which Mua,aawiyeh was left to govern Damascus. *Mua,aawiyeh* took over the whole Khelaphaht formally in A.D.660 and embarked on a series of engagements against the *Khawarij*. He established a vast hereditary Empire which stretched from Central Asia right through North Africa and Spain during the 60s and the 70s of the 7th century, under the *El-Amaweyeen* family. He constituted the political position of Damascus as capital of his Euro-Afro-Asian empire rather than Macca and Madeena, therefore causing loss of power and political influence to those two holy Islamic cities, the place of origin of Islam. But despite the change of the political situation, the *El-Amaweyeen* (7th-8th centuries) as well as the *Abbasyeen* (8th-13th centuries) after them did not change the title of Khalyphah, (successor). The Sunnees acknowledged Mua,aawiyeh as Khaliphah, despite his changing of the Islamic system of succession.

In Oman the Ya,aarebeh themselves behaved in practice as hereditary monarchs despite their religious title. That was because a crucial change in Omani social structure happened as a result of Omani imperial expansion in East Africa and on both sides of the Gulf under the Ya,aarebeh. This was the rise in the political influence of the wealthy coastal merchants who were preoccupied with the pursuit of profitable trade. This development in turn led to a gradual relaxation of the hitherto rigidly conservative Ibadi doctrine. The character of the Imamate was inexorably changed by the progressive commercialization of the coastal regions and became less fundamentalist, more secular and moderate. So practically the destruction of the Imamate started during the Ya,aarebeh dynasty, and probably before.

However it was unusual in Arabia for the *El-bu-Sa,eed* to associate their security and policy with a foreign power such as Great Britain. It is not clear how relations between the British and the *El-bu-Sa,eedys* started, but the former may naturally have welcomed the new regime since they had become unhappy about the sea trade in the Gulf. Ahmed bin Sa,eed, a moderate, was the proper

person with whom a deal could be made. He entered into an alliance with the British when they were engaged in conflict with pirates in the Gulf. He was probably suffering from the hostile activities of his opponents *El- Qawaem* in the Gulf, and the British were able to bring the support he was looking for. There is little evidence available regarding details about the relations between Ahmed and the British, but it seems that the establishment of British relations with Albu Sa,eed was linked to the establishment of British influence on the Indian sub-continent. The English East India Company's attempt to assume sovereign power locally during the late 17th century was frustrated because of the French. For their part the French were trying to assume sovereign power for themselves, and they were maintaining soldiers and waging wars. In fact, as early as 1627, Charles I gave instructions to the Duke of Buckingham that "The Catholic King of France must.. be prevented from extending his dominions over the oceans"⁸. It was felt by him that his enemies the French consistently tried to deprive England of her sovereignty over places to which England had given her name "and which our ancestors have enjoyed from time immemorial". "From 1689 to 1815 Britain and France were directly at war for fifty years, not counting periods of masked conflict when war was fought through third parties, or of direct hostilities without a preliminary declaration of war which will give total of over sixty years"⁹. On the Indian subcontinent it was almost inevitable that both parties should fight until one of them destroyed the other. During the 1740s the French proposed neutrality with the British in India, so that the situation should not be affected by the wars in Europe. The British refused the French proposals. In reaction to this the French captured Madras from the English in 1746. In 1747 a French fleet sailed for India, but it was destroyed by the English in the Bay of Biscay. In 1748 the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle was signed between England and France. Louisburg in Cape Breton was to be returned to France and Madras to be received by the British.

8. Johnson, *Britain and France*, p.140.

9. *Ibid.*

Even so unofficial war between the two parties was to continue despite this treaty. 1750 was a turning point in the British history in India. The Indian Prince Chandra Sahib attacked Arcot. He was in alliance with the French, but both were defeated by the British. This victory of the British established their power strongly in India, while the recapture of Calcutta in 1757 from the French and the Nawab of Bangal was a decisive victory. It laid the foundation of British sovereignty in India. After 1760 there was no European power to challenge the British in India. In 1773 George III signed an Act of Parliament to organize the administration in those parts of India under the British Company. The organization involved the appointment of a Governor-General, a Council and a Supreme Court¹⁰. Company rule in Bengal and elsewhere made desirable friendly rulers in countries neighbouring India, for example in Oman and Persia. The new organization strengthened previous arrangements by the British with both countries. At the same time it was to play a political and economic role in organizing and serving British interests in the Gulf region, as when in 1778 Bushire in Persia became the principal centre and home of the British Resident, who directed all British consuls in the Gulf. This was significant in influencing the political situation throughout the coming century and a half.

Ahmed gave up power in 1775, seemingly in response to action by his son Saeed 1, three years before his death in Rustak. Muscat during Sa'eed 1's rule became the principal port between the Persian Gulf and India, and the richest and most flourishing in the whole Persian Gulf region. It became also a regular port of call for British ships. The British stationed warships there several times in order to keep watch on piracy. During 1775, the British frigate *Seahorse* made Muscat her base for two months when a famous personality was on board, the future hero of the Nile and Trafalgar, Horatio Nelson, who was at that time a

10. For this account see Mukherjee, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 93-101; Frayers, *New Account* pp. 26-30; Williamson, *Note Book*, p.57; Trevelyan, *English Social History*, p. 216.

midshipman¹¹. Hamad, Sa'eed's 1 son, took over the throne in 1784 before his father's death from smallpox in 1792. He made a significant turning point in the history of Oman when he shifted the capital from Rustak to Muscat in the same year and expelled his uncle Sultan from there. This transfer denoted a significant change in the intellectual orientation of the Imam. It marked the first step towards the conversion of Oman from an isolated Arab State to a maritime political entity in intimate contact with liberalizing influences from the external world. This marked the beginning of further conflict which was to spread all over the country between what was to be known as Muscat, and Oman. Therefore it was not simply a shifting of the capital from Rustak, but indeed, a creation of the Muscat state, because Sa'eed remained as Imam in Rustak until his death¹². However this produced two wings in Omani social life, one of commerce and the other of agriculture; this extended to the ruling family as well as other social and tribal leaders. In fact Muscat, this Portuguese-equipped and -established city, which survived under them for about one century and a half with their churches, bars and perhaps personal freedom and purely commercial activities, assisted in undermining the traditional life of Oman. It created a different kind of struggle, which was to affect life in all the country. Even today the Sultans of Oman are proud to take the title of the Sultan of Muscat, proud that Muscat is the capital of all Oman and proud of the three great Portuguese forts the Jalaly, the Meerany and the Mutrah. This city gave them prestige in the eyes of foreigners and was an indication of power in the eyes of their local subjects. It is, therefore, strange to find Reute R. Sa'eed, in 1929, stating that the Portuguese left no lasting effect upon the country.

That division, however, was to cause further internal problems till the middle of the twentieth century. At this stage, however, it did not cause much

11. R. Coupland, *East Africa and its invaders*, (1938), p.84; R. Reute Said, 'The Albusaid Dynasty in Arabia and East Africa', *J. Cent. As. Soc.* 16 (1929).

12. For more details about Hamad reign until Sa'eed bin Sultan see, Calven H. Allen, Jr. 'The State of Masqat in the Gulf and East Africa, 1785-1829' *Int. J. Middle East Stu.*, 14 (1982), 117-127.

concern to British policy makers. The main question for the British by this time was the competition with France and the challenge of the power of *El-Qawqasem* of *Ra,s-el- Khaimeh*.

During Hamad's reign Oman soon became diplomatically involved in conflicts between France and Britain over Muscat. Muscat became an important place for the French who regarded it as the only considerable outlet on the Arabian coast. It would facilitate French commercial business in the Persian Gulf and the Coast of Arabia and it held the gate to the Persian Gulf¹³. Hamad was not interested in being involved in any conflict which might arise between the Europeans in the Indian Ocean. Sometimes, however, he was forced to join with the British as when the French attacked a British merchant ship sheltering in Muscat harbour in 1779, and when they attacked an Omani frigate *Saleh* in 1781. Hamad ordered an attack on the French ship *La Philippine* and seized it, but he also showed the French his neutrality and his desire to maintain the old established friendship. He sent back *La Phillippine* to them. In return, Hamad received a French- built ship, renamed *Saleh* in 1790, as a way of retaining the confidence of the Omanis. He was very impressed by this French action.

France's interest in Muscat became more clear when an envoy, De Rosily, in 1785 visited Muscat seeking permission to establish a factory and a French agent. When Hamad died in 1792 his uncle Sultan bin Ahmed, whom he had expelled from Muscat, took over (Imam Sultan was the son of the Imam Ahmed bin Saeed). In fact the Imam Sultan was a tough man and he had experience of ruling since 1784, though not in Oman! He had emigrated across the Gulf to Baluchistan during the shifting of the capital to Muscat. In Baluchistan he ruled the port and district of Guader which he made a base for attacking his enemies in his homeland Oman. He remained eight years there until 1792 when he saw his chance to return to Muscat to take over the throne after Hamad's death.

13. Phillips, *Oman: a history*, pp.67-68; Coupland, *Exploitation* pp. 82, 85; Kumar, 'British Attitudes', p. 444; Kaylani, 'Politics', p. 570, and Clements, *Oman*, pp. 42, 52.

During his reign, the Imam Sultan became a natural ally with Britain against his rival Elquasem of Ra,s-el-khaimh¹⁴. Six years after taking over, he signed his first treaty in 1798 with the British East India Company which was represented by its agent Mehdy Ali Khan, the agent in Bushire. In 1800 a second treaty was signed by the Imam, this time with Sir John Malcolm, both to confirm the first agreement and to allow the first residence of a British gentleman in an official capacity at Muscat. This treaty marks the first British diplomatic presence in Oman and the first political intervention and entrenchment in Omani affairs. It was a triumph for British diplomacy. It was agreed for the first time that enemies of both Oman and Britain should not be allowed to use any facilities available in both countries against any one of them. Accordingly, Oman should not give France and Holland permission to establish factories or even any kind of foothold. Consequently, the French gentleman who had been serving the Imam for several years as a sea commander, had to be dismissed and expelled from the country . A French ship could not be allowed to enter the cove into which the English ships were admitted. The Imam should support the English in any case of hostile engagement with the French, but not on the high seas. In the Port of Abassy (also Gombroom or Bander Abbas)¹⁵ "whenever the English shall be disposed to establish a Factory the Imam should have no objection to their fortifying the same and mounting guns thereon, as many as they list, and to forty or fifty English gentlemen residing there, with seven or eight hundred English Sepoys , and for the rest, the rate of duties on goods on buying and selling will be on the same footing as at Bssora (Basrah) and Abushehr (Bushire)"¹⁶.

14. Holden Furber, *John Company at Work* (1948), pp. 69-70, 168; L. Graz, *The Omanis: Sentinels of the Gulf* (1982), pp. 2, 10. Coupland, *Exploitation*, p. 86; Clements, *Oman*, p. 42; Phillips, *Oman: a History*, pp. 51, 69.
15. Aitchison, Charles Umpherston, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and neighbouring Countries Vol XI*, (treaties relating to Aden and South western coast of Arabia, the Arab principalities, Muscat (Oman), Baluchstan and North-West Frontier Province (1933), p. 269; Phillips, *Oman: A History*, p. 70.
16. S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf* vol. 1 (1919-1920), p.287. For Bander Abbas history and its involvement with Omanis see Hasan-E Fasa,i., *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, in Herbert Busse (ed), *History of Persia under Qajar rule* (New York, 1972), pp. 309-315, and for the agreement between the Shah and Sa,eed ben Sultan see the same

This treaty was very important. Firstly, it was followed by the defeat of the Typu Sultan of Mysore who was killed in his palace in 1799 in an engagement against a British force led by Colonel Arthur Wellesley¹⁷. Sultan of Mysore was the Omani Imam's friend and was regarded as a French ally, whom Bonaparte wanted to contact. Secondly, it initiated a series of treaties which were to establish a strong British hold on Omani foreign relations, imposed tighter commitments on the Omanis and enlisted their support against Britain's competitors throughout the rest of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Thirdly, it represented a British presence in Oman's dominions, not only commercially but also in the form of power. Sepoys and guns would now give the British a strong hand to impose their policy not only in Oman but in all the Gulf region. Fourthly, this treaty indicated how important by 1800 Muscat had become in the eyes of the British Indian Government. Muscat by this period became almost exclusively a transit port between India and the Gulf. Therefore a strong position here in the hands of a hostile power would be a direct threat to the British route to India. Fifthly, since the Persian Gulf was the gateway to Mesopotamia and Persia by sea, the importance of Oman as the gateway to the Gulf itself became more apparent. British interest in the Gulf, Persia, and Mesopotamia grew rapidly during this period. Sixthly, this treaty, which established an armed British settlement for the first time in the Gulf set the stage for British imperialism in the Gulf as a whole. It was the first stage in a period of control which was to last for more than a century and a half. Oman was the vehicle by which British interest in the Gulf was to be administered¹⁸.

work pp.316, 344-366. (note that Sa'eed ben Sultan could be named as Sa'id-Khan, Imam of Muscat); Aitchison, *Collection XI*, pp. 87-88.

17. See A. W. Lawrence, *Captive of Typu*, (1929), pp. 8-10, 205. The writer of this thesis visited Typu's palace in Mysore in 1983 and saw the place he was killed.
18. Phillips, *Oman : a History* p.91; B.C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (1967), p.12; R. Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907*, (1965), pp. 443, 445; Robert Geran Landen, *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton 1967), p. 165. For more details about 1798 and 1800 treaties between Sultan and Britain see Miles, *Countries* pp. 92-93; Phillip Woodruff, *The Men who ruled India*, Vol 1 (1953), p.207; Ann Williams, *Britain and France in the Middle*

However, despite this treaty between Imam Sultan and the British, the French did not give up trying to be as close to him as possible and trying to prevent the British from gaining all the profit. They offered him, for example, some assistance in his expedition against Bahrain. This period witnessed bitter competition between France and Britain, since most of the other European powers had become weak in the the Indian Ocean. This competition reached its peak when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt. Bonaparte sent a letter to the Imam of Muscat dated 25 January 1799, informing him about his army's arrival in Egypt and offering the Imam Sultan protection for his ships and commerce. "I write you this letter to inform you of the arrival of the French army in Egypt, and as the Imam,s relations were always friendly with the French", Bonaparte assured Imam Sultan, "you could be convinced of our desire to protect all the merchant vessels you may send to Suez. I also beg you will forward the inclosed letter to Tipoo Sahib [in Mysore] at the first opportunity". But the letter did not reach the Imam. It was intercepted and seized by a British agent in Mocha¹⁹. By this action the British cut any further possiblity of communication between France and the Omanis and also seized the occasion to safeguard their position in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, at least for a while. But the British did not sit quiet. In the same year as Napoleon's letter to Imam Sultan and after its interception, the British acted quickly. Their Resident at Bushire wrote a letter to Saif bin Hamad, the acting regent of Oman during the absence of Sultan, asking him to preserve the friendship between Oman and Britain, and to esteem the English government as a soul by which Muscat could breathe and to get rid of the French. Certainly Saif did not fully understand what the British letter was all about. The British were very concerned about the French ambitions in the Indian Ocean, which the letter

East and North Africa (1968), p. 69; G. S. Misra, *British Foreign Policy and Indian Affairs, 1783-1815* (1963), p.69.

19. Phillips, *Oman :A History*, pp.71,109; Sir Reader Bullard, *Large And Loving Privileges* (1960), p. 32; Miles, *Countries*, p. 290; Graz, *Omanis*, pp.10-12. ; J.B.Kelly, 'The Legal And Historical Basis of the British Position in the Persian Gulf', *Middle Eastern Affairs*, No1 St. Anthony's Paper, No4 (1958), p. 127; Kumar, *India*,p. 144; Kaylany, 'Politics'. Coupland, *Exploitation*, p.71.

did not explain. They took the occupation of Egypt as a serious matter and a warning bell with the objective of ousting the British from India, from Cairo by way of Suez as Talleyrand put it. Egypt, he said, was only the first stage of an advance to India. The French did not keep their desire a secret, and Muscat, if it had come under their influence, would have done a wonderful job. In fact, the Egyptian campaign of Bonaparte focused London's attention on the Gulf as a vital link between India and Europe²⁰. Unless the Gulf were to fall into French hands, the principal regional power had to be tightly controlled. One of the means whereby the British sought to strengthen their influence in the region was an alliance with Imam Sultan Bin Ahmed.

Throughout much of the late 18th and early 19th centuries Muscat was at the top of the agenda for both Britain and France in the region, especially after the decline of the Persian Safaweed Empire²¹. British policy at that time was to contain France's ambition, and keep French ships and soldiers away from India²². The treaties of 1798 and 1800 with the Imam provided that an English Resident should stay at Muscat through whom all intercourse between the two states should be conducted and that the friendship of the two countries Oman and Britain should remain for ever. However Sultan had reasons of his own for seeking alliance with a foreign power, and with the British in particular. Muscat, since ancient times had had direct links with the west coast of India, and commercial relations between both coasts was a matter of an everyday life. To disturb those links meant to disturb Oman's commercial life. In fact it was a daily exchange between all of south-eastern Arabia and India, providing Arabia with many of its necessities. This same historical commercial power of India provided the British with an instrument of ascendancy in Oman. The English spoke about Muscat dependence on the Indian trade as early as 1647 when on 8 September, John

20. For the aim of Napoleon see Johnson, *Britain and France*, p.156.

21. Phillips *Oman : a History*, p. 71; Kelly 'Legal And Historical', p. 127; Kumar, *India*, p. 144; Kaylany, 'Politics' p. 571; Coupland, *Exploitation* pp.10, 71.

22. Malcolm C. Peck, *The United Arab Emirates: a Venture in Unity* (Boulder, Colorado, 1986); Aitchison, *Collection XI*, p.2; Kelly, 'Legal and Historical', p 128.

Spiller reported to the English Company that "subsistence of Muscat depends wholly one the trade of this city [Ahmed Abad in India]"²³.

Thus Muscat played an important part in British policy in the Gulf during the nineteenth century. It possessed considerable commercial resources, situated on the trade routes to India from Arabia, Persia and Africa. But the Indian trade formed the greater part of these commercial activities, and the British used their position very effectively. Secondly, Oman was increasingly coming under attack by the Wahabbis of Arabia, who found support for their movement from those Omanis who were disloyal to the (El-bu-Sa,eedy) family, or even from some of Albu Sa,eed themselves who were dissatisfied with the rule of their own relative. The Wahhabis managed to form a kind of alliance with the *El-Qwasem of Ra,s-el-Khaimah* and the Omanis of the trucional coast. For this reason Sultan was in need of foreign support to assist him, not only against an external threat, but an internal one as well. Those who disliked the government and opposed the policy of Sultan would certainly welcome any outside threat even from his own family members. This pattern recurs at different stages in Oman's history when one party brings support from outside to assist its claim. It happened during the Islamic and the *Ya,aaribeh* periods and is still the case. In 1800 Oman was attacked by the Wahabbis of Arabia who occupied the Buraimi oasis. Sultan ran to the English asking for help and he got it. If the French had hurried to assist Sultan the situation might have been different. In a counter-attack by the British and Sultan's forces, they defeated the Wahabbis in the first direct engagement for the British in Arabia. But the price for that victory was high. In reply, the Wahabbis's allies reacted quickly. Sultan was attacked and killed while he was sailing in the Gulf on his return journey from Basrah to Muscat in 1804 . He had lost his life and the British lost a great friend who had first signed with them a historic treaty. The British suffered other severe losses in the same year when nine British ships were attacked in the Gulf. The killing of Sultan inaugurated a

23. Foster, *English Factories, 1646-1650*, (1914), p 153.

new period in Oman's international relations, a period which would decide all Oman's future in the 19th and much of the 20th century. This new era started with Sultan's son, Sa'eed.

Sa'eed bin Sultan ruled Oman three years after his father's death in 1804. His cousin's son Bader bin Hamad ruled Oman as a regent during those three years. Sa'eed took over the throne after he stabbed him to death with his dagger in a seemingly friendly conversation in 1807. The British sources noted that Sultan was succeeded by his two sons, Salim and Sa'eed, reigning jointly, but Sayid Salim died in 1821 and then Sa'eed continued to rule the country by himself. It is not known what exactly was the role of Salim.

Section Three

The Imam Sa'eed bin Sultan; first stage, 1807-1822

From the beginning Sa'eed had to face several challenges at home, in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Like his father those challenges led him to think of a reliable ally already to hand, namely the British, with whom his father had signed a treaty and whose help would be most effective. For their part, the British began to suffer from hostile activities in the Gulf. It happened that the problems of Sa'eed came from the same source as those of his father. As a consequence of his friendship with Britain he brought on himself hostility not just from local powers but from the French. To satisfy a request by the British, Sa'eed ordered the French ship *Vigilant* out of Muscat. The British attacked and captured the ship after her departure from the harbour. The French saw those measures taken by Sa'eed against their ship as a collaboration between Sa'eed and the British Government of India against their interests and, therefore, an abandoning of Oman's neutrality. On top of this Sa'eed's father's previous rejection of a French Resident in Muscat still upset the French. For these reasons, therefore, the French took action against the Omanis on the high seas, and eight Muscat merchant ships were attacked near

Ceylon in retaliation²⁴. The French reaction caused Sa'eed great alarm since it could cause serious damage to his commercial activities with bad consequences at home. It led him to take the following steps. Firstly, he tried to ease tension between himself and the French, regain their confidence and friendship, thus avoiding their hostility and any further losses²⁵. Secondly, he sought British protection against the French so he could face them in case of further confrontation. From the British side Sa'eed's move caused them great surprise since they never expected such a request from him. They knew how strong and challenging a navy he owned. So the Government in Bombay gave a limited response to Sa'eed's appeal. It only offered him trade protection against French privateers, since the French were too weak to attack Muscat and the British would not gain advantages from the active co-operation of the State of Muscat.

It however appeared that Sa'eed was threatened by a danger even more serious than that of France. The Wahhabis of Arabia presented a real challenge. He tried to use the treaties which were signed between his father and Britain 1798-80, which declared that the enemies of one state to be the enemies of the other, in the sense of obligation on the part of the British government to aid him against his enemies in Arabia. But the British reply was that the treaty with his father was not intended to have reference to any situation other than that created by the war with France. The British reluctance to meet Sa'eed's full demand suggested that they did not take into consideration the threat he faced in Arabia. This led Sa'eed to try the alternative of linking his fortunes with France and repairing his damaged relations with them. He sent his delegate, Maajid bin Khalfan, to Port Louis on the Isle of France in the Indian Ocean on 16 June 1807 with full authority to sign a treaty of amity and commerce with the French Governor. Undoubtedly this approach was a success for the French in Muscat and

24. Townsend, *Oman*, pp. 40-41; Phillips, *Oman: A History* pp. 17, 71, 73. P. Tuson (ed.), *British Policy In Asia: India Office Memoranda*, B15, F12; Coupland, *Exploitation*, pp. 108-112, 114-116.

25. For details about Oman and French relations during the 18th-19th centuries see Norman R Bennet, *East African History*, vol 3 (ed) Daniel F. McCall ch 6, pp. 149, 164 (Boston).

a success for Sa'eed's diplomacy. But Sa'eed did not get all that he wanted. For a still unclear reason they hesitated to assist him against his Arab enemies, the Wahhabis. This pushed him again towards the British camp. In fact, he wanted the kind of help which only the British could give for his country and his own throne. However his approach to the French served his diplomacy. The British did not want him to go back to France or any other power which might threaten their position in India so they decided to take account of his anxiety and offer him the support he needed. In fact the situation in the Gulf was causing great inconvenience to the British, and Sa'eed and Muscat could provide much help to the British men-of-war. This fact linked the interests of Britain and Muscat and led them to take common action against a common enemy²⁶.

Meanwhile, during 1807-1813, the British gained a diplomatic success on the North-West frontier, namely in Persia and Afghanistan. They established a permanent embassy in Tehran. But in the Gulf they had suffered enough losses since 1804 when nine British ships were attacked. In 1805 a British trading boat was captured and all its crew put to death and in 1808 the British ship *Minerva* was captured. Accordingly, British trade increasingly came under threat. Britain was determined to crush this threat because of its dangerous impact on imperial communications and India's frontiers, so co-operation with Sa'eed was desperately needed. Sa'eed, for his part, lost patience and tried his luck in initiating his first attack against his rivals the *El-Qawasem* in *Ra,s-el-Khaimah*. But they put up a brave fight and defeated him. Captain Seton, the British Agent in Muscat, and Major-General Sir John Malcolm urged that the support of Sa'eed was in British interests. When Sa'eed launched his second attack against *El-Qawasem* in 1809 he supposed that he was carrying it out with the full co-operation of the British. But the British retreated and left him alone to be defeated for the second time. Certainly this was disastrous for Sa'eed and his situation became dangerous. He

26. See Kelly, 'Legal and Historical', p. 127; Coupland, *Exploitation*, p.119, 132, 135.; Reute, Rudolf Sa'eed. *Saeed bin Sultan, 1791-1856* (1929), p. 22. Reute was the son of Princess Salma, daughter of Sa'eed Bin Sultan.

was most disappointed and his confidence in British assistance was severely weakened. In another diplomatic move he decided to approach his grandfather's old enemies, the ancient lords of Oman, the Persians, since they too suffered from the twin alliance of *El-Qawaasem* and *El-Wahhaabe^yeen*. From the Persian side they probably found also that the time was convenient now to renew their old policy of imposing their influence in Oman, a dream of two centuries ago when they tried to take Muscat. They decided to help Sa'eed by sending a large force to Oman under the command of Sa'di Khan²⁷. There was another offer of help to Sa'eed, this time from Muhammed Ali of Egypt, who sent a message to Sa'eed for an alliance against the Wahhabis. But Muhammed Ali did not take steps to help Sa'eed in coping with his severe losses. In addition the Persian assistance does not seem to have fulfilled his desire, although they may have fought beside him. It was argued that he discovered a plot had been made by the Persians to arrest him, so he got rid of them as soon as possible.

Sa'eed had reached a situation which can be summarised as follows:- his disappointment with British assistance was acute; his alliance with the Egyptians was probably impracticable because of their geographical distance; his discovery that the Persians had their own policy in Muscat was worrying. At the same time he was under severe pressure from his rivals the Qawasemees. He felt both threatened and disappointed.

Facing all these difficulties, he decided to play another card and try to conclude another alliance with the apparently more trustworthy France, now under the new regime of the restored Bourbon monarchy. He renewed trade relations and signed a convention on 30 March 1817. This agreement with France demonstrated how Sa'eed could play a successful diplomatic role. He gave a signal to the Government of India that he could bring their old competitors into their own arena, and that he could trust the French and depend on them. From the

27. Low, C R . *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*, (1877), p. 320. Ch X and Ch XI are very important for Oman and Gulf History from 1767 to 1824. Gerald Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean* (1967), p 24; Landen, *Oman*, p. 167; Reute, *Saeed*, pp. 24-36.

British side, despite the end of the threat from Napoleon, they did not wish to see Sa'eed go further. It seems reasonable to assume, given their subsequent action, that they concluded the following: Sa'eed should not be allowed to develop his relations with France. The news came that the Wahabbies of Arabia had suffered a severe defeat in front of the Egyptian army of Mohammed Ali. Consequently *Ra,s-el-Khaimh* would be weakened without the support of the Wahhabies. In the British view the Gulf was now to be cleared up, and they should not allow this opportunity to go to France. The time was ripe for a diplomatic move to regain the confidence of Sa'eed. For Sa'eed himself the time was right to take his revenge, probably for his father's murder, but definitely for his defeats and losses at the hands of the Qawasemees. For him, the Wahabis defeat in Arabia was a great relief. It allowed him to try again and challenge *Ra,s-el-Khaimh* and her brave sea warriors. He could go now and settle his dispute with them. The Government of India now decided to co-operate with Sa'eed and to carry out a new policy of asking the Egyptians to join in the effort against the common enemy. The Egyptians refused the British proposals for forming an alliance, since their cause was not in the Gulf but in Arabia, but Sa'eed himself welcomed the British proposals. For Sa'eed now it was time not to use his diplomacy with the Qawasem but his power. So he did not want to lose the chance to defeat his and his family's old enemies who had challenged the El-bu Sa'eed's since the 40s of the last century. If this question was not settled then it might end in Muscat itself with unpredictable consequences. In 1819 the British Government of India gathered its sea power and with full co-operation from Sa'eed attacked *Ra,s-el-Khaimh*. After a long and bitter fight with heavy losses in lives and property, they occupied it, and defeated the Qawasem in 1820. By this and by attacking Bander Lingeh on the Persian coast and Shinas on the *El-batneh* coast, Qawasem influence was completely destroyed in the Gulf.

Sa'eed was delighted with the defeat of the Qawasem, but he left all other things to be dealt with by the British for their own benefit, despite the fact

that he might have been able to restore the unity of Oman since his rivals were now not united. Even Sheikh *S^Sakar Al-kaasemy* decided not to join the party which opposed Sa'eed, and, indeed, he turned against the Wahabbies of Arabia and was jailed by them. Sa'eed showed that he was a skilful diplomat who could co-operate and deal with both the British and the French, but he failed to do the same with his own country's people, and so failed to reunite his country, Oman. He did not combine his expensive efforts to defeat the *El- Qawasem* with an historic aim of imposing his country's reunification on the chiefs of the Omani truce when it became possible, thereby establishing a Greater Oman under his leadership. Sadly he lost that favourable chance.

Britain, after the defeat of the Qawasem, soon started to put this victory to useful effect, by imposing the first treaty on the chiefs of the Omani tracial Coast to stop hostile attacks against British ships and abolish so-called piracy in the Gulf. Hurmuz came under Sa'eed's control. Yet soon after the problem of *Ra,s-el-Khaimh* was settled when the Bany Bu Ali, an Omani tribe of Sarqiyah of Oman East coast province, rose up against Sa'eed and his allies²⁸. They murdered an English interpreter in *Lashkharaah*. Sa'eed himself led a joint British-Omani force to punish *Al-Bu-Ali*. On this occasion Sa'eed gave the British every assistance his country could afford. In 1820 fighting took place between the Anglo-Sa'eed force and Al Bu Ali who was defeated.

The confrontation of *Ra,sel Khaimh* and the Al Bu Ali tribes marks a significant development in Oman's history as well as the Gulf region as a whole. As from 1820 Greater Oman politically went in two different ways, though these separate paths had started in fact after the civil war and the emergence of the *El-bu-Sa'eed*. From this point, the division of the country was firmly constituted, and under British influence one portion developed to what is known now as the Sultanate of Oman and the other the Oman Tracial coast, which eventually became the United Arab Emirates. The British joint operations with Sa'eed

28. Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 288; Miles, *Countries*, p 325.

against Al-Bu-Ali were to drag them into more commitments in defending the El-Bu-Sa,eedis and increased the British intervention in the domestic affairs of Oman. It increased British influence upon Sa,eed himself and contributed to the decline and the destruction of Sa,eed's Omani Empire. In the Gulf the British patrolled the region from 1822 and they regulated their position with the conclusion of a series of treaties and settlements. In the process they acquired extra-territorial rights in the Arab States under British protection, and also in Oman. Sa,eed, after the *Ra,s-el- Khaimah* and *Al-bu-Ali* battles 1820-1822, gained a good deal in the short term but for Oman the consequences were disastrous. Sa,eed was firmly seated on his throne, at least while under the protection of the British Government of Bombay²⁹, and passed on this dependence to his children and grandchildren. Through his steady loyalty to Britain he was able to build a commercial empire based on Zanzibar. The British realized that Sa,eed wanted their protection for his own throne and to enable him to carry on his own commercial business. Captain W. F. Owen, who visited Muscat during Sa,eed's reign, found Sa,eed himself the chief merchant in the city. He found also that he could borrow money largely from the Banyans to whom he farmed certain revenues. The government of India was fully informed about Sa,eed's commercial activities and desires, so they offered him all that he wished. But what did they want from him and what was the impact on Oman? It is to this question that we now turn.

Section four

Sa,eed bin Sultan; second stage, 1822-1856³⁰

Between 1822 and 1856 British-Omani relations were to take a different shape. Oman from now on was to fall into the British sphere of influence and in 1822 the

29. Reute, *Saeed*, pp. 37-39, 518; Graham, *Indian Ocean*, p. 234.

30. In the year 1835 Sa,eed received an American delegate in Muscat headed by the Commander Edmund P. Kennedy. For the description of that visit see, W. S. W. Ruschenberger, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World*, 1 (1838) pp. 91-151.

British Resident at Bushire took the title of Resident in the Gulf³¹. His duty became political and he became in overall charge of British interests in the Gulf area, including Muscat. In the same year Britain started to impose restrictions on the slave trade in Oman and for this reason they concluded a treaty with Sa'eed for the suppression of slavery. In the beginning it was a limited restriction, that slaves should not be carried to or sold to Christian nations. Any Arab merchant ship carrying slaves would be regarded as being against this treaty and the ship accordingly would be seized by the British and taken into Muscat for punishment by Sa'eed. With this treaty Sa'eed allowed British influence on himself and his dominions to grow rapidly. It established a precedent which underlined the British intention to preserve their essentially political status in the Gulf. Several treaties had been signed between Britain and the local Sheikhs, which gave Britain the right to prevent maritime disorder, police the Gulf and mediate in disputes between the Gulf states. In the 20s and increasingly in the 30s Britain's influence began to grow rapidly in Sa'eed's dominions in Africa.

On the North-West Frontier of India, in what was known as the first Afghan war, British troops were sent to Afghanistan in 1839 to counter a Russian threat. They occupied Cabul, and captured the Afghan Muhammed Dost³². But their defeat after two years by the Afghans initiated a series of challenges to British power in India especially towards the end of the century. This had a direct effect on Oman on account of the arms trade issue by the time of the second Afghan war of 1879-1880. Meanwhile, however, in Oman, a treaty of commerce was signed between the British and Sa'eed, and then further articles were added³³

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31. Reute, *Saeed*, pp. 40-143; Bin Ruzaik, Humaid bin Muhammed bin Bakheet. *Al Fathul Mubeen* (Ministry Of Heritage, Oman, 1984), pp. 532-535; W. F. W Owen, Captain, *Narrative of voyages to explore the shores of Africa, Arabia and Madagascar*, vol. 1 (1833) p. 340-341; Kenneth Ingham, *History Of East Africa* (1962), p.8.
 32. Dost Muhammed, said to the Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough: "I can't understand why the rulers of so vast and flourishing an Empire should have gone across the Indus to deprive me of my poor and barren country". R. B. Mowat, *A Short History of the British Empire* (1933), p. 200.
 33. Coupland, *Exploitation*, p.119; Clements, *Oman* pp.43-44; Philip K.Hitti, *The Near East in History: A 5000 years story* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1961) p. 470; Townsend, *Oman*, p. 43; Landen, *Oman*, p. 172. Aitchison, *Collection*, pp. 289-290.

.They gave power to seize any ship carrying slaves, and to punish any one trading in slaves as a pirate if he carried Somalis for sale. In 1845 Sa'eed signed another treaty, this time one which insisted that he should stop any export of slaves from his dominions, and any offender should be put under the severest penalties.

It is a strange phenomenon that Great Britain concentrated on the suppression of the slave trade despite the fact, according to Eric Williams, that in England itself slavery provided one of the main streams of capital accumulation which financed the industrial revolution³⁴. Why was this so? The reply is that Britain since the last quarter of the 18th century, had experienced a concentrated debate about slavery. The question of the slave trade was seriously raised in the house of commons in 1772. In 1788 a report was submitted for the abolition of the slave trade. In 1789 the voices became even stronger for the abolition of the trade. In 1807 an Act was passed for the abolition of the slave trade, and in August 1833 the most important one, namely the Act for the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies. "Whereas divers persons are holden in slavery within divers of his Majesty's colonies, and it is just and expedient that all such persons should be manumitted and set free". So that was imposed on Sa'eed as well.

Undoubtedly, the abolition of the slave trade was to have disastrous consequences on Sa'eed's economy and, needless to say, on his local political situation. The slave trade was the basis of the Omani economy and an integral part of the structure of Omani society. Sa'eed himself wished to please the British as an insurance for his continued rule but Sa'eed's subjects lost one of their basic exports so they started to show disloyalty to him and his friends the British. This

34. Landen, *Oman*, p.169,168; A. Wyatt Tilby, *Britain in the Tropics, 1527-1910*, Vol. IV (1912), p. 178; Denis Judd, *The Victorian Empire, 1837-1901* (1970), p.95; E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, (1964), p. 52; M. B. Brown, *Economics of Imperialism*, (1978). For more details about slavery suppression and the debates in Great Britain, see, W Plumb, *Great Britain, Foreign Policy and the Span of Empire 1689-1971*, Vol. 3 (New York, 1972), pp. 1973-2035.

dissatisfaction was to produce another political problem and one which would profit the French.

The French saw this discontent as a chance to intervene with the Omanis and allow the export of slaves in their vessels and also offer protection for those who kept the business going. This was welcomed by the Arab merchants, tribal chiefs and the local leaders of Zanzibar who carried on the slave trade. The disloyalty of Saeed's subjects was to have some impact on the disturbances in Oman which developed after Sa'eed, and to lead to disputes even among the ruling family themselves. Muscat then became the stage for dramatic events. Britain carried out slave suppression through gun-boat diplomacy supported by the ubiquitous Royal Navy in its most classical form³⁵.

In 1840 Sa'eed shifted his capital from his homeland Oman to Zanzibar. In fact between 1832 and 1837 he spent most of his time in his African base rather than in Muscat. Whatever could be said about his move it did not help Oman at all. It was a grave mistake, forcing the Omanis to look at a tiny colony far on the African coast as their capital. Sa'eed by this step governed Oman from East Africa instead of governing East Africa from Oman. By this step he put Oman on the second level socially and politically, and his relations with his own homeland were weakened. His reign also witnessed a decline in economic activities in East Africa³⁶.

Just two years before his death, in 1854 he signed a deed of cession of the Kuria Muria islands off the south Omani coast at Dofar with Captain Fremantle, the commander of H.M.S. *Juno*. Accordingly Sa'eed granted the islands to Queen Victoria. "From the humble Saeed bin Sultan, to all and every one who may see this paper, whether Mahomedans or others... I hereby cede to

35. Aitchison, *Collection*, pp. 292-301; Clements, *Oman*, pp. 43-44.

36. Bennet, Ch 6, p 152; Judd, *British empire*, p. 95; Coupland, *Exploitation* p. 293-299; Townsend, *Oman*, p 43; Bin Ruzaik, *Imams and sayids*, p 643; Ahmed Humood Al Ma'ammery, *Oman and East Africa*, p. 167; Aitchison, *Collection*, pp. 301-302; L.C.S. Arnold Wilson, *Taareekhh Al khaleej* (the History of the Gulf) translated by Mohammed Ameen abdullah (Ministry of Heritage, Oman, 1985), p. 171.

Queen Victoria the above mentioned islands, to her possessions or her heirs and successors after her. In proof whereof I have hereunto affixed my signature and seal, on behalf of myself and my son after me, of my own will and pleasure, without force, intimidation, or pecuniary interest whatsoever...."³⁷.

In the Gulf the Persians captured Bander Abbas in the same year as this treaty. Sa'eed was unable to recapture it and his friends the British did not assist him. He also lost Hurmuz and Kishim Islands. The decline of the Omani Empire had, indeed, started before Sa'eed's death and he himself sowed some of the seeds of decline. Before we end our consideration of Saeed's period, which alone could fill a whole thesis, it is worth shedding some light on his local policy in its relation to his foreign one, because this too had a great effect on Oman's future, even down to the present.

Sa'eed's policy created a growing community of foreign immigrants in the country. Indians, of course, had long been engaged in trade and high finance, gathering all commerce into their own hands and thrusting out native operators. But during Sa'eed's reign Omanis were pushed out of business and ignored by their own government. Sa'eed in the 30s and the 40s weakened his navy since it was required no more. He depended on British sea power. He drastically reduced what had been the largest fighting force in the Gulf. A British naval observer had recorded that if it should ever occur to Sa'eed to contend for naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean, the British would find him a very difficult foe with whom to deal. In the 40s he began to recruit Baluchi people instead of Omanis for his force. The Omanis no longer bore arms for the Muscat government. In the interior of the country (Oman) the Omanis found themselves abandoned by their state, a matter which produced some kind of co-operation or loyalty to the Wahhabis of Najd and which produced a series of disturbances and risings against the *El-bu-Sa'eed* ruling family in Oman. These revolts could have toppled the regime if there had not been British support for Elbu Sa'eed during the second half

37. Aitchison, *Collection*, p.272; Phillips, Oman, p. 130.

of the 19th and early 20th centuries³⁸. That also led the country into great confusion which even extended to the ruling family.

In 1856 Sa'eed died on his ship *Victory* near the Seychelles Islands. On his death, his Afro-Omani empire was divided. Zanzibar was separated from Muscat. Thuwaini, Sa'eed's oldest son was to rule as Sultan of Muscat and his brother Maajid was to rule as Sultan of Zanzibar, and the East coast of Africa. A new stage of Omani history and Anglo-Omani relations had been initiated³⁹.

Conclusion

British policy towards Oman during the *El-bu-Sa'eed* period seems linked first with the establishment of British influence on the Indian subcontinent; secondly, with curbing the *El-Qawasem* and the Wahhabis influence as a local challenger in the Gulf and Arabia; thirdly, with the weakening of Oman's position at the same time; fourthly, from the international standpoint, with Britain's dislike of any European power competing with her in Oman and the Gulf area. The keystone of British policy in the Gulf had, indeed, since at least the end of the eighteenth century been a concern with western Indian frontiers and generally to safeguard the British empire in India. From the eighteenth century until the early twentieth century the power which Britain most feared on the sea was France. But this was paralleled by the fear of a Russian threat in central Asia and Afghanistan, which during the 19th century led to two wars there. But in Oman the major challenge to Britain was from France. However, after the death of Imam Sa'eed bin Sultan, on 10 March 1862, a Declaration was signed at Paris between Great Britain and France, respecting the independence of Muscat and Zanzibar: "Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and His Majesty the Emperor of the French, taking into consideration the importance of maintaining the independence of His Highness the Sultan of Muscat and His Highness the

38. R J Gavin, 'The Bartle Frere Mission to Zanzibar, 1873' *Historical Journal*, 5 (1962), pp. 122-23; Miles, *Countries*, p. 354. Philips, *Oman*, pp. 108-109.

39. Graz, *Omanis* p. 13; Townsend, *Oman*, p. 43; *Uman wa Taareekhuhu al-bahree (Oman Navigation History)* p 85; Clements, *Oman*, p. 44; Coupland, *Exploitation*, p. 30.

Sultan of Zanzibar, have thought it right to engage reciprocally to respect the independence of these Sovereigns "40. This treaty was to be the basis of Franco-British relations in Oman throughout the rest of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This treaty would be brought out at any subsequent time by either Britain or France for asserting a claim or resolving a problem. It was to rule Anglo-French relations in Oman.

40. Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 304.

CHAPTER THREE

BRITISH RECOGNITION OF SULTAN FAISAL BIN TURKY

1888-1890

Introduction

The reign of Sultan Faisal bin Turkey was an unusual one in Oman's history. It was overloaded with notable events, even for a country in which local disputes were endemic. No sooner was one fight between tribes settled than another was likely to break out. Sultan Faisal came from an environment where his relatives fought each other in pursuit of their own interests, with fathers killing sons, sons killing fathers, and brothers fighting with brothers in competition for influence and for the throne. This kind of 'Shakespearian drama' was nothing new for the Albu Sa'eeds Imams and their predecessors El-Ya,aarebah, but the Faisal period was significant not simply because of such heroic events. Not only can the events be much better understood because the differences between the interests of the parties now can be traced and clarified but, above all, because great power involvement in those events made Muscat affairs not merely of local concern but of international importance.

Section Two

Social and Economic Background

Though largely a tribal country, Oman's imperial past from the 1650s till the 1850s had created a commercial bourgeois class within a framework of quasi-feudalism. But it was also a society in which ownership of the grazing lands was held in common by the members of the tribe, though nominally owned by its Sheikhs. When some dispute arose the Sheikh could settle matters between members of his tribe, and by his permission other tribes which might come under his influence could also graze on his tribe's land. This access had existed for many centuries and the meat trade in the towns that developed from it was of great economic importance. A sheikh could impose taxes on his tribal members

in return for his protection and he could also punish any of them for wrongdoing. In the case of general ownership (*Al-Awqaf*) of farms, arable or orchard, family-inheritance-ownership (*wakf-a-dhurryeh*) and mosque-ownership (*waqf-al-masjed*) could be found, and the water supply from the (*al-aflaj*) canal system had been communal since the heyday of the Persian Empire. But in general most farm ownership rested unquestionably with the Sheikh, or a wealthy person, and those who worked on the farm were either slaves or free farmers with wages. At the same time, the farm owners were likely to be seen working alongside their farm workers and slaves. A person who carried on farm work could at the same time run a commercial business, run shops, own ships, appoint agents, have clients in the coastal towns and pay taxes to the Government of Muscat. While doing so he might also pay taxes on imports from Bombay and Africa. Those imports included loads of rice, spices, sugar, coffee, other foodstuffs, fabrics, catering items, fishing and farming materials, tools for local industries and other commodities for trading and local consumption¹. Alternatively, he could buy all his requirements for the same purposes from his British-Indian agent in Muscat and the coastal towns.

The traditional Omani tax, the 'zakat', was a payment on home produce. The 'zakat' almsgiving according to Islam is one of five essential practices which a good Muslim should follow: 1, Creed 2, Prayer 3, Fasting 4, Almsgiving 5, Pilgrimage. The 'zakat' "is the legal alms and *sodeque* is [an offering] made at specific times but also covering general almsgiving". Zakat is due provided a person is ... " 1) A freeman. 2) A Muslim. 3) Of sound mind. 4) An adult. 5) In complete ownership of his or her wealth. 6) In possession of such wealth which is over and above the requirements to satisfy the essential needs of the possessor and those legitimately dependent upon him or her. 7) Free from debt. 8) In possession of a defined quantity of wealth for one complete Hijrah year"². "It is

1. F.O.54/35, report, British consulate, Muscat, 4 Oct. 1904.

2. Abdul Rehman Ansari, *Zaka-h The Religion Tax of Islam*, (Brief Guidelines), Islamic Propagation Centre, (Birmingham n.d.)

reckoned as two and half per cent of one's net wealth. It is collected by people especially appointed for the task and should be used for poor relief, which may include enabling someone to make their pilgrimage"³. In the past, when the Ruler of Oman, as Imam, was representing both the secular state and the religion, the Zakat was probably paid more willingly than it was to the Sultans. The Imam, therefore, experienced less trouble in the collection of it, though it is not known on what the Imams were spending it⁴. If they distributed it to the poor and the homeless, in other words used it for social maintenance according to Islamic instructions, then they were following what Islam meant by the 'zakat'. If not, then they were exploiting the 'zakat' for their own political purposes, though the Imam could still claim that he was taking the 'zakat' in return for looking after the nation and defending their religion. But the 'zakat' under the Sultan's rule lost its religious and social connections, and no longer served religious purposes. It became a joke and lost its reputation since it was collected to help not the desperately poor but the Sultans of Muscat! The zakat "simply amounts to an exercise, which is for the most part only paid in centres where the Sultan is represented by a Wali, [Governor] and where the Wali was strong enough to collect it"⁵. Sultan Turkey, Faisal's father, had been allowed by the British Government to introduce the zakat in 1885, and it had since remained a recognized institution⁶. But in the case of the interior of the country, the Wali had much difficulty in imposing it. The tendency, therefore, was to endeavour to collect the 'zakat' at the ports, where caravans could be detained by the Sultan until the 'zakat' was paid, and Faisal continued this practice. But the 'zakat' varied from place to place, for example at *Es-Seeb* and *Barkeh*, the Sultan farmed it out to the highest bidder. At *SSoor* and *Ja,laan* in *Esh-Sharky-eh*, Oman's Eastern

3. *Arab World Ministries*, News letter, founded as North Africa Mission 1881 (n.d. Loughborough).

4. F.O.54/33, no. 276, Cox to For.Dept., Govt. India, 22 June 1903. Major P. Z. Cox was the Political Agent at Muscat.

5. *Ibid.*

6. F.O.54/35, report, British consulate, Muscat, 4 Oct. 1904.

provinces, the Chiefs claimed part of the dates for themselves and in most cases they refused to pay duties at all, defying both the Sultan's Wali and the customs farmer. Faisal feared to take any action against them because of their possession of French papers⁷. The *Yaal Sa,ad* tribes in the North, were immune from the levy of the 'zakat' on their export of dates since the Sultan was also unable to collect it⁸.

What was British involvement in this matter? It is interesting to note that when the Sultan imposed the zakat at the ports as shown above, some of the British-Indians claimed that the dates had been bought by them as a crop and were entitled to immunity as British property, thereby in effect, helping the Omani tribes to frustrate the Sultan's efforts to collect taxes. The quantity of dates coming into Muscat was limited and there was keen competition among the British exporters for the acquisition of them⁹. The British obtained their supplies in three ways. Firstly, they could employ a trustworthy local middleman who, provided with considerable sums of money, went during the off-season to the interior of Oman where he bought, from persons he knew, the whole or a portion of the crop which they hoped to produce in the next season. He paid them either the whole or part of the price in advance. For his part, the Omani grower agreed to consign his product to the middleman when the time came. On the arrival of the dates at the ports of Muscat, accounts finally were adjusted, and the consignee paid the duty, but he could charge it to the consigner in his account if he wanted¹⁰. Secondly, the grower could consign his product to his British-Indian agent and banker in Muscat, who, if he was himself a date exporter, would buy the dates for himself, or sell them in the local market. For that he received and credited his client's account with the proceeds, after deducting his own commission, and the

7. *Ibid.*

8. F.O. 54/33, no. 276, Cox to For. Dept., Govt. India, 22 June 1903.

9. *Ibid.* See also F.O. 54/33, Hamilton to F.O., 20 Aug. 1903; Sultan of Muscat to Cox, 17 Rabi-ul- Awal (12 June 1903); no.274, Cox to Sultan of Muscat, 17 June 1903; tel. Cox to Govt. Ind., 17 July 1903; tel. no. 1646-E., For. Sec., Simla, to Cox, 21 July. 1903.

10. F.O. 54/33, no. 276, Cox to Govt. Ind., 22 June 1903.

customs duty paid¹¹. Thirdly, in some cases the British agent could send someone to the date groves during the gathering period and buy with cash on the spot, then bringing them into Muscat where he himself paid the duty.

After the Portuguese expulsion from Muscat in 1650, or probably before that, the Indians, Muslims or Hindus, seem to have carried on business as agents for the Omanis on the Muscat coast. During the period of the Omani Imams *Elya,aaribeh*, Muscat became an important commercial centre for the whole of Arabia, despite losing its political status, since it was still not the capital of Oman. The *Elya,aaribeh* did not fill the political vacuum in Muscat after the Portuguese and they were rarely to be seen there according to Engelbert Kaempfer¹². But after the coming of the Albu Sa,eedy family in 1744, Muscat seems to gain both political and commercial status, linking the old to the modern history, when it became the seat of the ruler and the capital of Oman.

Imam Hamad bin Sa,eed, grandson of the man who established the Albu-Sa,eed dynasty, shifted the capital from Rustak to Muscat (as discussed in chapter two) but it was his uncle Sultan bin Ahmed who first aroused interest in Muscat¹³, when he was Waly there during his father's lifetime. He escaped to Baluchistan when his nephew Hamad shifted the capital, but he returned to take over the city after Hamad's death.

It is very important to realize that until this period none of the Omani rulers took the title of Sultan but only that of Imam. Sultan bin Ahmed by coincidence gave his name Sultan, which had no titular significance, to his son Sa,eed. Sa,eed himself never used the title of Sultan but only that of Imam¹⁴. It is very likely that the use of Sultan as a title emerged from the reading of Sa,eed's name as 'Sa,eed bin *Sultan* of Oman' Perhaps the English order of names, the

11. *Ibid.*

12. G.Weisgerber, 'Muscat in 1688: Engelbert Kaempfer's Report', *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 5 (1979), pp. 95-101. Engelbert Kaempfer was one of the few travellers to Asia in the seventeenth century to have left us a description and drawings of Muscat.

13. R. Hughes Thomas (ed.), *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, selections from the records of the Bombay Government*, New Series, No.XXIV, 1856 (N.Y., 1985), p. 171.

14. For the Albu Sa,eed Family see the writer's previous chapter.

emigrant communities in Muscat and Zanzibar, and the expansion of Sa'eed's rule over about a half century played a significant role in Al-bu-Sa'eed taking Sultan as a title, which exists until today. In fact the Omani rulers of Muscat and Zanzibar only officially took the title of Sultan after the death of Sa'eed, 1856¹⁵.

The Imam Sultan bin Ahmed however left a strong state, and gave Muscat a strong position but his son Sa'eed preferred Zanzibar on the African coast as his capital. He consumed all his father had created in Muscat and ruled more or less like a property owner for his own personal *gloriya*, rather than a historical leader, leaving to his successors a crumbling state, and having alienated his own society and caused great damage to Oman's and Muscat's history.

However the Albu Saeed ruler who was resident in Muscat started to represent generally the commercial class be it of Omani origin, other Arabs (Bahrani) or British, French, Portuguese, Indian, Baluchis, Armenians, Georgians, Africans or Persians.

In fact this was consistent with Muscat's political, social and economic development since the thirteenth century (1265) and probably before, as an important part of the kingdom of Hurmuz, ruled by the *El-koosy* family. Muscat became a centre of entirely commercial activity and revenue, notably cosmopolitan in its links with southern Persia across the Strait, and with India and Africa across the Indian Ocean. Arab mixed with Persian Shee,ah seem to have

15. Even before that the Al-bu Sa'eed family, who are Hinawi Abadies, seem also to have adopted the title 'Seyyed', perhaps to impress the *Shee,ah* Arabs community of Muscat (of the old Hrmuz kingdom) who would not have accepted their rulers as Imam, and who at least in their social affairs, were ruled by their own real Seyyeds of *A-l-al-beyt*. The title Imam has three different meanings. For the *Shee,ah* it means the Twelve Imams, equivalent of Saints, all of whom were dead, except the last one '*Al-Mahdi al-muntadhar*' who disappeared, and no Imam emerged after him. For the Sunnies Imam means simply the Sheikh or priest of a Mosque, or congregation, as it is in Arabic literature. For the Abadies, Imam means a secular and religious ruler. The late Zeidies, Kings of Yeman, called themselves Imams. The title Seyyed is used in all Arabia, Persia and India to distinguish people who are descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's family of Ali and Fatima, (*A-l-al-beyt*), either being Priests or Commoners. But also the title Seyyed can be used as the equivalent of Mister, Owner, Master, or Sir in Arabic literature, but not by any means as in Omani tradition, which always distinguished notables by the title Sheikh and rulers by that of Imam.

some domination there throughout that period, before the Portuguese arrival which conferred a unity beyond that of tribe or nation under Persian influence¹⁶.

The Portuguese took over the political and economic power from the Hurmuzians and ruled Muscat for about a century and a half (1508-1650), bringing with them the social values of early modern Europe together with its expertise in architecture, commerce, navigation, and administration, and above all a spirit of adventure. They gave Muscat its first direct links with Europe and with the first global Empire in the world, making Muscat in effect a member of this 'International Club'¹⁷. At the time the most likely alternative to Portuguese domination was that of the Ottoman Turks.

The Portuguese seem to have kept on good terms with the ruling family of the kingdom of Hurmuz¹⁸, so that old values of the kingdom were by no means totally replaced by the new European values. Conflict between Islam and Christianity seems to have been avoided, and despite some difficulties the two cultures managed to coexist for a long period. The Portuguese presence in the Gulf gave assistance to Shah Ismae,yi who established the first Shee,e,y Empire in Iran and the Gulf in opposition to the Sunny Ottoman Turks, undermining their claim to be the new successors to the Prophet, while establishing the modern Persian identity¹⁹. His effort along with the presence of the Portuguese seem to have saved the Arabs of the Gulf from Turkanization. Apart from the Gulf and

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16. Salil Ibin Razik [Ruzayk], transl. and ed, G. P. Badger, *Imams and Seyyids of Oman* (Hakluyt Society, 1871), p. xx: "Oman was twice invaded from Persia, once by the people of Sheeraz, A.D.1265, and again a few years later by the Amir Mahmud-bin-Ahmed,el-Kusy, from Hormuz, on the mainland of Kerman, the seat of a petty principality, of Arab origin, which for the time being was subverted by the Moghuls, but was subsequently re-established on the Island of Jerun, Zarun, since called Hormuz. The kings of Hormuz continued to claim jurisdiction over the seaboard of Oman [Muscat] up to the beginning of the sixteenth century."
 17. W. de G.Birch, (ed.), *The Commentaries of the Great Alfonso Dalboquerque, Second Viceroy of India*, (Hakluyt Society, 1875), II pp.76-93.
 18. A friendly letter was sent to Abenader [Abe-Naader], the king of Hurmuz from Dalbuquerque. Birch, *Commentaries*, pp. 119-120.
 19. Sayed Amir Ali, 'Persia and Her Neighbours', *J.Cent. As. Soc.*, V (1918), pp.85-104; in 1518 Duarte Barbosa identified Shah Ismae,yia as *Xeque Ismael* in his book, *An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants*, (Hakluyt Society, 1918) 1, pp. 82-87.

Arabia, in which the Arabic culture was preserved, except those of self otonomy the Turks turkanized the entire Arab world, and both the Shee,ah and the Christian Arabs under them were badly treated. This may explain the great number of Shee,ah theologians, authors and other intellectuals, and their enormous amount of cultural production during the Safawi era. The Island of Bahrain seems to have been the centre of this culture. There were over a hundred authors in Bahrain Island alone and over eighty in Al-Ehsaa and Al-Kateef' and more else where. During the course of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries the great Bahrani author and bibliographer (Sheikh-) Yousuf bin-Ahmed Al-Mahoozi, (Al-Bahrani) and the bibliographer (Sheikh-) Ali bin-Hasan Al-Bladi, (-Al-Bahrani) left for us two expanded and invaluable bibliographies for the Shee,ah Theologians and authors²⁰. Some of them very old but most of them were of the 16th and 17th centuries. This shows that the Shee,ah Arabs of Bahrain in particular enjoyed a flourishing and mature culture during the Safawi period and that Arabic culture was highly developed by them. Certainly Bahrain had been culturally very rich throughout recorded history, but this tiny island, during the 16th, and 17th, centuries seems to have been not only in the van of Arabic culture in the Gulf but perhaps of the entire Arab world. It is interesting to note that the influence of Bahrani intellectuals and theologians (*Ulama'*) Originated from the Safawi era was not confined to their small island but extended throughout the Gulf region, south to Muscat and north to Iraq, eastward to the Persian coast and westward to the rest of Arabia until the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries²¹. This did not seem to offend the Persian nationalism of Shah Ismae,yI Al-Safawi or of his

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20. See Al-Sheikh A,li Sk. Hasan Al-Blaadi Al-Bahraani, *Anwar Albadrain: fy Traajem U,lama' Al-Katyf wal-Ahsaa' wal-Bahrain*, [The Two Full Moons: in a Discussion of the Thealuginians of Katyf, Ahsaa' and Bahrain] (Kum, A. H. 1407=1988); Al-Shaykh Yousuf bin-Ahmed Al-Bahrani, *Lu'lu'atu-l-Bahrain fy Al-e'jaasaat wa-traajim Rijaal Al-Hadeeth* [Pearl of Bahrain in Certification and Analysis of Al-Hadeeth Authorities] (Bairut, 1986).
 21. *Ibid*; Abdil-Haadi Al-Fadly, *Neyl-il-amaani Dywan Al-Sheikh Hasan Al-Demestani*, (Obtaining wishes: Book of Poems of the Sheikh Hasan Al-Demestani), (n.d. Bahrain); this also includes a number of other poets; Alhaj-Al-Sheikh Abdil-A,dzym Alrabye,y, *Dywan Alrabye,y* (n.d. Bahrain) a poetry book.

successors, and the Arabs of Bahrain shared his hostility towards the Turks while the Portuguese in Muscat too saw in Shah Ismae,yl an unexpected ally against the Turks. In Muscat, however the Shee,ah influence, seems also flourished when the city came under Nader Shah rule by the mid of the 18th century before the coming of Albu Sa,eed.

It is a tradition in Dufar to use the red dot on the forehead either by the male or female. This perhaps indicates some kind of ancient Hindu cultural influence.

The place which is known locally now as *Ddareeh^ Byby Mariam* (Lady Mariam Shrine) in Qalhat inside this place which represents a square room there still can be seen Gujarati writings on the wall above one of the shelves. Either these writings dates from the ancient town of Kalhat in the Persian Empire period or the Kingdom of Hurmuz it is possible that the Indians' presence in Oman was continued for a long time.

In Muscat the Indian Community enjoyed worshipping their Hindu deities, and burning their dead in absolute freedom. This was naturally carried on during the Portuguese era, but it was a privilege granted to them by the *Elya,aaribeh* Imams as a recognition of their support for the Omani advance against the Portuguese²². Indian culture undoubtedly was influential; its fingerprints on the whole social life in Muscat and Oman cannot be missed.

Due to the political circumstances Christianity obviously suffered a setback in Muscat after the Omani occupation but at the same time there was no unpleasant event recorded between the Hindus, Christians and Muslims of Muscat, indicating that all interests were preserved and matters were carried on in harmony.

By the time of the arrival of the Albu-Sa,eed in power, Muscat had already developed in a manner very different from that of the tribal towns of the

22. Allen Jr., Calvin H.: 'The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat' Bull. S.O.A.S., 44 (1981), 39-53.

interior of Oman. And despite the *Elyaaaribeh* era, the Hurmuzian and Portuguese influences in the city were still there, while Indians had been in Muscat long before they became British citizens. So the natural function of the Omani ruler in Muscat was to sustain this glorious city's commercial history, based on a mixture of traditions, cultures, classes, races, religions and languages, with all that meant in terms of openness, freedom, and flexibility for moderate secular kings to relax in and enjoy²³. Major Gray, British Consul in Muscat (1904-1908) reported " that fourteen languages are spoken daily in the bazaars of Muscat and Mutrah and if Arabic dialects were separately considered, this number would be greatly exceeded", and he named the fourteen languages as "Arabic, Persian, Baluchi, English, French, Swahili, Somali, Hindustani, Sindi, Gujrati, Portuguese, Pushtu, Armenian and Turkish"²⁴. With the Arabic language Swahili has also special status in Oman because it is not only spoken by the Africans but by those Omani Arabs who emigrated for a while to East Africa or have business there²⁵. Amongst them were members of the ruling family. The Sultans, however, found themselves representing the interests of all those people with multi-cultural backgrounds and dealing with the representatives of such powers as the Indian rulers, Great Britain, France, Holland and the USA, with whom they

23. Sir Edgar Collins Boehm, *The Persian Gulf and the South Sea Isles*, (1904), p. 6; W. Phillips, *Oman a History*, p. 136. Clements, *Oman*, p. 20.

24. W. G. Gray, 'Trade and Races of Oman', in *Mythic Society* 2 (1911), pp. 60-61; *Muscat: Report for the Year 1912-13 on the Trade of Muscat* (1913) [Cd. 7048-14], p. 5.

25. In addition to this fact the Omani emigrants to East Africa, despite their strong Arabic culture, and despite being representatives of old colonial power (Oman), used the Swahili language instead of the Arabic and they lost most of their Arabic background. In recent times there has been a great number of East Africans who claimed Omani origin, and bore Omani tribal titles, by right or by fraud and therefore the right to return to Oman, bringing with them a fresh Swahili language, from different parts of East Africa: Rawanda, Borondi, Kenya, Tanganika and Zanzibar, and it is spoken widely in Oman today. In Muscat the Baluchi, Persian and the Sindy languages are also widely used. Other than that there are local languages which are still alive in Oman: the Shih^{hi}, of Shihuhh Omani tribes of Musandam, on the strait of Hurmuz; the Jabbali, similar to Amharic in Dufar; the Hursusi, similar to Arabic in the desert of Jedd^{et}-el-Harasys, in Rub-el-Khali desert (the empty quarter). To know more about the Shih^{hi} language, see Bertram Thomas, 'The Musandam Peninsula and its people the Shihu' *J. Cent. As. Soc.* 16 (1929), 71-85, and for the Baluchi language, see Demetrius Boulger (ed.), 'Baluchistan and the new Indian Province', *Asiatic. Q. Rev.*, V (1888), pp. 54-64, and C.E. Yate, Col. 'Baluchistan' *Proceed. ent. As. Soc.*, 14 (1906), pp. 3-39.

had established diplomatic relations and signed commercial treaties. They came under various influences and sought foreign recognition. Therefore the Omani Imams (then Sultans) became distinguished from those Shaikhs of the interior by this type of non-tribal society. They depended on the loyalty of their State military and labour force. Their income rested upon their international reputation, political and commercial commitment, imports and exports, customs and taxes, and on their involvement in the policy of the colonial powers²⁶. Like their predecessors, apart from the Ya,aarebeh, the Sultans of Muscat mainly ruled only the coastal regions of the country, leaving the interior to the traditional tribal leaders who resisted commercial innovation as well the Sultan's exercise of sovereignty and, consequently, the right of taxation. The Sultan's function was likely to be similar to that of the Hurmuzian kingdom and the Portuguese. They were only lords of the country's ports, and did not have to respond to the influence of the El-Ya,aaribeh in the interior. They did not rule the Omani tracial coast at all, they simply inherited part of the Portuguese and the Hurmuzian political influence at Muscat. But despite the dependence of the Sultans on commercial activities and taxes from the ports, they could not avoid friction and conflict with the tribes about, for example, taxing their crops when reaching ports under the Sultan's direction. In addition, there was the innovation of an economic system based on capital investment. Interest on loans, *Riba* or *Sood* in local Omani, for example, is completely forbidden in Islam but the Sultans allowed it. This was contrary to Islamic instruction, and had its impact on the political system. It caused conflict between the old religious and political philosophy, by which an Omani government should be led by an elected Ibady Imam who forbade that practice and whose power base was entirely tribal, agricultural and religious, and that of

26. H. W. Maclean, Trade with Muscat Region, (H.M.S. O. 1904), p. 5.; Muscat: Report for the Year 1912-13 on the Trade of Muscat (1913) [Cd. 7048-14],,p. 5.; F.O. Confidential Print (9161)[4920] No.1. Memorandum respecting British Interests in the Persian Gulf Jan. 1914.

the Sultanate (monarchy) with a base that was capitalist, commercial and non-tribal.

Industry was essentially manual, involving family workers, mainly in boat-building, clay, *Omani-halwa* sweets, textiles, fish, salt, oil, lime and dates, leather crafts and work by blacksmiths and goldsmiths. Some of these activities could be carried on by local Arabs and others by immigrants, Baluchis, Persians, Indians, and freed slaves.

When any of the Albu Sa'eed family took control he had to keep the above facts in mind, as did any rival from the Sultan's family. In general, the Sultan's function in fact was complicated. As lord of the ports he had to hold the balance between the tribal and commercial interests, between the maritime powers, especially the British, and the powers behind him in the Arabian desert. If he miscalculated he would suffer the consequences from both sides.

Sultan Faisal seems to have been in a situation like that. To understand the circumstances in which he succeeded his father Turki after the latter's death in 1888, on the recommendation of the British Government, and to understand his relations with foreign powers, it is necessary to examine the era after his grandfather's death.

Section Three

Immediate Historical Background

The period after 1856 saw the decline of Sa'eed's Empire, as discussed in chapter two. The British favoured the independence of Zanzibar, under Majid, from Muscat, under Thuwaini, and hence the division of their friend's kingdom. But the Sultan of Muscat, Thuwaini, did not accept the separation because Zanzibar was much richer than Muscat, and its loss was a greater blow to him than that of southern Persia. It would be difficult to maintain his government on the limited resources of Oman so he decided to retain Zanzibar by force. In 1858 he mobilised his navy for this purpose, but the Government of India immediately sent

Colonel Russell in H.M.S. *Punjab* to stop Thuwainy's expedition before it reached Zanzibar.

In Zanzibar Bargash, another son of Sa'eed, led a coup right after his father's death to takeover from his elder brother Majid, but the Government of India interfered and persuaded him that Majid should rule first²⁷.

Having prevented Thuwainy from going ahead with his Zanzibar project, the British Government of India desired to maintain peace and stability in an area lying on the sea route to India and to safeguard it. This objective became the keystone of British imperial policy in the region. To carry out this policy required the exercise of influence on the seas adjoining India. It required a network of British Residents backed up by a strong navy. Gunboat diplomacy was of prime importance. But why was India so important during this period?. India supplied some of the essential raw materials required for the industrial revolution in England, and offered an ideal market for British manufactures at the same time. To safeguard this route was of great importance and an appropriate policy would be carried out to satisfy the imperial desire, and that meant keeping both Muscat and Zanzibar under its influence.

The British Government of India realized the economic loss caused to Oman by the Zanzibar separation, but they offered a solution that Zanzibar should make an annual payment to Oman as a subsidy of 40,000 Maria Theresa dollars²⁸. This was a most disgraceful position for the Omani rulers of Muscat to accept.

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27. Thuwainy's son Hamed ruled Zanzibar after the death of Bargash, (see chapter five; The case of Abdul aziz); subsequent rulers of Zanzibar were his descendants down until Sultan Jamsheed of Zanzibar, who is living now in exile in London after the Zanzibar coup in 1965. For the situation in Zanzibar after Saeed's death see, *Mudthakkiraat Al-Ammeerah Saleme ebnat Alsayyed Sa'eed bin Sultan, Sultan muscat wa zinjibar. (Memoirs of Princess Salma, the daughter of the Sayyed Sa'eed ben Sultan, The Sultan of Muscat and Zanzibar)* (Oman, 1985), p.160. Ministry of Heritage publication. Salma, known also as Emily Reute, was mother of Reute Sa'eed, the biographer of his grandfather. Phillips, *Oman: A History*, p 136; Clements, *Oman*, p 20. There was a saying of the people of Zanzibar which illustrates their bad feeling about Bargash: it says (in Arabic) *kad blana-allahu, be thalathatin; albakku, wal-bargoothu, wal-Bargashu*. (From heaven, three plagues God threw on us. Fleas, bugs, and the Bargash)
28. Coupland, *Exploitation*, pp. 14, 20-37; Townsend, *Oman*, p. 43; Judd, *Victorian Empire*, p.95; Brown, *Economics*, p. 84; R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, (1940), p. 105; Clements, *Oman*, p. 45; Phillips, *Oman : A History*, p. 8.

This ruling of Lord Canning, the Governor-General of India, did not last very long. The payment was suspended by Majid after his economic collapse. The British, consistent with their imperial policy, decided the payment would instead be made by the Government of India, so as to avoid any possible conflict and to promote the consolidation of their political paramountcy in the Gulf. Their policy from now on depended on skilful diplomatic expediciencies to preserve strategic positions like Muscat²⁹.

In 1864 and 1865 the Government of India concluded two agreements with Thuwainy for an imperial telegraph line, which should be protected in the areas under Muscat control both in Oman and Baluchistan.

During the second half of the 19th century Muscat was hit by a severe commercial depression because of: (1) separation from the old source of wealth in East Africa, so that the country fell into internal political trouble: (2) the removal of Omani dominance over the Gulf region, and the shifting of the centre of international interest from Muscat to Aden, by the opening of the Suez canal, had deeply contributed to Muscat's problem³⁰.

Between 1864 and 1868 the city became almost bereft of trade and the economy of Oman totally collapsed. This made it difficult for Thuwainy to consolidate his power over the country.

Thuwainy was killed while he was asleep in 1866. He was murdered by his son Salem. His assassination came when he was preparing to march against the Wahhabis of Arabia, who had raided his territories. Soon after shooting his father, Salem forcibly consolidated his position of power in Oman³¹.

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- 29. B. R. Pridham, *Oman: Economic and Strategic Development*, (1987), p.8; Aitchison, *Collection*, pp. 305-7.
 - 30. Gavin, 'Bartle Frere Mission', p. 123; Landen, *Oman*, p.13; Hitti, *Near East*, p.471. In the year 1840 the West Indian and Far East mail service had begun; for that and for steam navigation development, see A. Redford, *Economic History of England 1760-1860* (1960), p. 99; Pauline Gregg, *A Social and Economic History of Britain, 1760-1965*, (1965), p. 109.
 - 31. Alsalmi, *Uman Tareekh*, p. 167; Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, p.173; Captain P. H. Colomb, *Slave Catching in the Indian Ocean*, (1873) pp. 120-23: the author saw Sultan Turki in his exile in Bombay.

Having no alternative, the British government of India recognized Salem as Sultan of Muscat. Turkey, another son of Sa'ed and who was jailed by his brother Thuwainy, was released from his jail and was determined to overthrow his nephew Salem, but the Government of India interfered and took Turkey to exile in Bombay. Salem did not last more than three years when he was forced to leave Muscat after a revolt led in 1869 by Azzan bin Qais, his brother-in-law and one of Ahmed bin Sa'eed's descendants. This time the Government of India did nothing to help Salem; instead they offered him a vessel to escape in and a place of exile. Nevertheless, with this revolt British-Omani relations took another turn.

Overall the period between 1862-1891 was marked by a gradual extension of the British influence in Oman³², but at the end of the sixties this influence seemed threatened with takeover by the Imam Azzan, and the British Government feared general uncertainty in the whole region because of the religious orientation which shaped Imam Azzan's government and its possible links with Arabia's fanatical religious movement. Although Azzan was from the Albusa'eed family, he did not take the secular title of Sultan unlike the previous two rulers Thuwainy and his son Salem, but retained the religious one of Imam³³. When Imam Azzan overthrew Salem, Turkey, father of the future Sultan Faisal and currently held in Bombay by the Government of India, was released and given significant help to recruit forces from different parts of the Gulf. He also received support from his brother Majid of Zanzibar. Pelly, the British Resident in the Gulf, supported Turkey by all means possible. By this support Turkey managed to attack Muscat from the *El-Batneh* coast. He reached Mutrah Walls and engaged with Azzan's force, Azzan himself being killed at Mutrah in 1871. The battle between Azzan and Turkey witnessed the bloodiest conflict between two rivals of the Albu Sa'eed family, one of them was to be Imam and the second was to be a

32. Bathhurst, 'Maritime Trade and Imamet Government', *Arabian Peninsula: society and politics*, ed, Hopwood, D.(1972), p.18.

33. For more details about the British stand towards the Imam Azzan see, Ravinder Kumar, 'British Attitude Towards the Ibadyyah Revivalist Movement in East Arabia', *International Studies*, (New Delhi) 3 (1962), 443-50.

sultan on the throne of Muscat³⁴. But the Sultan had won Muscat in that competition.

A dispute broke out between the British political agents and officials in the Gulf and Bombay on the one hand and the Viceroy John Lawrence in Calcutta on the other. No reports about Turkey's attack at Muscat were passed on from Bombay to Calcutta until Turkey's operation against Azzan had ended. After hearing that, the Viceroy of India, John Lawrence, protested angrily against the absence of information, and complained to London about his subordinate's behaviour in Bombay³⁵. He requested that the whole control of frontier policy should be put firmly in the hands of the supreme government. However this problem was solved, and general agreement was reached between London and Bombay that Turkey should be supported. Money was the only means by which Turkey could survive, and the British provision of that would put Muscat under effective British control. But where should the money come from? One possible way would be to renew the old Zanzibar subsidy arranged by Lord Canning for Thuwainy of Muscat from Maajid of Zanzibar after the death of Sa'eed bin Sultan³⁶. The British decided to use their influence with the Sultan of Zanzibar to restore payment of the subsidy indirectly, through Foreign and India Office channels. Eventually the Sultan of Zanzibar agreed to pay and the problem was solved in such a way as to put Muscat totally in the hands of the British Indian Government. The subsidy was used effectively to dictate British policy to the Omani Sultans not only on foreign relations but even on domestic and administrative matters.

34. Phillips, *Oman a History*, p. 142; Wilson, *Taareekh Al Khaleej [The History of the Gulf]* p.173; Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Salmi and Najy Assaf, (in Arabic) *UMAN TAAREEKH YATAKALLEM, [Oman oral History]* (Damascus, 1963), p.168-169; R.J.Gavin, 'The Bartle Frere Mission to Zanzibar, 1873', *The Historical Journal*, 5 (1962), pp. 125, 131. Imam Azzan bin Kias lies in a cemetery in *Haret Esshimal* in Mutrah beyond the fish market *Sook Essamek* now Qaboos Harbour.

35. John Lawrence was Viceroy of India from 1863 till 1869.

36. For the Zanzibar question see, Ravendar Kumar, 'Dismemberment of Oman and the British Policy Towards the Persian Gulf', *Islamic Culture*, 36. (1962), 8-19.

In fact during that period it became particularly important to keep Muscat under British control. In the first place they had now reason to fear Ottoman penetration of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean because the opening of the Suez Canal gave their Navy an opening to the South East of the Islamic world and an opportunity to interfere in a sphere of British influence. This penetration might take advantage of nationalist and religious feelings in Oman³⁷. Secondly the Persian Gulf had become of crucial significance for British imperial strategy. The fact was that before the middle of the century steam navigation had started to revolutionize communications in the world, extending the involvement and interests of many powers around the globe, reducing travelling time between the continents, and bringing unprecedented complications which could make even small domestic issues of international concern. Britain as a world power and as an innovator of that new energy was in the vanguard of this revolution. From 1840 a British mail service by steam navigation from London to India and the Far East was initiated and the Gulf (Oman in particular) was at the centre of the mail route to India. Later, likewise, when the telegraph was founded, Oman and the Gulf became a strategic junction for the imperial telegraphic lines constructed between Europe and India. At this time too, a new steam navigation system, was founded in the Persian Gulf region as well and it also became of great commercial importance for Britain. At the same time this modern communication system could connect the Gulf area with other powers of the world such as Germany, France, Russia, and the USA which could threaten British ascendancy in the region, especially in the Indian Ocean³⁸. Due to these circumstances the British Government sought to consolidate its political and diplomatic influence in the Gulf. Oman was the prime example. The British exercised what was known as indirect rule. This policy when carried out in Oman, especially by Edward

37. Gavin, 'Bartle Frere', pp. 126-34, 218.

38. F.C.Danvers, 'The Sea Route to India' and 'The Persian Gulf Route and Commerce', *Asiatic Quarterly Rev.* 5 (1888), pp. 21-3 and 412-13.

Ross, the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, was so explicit as to leave no doubt about it at all.

Turky was a completely loyal and firm ally of the British. In 1873 he signed a fresh agreement with Britain to forbid slave trading entirely. It was clear that the agreements concluded with his father Sa'eed did not work. The signing of this treaty increased the weakness of Muscat's economy which Britain was trying to sustain and it resulted in more Omani migration to Zanzibar. It also produced a severe political problem for Turkey and subsequently his son Faisal. Soon after the signing of this treaty unrest in Turkey's possessions in Baluchistan on the north west frontiers by the Baluchi tribes had begun. They revolted because of the collapse of their business. This also made the situation on the north-west frontier of India more complicated. The Baluchi tribes attacked commercial caravans, and British telegraph offices, cutting the imperial telegraph line in 1875. W. Phillips noticed that Turkey had signed the treaty for his own benefit, having been bribed a total of 60,000 Maria Theresa dollars by Sir Bartle Frere. But the slave trade did not stop³⁹. Five years after Turkey's death, during his son Faisal's reign, the Political Resident at Bushire wrote a letter to the Secretary of State to the Government of India on 25 March 1893 informing him of seven slaves having been imported from Melindi on the East African coast into Oman in 1892⁴⁰. Turkey's policy was hated by his own people, who did not stop revolting against him. Without British support against his own subjects he would have been overthrown, and his family's rule brought to an end. He was fully assisted even against his own family members, for instance his brother Abdul Aziz. In 1874 the Sultan Turkey had been unable to cope with a rebellious cousin, Ibraheem bin Kais. Accordingly, British subjects suffered from the consequent disturbances. The

39. For this account see, Landen, *Oman*, pp.213, 231-233, 262ff., 270, [Landen's book was translated into Arabic by Mohammed Ameen Abdullah under *Uman munthu 1856 masseeran wa maseera*, Ministry of Heritage Oman]; Frank A.Clements, *Oman: World Bibliography*, (Oxford 1981), p. xii. Phillips, *Oman: a History*, pp. 143, 147; Wilson, *History of the Gulf*, p. 173; Aitchison, *Collection*, XI pp.308-309.

40. F.O. 54/26 Political Agent in Muscat to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 16 March 1893.

British fleet took active measures against Ibraheem's force, shelled them out of their fort at *Messen,ah* town on the coast and exacted an indemnity from them as compensation to British subjects. In 1877, the tribal coalition of El-sharkeyeh under the leadership of El-hurth attacked Muscat and Mutrah. The Sultan was not in a position to protect himself, so H.M.S. *Teazer* interfered to assist the Sultan in defending the town of Muscat from the sea, thereby causing the rebels to retire. In 1882 and 1883 Mutrah and Muscat were attacked again by Abdul Aziz bin Sa'eed and the Sultan appealed to the Political Agent for help, and the *Philomel* shelled the rebellious camps, thus preventing their advance into Muscat⁴¹. In 1886 Ibraheem bin kais attacked Sowaik, another town on the coast and captured its fort. Immediately the Resident proceeded to Sowaik and warned Ibraheem that if he did not withdraw peacefully the British Government's interference would become inevitable. Ibraheem thereupon pulled out from Sowaik⁴².

Turky and the British were sincere friends apart from only a slight dispute over British Indian subjects resident in Muscat who were evading customs duties. Turkey regarded the Indian muslims (*Lawatyeh*) as his own citizens and treated them according to the rules which Omanis had to follow in the matter of customs duties. But the Government of India insisted that the Lawatyas were British subjects. The customs issue was revived by the Government of India during the arms trade dispute in 1898-1899 during the reign of Faisal. In 1873 Turkey had signed an agreement which gave the British political agent jurisdictional rights over subjects of the native states of India residing in Muscat⁴³. Before the end of Turkey's reign the arms trade had already started between Birmingham and Muscat and the British suggested restriction on arms importation into Muscat in 1888 in respect to the situation on the North West of India. On 12

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41. F.O. 54/27, Govt of Ind. F. D., secret external, 8 Sep 1890; No. 69 Encl. 1, Major C.E. Yate to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 23 Feb. 1890; *The Persian Gulf Administration reports*, vol. III, No. 140, Lieutenant-Colonel E. C. Ross to Charles Grant, Sec. Govt. Ind. F.D., 17 July 1884.
 42. F.O. 54/27, Muscat Political Agent to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 23 Feb. 1890.
 43. Phillips, *Oman: a history*, p. 143.

July 1888 Colonel E.C.Ross. Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, wrote to the Secretary to the Government of India's Foreign department about a suggestion giving the Sultan Turkey power to restrict importation of arms and ammunition into Muscat's territories. But the matter was not taken seriously and was left to be dealt with as and when the occasion should arise⁴⁴.

Section Four

The Challenge to the Sultan

The Sultan Turkey died on 3 June 1888, and his son Faisal assumed the government⁴⁵. But he was not recognized until 1890 by the British government as Sultan. According to British sources, Faisal's succession took place without advice or assistance from officers of the Government of India, and his recognition as new ruler only came when it had become clear that his elder brother did not oppose him and that no other aspirants were able to oust him⁴⁶. His ability to maintain his position for a year and nine months justified his recognition⁴⁷. From the beginning he expressed his wish to rely on British advice and to administer his government in such a way as to keep on friendly terms with Great Britain. Theodore Bent has provided us with an account of Faisal's succession: "The way in which *Feysul* obtained possession of the Sultan's palace on his father's death, to the exclusion of his brother is curious. *Feysul* said his grief for his father was so great that his feelings would not admit his attending the funeral, so he stayed at home while Mahmoud [*Muhhammed*] went, who on his return found the door locked in his face". Mr Bent, who saw Sultan Faisal twice during his childhood and during his adulthood when he became Sultan, explained why the elder brother *Muhhammed* [Mahmood] could not be Sultan of Muscat: he was the son of a negress, and therefore could not be considered a suitable person to inherit the

44. F.O. 54/25. No.218, encl. 5, (Bushire), Ross to Grant, 12 July 1888.

45. Nabil. M. Kailani, 'Politics and Religion in Uman: Historical Overview', *J. Middle East Stud.*, 10 (1979), 567-579; Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 278.

46. F.O. 54/27, I.O. to F.O., 25 May 1891.

47. F.O. 54/27, Tel., Viceroy to F.O., 13 May 1891.

throne of Muscat⁴⁸. He was according to Colonel Ross, the Political Resident, "somewhat disqualified by appearance, manner, &c., from becoming ruler of the Muscat State, and was, more or less with his acquiescence, put aside"⁴⁹. But this was not the only reason. Muhammed bin Turkey seems to have been considered by his own father, Sultan Turkey unfit to hold Muscat. During his father's reign in 1884, he had been given a chance to rule at Suhar but he showed his incapacity for that task⁵⁰.

News of Faisal's succession came in *The Times* on 8 June 1888, in an extremely brief announcement which did not even name him or his father: "Bombay June 7th. The second son of the Sultan of Muscat has peaceably succeeded to the Sultan⁵¹". However the Sultan telegraphed to the Queen and the Viceroy, informing them of his taking over and soliciting their protection. He wrote to the Political Agent in Muscat trusting that the friendship which used to exist between the British Government and his father might be continued with him. He offered to carry out orders steadfastly, and solicit the protection and favour of the British Government in whom was his trust⁵². He undertook to be guided in all important matters of policy by the advice of the British Government⁵³. The Sultan also communicated with the Chiefs of his own country, writing to them to announce his assumption of power. He received from most of them replies of loyalty and no problems occurred during his succession. The local powers who had opposed his father were uncertain as to whether or not the British Government would maintain the same policy of support promised to his father⁵⁴. In fact the

48. Theodore Bent and Mrs Theodore Bent, *Southern Arabia* (1900), pp.56-57.

49. Ross to Sir H. M. Durand, 21 June 1889, in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1890*, (Archive Eds.,1986),p. 5.

50. F.O. 54/27, Resident to For. Dept., Govt. Ind.,17 Nov. 1884; no. 166, 29 May 1888.

51. *The Times*, 8 June 1888.

52. F.O. 54/27, Major C. E. Yate, Political Agent, Muscat, to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 23 Feb. 1890; Wilson, *History* (1902), pp. 174, 428; R. Albusaid-Reute, 'Albusaid Dynasty'.

53. Bertram Thomas, 'Arab Rule Under the al bu Sa'id Dynasty of Oman 1741-1937', *Proc. British Academy*, (1938), p.43.

54. F.O. 54/27, C. E. Yate, Political Agent, Muscat, to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 23 Feb. 1890.

British Government's recognition was not at first accorded to Faisal, possibly because the way in which he had assumed power might produce conflict with his brother⁵⁵. After his assumption of power, the Sultan himself was in dread of his brother Muhammad, and the two never met without their own escorts to protect them from each other⁵⁶. But the real threat did not come to the Sultan from Muhammad, who finally accepted his younger brother's succession without demur, but came from his uncle, Abdul Aziz bin Sa'eed⁵⁷.

On 1 July 1888 Abdul Aziz did claim the throne of Muscat. In a letter to the Resident he expressed his hope for support from the British Government⁵⁸. On 12 July the Resident replied that the interests of the British government were essentially concerned with the maintenance of tranquillity and the prosperity of the people of Oman under rulers of their own choice⁵⁹...

On 10 August Abdul Aziz wrote an interesting letter to Lieutenant-Colonel Mockler, the Political Agent in Muscat, expressing his views about his position and about the Omani people. "If the people of Oman had regulations or even sense to understand the advantages and honour and ease that would accrue to them from choosing by them of rulers who would strengthen the pillars of their kingdom, improve their country, attend to the welfare of the people, and endeavour to direct them for their good, as is the custom amongst other people, they would doubtless be in the greatest prosperity and peace such as is the desire of the great Government". He did not agree with the British Government that the Omani people should elect their own rulers, denying their capacity to make that kind of choice, because, "in the condition of the people of Oman there is great difficulty, for, what are the people of Oman except miserable animals, who follow

55. B.Thomas, *Arab Rule*, p.46.

56. Bent, *South Arabia*, p. 56.

57. *Ibid*; Col. Atkins Hamerton saw Abdul Aziz in 1855 when he was five years old; see *Arabian Gulf Intelligence*, p. 237.

58. F.O. 54/27, Yate to Resident, 23 Feb. 1890; Political Agent, Muscat, to Resident, 1 July 1888. For more details about Abdul Aziz bin Sa'eed's political activities in Oman see, Ravinder Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf Region 1858-1907* (1955), pp. 69-73.

59. F.O. 54/27, Resident to Political Agent, Muscat, 12 July 1888.

any one who calls them, who turn with every breeze, who are unilluminated by the light of learning." He asked, "how can one expect them to have the knowledge and ability to choose fit rulers ?". He explained the psychological and political attitude of the Omanis towards their Governments or rulers, which could mislead observers, including the British. He said that the Omanis were two-faced behind their appearance of loyalty, fleeing from rulers and from laws as they would from a lion. But their truly "highest desire is that one should rule over them who is weak in intellect, poor in judgement and without energy, who will neither command nor forbid, so that each one may be a separate ruler and engage in strife and the spreading of discord, that there shall be no one to stop them, that the strong may oppress the weak, then will the land and its stock be ruined; and such are their doings at present (may God's wrath not overtake them)". It is clear that he meant by this not only the ordinary Omani people but their tribal leaders. He asked again, "how can there be expected from people in such condition good deeds and the choosing of rulers fit to guide them?" He answered "it was absurd to expect that, for they were utterly lacking in good deeds and integrity, but by nature imbued with evil and strife, and when I saw that matters had come to this pass from the abundance of strife and the growing boldness of lawless persons I perceived that the resumption of the law of God and the suppression of innovations, the restraining of the tyrant and the protection of the oppressed," was necessary. He gave himself the responsibility of bringing the people to a state of discipline so as to achieve his aim of securing their and the country's tranquillity, by the deeds which would give him most propinquity to God and it was his duty to achieve this with God's assistance. It was however impossible for him to accomplish his desire and he accused the British Government of misunderstanding his intentions and stressed how far he would go. If only Britain would "understand my desire and intentions and see that I have drawn the sword to accomplish them, they will certainly excuse me, since they will know that I only desire what is right and to improve the condition of Oman". Finally he appealed

for assistance to restore order in the country, and he could not believe that "the English Government, which is one of the most glorious and is the greatest of civilized powers, should in the case of a people who have reached the point of ignorance and stupidity and wretchedness that the people of Oman have now and, if able to turn them into another path and give assistance for their benefit, be anything except desirous to hasten to do so". He believed that, "the people of Oman are their neighbours and very much in need of the assistance of the Great English Government". Finally he demanded from the Resident: "I ask you to kindly inform me whether I shall receive assistance from the Great Government in doing what I propose for the settlement of Oman". He assured him that if the British Government was pleased to give him only a little help he would be able to accomplish it easily and without any bloodshed⁶⁰.

Abdul Aziz did not receive a positive response to his appeal from the British Government. One year later on 13 July 1889 he wrote to the Political Agent in Muscat and the Resident in Bushire informing them of his intention of attacking Muscat⁶¹. He trusted that his undertaking would be accorded support by the British Government. On 29 July he led his force towards Muscat with some aid from *El-Hijryien*, but he was defeated near the Kazah-pass by the Sultan's troops, and he was compelled, as his followers dispersed, to retire to his headquarters in Samad al-Sha,n⁶². In January 1890 Abdul Aziz made another attempt but he did not succeed in bringing about co-operation with the El,sharkyeh co-alition under the Sheikh Saleh bin Ali, and he failed to get enough supporters for his campaign. Sheikh Saleh bin Ali had supported Abdul-Aziz's campaign against his brother Turkey due to ill-feeling against the Sultan, but now after the death of Turkey, his zeal perceptibly had cooled. Shaikh Saleh now had no wish to see Abdul-Aziz in power, as he once had done. Saleh had established a

60. F.O. 54/27, Translation of a letter from Seyyid Abdul Aziz to Lieutenant-Colonel Mockler, Political Agent, Muscat 1 Dil Hujj 1305=10 Aug. 1888.

61. Col. E. C. Ross to W. J. Cuninghame, 23 June 1890, in *The Persian Gulf Administrative Reports 1873-1947*, vol III, (Archive Eds.,1986), p.23.

62. F.O. 54/27, Agent to Resident, 26 July 1889; Agent to Resident, 8 Aug. 1889.

position of power and influence which he was not prepared to give up for the sake of Abdul Aziz. As it was he could place himself in a position to control the balance between the two rival parties⁶³. With him were the Chiefs of the people. Their aim was to maintain a division of power so as to prevent any one of the Albu Sa,eedi wings becoming strong enough to tax them all with impunity, and yet at the same time to retain in their hands a lever sufficiently powerful to extract benefits and money for themselves from the Sultan when an opportunity should come. Shaikh Saleh then rebuffed Abdul-Aziz and he showed his alliance, support and friendship for the Sultan by informing him of Abdul-Aziz's coalition proposals. "His Highness Sayid Feysal, now believing in the rumours, lost no time in reinforcing the garrisons of Muscat and Muttrah, whilst Sheikh Saleh sent a direct message to the chiefs in charge of the several passes to prepare for the enemy"⁶⁴. So Abdul Aziz had only the support of another Al-Busa,eedy party with only a few followers under Hamud and Sa,ud, sons of the late Imam Azzan, and a small party under Sheikh Humood el-Jahhafi, a freebooter. Failing to recruit supporters for his bid he went to Rustak seeking the hospitality of Ibraheem bin Kais Brother of Imam Azzan and head of another religious party.

Major C.E. Yate, the new Political Agent in Muscat, was surprised that these two persons had never met before and at their forming an alliance against the party of Albu Sa,eedi of Muscat, given the differences in their views as to of the kind of Government which should be established in Oman. From his letter to British Officials, it was apparent that Abdul-Aziz, though a believer, wanted to rule as a secular Sultan and not as Imam, while Ibraheem was ambitious to have the religious title of his Brother Azzan and to rule as an Imam. So each sought power for himself according to different ideological assumptions and each became convinced that victory was impossible by his own efforts alone. They began to think in terms of cooperation. But, according to the Political Agency, although

63. F.O. 54/27, Resident to For. Dep., Govt. Ind., 29 May 1888.

64. Ross to Cuninghame, 23 June 1890 in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1883-1890* vol. III, (A.E., 1986).

Ibraheem had given a friendly welcome to Abdu-Aziz, he had no intention of giving him any active support. If that was the case then it may explain why those two rivals were not able to meet together before. But, as we saw, the political situation had changed in Oman after the death of Turki, as rival groups everywhere made alliances, dissolved alliances, or fought one another according to what best suited their interests at the time. The friend of today could become the enemy of tomorrow and vice versa. Thus in Oman the old alliance between Abdul-Aziz and Sheikh Saleh of Oman Eastern province diminished while the new alliance between Abdul Aziz and Ibraheem, despite their differences, developed.

What would each gain from the other? Since 1887 it was supposed by British officials that in the event of such a coalition Ibraheem would make the price of his support for Abdul-Aziz's claim for the throne of Muscat the cession of Sohar or possibly of all the Batinah coast. That might be a fair division between the two which could fulfil their ambitions and also keep them away from each other. Perhaps the British noted the agreement of 1839 between Abdul Aziz's father Imam Sa'eed bin Sultan and his cousin Humood bin Azzan, Ibraheem's uncle killed his son Seif, fearing his ambitions⁶⁵. In this event, neither Abdul-Aziz nor Ibraheem benefited. The Chief's coalition, on the other hand, was more successful. The chiefs of Oman Eastern province carried out their new policy of holding the balance between the power of Abdul-Aziz and Ibrahim and the power of Faisal. In their campaign against the new alliance of Ibraheem and Abdul-Aziz in Rustak the coalition of *El-Sharkyeh* Chiefs initially showed their support for the

65. The treaty was signed through the mediation of Captain Hennell, the British Resident. It even distinguished subjects of Humood (bin Azzan I, bin Qais I bin Ahmed bin Sa'eed) from those of his cousin (Sa'eed bin Sultan bin Ahmed bin Sa'eed). The British Government entered in an engagement with Humood's son, Seif in 1849, who, it seems, took over Sohar from his father, for the abolition of the slave trade in Sohar. Fearing his final desire, Humood killed his son Seif, and ruled Sohar again but his rule did not last there. Thuwainy, the future Sultan of Muscat, had arrested Humood and kept him in Muscat prison until he died in 1850 (Thuwainy, later, himself was killed by his son Salem in Sohar). Qais II, Humood's brother and Azzan II's (Imam) and Ibraheem's father raised against Thuwainy but then he was persuaded to retreat and to accept the offer of ruling Rustak and probably Ibri. For more details see Aitchison, *Treaties*, pp. 285-86, 320-322.

Sultan and their willingness to accompany and fight beside him. They recruited their men and sent them to fight under the leadership of the Sultan. But when things began to look difficult they pulled out, and the Sultan's expedition was abruptly brought to an end. They had managed to get all they could out of the Sultan, but they had no intention of fighting or of ousting Ibraheem. When the Alliance made a fresh advance against Muscat, the Chiefs and their troops came to support the Sultan. They flocked into Muscat, lived in free quarters and got all the money they could, but, according to the British sources, even if the Sultan himself had been attacked, not one of them would have stirred hand or foot to drive the attackers away. That situation cost the Sultan dear; more than a lakh of rupees, which went to the benefit of the Chiefs in the shape of food or presents.

At the same time the Omani people's attitude towards the Sultan and the response Abdul-Aziz received during his campaign proved that he was wrong in his judgement that the Omanis, because of their illiteracy, would follow any one prepared to lead them. If that had been true he should have succeeded in his campaign to assume the throne of Muscat. Such opinions were strange about the people he wanted to rule. He did not fail simply because he did not have the money to purchase the tribal leaders adherence, as the Sultan had managed to do for a while, but seems he to have failed to win over the Omanis by his own personal qualities⁶⁶ The opinion expressed in the Persian Gulf Residency about Abdul Aziz personally was that he was a little too much of an autocrat, but best fitted, by education, to succeed his late brother on the throne of Muscat. If so what went wrong with him and why did the British government not support him? The reasons were as follows:

1: Abdul-Aziz had no son. So, in the event of his death without an heir, the succession might again be disputed, and fresh difficulties would arise.

2: Sultan Faisal bin Turkey had a son and had no problem of that kind . He had governed for a year and nine months, and though he was not experienced

66. F.O. 54/27, Political Res. to For.Sec., 29 May 1888.

at first, he was managing to solve some of his problems in time. He also did his best to meet the wishes of the British Government "and he appears to meet the promise to be able and willing to fulfil all the conditions we require".

3: In showing the Sultan merely their nominal support the Chief's party in fact strengthened Sultan Faisal's political position in the eyes of the British Government. It appeared to them that the majority of the people of Oman had no wish to disturb Faisal's Government. Accordingly they concluded "that in recognizing Saiyid Faisal we shall be giving effect to the wishes of the chiefs and people of the country ⁶⁷".

4: The British subjects, both Hindu *Baniyan* and Muslem Khojas, or *Lawatiyeh* as the local Omani called them, were confined entirely to the coast towns and held the trade of Oman in their hands. The value of the property they owned amounted to many lakhs of rupees. Any plunder by the Omanis from the interior would impose heavy losses upon them. Therefore British policy as far as these British subjects were concerned, "seems to be principally concerned in securing a ruler able and willing to give effect to the wishes of the British Government, and strong enough so to fortify and hold the coast towns as to give due protection to our subjects therein⁶⁸".

Abdul-Aziz made a lot of effort to incite the people of Oman to revolt against the Sultan but he ended in frustration, a result which indicated the weakness of his cause. He took refuge with Sheikh of Abu-Dhaby, H.H. *Zayid bin-Khalyfeh*, and finally in April 1890 he proceeded to Bushire, where he was interviewed by the Resident, Colonel Ross, and deported to Bombay⁶⁹. This outcome was probably an acceptable enough solution to Abdul-Aziz himself for several reasons; First he had decided not to return to his old headquarters of *Samad-e-Sha,n* because the situation of this town in the centre of the country

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. Govt. Ind., For. Dept. to Major A. C. Talbot, 20 July 1891, in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports, 1890-1899*, Vol IV, (A.E., 1986), p.15

without easy access to the sea could mean isolation and blockade there Secondly, *Samad-e-Sha,n* would be poor compensation for one who had desired to make himself ruler of the country. Thirdly, Samad was poor in comparison to the *El-Baatneh* coast, *El-Sharkyeh* or *El-Jabel-El-Akhdar* (the Green Mountain) provinces of Oman. Fourthly, in returning to Samad he would not have received the same degree of support that he had before as he have would been seen as a failure. Finally, going to Bombay did have possible compensations. He would be in a safer position under British government protection. He would not be out of touch with events and he might make Faisal uneasy: the Sultan was, indeed, supported by the British Governemnt but he too had its potential backing in that should circumstances change he might be appointed through British support as the Sultan of the country, as his brother Turkey had been. So the chance of being Sultan after being in Bombay was better than being at Samad-e-Sha,n in Oman proper. Moreover sailing from Bombay to Muscat could be quicker than travelling within Oman. In fact, after eight years, relations between the British government and the Sultan deteriorated, opening up precisely such a possibility in 1898. Abdul-Aziz was a very likely successor as Sultan in place of Faisal if there was no better alternative, such as the son of Faisal, Taimur. However, Abdul Aziz seems to have been a danger not to Faisal alone but also to the Sultan of Zanzibar. "In 1891 the Sultan of Zanzibar offered him an allowance of Rs.600 a month, on the express conditions that he did not attempt to go to Zanzibar, or to apply to the Sultan for more money. He was advised by the Government of India to accept this offer, and was warned against disturbing the peace of either Zanzibar or Muscat⁷⁰."

70. Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 278.

Section Five

The recognition of the Sultan

After it had become clear that Abdul-Aziz was giving up his resistance, the British Residency inclined to think that the time had arrived "when we may in all fairness give Saiyid Faisal the benefit of our support by formal recognition, and the fact of our doing so would have a good moral effect in itself, and would, moreover, strengthen Saiyid Faisal's hands and help to check the tendency to disturbance⁷¹". This was to be carried out in the form of active support similar to that given to his father. It should not be limited to Muscat and Mutrah, but to all the sea coastal towns inhabited by British subjects. This policy, if carried out, would maintain the advantage to the British which they had possessed through the administrative, commercial and customs services along the coast. Accordingly any attempt by Faisal's rivals would be resisted by the British Government⁷². But the British, in contrast to the time of Turkey, started to be aware of the rights of direct interference in Oman's political situation because, "by the armed intervention of the British Government, the probability is therefore that future rulers of Muscat will always be more or less dependent on our support, whoever they are". So they measured their action in Oman, "by the limitation of armed interference as a rule to the protection of British interests, and by careful avoidance of all interference in internal affairs". They also put limitations on how far the Omani ruler could go in asking for British support and to depend on himself as much as he could. "The ruler, however, ought not to be led to rely too entirely upon us or to neglect defensive measures, while his power to take advantage of our support to use oppressive measures is limited by the little actual hold he really has over the interior of the country". This policy became clear during the revolt of 1895, when the Sultan had to fight by himself to defend his capital Muscat and received no direct support from the British⁷³. So the acknowledgement and support Faisal

71. F.O. 54/27, Resident to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 9 Nov. 1893.

72. F.O. 54/27, For. Dept., Govt. Ind. to Resident, 9 Feb. 1896.

73. F.O. 54/27, Muscat Agent to Resident, 17 Oct. 1895.

would receive would be on this basis. For how long did they carry out that new policy of no direct interference? Or was it the kind of partial commitment to be carried out or not as necessary? Briefly, the answer is that the British carried on interfering into every aspect of Oman till the second half of the twentieth century, and the Omani Sultans carried on relying on British support and on finance by British subjects, whenever there was resistance by the Omanis against their regime.

However the British this time found no alternative for the Muscat succession but to acknowledge Faisal and to carry on subsidizing him by Zanzibar's 40,000 dollars annually to enable him to hold his power over Muscat. Without that he could not well carry on the administration. It was necessary for British interests that *de facto* Government should be strong enough to maintain good order in Muscat and Mutrah⁷⁴. But the initiative of recognition came from the Political Agency in Muscat. On 23 February 1890 Major C.E. Yate, the Political Agent in Muscat, wrote to Colonel E.C. Ross, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf; "I have the honour to address you on the subject of the recognition by the Government of His Highness Said [Sayyed] Faisal as Sultan of Muscat." In his recommendation to recognize Faisal formally, Major Yate suggested that the opportunity should be taken to place "our relations with the Muscat Government on a more definite footing, that is to say, that we should seek such treaty conditions as would constitute England the paramount power⁷⁵". The Resident fully supported Major Yate's suggestion and his estimate of the political condition of Oman, namely that "both Chiefs and people are actuated by sordid mercenary objects, coupled with the resolve to gain their objects and maintain the real power in their own hands by a 'trimming' policy", therefore meant that "we have to deal with matters as they are not as they ought to be". But the Resident remarked that the Political Agent in Muscat was mistaken in believing that the

74. F.O. 54/27, Resident to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 20 June 1888.

75. F.O. 54/27, Ross to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 30 March 1890.

subsidy was to be continued in any circumstances. The Resident's understanding of that question was that the subsidy could be continued to any ruler of the Muscat State if he was acceptable to the British Government. In other words, the subsidy should not be regarded as a right for an Omani ruler but as a privilege. The Resident had special reasons for recommending payment of the subsidy to Faisal, before his formal recognition, but now the situation had changed and Faisal had to prove his loyalty to British interests. The Resident realized that the strategic position of Oman put it on a special footing as regards to British interests, and neither France nor any power could with justice deny that Oman fell legitimately within the sphere of British influence. The Resident's view was that there was no reason to apprehend any diminution of that influence. He therefore wrote the Government of India supporting the recognition of Faisal, adding "I therefore would adhere to my opinion that it would be undesirable to impose any special conditions when recognizing Faisal as Sultan of Muscat⁷⁶".

On 27 March 1890, the Viceroy's Foreign Secretary sent a telegram to the Resident: "recognition of Faisal approved and special conditions not desired"⁷⁷. Receiving this approval the Resident crossed the Gulf to Muscat in the Indian Marine ship *Lawrence*, and arrived there on 6 April. He told Faisal the news. "I am instructed to inform Your Highness that it affords His Excellency the Viceroy and the Governor -General of India in Council much pleasure to recognize your Highness as Sultan of Muscat, and to continue with Your Highness the same relations of friendship as have existed between the two States from the time of Saiyd Sa,eed -bin Sultan to that of Your Highness's late father, Saiyid Turki. His Excellency the Viceroy hopes that Muscat and Oman will enjoy peace and prosperity under Your Highness' rule". He went on, "it is a gratification to me to convey this message to the son of my late honourable friend Said Turki, to whom it was my welcome duty to make a similar intimation nearly twenty years ~~ago~~".

76. *Ibid.*

77. -F.O. 54/27, For. Dept., Govt. Ind. to Resident, 27 March 1890.

ago". He ended "I beg to tender my own best wishes and felicitations to your Highness on this occasion and those of the British officers present". Faisal replied to the Resident requesting him to convey to the Viceroy the expression of his respectful acknowledgments. He said; "my intention is to maintain to the full the same relations as existed with the British Government in the time of my father; and to act up to all the engagements undertaken by my father and his predecessors in the Government of Muscat". Sultan Faisal went on; "it is my earnest desire to be guided in all important matters of policy by the advice of the British Government and to so conduct the government as to secure the continued friendship and approbation of His Excellency the Viceroy and the British Government"⁷⁸.

This was a very special occasion for Faisal, one which he had been waiting to celebrate for a long time. It was certainly a special occasion and celebration for Muscat's people as well after the fighting which overshadowed the country for a long time. This is what the Resident reported about the occasion of the Sultan's recognition, "Her Majesty's Ship *Mariner* being in harbour, Captain Arbuthnot, R.N., and some of his officers as well as Captain Chandler and officers of the *Lawrence* accompanied me with Surgeon Jayaker to the Palace, where Sayid Faisal received us in Durbar, and in the presence of His Highness's brothers and the principal inhabitants the announcement was made by me verbally, and afterwards read aloud by the [British] Agency *Moonshi*. A salute of 21 guns was fired from the *Lawrence* in honour of the Sultan, and afterwards the forts and shipping were decorated with flags⁷⁹". The British Government approved the Resident's proceedings in Muscat for the recognition of Faisal as Sultan⁸⁰. The Resident for his part suggested "a kharita from His Excellency the Viceroy to His Highness Saiyid Faisal would be opportune, and would certainly be the cause of

78. F.O. 54/27, Resident to the For. Dept., Govt. Ind., Purport of address to His Highness Sayid Faisal, and His Highness' reply, Apr. 1890.

79. *Ibid.*

80. F.O. 54/27, Captain W. H. Cornish, Assistant Sec. Gov. Ind. For. Dept. to the Political Resident, 23 April 1890.

much gratification to the newly recognized Sultan ⁸¹". The suggestion was accepted. On 23 May 1890 Lord Lansdowne, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, sent to his 'Honoured and Valued Friend' Sultan Faisal a very friendly letter. He wrote "I have read with pleasure the reply of your Highness to the communication addressed to you at my request by Colonel Ross, on the occasion of Your Highness's formal recognition by the Government of India as Sultan of Muscat". The Viceroy assured the Sultan, "I shall always feel the greatest interest in all that concerns Your Highness's welfare and the prosperity of your dominions. I desire to express the high consideration, & c. ⁸²". With full recognition by the British Government of India Faisal would sit more securely and comfortably on his throne and be better able to face his opponents either from his own family or others. Abdul Aziz was under British guard in Bombay, while his friend Sheikh Humood El-Jahhafi left Ibraheem in Rustak alone and went back to El-Sharkeyeh⁸³. In May His Highness Sayyid Faisal, went with his brother in the *Sultanee* steamer to Soor where he arranged meetings and solved problems between tribes in the vicinity, an indication that his standing was such that he could act as judge between his people. However, although the social and political situation was peaceful and friendly, and the people of Muscat managed to entertain again and enjoy some tranquillity, the Sultan and his people were afflicted by natural misfortunes. While the sounds of the Sultan's festival drums and songs perhaps of *leywa*, *Soma*, and *Rasfah* were still fresh in people's memories in Muscat, and about only two months after his formal recognition by the British, a cyclone visited the city on 8-9 June 1890, causing much loss of life and property through the powerful winds and floods. Over 700 persons were killed on land and sea, Muscat was greatly damaged and people panicked. Eye witnesses saw houses falling, and date trees in the interior badly damaged. Native shipping severely

81. F.O. 54/27, Resident to the For. Dept., Govt.Ind., 23 April 1890.

82. F.O. 54/27, Lansdowne to Faisal, 23 May 1890. .

83. Talbot to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 20 July 1891 in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1890-1899*, vol IV, (A.E.1986),p.15.

suffered. People thought it was their last day ⁸⁴. Moreover from the political side there was another storm waiting for the Sultan strong enough to blow him out of his throne. For only five years did the Sultan enjoy peaceful relations with the Chiefs of El-Sharkey-eh. They then surprisingly found a new ally on the Eastern coast of Africa in 1895. The generator of that storm was Faisal's cousin the Sultan of Zanzibar *Haamid-bin-Thuwaini*, who decided to reunite his grandfather Saeed's Afro-Asian Empire under his sovereignty. It was only the bravery of his wife and the help of the British agent which allowed the Sultan to escape to Jalaly Fourt and save his life⁸⁵.

Conclusion

The British government had not been confident of Faisal's capacity to survive had Abdul Aziz persisted with his resistance. By giving up in 1890 Abdul Aziz helped Britain to recognize Faisal as Sultan. But giving Abdul-Aziz refuge in Bombay was not only for keeping him under watch, or for his own protection but probably also to show the Sultan two things: first, that Great Britain alone was responsible for preventing a revival of his threat to the Sultan, and, secondly, that any action of his harmful to British interests might mean a revival of the threat. When the Sultan's relations with the British Government deteriorated nine years after his recognition, Mead, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, suggested in 1899 to the Government of India that "the arrival of Abdul Aziz-bin-Saeed, the

84. *Ibid*; The Times 10 June 1890. Mahfoodah bint Muhammed bin Nasser Al Hamadani, the writer's grandmother remembers this as one of the Most important occasions during Sayed Faisal's reign; her father, Muhammed bin Nasser, was accused of assisting the 1895 rebellion by allowing the tribes to use his house as a station from which to attack the Sultan's palace, a matter denied by her; the house was certainly used during the dark, but that was beyond the knowledge of her father who welcomed the tribes as just friends, and who was taken by surprise, as the Sultan himself did. After the revolution was over his house was searched and all the belongings were thrown out. Muhammed bin Nasser was forced to exile in Zanzibar where he died leaving behind his family in Muscat. Her brother Saleh bin Muhammed bin Nasser who later worked with Sultan Taimur bin Faisal, was killed by the Sultan himself, in a 'friendly joke' by a seemingly empty pistol, in Soor-town sometime before his abdication in 1932.

85. Phillips, *Oman: a History*, p. 149. The writer's private information is that, when the Sultan escaped to Jalaly the Banyans (Hindus) and the Khojas (Muslim Shee,ahs) supplied the Sultan with food and ammunition by boats from Mutrah and helped his confrontation against the rebels.

Sultan's uncle, on the Oman Coast, would probably be the signal for a general rising against Saiyid Feyusal-bin-Turky, for his unfriendly attitude towards the British. If the Government of India decide not to stand in the way of Abdul-Aziz, it will, I believe, be easy to make satisfactory arrangements with him, for he is said to be eager to return to Muscat as Ruler, and his long residence in India has given him a far more accurate conception of our power and sense of justice than his nephew possesses." The Resident said that it ought to be "known that the British Government will not be averse to a change in the person of the Ruler of Muscat, and will not support Sayid Feysul against his uncle, should the latter decide to renew his claims to the throne"⁸⁶. However it was thought that Abdul Aziz was too old to be a Sultan while Faisal had a son who could succeed him. Probably French opposition was also a factor.

By the turn of the nineteenth century Muscat became in all but name a British protectorate and the Albu-Sa'eed the instrument of imperial machinations, while at the top of the Omani political and economic system were many British nationals. The Government of India exploited the Sultan's weakness as much as possible, limiting his foreign relations in such a way as to serve only British interests. The next chapter will try to highlight aspects of this.

86. F.O. 54/29, Political Resident to Govt. Ind., 21 May 1899.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT FOR A BRITISH PROTECTORATE OVER MUSCAT

1890-1895

Introduction

The historical background to the idea of a protectorate over Muscat could be traced from as early as 11 February 1873. The story began when the Government of India brought to the attention of the government in London that the Turkish authorities in Yemen were trying to induce the Chiefs of certain tribes near Aden to acknowledge the supremacy of the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul. The British government "expressed their opinion that any interference on the part of the Turkish Government with those chiefs who had treaties with or received stipends from us was most dangerous to our interests at Aden and should most peremptorily be prevented." Accordingly they suggested, "if Her Majesty's Government considered such a course desirable, to take the Chiefs directly under their protection, and to engage to defend them from aggression". The Duke of Argyll, the Secretary of State for India, informed the Viceroy of India that the Foreign Office wished for distinct proof of the right to take the Yemen Chiefs under protection. However, much correspondence took place before compromise proposals were worked out making possible an agreement with the Turks. "The Government of India accepted these proposals, but recommended an extension of the Protectorate scheme by including within it certain tribes occupying portions of the Hadramaut Coast north-eastwards between Aden and Muscat territory". They recommended, "that a small sum of money should be spent in establishing once for all an effective protectorate over the Arab tribes from Sheikh Saiyid to the frontiers of Oman, thus excluding all chance of foreign interference in Aden or between Aden and Muscat". If an agreement could be made with the Turks, well and good. "If not, we would lay down the limits of our protectorate without their consent, and would require them to respect it". It soon became obvious that such an agreement was impossible, and the proposals were not pressed to a conclusion

in consequence of a report from the British Ambassador at Istanbul that the Sultan would feel considerable irritation and anxiety if he heard such an agreement was to be suggested. So the proposals in that shape were kept in reserve, and the matter was delayed for about seventeen years till after the Sultan Faisal's recognition in 1890 by the British government¹.

Section Two

The Unauthorized Treaty

Right after the Sultan's recognition by the British Government, Colonel Ross, the Political Resident, took his reward from the Sultan. He concluded with him a new commercial treaty which seems to have been the price of recognition of the Sultan in the same month (April 1890). It is interesting to note that this was done even without any authority given to him either by the Government of India or by the India Office. He sent four copies to the Government of India, two in English and two in Arabic, all bearing the signature of the Sultan and himself, for ratification².

As was mentioned above, Colonel Ross was not given authority to sign the treaty on H.M. Government's behalf, but during the time of Sultan Turkey, on November 15 1887, he had been given authority to ascertain whether the Sultan would be prepared to accept revision of the old commercial treaty following the provision of the new commercial treaty with Zanzibar. A draft of the proposals was sent to the Resident which with certain alterations would be acceptable³. But the Resident misunderstood the instruction and carried out negotiations and signed

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1. Tuson, *British Policy*, 11, D/11-14.
 2. F.O. 54/25, Ross to Cunningham, For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 23 Apr. 1890; Talbot to For. Dept., 20 July 1891, *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports*, vol.4, 1890-1899, (Archive Editions, 1986),
 3. F.O. 54/25, Ross to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 1 Sep 1887, 14 Oct. 1887; Crawford, For. Dept., Govt. Ind. to Political Resid., 5 Nov. 1887; Political Resid. to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 5 Nov. 1887; and Draft *Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between Her Majesty and His Highness the Sultan of Muscat*; encl.4 in no. 1076-E, Sir H. M. Durand, For. Dept., Govt. Ind. to the Political Resid., 28 May 1888; Political Resid. to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 12 July 1888; encl.6 in no.1654-E., W. H. Cornish, For. Dept., Govt. Ind. to Political Resid., 15 Aug. 1888. Later it was suggested by the Resident that the question of imposing restriction on arms and ammunition into Muscat territory might be left to be dealt with as occasion arose. India agreed with that.

the treaty on behalf of Her Majesty's Government after Turkey's death, with the new Sultan Faisal. The government of India, and the India Office, though they regarded Colonel Ross as having exceeded the instructions given to him, considered that despite the absence of authority on the part of the Political Resident to act in the matter as Plenipotentiary, it did not necessarily vitiate the transaction and they would recommend that the treaty be accepted and ratified. Lord Cross, Secretary of State for India, informed the Foreign Office about the issue, and asked "to be favoured with the views of the Marquis of Salisbury in respect to the terms of the proposed treaty and upon the question whether its execution should be considered undesirable by the absence of sufficient authority on the part of the Political Resident. If it is not validated, His Lordship as at present advised, is inclined to support the recommendation of the government of India that it should be accepted and ratified in its present form⁴" However the Government of India asked the Home Government whether that treaty was considered undesirable. They could regard it as an informal preliminary, and the Resident could be empowered to enter into a treaty on the terms set forth⁵.

Although the Government of India sent to the Home Government the unauthorized treaty which the Resident had signed with the Sultan, they criticised the Resident for misusing his authority. H.S. Barnes, Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, notified the Resident, "that the usual formalities have not been observed in its execution. No authority had been conferred upon you as Plenipotentiary of Her Majesty for the purpose of negotiating the treaty". He went on: "the proposed treaty [was] to enable you to ascertain whether the Sultan was prepared to accept the amended draft. If you had submitted the accepted draft to the Government of India for the purpose of having the copies engrossed, an opportunity would then have been afforded to the Governor-General in Council to obtain for you the necessary authority to conclude the negotiation". He also

4. F.O. 54/25, I. O. to F. O., 9 Oct. 1890.

5. F.O. 54/25, For. Dept., Govt. Ind. to Cross, 8 Sep. 1890.

noticed that in the last article of the signed copies of the treaty, there was an erasure which had not been initialled by the Sultan and by the Resident. He insisted that any alteration in an engrossment of a treaty should be initialled by the contracting parties before signature⁶.

In London at the India Office, too, Lord Cross was inclined to support the ratification of the treaty in its present form⁷. The India Office found some cases similar to the present case, such as the cession of Heligoland, which not only was signed by Sir P. Anderson without any full power, but contained no ratification clause. Sir E. Malet, who also signed it, did have full power himself, but there are also many cases where treaties have been signed without any full power at all. If it was thought expedient to uphold such treaties, they had not been invalidated on that account. In the case of Resident Ross, although he was not empowered to sign a treaty in the Queen's name, there were numerous instances which could be cited in which this has been done for one reason or another. It could be therefore proceeded with in the present instance if the treaty was considered satisfactory. Their view also was that the commercial department would no doubt report positively on the commercial stipulation which seemed satisfactory. The India Office made a number of general observations about the treaty. First, there was the absence of a clause "providing for the period of the duration of the treaty which would therefore when ratified be interminable, because that is undesirable in Commercial treaties. The omission could be formally ratified, by a statement in the protocol of the Ratification". They suggested 12 years for the duration of the treaty, with one year's notice thereafter of termination. Secondly, nothing was stated "as to what becomes of the existing convention of the 31 May 1839. If it has lapsed it would be better to say so, and this also might be done in the same protocol". Thirdly, the Order in Council of November 4 1867 was considered sufficient to enable the consul to act under

6. F.O. 54/25, H.S.Barnes, For. Dept., Gov. Ind., to the Resident, 4 Sep. 1890.

7. F.O. 54/25, no.109, E.148. *Commercial Treaty with Sultan of Muscat*, 9, 10 Oct. 1890.

Articles 13 to 17. Fourthly, the second paragraph of Article 12 was probably in excess of legal powers⁸.

The Foreign Office debated the question thoroughly and also consulted the Order in Council which gave sufficient power to enable the Consul to act under articles 13 and 17. It was also thought that the phrase 'British Law' in the 'Order' was not correct, it should be 'English law', but then it was noted that there was nothing wrong in this as it was an ordinary form for an act under foreign jurisdiction Acts of that era (1867). In addition the Foreign Office was concerned very much with the question of Deserters from ships-of-war, a matter raised by the India Office as well⁹. The Admiralty should first be consulted. With some powers the British Government had "treaty stipulation for the mutual surrender of deserters from ships of war but, if there is no act of parliament enabling the Queen to give up such foreign deserters, a writ of *Habeas Corpus* would protect them and we [the British Government] could not fulfil our part of the contract. The Foreign Deserters Act 1852 applied only to seamen deserters from foreign *merchant vessels alien within H.M's dominions*. (The territories of the East India Company being now of course included in that term). Therefore this section had no application at all to foreign seamen deserters (whether from men of war or merchant vessels) which are lying [in the] international waters other than that at the time". The government must consider the paragraph entirely apart from any provisions of the Foreign Deserters Act. In the case of Muscat the British Government could only promise that "in the case of men deserting from ships of H.H. the Sultan or his subjects, and who have taken refuge on board of a British vessel in harbour or in the house of a British subject on the shore of Muscat, the British consular official or in his absence the Captain or house occupant, shall *unless there is reason to the contrary, take the necessary steps to cause to quit the vessel or premises* for the purpose of being returned to the Sultan's authorities."

8. *Ibid.*

9. F.O. 54/25, (intern), 28 Oct. 1890.

As to the writ of *Habeas Corpus*, even if it were applicable it would not prevent the Captain of a man-of-war turning an unauthorized intruder out of his ship or, to use the more elegant phraseology of the draft treaty, taking the necessary steps to cause him to quit the vessel. But 1; was there any power to surrender deserters from ships of war who took refuge in British territory? And 2; what was the legal position of a British ship in a foreign port? The reply to the first question was that there was no power to surrender deserters from ships of war who take refuge in British territory, and to the second question that a British ship of war, even in a foreign port, is strictly speaking British territory. But the Foreign Office wanted to be sure of the power of the British Commander in such cases, for instance as to expelling from on board intruders without authorized powers. The Foreign Deserters Act 1852 gave no power to surrender deserters from foreign ships of war, but the act was a legal power whereby deserters could be surrendered from British ships of war. Though "such may possibly exist; if it does not, a man deserting from a ship of the Sultan and taking refuge on board a British ship of war in the harbour at Muscat could scarcely be surrendered as provided in article 12".

The home Government found that there was no objection to the treaty on commercial grounds. But it was bound to consult the Admiralty and the Colonial Office for their observations¹⁰. Also it was suggested that the duration of the treaty should be limited and the commercial treaty between Oman and Great Britain of 31 May 1839 should be superseded by the new one. It should be stated that the old one would cease to be in force as soon as the new treaty came into operation. A more important suggestion was to insert a clause stipulating that there should be no cession of any part of the Sultan of Muscat's dominions to any foreign power except Great Britain. That should be made as a declaration on the exchange of Ratification.

10. F.O. 54/25., Foreign Office minutes on the question of Commercial Treaty with the Sultan of Muscat, 9, 10, 17, 20, 27, 28 Oct. 1890.

While this was being discussed another suggestion was on its way to the India Office from the Government of India, for a protectorate over Muscat.

Section Three

Proposed Protectorate Over Muscat

Five months after Faisal's recognition by the British Government and while the treaty was still being discussed in London, the policy in India towards Muscat seems to have crystalized and an explicit proposal was made to place Muscat under British protection. In 1890, a suggestion was made to the Government of India to place relations on a more definite footing at an opportune time perhaps by a declaration of formal protection. Opposition was expected from France, which jointly with Britain had declared its respect for Muscat's independence in 1862¹¹. When on 8 September 1890 the Viceroy of India, Lord Lansdowne, wrote to Cross explaining his views, he suggested a preliminary understanding with France. "Her Majesty's Government are in a position to judge of the validity of any objection that France might raise to the establishment of a British protectorate in Muscat, to assess the cost at which such objection could be removed, and consequently to decide whether it is worth while at the present time to move at all in the matter". He mentioned four cases in which the British Government had assumed the role of a protecting power. First, on the death of Sa'eed bin Sultan in 1856, Lord Canning had decided that Muscat and Zanzibar should remain separate, thereby solving the dispute between Sa'eed's two successors, his sons Majid of Zanzibar and Thuwainy of Muscat. He had also ruled that Zanzibar in return for remaining independent should pay 40,000 crowns annually to Muscat. This payment went on until the time of Faisal. Secondly, no Sultan of Muscat had been able to establish himself effectively since the time of Imam Sa'eed bin Sultan without first obtaining the recognition of the British government, whereas such recognition had never been sought from any other foreign government. Thirdly

11. Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967) pp. 18-19.

"between 1866-1881, the Government of India several times intervened in the dynastic disputes of the Muscat State. Claimants or pretenders were interned in India, were prevented from attacking a reigning Sultan, were given allowances, and were otherwise dealt with as only a power, recognized as possessing practical supremacy, could deal with such people". He gave examples, during Sultan Turkey's reign, when Great Britain was the only power to help him against his rebellious subjects in 1874, 1877 and 1883. Finally, the Dutch Treaty with Muscat provided conclusive evidence, in that the Dutch requested British co-operation in negotiating it: "the Captain of the Netherlands' corvette *Batavia* who was in charge of the treaty, left it in the Resident's hands, and Colonel Prideaux sent it to the Political Agent at Muscat to negotiate with the Sultan".

There were other reasons for suggesting a Protectorate. Lansdowne pointed out that British trade with Muscat had far exceeded that of any other European or American country. He calculated the number of the British subjects resident in Muscat as out of proportion to those of any other nations. Great Britain, moreover, was the only country which had telegraph interests in Muscat. He concluded, that policing of the Omani coast had been exercised for many years past by Her Majesty's ships alone¹².

This was the case which was made by the Government of India for a protectorate over Muscat. Cross referred the matter to the Foreign Secretary, supporting and quoting the points raised by the Viceroy. When British relations with Muscat for nearly a century past were taken into consideration, a declaration of a formal protectorate could be justified at the earliest convenient opportunity. Neither France nor any other power could with justice deny that Muscat fell legitimately within the sphere of British influence. Regarding the declaration of 1862, this had been modified in 1890 by French recognition of an exclusive British protectorate over Zanzibar, so if that was possible in Zanzibar, "it is advisable of withdrawing altogether from the declaration..., and establishing an

12. F.O. 54/27, Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to Cross, 8 Sep. 1890.

exclusive British protectorate also over Muscat". It must be left to Salisbury to decide the appropriate time and the occasion on which to try and win French agreement to this¹³. The Viceroy also wrote privately to Viscount Cross suggesting a secret Convention with Muscat attached to the commercial treaty by which Sultan Faisal should place the management of his foreign relations in British hands.

At the Foreign Office, Thomas Sanderson did not agree with that view. He did not see how such an agreement could be kept secret, as soon as the Sultan had any foreign relations, which must be under his own operation. Though at present he had none, and he supposed that the convention would really be designed to prevent the Sultan having any treaty with other countries, the convention would be a departure from the agreement with France. He preferred not to attack the question at present, but for it to be kept in reserve for a future negotiation with France. Lord Salisbury agreed with Sanderson's view. On this matter Sir Percy Anderson asked Sir E. Hertslet whether there was any engagement with Muscat preventing the Sultan from ceding his territory to any foreign power. Hertslet replied that he was not aware of any engagement, but he did not see why a provision should not be attached to the new commercial treaty that the Sultan would never sell or mortgage, save to the British Government, any portion of his dominions. He did not think this could be protested against by the French as being a violation of the declaration of 1862. The Treaty department in the Foreign Office agreed with Hertslet's suggestion as a wise step that would secure the British Government till the time came for assuming a protectorate over Muscat and confirmed that it would not be in breach of the 1862 declaration. Some suggested proceeding with the matter secretly, but most of the arguments in the Foreign Office supported the views of Hertslet that a declaration should accompany the commercial treaty.

13. F.O. 54/57, I. O. to F. O., 9 Oct. 1890.

In a private internal letter Sanderson wrote to K. Neil at the India Office that he would receive an official answer to the letter of 9 October which recommended withdrawal from the joint declaration. He repeated Lord Salisbury's opinion who found it "hardly practicable to enter upon the subject with France just now and would prefer to reserve it till a more favourable opportunity". Salisbury thought also that "there are obvious objections to the proposal for a secret convention or article stipulating that the *Imam* [the Sultan] should place the conduct of his foreign relations in our hands". If a protectorate was "contrary to the Declaration this agreement would be equally so. It would be impossible to keep it secret. These things always come out and [at] the most inconvenient moment". Sanderson pointed out that such an agreement could only be kept secret by not taking advantage of it, in which case it might as well not be made. Since the Sultan had no foreign relations, Salisbury thought that "it will be better to do our best to preserve that blissful condition of things and to postpone the protectorate till we can assume it openly and completely"¹⁴. So the idea of protection survived but was to be realised only at a convenient time, with French consent. In a secret letter dated 16 October 1890 sent by the Foreign Office to the India Office, Salisbury promised that in negotiations on other matters with France, he would bear in mind the views expressed by Lord Cross and the Government of India in relation to Muscat, but that an approach was not advisable just then¹⁵. Nevertheless, in a subsequent letter on 24 October 1890, Salisbury took up Hertslet's more modest suggestion. He wrote that "the commercial treaty between Great Britain and Muscat which was inclosed in your letter of the 9th September would apparently offer an opportunity to propose to the Sultan a Declaration in which His Highness should engage that neither he nor his heirs and successors would cede, mortgage or otherwise give for occupation any portion of his Dominions save to Her Britannic Majesty's Government". This would not be

14. F.O. 54/27, Sanderson to Neil, 15 Oct. 1890.

15. F.O. 54/27, I. O. to F.O., 16 Oct. 1890.

open to interpretation on the part of France as being a violation of the Declaration of 1862. Lord Salisbury further assured the Government of India that the commercial treaty would be ratified despite its lack of authorization¹⁶. In reply Viscount Cross agreed with the proposed Declaration by the Sultan as to 'non-cession of territory'. He told the Foreign Office that he would inform the Viceroy that, when the ratification of the new commercial treaty entered into with the Sultan was announced, steps would be taken for obtaining from him a Declaration to the effect indicated¹⁷. This completed the Commercial treaty's formal examination by the Foreign Office through its African and Treaty Departments, but before ratification could take place the views of the Colonial Office and the Admiralty were sought¹⁸.

Section Four

The Treaty and the Declaration

On November 1 1890 Salisbury contacted Lord Knutsford of the Colonial Office, laying before his Lordship a copy of a "*Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation, Between Great Britain and the Sultan of Muscat signed at Muscat [in] April 18, 1890*". The Government of India having recommended that this treaty should be accepted and ratified, Salisbury enquired whether Knutsford had any objection to offer from the colonial point of view to the stipulations contained in the treaty¹⁹. On 7 November 1890 the Colonial office replied that Lord Knutsford had no objection to offer, but pointed to the need for correction of two names in the treaty: that in the colonial article for words 'the Dominions of Canada' and 'Cape' should be substituted the words 'the dominion of Canada', and 'The Cape of Good Hope'²⁰. This Colonial Office observation was followed by Foreign Office corrections. For example, in articles 15 and 17, there was a

16. F.O. 54/27, Salisbury to Govt. Ind. (Secret), 24 Oct. 1890.

17. F.O. 54/27, I. O. to F. O., 30 Oct. 1890.

18. F.O. 54/27, I. O. to F. O., 31 Oct. 1890

19. F.O. 54/27, F. O. to C. O., 1 Nov. 1890.

20. F.O. 54/27, C. O. to F. O., 7 Nov. 1890.

reference to 'British law', that should read 'English law'. Also in article 4, 3rd line, the word 'vessel' should read 'vessels' and in Article 6 the word 'manner' should be inserted²¹.

In a letter, dated 3 Nov. 1890, to the Admiralty Lord Salisbury pointed out that: 1-, "a doubt has been expressed whether H.M. Government have the power to carry out the stipulation of article XII, in so far as they might include the surrender of deserters from ships of His Highness the Sultan who might take refuge on board of a British ship of war in harbour". He asked his opinion on the above point. 2-, there was the question of "the nature of any instructions under which the commanding officer of H.M. ships of war could take steps for the expulsion from H.M. ships of persons who have taken refuge therein"²².

On 10 Nov 1890, the Admiralty replied with regard to first point that "article 12 requires much consideration, as cases might arise in which it might act very prejudicially as regards fugitive slaves, for instance, the owner of a slave who had taken refuge on board one of H.M. Ships might obtain his surrender, and thus lower the prestige of H.M. ships in the eyes of slave owners and slaves". Therefore the Lords Commissioners recommended that the article in question should be omitted. With regard to the second point "as Commanding Officer of one of H.M. ships is in supreme command in all matters relating to the ship he commands, no instructions are required to enable him to exclude or expel any one from his ship whose presence on board he may consider undesirable"²³. The Foreign Office did not agree with the Admiralty that article 12 should be entirely omitted, but only the last paragraph of it. The first 'portion' of the article they considered "may be of use to us and is open to no objection". In view of various criticisms of the treaty, the best thing would be to suggest to the India Office that a new treaty should be signed in place of the old one. For that the following points should be taken into consideration; that the last part of article 12 should be

21. F.O. 54/25, F. O. to I. O. (conf), 11 Dec. 1890.

22. F.O. 54/25, no. 559, F. O. to Admiralty, 3 Nov. 1890.

23. F.O. 54/25, Admir. to F. O., 10 Nov. 1890.

omitted, errors mentioned by the Colonial Office should be corrected, a 'No Cession Declaration' was to be added to the new treaty and there should be inserted an article as to the cessation of the convention of 1839, and a duration article²⁴.

On 15 November the Foreign Office consulted the Board of Trade who saw no objection to the course which Lord Salisbury proposed to adopt as set forth in the draft letter to the India Office which accompanied his letter²⁵. "The Board of Trade note with satisfaction that 5% import duty which this country has enjoyed under the Treaty with Muscat of 1839 is continued by the proposed Treaty, for although the direct trade between the United Kingdom and Muscat is extremely small, the trade of the latter with India of some importance"²⁶.

In their letter on 11 Dec. 1890 to the India Office, the Foreign Office listed first the Colonial Office corrections to the treaty. They then drew attention to Article 12 which might give rise to great difficulties, as the legal power of this country extended only to the surrender of deserters from merchant vessels, but the first two paragraphs of the Article would be useful, if the Sultan would agree to retain them without the last paragraph. If the Sultan would not consent to this, the whole of Article 12 should be taken out of the treaty according to the Admiralty's suggestion. The treaty should remain in force for 12 years from the date of exchange of ratification, and thereafter terminated at 12 months notice. Since all these changes were required it would be best to instruct Colonel Ross, the Political Resident, to conclude a fresh treaty containing the necessary amendments. It would be considered whether it would be the best to propose that the Declaration of 'Non Cession' should be inserted in the treaty itself or should be made in a separate Declaration. But in contrast to the duration of 12 years for the 'Commercial Treaty' the separate Declaration could take a permanent shape²⁷. On

24. *Ibid.*

25. F.O. 54/25, F. O. to Brd. Trd., 15 Nov. 1890.

26. F.O. 54/25, F. O. to Brd. Trd., 9 Dec. 1890; Brd. Trd. to F.O., 9 Dec. 1890.

27. F.O. 54/25, I. O., to F. O., 11 Dec. 1890; I. O. (internal) 9-30 Oct. 1890.

1 January 1891, India Office decided on the negotiation of a new Treaty to replace the old one signed in April 1890²⁸.

Section Five

The French Complaint

In 1891 a diplomatic exchange took place between the British and the French Governments in regard to the Muscat question. The British Government raised with the French Ambassador in London the possibility of assuming a protectorate over Muscat. That approach brought into play a new issue, as the French not only challenged the British desire for a protectorate but their intervention over Sultan Faisal's succession, the British Government being accused of helping Faisal to succeed his father. On 29 April 1891, Lord Salisbury sent the British Ambassador in Paris, Lord Lytton, a letter recording a conversation with the French Ambassador in London, in which M. Waddington made his complaint²⁹. Waddington's complaint, in particular, was that a change had been made in the succession to the throne of Muscat under the advice of the Government of India. French suspicions were reinforced by the idea of the assumption of a British protectorate over Muscat. Accordingly the British attitude was seen by the French as in contravention of the Anglo-French Agreement of 1862 respecting Muscat's independence³⁰. On 4 May Lord Salisbury contacted the India Office about this new issue, requesting Viscount Cross to furnish him with any information about the Viceroy's contacts with the 'Imam' Faisal at the time of his recognition³¹. Cross lost no time in telegraphing to the Viceroy of India the substance of Waddington's complaints. Salisbury was told that when the late Sultan Turkey died in June 1888, "his second son Syud [Seyyid] Faisal assumed the government without advice or assistance from the officers of the Government of India, who only recognized the new ruler in March 1890 when it

28. F.O. 54/25, I. O. to F. O., 11 Dec. 1890, and 2 Jan. 1891.

29. F.O. 54/27, Salisbury to Lytton, 29 Apr. 1891; I. O. to F.O. (Conf.), 4 May 1891.

30. F.O. 54/27, Cross to Salisbury, 25 May 1891.

31. F.O. 54/25, F. O. to I. O. (Conf), 4 May 1891.

had become clear that his elder brother did not oppose him and no other aspirant was able to oust him". It also would be seen that "as far back as 1881 while the late ruler was alive the Government of India declared that the succession to Syud Turki should be settled by the Chiefs, and the people of the country". Those facts did not support, Cross maintained, the remonstrance of the French Government³². No interference had taken place in respect of the succession. The Foreign office replied to M.Waddington in these terms³³. The Viceroy in his telegram of 13 May 1891 to the India Office, expressed surprise at the the French complaint, "I don't know to what the complaint refers," he went on, "possibly Abdul Aziz, who is in Bombay, may have appealed to the French"³⁴.

Section Six

The 'Non-Cession' Declaration and the new treaty

On 2 September 1891 Viscount Cross forwarded "for deposit in the archives of the Foreign Office, the original copy of the Declaration, dated the 20th March, By His Highness Seyyid Feysal bin Turki bin Sa'eed, Sultan of Muscat and Oman³⁵".

The Declaration began:

'Praise be to God Alone'

"The object of writing this lawful and honourable Bond is that it is hereby covenanted and agreed between His Highness Seyyid Feysal bin Turki bin Seyyid, Sultan of Muscat and Oman, on the one part, and Colonel Edward Charles Ross, Companion of Star of India, Her Britannic Majesty's Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, on behalf of the British Government, on the other part, that the Seyyid Feysal bin Turki bin Saeed, Sultan of Muscat and Oman, does pledge himself, his heirs and successors never to cede, to sell, to mortgage or otherwise give for occupation, save to the British Government, the dominions of Muscat and Oman or any of their dependencies.

In token of the conclusion of this lawful and honourable Bond Seyyid Feysal bin Turki bin Saeed, Sultan of Muscat and Oman, and Colonel Edward Charles Ross, Companion of Star of India, Her Britannic Majesty's Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, the former for himself, his heirs and successors, and the latter on behalf of the British Government, do each, in the

32. F.O. 54/25, I. O. to F. O., 4, 25, 26 May, 1891, (French Government Complaint of British Interference in Succession.)

33. F.O. 54/27, Tel., Viceroy to I. O., 13 May 1891.

34. *Ibid.*

35. F.O. 54/25, I. O. to F. O., 2 Sep. 1891, (Treaty with Muscat, 20 March 1891); Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 279.

presence of witnesses affix their signatures on this ninth day of Shaaban one thousand three hundred and eight(a.H.) corresponding to the twentieth day of March(A.D.) 1891."

Signed by "Seyyid Feysal bin Turki bin Saeed, Sultan of Muscat and Oman. (And) E.C.Cross, Colonel, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf.Ratified by His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor General of India, at Simla on the twenty third day of May 1891.(and) H.M.Durand, Secretary to the Government of India Foreign department"³⁶.

On 17 September 1891, Cross forwarded to the Foreign Office the modified Commercial treaty which had been concluded with the Sultan of Muscat, with certain alterations found to be necessary in the Arabic version initialled by the Sultan himself. He requested the Foreign Office that when the treaty had been ratified, one copy of the treaty might be forwarded for transmission to his Highness the Sultan³⁷. However Lord Salisbury was not completely happy about the treaty. He observed in a letter to the India Office on the same date that "Colonel Ross has followed out the instructions contained in our letter to the India Office of 11 Dec. 1890, *except* as regards the article providing for the termination of the treaty". He suggested before that an article should be inserted to the effect that the treaty was to remain in force for 12 years from the date of the exchange of ratification and was to be thereafter terminable at 12 months notice, given by either party. He pointed out that article 23 in the signed treaty dealt not with the termination but only with the revision of the treaty. He suggested that the treaty should be subject to revision by persons appointed on both sides for this purpose, who should be empowered to decide on and adopt such amendments as experience should prove to be desirable. The matter of termination might be dealt with when the ratifications were exchanged³⁸. The Foreign Office assured the India Office that in the protocol of exchange it was understood that under article 23 of the treaty either of the high contracting parties could terminate the treaty after 12 years and after giving 12 months notice³⁹. Copies in English and Arabic

36. Aitchison, *Collection*, (Agreement regarding the cession of territory by the Sultan of Oman), pp. 317-318.

37. F.O. 54/25, I. O. to F. O., 17 Sep. 1891; Aitchison, *Collection*, pp. 310-16; F. O. 54/25, Govt. Ind. For. Dept. (Secret) Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation Between Her Majesty and His Highness the Sultan of Muscat 1891.

38. F.O. 54/25, Salisbury to I. O., 17 Sep. 1891.

39. F.O. 54/25, F. O. to I. O., 3 Oct. 1891.

of the protocol were sent to the Foreign Office on 22nd April 1892⁴⁰. The treaty was to be laid before Parliament with the Protocol of exchange⁴¹.

Copies were also sent to the Board of Trade and the Colonial Office. The Colonial Office drew attention to Article 21 of the treaty which provided for the accession of the Self-Governing Colonies. The Colonies which expressed a desire to be included in the operation of the Commercial treaty were: Natal, Queensland, the Colony of Newfoundland, and Canada; all requested that the necessary notice be given to His Highness the Sultan by Her Majesty's representative in Muscat for accession of the treaty of 19 March 1891⁴². "As regards to other colonies specially named in Article XXI of the convention: Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia, and New Zealand do not desire to adhere to the Convention, and no intimation has been received as to the wishes of New South Wales and South Australia". The list of Colonial accessions was also laid before Parliament⁴³.

Section Seven

The French Reaction

France reacted quickly while the British commercial treaty with Muscat was going through these procedures in the United Kingdom, and therefore Lord Salisbury's 'blissful' Muscat position was ended. On 24 April 1893, the Persian Gulf Residency Agent translated a report that a French ship with three French Consuls for Muscat, Bunder Abbas, and Oman was expected in two months time,

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40. F.O. 54/25, Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to Cross, (Secret), 30 March 1892; Lansdowne., P. P. Hutchins., A. E. Miller, Viscount Cross to Salisbury, 22 Apr. 1892.
 41. F.O. 54/25, no.86, I. O. to F. O., 22 Apr. 1891, (Muscat Treaty of Commerce, The Sultan of Muscat Ratification).
 42. F.O. 54/25, C. O. to F. O., 3 Sep. 1892, Muscat Commercial Treaty, (Natal Colony); I. O. to C. O., 8 Sep. 1892, Muscat Commercial treaty (Queensland); Sadler to Muscat Polit. Ag., 11 Nov. 1892; no.3, Jayaker, Muscat Polit. Ag. to Sadler, 14 Nov. 1892; Sadler to Jayaker, 15 Dec. 1892; C. O. to F. O., 4 Mar 1893, Muscat Commercial treaty, (Canada), *Muscat Commercial Treaty Accession of Colonies*. For the treaty and the list of the Colonies which acceded under article XXI, see Parliamentary Papers C-6638, 1892. Treaty Ss. 1894. *Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Between Great Britain and Muscat*, Signed at Muscat, 19 March 1891. (H.M.S.O, 1894).
 43. F. O. 54/25, C. O. to F. O., Muscat Commercial Treaty Accession and Non-Accession of Colonies, 21, 22 Feb. 1894.

since there were French subjects requiring French representation. No French consuls had been appointed before, because there had been no French subjects in those places⁴⁴. If that story was true, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf blamed M.Chapuy, who lived at Bunder Abbas, for his suggestion to the French authorities during his recent visit to France⁴⁵. On 17 June 1893, the Resident reported that in the course of a conversation he had with Monsieur Gues, the French Vice-Consul, he learned that the latter was probably destined for Muscat in the event of the French Government establishing a Consulate at that place, but that it had not yet been decided. "M. Gues told me that he did not understand why importance was attached in France to his Government being represented at Muscat; and I gathered from what he said that he did not seem to think that French interest in that quarter necessitated such an appointment."⁴⁶ The Government of India took the matter seriously and informed the Home Government in a secret letter dated 18 July 1893 of the appointment of a French Vice-Consul at Muscat. The appointment, they said, appeared to be due to political, rather than to commercial, considerations, and French protection to Omani dhows using French flags was expected⁴⁷. In London, although they regarded the case as still hypothetical, the Foreign Office considered whether to ask the French in a friendly manner if they contemplated such an appointment and whether they might agree to abandon the idea, but they decided against such action unless asked to do so by the Government of India⁴⁸. But the Foreign Office communicated with the British Embassy in Paris who reported that M. Ottavi had been appointed but he had not yet left Paris for his post⁴⁹.

On 11 June 1894, Major Sadler, the Political Agent at Muscat, reported to the Residency that, "the post-master had received a communication from the

44. F. O. 54/27, Translation of a Report by the Residency Agent, at Lingah, no.62, 24 April 1893.

45. F.O. 54/27, Talbot to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., 9 May 1893.

46. F.O. 54/27, Hayes Sadler. to Govt. Ind. For. Dept. (Conf), 17 June 1893.

47. F.O. 54/27, Lansdowne to Earl of Kimberley (Secret), 18 Jul. 1893.

48. F.O. 54/27, I. O. to F. O., 10 Aug. 1893; I.O. (Int.), 29 Sep., 1 Oct. 1894.

49. F.O. 54/27, F. O. minute, 9 Jul. 1894.

French Consul-General in Bombay, informing him that the French Government had appointed a Vice-Consul at Muscat, and requesting him to retain all letters addressed to that officer pending his arrival". The Vice-Consul was M. Paul Ottavi, who had been lately serving as Dragoman in the French Consulate in Zanzibar and he shortly expected to be in Muscat. The Political Agent asked the Sultan if he had received any communication from the French Government relative to the appointment of a consular officer at his court. The Sultan assured him that he had not, and he wished to know from the Political Agent about the duties of the French consul in Muscat, as the French had no subjects there. The Sultan drew the Political Agent's attention to the question of the Suri dhows and the French flag⁵⁰. The Resident, F.A. Wilson, on his part reported the matter to the Government of India on 29 June 1894, and followed that with another interesting letter on the next day about the complication which might reasonably be expected to follow the establishment of a French Consular representative at Muscat. Despite that the Government of India believed that the Sultan was in a position to enforce his authority and jurisdiction over his subjects, it seemed more than doubtful whether he had adequate influence over them. According to the Resident, the Sultan was considerably disturbed at the prospect of these difficulties and so had appealed to the Political Agent for advice and guidance as to the course to be pursued. The Resident requested instructions⁵¹. In fact, the Political Agent's most interesting report of 14 June drew attention, in the event of such an appointment, to the question of the Suri dhows granted the French flag. That "one phase which it is possible that this question may assume would be a pretention on the part of the French Vice-Consul to exercise protection over those Arabs of Sur who have accepted the French flag and papers". Twenty-eight Suri dhows raised the French flag, of which nineteen were owned by Jenebeh and nine by Bani bu Hasen. The Sultan, said the Political Agent, had taken absolutely no

50. F.O. 54/27, Sadler to Polit. Res. (Conf), 11 June 1894.

51. F.O. 54/27, Political Resid. to Govt. Ind. (Conf), 30 June 1894.

steps against this, and with six or seven of these dhows visiting Muttrah every year, he had never attempted to ascertain in any one instance by what right use had been made of the foreign flag. The Political Agent warned of indications that the Jenebeh tribe and possibly some of the Beni bu Hasen would be willing to consider themselves as French subjects. The French flag was hoisted over the house in which M. Chapuy stayed when he visited Sur. He was most favourably received there and French flags were flown from the dhows in his honour⁵².

The Government of India in response to the Resident's report instructed him to tell the Sultan he should "refer the French Vice-Consul at Muscat to the Declaration, dated the 10th March 1862, respecting the independence of Muscat and Zanzibar, and to inform him that the assertion of French protection over Suri boats in Oman waters would be a contravention of that Declaration"⁵³. Informed of their action the home Government approved but were more concerned about the consular appointment⁵⁴. The question of the French flag could be exaggerated by the British Government to create a hard time for the newly appointed French Consul, but it was important only in relation to the general matter of a protectorate over Muscat. These developments, however, were interrupted by the events of the 1895 revolt and its consequences. But the British wariness about French policy in Muscat would stay on the political agenda till 1902, part of this issue emerging strongly in 1897, 1898 and after, till finally this flag question was settled in the Hague Arbitration in 1905, as will be shown in the forthcoming chapters.

Conclusion

The French well understood the British aims in Muscat, and in response they lost no time in establishing themselves in Muscat as well, especially given

52. F.O. 54/27, Govt. Ind. For. Dep.to I. O., 18 July 1893.; Sadler to Govt. Ind. For. Dept (Secret), 14 June, 9 Jul. 1894.

53. F.O. 54/27, Govt. Ind. to Resid., 29 August 1894.

54. F.O. 54/27, Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to. H. H. Fowler, (Secret), 4 Sep. 1894.

their status as joint guarantor with Britain of Muscat independence, by the 18 March 1862 agreement signed in Paris⁵⁵.

The main reason why the French established a consulate in Muscat seems to date from the meeting of Lord Salisbury with the French Ambassador in London when the question of a protectorate over Muscat was raised. They seem to have taken the matter seriously and decided to act as soon as possible. Two other reasons may be suggested First, they wanted to spoil the whole British game by a counter measure: if the British wanted to protect the Sultan they would in return offer protection to his subjects, thereby helping to frustrate British policy in Oman. Secondly, after the diplomatic exchanges about alleged British interference over Sultan Faisal's succession, the French were convinced that the Sultan was expected sooner or later to accept a direct British protectorate. If that happened, the French protection to his people would place him in a difficult position. The British efforts would be worthless if they ended by protecting a Sultan without his people!

55. See last para. in the conclusion of Chapter 2.

CHAPTER FIVE

MUSCAT AND BIRMINGHAM

Introduction

The Birmingham arms trade with the Persian Gulf had begun in about the year 1810, and increased year by year. In 1887 the trade had reached over £100,000¹. The arms importation was Muscat's major commercial operation between 1890 and 1912². Birmingham had been long known in connection with the arms trade all over the world. In 1708 the output of gun production in this city grew to over 150,000 items a year³. In Britain around 1770 the gun industry had gained fresh importance because of the French wars and American wars. The British government made contracts with gun makers in Birmingham for its own arms supply, and there was a growing demand for gun exports from Britain to the American continent, and to the colonial and the tropical lands⁴. It is interesting to note that in 1708 guns were exported from Birmingham to Africa, where tribesmen were bribed with flint muskets. Many of the guns had reached there in the holds of ships carrying missionaries eager to convert the natives to Christianity⁵. If Birmingham's guns reached Africa as early as this period, there was a strong possibility of reaching Muscat via Zanzibar. East Africa formed a part of Oman's dominions since 1650s and until 1856. The trade in Africa, was seriously affected by the general act of the Brussels Conference of 2nd July 1890⁶. Because the arms trade was associated with the taking of slaves it was restricted in Zanzibar in 1892⁷. This made the interested bodies in Zanzibar pull out of their

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1. *Hansard*, 4th ser. vol LXIV . 4 to 11 Aug. 1898; *Kynoch J.* 1 (2), p. 33.
 2. Landen, *Oman*, p. 139.
 3. Joan Zuckerman and Geoffrey Eley, *Birmingham Heritage*, (1979), p. 95.
 4. Conrad Gill, *History Of Birmingham*, vol. 1 (1952), p. 97.
 5. Zuckerman and Eley, *Birmingham Heritage*, p.95.
 6. Translation of Protocols and General Act of Slave Trade Conference Held At Brussels, 1889-1890, no. 7, pp. 29-30, Protocol, no. 9, pp. 33-34, 174-175 (H.M.S.O. 1890).
 7. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, p. 272.

trade and direct it all to the Persian Gulf by 1892, especially to Muscat. Even the steamer of Zanzibar's Sultan, for example, was largely involved in the shipment⁸.

In Oman it is not clear whether the Kingdom of Hurmus (9th to the 16th centuries) did introduce firearms to Muscat or not. But certainly canon were used to bombard Muscat in 1505 by the Portuguese under Alfonso De Albuquerque before their occupation of the city. It is also not clear when the Omanis started using firearms, but certainly they used them during their campaign against the Portuguese in 1650, under the Imam Saif Bin Sultan. We are not now able to give a precise date at which the firearms industry began in Oman⁹. In 1834 the treaty between the U.S.A. and Oman spoke about the sale of muskets, powder and ball by the Americans to the Omani Government, and about selling munitions of war in the ports of the Sultan¹⁰.

In England at the end of 17th century William III employed certain manufacturers of the town of Birmingham to supply a quantity of arms for the Government service. From that day the arms trade had increased until it became one of the most important industries of the town¹¹. It became the prime factor which enabled Birmingham to become the centre of gunmaking. The flint gun was introduced to Birmingham from Germany, whose origins may have been French or Dutch, early in William III's reign, and the craftsmen there eagerly took up its manufacture and it soon became in general use on most coaches for protection against highwaymen. In 1692 Birmingham received an order for arms at the rate of 200 muskets per month for a long period. They were used against

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8. Mahmood Ali Daud, *British Relations with the Persian Gulf 1890-1902*, (Ph.D., Univ. London, 1957), pp. 340-341.
 9. Landen, *Oman*, p. 146 noticed that the import of European firearms destroyed the Omani local arms industry, but he did not mention when that local industry started. However the tradition of Omani gun making still exists in individual workshops in the Omani countryside today. See *Oman daily news paper* 9 December 1988, featuring a coloured photograph of *Ssan,a Al-ita-fakk* (Gunmaker).
 10. W. S. W. Ruschenberger, M.D., *A Narrative Of An Embassy To The Sultan Of Muscat And The King Of Siam*, vol. 1, (1838), p. 152.
 11. For this account see Zuckerman, *Birmingham Heritage*, pp. 92-97 and Gill, *History of Birmingham*, pp. 58, 98.

Louis XIV of France¹². Another government order was made for 2,400 muskets two years later at a price of 17 shillings each, and five Birmingham gunsmiths were named in that contract. They were: William Bourn, Thomas Moore, John West, Richard Weston and Jacob Austin. Between 1804 and 1815, in the latter phases of the Napoleonic wars, this town made some three million gun barrels and a similar quantity of gun locks for the government.

Gun trade development in Birmingham did not come easily; its early struggling days were full of jealousy and intrigue between Birmingham and London. About 1709 a petition from Birmingham craftsmen reached parliament complaining of the London men making life difficult for provincial competitors. But, despite that, gunmaking in Birmingham grew in strength and became a striking example of the importance of new industries which were setting up there. In fact, trade in arms was vital for Birmingham; for example, when wars in France caused trade depression and people suffered hunger and unemployment all round the country, the city was more fortunate than many others thanks to the gun trade, and to the great variety of goods in the small workshops. A small-arms factory was built, which extended over 25 acres of land. It developed into the largest private arms establishment in Europe. Birmingham's hand-made guns were exported to America in hundreds of thousands at the time of the civil war from 1861 to 1865, and during the 1860s Birmingham made a radical change in arms production methods. The introducing of the American system in arms production was regarded as a remarkable development. "The formation of the Birmingham Small Arms Co. (BSA) in 1861 initiated a transformation in the making of military small arms from a skilled handcraft to the factory production by machinery of weapons with interchangeable parts."¹³ The guns used in the war

12. *Ibid.*

13. Roger Lumley, ' "The American System of Manufactures" in Birmingham: Production Methods at the Birmingham Small Arms Co. in the Nineteenth Century', *Business History*, 31 (1989), p. 29. This system "was based upon the notion of transfer of skill from human to machine, with a very high degree of specialisation and each worker responsible for only one or two operations". It had been developed in the American Federal Armouries over the first half of the nineteenth century. But that did not mean

between Germany and France in 1870 were mostly made in Birmingham, from which also came the guns used in South Africa in Jameson's Raid of 1895 which precipitated the Boer War. In the twentieth century, Birmingham made an enormous contribution to national defence during the 1914-1918 war. The first tanks to be made came from Birmingham factories. The city seems to have been central to that transformation of world history represented by the universal use of firearms.

As was noticed above, Birmingham initiated its gun trade links with the Persian Gulf in 1810. It is interesting to look at how great the impact of the trade was on the Gulf and in particular on the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. By the 1880s the gun trade became the key point of the North-West frontier policy, and therefore in British policy-making in Oman during the reign of Sultan Faisal (1888-1913). It became the major issue in British international relations regarding Muscat. On what scale was it conducted and how did it affect Oman's and Britain's recent history?

Section Two

Early British Restrictions on Arms in India

The British government became alarmed by the early 1880s. This official concern made the arms business in the Gulf difficult. The problem now was not London's jealousy of Birmingham but the Government of India's interest and intervention. This led to a policy which sometimes threatened the interests of its British subjects. Birmingham was in the lead in confronting this threat. It had to fight in the House of Commons and even in front of the British courts at home. Why was that?

The Second Afghan War of 1879-1880 alarmed the Government of India concerning the arms from the Persian Gulf which might reach the tribes of the northern frontiers. In 1880 the Government prohibited the granting of licenses for

that Birmingham gave up the handi craft skills.

exporting heavy consignments of arms and ammunition to Persian Gulf ports. The British measures were supported by the Persian Government which became interested in arms suppression and issued a decree in 1881 restricting any trade in arms or ammunition from entering their territory¹⁴. "His Majesty the Shah has issued orders that no one shall import arms of any descriptions whatsoever into this country from abroad and any person in whose possession arms of foreign make are found will be liable to have them confiscated by the Government". However, we shall see in section three how serious the Persian Government was in this matter.

One port involved in the arms traffic which lay outside the jurisdiction of the British and Persian authorities was Gwadar, which belonged to the Sultan of Muscat. Gwadar was situated between India and Persia, and geographically it formed part of the Baluchistan region. The trade in Baluchistan caused concern to the British authorities as from there arms could go to the tribes. Another step was needed to impose a check on the trade there, and this was to seek the Sultan of Muscat's cooperation and to persuade him to prohibit the export and import of arms and ammunition at Gwadar¹⁵. According to Bannerman, in 1882 the British Government tried to persuade Sultan Turkey to suppress the arms trade in Muscat, but the Sultan refused¹⁶.

In 1888 the Persian Gulf Residency tried to encourage the Sultan to restrict the arms trade but, as shown in chapter three, no immediate action was taken. In 1891 Sultan Faisal, perhaps as another price for his recognition by the British Government, agreed to issue a notification banning all arms trade at the port of Gwadar: "let it be known by this writing that we have forbidden the import into our territory of Gwadar and its dependencies of arms and ammunition, nothing of the kind is to be landed there or taken thence to any place what ever". It was

14. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 16, A 14.

15. *Ibid.*

16. M.Graeme.Bannerman, *Unity and Disunity in Oman 1895-1920*, (Ph.D., Univ. Wisconsin, 1976) p. 230.

stated that those who defied the prohibition would be liable to punishment¹⁷. Faisal issued this proclamation at the time when the commercial treaty of 1891 was negotiated (as was discussed in chapter four)¹⁸. The timing of the proclamation and the treaty seems not to have been a coincidence. However it is interesting to note that the treaty of 1891, which was signed on March 19, was incompatible with the British desire to suppress the arms trade. The treaty stated that, "there shall be perfect freedom of commerce and navigation" between the high contracting parties and, "no article whatever shall be prohibited from being imported into or exported from the territories of His Highness the Sultan of Muscat"¹⁹. The British desire would also affect the Sultan's obligations under his commercial treaties with other powers, a question which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In 1891 British and Persian policy made the arms traffic illegal along the whole littoral from the head of the Persian Gulf to the British border. But to what extent was that serious?

It is interesting to note that although the British Government of India initiated the arms restrictions, the Persians seemed, however misleadingly, to act more seriously in the matter than the British themselves. In the same year as the Sultan of Muscat's proclamation of 1891 regarding the arms trade in Gwadar, the Persian Government noticed that the sale of arms was still going on in Tehran by British merchants. The Shah complained to the Governor of Bushire and gave "strict orders that the prohibition on imports should be maintained and all arms imported should be confiscated"²⁰. This situation led to restricted measures taken by the Persian customs authorities against arms consignments brought for Muscat traders in 1893, a case which brought complications with the British authorities and their subjects in Muscat.

17. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 16, E 2, A 14, appendix ix, iv; Daud, *British Relations*, p. 341; Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 279.

18. Bannerman, *Unity*, p. 230.

19. Aitchison, *Collection*, (art. 4 and 7) pp. 311-312.

20. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 16, B 1; Sir George Roos Keppel, *Gun Running and the Indian North-West Frontier*, (1911), p. 49.

Section Three

The Question of the Persian Restrictions

In 1893 a consignment of arms was shifted from London via Bushire for transshipment to Messrs. W.J.Towell & Co at Muscat, but the customs authorities of Bushire seized it²¹. In Muscat the consignees appealed to the British Residency at Bushire to intervene to secure the release of the consignment. They claimed that the arms were intended for sale in Muscat, in an ordinary way of business, and no treaty or law existed which prohibited the importation of firearms into Muscat from England. They claimed that "they have previously imported arms from Karachi, and on their applying to Her Britannic Majesty's Consul and Political Agent for letters to the collector of that port authorizing transshipment, such letters were always granted without difficulty". They pointed out that under existing treaties it was allowed to land firearms at Muscat directly from England. They warned that if the arms trade was prohibited to Englishmen, it could be carried out by the Americans and the French. They argued that Muscat was not under the scope of the Brussels conference act of 1892, and denied any desire of acting against any law²². On his part, the Political Agent at Muscat, Major J.Hayes Sadler, communicated with the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, noticing that Messrs and W.J.Towell & Co would be correct in the contention they made, and only firearms landed in India for transshipment came under the the Indian Arms Act. But despite that, the Agency did not seem sympathetic towards the Muscat traders. Sadler, in his letter, enclosed a statement by Messrs. Towell which indicated that some of seven cases containing approximately 130 guns and rifles had been imported and that an accurate description of the arms had not been given. Sadler added that "as the consignments are classed as guns, and in two instances rifles are specified, it may be assumed that these arms were not what we know of as precision, they consist of rifles some apparently of a very modern

21. F.O. 54/27, no. 197, J. A. Crowford, Polit. Resid. in the Persian Gulf to Govt. Ind., For. Dept., 18 Dec. 1893.

22. F.O. 54/27, no. 330, Sadler Polit. Age., Muscat to Resid. 8 Dec. 1893

description". He described their number as about double the total of arms previously imported by the above companies. It was not in the British interest to allow such a consignment of arms to be landed at Muscat at that time and it would be better if it could be prevented. But he did not mention the actual reason behind that fear, although he warned that those arms might find their way up to the Gulf, or to the West Coast of Arabia, by Yamen dhows, and might be smuggled on to the West coast of Africa, which came within the zone of the Brussels Act. He was not able to prove any practical threat to British policy, and also he did not mention the original reason for the British restriction policy on the North West frontiers, instead he raised the Brussels act in its relation to Africa. Sadler was absolutely right and precise in the suggestion that some good would be done if the home Government were to issue a similar prohibition, but it proved difficult. He thought it might be achieved only if the Sultan of Muscat put a stop to the arms trade and even in this case, there could be a problem. How could the Sultan's obligations be compatible with his treaties with other countries-France, U.S.A. and Holland. Sadler thought that perhaps a solution for that problem might be found by bringing Oman within the sphere of the Brussels Act²³. However Sadler's suggestion was too early to be carried out, not before the Muscat arbitration between France and Britain in 1905, the Brussels Arms Conference of 1908-9 and the British-French agreement over arms trade in Muscat in 1914, as will be shown in chapters seven and eight.

However, the Residency in the Persian Gulf seems to have been encouraged by the Muscat Agency's suggestion. It did not find sufficient reason to intervene to obtain the release of the consignments of Muscat traders from the Bushire customs authorities to support the measures taken by the Persian authorities, and to back Sadler's suggestion. The Residency pointed out that the reply to the firms should be in that sense²⁴. Being informed about the matter, the

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

Under-Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, supported the Residency's opinion in Bushire of noninterference as regards securing the release of the arms consignment in Bushire, and asked that the firms concerned should be informed of this opinion. But the Government of India did not take any steps to bring the littoral of the Persian Gulf within the scope of the Brussels Act²⁵. By this stand Messrs. Towell and Co either lost their case because they were deprived of the British Government's support, or they may have found their own solution with the Persian customs authorities. In fact it could be expected that the arms trade via Bushire would be totally stopped after the affair of the Muscat traders, but two years after that event, the Political Agent in Muscat noticed in 1895 that arms and ammunition were conveyed to Muscat from Bushire direct from England. It is surprising that the orders were sent from Bushire by Muscat traders; one of them was Messrs. T.J. Malcolm & Co, and the other Rutonsi Purshotam of Muscat, a British subject who was the Sultan's friend and the Sultan's customs farmer²⁶. If that was true then why were those previous measures taken by the Persian customs authorities? The question as a whole seems to be strange and confusing. The traders did not seem to respect the Persian prohibitory measures. They carried on trade as if there was nothing to stop them at all. But what made the matter more strange is that in the same year 1895 the British steamer *Zulu* landed at Bushire cases of arms for transshipment to Muscat, but the cases were seized by the Persians²⁷. Why did that happen? The Persian demand was in fact to stop the arms being shipped via Bushire but, according to information given to a British court, when the *Zulu* landed at Bushire, "the Customs officials there detained the goods on the plea that the heavy duty on arms and ammunition imported into Persia must be paid. The owners of the goods were not intended for Persia, and were merely landed at Bushire in

25. F.O. 54/27, encl. 2 in no. 422-E, A. Williams, Govt. I. For. Dept. to Polit. Resid., 24 Feb. 1894.

26. F.O. 54/27, no 32, Sadler to Polit. Resid., 5 Feb. 1895.

27. Tuson, *British Policy*, I. O. Memo. no. 2040/98 on State of [Gun] traffic 1891-1897; Durand to Salisbury, 10 June 1898, (16) B1; Keppel, *Gunrunning*, p. 49.

transit for Muscat." The British representative in Tehran, Sir Mortimer Durand and the Persian Government suspected the truth of this assertion; but ultimately the goods were released and unlike the previous case they were forwarded to Muscat²⁸. But this fact might put all Persian arms restrictions under question. In the same year 1895 the Persian Government took another decision and issued an order that all firearms intended for Oman should be imported directly without passing Persian ports, and if firearms were found there they would not be considered destined for Oman, and should be confiscated by order of the Persian Government. For this reason, Sir Mortimer Durand at Tehran wrote to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign department, urging him to give orders to those who imported firearms intended for Oman that they should not use the Persian ports, in order that they might not be interfered with by the Persian authorities²⁹. But the reply which he received to his letter was disappointing. The home government denied responsibility for the issue raised by Sir Mortimer. It was for the Persian Government alone to take action in that matter, to adopt any measures which might be considered necessary in respect to the introduction of arms through Persian ports. But the most significant point was that the home government was cautious to take a decision in the matter and reluctant to act directly. The reason was that the Government of India preferred to avoid any action which might tend, directly or indirectly, to stimulate the trade in arms with Oman, so the Government did not propose to move in the matter³⁰. From this situation three points may be concluded. First, the British Government preferred not to encourage direct arms shipments to Oman and this indicates that they did not like to see Muscat transformed into an arms shipment centre. They may have kept in mind that the Muscat situation could develop in ways that would be against British policy. In addition to the possibility of shifting arms to the North

28. J. P. Aspinall and Butler Aspinall, *Reports of cases relating to Maritime Law*, vol. viii., (1900) p. 418; F. O. Robinson and R. H. Balloch, *Barristers-at-Law, Reports Of Commercial Cases*, vol. iii, 1897-98, (1898), p. 232.

29. F.O. 54/27, encl. 4 Durand to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., 10 Apr. 1895.

30. F.O. 54/27, encl. 5 in 1383-E, Cunningham to Durand, 15 Jul. 1895,

West frontier tribes, Muscat's close relations with East Africa might result in shifting arms again to that continent and thus upset the Brussels Act of 1892 which formed an important part of British policy and that of other powers in Africa. Muscat's position regarding the arms trade might involve other European powers in treaty with Muscat, so prevention was better than cure- although it is going to be found that prevention was impossible. Secondly, the British Government wanted to avoid any complications which might emerge at home with interested bodies in this matter, lest it appear that the British Government was carrying out the Persian Government's policy against the arms trade even when that trade was compatible with British law. Thirdly, the British Government did not wish to reveal to the British public that the arms trade restriction was purely its own policy. Especially in the latter case the Government even tried to wash its hands of the matter totally and make it a purely Persian interest and, therefore, decision.

However, it seems that the Persians were good enough at issuing orders but showed little capacity to make them effective. The order of 1895 by the Persian government to stop using Persian ports for arms transshipment did not stop the arms transshipment. The traders of Muscat carried on their business as usual. This indicates that the Persian Government itself was not serious in the orders it issued³¹. This does put a big question mark against the entire matter. If the Persians were not serious then why did they issue all those restriction orders against the arms trade? Why did they confiscate arms consignments on some occasions only? The reply to these questions came three years later, in a British domestic court. It appeared that local authorities in Persia obtained arms in return for conniving at the trade. The demand for the arms was so extensive "that the central government considered that there was room for another partner in it, and a special official was appointed from Tehran *nominally to enforce prohibition*

31. F.O. 45/27, encl. 6 in no. 30, Colonel F. A. Wilson, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., 17 Mar 1896; no 49, Sadler, to the Polit. Resid. 25 Feb. 1895.

against the import of arms; but as the official in question paid for his post in the usual fashion, it is certain that neither he nor the Government had any intention of carrying out the orders. In fact the trade showed an increase of ten lakhs³² and there was no real prohibition at all, and no one engaged in the trade imagined certainly that there was any danger so long as duties were forthcoming in answer to the demands of the Government officials³³. But why then were there prohibitions and what did it all mean? "Theoretically the trade was prohibited by the Persian government, but like all similar prohibitions in Persia, this practically only substituted an arbitrary impost for a fixed duty"³⁴. But did the traders know that, and what was their reaction to it? They knew that there was a nominal prohibition against the importation of arms³⁵, but the fact was that it was never acted upon, and the traders never heard of any attempt to enforce it so long as the duties which were arbitrarily imposed were paid. If that demand was accordingly met by the Persians, the trade was open and notorious³⁶. In fact the prohibition was merely effective for only one purpose and that was to enable the representative of the Shah, who apparently farmed his office from the Government, to levy heavy and arbitrary duties on imported goods³⁷. This person was an official who had the largest power, and while holding his office he could do practically what he pleased³⁸. But the question is did the British Government act in full knowledge of this situation? The answer is that it did. A report was addressed to the Government of India for the year 1896/97 sent by Major Mead to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, and there was also a report by the British Consul-General Fred A. Wilson, for the year 1895 on the trade at Bushire.

32. Aspinall, *Reports*, p. 419.

33. *Ibid*; Robinson et al, *Reports*, p. 229.

34. Aspinall, *Reports*, p.419.

35. *Hansard* 4th sers., vol LXIV, 10 Aug. 1898, p. 358.

36. Aspinall, *Reports*, p. 419.

37. *Ibid*; Arthur Russell (ed.), *The Times Law reports*. vol. XVI, (1899-1900), p. 405;
Hansard, 4th sers., vol. LXIV, 10 Aug. 1898, p 855.

38. Aspinall *Reports*, p. 419.

The Persian way of suppressing the arms trade seems to have attracted the Sultan of Muscat's admiration. Perhaps His Highness's delight in that unique Persian policy expressed itself in the sparking of similar ideas in his own mind or may be, in his customs farmer's, in a similar way to that of the Persian official who worked under the Shah. The Sultan's idea was to increase customs duty on imported arms in Muscat. But how could he convince the British authorities? To what extent would they accept in Muscat what they accepted in Persia? Unlike the Persians, how far was the Muscat Sultan free in taking decisions of this kind and what would the consequences be? It is this position which we now consider.

Section Four

The Question of Arms Duty in Muscat

In Muscat, Sultan Faisal, unlike the Persians, developed a direct practical way to increase his income from arms importation. He thought of imposing a 15 per cent custom duty, without issuing any prohibition³⁹. When the Sultan suggested this increase to the British Political Agent, Major J.Hays Sadler, he found opposition. The Political Agent told the Sultan that this could not be done and the Sultan should not levy from British subjects without special sanction of the British Government as it would be opposed to the terms of article 6 of the 1891 treaty between Muscat and Great Britain. By this, Faisal and Britain had to enter into a long new series of engagements which involved other international powers. The British Political Agent believed that the Sultan had intimated to his subjects involved in the trade that a higher rate of import duty would be levied. The Political Agent believed that the consequence of this would be to throw the monopoly of the arms trade into the hands of Ruttonsi Parshotam, a British Indian and the Sultan's customs farmer. The Political Agent suggested to the Government authorities that if this duty were imposed, the British commercial treaty with him should be amended as well as other treaties with other powers.

39. F.O. 54/27, no. 49. Sadler to Resid., 25 Feb. 1896.

But he believed that the percentage suggested by the Sultan, 15%., would not be a prohibitive one, and also he warned of the consequences of levying a heavy duty on arms because the Sultan could only exercise control at the two cites of Muscat and Muttrah, so the traffic would be diverted to other places on his coasts, where his authority was too weak and where no means of collecting the duty would exist⁴⁰.

Despite the British home Government's warning against making Muscat a centre for the arms trade, from 1890 to 1912 Muscat became an arms transit station⁴¹. During this time the city took over some of Bushire's role in arms selling, though the flow of arms into Bushire did not stop entirely. But Muscat dealers started to make their orders direct from England. Ruttonsi Parshotam had the monopoly of this trade⁴². A statement of the arms trade into Muscat shows that between 30 March 1895 and the 30 January 1896 a total of 87 cases of rifles and 151 cases of cartridges were shifted to Muscat from Bushire and England by Messrs. Malcolm & Co of Birmingham and by Najaf bin Ghalib of Bushire. However, from that date on, a number of Faisal's subjects became involved in the trade and were commencing to compete. As was mentioned above, Zanzibar, which started shifting arms to Muscat about 1892, participated in the trade during this period and took a large portion. Between the years 1896 and 1897, 20,000 rifles and 750 cases of ammunition were imported into Muscat. The Naval Intelligence Department noticed that Muscat received in 1896 itself between 23 June and 25 August a total of 906 rifle cases of the old kind (*Long Enfield 180*), and 200,000 safety cartridges⁴³. The percentage of arms distributed over the Gulf and Arabia was as follows; about 60% for Persian territory, 25% for the Turkish and the rest for Arabia. The kind of weapons were Martini-Henry rifles. Of the Enfield rifles and other weapons 5% were estimated as going to Arabia, 20% for

40. *Ibid*; and [the writer's chap. 3 Sec. 2, about Zakat collection]

41. See text above.

42. *Ibid*.

43. *Ibid*; F. O. 54/27 Govt. Ind. For. Dept. (Secret ext) to Hamilton, 4 August 1897; Daud, *British Relations*, p 348

Oman itself, 10% for El Hasa Kowait, and 20% to Makran and South Eastern Persia⁴⁴.

By 1897 the arms coming into Muscat reached a considerable significance. It made Muscat a distributing source of arms to various quarters and the value of arms imported was 900,000 dollars from Birmingham in Great Britain and only 10,000 dollars from France. In the same year Sultan Faisal requested permission from the British authorities to increase duty on arms and ammunition imported from 5% to 7.50%. In fact it is not clear why Faisal changed his mind, since one year before he suggested a 15% increase in duty, though probably he thought that was too much to be accepted by the British authorities, and, misunderstanding the British desire, he reduced the duty by a half so as to be accepted by them. On 26 *Shawwal* 1314, 30th March 1897, His Highness wrote a letter to the Political Agent at Muscat regarding the importation of arms and ammunition into his dominions saying "we are of opinion that the duty of 5% should not be made to apply to these articles which were formerly not considered merchandise, and were not imported from Europe as they have been in recent years". It is also obvious that Faisal did not regard the arms as merchandise goods. He also raised the point that his treaties with the European countries did not apply to goods which came from Bushire or Zanzibar for example, which were not European ports. He repeated that the continued importation of large quantities of arms and ammunition was likely to cause serious trouble to himself. He said "and we therefore trust that the Great Government will agree to permit us to levy an additional duty of 2.50% on these articles. The duty on arms and ammunition will then be 7%. By agreeing to this the Great Government will confer a favour upon us"⁴⁵. In fact, the Sultan seems to have been encouraged by the enormous pouring of arms into his port. He was right in this case to benefit from this situation but to link that request with his security proved shortsighted. The Sultan may have

44. F. O. 54/27 Sultan of Muscat to the Political Agent, 26 Shawl [Shaw[^]wal] 1314=30 March 1897.

45. Sadler to resid 25 Feb 1896.

thought that the Persians took advantage of the British policy for suppressing arms trade in the Persian Gulf, by the way in which they dealt with the trade in their country. The British never stopped them, so why could he not do it? If the Persians used the British fear of the tribes of the North West frontiers why could he not use the same fear from tribes, loyal to France, close at hand and occasionally in revolt against him at home in Oman? If Persian measures towards suppressing arms trade were accepted by the British why should his not be? The tribes which he had at home could be not only dangerous to him but also dangerous to British policy. His objective, as was the case with his Persian counterparts, was to increase the customs income which his farmer (a British subject) looked after for him. By this also he would increase his farmer's income since the latter was the leading arms trade merchant, and this would return benefit to the Sultan himself, allowing him to acquire more cash. The increase of duty would consequently increase the price of the arms sold in the market or re-exported, a matter which would result in doubling both partners' income. This additional income seemed more important for the Sultan than the question of his security since economically he was totally dependent on the Zanzibar subsidy which he received via the British Government. From the security point of view, the British Government was in doubt whether the Sultan's allegations that the continuous and large importation of arms into his dominions might involve serious danger to him, since they knew that the Sultan's authority was already little more than nominal away from the sea coast, and also they believed that an addition of 2.50% to the duty on arms was not likely to act as a deterrent⁴⁶. They did not believe that Faisal was serious about putting down the arms trade because His Highness appeared to make a profit from the trade. They were thinking of prohibiting the trade instead of benefiting from it. So they reached a point that the trade could only be checked if the Sultan himself prohibited it⁴⁷. Despite that

46. *Ibid*; Tuson British Policy B16, B1.

47. F. O. 54/27, F. G. Benville, Polit Resid. to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., 31 Mar 1897; Lovat Frazer 'Gun Running in the Persian Gulf' *P. C. A. S.*, 17 May 1911, 3-16.

point, the British official's reaction to Faisal's desire to increase duty on arms varied according to their more precise concerns. It also caused some confusion about the real British stand in the matter. For example, the British Residency in the Persian Gulf found that the increase of duty could be possible if the assent of other powers allowed it to be of general application, and that the interests of British manufacturers and merchants should not suffer⁴⁸. The trade was in the hands of English companies such as Messrs. Joice and Kynoch, and any increase in the import tax would act in a manner detrimental to British trade⁴⁹. At the same time, the Residency in the Gulf realized that if heavy taxes were placed upon imports of arms into Muscat, one of the ports on the Pirate Coast could become a future imperium of the arms trade, and the Sultan then would have to face heavy loss of revenue which he could ill afford⁵⁰. Meanwhile, the Residency considered a 15% tax would be necessary to put a stop to the import of arms into the Persian Gulf and the 2.50 % would not materially affect the trade⁵¹. In London, the India Office gave a reminder that the Muscat commercial treaty of 1891 provided that the duty should not exceed 5%. It also stated that there should be no prohibition of any item of trade and that the treaty was not to be reviewed before twelve years⁵². In India, in fact, the Government seemed to agree that the continued import of arms might very likely cause trouble in Oman. However, they did not agree that the Sultan's percentage suggestion could prevent it, and disagreed with the 15% increase suggested by the Persian Gulf Residency. In addition the British officials found that treaties which the Sultan had with other powers presented another obstacle both to the raising of duty and the check on arms. However, the India Office found another solution for the problem, namely that the Sultan should give his adhesion to the Brussels Act. But the Government of India was not prepared to take steps to apply that act, in respect to all circumstances. To stop

48. F. O. 54/27, *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

52. F. O. 54/27, no. 62, I. O. to F. O., 2 Sep. 1897.

the trade a really prohibitive rate should be proposed but the Government of India could not insist on it, until the expiration after twelve years of the Muscat commercial treaty which would occur in 1903. The India Office imagined the possibility of concessions involving all the parties' interests. But before taking any action the Office advised reference to the treaties with Muscat and wanted enquiries made on the question of duties in Paris, The Hague and Washington. On the same matter Lord George Hamilton ordered Sir Mortimer Durand in the Sistan Department to be consulted⁵³. Sir Mortimer, for his part, agreed with the idea of stopping the trade and he pointed out the advantages of a joint declaration between the states concerned, U.S.A, France, Holland, and Muscat. (He did not mention Great Britain). He suggested bringing the countries concerned into agreement for the increase of duty on imported arms into Muscat from 5% to 15%, so the Sultan then could free himself of personal responsibility for introducing the tax of 15% . Sir Mortimer Durand warned of the dangers of diverting the trade to the pirate coast⁵⁴. However until 2 September none of the different suggestions was carried out by the British Government. The Sultan, however, took his own initiative. The India Office reported to the Foreign Office that proposals of the Sultan of Muscat to raise duty on arms from 5% to 7.50% had already been made to the French Government. But the India Office was not sure whether the Foreign Office had received any information about that and whether the Sultan had approached the U.S. Government as well with regard to any modification of their treaties. The India Office however agreed with the view that a 7.50% duty increase on imported arms into Muscat would not diminish the importation⁵⁵. Despite that, the British Government seemed slightly to be coming to accept the 7.50%, from the point of view that any check on the trade, no matter how modest it was, would be a positive step in suppressing it⁵⁶. Accordingly,

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. Tuson, *British Policy*, I. O. Memo. no. 802/92, Govt. Ind. to F. O. (on increase of import duty on arms at Muscat) 4 Aug. 1897, B16, B1.

Faisal's action, no matter what his real desire was, should be encouraged in this right direction. So the Sultan should receive some help in his communication with treaty powers.

With the U.S.A, Oman had concluded a treaty during the reign of Faisal's grandfather (Saeed bin Sultan) and the Presidency of Andrew Jackson in 1834. The President delegated Edmond Roberts to sign the treaty with Sayed Sa'eed. The agreement was the first and longest-lasting treaty in U.S. diplomatic history⁵⁷. Article III of the treaty stated that "vessels of the United States, entering any port within the Sultan's dominions, shall pay no more than five per cent duties on cargo landed, and this shall be in full consideration of all import and export duties, tonnage, license to trade, pilotage, anchorage or any other charge whatever....⁵⁸". But, despite that, the U.S. Government gave their positive diplomatic response to the matter, accepting the 7.50 % duty increase if the Government of the Sultan should be in a position to collect such a tax generally from the other treaty states trading with Muscat. Probably they knew that the Sultan was not in that position. However, by this clever response, they cleared their position and sat watching developments. They were convinced that one country's rejection could be enough to spoil the game. Amending commercial treaties proved an uneasy task for the Sultan as well as for the British Government. France refused to consider any modification in their commercial treaty (of 17 November 1844) with Muscat which stated that trade should be perfectly free in the said territories of the Sultan of Muscat subject to duty at 5%. Accordingly, the Sultan seems to have given up the 7.50% proposals, but his own interest, it seems, forced him after that lengthy effort to increase import duty by his own decision to a new percentage, 6%, without amending any of the treaties.

57. J. D. Porter (ed.), *Oman and the Persian Gulf 1835-1949 Uman wal khaleej Al Farisy* (U.S.A 1982), p. ii.

58. W. S. W. Ruschenberger 'Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between The United States Of America, And His Majesty Syed Syeed Bin Sultan of Muscat and His Dependencies', 30 June 1834, in , *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World 1835, 36, 37, including A Narrative of an Embassy to the Sultan Of Muscat and The King of Siam* pp. 151-154, (1938).

Such a figure was of course less than the one proposed before by (1.50%) but would probably avoid strong rejection from the powers concerned who were not going to regard the increase as very great, though it would be seen as an infringement of the treaties. However, there was no significant objection to that increase either from the states in relation with Muscat or from dealers native to those states. However, after all, the Sultan had won only one per cent to increase his income⁵⁹. From the British side, there is nothing to show that they objected or acknowledged the Sultan's step in raising duty, but the question with the British Government still was not over. The arms customs duty in Muscat, it seems, focused the attention and interest of the Government of India on Muscat customs, the place at which the arms entered into the country and from which they were re-exported, and from which the Sultan derived the assistance necessary for his survival. The Sultan's customs were administered by a powerful British subject, but one whose interests were with the Sultan more than with those of his own government; a matter which will bring complication between the British Government and its own subject on the one hand and the Sultan on the another. And, as will shortly be made clear, these two parties, could not settle this matter on their own: others will be involved.

Section Five

The British Government and Muscat Customs

The British government made three attempts to take over the Muscat Customs. The first was on 21 January 1898 when the Viceroy of India was encouraged by reports from Muscat that the Sultan was likely to consent to giving Government of India control over the Customs Department for 10 years. But it is still not clear how that had happened Was this new suggestion from the Sultan himself or was it an initiative from the British Political Agent? However, the Viceroy asked the Secretary of State for India's permission to offer as inducement,

59. Tuson, *British Policy*, I. O. Memo B16, B1.

if necessary, the advance to the Sultan of Muscat of one year's customs revenue, and, if it could be done, to control Muscat customs without infringing the provisions of the declaration of 1862, between France and Britain to respect Muscat and Zanzibar independence. In regard to this request the India Office agreed that, if that was achieved, it would give to the Government of India not merely a control over traffic in arms but it would add other powers which would be of advantage to the Indian authorities. But the India Office was not sure how far the joint declaration of 1862 with France would cause problems. So the matter was referred to Lord Salisbury to give his view on the point concerned⁶⁰. Lord Salisbury's opinion was that actual and direct control of the Sultan's customs by the Government of India was scarcely compatible with the independence of the Sultan of Muscat, which was assumed by the declaration in question. Therefore, if this proposal was suggested, it would be certainly rejected by France. Instead of that, he suggested a plan for the employment of a British official by the Sultan himself in order to superintend his customs. And that, according to Lord Salisbury, might give the same security for good administration without being vulnerable to objection on the part of France⁶¹. He agreed that an advance of money to the Sultan on the security of the customs would be worthwhile. He also suggested that the officer of the customs in question should not be under British Government control but under the Sultan's direction. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs asked the Viceroy if he agreed with his views. If the Viceroy did, Salisbury would approve the arrangement⁶². But from February 1898 till November of the same year serious steps were not taken to proceed in this matter by the Government of India and details of the reason for that delay are still unknown. It seems that the Government of India did not agree with Lord Salisbury's suggestion and decided to carry out their original suggestion of establishing direct control despite the British-French declaration of 1862 and

60. F. O. 54/28, I. O. to F. O., 29 Jan. 1898.

61. F. O. 54/28, F. O. to I. O. (Conf), 7 Feb. 1898.

62. F. O. 54/28, Hamilton to Viceroy, 18 Feb. 1898.

despite the advice given by Lord Salisbury in that question. This may give some explanation why the procedure in the matter was delayed

The second attempt was in November 1898, when the Government of India authorized Consul Fagan, the Political Agent in Muscat, to make an advance to the extent of one year's purchase money for Muscat customs if he could thereby induce the Sultan to let the British run the customs directly. The Government of India were anxious to get Muscat customs into their own hands⁶³. It is interesting to notice whether the Government of India communicated with the Foreign Office in London before taking this decision and whether the Home Government approved it. It is also interesting to notice that Fagan, on this matter, did not communicate with the Persian Gulf Residency or India, but directly communicated with London. We will discuss this matter later in this section. However Fagan approached the Sultan to carry out what he had been ordered by the Government of India, but the Sultan refused to accept his proposals. He was most reluctant to do anything of that sort, and was suspicious of the Government of India's desire⁶⁴. For this, Consul Fagan blamed angrily, not the Sultan but some British subjects who helped him with money and advised him not to surrender his customs to the Government of India. This assistance gave the Sultan some strength to refuse India's proposals. Consul Fagan acted angrily against that alliance of the Sultan and the British subjects against the British authorities. If the Sultan was on his own he might give up his resistance and surrender his customs. The Political Agent accused those British subjects of being the cause of conflict between the Sultan and the British Government. In his letter to the India Office dated 26 November 1898 he said that the Sultan, for the severe economic circumstances he was in, would agree with the proposals. Fagan said that "our Bania subjects, who purchase the right to farm the customs, and by advancing sums of money to the Sultan... get a certain hold over him, and persuade him to

63. F. O. 54/28, no. 1, Lee Warner to Sanderson 19 Dec. 1898.

64. F. O. 54/28, encl. in no. 1, Fagan to Lee Warner, 26 Nov. 1898.

sanction or, at any rate, to wink at illegal and excessive taxation and other irregularities which result in endless correspondence and constant friction of a petty, but not the less irritating nature between the two governments"⁶⁵. The refusal of the Sultan and the support of British subjects for him in the question of the customs also made Fagan even angrier because he regarded it as a challenge against him or his authorities and he stated firmly, "it seems absurd to me that we should quietly allow ourselves to be defeated in any object we may have in view of the selfish action of one or two of our own subjects, which can be so very easily put a stop to". Therefore Mr Fagan drafted, on his own, rules to limit the freedom of British subjects to farm the Sultan's customs⁶⁶. Every British subject intending to enter "into contract for purchase of the right to farm the customs of any town or port within the said dominions shall without unreasonable delay, furnish to Her Majesty's consul at Muscat a true and complete copy of the terms of such contract"⁶⁷. In addition to the authority he had over British subjects he put himself as the sole judge as to what constituted unreasonable delay in furnishing him with full information in the matter concerned. And he warned those who failed to do so that they would be liable on conviction before Her Majesty's Consul at Muscat, to a fine not exceeding 500 dollars or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three calendar months⁶⁸ (articles 1,4,5). Reading the rules, it seems that the original reason (to keep an eye on arms flow in the town) was diverted to something different, namely to get his hands on the Muscat customs. For example, Articles 1 and 4 gave the British Consul a strong hold over British subjects, especially those who were of the business class and in partnership with the Sultan. Articles 2,3,and 5 stated that nothing more then taxes should be collected from Her Majesty's subjects within the dominions of the Sultan by any one of his subjects. The most important were articles 1, 4 and 5 mentioned above.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*

67. F. O. 54/28, draft notification by Fagan, 21 Nov. 1898.

68. *Ibid.*

On 21 November Fagan posted his proposed rules of five articles with a letter addressed directly to the Foreign Office in London. The Foreign Office received the letter on the 12 December⁶⁹. In fact, in order to ensure that his rules should be adopted, Fagan cut out the accepted diplomatic channels of communication which the Muscat Political Agent should follow; A, with the Residency in the Persian Gulf, B, with the Government of India and C, with the India Office, by communicating directly with Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs. By this unusual move it seems that Fagan was seeking quick support for his rules in order to bring about an immediate punishment for those who challenged him in Muscat. He wrote to Lord Salisbury, "I have the honour to transmit for your Lordship's consideration a copy of the rules and regulations made by me in exercise of the power and authority vested in Her Majesty's consul at Muscat by Article 1 of the Muscat Order in Council dated 4th November 1867"⁷⁰. Anticipating approval of his rules, Fagan followed his letter to Lord Salisbury with another one on 26th of the same month, this time to the India Office in an another unexpected diplomatic communication which seemed to go behind Lord Salisbury's back and deal with the matter in his own way and give the appearance of mastering the situation. He wrote to William Lee Warner in the India Office informing him about the rules he drafted and which were sent by him to the Foreign Office in London. He said "Lord Salisbury will send on the rules to the India Office, I am just sending you a few explanatory lines about them ". He was sure that Lord Salisbury would not take a decision on his own without consulting the India Office, but in fact he did nothing more then brief the India

69. F. O. 54/28, no. 8, Fagan to Salisbury, 19 Nov. 1898.

70. F. O. 54/29, British Order in Council, 4 Nov. 1867; *London Gazette*, Nov. (1867) vol. XXXI P. 984. This Order was, "an Act made and passed by the parliament holden on the 6th 7th years reign, entitled an Act to remove doubts as to exercise of power and jurisdiction in Her Majesty's dominions, and to render the same more effectual, or may at any time here after have within any country of place out of Her Majesty's dominions in the same and as ample a manner as if Her Majesty had acquired such power or jurisdiction by the cession or conquest of territory: and whereas Her Majesty hath power and jurisdiction in the Dominions of his Majesty the Sultan of Muscat and its dependencies".

Office with the same ideas which he reported to Lord Salisbury at length, about the Muscat Customs question. More important was his urging and appealing for support from the India Office to ensure approval of his suggestion. But it is interesting to question whether Fagan's latest effort was known by the Residency in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Government. Fagan's rules were passed by the Foreign Office to the Eastern Department which noticed that they had been forwarded on 23 December. This department had not been consulted earlier on the matter. It was found by this department that the rules were to come into force by 21 December and normal procedure had still not been followed. Accordingly, the Sistan department suggested that Fagan should be instructed by telegram to defer the operation of the rules until he received further instructions. The matter was referred back to the India Office on the same date⁷¹. On 19 December W. Lee Warner of the India Office was already referring Consul Fagan's proposed rules (with his letter of 26 December to the India Office which was mentioned above) to Sir Thomas Sanderson in the Foreign Office. But Sanderson directed that Sir W. Lee Warner of the India Office should be asked whether they would first consider the matter or leave the Foreign Office to do so and then pass on their views to them. On the whole Sir W. Lee Warner thought that the matter should first be considered in the Foreign Office, but he was doubtful whether Consul Fagan was right in referring the matter direct to the Foreign Office in the first instance instead of working through India. He pointed out, however, that these regulations had now been posted for a month and therefore became law unless disallowed⁷². The Foreign Office agreed with the India Office⁷³. However, the Foreign Office understood that the main object of these rules was to place the customs of Muscat practically under the control of the Government of India. The Foreign Office persisted in its earlier stand on the matter, and they advised

71. F. O. 54/28, encl. 1 in no. 7, Fagan, 'Rules and Regulations issued for the observation by British subjects at Muscat', 19 Nov. 1898.

72. F. O. 54/28, minute by R. N. M., 23 Dec. 1898.

73. F. O. 54/28, minute by W. E. D., nd.

cautiousness in obtaining that control owing to the British engagement with France of 1862. The Foreign Office reminded the India Office about its letter of 7 February⁷⁴.

However, Fagan seems to have been encouraged and pleased by direct contact between him and the Foreign Office on 17 August 1898. As a result, the Residency in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Government ceased to be his primary reference in the Muscat question. Yet this question started with the Residency of the Persian Gulf, when the Residency sent the letter on 27 January 1898 to the Government of India based on Fagan's report about arms traffic, stating that the traffic from Muscat was to be stopped and registration of arms should be declared compulsory for British subjects⁷⁵. For its part, the Government of India sent a letter to the Secretary of State for India on 4 February 1898 enclosing the Residency's proposals for the compulsory registration of arms at the British Consulate at Muscat on the basis that Article 1 of the Muscat Order in Council 1867 was sufficient to enable the Consul to make rules providing for such registration. But the Government of India made it clear that with regard to compulsory registration of arms the idea did not commend itself to Lord Salisbury, and they advised that the Consul in Muscat should not move in the matter of framing a rule until the Government of India was in a position to instruct him as to the views of Her Majesty's Government⁷⁶. But despite that, on 17 August, Lord Salisbury directly sent a letter to the Muscat consulate asking them to submit fresh approved rules regarding the registration of arms⁷⁷. Being asked directly by Lord Salisbury to do so, Fagan was encouraged to find himself with another chance to make other rules and if, in the first case, it had proved possible to contact the Foreign Office directly, why not in the second? If the arms issue was interesting to the Foreign Secretary why should not the customs issue also be?

74. F. O. 54/28, minute by R. N. M., 24 Dec. 1898.

75. F. O. 54/28, encl. 1 in no. 56, Tel. Polit, Resid. to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., 27 Jan. 1898.

76. F. O. 54/28, no. 56 Govt. Ind. For. Dept (Secret Ext) to Hamilton, 4 Feb. 1898.

77. F. O. 54/28, no. 5, Fagan to Salisbury, 23 Sep. 1898.

However, Fagan's report about the Muscat customs position to Lord Salisbury is an important historical document. As was noticed above, Fagan was very angry about the obstruction by the Sultan and his British subject allies of the plan to control the Sultan's customs by the Indian Government. So he was determined to challenge them and so he released to the Foreign Office details of the most private commercial relations between the Sultan and British subjects, in particular those who purchased the Sultan's customs. His aim was to guarantee approval of the rules he drafted.

Fagan wrote enclosing a long report to Lord Salisbury claiming that the whole of the Persian and import trade of Oman was in the hands of the Banians (British subjects). Such men also had the right to farm the customs at various ports because they were the only traders in the place possessing sufficient capital and therefore able to carry out one of the most important functions of a customs farmer. In that position they been acting as the Sultan's bankers, a position which carried with it the obligation to honour cheques for considerable sums on an already overdrawn account. Fagan went on to explain the system of farming the customs of Muscat as follows: "the right to collect the customs is sold to the highest bidder and when the bargain is completed, the privilege of collecting the dues belongs or ought to belong to the purchaser for one year, at the end of which period the same method is repeated"⁷⁸. The contract was a onesided affair and was not binding on the Sultan but only on the Banian. The purchase money was not paid in a lump sum, but usually in monthly instalments. The arrangement was granted on the condition that the Muscat farmer had to be prepared at any time to make considerable advances whenever required to do so. Fagan explained the system on which the customs duties were collected. It was done by the private employees of the Farmer and the whole arrangement was carried out in any manner he might think proper. But what was then the Farmer's profit in all that? It was considerable and consisted of all money collected in excess of the amount

78. F. O. 54/28, no. 7, Fagan to Salisbury, 19 Nov. 1898.

payable to the local Government. In some cases, however, the Sultan drew on the Farmer for a larger sum than the latter had stipulated to pay for the customs, so there was an overdraft to be recovered. Because the Sultan's financial position did not enable him to repay the money he borrowed, it was necessary for him to find ways to satisfy his farmer by indirect means, sufficient to compensate for the risks run and to make the position generally worth keeping⁷⁹. As illustration, Fagan related the history of the Customs purchase since 1896-97 by Rotancy Parshotum, a British Indian subject. Using his official position and his close relation with the Sultan, he was obstructing the business of his trade competitors and thus unduly and unfairly supporting his own interest. The Sultan himself was so situated that he could not afford to offend his farmer⁸⁰. The farmer, Fagan said, could always "have resort to expedients for increasing his income, which are detrimental to the interest of the Country to which he owes allegiance, and it enables him to carry them out under cover of a pretext which will not bear examination, namely,"⁸¹he said that he was a servant carrying out orders of his master the Sultan, as it was the practice to look upon the customs Farmer in Muscat. But he was imposing illegal taxation even against British subjects. Fagan considered the relations between the Sultan and the customs farmer were purely commercial. If the Sultan's partner was a British subject, he must be held, according to Fagan, "responsible and liable for acts committed by him in that capacity calculated to infringe our treaty rights and to cause friction between the two Governments". For all those reasons and others he sent his rules which have been discussed above to the Foreign Office, warning "if this were not done it would be easy for a Banian to purchase the customs in the name of some local subjects whom he would finance". Fagan's rules would tighten the grip on such Banians.

However, Fagan's rules, after transfer to the India Office, did not seem to proceed further. It seems that the Foreign Office's caution managed to convince

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*

the India Office of possible conflict with France because these rules would be in conflict with the joint declaration of 1862. However the customs question seems to make another fresh start after the failure of the second attempt of 1898. The third attempt by the Political Agent was to take place in 1899 and be supported by the Residency in the Persian Gulf.

The third attempt was on 16 March 1899. Fagan sent a telegram to the Foreign Office expressing the hope that the Sultan would place control of the customs in the Government of India's hands. However the Foreign Secretary refused direct control of the customs. It repeated its previous opinion that the Sultan might apply for the services of British officials⁸². But Fagan insisted on his idea of controlling Muscat's customs as of the utmost importance. He said "we should obtain a control over the customs, as doing so will remove the only security the Sultan can offer for a loan from any other power, and secure our preponderance for the future"⁸³. The Persian Gulf Resident thought that if he applied for the services of a British person to manage the customs it could be of advantage, and to induce him to do so was advisable. It seems that Fagan worsened the Sultan's relations with the British authorities and led the Sultan to show his disloyalty to the British Government, which in turn forced them to jeopardise his subsidy. Colonel Mead, the Political Resident, expressed to the Sultan his disappointment at the level which the Sultan's relations with the British authorities had reached. He mentioned to the Sultan that he had informed his Government "that you had resolved to walk along the path of loyal friendship to the British, and would in future accept the advice of Her Majesty's representative at Muscat". Mead said to the Sultan "you should desire to carry out the wishes of the British Government". Concerning the subsidy, which was linked with the Sultan's attitude, Mead said that he was surprised to find that fresh difficulty had arisen. The Sultan should convince Major Fagan that he intended to be loyal, and

82. F. O. 54/29, Tel. no. 477. E.A, Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to the Polit Resid., 20 Mar. 1899.

83. F. O. 54/29, no. 45, Fagan to Resid., 20 Mar. 1899.

that he would resolve in the future to treat him as the representative of Her Majesty's Government should be treated. After that he said "I feel sure the Government will order that your subsidy, along with the arrears shall at once be paid". Regarding the relation between the Sultan and Major Fagan, Mead advised the Sultan to regard him as his friend and to show that he regretted past mistakes⁸⁴.

But did Mead succeed in assisting Major Fagan in Muscat? In fact no. In a letter dated 28 March 1899 Fagan wrote to Colonel Mead that he had communicated with the Sultan and pointed out to him that the Government of India wished to see his government on a sound stable footing. It would be therefore necessary for His Highness to institute considerable reform in the matter of finance, which would enable him to get rid of his debts to the Banians (customs farmers) which amounted to about 170,000 Rupees and thus ease himself of the burden of interest which such debts involved. There was a considerable sum yearly going into the farmer's pocket which could go to the Sultan himself. Fagan suggested to the Sultan that a wise policy on his part would be to ask the Government of India for the service of a trained official to manage his customs. But he found the Sultan was not inclined to follow his advice, and he could not see any chance of any reform being undertaken by His Highness. He said "His Highness suddenly veered round"⁸⁵. On 28 April 1899, Colonel Mead wrote to the Sultan saying "I now write to advise Your Highness to apply as soon as you can to the Government of India for the service of an experienced official to manage your customs", and His Highness should understand that the Government of India had no thought of interfering with his customs or of taking them over. He said "the official you ask for will be lent to you and be in your highness's service, for the time being. As your friend I can without hesitation advise you to do what the Government wish without delay." He went on "you need not ask that the

84. F. O. 54/29, no. 106, Mead to Sultan of Muscat, 9 Apr. 1899.

85. F. O. 54/29, Fagan to Mead, 28 Mar. 1899.

officer lent should be employed permanently, but a fixed time, say two or three years." Pointing out the advantage of such a course, he said "at the end of that time you will know for certain what your customs are worth, and can either continue working them direct or revert". This step would improve the Sultan's income and relieve his financial difficulties. But, above all, he said "you will thereby please the Government and show that you really intend to work in future along the path of loyal friendship towards them"⁸⁶. But the Sultan's attitude towards the Government of India was suspicious, especially after the case of the seizure of the *Baluchistan*, in January 1898. (which will be discussed in the next chapter). The Sultan's reply to Mead was frustrating. He said "I regret to say that this country is not fit for such an arrangement, I have often informed Major Fagan that I cannot accept it". He went on, "in view of the kindness and good feeling which the high Government bears towards me," he said, "they will not like to see the peace of my country and people disturbed"⁸⁷. So all the effort, which was made from February 1898 to May 1899 to convince the Sultan concerning the control of his customs, was wasted. Mead believed that the Sultan's stand could be explained not by the influence of his customs farmer but as a result of French influence. The Sultan's answer to his letter, he believed was made on the advice of the French Consul, if it was not actually dictated by him. It is important to recall Mead's military background rather than diplomatic position. In regard to the British agreement with France of 1862 and to the new French influence over the Sultan, Mead suggested that if France were to take control over Muscat or to obtain any other advantage in return for a loan or subsidy Her Majesty's Government should denounce the agreement and establish a British protectorate over Oman. And if the Sultan continued to insist on not obtaining British help for better management of his customs and affairs generally, he must be informed that his subsidy would not be paid and that would result in his downfall. Britain

86. F. O. 54/29, Mead to Sultan of Muscat, 23 Apr. 1899.

87. F. O. 54/29, Sultan of Muscat to the Polit. Resid. (A. H. 28 *Zilhaj* 1316), 19 May 1899.

would not take any measures to defend him⁸⁸. After that, it was needless to speak about the level which the relations between the British officials in the Gulf and the Sultan of Muscat had reached. It would lead the Sultan to grant the French a coal station in Bander Jessah. This event should be considered separately⁸⁹. By 1901 it seems that the Sultan was convinced by the British authorities to reform his Customs and take over their management as will be discussed in chapter seven⁹⁰. The later reforms were to affect all aspects of the administrative, financial, military and educational position in Muscat. This will take place during the twenties, the thirties and the forties of the century in several stages⁹¹. In terms of the customs, the peak of reform was reached by the issue of *The Muscat Customs Manual* in 1942 approved by the Sultan of Muscat and Oman (Sa'eed bin Taimur), and which controlled all customs activities in Oman until 1970.⁹²

Conclusion

Birmingham and Muscat had something in common in respect to the gun trade despite the fact that Birmingham was exporting and Muscat was importing. Both cities were highly dependent on that trade. But the object here is not to make simply that comparison so much as to draw attention to the political impact of the trade on Muscat's recent history. A scholar will not be surprised that the impact of the gun trade was great on Birmingham, simply because this city became the most important centre for arms making in the world by the late nineteenth and early

88. F. O. 54/29, Mead to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., conf., 21 May 1899.

89. For the full story of this event see Landen, *Oman*, pp. 49-54.

90. *The Times*, 25 Oct. 1901 p. 9, col 1.

91. For these reforms see J. E. Peterson, *Oman In The Twentieth Century: Political Foundation Of An Emerging State* (1978), pp. 31, 91-92, 175-176, 30,; W. D. Peyton, *Old Oman*, (nd.) 3, pp. 52, 56, 57; Bartram Thomas, 'Arab Rule Under The Albussaid Dynasty of Oman' 1741-1937, *Proceedings of The British Academy* XXIV (1938), p. 51; Ronald Wingate, *Not In The Limelight*, (1959), p 82; John Townsend, *Oman The Making*, p. 50; K. H. Mead (ed.), 'The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman', *Asiatic Review* XXIV (1928) pp. 572-573; Phillip Warner, *The SAS. The Official History of The Special Air Service*, (1983), p. 223.

92. Director General of Customs, (ed.), approved by [Sa'eed bin Taimur] Sultan of Muscat And Oman, *The Muscat Customs Manual*, (Bombay 1942), [1942-1970].

twentieth century, culminating in the world war of 1914. But the impact of that trade on a distant country is very dramatic.

However, as we have seen, the arms question in the Persian Gulf caused alarm to the British authorities in India because of trouble caused by tribes on the northern frontiers of India. This alarm brought strict measures by the British government of India to suppress the arms trade in the Persian Gulf so that the arms could not reach the tribes. The Persian government unfortunately abused that British policy in order to increase its own income by imposing arbitrary taxes on the trade. The British authorities certainly knew about the intention of the Persian government but they kept quiet, waiting for the appropriate moment. When the Sultan of Muscat decided to use the same Persian method, the British authorities found that the local ruler's desire was not to stop the trade but to benefit from the British policy. It was only nominally that the trade was to be checked; but in practice it was encouraged. In Muscat this method was to benefit the Sultan's customs farmer by increasing duty on imported arms and consequently increasing the Sultan's income from illicit trade, as it was described by the British authorities. This tendency by the Sultan to increase his income by raising duty led the Government of India to think of controlling the Sultan's customs, which in turn led to a variety of other issues, events and developments which were significant in Oman's recent history. The case of the *Baluchistan* was one of them and it is this case involving both Oman and Great Britain to which we now turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CASE OF THE *BALUCHISTAN* IN OMAN**Introduction**

This case was about the seizure of the British steamer *Baluchistan* on 24 January 1898 by H. M. S. *Lapwing*, in the territorial waters of Muscat, and of confiscated arms aboard. It became one of the longest legal cases concerning the arms trade, lasting from 1898 to 1903. It caused dispute between the Sultan Faisal of Muscat and the British Government, and resulted in damage to relations between him and the British authorities.

At home, the British Government faced another long debate and opposition by members of Parliament representing the arms trade companies in Birmingham to the action taken against the *Baluchistan*¹. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Curzon, on 21, 24 February, 4 April, 4 and 28 July, and 1 August 1898 had to reply to several questions in the House of Commons. On 10 August there was an extensive debate regarding the question, but Curzon was absent and the question was referred to the First Lord of the Treasury². The interested parties also took this case to the British courts and several organizations and bodies were involved³. Eventually the case was forwarded to the House of Lords Judicial Committee of the Privy Council which debated the case⁴.

While this was proceeding at home, in Muscat a different political development was taking place, since Muscat became, largely, part and parcel of British policy on the north-west frontiers of India. The French became involved directly in the arms trade in Muscat and took over a great proportion of it and its profits. This multiplied the French interests and allowed them to share with the British influence over the formation of Muscat's policy, a matter which the British

1. *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. LXIV, 10 Aug. 1898, pp. 851-860.

2. *Hansard*, 4th ser., vol. LXIII, 21, 24 Feb. 1898, pp. 1200, 1520; vol. LVI, 4 Apr. 1898, pp. 38-39.

3. Russell, *The Times Law*, vol. III, (1897-98), p. 229; vol. XVI, (1899-1900), p. 229.

4. Frederick Pollock (ed.), *The Law Reports, House of Lords* (1902), p. 176.

had long tried to prevent, as shown in chapter four. But now the Omani people themselves increasingly required French protection, and French flags for their vessels, a situation which the British had been worried about since June 1893 when a French Consul was appointed⁵. The French challenge to the British even went further and was beyond the British expectation. Their protected Omanis managed to influence the Sultan, and share in his administration, and in the decision making of the Muscat Government. This had an important impact on the direction of British policy in Muscat from 1898 till 1905.

Section Two

The Origins of The Case

The case of *Baluchistan* originated from general British efforts to suppress the arms trade in Muscat and in the Persian Gulf from 1880, as was discussed in the previous chapter. But the arms suppression was not taken very seriously, either by the British or by local Governments in the Persian Gulf. In the Persian Gulf, for example, the Shah of Persia and the Sultan of Muscat tended to exploit the British policy of arms suppression to increase both their customs income and to profit from rather than to suppress it. They were joined by their officials in sharing the benefits. In Muscat it was the Customs farmer, and in Persia it was not only the Customs officials of the Shah but the Minister of War himself (Naa'ib Ass-sultaneh) who was importing Austrian-made Werndle rifles and made a good profit from that. For example a rifle purchased for 15s in Vienna sold for £8 in Persia⁶. In Britain there was fear of losses for the British firms, and the possibility of other countries' firms entering the arms market and replacing the British if the suppression policy was taken seriously. The situation became complicated and very difficult for the British authorities. In the south of Persia the tribesmen were buying weapons (Lee Metfords and Martini Henrys) shipped via Muscat, often by British companies and vessels.

5. See Chap. Four (French reaction).

6. R. M. Burrell, 'Arms And Afghans in Makran: An Episode in Anglo-Persian Relations, 1905-1912', *Bull. S.O.A.S.*, XLIX (1986), p. 10.

This indicates that the early British effort with the Sultan of Muscat and the sultan's order of 1891 to stop traders carrying on their activities in Persia and India had not worked⁷. No wonder that during 1897, 30,000 breech-loading rifles were imported to the South of Persia through Bushire⁸. This port in general received in that year arms and ammunition valued over £100,000 almost all of which came from Great Britain⁹. It is another example of the Persian attitude towards the arms trade, as explained in the previous chapter, and of making business out of the suppression policy. But the lack of determination on the part of the British in suppressing the trade was also an interesting matter. The British were aware of the complicated situation but they kept quiet for a while waiting for better opportunities to promote British policy.

By the end of 1897 new steps for suppressing the trade were taken seriously for the first time in Persia. On the 7th December, "suddenly and without any warning being given, and without any reason being assigned, a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition belonging to British merchants and manufacturers, stored at Bushire, which had actually passed the Customs, and upon which duty had been paid to the Persian officials, were seized by the British Consul or his subordinates, and were handed over by them to the Persian Government "¹⁰. The number of rifles seized in this operation was 7,000¹¹; of that number, 2,000 rifles were of Belgian origin, but imported by the English firms Messrs. Francais and Son Ltd¹². At the same time Muzaffer al-Deen Shah of Iran, feeling some concern about the arming of the Southern tribes, gave ships of the Royal Navy authority to stop and search the cargoes of all Persian vessels ,requesting that any weapons found should be seized and turned over to the Persian Customs authorities¹³.

7. See Chap. Five, sec. two for the Sultan's notification of 1891.

8. Burrell, *Arms And Afghans*, p. 10.

9. Lovat Fraser, 'Gun Running in The Persian Gulf', *Proc. Cent. As. Soc.*, 17 May 1911, p 5.

10. Mr. Lowe (Birmingham, Edgbaston), speech on 4 August 1898, in Hansard, 4th ser., vol. LXIV., p. 854; Captain R. St. P. Parry, 'The Navy in The Persian Gulf', *J. R. Un. Ser. Inst.*, LXXV (1930), p. 319.

11. Fraser, *Gun Running*, p.5.

12. Daud, *British relations*, p. 355.

13. Tuson, *British Policy*, B16 B2; R. M. Burrell, *Arms and Afghans*, p. 10.

The Shah's concern probably ran parallel to the latest situation on the North-West Frontier of India which caused great alarm to the British authorities. That led them to make every possible effort to close any source of arms supply to the Indian frontier tribes. Those tribes were in a state of conflict with the British army of the Government of India. But this time the conflict became very serious. On 9 December General Westmacott was ordered to occupy a crest commanding points leading to the Raigul valley on the Indian Northern frontier. On 10 December a British Messenger was attacked by the tribesmen, beaten and robbed. On the 14th and the 15th the British army under General Westmacott engaged in heavy fighting with the Afredies tribes from daylight till dark. The tribesmen were persistent and bold in attack. Lieutenant West of the 3rd Gurkhas and the Jemadar who was leading General Westmacott's horse were shot dead. Lieutenant Champain and Captain Scott were wounded. The Gurkhas lost five killed and seven wounded, and the Borderers two killed and five wounded. In this engagement from the British side there were 150 Scottish Borderers, 130 Sikhs, and 150 Gurkhas, two companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers and two companies of the Northhamptonshire Regiment forming the rear fighting line¹⁴.

So the situation had developed into unusually large scale serious fighting on the North-Western frontiers. That tension may well explain British action to suppress the arms trade becoming more serious than any time before, and their search for any possible centres which might supply the tribesmen with arms so as to check the arms traffic.

But the joint measures which were taken by the British and the Persian authorities in Bushire together with Persian arbitrary extortion at the expense of the traders caused the latter to open wider another gate of the arms trade. Muscat, from which the arms traders had operated before, could supply the tribes with arms. Muscat again became a centre for supplying arms in the area. During 1896-1897 that city received 20,000 rifles and 750 cases of ammunition from Messrs., Joyce

14. *The Times* 'The Indian Frontier', 15, 16, Dec. 1897.

and Kynoch of Birmingham¹⁵. In fact, it was in November of 1897 that it was discovered that Martini Henry rifles were on sale at Kurram on the North-West Frontier. This raised speculation about the possible source of supply, whether it was Persia or Afghanistan. It was also believed by the Political Residency in Bushire that the arms had been purchased in Muscat although this matter was disputed by the British Military Attache in Tehran¹⁶. However, serious measures would have to be taken with respect to Muscat as well.

In Muscat the first tough measures were taken against a British arms trader. He was Mr Messulam, residing in Manchester, who was a travelling agent of Carling Company, and he had stayed in Muscat from June till December 1897. He became deeply involved in arms importation and intended to introduce machine guns. In a letter dated 31 December 1897 to the Political Agent in Muscat, the Viceroy of India proposed to urge the Sultan to expel Mr Messulam. In case of failing to do so the Viceroy gave the Political Agent the power to order his deportation¹⁷. It is not clear whether Mr Messulam was expelled or not but it is obvious that the British authorities in India were aware of the danger of allowing further firms involving British subjects to enter the arms market in the region. It shows also the Government of India's concern about the type of arms which might be introduced. The machine guns were obviously far more complicated and developed than traditional firearms. But the British Government was also to bring about a different kind of pressure on the Sultan of Muscat to make arms suppression more effective. They joined Persia in an effort to persuade the Sultan of Muscat to co-operate with them¹⁸. The British and Persian Governments sent a joint delegation to Sultan Faisal of Muscat with a letter to him dated 5th January 1898, expressing their concern about arms shipments from Muscat territory to tribes subject to Persia and those on the frontier of India who were engaged in hostilities with the British Government. That could be regarded as an action against both

15. Daud, *British Relations*, p. 348.

16. R. M. Burrell, *Arms and Afghans*, p. 9.

17. F. O. 54/28, Viceroy to I. O., 31 Dec. 1897.

18. Burrell, *Arms and Afghans*, p. 10.

Governments' laws for suppressing the arms traffic. Because of that the letter asked the Sultan to warn his subjects and any person resident in his territories to stop exporting arms to both countries from His Highness's dominions. Finally they invited him to authorize British and Persian ships of war to stop the illicit traffic, and to seize and confiscate any cargoes of arms owned by British subjects in Muscat waters destined for illicit importation into the ports of Persia and India¹⁹. But, it seems, Faisal did not give an immediate response to this overture, possibly confused by the co-operation of Persia with Great Britain. Since it was very well known by the Muscat arms merchants what were the Persian measures of suppressing arms, it was probably doubted whether they were any more serious this time about suppressing the trade or whether they would continue tending to profit by involving themselves in the arms suppression²⁰. At Bushire, for example, after the remarkable arms seizure of December 1897, Malik a'Ttujjar was appointed officer to prevent the arms trade, but with the agreement that one third of the confiscated arms should be given to him as reward!²¹ If that was true, it would raise the question of what Malik would do with his third share. The Sultan certainly would be aware of the value of his customs revenue from the arms trade. But Britain in practice dealt with the Sultan alone and directly, though the commitment the Sultan gave was to both governments, Britain and Persia, just as it was demanded.

However the main concern of the British authorities with regard to arms suppression was the fresh uprising of the Afriedies tribes on the North-West frontier in December 1897. But this policy also affected other areas under British influence, Muscat and Persia for example. In Muscat this policy was to create the circumstances of the *Baluchistan* affair. In fact it was quite possible that another ship than the *Baluchistan* might have become involved at some different date and perhaps in Persian or Indian territorial waters with quite different consequences. However, the outcome of the *Baluchistan* case was important in respect to both

19. F. O. 60/603, Translation of the Persian text of letter to the Sultan of Muscat, 5 Jan. 1898. Sited in Daud, *British Relations*, Appendix VIII.

20. Chap. Five, sec. two.

21. Daud, *British relations*, p. 357

Muscat and Great Britain.

Section Three

Towards the Case of the Baluchistan, 1898

In the year 1898 political events seem to have developed rapidly in Muscat, Birmingham and London. After the British-Persian joint letter of 5 January to the Sultan of Muscat, he received a similar letter on 12 January from Colonel Meade, the Political Resident. The letter enclosed a notification drafted by him which the Sultan was requested to adopt and declare. Next day, quickly, on the 13th the Sultan replied; "your esteemed letter of yesterday's date has arrived together with the draft copy of the notification; we have accepted it and we shall publish it. A copy of it is (herewith) sent to you ". Faisal expressed his compliance with what the British desired in respect of preventing the traffic of arms and ammunition to India and Persia. In fact, he was cautious and precise in his reply in mentioning India and Persia. That meant there was not any commitment to include Oman in the suppression project. He only assured his willingness to co-operate with both Britain and Persia in arrangements to suppress the trade in their territories²². It is also important to note that Faisal's willingness was not without conditions. He made it clear in his reply to the Political Resident that "with regard to what you have hinted to us about representing this matter to the great government in the best way possible, so that we should be (not only) *guaranteed against any loss but (also) derive benefit by what we are doing, we firmly believe that the Government [the British Government] and yourself will not be pleased with any loss to us*²³.

Sultan Faisal made three important points. First, he excluded Oman from any measures of arms suppression, second, he wanted to be guaranteed against any loss and to benefit instead, and third, he issued a diplomatic warning about possible consequences if he suffered losses. And if his wishes were taken into consideration, he said to the Resident, "we shall thank the Government and yourself for that ". In

22. Tuson, *British Policy*, B16/E4.

23. F. O. 54/28, Sultan of Muscat to the Political Resident, 19 Shaban 1325 A.H.(13 Jan. 1898). writers emphases.

other words it would avoid any complication in his relations with the British Government. It seems that Faisal was not fully sure that his wishes would be considered, though he was showing confidence in his reply by making those points. But Faisal would have been encouraged by the news of December 1897 of arms seized in Bushire by Her Majesty's Consul-General, who handed them over to the Persian authorities (see text above), while a third of the confiscated arms were to go to the officer in charge (Malik a'Ttujjaar) as reward for his wonderful services. So why could this not be done for the Sultan? What did he really gain from his willingness to co-operate? The following will provide the answer.

Colonel M.J.Meade sent a letter to the Government of India about his meeting with the Sultan, which made the Sultan's proposition clearer. The Sultan had asked him whether he would be given the arms seized in his territorial waters. The Sultan was apprehensive, saying that he would suffer in a pecuniary way from the proposed arrangement. Replying to the Sultan's points Meade said, "I impressed on him that his own authority would certainly benefit if he could prevent the arming of the Arab tribes [the Omanis] in the interior and that, that alone was in my opinion a strong reason in favour of his joining the British and Persian Governments in putting an end to the traffic in arms". Regarding the handing over of the arms he mentioned to the Sultan that he had received no instructions and could not guarantee his Highness against loss. But, he said, "in view of the advantages which would result from the early conclusion of an agreement with the Sultan, I felt justified in telling him that I was prepared to make recommendation on his behalf if he readily complied with the wishes of the British Government ". He said to the Sultan that the British Government was "kindly disposed towards him and did not wish that he should suffer in any way, but on the contrary, that he should benefit by carrying out their views". But Faisal was practical in putting forward to Meade his possible total loss of \$24,000 a year revenue from the duties levied on the import and export of arms²⁴, if the British measures against the arms trade took place.

24. F. O. 54/28, Meade to Govt.Ind. For. Dept., 22 Jan.1898.

It is clear however that Faisal was not concerned, as Meade implied, about any threat to his authority but simply concerned about his revenue. The Sultan probably was satisfied with Colonel Meade's view that he would benefit by carrying out the British Government's policy. He was probably pleased to know that the Government did not wish him to suffer, if he was willing to co-operate. So he took that as a diplomatic signal that something could be done either by handing over to him any seized arms or by compensation for his possible loss. If he could benefit in the same way as the Persians had in the previous December and if the trade was not to be touched in Muscat, he would be satisfied. Muscat then would be the only place which could carry on the arms trade with profit. When Meade drafted the Sultan's proclamation he was trying to influence the Sultan's own thinking in this way and to show that his role was simply a cooperative one. He knew if he included Muscat in the suppression policy it would be refused by the Sultan. Meade drafted the proclamation so as not to be rejected. The quick response of the Sultan shows that Meade achieved what he had put into Faisal's mind. At the same time it reveals the Sultan's ambitions to profit by and to monopolize the trade. It appeared to be a diplomatic game between the Resident and the Sultan, the Resident to pursue his Government's policy and the Sultan to meet his own interests. Both appeared to have different desires. The Sultan's ends were to gain the seized arms or to be compensated if losses occurred. The Sultan's negotiation with the Resident and his reply is an interesting issue in itself. The way the Sultan dealt with the proclamation indicated his awareness of the dangerous consequences of that issue, but he accepted on condition that he should be guaranteed by his opponent to win the game! The Resident's idea of winning that game was simply the issuing of that proclamation, by which the arms trade would be suppressed, unaware of what might happen, if the Sultan's wishes were not taken seriously. In fact it was a great political gamble between the two great players, the Sultan of Muscat and the British Resident. Normally in gambling there are winners and losers, but who won this game, the Sultan or the Resident?

After meeting with Colonel Meade²⁵, the Sultan issued his notification on 13 January 1898, as follows: "*Be it known to such of our subjects as see this that ,whereas the British and Persian Governments have represented to us that they are desirous of preventing introduction of arms and ammunition into India and Persia, and that there is reason to think that many are exported from Muscat and taken to those two above named countries, we have resolved to join them and to assist them as far as it lies in our power in suppressing this trade in arms and ammunition between Muscat and India and Persia .We therefore warn (our subjects) that all the arms and ammunition sent to those two countries will be confiscated ,and those engaged in the trade will be punished, as the introduction of arms and ammunition into India and Persia is prohibited by the Government of these two countries, and therefore illegal.*

*In future our Maskat flag will be no protection to vessels carrying the said arms and ammunition from our dominions to India and Persia (This is written) that it may be known"*²⁶. Bannerman noticed that discussion between Faisal and the Political Resident over the issuance of the proclamation was not recorded, but Colonel Meade's report to the Government of India of 22 January, mentioned above, may be enough to show the major points of concern raised by the Sultan and the conditions under which he did issue his proclamation. Meade's letter could be sufficient to indicate the way the negotiation went on. However, on the same date the Sultan also issued his proclamation giving the right for British and Persian ships of war to search Muscat's vessels for arms. "*We have given permission to British and Persian vessels of war to search vessels carrying their and our flag in our territorial waters, to confiscate all arms and ammunition (weapons of war)in them"*. This referred to arms intended for India or Persia and belonging to British,

25. The date of the meeting between the Sultan and Colonel Meade is not clear but it seems it took place between the 5th and the 13th.

26. Tuson, *British Policy*, B16/B2, E4-48; F. O. 54/28, Translation of notification of the Sultan of Muscat, 13 Jan. 1898; Bannerman, *Unity*, p. 231; Fraser, *Gun Running*, p. 5; Keppel, *Gun Running*, p. 50; *Law Times Reports*, vol. LXXXII, 1902; *The Law Reports*, 1902 'House of Lords, Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and Peerage Cases', (1902), p. 699. Busch, *Britain Persian Gulf*, p. 273. Writer's emphasis.

Persian or Omani subjects, on all waters belonging to the three countries²⁷. The proclamation did not state any punishment for the offenders; it was left for the Notification to deal with that. It could be pointed out that the Sultan's notification and the Proclamation carried a significant weakness. In both of them it was stated that the Muscat flag would be no protection to vessels carrying arms, and that vessels of war would search vessels flying British, Persian and Muscat flags. The flag question was going to be an issue in itself and would not be solved before 1904. If the Omanis were to feel that their flag would no longer be protection to them when threatened by Persian or British ships of war how could they be expected to behave? It was for them a good reason for seeking protection under the flag of another country not covered by the Muscat-British and the Persian Agreement. But which country would that be, and how would the Omanis proceed for that purpose? Section five will discuss this question. However there is still nothing to show any direct reaction in Muscat to the Sultan's notification and proclamation, and that may be because the arms traders in Muscat thought that their business was unaffected since both the notification and the Proclamation mentioned only Persia and India and not Muscat. Despite that, the arms traders took precautions and prepared themselves in the matter of the flag just in case. But, so far there was nothing to fear and no reason for any panic. The traders certainly knew about the Sultan's commitment to treaties with other states than Great Britain. Those states were not suppressing the arms trade and were trading freely in it, such as U. S. A. and France. Just about ten days after the notification and the Proclamation the steamer *Baluchistan* was seized by H. M. S. *Lapwing*.

Section Four

The seizure of *Baluchistan*, 1898

Before the latest efforts for suppressing the arms traffic of December 1897 in Bushire, and the Sultan of Muscat's declarations of January 1898, the steamer

27. Richard W. Brant (ed.), 'Muscat Proclamation' in , *A Collection of Treaties and Conventions, Between Great Britain and Foreign Powers*, vol. XXV, (Hertslet's Commercial Treaties 1910), p 947. Writer's emphasis.

Baluchistan had sailed from England. It left London on 26 November 1897 on its trip to Bahrain via either Bushire or Muscat. It was loaded with four cases of cartridges valued at 125L. and one case of rifles and one case of cartridges valued at 200L²⁸. On 24 January 1898 when *Baluchistan* was within the Muscat's territorial waters and making for the harbour of Muscat, H. M. S. *Lapwing* signalled her to stop and fired a shot across her bows²⁹. The ship *Baluchistan* was boarded by an officer, Carr, from H. M. S. *Lapwing* who told her master to consider the cargo under arrest. He seized all the cargo of rifles and ammunition and took them to Muscat³⁰. This was done on the grounds that the arms were intended for importation into Persian territory and that this was forbidden by Persian law³¹.

The case of the *Baluchistan* developed in two ways, one in London and Birmingham, and the other in the whole of Oman (Muscat, Batinah, interior of Oman and Sure). At home the case went to the courts, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Guardians of the Birmingham Proof House. The Times, The Economist, covered most of those events³².

In Oman the seizure of the *Baluchistan* and its arms cargo brought a fresh dispute between the Sultan of Muscat and the British Government. It appeared that the Sultan's willingness to adopt the Political Resident's notification of 13 January was based on the belief that any confiscated consignment of arms would be turned over to him. He perhaps thought of equipping his soldiers with these modern arms, or he may have intended to sell them with a good profit. It appeared that he seriously meant what he said in his reply of 13 January to the Political Resident that he should benefit from his co-operation in the suppression of arms traffic to Persia

28. Aspinall, *Reports*, p.418; *The Law Times Reports* vol. 79 (1898), p. 28.

29. *The Law Times Reports*, vol. 82 (1902), p.700.

30. *Ibid*; F. Barry, (ed.), *The Times Law reports* vol. XVII. (1900-1901), p. 658.

31. *Solicitor's Journal (& Reporter)*, 42, (1898) p. 635; F. O. Robinson and R. H. Balloch, *Reports of Commercial Cases* vol. III, (1897-98), p. 230; Fraser, *Gun Running*, p. 5; Russell, *The Times Law Reports*, vol. XVI, (1899-1900), p. 406; *Law Journal Reporters (new series)* vol. 71 (1902), p. 361; *The Law Times Report*, vol. LXXIX (1898), p. 28.

32. *The Times*, 3, 4, May, 6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 20, 23, 30 Jun., 5 Jul., 5 Nov. 1898; 17 Jan., 8 Feb., 1, 4, 6, 9 May 1899; Report of the Guardians of the *Birmingham Proof House*. 1899. (31 Dec. 1898); *The Birmingham Daily Mail*, 15 June 1898; *The Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 16 June 1898.

and India. That belief could be a reasonable justification for the Notification and the Proclamation. But what had happened after the seizure of the *Baluchistan*? The captured arms were handed over by the *Lapwing* officers to the British Political Agent and not to the Sultan. Faisal was confused and became angry. He asked to be given the seized arms. He protested and claimed to the British Political Agent in Muscat that by this seizure alone he lost \$MT 25000³³. But the Political Agent denied that any agreement had been reached with the Sultan whereby the seized arms should be given to him. This caused tension between the Sultan and the British authorities. The strain in relations between the two parties began to overshadow the situation³⁴.

It was noticed above that there was not any reaction against the Sultan's Notification and Proclamation since the Muscat trade was not touched. But after the seizure of the *Baluchistan*, the situation immediately took a new turn. That was because of the fears and doubts among the arms traders in Muscat about the British attitude and maybe doubts about the Sultan himself even from his own subjects. For example, three days after the seizure of the *Baluchistan*, on 27 January the British Political Agent in Muscat reported that quantities of arms in Muscat were being removed and concealed in dhows, so that detection by British men-of-war at sea would be extremely difficult³⁵. The trade did not stop because the traders found their own ways to deal with an uncertain situation. So most of the arms dealers diverted their traffic to other ports. Consequently the Muscat arms trade decreased to less than a third in 1898 compared with the previous year³⁶. This was to mean a considerable loss of revenue to the Sultan.

The French, however, found it a wonderful chance to promote their own interests by offering flags and security for the arms dealers' dhows³⁷.

Sultan Faisal soon discovered that his willingness to co-operate with the

33. Bannerman, *Unity*, p.232.

34. *Ibid.*

35. F. O. 54/28, Tel., Polit. Agent to For. Dept., Govt. Ind., 27 Jan. 1898.

36. Bannerman, *Unity*, p. 232.

37. *Ibid.*

Persians and the British had been short-sighted. He was unable to prevent the consequences. His prestige as sultan was severely damaged amongst his own loyal subjects who took refuge in French protection, and he became unable to prevent this disastrous consequence even amongst his own officials. Perhaps the assault by some of them against seamen of the British cruiser *Cossack* on 10 February 1898 indicated some hostility towards the British though it did not have any direct relation with the arms trade³⁸. But the Sultan himself became unhappy with the British.

In the Persian Gulf, Colonel Meade reported that the Sultan's attitude had become very unsatisfactory. The Sultan refused the British request to hold a court of Judicature without prior assurance that the seized arms should be at his absolute disposal if the Court found that arms of the steamer *Baluchistan* were lawfully seized³⁹. The Sultan also refused to co-operate with the British Government for a preliminary inquiry in the case of *Baluchistan*, since the arms were seized by the British ship *Lapwing* without the presence of any Muscat officials empowered to inquire and seize in the Sultan's name⁴⁰. Given this changed attitude of the Sultan Faisal, he was warned by the Persian Gulf Residency that payment of his subsidy would be suspended pending orders of the Government⁴¹. But the Sultan's position presented the British Government with a problem.

It appeared that the Sultan's co-operation was essential. This was necessary from the jurisdictional angle, since, if he was willing to give his authority to the seizure of the *Baluchistan*, he would vindicate H. M. S. *Lapwing's* action, which would be seen as an action taken by him, but carried out by H. M. S. *Lapwing*. So as far as he was a sovereign ruler, both his position and the action of the British man-of-war would be seen as legal. That became clear when several complaints and applications were received by the British Government and law-suits by interested bodies at home became possible. The Home Government advised the

38. *The Times*, 11 Feb. 1898.

39. F. O. 54/28, Viceroy to Secretary of State, 21 Mar. 1898.

40. F. O. 54/28, Secretary of State to Viceroy, 22 Mar. 1898.

41. F. O. 54/28, Viceroy to Secretary of State, 21 Mar. 1898

Viceroy of India not to be impatient with the Sultan. Instead they found it desirable to conciliate him. They warned that it was a grave mistake to threaten the Sultan with suspension of his subsidy and regarded that threat as impolitic. In fact, it was very important given that the British authorities were seeking collaboration with a foreign ruler against the interests of British citizens.

What was needed was a courteous request to the Sultan to appoint an officer to hold an inquiry in the case of *Baluchistan*. The Consul in Muscat, Major Fagan, was told that he should regulate his action in this matter according to the instructions to be given him by the Home Government. The Home Government's request for details about the arms seizure was only for reference⁴².

However this question remained unsolved between the Sultan and the British authorities till April 1898 when Colonel Meade, the Resident in the Persian Gulf, visited the Sultan. It was his second visit in one year, the first being for the Notification of 13 January. The Sultan seems to have softened his stand and asked for assurance of British support, in the event of enquiries involving arms belonging to subjects of other European powers. However Meade was instructed by the Viceroy to say to the Sultan that the object of the procedure laid down was to secure full opportunity for all claimants to prove their claims, and that the Government would deal with claims and questions of final possession. So His Highness should have no anxiety on those points⁴³. There was nothing to show that the Sultan's demand for the seized arms was accepted, but it seems that Meade's visit to persuade the Sultan to hold a court was successful because the Sultan's wishes in respect of the seized arms were quietly satisfied.

On 15 April 1898 a High Court by order of the Sultan was held in Muscat under Sa'eed bin Muhammed, the *Wazeer* of His Highness, and Bader bin Seif for inquiring into the circumstances under which certain munitions of war from the steamship *Baluchistan* of Swansea, were confiscated. The court examined Lieutenant-Commander G.Carr, R.N., captain of the *Lapwing*, heard his evidence

42. F. O. 54/28, Secretary of State to Viceroy, 22 Mar. 1898.

43. F. O. 54/28, Viceroy to Meade, 13 Apr. 1898.

and examined the bills of landing, manifest and papers, and telegrams produced by the captain. The court found that (1) munitions of war from the steamship *Baluchistan* had been seized by the British man-of-war *Lapwing*; (2) the seizure was in every respect legal and in accordance with the permission given by His Highness to British men-of-war at the request of the British and Persian Governments; (3) the munitions of war were intended for Persian ports; (4)" The alteration in the port-marks of destination on the cases took place during the stay of the steamship *Baluchistan* at Port Said on or about the 12th Shaban 1315 A.H.(6 Jan.1898) with the intention of misleading as to the true destination of those cases; but such alteration did not provide any immunity on them from seizure in accordance with the above -mentioned permission";(5) the munitions of war seized were the very ones mentioned in the original manifest which was attached to this decision⁴⁴. The Sultan signed the court decision. He stated, "I, Feysal bin Turki, Sultan of Muscat, having carefully considered this decision of my High Court, approve of it and agree with it. In witness whereof I have put my signature and seal to it". On behalf of the British Government Major Fagan was present in the court of Muscat. Presumably this court was needed essentially to anticipate any problems which Lt.Commander Carr might have at home and to confirm the legality of his action by decision of the Sultan of Muscat's court. The Sultan's desire was to have the seized arms for himself. According to his court's decision, the ship *Baluchistan* was heading for Persian ports, and the change of destination conferred no immunity from seizure, which was legal in every respect according to his proclamation of 13 January 1898 . Whether the Sultan had the right as a sovereign ruler to set up a court to decide on the legality of seizing arms aboard a foreign ship was another question. The arms were seized not according to Omani law but Persian law. The courts would have to decide whether this court was compatible (1) with the British Parliamentary Act of 1843⁴⁵ and (2) with the regulation of British consular

44. *The Law Times*, vol. LXXXII (1902), pp. 698-99.

45. *Act of Parliament 6th 7th Vict 1843*, (an act to remove doubts as to exercise of power and jurisdiction by Her Majesty in divers countries and places out of Her Majesty's Dominions and to render the the same more effectual, 24th August, 1843) XCIV pp. 957-962.

jurisdiction in Muscat of 1867⁴⁶ and (3) with the treaty of 1873 between the Sultan of Muscat and Great Britain for the jurisdictional rights of the Political Agent in Muscat⁴⁷.

However it was not until 1900 that the British authorities decided to hand over to the Sultan the seized arms, after all legal actions had been decided in Britain and Muscat regarding the matter. But the Sultan's court did not help to improve his relations with the British. He also did not recover the loss to his customs revenue.

Section Five

The Consequences of the Baluchistan Case in Oman

Eight months after the Sultan's court decision his subsidy was cut by the Political Agent in Muscat, especially damaging after his loss of arms revenue. B. C. Busch, in his book, *Britain and the Persian Gulf* concluded that the suspension of the Sultan's subsidy was a consequence of his refusal to hold a court of inquiry and declare that the seizure of arms was legal⁴⁸. As shown above the Sultan in fact agreed to hold the court but on condition of his being given the seized arms if the court found that the arms had been seized on a legal basis. But then he agreed to hold the court after Colonel Meade's visit to Muscat in April 1898, and probably after he had been convinced that he might receive the arms after all legal procedures had been completed. The Sultan's court decision came before the British courts and the House of Lords in 1898 and 1902. The reason for his subsidy's suspension was his granting the coaling station to France when this became known on 23 November. After the seizure of *Baluchistan*, Busch said, "The arms were taken to Muscat in the hope that the Sultan would declare the seizure legal by court of inquiry. Faisal did nothing of the sort, and Fagan, once again acting in the heat of the moment, announced to the Sultan that his subsidy was suspended, pending Indian government approval, until his attitude should become more

46. F. O. 54/29, British Order in Council, for the Regulation of Consular jurisdiction within the Dominions of the Sultan of Muscat, (Windsor), 4 Nov. 1867.

47. Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 309.

48. Busch, *Britain Persian Gulf*, pp. 66-67.

accommodating". It seems that Busch built his assumption on Fagan's first suggestion which was refused by the Home Government. It was still too early to state that the arms seized had been taken to Muscat for the sake of declaring the seizure legal. This was not considered before it had become clear that action could be taken by arms dealers against the naval officer Lt. Carr before a British court. First legal proceedings for the arms seizure in a Muscat court took place in April, about two and a half months after the seizure. However, after the seizure of the *Baluchistan*, Muscat's imports of arms fell from \$900,000 to \$200,000 from Great Britain, and from France fell from \$100,000 to \$60,000⁴⁹. This drove the Sultan towards bankruptcy, as his indebtedness jumped to \$MT 190,000 in 1898⁵⁰. This led him to take various measures which brought him into difficulties with the British authorities.

To cover some of his losses, on 4 July 1898 Sultan Faisal announced without any warning that an extra tax of 5% would be levied on all goods reaching the coast from Rostak and Wadi Al Ma,aawil in the Omani interior, ostensibly to punish the tribes of those places for the trouble which they had been giving him. But how did His Highness proceed to impose this tax ? The Political Agent reported that it was done in the same manner as with all other taxes. It was put up to auction and purchased by Purshotum, the Sultan's customs farmer, for 9,000 dollars. But during the year 1898 the crop of dates grown at those places had already been bought up and paid for by British Indian traders. So the punitive tax fell not on the tribesmen but on the British subjects. Because of that the Political Agent requested the Sultan to repeal this obnoxious tax, but His Highness expressed his intention of imposing a similar punitive tax on the same tribes' production in 1899.

This issue raises several points. First, the Sultan's disappointment in not receiving the seized arms of the *Baluchistan* and in the reduction in his customs revenue led him to impose an additional tax on goods traded within his own country, (a) to recover some of his losses by making British subjects suffer this

49. Fraser, *Gun Running*, p. 6.

50. Landen, *Oman*, p. 380.

additional tax at least for that year; (b) to use his political difficulties as an excuse for increased income, indicating thereby the kind of person the British were dealing with; (c) to insist on the same sanction for the next year, thus giving the British authorities no alternative but to support him in his attempt to punish his political opponents, even though it caused some inconvenience for British subjects.

Secondly, although the taxes raised by the Sultan affected British subjects in the first instance, they would remain to affect the Omanis of the interior, even those of his most loyal subjects⁵¹. This tax later caused such hardship to the Omanis that it can be seen as one of the root causes of the revolution of 1913.

However this was an important issue for the British Government since goods belonging to British subjects sent from one port to another were taxed at both. This matter caused another problem between the Sultan and the British authorities. Moreover, a payment [U'shoor] of from 1 to 10 *Paisa* per package at Muscat and from 3 to 15 *Paisa* per package at Matrah was levied for weighing all goods landed at those ports, contrary to Article VI of the 1891 treaty⁵². Though Muscat traders were not excluded from that, Mutrah City was, and even today it is still the acknowledged mart for the date trade overland or by sea. This city's traders have their establishments [Wekaleh] and storehouses [Bakkhar] there. The sultan's customs farmer persuaded him to close down the weighing of dates at Mutrah, by which arrangement the traders there, mostly British, were forced to bring their dates to Muscat for weighing. The customs farmer himself was a date broker and had a strong position in the trade in Muscat. By being forced to do their business at Muscat they were subjected to obstruction and delay which conflicted with article X of the 1891 treaty, framed to protect them

. "By this ingenious device, Matrah traders were compelled either to utilize the services of the customs farmer in his capacity as date broker for the purpose of disposing of their dates at Muscat or to incur the extra expense of taking them back

51. F. O. 54/28, Fagan's report to the Foreign Secretary, 19 November 1898.

52. *Ibid*; Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 311.

to Matrah⁵³". So the Sultan found his own way of compensating himself from the losses of the arms revenue he suffered after the case of the *Baluchistan*. Whether or not he gained all he hoped for, the purpose of proceeding in that way seems to be clear. But this put him face to face with the British authorities and his customs became an additional subject of interest to the Government of India (as was discussed in the previous chapter). However, the Sultan's financial position and his reaction to it was not the only aftermath of the *Baluchistan* affair. Muscat became a place of international concern in other ways. The major players in that were France and Britain during this period before the 1914-18 war.

France in fact gained a golden opportunity to interfere in Muscat's affairs. Omanis, whether they owned ships or not, by their own will were asking for French protection. Britain's dominant influence in Muscat was thereby becoming undermined. For several reasons Britain's influence had always been greater than that of any other states there. It was very important that French protection should appear to be as a kind of hospitality for the Omanis, and that it was not imposed by the French but demanded by the Omani people. The situation was novel and unusual. The British government had long had a commitment to protect Muscat's Sultans for their own interests. But the French now became involved in protecting the interests of the Sultan's subjects. And in so far as they proved successful they could through the Sultan's subjects seek influence on the Sultan himself and draw him away from the British. Part of this issue will be discussed in the next section.

Section Six

The French Question at Muscat

The case of the *Baluchistan* caused severe damage to British policy in Muscat. It opened wide the way for other powers to interfere in Muscat affairs and offer protection to the Omanis. Some of Muscat's people, as well as those in other parts of Oman, desired French protection. This had been true for a long time but it increased rapidly after the seizure of the *Baluchistan*. The Omanis, though some

53. F. O. 54/28, Fagan to Salisbury, 19 November 1898.

were involved in fraud cases may have looked to French protection as an escape from British policy and may have lost confidence in the Sultan⁵⁴. It became quite common practice for inhabitants of Sur and those of the Batinah coast, who owned dhows and wished to navigate their vessels under French protection, to send them to French settlements for registration as if they belonged to inhabitants living in those places so as to obtain French papers and the right to fly the French flag⁵⁵. For a long time the French in Obokh, Madagascar, and the Comoros had granted French ship's papers and flags to subjects of the sultan of Muscat, as was done by the French consul at Aden, Muscat and Zanzibar⁵⁶. The situation became complicated since it was not part of any agreement, or any formal relationship between the Sultan of Muscat and France. It was through the direct contact and mutual interest between the Omani people and the French Government, which developed over the years since the 30s of the century. This put the French in a position to protect the Omani people's interests and could be expected to give them a very good local reputation. Even people from the interior of the country, who had nothing to do with seafaring, demanded French protection. Early in 1898, several Sheiks of Beni Ruwahhah sent a message to Ottavi, the French Vice-Consul, asking him to put them under French protection. They stated that 10,000 of them were seeking it. The Government of India urged the Home Government to secure the discontinuance by the French authorities of a practice which served to stimulate an illegal trade of arms which was likely to hinder action to check it in the Persian Gulf⁵⁷. There was certainly fear amongst the British authorities of the traffic in arms being encouraged, but there may have been also a political fear of the French increasing their influence in the Gulf in this way. Most of the Omanis who received French papers belonged to the area of J'alan and the town of Sur. The situation could be a delicate one in terms of interests. French influence could challenge that of the

54. F. O. 54/28, Fagan to Resid., 20 Jan. 1898; Meade to Govt. Ind., For. Dept., 29 Jan. 1898.

55. F. O. 54/28, I. O. to F. O., 23 May 1898.

56. F. O. (9161) [4920]. Political Memo., respecting British Interests In the Persian Gulf. Conf.- Jan. 1914; Tuson, *British Policy*, B 15, (B 129), F 12, G9. F. O. 54/29, Muscat Polit. Agent to Resid., 23 Mar. 1898.

57. F. O. 54/28, Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to Hamilton, (secret), 31 Mar. 1898.

British in Muscat and could hardly be removed. This created a totally new situation which could embarrass the Sultan himself however much he detested the British policy of arms suppression. Those Omanis who held French papers for their dhows were neither of French nationality nor naturalized French citizens and had no authority from the Sultan to change their allegiance to France. According to British sources the Omanis were not permanent residents in French territory. They only paid fleeting visits there to renew their navigation licenses⁵⁸. In fact the Sultan had disliked for some time the French policy towards his people regarding the granting of flags. For example, on 28 May 1897, he wrote to the French Consul, that his subjects living at Soor and in the Batineh, who were usually sailing to the coasts of Africa and Aden were requesting French flags, and "to become French subjects by purchasing some little immovable property in those places and living there". The Sultan complained in his letter that the matter was against the rule observed in all countries and against the custom. He claimed that every one should return to his original nationality and asked that they should be prevented from following in their countries a course contrary to the rule⁵⁹. The French consul, Mr Ottavi, did not agree with the points raised by the Sultan. In his reply the French consul regretted that it was impossible to comply with the Sultan's desire, and he told the Sultan that he was misled regarding the points he raised. The protection could be obtained from a country by any one who complied with certain known conditions which varied from country to country. The French consul mentioned that many dhows belonging to Arabs, Omani and others had been visiting French colonies for forty years. They had decided to live there and obtained protection and flags legally, according to the rules of those colonies. The orders were issued by the French Minister of Marine Affairs and no one had the right to dispute the matter. Ottavi reminded the Sultan that His Highness had confirmed that arrangement by France publicly and privately. France would only go against custom if it required their officers to change the rules for protection and the granting of flags specially for

58. F. O. (9161) [4920], Conf. no.1, 'Political Memo..'.
 59. F. O. 54/28, Sultan of Muscat to French Consul, A. H. 25 Dhilhijjah (28 May 1897).

those who came originally from Soor and Batineh. They would oppose the custom if it stopped any person under their protection from visiting any particular port, and possessing many dhows on account of his origins. Ottavi pointed out to the Sultan that what would be against the custom would be to put obstacles in the way of voyages and mercantile transactions for those from French protectorates. Ottavi resented the Sultan's claim that French protection to Omanis caused him injury; "as to injury which you mentioned, if it were (real) injury, how is it that others than yourself have not complained of it, and how is it that you yourself did not mention it during all this long period until now ?"⁶⁰.

That was the situation about the end of 1897 between the Sultan and the French. It was probably due to the assistance which the Sultan received from the British to beat the rebellion of Dhofar of 1897. It was also because of the influence of his pro-British *Wazeer* Sayyid Sa'eed, but the latter was dismissed from his post⁶¹. One would not, however, expect the Sultan to become a friend of the French so quickly since relations on both sides had been so strained⁶². But by the beginning of 1898, he was reported as having "come under French influence, according to British sources. On 5 January, there were signs of the Sultan's new unfriendly attitude towards the British Government. The superintendent of Karachi telegraph station wrote to the Foreign Secretary in Calcutta that the Sultan had been persuaded by the French Consul not to hoist the British flag on 1 January, but only to fire 31 guns⁶³. This was the usual honour for the assumption of the title of Empress of India by Her Majesty the Queen. By doing so he showed that he considered himself as independent and not under the control of the Government of India. When he was asked for an explanation of the change, he replied that the salute had been a New Year's day compliment to all Christians, and not to the Queen Empress. This was

60. F. O. 54/28, Ottavi to Sultan of Muscat, 15 Jul. 1897 (14 Safar 1315).

61. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 15.

62. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 76, (7). Some tough letters had been exchanged between the Sultan and the French Consul during this period: Sultan of Muscat to Ottavi, 27 Rabe'e II (26 Sep. 1897.); Ottavi to Sultan of Muscat, 11 Oct. 1897; Sultan of Muscat to Ottavi, 27 Jemadi I (25 Oct. 1897); Ottavi to Sultan of Muscat, 7 Dec 1897 (1st Rajab 1314).

63. F. O. 54/28, Tel., Assis.Superint.Indo-Euro.Tel. (Karachi) to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., 5 Jan. 1898.

regarded as creating an impression unfavourable to British prestige. He was told that stopping a compliment always hitherto accorded could only be regarded as unfriendly. The salute must be fired at once with the British flag flying all day according to custom. He complied with the request and the salute was fired on 3 January and the flag hoisted all day. The British officials considered that in view of the Sultan's recent behaviour, it was "desirable to make the Sultan express his regret in writing that he omitted compliment at proper time, and to give assurance that the occasion will be properly observed in future". The Sultan agreed with that without difficulty⁶⁴. But they started to believe that the Sultan of Muscat had come to be much under French influence and it was improbable that he would readily consent to their proposals regarding arms, customs and other things and there was call for a stronger line than that adopted. They advised that the British should impress upon him that their interests were paramount and he must attend to their advice. Regarding the flag question the Foreign Secretary in Calcutta wanted no public dispute with either the Sultan or the French. To deal with the flag question at the New Year required a restrained reaction as far as possible. Though they approved the action taken by the telegram Superintendent, Colonel Meade was advised that Her Majesty's Government specially desired to maintain friendly relations with France as well as influence over the Sultan. The Foreign Secretary said " you should therefore do your utmost to secure his [the Sultan's] confidence and goodwill. You might remind him of assistance we have given in financial matters and at Dhofar"⁶⁵. This kinder treatment for the Sultan was needed at that time because he was due to meet the joint delegation, on 5 January, of the Persian and British Governments for his co-operation and for his two declarations of 13 January in regard to the arms traffic. But British officials in the Gulf may have exaggerated the flag hoisting question, because the Sultan agreed to co-operate with the British Government in connection with arms trafficking after their report that he had come under French influence. This seems to be not true, since there was nothing to prove

64. Tuson, *British policy*, B 15.

65. F. O. 54/28, Tel., Govt. Ind. For.Dept. to Assist. Superint., Indo-Euro. Tel., 8 Jan. 1898.

that allegation. Not hoisting the flag alone was not enough to prove France's influence upon him at that stage. If the Sultan was under French influence he would not have co-operated with the British and issued his declarations giving British ships the right to confiscate arms in his territorial waters. However there was a feeling from early 1898 among the British officials that the French might benefit at the expense of British prestige⁶⁶.

The Omanis had started to believe that Britain feared France, since they were convinced that French colours secured for them absolute immunity from interference by British maritime patrols. They realized that protection from ships of war of a power known to be strong could be obtained by flying the flag of another power. The non-interference must be due to the superiority of the power under whose protection they had placed themselves. This also applied to their personal safety. The importance of this lay in its political impact on the relations between the Sultan and the British authorities. The case of Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed al Ruwahhy (to be discussed in the next section) was a prime example. The British Agency in Muscat was angry that such a state of affairs was allowed to continue, given the damage it did to British prestige. Two suggestions were made. First, that the Sultan could be asked to adhere to the General Act of the Brussels Conference, though this depended on the Sultan having the power to enforce his authority which at present he did not. Secondly, the Sultan might institute a distinctive flag for the use of the vessels of his subjects. But, again, the Sultan had no power to force his subjects to fly his flag, and any orders from him would be certainly inoperative. This is clear from a review of events from the end of 1897 to early 1898.

At that time measures putting a stop to arms running up to the Gulf were expected to work by securing the co-operation of Persia and Muscat. From the middle of January 1898 it was expected that after a few months, vessels flying British, Persian and Muscat flags and containing cargoes of arms for Persian or Indian ports would be seized and confiscated by British men-of-war⁶⁷. But side-

66. F. O. 54/28, Fagan to Resid., 14 Jan. 1898.

67. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 15.

effects of that operation were also expected in that vessels under flags of the three co-operating countries, deprived of protection in the matter of loading arms, would consequently transfer their vessels to the French flag. Accordingly there would be a great increase in the number of applicants for the French flag and protection not in Oman only but in the Gulf as well⁶⁸. Therefore the trade in arms was expected to flourish unchecked with simply the diversion of profits from English into French hands⁶⁹. This was exactly what happened and Major Fagan's expectations proved correct. A suggestion for a diplomatic solution by the Persian Gulf Residency had also already been presented⁷⁰. The sultan's undertaking to assist Persia and the Government of India in preventing the arms traffic had become meaningless by his own reaction and by the French protection to his subjects⁷¹. But the Sultan's attitude towards the British was the key point of the whole issue, especially after the case of the *Baluchistan*.

The Sultan welcomed French supporters in his administration and shared with them the decision-making of his government. This created a new situation in Muscat and was of great concern to the British. This situation was exacerbated by the granting to the French of a coaling station by the Sultan. This created a major dispute between the British on the one hand and the Sultan and the French on the other. It reached its peak when the British navy faced the prospect of a disastrous clash with the French. The British ships of war were also in a position to bombard the Sultan's palace and warning had been given to bombard the city of Muscat. The next section will discuss this matter.

Section Seven

The Case of Abdul Aziz al-Ruwahhy

The British had been informed by a secret diary submitted to the Political Resident in the Gulf of an important development in Muscat after the seizure of the

68. F. O. 54/28, Meade to Govt. Ind., For. Dept., 22 Jan. 1898.

69. F. O. 54/28, Fagan to Resid., 14 Jan. 1898.

70. *Ibid*; F. O. 54/28, Meade to Govt. Ind. For. Dept., 22 Jan. 1898.

71. F. O. 54/28, I. O. to F. O. (secret), 31 Mar. 1898.

Baluchistan. That "as soon as the seizure of arms and ammunition on the *Baluchistan* was effected the Sultan appears to have repented of the agreement he had entered into. He was heard to say that this was not what he intended, and now he is going to throw himself and his family into the arms of the French Government". The diary also mentioned a practical action taken by the Sultan right after the seizure of the *Baluchistan* indicating his desire to tighten links with the French. "On the 25th or 26th January 1898, His Highness paid a visit to Mons. Ottavi (French Vice consul) with the object of consulting him as to what he had better do about the seizure of arms by British". The Sultan carried on consulting the French in everything through the medium of Abdul Aziz⁷². In addition to that he felt suspicious about British aims in the matter of his customs administration. He refused any offer for farming his customs by the Indian Government, and refused a proposal for appointing a British official to manage his customs. That coincided with the Sultan's new local taxes on dates which was seen by the British Political Agency in Muscat as an arbitrary and heavy burden on British subjects and a violation of the 1891 treaty. Despite demands from the Political Agent the Sultan declined to remedy the matter⁷³.

The general situation was certainly no longer favourable to the British in Muscat⁷⁴. While Britain thus was deeply concerned throughout 1898 in respect to French flags and protection to Muscat vessels and subjects, which increased rapidly after the seizure of the *Baluchistan*,⁷⁵ the registration of arms by British subjects,⁷⁶

72. F. O. 54/29, extract from the Secret Diary of the Political Agent to the Polit. Resid (nd.).

73. See Chap. Five, sects.4 and 5; Tuson, *British Policy*, B15.

74. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 119.

75. F. O. 54/28, Govt.Ind. For. Dept. to Hamilton, (secret), 31 Mar. 1898; F. O. 54/28, I. O. .to F. O., 23 May 1898, in which suggestions were made that the Sultan of Muscat must institute his distinctive flag for his subjects' ships, so that he would then have the right to prohibit them from using the French flag; F. O. 54/28, Hamilton to Govr. Genl., Ind. on Slave trade and Grant of French flags to Suri dhows (secret), 30 Dec. 1898; F. O. 54/28, F. O. to I. O., Conf., 20 Dec. 1898, after orders issued by the Sultan to his subjects forbidding them from holding French flags; those who used French flags after that would disobey ruler's orders, and the French would be in the position of challenging the law of the Sultan. That would put the British Government in a position to deny validity of the French flag to Omanis and therefore protection; F. O. 54/28, F. O. to Law Ofc. Crown, 12 Jul. 1898; F. O. 54/28, F. O. to I. O., conf., 20 Dec. 1898.

76. F. O. 54/28, Govt. Ind. For. Dept., to Hamilton (secret) 10 Feb. 1898.

the Muscat customs administration and the Sultan's taxation on British subjects,⁷⁷ other significant issues did emerge.

This occasion was to result in one of the most remarkable events in the modern history of Muscat and Oman. On 7 March 1898, the Sultan granted the station to the French, but nothing was heard about it until 20 November 1898 when the *Journal des Debats* released the news. This meant that the Sultan made his arrangement with the French secretly. On 13 December the Government of India started to take action. The Sultan did not admit the arrangement until 17 January 1899, but he said that the actual location was still unsettled⁷⁸. However before that controversy developed, the inclusion in the Sultan's administration of a figure regarded by the British authorities as a dangerous person because of his background, came into focus.

This figure was Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed bin Salim-al-Rruwaihi, of Samayil origin in Oman (interior) from the Ruwahnah tribe and valley⁷⁹. It is worth while first looking at this person's career. He emigrated from Wadi Al Ma'awil in Oman to Zanzibar and then Pemba island in 1879, where he was first employed by Nasser bin Khalef and as secretary by Salim bin Ali. After some time he returned to Zanzibar to work with the Qadhi (Judge) Hamed bin Sa'eed, by whose good offices he obtained an appointment as assistant to Muhammed bin Salim, the Clerk of Sultan Bargash bin Sa'eed of Zanzibar (uncle of Faisal, Sultan of Muscat). After the death of Muhammed bin Salim, Abdul Aziz was promoted to chief clerk and received a salary of \$20 per month. After the death of Bargash the Sultan Khalifah confirmed him in his position and raised his salary to \$40⁸⁰. It was during this period that he first began giving trouble to the British in Zanzibar. He started to use his influence to prejudice the Sultan Khalifah against the British authorities. When Sultan Ali came to power after Khalifah, he first dismissed Abdul Aziz, but then withdrew his

77. See Chap. Five Sect. 5; F. O. 54/29, Meade to Govt Ind., For. Dept., 1 Jan 1899; Fagan to Meade, 5 Dec. 1898.

78. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 119.

79. F. O. 54/28, Fagan to Meade, conf., 26 Oct. 1898.

80. F. O. 54/29, Fagan to Mead, 21 Jan. 1899.

decision because of intervention by some leading Arabs in his favour. He continued to act as chief writer to the Sultan, and to oppose by all the means in his power the influence of the British Agent. On the death of Sultan Ali in 1893 it was through the work of Abdul Aziz, that Khalid bin Barghash, the son of Sultan Barghash, obtained possession of the palace until he was forcibly removed. Khalid then escaped to the German embassy⁸¹. Abdul Aziz's deportation from Zanzibar on 27 March 1893 was ordered by Sultan Hamed bin Thuwaini, cousin of Faisal, Sultan of Muscat and son of former Sultan Thuwainy bin Sa'eed of Muscat⁸². Zanzibar had been the French Consul Ottavi's previous posting, and he and Abdul Aziz had been acquainted there⁸³. In Muscat he became a writer in the employ of the French Vice-consulate. He naturally came under French protection according to the French-Oman Treaty of 1844⁸⁴. The British claimed that he and the French consul were behind the failure to hoist the British flag on 1 January 1898 when the salute of 31 guns was fired⁸⁵. The rise of French influence in the Sultan's court was facilitated when he was appointed as the Sultan's Secretary in 1898. " This man had far more influence with the sultan than the Wazeer Sa'id ibn-Muhammad, pro-British as he was, and the latter eventually was dismissed in 1898"⁸⁶. Abdul Aziz's position was described as more like confidential adviser to the Sultan than a secretary⁸⁷. In addition to that he was a prominent merchant on good business terms and in friendly relationship with Sur traders⁸⁸. The case of Abdul Aziz aroused British interest in

81. For more details about this occasion see Gooch and Temperley (ed.), *British documents on the origins of the war 1898-1914*, (1927), I p. 327.

82. About Sultan Thuwainy see Chap. Two.

83. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, p. 63.

84. F. O. 54/28, Mead to Salisbury (conf.), 14 Nov. 1898; Treaty of commerce between His Highness the Imam of Muscat and the King of the French, 17th November 1844. An English version of the treaty can be found in R.Hughes Thomas (ed.), *Arabian Gulf Intelligence*, New Series, No.XXIV, (Cambridge, 1856), p. 266, and a French version in F. O. 54/29. Article IV of the treaty says, "*The subjects of Syud Sued bin Sultan of Muscat, actually in the service of the French, shall enjoy the same privileges which are granted to the French themselves ;but if such subjects of His Highness shall be convicted of any crime or infraction of the law, they shall be discharged by the French, and delivered over to the authorities of the place.*" Writer's emphasis.

85. F. O. 54/29, Extract from the Secret dairy of the Polit. Agent to the Resid.

86. Landen, *Oman*, p. 381.

87. See F. O. 54/28, Mead to the Govt. Ind., 7 Nov. 1898.

88. Mahmood Ali al-Daud, (Arabic book) *Alkhalij Al Arabi wal Alakat Al-duwaleyh Jame'a Al Dual Al Arabiyeh*, (Ma'ahd al Derasat Al Arabiyeh Al A'alieh, Dar Al Ma'refah) [The

the nature of the Sultan's administration in Muscat and their reaction affected further administrative development in the country and the question of whom the Sultan should employ. R. G. Landen noticed that "The British became particularly disturbed over the fact that Abdul Aziz, Ottavi's dragoman, also occupied a key position as the Sultan's confidential secretary, while other anti-British Omanis also were welcomed at court." He found that the "Sultan Faisal, for his part encouraged French interests in Oman in the hope that they could balance British interests and thus allow Oman to enjoy some real measure of independence". Meade, the British Consul-General in the Persian Gulf, suggested that some effort be made to induce His Highness the Sultan to dismiss Abdul Aziz from his service. As an adviser to the Sultan he could obstruct the actions of British representatives at Muscat, and prevent anything like confidential relations between them and the Sultan⁸⁹. According to the British authorities in Muscat, every letter written to the Political Agent in Muscat was drafted by Abdul Aziz. The British Agent said that the Sultan himself was almost illiterate, and was very much under the influence of Abdul Aziz. "Every letter sent to me by the Sultan", he said, "is drafted by the French Consulate. Every letter also sent by me to the Sultan is read by Abdul Aziz, and it is at the present time impossible for me to say anything to the Sultan which he does not repeat to Abdul Aziz, or to write to His Highness any letter, however confidential, the contents of which are not immediately seen and communicated by the Munshi to M.Ottavi " Consul Fagan was irritated by the political direction of the Sultan's administration. He pointed out to Resident Meade that the existence of such a state of affairs could only be allowed to continue if the British were prepared to see their interests at Muscat entirely subordinated to those of the Government of the French Republic. He urged that some kind of pressure be brought to bear on the Sultan to dismiss Abdul Aziz from his work, so as to ease a situation which would certainly result in complications between the Sultan and the British Government⁹⁰.

Arabian Gulf and International relations (The Arab League, The Arabic High Institute Studies)] (Cairo,nd.) p. 97.

89. Landen, *Oman*, p. 248.

90. F. O. 54/28, Fagan to Meade, Conf., 21 Jan. 1899.

Meade took the Abdul Aziz question very seriously and proposed to visit Muscat to urge the Sultan very strongly to dismiss Abdul Aziz from his service. Also he would warn the Sultan that "failure to do so will be regarded as evincing a want of the friendly feeling which the British Government has a right to expect from the Ruler of Muscat. " He would tell him that he "cannot expect kindly and generous treatment from Her Majesty's Government if he continues to employ in a confidential post, one who is avowedly hostile to the British". Meade said that he would "point out to the Sultan that it is impossible for Major Fagan to maintain the cordial and confidential relations that should exist between His Highness and the British Representative as long as he has Abdul Aziz for his Confidential Adviser, who reads all letters to his address and writes his replies". And Meade suggested that to ensure that the Sultan complied with the British demands he himself might be empowered to bring pressure to bear on the Sultan, in case of his refusal, by withholding his subsidy or by any other means that might be available. But Meade was aware of the difficulties of removing Abdul Aziz from his post and the opposition which might be caused by the French as well as by Abdul Aziz himself. It would be regarded as a blow to the Sultan's authority, and it would not, therefore, be easy to persuade His Highness to carry out the British wishes. It would probably be better to moderate the toughness of this approach to the Sultan and" not to bring the matter prominently forward, and that I should merely tell His Highness that I regret to find Abdul Aziz still in his employment, as it is impossible for her Majesty's Representatives to address him freely and in the friendly spirit they would like as long as he has this man for his confidential adviser⁹¹.

As mentioned above the British government learned in November 1898 about the coaling station granted by the Sultan. And from then on the British government began to realize more the effect of Abdul Aziz and perhaps to link both cases together.

On 20 November 1898, *Journal des Debats* released the news of the

91. F. O. 54/28, Meade to Govt. Ind., 7 Nov. 1898.

granting of a coaling station to the French in Bander Jessah, about 15-20 miles south-east of Muscat. The British authorities regarded this as a violation of the Franco-British declaration of 1862 regarding Muscat's independence, and violation of the 1891 treaty between the British government and the sultan of Muscat. The commander of H.M.S *Sphinx* therefore, received an order to sail to Jessah and hoist the British flag if a French man-of-war appeared in the harbour. At the same time the payment of the Sultan's subsidy was stopped. On 21 January 1899 Major Fagan wrote a letter to the Political Resident in Bushire, informing him of the arrival of H. M. S. *Sphinx* on 16 January. He reported that on their way to Jessah they had found it quiet and had seen no sign of any French occupation. But when he went to a meeting with the Sultan he informed him that a statement had appeared in the French papers to the effect that His Highness had leased the port of Jessah to the French Government, and that any such action would contradict the engagement of 1891 and could not be permitted by the British government. The Sultan's answer was it would not infringe the agreement between himself and the British Government more than would a house gifted by him to the French government for the use of the French consul⁹². In reaction to the new situation in Muscat most of the ministers of the British government in London favoured the threat of deposition of the Sultan but "Salisbury refused. It looked as though another ultimatum, backed by threat of naval force, would be delivered; for, as Godley observed ' it is the privilege of an independent sovereign to be bombarded, not deposed". Fagan accused Abdul Aziz as being responsible for what had happened. Abdul Aziz was, he said, " doubtless the root of the present mischief and we can expect no peace as long he remains in Muscat." The sultan for some time past had consulted no one but Abdul Aziz. "His Highness's openly hostile attitude towards the British has been frequently brought to the notice of the Government and there is in my opinion no hope whatever of any improvement in this respect in the future"⁹³. Muhammad bin Turkey, the Sultan's elder brother, who was supporting the British authorities,

92. F. O. 54/29, Fagan to Resid., conf., 21 Jan. 1899.

93. David Dilks, *Curzon in India*, 2 (1970), p. 119.

disliked Abdul Aziz's anti British policy and probably was jealous of his influence and power over the Sultan. Muhammad recommended the Sultan to have Abdul Aziz shot, on the ground that he was the cause of all the trouble between the British and the Sultan. He also pointed out that the murder of Abdul Aziz might easily be passed off as an accident⁹⁴. On 28 January the India Office sent a long memorandum to the Sultan of Muscat reminding him about the history of support given to the Muscat Sultans by the British government and the special political support and financial assistance he had enjoyed. But the memorandum said "your Highness employs as a confidential adviser Abdul Aziz, who is the Munshi of the Vice-consul of France, and whose advice is inimical to the existence of peaceful relations with the British government, and to the welfare of the state". The memorandum put forward to the Sultan a list of demands which included all the concerns of the British government. First was the dismissal of Abdul Aziz from all employment he was engaged in or may be engaged in at any future period either by the Sultan or by any one under his authority. Secondly that His Highness should order his subjects to use a distinctive flag. In case that was not observed either by the sultan's subjects or by the French, His Highness must regard that as disobedience against the lawful order of his own sovereignty in the case of the Omanis, and infringement of the 1862 treaty in the case of the French. Thirdly, the memorandum asked for cancellation of the levy on the British of any tax not levied on Muscat subjects, and for reduction of import duty to 5%. The memorandum warned the Sultan, that if these demands were not complied with "no portion of your subsidy, which has been withheld since the month of December, shall be paid to your highness; and that in the event of continuance or repetition of an unfriendly attitude on your part, the support in money and assistance, whether diplomatic or military, which you and your predecessor have enjoyed, will be withdrawn from you ,and may possibly take another direction." The memorandum stated: "it is impossible for the British Government to continue their support to a ruler who

94. F. O. 54/29, Extract from the secret diary of the Political Agent, (nd.).

habitually violates the solemn obligations into which he has entered with them"⁹⁵. The Political Resident in the Persian Gulf received instructions, on 12 February 1899 from the Foreign Secretary in Calcutta, in which he was authorized to compel compliance with the demands above, to the length of employing naval force against the Sultan if necessary, but that he should avoid any collision with France. Dismissal of Abdul Aziz was one of the conditions of the Resident. But the British Government could not authorize his deportation from Muscat, because that might raise serious questions of international law. On 11 February 1899 Admiral Douglas left Bombay for Muscat in his flagship and the Resident was ordered to consult with him on the whole matter⁹⁶. By that time the situation had taken a rapid and sharp turn in Muscat. On 14 February Admiral Douglas arrived there. Col. Meade requested that the Sultan should publicly cancel the lease of the French station but the Sultan did not answer. On 16 February Admiral Douglas ordered the Sultan to meet him aboard his flagship. Meanwhile he moved his ships " into position to open fire on the Sultan's palace and his forts off Muscat. At the same time "a warning was given to the town that bombardment was imminent. The Sultan capitulated. He came out to the flagship and agreed to all demands. Ironically, when Sultan Faisal rowed away Admiral Douglas fired the 21-gun salute reserved for an independent sovereign in the ruler's honour"⁹⁷.

But the problem of Abdul Aziz was still far from over. On 1 March 1899 the viceroy of India sent a telegram to the Secretary of State for India, Lord George Hamilton, complaining that the attitude of the Sultan was still unsatisfactory. His Highness continued to receive Abdul Aziz by night and by day. Abdul Aziz was reported to be endeavouring to raise the tribes of Sharkiyeh in Oman's Eastern provinces, but this time raised against both the Sultan and the British, on the grounds of British intentions to occupy Oman. Fagan therefore withheld the Sultan's subsidy⁹⁸. Hamilton asked the Viceroy; "If continued stoppage of subsidy

95. F. O. 54/29, Memo., I. O. for the Sultan of Muscat, 28 Jan. 1899.

96. F. O. 54/29, Tel, Govt. Ind. to Resid., 12 Feb. 1899.

97. Landen, *Oman*, p. 252.

98. F. O. 54/29, Viceroy to Hamilton, 1 Mar. 1899.

was not effective, what further pressure would you suggest ?". He went on to say that he had been advised that even deposition of the Sultan by the British for breach of engagement or of international law would not be contrary to the 1862 Franco-British declaration provided that his successor was equally independent. The Secretary of State had also been advised that requiring Faisal to dismiss a particular adviser must depend on the special circumstances of the case. But, he went on, "it is hardly compatible with independence of Muscat that Sultan should be compelled to accept ministers and advisers who are acceptable to British Government"⁹⁹. It is clear that there was some difference of opinion between Curzon and Hamilton.

In the end it appeared that Abdul Aziz was not the only obstacle to British-Omani relations, but also the British Political Agent in Muscat himself. Despite the Secretary of State's advice in regard to the question of Abdul Aziz, Major Fagan requested the Sultan again to dismiss him¹⁰⁰. The British authorities came to realize that before long they must have a change in their Muscat representation. Although Fagan was carrying out the Resident's directions under the supervision of the Viceroy of India, he appeared to Curzon to have become an obstacle to improved relations between the Sultan of Muscat and the British authorities. He was replaced by Major Percy Cox in September 1899. Cox was to initiate a new stage in British-Muscat relations. Chapter Eight will discuss that stage which lasted from 1900 to 1912.

Conclusion

The case of the *Baluchistan* not only raised new issues in Muscat but provoked old ones as well. The use of French flags was an old issue. It had been used since the time of Sa'eed bin Sultan during the 1830s when Great Britain imposed suppression of the slave trade¹⁰¹. The French offered the Omani traders their ships and flags. But the British supervision perhaps sometimes did not distinguish between those who were involved in the trade and those who were not. That may have persuaded

99. F. O. 54/29, Hamilton to Viceroy, 10 Mar. 1899.

100. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, p. 88.

101. See the Introductory Chapter.

many merchants to use French flags for their protection. In addition to that, in the year 1873 further measures were taken by the British Government to suppress the slave trade and a proclamation was issued warning British subjects in the Persian Gulf of penalties if they became engaged in it. Effective measures were taken to make them aware of the intention of the Government¹⁰². Accordingly those other than British subjects were free to engage in the slave traffic. This could include those who were under French protection. But the arms suppression policy affected even the local people because of the traders' relations with the people of the interior of Oman. This became more significant when the Omanis found that the British men-of-war were not only against the Omanis but also acted against their own subjects in the arms question. Some of their own British subjects moved away placing themselves under other powers. It was a complete failure of British policy in Muscat. However the case of the *Baluchistan* provoked further issues. The Sultan decided to increase his local customs revenues to recover his losses, and brought into his administration persons who were pro-French. Moreover when registration of arms was imposed on British subjects after the case of the *Baluchistan* the trade was entirely taken over by French protected persons. That was what happened in Muscat after the *Baluchistan* affair but the case caused also significant events in Britain itself.

102. *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports, 1873-1947*, vol 1, 1873-1879, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 8, 74.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CASE OF THE *BALUCHISTAN* IN BRITAIN

Introduction

We saw in the previous chapter the impact of this case on Muscat in international, economic and political terms, and how it caused some of the most remarkable events in Oman's history. Meanwhile this case also had economic and political effects in Britain itself, becoming a major issue in the British courts, and in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The events in the British courts have been covered by Mahmood Ali Daud¹, and the proceedings in the court at Muscat, held under British pressure by the Sultan, have been dealt with in the previous chapter. Our main concern is with the political and economic outcome of the case. With regard to the Commons debates, it is interesting here to question whether Curzon's replies were clear and compatible with the British policy of imposing controls on the arms trade in India, Persia and Oman, and whether he accepted full responsibility for that policy. The answer is in the next section.

Section Two

The House of Commons, 1898

On 24 January 1898 HMS *Lapwing* seized the steamer *Baluchistan* in the territorial waters of Muscat and captured the consignment of arms on board. In Birmingham the seizure of the arms had serious effects on the gun makers.

In London, in the House of Commons the first reaction came when Mr J. Dillon (Mayo,E) on 21 February 1898, asked the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr.G.N.Curzon, whether he was aware that interference with the exportation of arms from Birmingham to the Persian Gulf had seriously affected several of the gunmakers in the city, and if so, on what ground had the trade been interfered with? In his reply the Under-Secretary relied on the Sultan of Muscat's representation to the Government of India a year before "about the trouble

1. Daud, *British Relations*, pp.371-386.

occasioned to him by the increasing importation of arms into Muscat, and in the same year the Persian Government mentioned to Her Majesty's Charge d' Affaires at Tehran, the great danger arising from the arming of the tribes in the south of Persia, notwithstanding the prohibition of the trade." Curzon said that, after enquiries into the manner in which the trade was being conducted, he had been "determined to assist the Persian Government in putting a stop to this illicit traffic in arms, which affected territories and tribes under British as well as under Persian influence, and which has already proved to be injurious to the British interests". He said that "the bulk of arms so imported, though they have been carried in British vessels are of foreign and not British manufacture". Mr Dalton asked again whether there was any reason to believe that any of the arms reached the frontier tribes with whom British troops had been in conflict. Curzon replied that such an opinion was not his but it was that of the officers on the spot who were conducting the investigation; "I have not yet seen the evidence on which that opinion is based"².

On 24 February Mr T.C.H. Hedderwick (Wick Burghs) asked Mr Curzon whether the Government was making or was intending to make any enquiry into the alleged supply of guns by Birmingham gunmakers to the hostile tribes of the North- West Frontier? Curzon assured him that an enquiry had already been conducted into the entire question of arms importation into Persia³. But after about one month and one week later the report of these enquiries was still not ready. On 4 April Curzon was asked by Mr Lowe, (Birmingham, Edgbaston): whether the Government was yet in a position to state the result of its enquiries about the question above; or if not, whether at a later date, further information would be given on the subject? He replied that a full report was on its way from the Consul-General at Bushire; "and upon its receipt I shall hope to be in a position to convey to hon. Members who are interested in the matter the further

2. *Hansard*, vol. LIII, col. 1200, 21 Feb. 1898.

3. *Hansard*, vol. LIII, col. 1520, 24 Feb. 1898.

information they desire". Mr Lowe raised another question, perhaps for the satisfaction of British gun manufacturers whose trade with Persia had been stopped. He asked whether "the right hon. Gentleman will be able to lay on the Table of the House Papers showing the reason for the action which the Government thought it necessary to take in this matter?" Curzon in his reply declined to justify the Government action: "I am afraid I can give no pledge at this moment, as obviously it is impossible for me to promise to lay before the house Papers I have not yet seen or read", but he hoped to have an opportunity later explaining the reasons for the action of the Government⁴.

On 4 July 1898 Captain Grice Hutchinson (Aston Manor) asked Mr Curzon if any other Governments than that of Great Britain had agreed with the Persian Government to prohibit the importation of arms into Persia *via* the Persian Gulf? Curzon stated that the prohibition of the import of arms into Persia could only be the act of the Persian Government. But he said "in the case of the other Governments possessing territories on or in the Persian Gulf -namely the Government of India and the Turkish Government, a similar prohibition exists, whilst it is also being enforced in their own territories by the Sultan of Muscat and the Sheikh of Bahrain". Curzon added that special enquiries had been made on the subject whether the prohibition enacted by the Persian government was being equally enforced against arms of other origins. But he said "we learn by telegraph that the prohibition is universal, and that the import of foreign, no less than of British arms, has ceased"⁵.

Till early July the actual case of the *Baluchistan* was not brought before the House of Commons. The questions were of a general kind, as the questioners had in mind both the *Baluchistan* case and earlier episodes such as the case of Bushire in December 1897. (see Chapter Five).

4. *Hansard*, vol. LVI, col. 37, 4 Apr. 1898.

5. *Hansard*, vol. LX, col. 945-946, 4 Jul. 1898.

On 28 July the case took another direction because by this time the case had already been presented to the commercial court and Mr Justice Bigham on the 5th July had already delivered his conclusion (see text below). Mr Hedderwick (Wick Burgh) asked Mr Curzon whether his attention had been drawn to the judgement of Mr Justice Bigham in the case of *Fracis, Times* against the Sea Insurance Company Limited. In that judgement, he said, "the Judge found that the import of arms (into Persia) was not illegal according to the law of Persia as that law was administered in practice and enjoined that the export of arms from England to Persia was certainly not contrary to our law". Mr Hedderwick asked whether that judgement might be considered by Her Majesty's Government, and if that was done whether compensation to owners of the cargo seized, on 24 January 1898, of arms and ammunition on board the *Baluchistan* would be considered. He also asked whether the owners of arms confiscated in December 1897 in Bushire also might be compensated. Curzon replied that he had seen the report of the judgement in question but he did not think that its purport could be correctly estimated by the quotation of a single sentence from it. The judge had found that there was something in the nature of a prohibition against arms importation into Persia, "and that the plaintiffs probably knew of it; but that the circumstances as known to them were not material to the defendants in estimating the risk". Curzon denied that the Consul-General had confiscated the arms in Bushire: "The facts are not correctly stated in the second question. The arms and ammunition stored in Bushire were not seized and not confiscated by her Majesty's Consul-General", but by an official of the Persian Government. The British vice-Consul was present only because the goods were belonging to British subjects. And in the case of any of the arms seized either in Muscat or Bushire, Her Majesty's Government saw no ground for interference unless "the owners or consignees can prove that the arms were proceeding to or had entered Persia with the authority of the Persian Government, and the parties concerned have advised, if they can produce such proofs, to represent their claims to the Consular authorities". But

into Persia was not illegal according to the Persian law ? The Speaker ruled Mr Lowe out of order, but Lowe went on saying "if that is the law as laid down, I wish to know on what ground--." The Speaker interrupted him again reminding him that if he wished further information regarding the question he must give notice. Replying to Mr. Hedderwick's enquiry as to whether he contested the lawfulness of the trade, Curzon replied that the Government "have always held the opinion which I have more than once stated in the House, that the importation of arms and ammuniton into Persia is illicit, and it is upon that assumption they have proceeded"⁶.

But Curzon's position was severely weakened by the reply of Sir R. Webster (Isle of Wight). On 1 August Mr J. Walton (Yorks, W. R., Barnsley) asked the Attorney-General Sir R. Webster whether the export of arms and ammunition in the way of trade from Great Britain to Persia was contrary to the law of England? Webster's reply was that it was not⁷. Then Walton turned to Curzon asking him whether the Government had warned the manufacturers engaged in the trade of exporting arms to Persia that this trade was illicit, and that arms and ammunition so exported would be confiscated by the Persian Government? Curzon referred to the history of the Persian Government's prohibitive measures since 1880; the notice of prohibition of 13 June 1891, for example, was given to British merchants in Persia. "There can be little doubt that the prohibition and the risks which were incurred by ignoring it have since then been known to the shippers and to the local firms engaged in the trade. The prohibition has on several occasions been mentioned in the British Consular Reports". And it was not the duty of the British Government to warn as to the steps might be taken for the enforcement of Persian law by the Persian Government. About the case of the *Baluchistan*, Walton asked

6. *Hansard*, vol. LXIII, col. 281-282, 28 Jul. 1898.

7. *Hansard*, vol. LXIII, col. 694, 1 Aug. 1898.

"whether the nature of the cargo of the *Baluchistan* and the port of her destination were duly declared by the shippers to the proper Government officers before the *Baluchistan* put to sea; and if so why was she allowed to proceed upon her voyage?" Mr Curzon replied that the statements made in reference to that case were found to be not uniformly correct. Certain persons or firms named as consignees in the bills of lading denied any knowledge of the transaction. But, he said "there is no provision in the English law under which the sailing of the *Baluchistan* with arms intended for illicit import into Persia could have been prevented". Walton asked if the Under-Secretary was aware of the fact that a considerable branch of British industry had been damaged, and a number of workmen thrown out of employment because of the arms seizure at Bushire and on board the *Baluchistan*. He asked "whether the Government will consider the advisability of opening negotiations with the Persian Government with a view to the recognition and resumption of the trade ?" Curzon said that he did not have evidence supporting that claim to establish the contention, and the arms trade was injurious both to British interests in and beyond the Persian Gulf and to the security of British trade with Persia. Equally, if not more, the trade was injurious to the Persian Government."Her Majesty's Government are not prepared to enter into negotiations for its recognition and resumption." Mr Walton asked "whether the export trade of arms and ammunition from this country to Persia has been carried on for a number of years with the full knowledge of Her Majesty's Government; and whether consignments of arms and ammunition for Persia have for years been cleared at the British customs houses, and duties upon arms and ammunition so exported regularly exacted by and paid to the Persian authorities appointed for such purposes by the Persian Government; if so, whether he can state when and upon what grounds Her Majesty's Government arrived at the conclusion that such trade was illicit? "Curzon replied that the Government did not interfere with the matter at an earlier date because, "as long as the prohibition was not enforced by the Persian Government ,there was no reason to impede a

British trade which would by such action only have been diverted into the hands of other foreign nations. About the duties exacted by and paid to the Persians, he said he could not admit that those have been regularly paid; on the contrary, they had been made in an irregular manner in many cases⁸.

On 10 August in the House of Commons the case of *Baluchistan* was debated at great length. Mr Lowe gave first the history of arms manufacturing in Birmingham, by which the city's international connections and good reputation were known. From the beginning of the arms trade with ports in the Persian Gulf in 1880, it had been carried on in the most open manner without the slightest interruption, and with the full knowledge and consent of both the British and Persian Governments. He spoke about the arms trade with Bushire and Muscat, and about Muscat he said, "I cannot find that there does exist, or that there ever has existed, any prohibition against the importation of arms into that place or the country of which it is the capital". But the question in Persia was different because prohibition against arms importation was issued by the authorities in 1881. Although that prohibition had not been formally repealed, it had never been acted upon. He said, "it has been universally regarded both in Persia and in this country, as merely nominal prohibition for securing a monopoly of the trade in arms to the Persian Government, and for enabling them to exact whatever rate of import duties they might think fit, however excessive and exorbitant those duties might be". Mr Lowe proved to the House that fact by showing that the annual consular reports sent from Bushire did not make any reference to that prohibition indicating that the Persian prohibition was only a nominal one⁹. The trade was well known to and well recognised by the Governments of Persia and Great Britain. Under those conditions, he said "this so-called illicit trade had been carried on without interruption from the year 1881 down to December of last year, a period of nearly 17 years, and those who were engaged in it had no reason

8. *Hansard*, vol. LXIII, col. 697-698, 1 Aug. 1898.

9. See Chaps. Five and Six about the Persian suppression measures.

whatever to suppose that anything had happened to alter or vary these conditions in the slightest particular ". Lowe explained to the House the manner of the arms seizure in Bushire on 7 December 1897¹⁰ (discussed in the preceding chapter). Mr Lowe challenged the Under-Secretary of State reminding him of his answer on 28 July to the question of Mr Hedderwick, when Curzon stated that arms stored at Bushire were not confiscated by Her Majesty's Consul-General. Now, Lowe said "I do not in any way wish to call into question the information upon which that answer was given, but it does not correspond with the facts which have been supplied to me"¹¹. In other words, Curzon's answers in the House of Commons were too vague. Lowe went on challenging the Under-Secretary of State with crucial evidence: he said, "I hold in my hand a statement made by a gentleman who was present when the seizure was made". That gentleman was Mr Dharwar, (a partner in the firm of Messrs. Fracis Times and Company, merchants carrying on business in London and at Bushire) who stated that a Persian official was present at the time of the seizure but "he took no part in the seizure, that the Consul-General and his assistants took the initiative in the matter, and that the Persian official took a back place ...if it had not been for the part taken by the British officials, the goods would not have been delivered up, as the Persians had no right to enter the premises where they were stored ". Dharwar was quite prepared to substantiate that statement upon oath, Lowe said. In the case of the seizure of the *Baluchistan* he noticed that the arms confiscated were handed over to the British Consul there. He asked, " now sir, the action of the Government in causing these seizures to be made was either legal or it was illegal. Either they were justified in taking this course, or they were not; and that is the direct issue which I wish to place before the House". Mr Lowe presented to the House the reason for the action taken by Fracis, Times and Company against the Sea Insurance Company, that to recover damages for loss of some of the goods

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Hansard*, vol. LLXIV, col. 853-854. 10 Aug. 1898.

shipped on the *Baluchiustan* under a policy of marine insurance. The Sea Insurance Company refused to pay the damages, claiming that the trade was contrary to Persian law and that traders should have known about the risk of carrying on the trade in Persia. But the Judge decided that the trade was not contrary to the Persian law and had been conducted openly. The prohibition was merely for the purpose of enabling the Persian Government to levy heavy duties upon the trade, and the seizure of *Baluchistan* had been carried out by the British authorities. He gave his Judgement for the plaintiffs with costs, and refused a stay of execution, stating that he considered the underwriters ought to pay for the damages. If that was the decision of the law, Mr. Lowe said "I fail to see upon what ground the British Foreign Office can justify their action in assisting the Persian Government to enforce a bogus prohibition against British subjects, who and whose trading interests it is their first duty to protect". He asked what right had the Persians to call upon the British to assist them in enforcing it against goods upon which they themselves had received duties. Regarding the case of *Baluchistan*, he said that the government was hasty and premature because no Persian prohibition could be applied to the high seas and it did not apply to Muscat. To prove his argument, Mr Lowe was holding in his hand copies of two letters from the Sultan of Muscat, in which he stated that no prohibition to the arms trade exists in his territory, and that the entry of arms and ammunition is perfectly free, open and welcome. Lowe said "the Government I think at least should have waited to see whether the goods would be landed in Persia or not before they seized them ". He would acknowledge any action against the trade if the arms were really finding their way to the Afridis tribes fighting against the Government on the North- West frontier, as had been said, and he was certain that "the Birmingham gun makers whom I represent, would not have uttered a single syllable of complaint however much they might have lost or been damaged by the transaction". But there was not the slightest shadow of foundation for that allegation . The Under-Secretary had apparently abandoned that reason for the

course which he had pursued. If that was true, what were the reasons on which the Foreign Office now relied to justify the action which they had taken in this matter ? He concluded the answers given by Curzon to the House were unacceptable, arguing that the term 'illicit' could not be correctly applied to the arms trade. He repeated the Judgement of Mr Justice Bigham in the case of *Francis, Times, V Sea Insurance Company* that the trade was not contrary to the law of England or Persia, and was carried on in an open manner and heavy duties demanded were cheerfully and readily paid. The rising of the Afridis at Mekran on the North-West frontier in early December 1897 in which Mr Graves of the Indo-European Telegraph Company had been killed, had been raised by Curzon. Mr Lowe denied that the arms traffic could be the reason since the tribes there were poorly and imperfectly armed; they had no breech-loading guns and Mr Graves had been murdered with knives, and not with guns at all. He pointed out that if a fair and reasonable warning had been given, those reasons might have been considered sufficiently valid for interference especially if the trade had been stopped gradually. The government at least should insist on that before they allowed British trading interests to be interfered with in this way. As to why that was not done, he said "there may exist some good and sufficient reasons which have yet been disclosed, some set of circumstances of which we are at present ignorant". He again explained that his object was not to bring an indictment against the Government so much as it was to ask them to see if some adequate remedy could be found for the injury which has been inflicted on the arms manufacturers. In explaining the condition of the arms manufacturers and the situation in Birmingham after the arms seizure operations, he said: "These manufacturers have had a large and remunerative branch of their trade entirely stopped and done away with. They have been deprived of property of very considerable value and a large number of their workpeople have been thrown out of employment. Resolutions condemning the action of the Government and asking for redress have been passed by several large meetings of people interested

in the gun trade in Birmingham ,and similar resolutions have been passed by such influential bodies as the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and the Guardians of the Birmingham Proofhouse".

After his long presentation Mr Lowe made three demands. First, calling on the Unionist Party to foster and encourage British trade in all parts of the world whenever it may be found rather than to hamper and to hinder it. Second, injustice had been committed, and the Government had, it may be unwittingly, proceeded without sufficient regard to the interest of British trade; the Unionist Party must take the initiative themselves to remove that injustice in conformity with such a prominent feature of their policy. Third, to compensate those who had suffered losses, and to restore lost property to its rightful owners.

Curzon being absent from the Commons on 10 August, Balfour, leader of the House and First Lord of the Treasury, replied to the points raised by Mr Lowe. Balfour replied that the arms trade did not concern Birmingham manufacturers so much as Belgian manufacturers. Arms illicitly imported were made not in this country but in Belgium. As for compensation, he asked upon what Mr Lowe based his claim? Mr Lowe, he said, "admits, as everybody must admit that the trade in arms is an illicit one, but he says though illicit it has been carried on ever since 1880, and though in 1890 there was some talk of prohibition, it was always found possible by merchants interested to get round prohibition by paying extra duty to the Persian Government". But Lowe denied that there was any prohibition in 1890, only in 1881 and that was purely nominal. The First Lord replied that Mr Lowe was mistaken and that there was prohibition subsequent to 1881. He pointed out that this was an exporter's rather than a manufacturer's question, that they knew that their trade was illicit, and that their giving those extra duties was clear evidence of this, as it was known that in the Orient a little expenditure may do a good deal to get round the best known custom. Those carrying on trade cannot complain when the law is enforced, even if the trade has been carried on year after year without previous interference. Balfour put before the House some

cases showing ways of evasion by the exporters. In one case the goods were consigned to certain individuals who absolutely denied that they were the consignees. Rifles had been described as hardware in the bills of lading, and "although that may not be an absolutely inaccurate description nobody can say that it is calculated to give much information to the Customs House officers, and it cannot be said therefore that this trade has been carried on in the light of day under these circumstances". Applications for intervention on behalf of the people concerned would be entertained, if they could prove that the arms confiscated were not intended for Persia, or, if the arms were really for Persia, they could produce permission from the Persian Government. But none of these people had given any such proof. At the same time he believed that export of arms into the Persian Gulf was inimical to British trade; "the Persian Government and the Sultan of Muscat both complain of the ill effects upon the order of their country through the easy access of arms, and our own information is that the introduction of arms does tend to those acts of piracy and highway robbery and general disorder which are some of the great obstacles to the augmentation of British interests in the Persian Gulf ". He asked the House to do all in its power to discourage the importation of arms which is against the well defined laws of these countries and "under which our commercial interests have grown up in those remote regions".

Section Three

Birmingham Gun Traders' Reaction

A number of developments took place between the debates in the Commons and the Lords. The arms seizures were discussed at the annual meetings of arms producers in May and June 1898¹². It was not only the problem of loss of arms and money that was discussed but the the problem of the seizure's impact on employment. On 9 June a deputation of gun traders went to the Foreign Office to

12. *Ironmonger*, 7 May; 25 June; 2 Jul. 1898.

discuss the seizures with Curzon¹³. On 15 June, at the annual meeting of the shareholders of Kynoch's Ltd., held at the Grand Hotel in Birmingham, Mr Arthur Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary's brother, attacked the Foreign Office, blaming them directly for the seizure, which had caused a loss to the Company of thousands of pounds. "The business was done through merchants and manufacturers who were themselves being brought to the verge of the bankruptcy court. The matter had been prejudiced in the eyes of the country because of the statement put forward by the Foreign Office that the confiscated guns were going out to their enemies, the hill tribes of Afghanistan, and that English merchants were supplying the Afridis"¹⁴. Chamberlain said that this was absolutely untrue. He said: "The weapons of the hill tribes were kindly supplied by the War Office. the Lee rifles were stolen from our own soldiers, and the Martini-Henri sold by the military authorities of this country for a few pence. It seemed very bad that it was necessary to bolster up the Foreign Office by statements so untrue and prejudicial as that"¹⁵. The Foreign Office had given no warning of the intention of the Government, "and Mr Curzon said it was not the habit of the British Government to give notice when they were going to enforce the law, which it was alleged was contravened...Curzon might have said that it was not the habit of the Foreign Office to give notice that they were going to enforce a law to the detriment of the English taxpayer. He thought that these matters might receive at least more sympathetic attention than they appeared to have had and considered there was something very flippant and insulting in the answers given to manufacturers and representative on this head. It seemed to him that in a little time there would absolutely be no foreign trade whatever"¹⁶. Chamberlain went on: "Not that the reign of peace had come but the trade would be driven into the hands of the Belgians, the Germans, and the French. Lord Salisbury, who had

13. *Kynoch Journal*, I 1899-1900. p. 33. Cited by Barbara Smith, in *Bibliography of Birmingham Industrial History 1850-1910*, (Birmingham, 1966), item 140.

14. *The Birmingham Daily Mail*, 15 June 1898.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

been receiving a deputation on another matter, at the conclusion of his remarks, said one thing- he thought it must have been spoken sarcastically, because Lord Salisbury was nothing if not sarcastic. He said they must not ask the Government to do things for the English trade, but said they must rely as their ancestors had done in the past on their own exertions, energy, and power to obtain trade"¹⁷. *The Birmingham Daily Gazette*, on the next day, gave a comment on Mr Chamberlain's speech: "Chamberlain seems to hanker after notoriety. When he cannot obtain it by persecuting publicans he may always rely upon the fact that his name, thanks to a more brilliant member of the family, is a household word, and that any extravagances of expression uttered by a bearer of that name are sure to attract attention"¹⁸. Yesterday, Chamberlain, the newspaper said, "presided over the meeting of Kynochs Limited, and he had to propose the adoption of a report which ought to be satisfactory to the shareholders, and which does not support the theory that British traders are ground down and ruined by the neglect of the Foreign Office"¹⁹. If Chamberlain "found it necessary to speak of the Foreign Office at all under the circumstances he might have done so in courteous terms. But he is aware that malignant rumours have been in circulation as to differences between his distinguished brother and the chief of the Ministry who is also Foreign Secretary. It would have been obvious to a less acute intellect than [Chamberlain] possesses that an attack upon the Foreign Office by the brother of the Colonial Secretary would at such a juncture attract far more than it seriously deserves"²⁰. The newspaper said, "We will say nothing of the grossly bad taste the speech displays. The fact that it was made by [Chamberlain] is perhaps a sufficient comment. Only on one subject is there the slightest excuse for the tone of the speech, and that is in reference to the Persian Gulf seizures, which threaten Kynochs with a loss of £1,000". Although the newspaper detested Chamberlain

17. *Ibid.*

18. *The Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 16 June 1898.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

for the way he spoke, it is obvious that it was sympathetic with the gun traders' loss. The newspaper accepted that "the seizures were arbitrary if not indeed wholly illegal, and that there is the flimsiest possible excuse for saying that the trade which has been carried on was of an illicit character." The arms trade was regularly reported upon by Her Majesty's Consuls, so it was treated as perfectly legitimate. The prohibition of the Shah of Persia was done for the purpose of extorting a higher duty than the treaties sanction. This was the "strongest argument the traders can put forward, and it is substantial enough to justify their demand for much more explicit information than has yet been given. It is also a conclusive reason against the method of the seizures, which were made without the slightest warning that the immunity enjoyed for seventeen years and openly recognized by our Government would be broken through". However the *Gazette* could not doubt that the Foreign Office had good reason for the action taken, but criticised the Government because the reasons had not been adequately disclosed; "surely there has been a cruel mistake in the way the change of attitude has been introduced and reparation should be made to those, who, without the slightest warning, have been deprived of their property"²¹. On 16 July 1898 *The Economist* contributed to the controversy over the *Baluchistan* affair, pointing out that "no Order in Council was issued prohibiting such shipments, and as a matter of law and practice, anybody could and can freely engage in them [arms trade] at his own risk. Arms to the Persian Gulf are not contraband of war, and their shipment then was, and to-day remains legal, and permitted"²². The *Economist* criticised the Government for inconsistency; it had always turned a deaf ear to belligerent representations, refusing to interfere with British trade in contraband of war. "By their action in the *Beluchistan* case, however, they have introduced a quasi-precedent in the opposite sense; a precedent which may one of these days prove very inconvenient in the event of similar representations"²³. The *Economist* made

21. *Ibid.*

22. *The Economist*, 16 Jul. 1898.

23. *Ibid.*

the legal and administrative points that "If it be necessary or desirable in the national interests that shipment of British arms to the Persian Gulf should cease, it is open to the executive to issue an Order in Council accordingly". But, in this case, *The Economist* said that "the action of the Government in seizing British goods on the high seas, ostensibly in support of a Persian proclamation, seems to us high-handed and illegal, as well as indiscreet. If, indeed, the ownership of the property seized in the case of the Beluchistan had proved to be vested for example, in German subjects, the Government might well have found itself placed by its own action in an untenable position. As it happens, no such question has arisen- the sufferers are only British subjects". It is yet to be seen whether the British subjects would "be content to sit down under such arbitrary treatment, or whether they will look for compensation to the naval officer who made the seizure, or to the officer of the Crown responsible for it"²³. *The Economist* was interested "to learn whether shipments of arms to the Persian Gulf will henceforth be made under the German flag, to the prejudice of British trade; and, if so," asked *The Economist* "what course will be adopted by Her Majesty's Government in support of the Persian proclamations when German and not British traders are concerned"²⁴. On 23 July 1898 the *Ironmonger's* leading article emphasized that the British Government's action against the arms trade and the seizure of arms in the Persian Gulf were unjustified and that the trade was not illegal²⁵. *The Times* on 17 January 1899 expected a fresh development in connection with the seizure of arms. "Counsel's opinion has been obtained to the effect that the owners of the arms seized have a good claim against the Crown. or by action against the commanding officer of the *Lapwing*" [Lieutenant Carr,]. Counsel said he was "unable to understand by what law, Persian or English, it can be justified. Proceedings may be taken against the Governemnt on a petition of right or against the commander of the *Lapwing* for trespass". It was reported that Carr had

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ironmonger*, 23 Jul. 1898. Cited by Smith, *Bibliography*, item no. 128-131.

already been served with a writ at the instance of the merchants interested. "At the present time guns are being allowed to enter Muscat under certain conditions but this does not alter the position as regards the Persian Gulf trade. The statement is denied that large orders from Persia for guns are being received in Birmingham. No guns have left the city for the Persian Gulf during the past year, and the attitude of the Foreign Office is described as remaining the same as before"²⁷. At the annual meeting held at Birmingham of the gunworkers in January, "the following resolution was unanimously adopted by a crowded gathering of gunmen:- [to write to Lord Salisbury] 'that this meeting testifies to the suffering caused among workmen by loss of wages through stoppage of trade resulting from the Persian Gulf seizures and humbly request your Lordship to use your influence with the Persian authorities to permit this trade to be continued'. Salisbury was asked also to receive a deputation of employers and workmen. The appeal was sent on 28 January. On 6 February 1899 Sir Thomas Sanderson on behalf of Salisbury replied that "nothing has occurred to alter the views of Her Majesty's Government on this question since Mr Curzon received a deputation on June 9 last [1898], and that no unusual purpose would be served by a fresh interview on the subject. Any written statement which you may wish to make will receive attention"²⁸. In May 1899 at the annual meeting of the Gunmakers in Birmingham "Mr Ward, the Chairman, stated that there was a loss of about £700 in the trade which, he said, 'arose from the stoppage by the Government of guns being allowed to go to the Persian Gulf. It seemed very hard that a trade which was carried on openly and legitimately for 16 years should be suddenly stopped without any notice being given, and the arms seized by the authorities. The Government had been challenged to show that the guns had found their way into the hands of the Afridis or any other of the Queen's enemies, but they had failed to do so'." Mr Ward hoped that something could be done soon to revive the arms

27. *The Times*, 17 Jan. 1899.

28. *The Times*, 8 Feb. 1899.

trade, since it caused loss to the Proofhouse as well as to makers. "The Proofhouse returns for the year indicated that the loss of revenue on account of the seizure of arms in the Persian Gulf ports was about £700, representing a loss of from 24 to 25 thousand rifles to the Birmingham guntraders"²⁹. The courts heard two cases relating to the *Baluchistan* affair. One of them, *Fracis, Times Company* against the Sea Insurance Company was heard on 24, 29 June and 4 July 1898³⁰; the judgement was for *Fracis, Times* as already mentioned in the Commons debates. In the case of *Fracis, Times* against Lt.-Commander Carr of *Lapwing* the original judgement on 19 June 1899 was for Carr, but this was reversed on appeal in May 1900.

Section Four

The House of Lords 1901

Carr then appealed to the House of Lords and on 8 July 1901 his appeal was allowed³¹. The Lord Chancellor (Earl of Halsbury) explained to their Lordships the final judgement in the case between Lieut. Com. Carr and *Fracis, Times & Co.* held on 4, 5, and 8 July 1901 as to the former's action in seizing the steamer *Baluchistan*. There had been taken "an action in this country for a wrong committed abroad. The wrong must be such that it would have been actionable if committed in this country, and the act must not have been justifiable by the law of the place where it was committed." The court found that British goods on board a British ship within the territorial waters of Muscat were seized by an officer of the British navy under the authority of a proclamation issued by the Sultan of Muscat. The court decided that "the seizure having been shown to be lawful by the law of Muscat no action could be maintained in this country by the owner of the goods against the naval officer".

29. *The Times*, 4 May 1899.

30. See *The Solicitors' J.*, 9 Jul. 1898, 42 (1898) pp. 634-35; *The Times Law*, 3 Sep. 1898, vol. LXXIX (1898), pp 28-30; F. O. Robinson and R. H. Balloch, *Reports of Commercial Cases* vol. III (1897-98) pp. 229-236.

31. See Arthur Russell (ed.) *The Times Law Reports*, vol. XVI (1899-1900), pp. 405-410; *Law Times Reports*, vol. 82 (1900) pp.698-704.

As Halsbury said "this was an action in which the plaintiffs complain of a tort committed on their property in the territorial waters of the Sultan of Muscat". He explained that the case turned on whether the Sultan of Muscat was or was not entitled within his own territory to say what shall and what shall not to be subject of traffic. The Sultan, he said, "prohibited a particular class of traffic (arms) passing through his territory, and he had enforced his prohibition by armed intervention. The Lord Chancellor confessed he was surprised that the matter had been contested or any doubts raised. "I am afraid I have not yet quite appreciated, with reference to some supposed analogy between the justification for this and what is called a judgement *in rem*." He dismissed arguments for the respondents (the original plaintiffs) that the issue should be decided on the basis of whether the decision of the court of Muscat was a judgement *in rem* and concentrated on the question of whether Mr Carr's action in seizing the arms and ammunition was legally justified according to the law of Muscat. "The Sultan has pronounced what his law is; and I may say at once that, looking at these two documents, upon the true construction of which, as it appears to me, the whole question turns, the Sultan himself pronounced by an authoritative declaration, that what was done was lawful". He said that an English jury can go behind that declaration of the Sultan and argue that those arms were not going where it was claimed they were. He asked; are we going to administer the law of Muscat and determine whether or not the Sultan was right in what he did? The Lord Chancellor emphasized that as the Sultan's authority in his own territory was unquestionable, his action should be regarded as an act of State. To turn that issue into another one such as a judgement *in rem* could be only misleading. That act was not between one person and another, but was done by a lawful State. There was no doubt that, under such circumstances, the act was done with the complete authority of Muscat and could not be made the subject of an action here as to whether or not this act was unlawful in this country but lawful in Muscat. No tribunal in this country could go behind that declaration and argue that the Sultan of Muscat was wrong in his

exposition of his own law and will, even if this was carried out by a British subject and participated in by the British Government.

Lord Macnaghten agreed with the Lord Chancellor in identifying two conditions in order to found an action in this country.

First; the wrong must be of such a character that it would have been actionable if committed in England.

Second; the act must not have been justifiable by the law of the place where it was committed.

In the case of *Baluchistan* the whole issue turned on the second point. This case was not about whether a wrong was done which would have been actionable if it have been done in England or on the high seas, but whether wrong had been done within the dominions of the sovereign Sultan of Muscat. He agreed with the appellant Carr's representation about the legality of what was done under the authority and direction of the Sultan, and supported his reliance upon the Sultan's proclamation of 13 January 1898 and his court conclusion of 15 April³². He dismissed the respondent Francis, Times & Co.'s points of argument in regard to those documents of the Sultan. "Her Britannic Majesty was welcome to seize munitions of war destined for Indian or Persian ports, if they were the property of British subjects, when found within the territorial waters of Muscat ". The Sultan would not resent such an act as an invasion of his sovereignty and after an enquiry he declared that he was satisfied that her Britannic Majesty had done no more than he had permitted her to do.

Lord Macnaghten explained the true meaning of the Sultan's documents. He believed that the act was done under the authority of the Sultan, who had declared it to be legal, "that is according to the law of Muscat, which for any thing I know to the contrary may be nothing more than the will and pleasure of the despot who rules over that country. If this was the true meaning of these documents, if the act was legal in Muscat and, therefore, justifiable there, in my

32. See previous chapter on the Case of *Baluchistan*.

opinion there is a conclusive answer to the action; and I am, therefore of opinion that the appeal must be allowed"³³.

Lord Lindley agreed with both the Lord Chancellor and Lord Macnaghten. He criticised the claim that the Sultan of Muscat had no jurisdictional rights of allowing any one to seize arms out of a British ship passing through his territorial waters in time of peace, and that the seizure, although sanctioned by Muscat, Persia and Great Britain, was unlawful by the law of the nations and ought to be so treated by an English court of law. Replying to that point, he dismissed any idea that an English court could pronounce on general principles of international law as to whether the Sultan had exceeded his powers, but he did not dismiss the possibility of any demand by the British Government for reparation.

The final conclusion of the House of Lords was "*judgement appealed from reserved, and judgment of Graham J., restored.*" Finally Francis, Times, & Co (*respondents*) lost their case against Lt. Com. Carr (*appellant*) and they had to pay his costs in the House of Lords and in the other courts³⁴.

Conclusion

After those long debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, a brief discussion of the debates in general is necessary. Despite the differences in the timing and the procedure, in both Houses there was a common issue. That was the seizure of arms on board *Baluchistan*. The Commons' discussion provided the political and economic context and the Lords dealt with the legal issues. In the Commons Curzon avoided giving any explanation for the developments from January last regarding the Sultan of Muscat on the 5th and the circumstances in which the sultan issued his notification on the 13th³⁵. Curzon did not take direct responsibility for the arms suppression policy as first

33. House of Lords, *Weekly Report*, 22 Feb. 1902, vol. 50 pp. 257-58; *Law J. Reps.*, (new s.), King's Bench Division, Vol. 71, p. 361; *The Times Law Reps.*, vol. XVII, (1900-1901) pp. 657-660; *The Law Times*, 82 (1900) pp. 698-704.

34. *Ibid.*

35. See Chap. Six.

carried out by the Government of India in 1880³⁶. He also did not give any impression that the government of India tried its best to persuade the Sultan of Muscat to order his subjects not to shift arms to Guwader in 1891 and if possible to suppress it in Muscat itself. He did not mention to the Commons the difficulties which were faced over the question of Muscat's commitment to other states when the Sultan decided to raise duties on imported arms. The Sultan's decision was finally supported by the British Government as a move in the right direction which could contribute to checking the trade. Curzon put Great Britain in the third place after Muscat and Persia as interested in suppressing the arms traffic although essentially it was a British initiative. Curzon's position seemed more a defence of Persian law than of compliance with British law, and although this implied official British support for Persian policy, he rejected the idea of giving formal notice to the arms traders not to trade with Persia. In fact it seems that the increase of import duty was linked with the Persian prohibitions on the import of arms, while the Sultan of Muscat simply increased duty, but both of them aimed to convince Great Britain that they were committed to suppression of the trade. Although the coin was minted in Britain, the British Government had stamped its head with a Persian decoration and the other side with an Omani one. However this was what was needed for the House of Commons. In the matter of the Persian law, if the Persian authorities themselves did not respect laws issued by themselves then it was very likely that others would take advantage of that. If the law in eastern countries could be got round by paying money as Balfour put it, then 'getting round' was the hidden part of the law. The law, in effect, could be used like those gates which are closed or opened by tickets.

In the Lords the focus was on the Sultan of Muscat's law for the prohibition on the arms trafficking in his territorial waters and not on the Persian

36. See early British restrictions on arms to India, in Chap. Five.

law. However despite that, the Lords final judgement was in favour of Carr, relying on the Muscat Court's judgement³⁷.

The effects of this case would continue. It would provide clearer answers as to whether the arms suppression policy was according to the law of the Sultan of Muscat, or of the Persians, or to comply with the British policy of curbing arms trafficking in an area of strategic importance to British imperial interests in India and the Persian Gulf. The later chapters will provide the answer.

37. For the circumstances in which the Muscat court was held see previous chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MUSCAT ARBITRATION 1899-1905

Introduction

Partly in consequence of the case of the *Baluchistan*, the period between 1899 and 1905 witnessed a new kind of British diplomacy in Muscat, initiated by Captain P. Z. Cox. It was an effort to remove the effects of the *Baluchistan* affair and to establish a firm and better footing for the British in Muscat. So there was a tendency towards softness and negotiations instead of the toughness and uncertainty which dominated the previous period.

Fagan, the British Consul in Muscat, seems not only to have had problems with the Sultan but even with his superiors. Either he was confused by some instructions or he was deliberately mixing them up. He embarrassed his own government's relations with the French, when he was instructed on 11 March 1899 to inform the Sultan that, should the latter receive a request for a coaling shed from the French Consul, the Sultan should submit the proposals to Fagan in writing for his approval, which he would only give if it satisfied conditions laid down. Otherwise Fagan should refer to the Government of India. However Fagan himself altered these instructions. Instead of asking the Sultan to refer directly to himself, he referred the matter to the Government of India. This step was regarded by the Government of India as unauthorised, and was subsequently made a ground of serious complaint by the French Government. The Government of India's "intention was that, while Fagan was not to make difficulties and was to tell Sultan beforehand that no objection would be raised to demand by French for coal shed in Muscat", Fagan "should not address further written communication to Sultan, but should clearly understand situation in case of conversation on the matter with the Sultan". However Fagan did not stay to deal with the matter, which received another kind of diplomacy when Captain Cox arrived. The removal of Fagan and all his staff from the British consulate in Muscat could be

seen as a moral gesture, which would bring satisfaction to the Sultan, since the latter had had enough of Fagan's 'reign' in Muscat. This brought success to the British policy in Muscat, and Cox described his aim, saying, "all I want to do in Muscat is to get the dusky Arab [Sultan Faisal] who presides over that place on our side, and not in the French pocket"¹. This appointment, however, gave Cox "great responsibility, a sporting chance of winning the doubtful Sultan to the British side, and a permanent post in the Political Department of the Government of India"². But it was not Percy Cox, who himself had some weaknesses, on his own who eased tension either between the Sultan and the British Government, or between the British and the French Governments.

This period witnessed a number of interesting issues, some of them continuations of the old ones and some of them new, for example, the question of an Arabic Newspaper *Fathul Bas^sa,er*, [Opening the Eyes], the revision of the 1892 Treaty with the effort to increase British commercial influence, and the French coaling station. There were several other interesting issues which cannot be covered by this chapter. The French coaling station can be regarded as a question which had its origins in the case of the *Baluchistan* and it was important to have it settled. The French flag question also dominated the politics in Muscat between Great Britain and France, though it too was not a new question. It became a serious issue especially after the case of the *Baluchistan*, since after that affair the Omani dhows sailed and traded in arms freely under the French colours. In addition to these two issues France's political position in the court of the Sultan became influential, and France's reputation in the eyes of the Omani was very high, especially after the case of the *Baluchistan*. So these two issues, the coaling shed and the flag, were finally settled, one at an early stage, and the other in an arbitration on 13 October 1904; in January 1905 an agreement was signed and published between Great Britain and France. However we must ask why it was

1. Dilks, *Curzon*, vol. 1, p. 134.

2. Philip Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox*, (1942), p.55.

important now for both Britain and France to try settling problems between themselves in Muscat. Was it because Germany started to knock on the doors of their sphere of influence? We must first of all consider the general relations between the two powers in Muscat³.

Section Two

'*Fathul Bas[^]sa,er*' and Public Opinion

France was frustrated by the British threat of bombardment of the Sultan's palace in 1899 when they attempted to lease a piece of ground for a coaling station. The incident caused considerable damage to the Sultan as sovereign ruler in the eyes of his people and of Arab and international public opinion. In the Arab world, for example the '*Fathul Bas[^]sa,er*' newspaper spread the news of the affair one year later (A. H. 25 *Shawwal* 1317 [A. D. 1900]). The newspaper, according to the Aden Residency, was posted from Beirut to Aden about a fortnight after the date of issue. It was published once a month. The Residency believed that the paper was Anglophobe in tone, and was probably printed in Paris. It was sent free to merchants and others in Aden and probably to Zanzibar and India. It was noted that "some ten years ago a similar paper was started in Egypt, by one Abu Nadarah (the father of spectacles), but he was expelled from Egypt and went to Paris, and edited his paper from there"⁴.

In Muscat also the newspaper arrived, and was addressed to the Sultan himself, his brother Mohammed, his cousin Muhammed bin Hilal, the military Commander, Badur bin Saif, Sleiman bin Suailem Wali at Sohar, Ali bin Juma,h, a retainer of the Sultan, and Jemadar Sleiman Abdurraheem, who commanded one of the Muscat forts. Other important persons, Sheikhs and famous merchants, also received copies: Sheikh Muhammed er-Rejhi, Sheikh Mohsin Bin Aamer-el-

3. F. O. 54/29, tel., Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to the Polit. Resid., 18 June 1899; I. O. to F. O., 11 July 1899.

4. F. O. 54/30, I. O. to F. O., 20 June 1900; Resid., in Aden, to Govt. of Bombay, 27 May 1900; Extract from *Fathal Basayyir* (Arabic Newspaper) 25th Shawal, 1317. The I. O. translation 'the father of spectacles' should be replaced by 'the Wise Man'.

Harthi, Sheikh Ali bin Aamer el Hinawy (both from the interior), Abdul Aziz er-Ruahi (French Dragoman), Ali Hussein (a British subject), Saiyid Yousuf ez-Zuwawy, an Arab merchant who came originally from Hijaz, Abdallah bin Akeel, a local Arab merchant, and Yusuf Jamal⁵.

Captain Cox believed that the newspaper was a device of the French consul or his myrmidons in order to undermine British influence. As already mentioned, the newspaper wrote about the occasion of the bombardment threat by Admiral Douglas to the Sultan's palace and the humiliation which the Sultan was put under as a result of granting the French a coaling station. Surely he was acting within his sovereign rights in granting such a concession? According to the newspaper, "The Viceroy of India, however, grew jealous at this and made a protest to Saiyid Feysal, putting forward the argument that the gift was inconsistent with the treaties in force between him and the English". The newspaper gave extensive coverage to the drama of the bombardment threat and the humiliation of the Sultan as a result being committed to abandon the coaling station to the French. As a result of this action the newspaper said, "the English made it appear that they were protecting Saiyid Fesal from foreign encroachment, but it was not at all the case. Their sole object was the annexation of Muscat and its dependencies, and if we want the simple truth it is that they took this action as furnishing a means for interfering in the affairs of the place and of quietly achieving their object". The English, said the newspaper, planted in the soil an iron flagstaff, 40 cubits in height, upon which to fly their flag, a procedure which was regarded by the Arab public as evidence of the annexation of the country. '*Fathul Bas^sa,er*' spoke about the subsidy paid by the British Government to the Omani Sultan which it had been customary for Zanzibar to make to Muscat. The British attitude in that matter was a strange one, according to the newspaper; "they now look upon the payment of this money as a piece of English charity and

5. F. O. 54/30, I. O. to F. O., 3 July 1900; Cox to Govt. Ind., 21 April 1900; Cox to Mead, 18 April 1900; translation of Articles from *Fath-ul-Basayar* [Opening the Eyes], published in Bairut, 7 Ramazan, 1317 H. (January 9, 1900).

benevolence, and, in fact, the Viceroy has frequently spoken of Muscat as being part of Bombay, and has stated that his Government expended a lakh of rupees yearly on the place." The Political Agent looked upon himself as a ruler of Muscat, which was regarded as piece of British territory. The newspaper mentioned the salute of guns which the Sultan had to fire on the occasion of every British festival for the Queen "Empress of India", the title assumed by Queen Victoria. Thirty-one guns should be fired in Muscat, whereas Royalties are not given more than twenty-one, so the extra ten said the newspaper, was for the claim of Great Britain. But the newspaper took the chance to remind the Omani public and intellectual opinion of the real power of Great Britain, that, "since the Transvaal (Boer) war started, the public of Asia and Africa have all taken the measure of Great Britain's power"⁶. It should be noted that not only news concerning Muscat was in the paper but there was also information about the Turkish Government, the Boer War and situation of the English troops there, the general position of English troops in India, the situation in the Persian Gulf and the British fear of any power interfering in it. Finally there was a call for Moslems to resist the seizure of the Moslem countries signed by "Abdu Muhammad" or perhaps [Imam Muhammad Abdu], a famous Egyptian nationalist and religious leader, a friend of Jamal-u-ddeen Al Huseiny, (Al Afghani) of Afghanistan.

However, the paper noted that "in these days the English are showing mildness to Saiyid Feysal, Sultan of Muscat, and they have now paid the usual subsidy which he gets from Zanzibar". The newspaper seemed to annoy both the Government of India and the Sultan of Muscat, so measures had to be taken against it. According to Cox, the Sultan asked him to confiscate the newspaper in the Muscat Post Office, because it was managed by the British Agency. There was some difficulty about such a step because some papers were addressed to French proteges, and there was therefore the possibility of news of such action

6. transl., *Fath-ul-Basayar*, 25 Shawal 1317 (-February 1900) Muscat.

leaking out. Cox therefore solicited the sanction of the Government of India before taking any action. He was anxious to know the origins of the newspaper, from the fact that the paper put in some of the envelopes used was made in England! It bore the maker's name, "James Bolton, 39 and 40, St. George's Place, Hyde Park Corner" in London. He thought that might possibly furnish a clue⁷. The India Office in London made an enquiry into the matter and brought to the notice of the Foreign Office the distribution of the newspaper, which was regarded by the India Office as "mischievous and offensive". In London the India Office contacted the maker of the envelopes, Mr J. Bolton, in St George Place. Mr Bolton told the India Office that the envelopes were specially made for the French Embassy in Albert Gate, and he knew that they were not for their own use in this country. They were sent to Paris for use there, he said "beyond that I can give no information"⁸. It is interesting that examination of the paper at the Stationery Office, produced no definite identification that the paper was of English or oriental manufacture. It was common on the continent and it had no mark of the maker, an indication by which the place of manufacture could be established. So the Foreign Office made an effort, via Mr Drummond Hay, who promised to let the Foreign Office know if he succeeded in finding out anything more about the newspaper on his return to Beirut⁹. Drummond Hay did not in fact go to Beirut himself but sent the envelope there. The answer came that no such envelopes were made there. Therefore, the India Office's conclusion was that the French Embassy was interested in the *Fathul Bas^sa,er*. The results of Sir Lee Warner's talk with Mr Bolton should be known in the proper quarters¹⁰. Sir Thomas Sanderson considered that the newspaper's desire was to raise mischief, but he thought that the French Government had its own political aim, namely to

7. F. O. 54/30, Cox to Gov. Ind., 18 May 1900; Cox to Govt. Ind., 22 May 1900.

8. F. O. 54/30, Mr J. Bolton, to Lee Warner, 18 Aug. 1900; Lee Warner to Fairholme, conf., 25 Aug. 1900,

9. F. O. 54/30, Lee Warner to Sanderson, 25 Aug. 1900.

10. F. O. 54/30, I. O. to F. O., conf., 25 July 1900; Sanderson to Lee Warner, 25 Aug. 1900.

undermine British influence in Muscat¹¹. The Government of India suggested that arrangement might be made for the examination and seizure of such papers before they could reach Muscat. These orders were to be treated as strictly confidential¹². However the newspaper was stopped from reaching Muscat at Beirut, according to Sanderson's internal letter to Lee Warner on 27 August 1900. Whether the newspaper suppression was successful or not, damage had already been done. The newspaper had been read by Omanis who realized that Great Britain was less dominant internationally. The newspaper reported the emergence of another new power in Europe which could challenge the British position. It was not France, but Germany, and the Omanis, probably, had already some example of that in East Africa in the case of the marriage of Princess Salma (daughter of Sa'eed bin Sultan Imaum of Oman and Zanzibar, and sister of *four* Sultans in Muscat and Zanzibar !) to a German diplomat, Herr Reute, and her visit to Zanzibar on board a German cruiser. Another occasion was the escape of Khalid bin Bargash, her nephew, to the German Consulate in Zanzibar after his attempt to assume power during which he was bombarded by the British navy¹³. The British authorities pressed for his surrender, but the German consul refused to give him up, claiming that the case was covered by German extraterritorial rights. Khalid then was taken by the consulate on a German man-of-war to Dar-es-Salaam. The British Government protested against this action and refused to admit that Germany was within her rights. On the mainland at Mombasa, German intrigues to undermine British influence were also going on¹⁴. These events came to the knowledge of Omanis because of their strong link with the East African

11. *Ibid.*

12. F. O. 54/30, Govt. Ind. to Meade, 4 June 1900; Govt. Ind. to Dir. Genl. Post Off. India.

13. See chapter six, The Case of Abdul Aziz Er-Ruwahi; *Mudhkirrat Amira Arabeyeh* of Princes Salma.

14. Gooch & Temperley, *British Docs.*, Vol. 1, pp. 323, 327, "In Zanzibar, the extra-territorial rights conferred on Germany by her Treaty of 1885 with the sultan became a source of constant dispute. The exemption from search claimed by German vessels made it impossible for Her Majesty's Government to perform the duties which, in their opinion, devolved on them as a protecting power under the Brussels Act, but Germany maintained her claims none the less".

coast. *Fathul Bas^{sa},er* brought the news of the seizing of six German trading ships by the British between Zanzibar and Delagoa Bay; they were *Herzuk, General, Admiral, Huns, Janer, Bundesrath*, and *Coseller*. The English took this action to display their maritime power to the Arabs, Indians, and the people of Zanzibar, so that they might know that the English had a long arm both at sea and on land, the newspaper said. For this reason "the German Emperor wrote a strong threatening letter for interfering with his subjects. The English were frightened, and released the German vessels".

The newspaper brought to the Omani public knowledge of another intervening power, the Russians. The Indian Government became very uneasy on hearing that a small Russian steamer had entered the Persian Gulf. When the British saw the natives had become delighted at what they heard of the Russian vessel, the newspaper claimed, they became afraid lest a rising might take place. The British at once falsified the news, added the newspaper, to assure the Arabs, Indians and others that no Government, except itself, had a navy. Whenever it hears that a vessel of a foreign Power has gone to the Persian Gulf it becomes afraid and alarmed¹⁵. *Fathul Bas^{sa},er*'s aim seems to be clear, not only to serve French desires but to explain that there was now more than one power which could challenge Great Britain; the French, the Russians and the Germans. In addition, the Arabs and the Indians could participate in that challenge. From the issues raised by the newspaper, it does not seem that it served completely French desires, rather expressing its own particular opinion. There was nothing in the newspaper which gave the French more advantage against the British than it gave the Germans, the Russians or the Turks. This was strange for a newspaper supported by the French.

15. F. O. 54/30, extract from '*Fathul Bas^{sa},er*' A.H. 25th Shawal 1317.

Section Three

Settling the Coalshed Question

As was noticed in the introduction, the British Government now had no objection to granting the French a coaling station in Muscat. It seems to have been changes in the international atmosphere which necessitated this more conciliatory policy toward the French. They had sailed their warships to prevent this development yet they were willing now to accept it and even offered help to achieve it, although it was less than three months since they had threatened to bombard the Sultan's palace. In May they wrote to the Political Agent in Muscat telling him to enquire about the place needed by the French. On 3 June instructions were given to him to tell the Sultan there was no objection on the part of the British Government if the French applied to him for a coaling shed within Muscat Harbour under the same conditions as the British one, without flag or fortification. Also the Government of India instructed the Agent to maintain his right to be consulted by the Sultan, a claim which had previously been refused by the Sultan¹⁶.

This new move, however, was based on diplomatic contact between the French and the British between February 1899 and June. On February 22 1899 M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, complained to the Marquess of Salisbury very earnestly of the excessive action which Admiral Douglas had pursued towards the Sultan of Muscat because of his granting a coaling station to the French. The Ambassador had complained also of the publicity which had been given to the affair, which induced the English newspapers to adopt a very disagreeable tone towards the French Government. He saw the Muscat incident announced upon the hoardings by an advertisement proclaiming "a new check for

16. F. O. 54/29, Polit. Resid. to Govt. Ind., conf., 17 May 1899; Polit. Agent. to Resid., tel., 9 May 1899, conf.; Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to Polit. Agent, tel., 13 May 1899; Polit. Agent. to Govt. Ind., 3 June 1899; Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to Polit. Agent., conf., 9 June 1899; Polit. Resid. to Polit. Agent, 8 June 1899; Resid. to Sultan of Muscat, tel., 18 June 1899; Govt. Ind. For. Dept. to the Polit. Resid., 27 April 1899; Polit. Agent to Sultan of Muscat, (17 Zilhaj 1316); Sultan of Muscat to Polit. Agent., (28 Zilhaj, 1316) 9 May 1899.

France". Salisbury replied that he had gone into the matter and was compelled to adhere to the view that "the Treaty of 1862, which bound both France and England to respect the independence of the Imam of Muscat, was seriously threatened if either power, acting as sovereign State, could take from the Imam [Sultan] a lease of any portion of his territory. If it could be done for a small piece of ground it could be for a large piece". He said it was impossible to say that the practical independence of the Sultan would not, in regard to such portions of territory, be impaired. The French Ambassador declined entirely to admit Lord Salisbury's interpretation of the treaty, and the British view on that subject, which was open to discussion, need not have been asserted by a threat of bombardment against Muscat and the Sultan's palace. Lord Salisbury repeated his view of France's violation of the 1862 Treaty, but he admitted that the case had not been conducted as quietly as he thought it might well have been. He expressed his sorrow that the matter had publicly taken the form of an apparent controversy with France. Salisbury also admitted that in the matter of sentiment the French ambassador had a grievance, though in the matter of substance the British action was entirely right. Britain for years had special engagements with the Sultan of Muscat, which involved some payments of money, and a very rigid prohibition on the alienation of his own territory. The British were afraid of the lease France obtained. It was only, they thought, a step towards obtaining the littoral in permanent possession. The French Ambassador assured Lord Salisbury that any such designs were very far from the contemplation of his Government and he was quite willing to make any declarations which were necessary to place the innocent intentions of his Government beyond doubt. But the Ambassador asked, whether after such declaration had been made, it would be possible to provide in some manner for the establishment of a coaling shed of which France had need. Lord Salisbury did not give a direct answer because the matter was entirely within the jurisdiction of the India Office, but he promised to convey his wishes to the Indian

Government and report back to him¹⁷. Five days after the first meeting took place, on 27 February, the French Ambassador called on the Foreign Office accepting, on behalf of the French Government, the British reading of the 1862 Treaty, but also with a proposal to establish a coal depot on exactly the same terms as the British one, that is to say, on sufferance. He requested that the British agent at Muscat might be informed that this was being done with the assent of H. M. Government as otherwise Faisal might object to the arrangement. Lord Salisbury replied that he would at once request the Secretary of State for India to communicate with the Viceroy on the subject by telegraph¹⁸. But before the coaling depot question was finally settled, the French seem to have attempted to clear up the situation between themselves and the British Government not in Muscat affairs alone but on an international basis in which they thought that the British would now be willing to make a positive reaction. On 15 March 1899, the French Ambassador had a lengthy discussion with Lord Salisbury, drawing general conclusions as to the present attitude of the two countries towards each other, a position not at all free from danger. "There was a tone prevalent in England which might have the effect of driving the pacific sentiments of France to despair, and leading Frenchmen to think that there was no hope of tranquil relations with this country". It was a *nuance*, but a *nuance* that might have very calamitous effects, he said, since France had no intention of taking any active policy against England. Lord Salisbury assured the Ambassador that he was mistaken in thinking that the British Government dealt with France on any other principle than that on which the British Government dealt with all other countries, and any encroachment or aggressiveness of tone was far from British thoughts and intentions. Lord Salisbury pointed out that menacing action by French officers in various parts of the world had forced upon the British Government considerations

17. Marquess of Salisbury to Sir E. Monson, 22 Feb. 1899 in Gooch & Temperley, *British Docs.*, vol. 1, pp. 209-210.

18. Gooch & Temperley, *British Docs.*, vol. 1, p. 210.

of self protection¹⁹. However both sides wished to show themselves victims of the other side's policy, and to have been unfairly treated in different parts of the world, while at the same time offering better treatment in the future. But it was not yet clear what lay behind the latest French move, and what was their information about the British situation round the world in the face of the Germans. It does seem that they were confident that their initiatives would succeed. The British willingness to negotiate the coaling shed in Muscat with them might give them an indication that the British also would do the same on the international level. Such a step would no doubt help both countries prepare themselves for the new international atmosphere caused by the appearance of the Germans and other European powers. The competition in Africa over territorial rights had already gone on for a decade. Probably neither France nor Britain wanted to see the other become too closely associated with the Germans overseas, but this possibility might bring them to settle matters. If concessions could be made in Oman they could be made elsewhere but there was still a long way to go. At least, however, in Muscat, a practical step was being taken to normality despite a lot of difficulties and doubts in the aftermath of the Fashoda crisis the year before.

On 2 June 1899 Hamilton telegraphed the Viceroy to instruct the Muscat Consulate to tell the Sultan at once that the British Government would have no objection if the French applied to him for a site for a coaling shed within Muscat harbour under the same conditions as the British, and the Consul was to be instructed to show every consideration to French susceptibilities and to meet their wishes as far as possible²⁰. However, the French Ambassador in London communicated with Lord Salisbury on 7 June 1899, telling him that "in the harbour of Muscat itself there was not room enough for a French depot of coal, and therefore he proposed to take some other creek, at some distance from Muscat, naming, especially in the first instance, that of Bunder Jis^sah, with

19. Marquess of Salisbury to Sir E. Monson, 15 Mar. 1899 in Gooch & Temperley, *British Docs.*, vol. 1, p. 211.

20. F. O. 54/29, Tel., Hamilton to Viceroy, 2 June 1899; Viceroy to Hamilton, 3 June 1899.

respect to which the controversy originally commenced." Salisbury replied that he thought, "there were many objections to such a course, and that it would give impressions as to the intentions of the French Government which neither they nor we would wish to be entertained". But, to solve this problem the India Office had told the Foreign Office that, "there were three coal-sheds occupied by the British Government, and that they had only need for two. They were prepared to sell the third to the French Government, if they should desire it". The Ambassador promised to refer the matter to his Government²¹. On 22 July 1899 Sir Thomas Sanderson sent to the India Office copies of two dispatches to the British Ambassador at Paris recording the communications above in regard to the offer to the French Government and requesting Lord George Hamilton's observations, especially on the proposal of the French Government to establish a coal depot in the Riyam bay between Muscat and Mutrah cities, about three miles from each. The French Ambassador in London reported to the British Foreign Office on 27 July that the French Vice-Consul at Muscat had reported by telegraph communications which had passed between him and the British Consul on the subject above. He stated that the British Agent had asked to show him the creek proposed for the French shed. After seeing it, the British Consul had no objection and was ready to settle the matter with M. Ottavi, the French Vice-Consul. Ottavi asked whether the British Consul, Mr Fagan, had authority for that, and Ottavi understood that he considered he had. He communicated to his Foreign Office which passed the matter to the French Ambassador in London asking whether the British Consul's statement was correct. The Foreign Office replied that, so far as the reports from India showed, Fagan had no authority except to make enquiries of his French colleague and to report that to the Foreign Office. On the same date, the French Minister spoke to Salisbury about what he heard from the Vice-Consul in Muscat, asking whether the British Agent was authorised to settle the matter

21. Salisbury to Sir E. Monson, 7 June 1899 in Gooch & Temperley, *British Docs.*, vol. 1, pp. 211-212.

either on the bases originally prepared, or on that of the cession of the English sheds. The French Government wished to know if that was correct. Lord Salisbury replied that he did not think that the Agent had received instructions to that effect²². It was probably for this reason that Meade, the Political Resident, had himself to depart to Muscat on 30 July 1899 to settle the matter, in respect to the Viceroy's instructions²³. But Meade found that Riam bay was not suitable for a coaling shed for several reasons. It was inhabited and could be fortified. It was also close to Mutrah harbour. The Political Agent and the Government of India were of the same opinion. Meade suggested Mukalla (on the right side of Muscat bay beside the fort Myrani and in front of the fort Jalaly²⁴) as the best place and saw no reason why the French claimed a lack of space in that place. They thought that the French had the same desire as before which had been refused by the British Government during the Jes[^]sah crisis. But the Foreign Office, it seems, wanted to resolve this question promptly. At the same time it was decided to let the French Government know about the British objections, because of the strategic position of the Riyam bay²⁵. In the middle of August 1899 an interesting meeting took place between Sir E. Monson, the British Ambassador in Paris and M. Delcassé, the French Foreign Minister on the latter's return from a visit to Russia. Though the British Ambassador was hardly expecting that the French Foreign Minister would give him any interesting information about his visit to Russia, it seems he was wishing to have some. However he was disappointed that Russia was not once mentioned during the hour and a half he spent with the Foreign Minister. Delcassé began to complain of the impossibility of keeping

22. F. O. 54/29, F. O. to I. O., 26 July 1899; 27 July 1899.

23. F. O. 54/29, tel., I. O. to Viceroy, 25 Jul. 1899; tel., Viceroy to I. O., 29 Jul. 1899.

24. *Mahmood Ali Al-Dauood*, in his Arabic book, *Alkahlyj Al-Arabi* (The Arabian Gulf), mentioned that, "*Mukalla a,laa Sahil Hadramout*" "*Mukalla on the coast of Hadramout*", seems to mix up Mukalla on the coast of Hadramaut (South Yaman) and Mukalla cove in Muscat bay. He also identified Bander Jes[^]sah as "*Bandar Jeeseh*"; a scholar could mix up the name Gysa of Egypt with Jes[^]sah, of Muscat

25. F. O. 54/29, Viceroy to I. O., 6 Aug. 1899; F. O. to I. O., 9 Aug. 1899; I. O. to F. O., 9 Aug. 1899; F. O. to I. O., 12 Aug. 1899; Viceroy to I. O., tel., 12 Aug. 1899; Hamilton to Govt. Ind., 11 Aug. 1899; Viceroy to I. O., tel., 23 Aug. 1899.

relations with England on a friendly footing, and of the way in which all the justifiable demands of the French were rejected in London. This attitude filled both himself and M. Cambon with profound discouragement. The British Ambassador was surprised at such a statement, noticing that he received on the same day despatches from M. Cambon himself respecting the coal depot at Muscat. But M. Delcassé looked upon the communications made by the Foreign Office to M. Cambon as most unsatisfactory, insisting that the conduct of the British Government seemed to show a deliberate intention to be unfriendly to France in every possible way. Sir Edmund Monson pointed out that the insistence upon such a theory was a most pernicious policy, and one calculated to bring about the very evils which he deprecated. The French Minister stated that he began to believe the politicians who argued that nothing satisfactory could be done with England. Monson replied that it was exactly the existence of such people and the influence they exercised which caused so much harm. He said that he honestly believed that no one in England desired to quarrel with France, but he had come to the conclusion after three years residence in France that many Frenchmen would like to quarrel with England.

The meeting ended like this: according to the British Ambassador the French Minister appealed to him to do all in his power to facilitate the maintenance of a good understanding between France and England, begging him not to treat that controversial discussion as an official one, and the British Ambassador expressed to his Government his satisfaction at the French minister's attitude. At the same time he took the chance to list some French press opinions and added that "the tone of the general press is at this moment hostile to England. The Transvaal question is the theme of constant notice in the Paris news papers, and the merits are completely transformed and disguised by French journalists. Then the adulation of Germany continues"²⁶.

26. Monson to Salisbury 14 Aug. 1899; 16 Aug. 1899 in Gooch & Temperley, *British Docs.*, Vol. 1, pp. 212-213.

However, the previous discussion between the British Ambassador and the French Foreign Minister was not so different from the discussion between the French Ambassador and the Foreign Secretary. One month after the British Ambassador's meeting with the French Minister an important report came from Muscat on 17 September 1899, that a German named Herr Troeppen, known as *Haji Mustafa*, had arrived at Muscat as a trader. He resided formally in Zanzibar where he embraced Islam and married a native of the Angazeeja tribe. And, although he was doing no business there at all, he appeared to have a good deal of money at his command. Here is an example. Herr Troeppen managed to reach the Sultan to persuade him to start a post office in Muscat and to institute local postage stamps, for which concession he declared his willingness to pay H. H. Rs 6000 per annum. The Sultan hesitated for some time whether or not to grant this concession, but then he decided not to do so. But "the Sultan has placed a large house at the disposal of Herr Troeppen and has declared his intention of taking the customs under his own control and of appointing Herr Troeppen to the post of Superintendent of Customs on a salary of Rs. 200 a month as soon as the present customs farmer's contract expired"²⁷. If that was true it could be enough warning to the French and the British, and their relations in Muscat will now be further considered.

Till the end of 1899 the question was still under negotiation and the British Government maintained its position concerning Riyam bay, while at the same time the French Government found it difficult to accept the English offer which it considered an insult to French national feelings²⁸. The French eventually applied to establish the station in Kalbooh, close to Reyam at the entrance to Mutrah bay (where *AL-Insherah* restaurant is now) but the British sent the Senior Naval Officer of the Persian Gulf Division, Captain John Denison of H. M. S.

27. F. O. 54/29, Resid. to Bushire Cons. Gen., 17 Sep. 1899; Polit. Agent. to Resid., 5 Sep. 1899.

28. Salisbury to Monson, 7 Oct. 1899 in Gooch & Temperley, *British Docs.*, vol. 1, pp. 213-14.

Melpomene, to report about the place. He found that its position was similar to that at Reyam²⁹. So the British insisted on their stand but at the same time they wished to bring this problem to an end. They suggested making changes at the cove of Mukalla in Muscat bay, where the British station was, in such a way as to meet French needs, by making a partition wall between the French and the British station³⁰. Finally, the French accepted the offer in Mukalla in August 1900, and with it an exhausting question between the British and the French was solved³¹. But was that all?

Section Four

Cox's Efforts, and Success

So far two successes had been achieved during the first year of Captain Cox's appointment (September 30th 1899). The Government of India authorized resumption of payment of the subsidy to the Sultan from October 1899³². That was the first success. The second, the coal shed question, though it began before his arrival, came to a successful conclusion during this time. On the diplomatic front Cox set out to maintain good relations between the Sultan and the British Government, and to try firmly to reduce the consequences of the *Baluchistan* affair. However, as he explained, he still had his difficulties with the Sultan. His Highness was still distrustful of the motives of the British Government and of its representative, through the influence of the French Consul and Omani persons against Britain. He said "His Highness's illiterateness has had not a little to do

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29. F. O. 54/30, Cox to Capt. Denison, 31 Jan. 1900; Hamilton to Viceroy, 19 Jan. 1900; Viceroy to I. O., 9 Feb. 1900; Hamilton to Viceroy, 23 Feb. 1900; Denison to Resid, tel., 22 Jan. 1900; F. B. Prideaux, Polit. Agent, to the Officer commanding H. M. S. *Melpomene* in Muscat Harbour, 23 Jan. 1900; Denison to Polit. Agent, 31 Jan. 1900; 1 Feb. 1900; Cox to Meade, 6 Feb. 1900; I. O. to F. O., 26 Mar. 1900; Meade to Cox, 19 Feb. 1900; Hamilton to Viceroy, 23 Feb. 1900; Viceroy to I. O., 2 Mar. 1900; Hamilton to Viceroy, 6 March 1900; I. O. to F. O., 21 Mar. 1900.
 30. F. O. 54/30, I. O., to Viceroy, tel., 20 Aug. 1900.
 31. F. O. 54/30, I. O., to Viceroy, tel., 2 Aug. 1900; Viceroy to I. O., tel., 27 Jul. 1900; [a picture of the plot can be seen with the document.]
 32. F. O. 54/30, Govt. Ind. to Hamilton, 25 Jan. 1900; Polit. Resid. to Govt. Ind., Oct. 1899; Cox to Polit. Agent, 5 Dec. 1899; Polit. Resid. to Govt. Ind., 13 Dec. 1899; Govt. Ind. to Polit. Resid., 2 Dec. 1899.

with that result. It must be remembered that he can practically do no more than sign his own name and talk the local *patois* of Arabic: he is quite ignorant of the etymology of the language, and the consequence is that anything in writing has to be interpreted, or drafted, as the case may be, by other parties". He went on to explain that communications of importance passing between His Highness and the Agency were handed round to one person after another for interpretation or opinion. In nine cases out of ten, he said, "some word or phrase occurs which can be distorted and represented to his ignorant mind as carrying some meaning, or some insinuation, which was never intended". But he said "no effort of mine will be spared towards counteracting these inevitable outside influences, as far as may be; but cure, if achieved, can but be as slow as has been the progress of the disease". In his report to the Political Resident, Cox spoke about the Sultan's claim for compensation in the matter of the arms seized on board the steamer *Baluchistan* in 1898, but he said that the Sultan was not in any way entitled to compensation. "I think," he said, "it is conceivable that an individual of Saiyid Feisal's standard of intellect cannot look at the matter in any but a purely practical light, *e.g.*, that he was on the point of "netting" so many dollars, but that owing to his co-operation in the action taken by the British Government the haul was lost to him". He, therefore, could be easily persuaded by some evilly-disposed advisers, "and for his own uneducated mind to persuade itself into the idea that Government and its representative have broken faith with him over the transaction". But Cox's desire was not to harm the Sultan with his comment about His Highness, but to serve his diplomacy by a gentle policy which the Government of India should adopt in Muscat. Also to prepare the ground for the generous reconsideration of the question of compensation for the losses after the business of the *Baluchistan*, so that His Highness would start with something in hand³³.

However, it seems that there was another important issue in the mind of Cox. During an interesting meeting between him and the Sultan he reminded H.

33. F. O. 54/30, Cox to Polit. Resid., 31 Oct. 1899.

H. of the great services the British Government offered to the Omani Sultans and the obligations which he and his forefathers had to the British Government. He asked the Sultan; what benefit you derive from displeasing my Government? The Sultan replied, "I assure you I have no wish to displease the English Government, but to what especially, do you now allude?". Cox reminded the Sultan about past *Bander-Jes^sah* crises as violation of H. H.'s treaties with the British Government and about the French who did not give the Sultan any help in the revolt of 1895. About the *Jes^sah* crisis, the Sultan did not comment, but about the French he said that it was only bazaar gossip. However, Cox wished the Sultan to make a fresh start. The Sultan reminded Cox of the old British suggestion to control Muscat customs: "What can I say? If Government have come to the fixed determination not to renew their 'favour' except under certain conditions one of which is my having an official to control my Customs, which it is impossible for me, in my own interests, to carry it out, I am powerless"³⁴. Cox did not agree that this was the intention or desire, but said it was only a matter of advice, to accept the loan of a British official to manage the Customs in H. H.'s own interest. However, they were ready to listen to any argument which he had to put forward. H. H. expressed his willingness to listen to Cox's advice, and asked whether he had any cause to complain and whether Cox had given him any advice to which he had not paid attention. Cox expressed satisfaction at his relations with His Highness, but asked him if he would give some proof of *bona fides*. The Sultan replied, "what proof can I give you? You must prove me for yourself in the future". And here Cox came to the key point of the issue which was in his mind. He said to the Sultan, "Well, one thing, at all events, suggests itself to me; that is, the matter of the distinctive flag for your subjects". Cox mentioned to the Sultan that he told Consul Fagan that the matter would take a couple of months to be considered, and that time had passed. Therefore he asked if H. H. had come to any conclusion. The Sultan understood why the British raised the flag question. They were hitting

34. See Chapter Five for the Sultan's Customs.

at two targets; first, the use of the French flag by the Omani dhows, and second, the arms trade. The target which was most serious for the British was the arms traffic which found its way under the protection of the French flag. If the Sultan issued a distinctive flag for his subjects they would be vulnerable to British check on the seas. The ships could be seized because of his declaration giving the right to the British ship of war to seize and confiscate arms. The Muscat flag would no longer offer protection to arms trafficking ships. The Sultan certainly remembered this and probably understood that the target was not France but the arms trade when he remarked that he had communicated with the French Government on the matter but he still had not received any reply. He mentioned that what the British Government wanted in respect to the flag would be impracticable for him. If he had a flag of his own, and other people or another power dishonoured or seized it and he could not exact satisfaction, he would lose all his prestige³⁵.

In another interview which took place in Muscat on 2 December 1899 between the Political Resident Colonel Meade and the Sultan Faisal, Meade assured the Sultan of the good intentions of the British Government in the question of the management of his customs. The Sultan described his difficulty, which lay in the views of his subjects who would misinterpret the Government's intentions and think that the British wanted to rule the customs in order to impose new and severe taxes. But he promised to reconsider the matter and discuss it with the Political Agent. The Sultan then raised the case of the *Baluchistan* and the compensation which he must receive from the British Government for the losses caused to him by the seizure of arms, and also he complained of his not receiving the seized arms. Meade explained the reasons why they had remained in the British Consulate so long, that "the owners had been instituting law suits in London for their restoration, on the ground of wrongful seizure; that appeals had

35. F. O. 54/30, Memo., regarding a conversation between H. H. Sultan of Muscat and the Political Agent, 14 Oct., 1899. The flag question was discussed in Chapter 6.

been made from one court to another and that the Government of India had not yet heard the final result". So if the British government won the case, the Sultan's claim to a share of the proceeds of the seizure would be considered. If not and it was finally ruled that the arms should be released, they would presumably pass through the Muscat Customs House before delivery and would have to pay duty³⁶. Though it seemed that the Sultan's demand was not completely fulfilled, this meeting helped the Residency and the Political Agency in preparing a better foundation for relations with the Sultan. Since Cox had showed the Sultan his friendship, and was kind enough to help in resuming his subsidy, the Sultan, though he did not move quickly in the matter of the flag, (a question which was not raised by Meade) apparently decided to please both Meade and Cox in the matter of the customs, thus responding to Meade's sincere sympathy towards him in face of the Government of India, and put another success in Cox's way. The Sultan decided to take over the management of the customs himself for one year, in order to see what they were really worth, which pleased the British Government. The Sultan telegraphed to Bombay for two Muslim Indians who were said to have had practical experience in the Bombay Customs. He arranged to refund the advance which Rotansi Purshotam had made to him in order to cancel the provisional contract made with him. Cox regarded that as "decidedly a move in the right direction and is the immediate outcome of the timely resumption of the subsidy"³⁷. This step by the Sultan in taking over the management of the customs was regarded by *The Times* as a reform in a system which had existed from time immemorial. But that was not enough, according to *The Times*; still greater improvement might be effected if the Sultan followed the example of his neighbours and appointed a fully qualified official to organize his customs administration, and went on saying "it is the British flag which is far the most

36. F. O. 54/30, Polit. Resid. to Govt. Ind., 4 Dec. 1899.

37. F. O. 54/30, Polit. Resid. to Govt. Ind., 24 Dec. 1899; Polit. Agent. to Polit. Resid., 12 Dec. 1899; William Cunningham to Polit. Resid., 2 Jan. 1900; Polit. Resid. to Govt. Ind., 22 Dec. 1899.

interested in the prosecution of these reforms and the peaceful furtherance of trade". "If the advice and the support given to the Sultan by the British Consul and Political Agent are distasteful to our contemporary we may point out that the maintenance of peace and tranquility in Oman and reform in its administration benefit the trade of all countries". It also pointed out that, "The Sultan is in treaty relations with the Government of India, and it has always been their policy to support his lawful authority and to encourage useful reforms"³⁸. This ends one stage of a question associated with the arms trade since 1893, as discussed in chapter five. But to settle the question of the flag required further effort.

Section Five

The Sultan and the question of the Flag

During the summer of 1900 definite diplomatic steps were taken over the flag question. The Sultan sailed to Sur on 7th June 1900 in H. M. S. *Sphinx* with Captain Cox, the Political Agent, and took serious steps in connection with the question³⁹. But why did he decide to take this action now, and on board a British ship of war? Commander Phillips of H. M. S. *Sphinx* said that "Captain Cox informed me that it was the wish of the British Government that H. H. the Sultan should be conveyed to Sur in H. M. S. *Sphinx*". But how did the Sultan manage to persuade some holders of a French flag to give it up? Cox said in his reports that no force was used, they gave it up voluntarily. Even so the obvious questions remain. Why was the visit on a gunboat? Was the firing of 21 guns as salute to the Sultan's landing at Sur, by request from Captain Cox, a normal formality for the people in Sur or was it done to remind them of what they might hear if they did not respond to the Sultan's request? If it was a normal procedure why did Captain Cox not request the firing of a salute in Qureyyaat, where the Sultan also landed, and why not again when he came back from Sur and landed at Muscat⁴⁰?

38. *The Times*, 25 Oct. 1899.

39. F. O. 54/30, Cox to Govt. Ind., 2 Jul. 1900.

40. F. O. 54/30, Admiralty to F. O., 30 Aug. 1900; Commander Phillips, H. M. S. *Sphinx* Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf division, to Admir., 16 June 1900.

At any rate on 12 June he received an undertaking from the Jennebeh and Bani bu Ali tribe that they would relinquish French protection as from June 12⁴¹. The Sultan replied to the undertaking that "whereas there appears to have been in time past a misunderstanding among you as to my wishes in this connection, there must be nothing of the sort in future; you must, therefore, clearly understand that from today. I neither recognize nor permit any subject of mine, no matter who he may be, should take so-called protection papers and flag from the French Government or any Government without my especial written permission, and in accordance with the Treaties existing between me and foreign powers"⁴². But that was not enough. On 15 June the Sultan issued a Notification to his subjects that "we do not recognize in our territories in the hands of our subjects flags and protection papers, and will not forgive any one who takes them otherwise than with our written permission"⁴³. The Sultan went further and sent a letter to the French Consul informing him about the situation in Sur and the wish of his subjects to return the French flags and papers, sending him some of them, and asking him to take those back⁴⁴. It seemed that the Sultan's relations with the French were entering into an unhappy period! The French Consul replied that he was not prepared to accept them, and he returned them to him. He said "The rest of what you have alluded to in the said communication has been before now explained to you, both in writing and by word of mouth, and no further explanation is called for now"⁴⁵. Captain Cox had asked the Political Resident, in case the French declined to receive back papers and flags, how should he advise the Sultan to act. At the same time he expected France to threaten force against the Sultan, so he asked Consuls at Aden and Zanzibar to warn him directly if any French gunboat

41. F. O. 54/30, Cox to Govt. Ind., 16 June 1900; I. O. to F. O., 11 Aug. 1900; Translation of document voluntarily passed by the Jenebeh and Beni Abu Ali [tribes], 12 June 1900.

42. F. O. 54/30, Translation of formal acceptance of undertaking passed by the Sultan to his subjects, 12 June, 1900; Cox to Resid., 15 June 1900.

43. F. O. 54/30, Notification issued by the Sultan of Muscat, 15 June 1900; Sultan to Polit. Resid., 15 June 1900.

44. F. O. 54/30, Sultan of Muscat to Ottavi, 15 June 1900.

45. F. O. 54/30, Ottavi to Sultan of Muscat, 15 June 1900.

passed that way.

In fact, it was a grave mistake by both H. H. the Sultan and the Political Agent Captain Cox to sail on an English gun boat for this purpose. The natural assumption would be that the Sultan was either acting on behalf of, or under compulsion from the British against the French. Sailing on a boat flying the British flag, from which a threat had been made to bombard his palace if he did not cancel his grant of *the Jessah* coaling station to France, he was now behaving in the same way himself, but using a power which was not his own.

However the French do not seem to have given up on the matter, and the apparent surrender by the Sultan's subjects of their flags and papers would probably be of short duration. Perhaps it was comparable to their guarantees at the time of his succession in 1888, which did not prevent them from revolting against him in 1895, and forcing him to escape to Jalali Fort to defend himself. Even the Sultan's apparent success in Sur was not matched elsewhere. At Sohar, for example, in the same month as his visit to Sur, he only succeeded in forcing three vessel owners to give up their French flags and papers, but the others rejected his advice⁴⁶. This placed him in a position of severe embarrassment as regards France, and shook his personal prestige in the eyes of his people. The French now enjoyed great advantage in dealing with the Sultan himself, since he had told the French Consul that his subjects wanted to give up their French flags and papers and they knew perfectly well what had happened in Sohar.

Cox seemed to have failed to resolve the flag question, but he had achieved two things overall: he had alienated the Sultan from the French and he had undermined *Abdul Aziz Er-Ruwahi*, the French Dragoman, towards whom the Sultan became more arrogant than ever. According to *The Times*, after the Sultan's failure in Sohar, he gave orders that A. Aziz should not be allowed to cross the threshold of his palace. *The Times* cited the French paper *Debats* for this attitude of the Sultan which the paper naturally attributed to the insidious attitude

46. *The Times*, 15 Oct. 1900.

of a foreign agent, whose sole concern was in every way to undermine French influence⁴⁷. But the French did not surrender. To the annoyance of the British, they organized a local, diplomatic and Press 'front', one manifestation of which was *La dépêche Colonial* and probably the issue of an Arabic newspaper *Fathul Bas^sa,er*⁴⁸. The British themselves, even when taking a firm line on one issue, could be accommodating enough on some other matter. It was just two months after the flag occasion in Sur and Sohar, that they completed the transfer to the French of a portion of Mukalla Cove, within Muscat harbour, for their coaling shed, as discussed above.

Finally the tone of the relations changed. The two governments found the persistent undermining of each other's influence in Muscat of dubious benefit and preferred to expand commerce generally as much as possible. Great Britain, for example, from August till November 1901, started to prepare for the revision of the commercial treaty of 19 March 1891, (discussed in chapter four) which was due to expire on 20 March, 1904 and there was something more to be gained from the Sultan. In May 1902, he made undertaking to the British Government that in respect of coal fields in Sur, he had no intention of entering upon the work himself. "In the future if any Government or Company asked [his] permission to embark upon the mining enterprise in question, [he] will not accord such permission without first communicating with [the British] Government, in order that they may themselves take up the work with me if they feel so inclined"⁴⁹. This might explain also why the British were so aware of France's influence in Sur, and why they wanted the consolidation of the Sultan's influence there. The Sultan's undertaking was a case of prevention being better than cure. The French

47. *Ibid.*

48. F. O. 54/30, Cox to Govt. Ind., 3 Jul. 1900; Sheikh Abdulla to Saeed bin Muhammad, 26 June 1900; Cox to Govt. Ind., 2 Jul. 1900; Memo. regarding Movements of M. Goguyer in Muscat, 18 May 1900; Cox to Govt. Ind., 18 July 1900; Cox to Govt. Ind., 4 Oct. 1900; Extract from *La dépêche Colonial*, 7 Sep. 1900; F. O. to I. O., 28 Dec. 1900; Govt. Ind. to Polit. Resid., 15 Oct. 1900.

49. F. O. 54/31, F. O. to I. O., 25 Oct. 1901; I. O. to F. O., 25 Oct. 1901; Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 318.

for their part also started to think of the installation of a properly regulated Bazaar for the display and introduction of French goods as the method which was most likely to lead to successful results⁵⁰. Muscat received a visit during 1903 from the *Mission du Golf Persique* of the *Comité de L'Asie Française* under M. A. Jouanin, which remained in Muscat for nearly a month⁵¹. From the British side, on 13 November 1903, the Viceroy of India himself initiated his tour of the Gulf by visiting Muscat. This visit was regarded by the Persian Gulf Residency as likely always to be "a memorable one in the annals of British relations with the Sultan of Oman as carrying the distinction of the First State visit of a Viceroy to Muscat"⁵². It was a great pleasure to Sultan Faisal, the first Omani Sultan to be visited by a Viceroy. "His Highness Seyyed Faisal expressed with much cordiality the pleasure and honour it would afford him to welcome His Excellency to Muscat, and from that moment he set himself to prepare to receive him in a manner befitting such a great occasion.... His Highness spared no effort to satisfy himself that the town and approaches should at all events look their best"⁵³. The Residency was gratified "to remark the readiness with which the Muscat public responded and did their best, each according to his lights, to put their houses in order"⁵⁴. "The Sultan's palace, his steamer *Norr-ul-Bahr*, the forts Jalali and Merani, were profusely decorated with bunting and at His Highness's wish, in order to place in special evidence the community of interests and sentiments which bind the two Governments, the flag-staffs of the Sultan's palace and the British Consulate were linked together by a graceful arc of bunting 300 yards in length"⁵⁵. The French and the American Consulates in Muscat were dressed as well as several chief buildings. All that for the occasion of Curzon's visit to Muscat.

50. British Consulate (Muscat) to F. O., 13 Sept. 1903.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*., vol. V, 1903-1904, p. 11-12.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

On 18 November 1903, about ten o'clock in the morning, R. I. M. S. *Hardinge*, escorted by five Men-of-war, approached the mouth of Muscat harbour. "The Sultan's flag was saluted with 21 guns as the flotilla came abreast of the signalling tower and gun for gun was returned by the Muscat Battery. As soon as the ships had taken up their billets a further salvo of 31 guns was fired as a welcome to His Excellency the Viceroy"⁵⁶. After the ships had dropped anchor, a delegation sent by the Sultan, headed by his brother Muhhammed bin Turki, including the Sultan's son Taimoor bin Faisl, Mohhammed bin Azzan, Badr bin Saif, and Mohhammed bin Nasi, sailed to *Hardinge* to convey the Sultan's compliments and to welcome Curzon. Shortly after they had returned to the shore, the Sultan himself went to *Hardinge* accompanied by his suite and by the British Political Agent. "After steaming round the entire squadron and acknowledging the compliments of the crew of His Majesty's ships, His Highness drew up alongside the *Hardinge*, where he was received by the Foreign and Military Secretaries and members of the Viceroy's Staff, and was by them conducted into his Excellency's presence on the quarter-deck of the *Hardinge*, which had been fitted up as a state reception room"⁵⁷. Greetings were exchanged and a short conversation took place. Members of the Sultan's suite were presented to Curzon, and then refreshments were served. The Sultan took his departure after a few minutes under a salute of 21 guns. By one o'clock, there had followed a visit of the French and the American Consuls to pay their respects and to interview Curzon. At two o'clock Curzon, accompanied by Rear Admiral Atkinson- Willes and staff, landed at Muscat's Customs jetty and was received by Meade and Cox . From the jetty the "Viceregal party walked through the narrow but gaily decorated street to the British Consulate where the Political Agent was honoured by their company at lunch"⁵⁸. At 3.15 pm Curzon received a deputation with an address from British subjects, and other communities who enjoyed British

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

protection, for example the Portuguese of Goa in Muscat. The address was read by Purshotam Dhanjee: "We the entire community of British subjects, Hindu, Muhammadan, Parsi, and other British protected persons, settled in the towns of Muskat and Mutra, most respectfully beg, on behalf of ourselves and our fellow subjects residing in other parts of His Highness the Sultan's dominions, to offer Your Excellencies a most heartfelt welcome on the occasion of your visit to Muscat." Dhanjee congratulated Curzon on being the first Viceroy to visit Muscat and he evaluated this as having "inaugurated a new and vigorous political departure in a sphere where so many Indian interests are involved"⁵⁹. He felt confident that "this happy undertaking will prove to be an epoch-making event in the progress and enhancement of British prestige and influence." He said "It will serve, too, as an abiding demonstration to the inhabitants of the littoral that the preponderating influence of Great Britain in these waters is no shadowy or remote force, but a lively and dignified reality"⁶⁰. He thereby expressed the unqualified loyalty and devotion of the British subject to "the Great Government". In Muscat, he said, we enjoy "the rights and privileges of the most favoured nation, our interests are carefully guarded by our Consular authorities, and we experience complete toleration in matters of religion. There is an absence of unnecessary litigation amongst us, British subjects, and justice is readily and promptly obtainable in the Agency Court"⁶¹. About the British subjects dealing with Omani of the interior, Dhanjee said: "In the matter connected with our dealing with the natives of Oman, while we are accustomed to receive a courteous hearing from His Highness, nevertheless we often experience difficulty in obtaining relief, and this is partly owing no doubt to the unsettled state of the interior... Strife and turbulence are within the nature of things, and when they are limited to the interior of the country do not immediately affect our welfare any more than that of

59. Address presented to the Viceroy by the British subjects in Muscat, 18 Nov. 1903. in Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, vol. V, 1903-1904, p. 12-19.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

other peaceable members of the community... When, as is sometimes the case, the scene of the strife is transferred to the coast ports, our commercial interests do immediately suffer; and we are put to anxiety for the safety of the lives and properties of our fellow subjects..". Dhanjee drew Curzon's attention to those British Indian subjects who resided at many of the coast towns of Oman, isolated from the capital in small communities, "in whose hands all the local trade is centred, and who, in however humble a capacity, are the pioneers of British Indian commerce in these waters". But he thanked "the vigilant activity of successive Political Agents and of British Men-of-war at seasons of unrest" which made the actual danger to the lives and properties of the British Indians very little. He hoped Curzon would strengthen the power of Sultan Faisal or, he said "by active interference on the coast where necessary for the preservation of British interests, to take measures which will deter the unruly tribesmen of Oman from disturbing the commerce of the country by their dissensions"⁶². The address "was then presented in a silver casket of local design and manufacture representing a led camel standing beneath the shade of a palmtree, the trunk of which formed the receptacle for the vellum"⁶³.

Curzon replied that the Muscat and India Coasts facing each other "at so inconsiderable a distance and the well-known aptitudes of the particular communities that you represent sufficiently explain the close mercantile connections that have grown up during the last century between Muscat and India and leave one no surprise at the commercial predominance of Great Britain in the trade and shipping of this State". Curzon did not lose the chance to link the commercial interests with the political ones; he said that "the political stake of one country in another is sometimes measured by its commercial interests". He calculated the British portion of the trade with Muscat for the last five years to be on average 84 per cent., and the total number of steamers cleared in Muscat port

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

to be 97 each year. Therefore, he said, "I am satisfied that the predominance of Great Britain in the mercantile interests of the State [Muscat] is supreme and incontestable"⁶⁴. Curzon praised the British Political Agents who had served in Muscat and he praised Cox especially. He disliked interference in any Omani internal disturbances, but he said that "undoubtedly if it were to reach a point that seriously menaced the interests or imperilled the lives and property of British subjects, lawfully trading upon the coast, we should feel called upon to intervene for their protection, and by no one I am sure would such intervention be more loyally welcomed or more cordially assisted by His Highness" [The Sultan]⁶⁵.

In the afternoon Curzon attended a reception in the Sultan's palace, where he was accompanied by Sultan Faisal to the Audience Chamber and was seated on his right on a raised dais. In the Chamber a number of loyal inscriptions in English capitals on coloured ground freely adorned the walls. Around eighty Sheiks from various parts of the interior were invited for the occasion. After the exchange of formal greetings the chief Darbaries were brought up and presented by the Political Agent. Then an Arabic address of welcome was read on the Sultan's behalf by Sheikh Rashid bin Ozaiz, Governor of Samayel. After refreshment the Darbar broke up, and Curzon returned to the *Hardinge*⁶⁶. On the same day Sir Arthur Hardinge, the British Minister at Tehran, arrived at Muscat in order to confer with the Viceroy before his entry into Persian waters. This brought the number of British vessels up to eight. Accordingly Muscat witnessed a joint British political and sea power demonstration. In the evening Curzon gave a large dinner party on board the *Hardinge* for Sir Arthur Hardinge, the naval Commander-in-Chief and staff, the senior naval officers belonging to the squadron and the Consular representatives of France and America - 70 persons in all. At night Curzon was entertained by fireworks from the high terraces of the Jalali and Mirani forts. This was the form into which British subjects "had chosen

64. Curzon's address to the British subjects, *Ibid.*

65. *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1903 carried summaries of these addresses.

66. *Ibid.*

to put their welcome to Their Excellencies, and the general effect was the more picturesque and complete owing to the fact that his Excellency Admiral Atkinson-Willes had thoughtfully arranged for the ships of the squadron to have the outlines of their hulls, masts and yards illuminated at the same time, so that an equally delightful spectacle was obtainable either from the shore or out at sea"⁶⁷. This occasion, according to the Residency, was thoroughly enjoyed by the people of Muscat, along with other Omanis from the interior who crowded on the beach and the streets throughout that day. According to *The Times* Correspondent, "The Sultan of Muscat went on board the *Hardinge* to visit Lord Curzon, who returned the visit in the afternoon. The whole reception was markedly loyal on the part of the Sultan, and the demeanour of the Muscatis, who had crowded in thousands into the town, was friendly in the extreme. The town is decorated"⁶⁸. On the next day Curzon held a Durbar for the Sultan on board the cruiser *Argonaut*. "On the Viceroy's right, on the large raised dais, was seated His Highness the Sultan, and on His Excellency's left the British Minister in Persia, the Naval Commander-in-chief, and their respective staffs. Below the dais were seated the Naval Officers of the squadron and other British officers on duty in Muscat in full dress, and opposite to them an equal number of the Sultan's Officers of State and notables of Oman. In the centre of the arena on either side of a large gun were accommodated the non-official darbaris and spectators. The magnificence of the trappings and the galaxy of uniforms made the scene an exceedingly brilliant one, which must have impressed itself indelibly on the memories of those present"⁶⁹. The Foreign Secretary of the Government of India had formally opened the Durbar. The chief Arab Notables were brought up in turn and presented to Curzon by Cox, the Political Agent. Afterwards an Arabic address most heartily welcoming the Viceroy was read on behalf of Sultan Faisal by Sheikh Rashid bin-Ozaiz: "I trust it will not be amiss if I take advantage of this auspicious occasion

67. *Ibid.*

68. *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1903.

69. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, Vol. V, 1903-1904, p. 13

to convey to your Excellency public expression of the pleasure and Honour which it affords to me and mine, in the first place to be able to welcome Your two Excellencies and His Excellency the Admiral and your imposing and distinguished escort to our modest capital of Oman, and in the second place to be thus afforded an opportunity of manifesting our sentiments of sincere friendship and attachment to that Great Government of India which Your Excellency directs and to His Majesty the King-Emperor of happy name whose Viceroy and proxy you are in these far-off climes"⁷⁰. The Sultan spoke about the old relations between Great Britain and his forefathers. "Muscat had been in constant commercial touch and intercourse with the English through the trading ports of India"⁷¹. The rulers of Oman have been in the closest relationship with Britain who always was ready in time of need and difficulty. He said: "I and my forebears have been the grateful recipients, on innumerable occasions, of that moral and substantial support which the British Government in the person of the Viceroy of India has been ever ready to afford. I am therefore in no way different from my predecessors in owing a large debt of gratitude to the Viceroy of India". However, he stood alone among the Omani rulers in "experiencing the great honour and pleasure of being able to welcome a Viceroy of India in person to Muscat and to express my feelings to him face to face". The Sultan said, "I declare that at no time in Muscat history and from no viceroy has greater sympathy and kindness been extended to us than by this Great Viceroy, Lord Curzon, whom I am privileged to address today"⁷². The Sultan considered himself fortunate in being able to testify before Lord Curzon to the reality of his obligations and his sincerity. More than that Faisal said, "I beg your Excellency to believe me when I declare that neither I nor my brother nor my children should they be called upon to follow after me will ever cease to be mindful of that strong and ancient friendship which in time past kept secure the bonds of union existing between Great Britain and ourselves, and that we will at

70. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, pp. 16-17.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

all time be loyal to those ties"⁷³. The Sultan said he was afraid "that Muskat offers few attractions to the experienced traveller, and, except to put our houses and highways in order as far as circumstances have permitted and to proclaim a general holiday during Your Excellencies' August presence here, there been little that it has been possible for us to do in honour of this great occasion. In this regard I can only ask Your Excellency to call to mind the sentiments of the poet who sang:-'It is not every thing that a man wants that he can achieve; nor can the speeding barque command the wind that she listeth'". Finally Faisal hoped that Curzon and his "fair and precious Lady, Her Excellency Lady Curzon," would not carry away with them from Muscat any but kindly recollections⁷⁴. Dilks noted that "The Sultan made a most favourable impression. He did not plead for any further pledge, though he did say that he would gladly invite Britain to assume the protectorate. His demeanour was rather that of a loyal feudatory than that of an independent sovereign"⁷⁵. In his reply to the Sultan's address, Curzon reminded him that no fewer than nine treaties had been concluded between Muscat and the British Government, which have provided for the closest political and commercial relations, for the suppression of the slave trade and piracy, and for the extension of the electric telegraph. Curzon repeated what he had said to the British subjects, that "Muscat lies just opposite to the shores of India, that its trade is not only for the most part with India, but is largely in Indian hands, that a large number of British Indian subjects reside here, and that the prosperity of the State [Muscat] is mainly dependent on these conditions." So he said "it is not surprising, therefore, that the Government of India should feel a particular interest in this particular place"⁷⁶. "He rejoiced to learn from the Sultan that he and his children would ever remain loyal to those strong and ancient obligations", and that to them he said "you and they will always remain loyal"⁷⁷. "Your Highness has now ruled your

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. Dilks, *Curzon*, 2 p. 63.

76. Curzon's reply to the Sultan, *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid*; *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1903. .

State for fifteen years. I had the pleasure of visiting it when you had only just succeeded fourteen years ago, and I am glad to congratulate Your Highness on the progress that has since been made"⁷⁸. Curzon praised the Sultan for "the wise step which the government of India so strongly urged on your Highness a few years ago, of taking over the customs of your state in preference to farming them to others, has been attended with largely increased profits"⁷⁹. Curzon praised Faisal's permission for laying a telegraphic cable from Jask to Muscat which brought Muscat into closer connection with the outer world. Curzon did not forget to give Cox another credit in front of the Sultan, "I also personally selected Major Cox, as an Officer in whose discretion and ability I had perfect confidence, to represent the Government of India at your capital, and your Highness has already assured me that you have found in him a prudent councillor and friend"⁸⁰. With reference to Oman's protection Curzon assured the Sultan "that the British Government have extended a peculiar measure of protection in the past to the State of Oman and its Rulers. They have on more than one occasion intervened to save it from rebellion or disruption. Your Highness may rest assured that this policy will not be departed from. So long as the rulers of Oman continue to observe their treaty engagements and to administer the State with enlightenment and justice they will continue to receive the support of the British Government..."⁸¹. But about the Sultan's subjects Curzon said: "We cannot regard with satisfaction the attempts of discontented classes or persons among Your Highness's subjects to disturb the tranquillity of your state, because, in so doing, not only do they contest Your Highness's authority, but they are apt to injure the interests of British subjects also. These interests we are bound to protect for our own sake as well as yours"⁸². Finally Curzon announced to the Sultan "Only yesterday I received the gracious permission of His Majesty the King-Emperor to

78. Curzon's reply to the Sultan, Arch Eds., *Persian Gulf*, Vol. V, 1903-1904, p.18.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid*; *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1903.

82. *Ibid.*

confer upon Your Highness the high honour of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Indian Empire. This distinction will be a proof to Your Highness of the sincere sentiments of friendship which are entertained towards you by the British Government, and it is also a recognition of the loyalty to which Your Highness has given such fervent expression on more than one occasion in the course of yesterday and today. It will be my pleasing duty as Grand Master of the Order to proceed to the due and solemn investiture of your Highness"⁸³.

With this announcement the Darbar was declared closed, and Curzon moved to a robing room to prepare for the immediate investiture of the Sultan. A few minutes later he returned to the throne on the dais which had been prepared on board *Argonaut*, dressed in his robes of the Grand Master of the Order: "the Chapter having been formally opened, the Sultan was conducted before the Viceroy with the usual ceremony by the Foreign Secretary and duly invested with the Ribbon, Badge, Star, and Collar of the Order"⁸⁴.

In the same year, right after Curzon's visit, in December, Muscat received a Special British Commissioner of the Commercial Intelligence Committee, Mr H. W. Maclean, to make a special report on trade conditions there⁸⁵. Mr Maclean prepared his report in February 1904 after his return to London, and one of the interesting elements he reported was the arms and ammunition imports, for which he compiled very useful statistics for the years 1896-97 to 1902-3⁸⁶. In 1905 an English company *The Sponge Exploration Syndicate Ltd* obtained from the Sultan a fifteen years concession for sponge fishing in the Omani territorial waters⁸⁷. It is obvious that during the early twentieth century, especially between 1900 and 1905, commercial attitudes dominated the situation, and Muscat witnessed an

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Ibid.*

85. F. O. 54/30, B. O. T. to F. O., 22 Oct. 1903; F. O. to B. O. T., 24 Oct. 1903; I. O. to F. O., 31 Oct. 1903; B. O. T. to I. O., 22 Oct. 1903; I. O. to B. O. T., 27 Oct. 1903; B. O. T. to F. O., 6 Nov. 1903; A. E. Bateman (Commercial Intelligence Committee) to Maclean, 4 Nov. 1903.

86. H. W. Maclean, *Report on The Condition and Prospects of British Trade in Oman, Bahrain, and Arab Ports in the Persian Gulf*. [C D 2281], H. M. S. O., 1904.

87. Aitchison, *Collection*, p. 282.

essentially commercial competition between France and Britain, represented by commercial delegations, reports and agreements.

Finally, although Curzon's visit helped to re-establish the British position in Muscat after the *Baluchistan* affair, and assisted Cox's diplomacy at the same time, Cox failed in the French flag question which still hung fire and was not yet solved. Despite the Sultan's expression of loyalty to the British Government, he was not able to convince his people not to use the French flags. So it was not for Bombay or Cox nor for the Sultan to solve that problem but a mutually satisfactory settlement directly between London and Paris was needed to put an end to this long dispute.

Section Six

Muscat Arbitration

France and Britain agreed on 13 October 1904 to refer the flag question to the Hague Tribunal. In June 1905 before the Court of Arbitration, they discussed to what extent the right to fly the French flag could be granted to certain Omani boats, thereby protecting those boats and their owners in the territorial waters of Muscat⁸⁸. "King Victor Emmanuel, to whom France and England have referred the difference with regard to the French right of protection for owners of certain native dhows in the Sultanate of Muscat has nominated Profesor Lammasch, the well known Austrian Jurisconsult, as supplementary arbitrator"⁸⁹. On 20 July 1905 the Hague Tribunal met and discussed the question above. Britain was represented by Mr. G. Mounsey, Secretary of the British Legation at the Hague. France was represented by M. Maurice Herbette, Secretary of Embassy, and M. Laronce, of the French Consular service⁹⁰. The British case in the Court was that granting flags and papers by the French to Omani dhows was, 1, contrary to French law; 2, contrary to the Muscat-France Treaty of November 1844; 3,

88. *The Times*, 6 May 1905.

89. *The Times*, 29 May 1905.

90. *The Times*, 20 Jul. 1905.

contrary to the clause in the Treaty of Brussels of 2 July 1890 in connection with the slave trade owing to the possibility that French protection might facilitate the trade, (but it should be noticed that they never made any reference to their arms suppression policy in connection with the French flag, the issue which provoked the question of the flag); and 4, an infringement of the independence of the rulers of Oman. Therefore the British conclusion was that the dhow owners were thereby withdrawn from their natural jurisdiction and rendered immune against search by Muscat (that is in effect, by British warships). The French reply was that, 1, the treaty of 17 November 1844 did not deprive them of that right, but on the contrary, granted them the right of protecting the French dhows, and Britain acknowledged that right in the case of Zanzibar; 2, the Anglo-French agreement of 1 June 1867 forbade the searching on the high seas of vessels flying the French flag; 3, the Brussels Treaty had been respected by the French; 4, the Sultan of Muscat had acquiesced in the practice in question, and the British were continually limiting the authority of the Sultan of Muscat, and trying to secure a privileged position for themselves there⁹¹. On 26 July 1905 the tribunal met again. Professor Lammasch, in his opening speech, referred to the progress between nations, and said the French appeal was a column added to the construction of the temple dedicated to peace and the community of nations.

The day before the French presented further conclusions, the Court adjourned for one week to allow the British to consult their Government. The Court decided that the English and the French languages should be admitted on an equal footing in the discussions. On 2 August, M. Herbette submitted the case on behalf of his Government. He said that France had only accepted arbitration on one condition, that is the presence of the Sultan, and he was surprised to find the British claimed the Sultan's approval at the British action; he wished to know whether there was not any connection between the Sultan's engagement with the English defined by the treaty of March 1891, and that last chieftain's policy

91. *The Times*, 25 Jul. 1905.

towards France. The French delegation asked permission to examine the text of the 1891 treaty, so the British reply could be made on the next day. On 3 August the British delegate Mr. Ronald Graham, stated that he had no further reply to make with reference to the Notes read on the previous day by the French. The President of the Court, Prof. Lammasch, formally closed the proceedings⁹².

On 9 August 1905 in the Hague, "the Court decided that as from January 2, 1892, France has lost the right to authorize subjects of the Sultan of Muscat to fly the French flag unless it can be proved that such subjects were considered and treated by France as under her special protection before 1863". But the ruling was not entirely a defeat for France, as the Court decided, "*Native craft (boutres) under French protection have within the territorial waters of Muscat the right of inviolability secured to them under the treaty of 1844 between France and Muscat*", but this right is not transferable to other persons or vessels, not even to vessels belonging to the same proprietor. Protected subjects and the crew and families on board such craft are not exempt from the jurisdiction of the Sultan of Muscat"⁹³.

Conclusion

The Hague Arbitration proved that Percy Cox's diplomacy in the matter of the French flag had failed, although the Sultan was weak enough to try and persuade the Omanis not to use the flag. As shown in Chapter three the French flag question had been of major British concern in Muscat since the 1890s, and to find a solution soon was in British interests. The previous action by the Sultan in the flag matter seems to have been carried out on behalf of the British and not in his own interests. Although the British Government was undoubtedly on the winning side at the Hague, the French did not lose completely as they still had some freedom of action though hedged round with various restrictions. It is also clear

92. *The Times*, 2, 3 Aug. 1905.

93. *The Times*, 9 Aug. 1905; *Award of The Arbitration Tribunal Appointed to Decide on the Question of the Grant of the French Flag to Muscat Dhows*. [Cd.2736.] H. M. S. O., 1905. Writer's emphasis.

that the British had given up the old policy of 'all or nothing', and their willingness to allow the French some share of influence indicates a softening towards them. Perhaps the situation in Europe made this change necessary. But in Oman the events were developing on a different scale from that of the nineteenth century. In fact the Muscat Arbitration closed an old chapter in relations between France and Britain. Only one last question still remained without solution. It was the arms trafficking, which was not ended before 1914 as will be discussed in the next chapter.

By The Hague Agreement, Muscat was to witness subsequently another kind of political development. The Sultan's good relations with the British were to collapse again, over the question of the arms trade, before finally he surrendered, but at the very high price of the 1913-1914 revolution in which the whole Albu Saeed rule in Muscat could even have perished, but for the help of Great Britain. In any case that brought to Oman an issue which remained important from 1912 to the end of the 60s of our century, namely the case of the dual Government system, the Imamate of Oman and the Sultanate of Muscat, which was to provoke an old religious and political dispute, one which had been renewed during the 60s of the last century when Imam Azzan bin Kais took over (see chapter 3). Only seven years after the Muscat arbitration, the Omanis formed a general tribal union and elected their own Imam. This developed under the influence of the Shaikh Hemyar en-Nabhany of the Jabel el-akhdar (descendant of an ancient Omani ruling family, namely *Banu Nabhan*) and then the Chieftain Shaikh Eyseh bin Saleh El-Harhty, whose father was the Sultan's ally (as shown in chapter three). It decided to replace the Sultan, and appoint the Imam Salim bin-Raashid Al-Kharussy. A case for the next chapter.

CHAPTER NINE

THE OMANI REVOLUTION, 1913-14

Introduction

In 1912 occurred one of the most significant developments in Oman's history. The Omani people, both the Hinawi and Ghafri coalitions, united to elect an Imam. Thereby they rejected the Sultan's sovereignty over them and thus joined in revolting to expel him. The reasons for this step had accumulated over a long time. Some of them were historical, others social and economic, religious and political. But the direct reason which ignited the revolution was the establishment of a warehouse for arms and ammunition by the Sultan in 1912. This plunged Oman into a long civil war from 1913 to 1920. A dispute broke out, this time not between the Sultan and mere tribal leaders, or with one of his family but with an 'elected' Imam. As a result, the Sultan was no longer acknowledged as sovereign over most of Oman other than Muscat and Mutrah. But that was not enough for the rebels who wanted to expel the Sultan from Muscat, his only remaining place. They desired to demolish the whole regime and its constitution as a secular Sultanate, and reestablish the religious Imamate over all Oman including Muscat. Although that aim was not completely achieved, the issue affected the Omani political situation and its international status for more than half a century, until 1970. Throughout the fifties and the sixties of the twentieth century the Omani people again revolted against the Sultan Sa'eed bin Taimur, Faisal's grandson. The Omani case was taken to the Arab League in Cairo and the United Nations in New York in a long dispute between the Imamate and its supporters, from several international organizations and countries, and the Sultan and his support, the British Government. It is very significant that most of the Omani argument concerned this revolution of 1913-14 and its consequences which resulted in the 1920 Es-sseeb Agreement. However the *Es-sseeb* Agreement and its effect will be considered in the next and concluding chapter.

Here we will try to examine the main reasons for the revolution and its far-reaching implications. We will also consider how far the Germans were involved in that conflict, because of its closeness to the world war of 1914, and in turn how the British made use of this coincidence.

First, however, the arms trade will be discussed along with the British continued reaction to it, and the local Omani and international connections.

Section Two

Muscat and the Arms Traffic

Two years after the case of *Baluchistan* in 1898, the trade of arms from Great Britain to Muscat saw an increase from 5,435 rifles in 1898 to 13,831 rifles in 1900, and the total number from other sources in 1900-1901, declared by Muscat customs, was 25,000. The figure declined to 17,000 between 1901-1902 and even more in 1903. But the trade saw again a sharp increase in 1904-1905; rifles imported were estimated at not less than 20,000, and in 1906-1907 the number reached 44,927, and on to 87,680 in 1907-1908¹.

In fact the trade from Muscat to the Persian littoral flourished during and after the year 1905-06, from which it seems that all measures taken to suppress the trade at the end of the century were not very successful. The British government decided to combat the trade by energetic action. "Captain F. McConaghey, Assistant Political Agent at Panjgur, was especially deputed to travel through the districts interested in the smuggling and to make a thorough investigation of the ramifications of the trade"². Its value was \$1,074,380 in 1905-06, against \$1,664,900 in 1904-1905. This shows a decrease, but that does not mean any reduction in the number of articles imported but only a reduction in the current prices. That was due to the fall in the market price of a rifle, a matter which caused even the arms merchants to ask for a reduction in price for the imported arms from the manufacturers. Purshotum, the leading figure in the trade, received

1. Tuson, *British Policy*, A4.

2. *Ibid*; Arch. Eds., *The Persian Gulf*, 1905-1906 vol. 6 (1986), p. 2.

the following reply from Schwarte & Hammer of London, dated 31 August 1906: "We are pleased to receive your specification of a further order for in all 500 rifles, but very much regret to say, that it is quite impossible to do so at lower prices than previously quoted and in fact makers are holding out even for higher prices now". So they offered him a price list which they thought very low; "we are therefore cabling you the following very lowest prices.

No.1 H. M. No.5 - 150 Rifles with 28 barrels @ 38/9 per rifle including 100 Cartridges.

No.2 100 Long Military Martini Henry Rifles @ 37/6 each, including 100 Cartridges.

No.3 200 rifles No.2. 25" Barrels, @ 38/ each inc. 100 Cartridges.

No.4 50 Rifles as sample No.3 ex "Griqua" @ 34/ each, inc. 100 Cartridges." In respect to that list they stated, "we sincerely hope, that you will after all be able to favour us with the order at the above prices. We might perhaps be able to do at a little less but only at the cost of quality"³. But on September 14 and 21 they suggested some reduction in prices in the above list, and in case of order a deposit of 33.1/ 3% should be sent, but Purshotum did not confirm the 450 Rifles with Cartridges at their price @ 37/3, and a deposit of 33.1/3% . They stated "we sincerely hope, that you have not taken objection to our demand of a deposit of 33.1/ 3% with order and that this is not the main reason of you not having confirmed the order." They stated that their works also insisted on their paying 1/3 of the value of an order on receipt of such an order, and they noted that, "as shipping of arms & ammunition to Muscat may at any time be interfered with

3. Schwarte & Hammer (London) to Purshotum, (Muscat), 31 Aug. 1906; Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 7 Sep. 1906. *Purshotum Private Papers*; Purshotum dealt with other firms for arms selling in England as well in Europe, namely: Joseph Winterhoff, London; H. Ch. O. Holstein, London; Times. Dharwar & Co., London; Eley Brothers, Limited, London; and later in 1907 he tried to communicate directly with the arms producers in Birmingham, Clabrough Johnstone, who replied that they already did a large trade with Muscat, asked him about the firm he did business with in England formerly, and about his suggestions for doing business with them. Clabrough Johnstone to Purshotum, 29 Jul. 1907. On the Continent he dealt with: Comptoir national d'Escompte de Paris; Moritz Magnus Junr. Hamburg; Ernst Kretschmar, Berlin; Georg Grotstuck, Berlin; August Francotte & Co., Liege; B. D. Zisman, Bucharest.

through unforeseen circumstances, we must really be sufficiently protected against any eventualities considering the very small margin of profit"⁴. But Purshotum insisted on a lower price for a rifle of 37/- including 100 cartridge per each, and he got it from the same Company⁵. They also offered him cartridges which were originally made for the British Government, which then did not require them, with a low price of 50/- per 1000 *c.i.f.net*, and the lot of 300 Rifles & 30000 Cartridges shipped for him from London in December 1906 by the Steamer *Edenhall*; the delay in shipment was due to not receiving the deposit on the consignment and to a collision in the Thames experienced by the first appointed ship *Guildhall* and therefore a change of ship⁶.

By 1906 exports to the Gulf had been maintained, but there were fewer to Mekran and the Persian coast during 1905-06. That was due to the patrol maintained by the Royal Navy between Muscat and that coast on the watch for any smuggling operations by Afghans and others⁷.

On 30 November 1906 some Afghans arrived at Muscat, where the arms smuggling season had begun. In December the arms trade at the port showed an exceedingly large increase in volume. The total value of arms imported stood at Rs. 1,685,075 in 1906-07 against Rs. 1,074,380 for 1905-06, an increase of 610,695, but most of the additional quantity was reexported to the Gulf area. Kuwait and Bahrain, for example, received large amounts of rifles and ammunition. Large quantities were also reexported to Mekran and the Persian coast⁸. In November 1906 British ships were engaged in checking arms

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4. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 14 Sept. 1906; Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 21 Sept. 1906. Purshotum Private Papers.
 5. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 12 Oct. 1906; Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 19 Oct. 1906.
 6. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 2 Nov. 1906; Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 23 Nov. 1906; Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 7, 21, 28 Dec. 1906; Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 21 Dec. 1906; Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 28 Dec. 1906; Jones Price & Co. Steam & Sailing Ship and Insurance Brokers, (London) to Schwarte & Hammer, 20 Dec. 1906; Schwart & Hammer to Dwarkadas Khimjee, 7 Dec. 1906. Purshotum Private Papers.
 7. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, vol.6, p. 70.
 8. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, 1905-1906 vol. 6 (1986), p. 60; F. O. 428/1, I. O. to F. O., 11 Feb. 1907; F. O. 428/1, Extract from I. O. Memo regarding Muscat Arms Trade, Dec.

smuggling by Afghans and Baluchis over to the Mekran coast and searching suspect dhows coming from Oman. At first the smugglers found it difficult to engage vessels for smuggling purposes in these circumstances. The route from Muscat to the Mekran Coast was almost closed. But smuggling resumed as soon as the gunboat was withdrawn because her presence was required elsewhere. If one of the smugglers succeeded in landing his cargo by one way or another, others would have the courage to follow. So the Royal Navy did not have much success up to the end of March 1907. The smugglers narrowly escaped capture on two or three occasions, but during September and October 1906, about 1,500 rifles with large amounts of ammunition were smuggled over the Mekran coast⁹. But that was not all. The mail steamers became involved in the smuggling business to Gulf ports under cover of various kinds of lawful merchandise. But how? "The goods [were] not, as a rule, booked by the agents ashore in the ordinary way, but taken on board privately and shipped, with the assistance of some ship's official, who is well paid for his services, the freight being settled with the commander or an officer deputed by him"¹⁰. It was difficult for the British officials in Muscat to suppress smuggling, because of the large share which the trade contributed to the income of the Sultan. Despite their awareness of the trade they did not like to breach the cordial relations between them and His Highness. The British agency had also doubts whether any abolition, if carried out in Muscat, would afford any permanent or effective check to the importation of arms into the various ports close by. In the same year Monsieur P. Caracalla of Paris established in Muscat a business to be known as the *Bazaar Francais*, and among other things he proposed to deal in arms¹¹.

However, the arms trade issue started to be more serious during this period than it had been in the last century, when only disloyal tribes on the North-West

1906; Tuson, *British Policy*, A7.

9. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, vol. 6, p. 60; F. O. 428/1, Grey to Cox, 26 Nov. 1906.

10. Ibid; F. O. 428/1, Grey to Govt. Ind., 26 Nov. 1906.

11. Ibid; F. O. 428/1, Extract Memo., Muscat arms, Dec 1906.

frontiers had been involved.

The opening of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new Islamic movements, and the arms trade was to link with them for the first time. It is interesting to note that from Muscat Major Grey, the British Agent, wrote to Cox, "so far as can be seen into the future, judging particularly by the danger and the difficulties caused to the British Empire by the recrudescence of the Pan-Islamic movement, the advisability of disarming savage and fanatical Moslem tribes will increase year by year. " He went on, "it is well known that frequent communication passes between Turkey and Afghanistan in connection with Pan-Islamism and the favour with which the Afghan Government looks upon the arming of the tribes on the north-west frontier of India has been more than (once) hinted at in official reports from that quarter". Grey argued that there was no danger in arming the Arabs since the British were profiting so long as the tribes were dissatisfied with Turkish rule. But this argument, if sound at present, which was doubtful, Grey said, would only continue to be such so long as Arab dislike of Turkish rule was not exceeded by their hatred of Christian interference in their affairs. "The agents of Pan-islamism are turning their attention to this very point, as I have remarked from a notable publication which has recently fallen into my hands, and which I am making the subject of a separate communication." He warned, "the danger involved here has to be taken into consideration"¹². The Political Agent of Muscat suggested that an arrangement should be made with the French, because they were themselves threatened with a fanatical outbreak in Morocco, and should be ready to help in limiting the power of Pan-Islamism.

At the same time the British Agency considered that the increase in the importation of arms and ammunition into Muscat would weaken British influence at the court of the Sultan, because His Highness became able "to pay a portion of his debts, largely owing to the enhanced income obtained from the duty on arms, and although an improvement in his financial position will be appreciated by the

12. F. O. 428/1, Grey to Cox, 26 Nov. 1906.

Government of India, it is obviously better that such improvement should be effected with their assistance and with a simultaneous increase of political gain to them." So, he suggested that the British position in Muscat would be better if the Sultan was granted an allowance which could compensate for the income which he would lose if arms importation into his capital were abolished¹³. The question of Muscat and the arms trade was to come again to the top of the agenda. On 24 November Captain Prideaux, the Political Agent in Bahrain, wrote to Cox that "arms and ammunition, of the "Martini Muscat" type, are purchased in Muscat from M. Goguyer, or from Ratansi Parshotum's [Rutunsee Purshotum] firm, or until recently from Saiyid [Seyyed] Yusuf-ez-Zuwawi. The greater number are sent to Bahrain in native craft via Doba [Doha] in Katar, but Yusuf-bu-fakhru [bin-Fakhru] and Ali-bin Musa are also in the habit of paying visits alternately to Muscat and smuggling up consignments probably small in steamers to Bahrain"¹⁴. The smuggling of arms between Bahrain and Muscat took place in a most experienced way, "professional arms-runners [were] shipping the arms in the British India steamers under false denomination, or by means of dissimulation in spicery, haberdashery, or other general merchandise". The steamship Company did not altogether ignore this practice, but, with a policy of toleration, it overlooked it by accepting false names of commodities and mentioning them accordingly in the manifest. This was paid for by the smugglers in Muscat, in the form of a very high rate for the shipment to the steamer company's officers. When the lot landed at Bahrain, it cleared customs with the aid of 'Hamal Bashee' [porter; Bashee, meaning Lord, is ironic]. The arms, once firm and secured, were gradually filtered into Persia by native craft¹⁵. In reaction to the smuggling activities between Muscat and Bahrain Captain Prideaux asked the commander of H. M. S. *Sphinx* to examine the cargo and baggage of passengers coming from Muscat and Dubai on British steamers for the next week or two. And even if a

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid; F. O. 428/1, Prideaux to Cox, 24 Nov. 1906.

15. Ibid; F. O. 428/1, M. Heynssens to Cox, 17 Oct. 1906.

draw Arabic letters on the rifles. At the same time it seems that the shippers did not like to lose their good customer, because they kept on the same old lower price of 37/- per rifle, under one condition that the shippers should add also "made in Belgium", otherwise the Customs authorities in England would not allow the rifles to pass. They would consider the mark to imply English-made rifles²⁰. English rifles were very popular in Oman owing to the workmanship and finish, but Belgian rifles had a very large sale because they were cheaper. The French and the German were even cheaper: Rs. 35. for the English rifle, Rs. 30, for the Belgian, Rs. 18, for the French, and Rs. 15 for the German²¹.

Unlike the previous century, it must now be understood that there were more than two nationalities involved in the arms trade. All of them were European powers, and Romania joined the arms trade club in Muscat in 1908-09. The British arms trade suppression policy became even more difficult and complicated, unless all those powers were consulted. This also turned the arms issue in the case of Muscat into an international affair.

In March 1907, the Foreign Office in London suggested to the India Office that it should collect information and statistics on the arms trade. That might be useful for the Arms Conference which was due to take place in Brussels in the following year, 1908. In respect to the Persian Gulf, it was suggested also that since Persia was a party to the Brussels Act of 1890, and even if the Persian Government would not to be represented at the forthcoming Conference, they could be pressed to adhere to its conclusions²². But it is interesting to note that in April 1907, the British government decided to remove the restrictions of 1898 to which British traders at Muscat were subjected in connection with the sale of arms at Muscat²³. The question is why the British Government took that step while

20. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 26, 28 Feb., 1, 8, 15, 22, 28 Mar. 1907 Purshotum Private Papers.

21. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, 1907-1908, vol. 6, p 88.

22. F. O. 428/1, F. O. to I. O., 18 Mar. 1907.

23. Ibid; F. O. 428/1, I. O. to F. O., 18 Apr. 1907; I. O. to F. O., 27 Mar. 1907; Govt. Ind. to Morley, 21 Feb. 1907; Poe to Adm. and to Govt. Ind., 26 Apr. 1906; I. O. to F. O., 15 Apr. 1907; C. O. to F. O., 3 May 1907; Comm. G. Warrender to Adm., 6 Apr. 1907; Cap.

they were preparing for the disarmament conference in Brussels. Was it because they wanted the British subjects to share some of the trade profit, or because the British traders in Muscat started to show some discomfort against the British policy, or because Britain feared that the trade would as a whole fall into the hands of the French or the Germans instead of the British at Muscat? In a memorandum the Foreign Office suggested that while the rules of 1898 were "stated to be prejudicially affecting British commerce in other directions, no very serious consequences would appear to have resulted during the ten years they have been in force. ...Moreover, it appears that British traders manage to evade the restrictions to which they are subject..."²⁴. But the British warships went on pursuing the Afghan arms runners on the seas especially between Muscat and the Baluchi coast²⁵. But the Afghans found who could help them in Muscat: M. Goguyer, an old established French businessman, in Muscat, [since March 1899]. Col. C. E. Yate gives this description: "when I was last at Muscat 1902, a French trader was established at the place, through whom thousands of rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition were annually imported"²⁶. Goguyer encouraged and assisted numerous Afghans in their purchases of arms²⁷. So the British Government decided to take action in the matter and communicated with the French Government. A French official, M. Lois, said that he would write to M. Laronce [at Muscat] and ask for a report on the subject, and promised that he would do all in his power to put a stop to M. Goguyer's objectionable activities. But M. Lois admitted that in the past M. Goguyer had proved a very difficult person to deal with because the latter had supporters in the French Government. However the French officials promised to see that everything possible was done to meet the wishes of H. M. Government.

Hickly to Warrender, 3 Apr. 1907; Comm. Hose to Hickly, 12, 22 Mar. 1907; Comm. James to Hickly, 1 Apr. 1907.

24. F. O. 428/1, F. O. to I. O., 15 May 1907.

25. F. O. 428/1, I. O. to F. O., 3 Jun. 1907.

26. Yate, Col. C. E., 'Baluchistan', *P. C. A. S.*, 14 (1906), pp. 1-39.

27. F. O. 428/1, Grey to Lister, 25 June 1907.

By the summer of 1907, it seems that the arms issue was a serious case not only with Great Britain but with most European colonial powers. On 15 July, the Germans issued an Imperial Decree, revoking the decree of 27 July 1895, which prohibited the export of arms and ammunition to Ethiopia from any part of the German Empire²⁸. The British authorities requested from the German Government the reasons behind taking this step²⁹. It seems that the Germans were annoyed by the arms passing through French territory [in East Africa] but they did not explain exactly the original reason for stopping the trade from Germany. Their complaint was against France because they informed the British that the French should co-operate loyally and thoroughly in checking the arms traffic³⁰.

The Italians also had some problems with the arms traders and became in need of British co-operation. Their Ambassador in London communicated to the Foreign Office, that, according to Italian Somaliland reports, an agent of the Mullah [tribe?] had gone to Muscat in order to obtain ammunition. The caravans of the Mullah then appeared in order to provide themselves with fresh arms and ammunition. "The Marquis of San Giuliano would be grateful to Sir E. Grey if he would be good enough to have immediate telegraphic instructions given to the proper British colonial authorities to exercise the necessary surveillance³¹". The British Government co-operated in the matter and took action by instructing the British Agents in Muscat through the Government of India and informed the Italians about it³². But that was too late. The consulate at Muscat stated that an "emissary from the Somaliland Mullah purchased ten months ago in Muscat arms to value of 15,000 rupees, which were conveyed in the "Khodra" [Khadrah] dhow under the French flag from Sur to Somaliland." It belonged to an Omani Arab, Muhammad bin Salim, who was under French Protection, under the agreement of

28. F. O. 428/1, Count de Salis to Grey, 25 Jul. 1907.

29. F. O. 428/1, Grey to de Salis, 2 Aug. 1907.

30. F. O. 428/1, Hohler to Grey, 29 Jul. 1907.

31. F. O. 428/1, The Marquis di San Giuliano to Grey, 30 Jul. 1907.

32. F. O. 428/1, F. O. to C. O., 31 Jul. 1907; F. O. to I. O., 31 Jul. 1907; Grey to San Giuliano, 2 Aug. 1907; Morley to Govt. Ind., 2 Aug. 1907.

1904 and its consequence, the Muscat Arbitration of 1905. The dhow however was captured and taken to French Jibuti, but not till after arms were safely delivered to agents of the Mullah, in Somalia³³.

In August 1907 the Germans requested details from the British government in the matter of arms traffic suppression, in order to render possible a detailed examination of their own suggested plan before the meeting of the Conference. Particularly, that would allow them to decide whether to consider such control consistent with the territorial principle, *Territorialitätsprinzip*, carried into execution in the colonies of all the Signatory powers to the Brussels General Act³⁴. The Italians wished to know in what sense the French and the Germans had replied to the British Government³⁵. They had already put their proposals for the Conference. They stated that large quantities of arms were brought into Africa, in ports situated within the actual prohibited zone according to the Brussels Act of 1890. The arms came from the west coast of Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and Oman. With regard to the arms trafficking they noted that Articles 68 and 69 of the General Act bore witness that the Sultan of Oman and the Shah of Persia had undertaken to keep an active watch on the west coast of Arabia and the Gulf in order to prevent the Slave trade. But did that relate to the arms trade? The Italians found that both Turkey and Persia had signed and ratified the Brussels Act of 1890, recognizing the necessity of preventing Africans from procuring arms, and it was further in their interest that their subjects in Asia should be unable to arm themselves to damage the sovereign Power. Therefore, they suggested that the next conference should extend the prohibition of arms importation to include not only the whole of Africa, but the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf region³⁶. But the British did not wait till the conference; they fully co-operated with the Italians to suppress the arms traffic by the Somalis from

33. F. O. 428/1, Govt. Ind. to Morley, 4 Aug. 1907.

34. F. O. 428/1, Metternich to Grey, 5 Aug. 1907.

35. F. O. 428/1, San Giuliano to Grey, 6 Aug. 1907.

36. F. O. 428/1, Memo. on Italian Govt. proposals for Brussels Act revision regarding Africa's Arms traffic, referring to British Note of 28 Mar. 1907.

Oman with the help of the Sultan of Muscat, but this was not easy³⁷.

By November 1907 the British Government started to raise a strong alarm about the danger to British interests caused by the traffic in arms in Muscat, so that British firms should take an appreciable part in the arms suppression. But they believed that no remedy could be found unless; 1- the Sultan agreed to impose restrictions on arms importation into his dominions. 2- "No steps in this direction can be taken without the consent of the French and other foreign governments, with whose rights under their Commercial Treaties such restriction would be inconsistent". During September, for example, 10,000 rifles and 7,000,000 cartridges were shipped to Muscat from the U.K. alone³⁸. The flow of arms to Baluchistan, despite all measures taken, did not stop. It continued to average 200 rifles weekly³⁹.

However from the summer of 1907 Britain, in addition to its own effort at arms suppression, added another additional task, on behalf of the Italians, to be carried out in Oman. It caused great irritation to the Omanis against the British and the Sultan. It was not yet known what the Italians would pay for that service. By December 1907 the Italians became more confident and went even further in their demands, and proposed checking arms trafficking in Muscat directly themselves⁴⁰. In December the Foreign Office in London suggested to the India Office that it would be advisable to communicate with the French, German, and Italian Ambassadors in London in order to establish the basis for an informal preliminary discussion. They suggested an early date in February 1908 between Their Excellencies and representatives of the India Office, the Colonial Office, and the Foreign Office. That would enable the four Powers to enter the Conference with a more or less unanimous policy⁴¹. In the same month it was

37. F. O. 428/1, F. O. to C. O., 26 Aug. 1907; F. O. to I. O., 26 Aug. 1907; I. O. to F. O., 30 Sep. 1907; Govt. Ind. to Morley, 27 Sep. 1907; I. O. to F. O., 14 Oct. 1907.

38. F. O. 428/1, I. O. to F. O., 26 Nov. 1907.

39. F. O. 428/1, I. O. to F. O., 3 Dec. 1907.

40. F. O. 428/1, Morley to Govt. Ind., 20 Dec. 1907.

41. F. O. 428/1, F. O. to I. O., 7 Dec. 1907; C. O. to F. O., 17 Dec. 1907.

proposed that information should be obtained with respect to arms and ammunition statistics, and for the import duties imposed from 1889- 1906. This was needed for the conference which was due to meet in April 1908⁴².

The preparation for the arms suppression conference made the arms suppliers aware of the consequences. On 24 January 1908 Schwarte & Hammer of London wrote to Purshotum "We understand that there are some negotiations amongst the governments to regulate the trade of arms & ammunitions to Muscat etc., but nothing definite has been decided. We shall of course be on the 'look out' & we will inform you as soon as something has been decided. We only hope however, it will not be stopped & that the business between us does not come to an end"⁴³. On 31 January Hammer noted to Purshotum that "As regard the negotiation of the various governments on the relation of the arms- trade, it is very difficult to obtain any information on this side as we understand the actual negotiations are taking place at Muscat amongst the various consuls, and you should therefore be better able to hear, what the result will be. We only hope however that importation of arms and ammunition at Muscat will not be seriously interfered with, and that you will soon be able to send your further order"⁴⁴. In March Hammer wrote that it was "very difficult to obtain any further information here about the conference relating to any restriction in the trade of arms and ammunition to Muscat and we do not think that anything definite has so far been arranged. The general opinion here is that the native firms over there are more frightened about this than the European dealers but it is just possible that the importation will perhaps be somewhat restricted as the governments cannot of course prevent the Sultan of Muscat to import Arms etc. altogether. We think you should be able, to get better information over there than from here. In any case it would be best to place only smaller Orders as long as this question is not

42. F. O. 428/1, Grey to Cave, 31 Dec. 1907.

43. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 24 Jan. 1908.

44. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 31 Jan. 1908.

finally settled"⁴⁵. In March, in another letter, Hammer informed Purshotum that the "governments have dropped the intention of a conference and that the business will be allowed to go on as before"⁴⁶. But it seems he was not quite sure of that. On 16 April Hammer asked Purshotum to ascertain from the officials in Muscat "whether according to the present regulations with the Sultan of Muscat any foreign Government can interfere in the importation of arms in Muscat." Hammer went on "-We here cannot really think that the Government can do so without at first giving sufficient time of notice. At all events in such case," he said, "they will we should think have to allow the landing of any parcels which are shipped and as it will surely take some time before any definite agreement between the Governments has been arrived at, we should say there would be not much risk to order in small parcels, so as to get at least a few hundreds rifles imported before any restriction takes place. If you can cable us an Order for say 200 or 300 Rifles, we think they can be shipped within about 6 weeks after receipt of Order, but for any fresh Order we must have a cash deposit of 1/3 of the whole amount, before we can proceed with the same and the balance must be paid immediately after we cable shipment, as we could not take the Rifles & Cartridges back if once shipped"⁴⁷.

Section Three

The Muscat Case at the Brussels Conference, 1908

The Arms conference opened on 28 April 1908. The British delegation consisted of Sir A. Hardinge, Mr. Walrond Clark, and Mr. Read of the Colonial Office, with Captain Bowman, R. N. as technical delegate⁴⁸.

It was suggested that the arms trafficking could be taken under four main heads: increasing duty, extension of zones of prohibition, establishment of

45. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, -- March 1908. (number of day illegible)

46. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 27 Mar. 1908.

47. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 16 Apr. 1908.

48. F. O. Conf. Print on the Brussels Conf., (9406) Memo. on Arms Traffic, Mar. 1909, p. 4.

international control, sanctions⁴⁹. On 2 May, the Italians submitted at considerable length their proposals to extend the new regime, to be established by the conference, for arms prohibition to include the entire African continent, as well as Arabia and the Persian Gulf. The British accepted part of that proposal but refused another part, and the inclusion of the Persian Gulf. Sir A. Hardinge replied to a request by several delegates for an explanation of the British reasons for restricting the zone only to Arabia, the Red Sea and the Hadramaut coasts when the British themselves originally contemplated extending it to the Persian Gulf. He said, "we had, however, come after fuller consideration, to the conclusion that it would be better to be content with a more moderate programme, comprising, for instance, the mere grant to the Sultan of Muscat of a freer hand in checking the arms traffic, partly because of the primitive organization of some of the Arab States of the Gulf, such as Oman and the territories of the Trucial Chiefs, and their lack of administrative machinery essential to the effective application of all proposed measures, and partly on account of the probability that certain Powers whose commercial interests deserved consideration would be less likely to accept increased restrictions if the zone to which they were to apply were made a very wide one"⁵⁰.

On the commercial side the arms traders were following the conference news. On 8th May 1908 Hammer enclosed a cutting from a London paper, dated 7/5/1908, with reference to the Brussels conference, which does not seem to mention Muscat arms trafficking at all but only Africa. Hammer did not know if that touched also the importation at Muscat but he heard that orders had been received again recently from Muscat; therefore, he hoped that Purshotum would also soon be able to make a fresh order on the same terms as before⁵¹. On 12 May Hammer still wished to be certain whether there would be any risk to export arms

49. F. O. 428/2, British Plenipotentiaries at Brussels to Grey, 28 Apr. 1908; I. O. to F. O., 28 Apr. 1908; Customs to F. O., 28 Apr. 1908.

50. F. O. 428/2, Plenipotentiaries to Grey, 2 May 1908; Hardinge to Grey, 9 May 1908.

51. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 8 May 1908.

to Muscat⁵².

At the Conference it is interesting to note that on 13 May 1908, the British Government faced criticism over their new and inconsistent stand over the arms trafficking. The Ottoman Charge d'Affaires opened the proceedings by reading a declaration in which he emphasized the importance attached by his government to extending the prohibition zone to the Persian Gulf, asking the British to explain more fully the reasons why H. M. Government, after having originally favoured this extension, had now changed their mind. Hardinge replied that H. M. Government was absolutely at one with those of Italy and Turkey in desiring to eradicate the arms trade on the coast of Persia and Arabia. But he said that "any extension to the Persian Gulf of the zone of prohibition would be futile unless it embraced Muscat, and that the peculiar political and commercial conditions prevailing in that state made it easier to deal with the evil there by circuitous than by direct measures". He added, "to call on the Sultan to adhere to the application to his dominions of the prohibition clauses of the Brussels Act would, in view of the decrease in his revenue and increase in his expenditure entailed by it, of the commercial interests of his Arab subjects and of foreign merchants, the former of whom were only under imperfect control, and of the perpetual and inelastic character of the prohibition, place him in a situation of some difficulty". The treaty powers, he said, should authorize the Sultan to take measures to suppress arms trafficking, as he deemed possible on his own initiative, or allow him to increase his duties on other articles as compensation. He suggested giving the Sultan the power to hold out to his own people the prospect that restrictions imposed by him, emanating from his personal decision and not from an external international authority might be subject to subsequent revision. The conference then called for the opinions of the delegates. "The Germans were in favour of widest possible extension of the zone; the Spaniards were prepared to agree to any extension in Arabia which commended itself to Great Britain or Italy; the Congo,

52. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 12 May 1908.

the U. S. A., the Portuguese and the Netherlands Delegates were of the same opinion". So also were the Belgians who would acquiesce in any conciliatory compromise. The French were unable to view with favour any extension of the zone but they promised to report to their government the new measures proposed⁵³.

However, it is interesting to note that the German, French and British stands about the prohibition zone extension became very similar. The French Government would not approve the extension of the prohibition zone to involve the Persian Gulf. The Germans qualified their acceptance of the extended zone by stating that it was conditional on its coincidence with the narrower British rather than with the wider Italian one proposed. But for Britain this stand alone, at least as far as the French were concerned, was not enough, unless France and other treaty powers agreed to amend their treaty with Muscat. That alone would help to allow the Sultan to take his measures to check the arms trafficking. Otherwise even this positive stand from the Germans and the French regarding the question would not help to suppress the arms trade. However it is interesting that the Italians were more close to Britain in this matter before the conference than they became during it. It became clear to the British that the Italian proposal of prohibition zone extension would allow other European powers to interfere in their sphere of influence. It was a British interest to keep the other powers away from forming policy in the Gulf. That made them prepared to deal with the arms trade by themselves despite all the consequences. So it was not the will of the Sultan of Muscat which the British defended, since the Sultan himself, except for raising duty during 1893 (see Ch. 5), never took any initiatives regarding the arms trafficking. They were taken by the British Government of India. The Sultan, who had a direct interest in the arms trafficking, was not represented at the conference, and it is not clear whether he had any say about it. His Highness found arms restrictive measures distasteful to him, but he always could be

53. F. O. 428/2, British Plens. to Grey, 14 May 1908.

persuaded to do all that was needed in the way of repression⁵⁴. But there is a question which still needs an answer. If that was the British position, then why were they one of the countries most enthusiastic for this conference to be held? It was advantageous to be close to other powers, watching their thoughts and therefore making it possible to take further steps on the spot, where easy communication with others was available. But the main point may be that the British did not at first discover the possibility of an international involvement in the Persian Gulf affairs through the arms traffic question. Even if they were aware, they were in need of an international stand on a basis which they had designed. But one has to ask what did remain of that desire? Britain had already exercised full influence on the Persian Gulf without need of any international acknowledgement. It had already initiated the arms suppression policy in the region, and already the Indian Army had established a station in Muscat in 1905⁵⁵. The answer is that Britain desired to establish an international acknowledgement of her exercising influence not only in the question of arms, but over the whole policy which she alone could carry out with very limited international interference. This also would grant the British Government the power, in the face of the local chiefs and the Sultan of Muscat, of acting on behalf not only of the British interest but now also, of an international interest. At the same time, they could possibly put the French into a difficult position if they were the only power refusing the international will. France was the only power which could spoil any step concerning Muscat in opposition to Great Britain. Why? Because it was only these two countries who had declared themselves as respecting the independence of Muscat in 1862. So one of the main aims of the British in Brussels was to keep France's position in Muscat under control.

At the close of the 20 May meeting, the Italian minister informed Sir Arthur Hardinge confidentially that he had been authorized to abandon the

54. F. O. 428/2, Memo. by I. O., 21 May 1908.

55. Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, p. 395.

proposal to include Muscat and the Persian Gulf in the extended zone, if the British were willing to include Egypt and Tripoli within the extended zone. Hardinge replied that the British Government were considering this point⁵⁶.

On the business side Purshotum, in a letter to Moriz Magnus Junr., a French firm dealing with arms, expressed his fear about the conference's results, and what seems to have been his fear about the British Government's desire with regard to the trade. The firm replied "We have carefully noted what you are writing about the conference held in this moment in Belgium, but we rather think your apprehensions are going too far. There are so many interests connected to the Arms Trade, & English are to [sic] good businessmen, as to spoil this important commerce of which even their subjects are taking profit of in a considerable manner"⁵⁷. Hammer however expressed his fear of sending arms to Muscat until the situation became clear⁵⁸.

On 27 May, however, Sir Arthur Hardinge "proceeded to read the inclosed draft article which he had prepared for dealing with the question of the arms traffic at Muscat, and suggested that the conference should resolve itself into a Committee to discuss it". He also explained the nature of the commercial treaties between Muscat and the five powers directly interested in the matter, with respect to the trade and the duties imposed. The Dutch, one of the five powers having treaties with Muscat, suggested that a clause should be added to the British draft article, to prevent the Sultan of Muscat from granting in the future to some Power, perhaps not a Signatory of the Brussels Act (Japan, for example), a right to trade in arms. Hardinge expressed his willingness to accept an amendment to that effect. But the French regarded such a step as premature and could not agree to it. However, the arms question seemed to produce a good deal of desultory conversation which resulted in the establishment of a sub-committee, but no date was fixed for its meeting. The conference however spent several weeks without

56. F. O. 428/2, Hardinge to Grey, 20 May 1908; Hardinge to Grey, 23 May 1908.

57. Moritz Magnus Junr. to Purshotum, 22 May 1908.

58. Hammer to Purshotum, 26 June 1908.

coming to any very definite conclusions. The French delegation were asked by the President whether they could be ready to take part in the discussion on the subject of Muscat. Their reply was that they were not able to express any opinion on the subject, or even to say whether at any time they could join in the discussion of the question. The French, as they explained, "found themselves much embarrassed, in face of the statements which had been made by the Italians and British delegations to the effect that they considered the question of the extension of the zone to the Arabian shore of the Red Sea and of the regulation of the arms traffic at Muscat as inseparable from any other measures which might be decided on"⁵⁹.

On 3 June 1908, the Netherlands and the USA gave Great Britain the offer it was waiting for. The first were prepared to grant to the Sultan of Muscat full liberty to deal with the arms traffic, provided that the other Powers having treaties with him concurred. The second declared to the same effect. This agreement of three powers out of four having treaties with Muscat, satisfied the President of the Conference. He asked the French whether they were yet in a position to express their views, but they delayed their answer until the next sitting⁶⁰. However, on the same day, the French informed the British that they were not authorized to discuss the question of Muscat in the Conference. But that did not mean they would not talk it over privately, not only with the British delegates but also top officials from both the British and the French Governments, though not in Brussels. For the British it became quite clear that the object of the French Government was to shelve the whole question without appearing openly to do so. So, the French did not discuss the Muscat question.

There was fear of the conference on the commercial side, and on 12 and 26 June Schwarte & Hammer said to Purshotum that they could not book any orders for arms to Muscat; "unless you can make sure that you will have no difficulties

59. F. O. 428/2, Hardinge to Grey, 27 May 1908; British Plens. to Grey, 27 May 1908.

60. F. O. 428/2, Hardinge to Grey, 3 June 1908.

and risk in getting Rifles and Cartridges landed, then we are afraid, there will be no fresh business until this question has been finally settled". But he went on by saying "We understand however that orders for cartridges had been placed during the last few weeks for Muscat so that other houses appear to take the risk of having these delivered at Muscat without difficulty"⁶¹. But despite that the arms traffic increased in Muscat via other firms.

On the diplomatic front it became clear to the British that the question of Muscat should be tackled via diplomatic channels but it became highly undesirable to continue by that method at the conference. The British became very concerned because the arms trade grew constantly at Muscat, which could cause danger to British India. At the same time, its value also grew, adding to the price which the French would ask the British Government for buying them out⁶². However as the question became more complicated the French seemed to soften their position and to be willing to discuss the Muscat arms question privately in Brussels with the British delegation. It was a good opportunity for the British Government, since the time was most significant. They agreed that an arrangement should be made to suit the interests of delegates from both countries. They should be given power to negotiate, since they had the benefit of expert advice and were conversant with all the details. At the same time the British should express in a friendly way and in confidence on behalf of H. M. Government, that, "as the tribes on the Indian north-west frontier obtain supplies of arms from Muscat, and are thereby enabled to maintain incessant warfare against the Government of India, a most unfortunate effect would be produced here should it become generally known that France alone among the Powers represented at the Conference prevents the closing of the Muscat arms traffic. The Delegates of all the other Powers which possess Treaty rights with Muscat have consented to their being abrogated in so far as is necessary in order to secure that the arms traffic shall be

61. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum 12, 26 June 1908.

62. F. O. 428/2, Hardinge to Grey, 5 June 1908; British Plens. to Grey, 4 June 1908.

stopped"⁶³.

However, the British delegate seemed to offer the French a compensation in money for any loss which might occur to their arms trade. It is surprising and interesting that unexpected matters between France and Britain in the question of Muscat were also discussed. One matter far exceeded the scope of the arms trade. On June 17, 1908 Hardinge, sent a telegram to Grey. "The French delegation, whom we saw yesterday, refuse all money compensation, but in return for Gambia they offer to hand over Muscat to us in the same manner as we have given them Madagascar, Tunis, and to give us everything we want in regard to the zone". It was also reported that "the French Delegates added, and we believe correctly, that the conference must otherwise be a failure as far as France was concerned"⁶⁴. But how serious were the French in the question of Muscat? Another interesting letter on the same date, sent to Sir E. Grey by the British Plenipotentiaries, made the points of the French stand in the question of Muscat very clear. They said that M. Lecomte, the head of the French Delegation, "proceeded in reply to certain questions by Sir Arthur Hardinge, to suggest that the "contre-partie" might be cession of the Gambia colony in return for her abandonment of the declaration of 1862, under which both Governments agreed to maintain the independence of the Albusaidi dynasty in Oman and Zanzibar." They assured him that "if England would give France the Gambia, France would withdraw over the independence, guaranteed by her in 1862, of the Sultan of Muscat, and would give us a free hand in that state-in other words , the French proposed that, in return for our surrender of the Gambia, they should cancel the Declaration of 1862 and let us do what we like in Oman"⁶⁵. If that was true it would be a most significant and surprising stand on the part of France, which for half a century had stood on the necessity of preserving the independence of Oman. However, the Conference failed to reach a

63. F. O. 428/2, Grey to F. Bertie, 11 June 1908; Bertie to Grey, 12 June 1908.

64. F. O. 428/2, Hardinge to Grey, 17 June 1908.

65. F. O. 428/2, British Plens. to Grey, 17 June 1908; Memo by the British Plens., 17 June 1908.

general agreement in regard to the extension of the prohibition zone which could reach to the Persian Gulf⁶⁶. Britain seemed to gain a lot from the conference, and the new French stand towards the British position in Muscat was interesting. For the British it was most significant and of great interest, not only for the arms suppression but for their ascendancy over the Gulf in general.

A Memorandum prepared by the British delegation to Brussels on 22 June 1908 considered that the French abandonment of their position on Muscat independence was just what was needed. That would allow the British, as the Memorandum put it, "to establish a Protectorate or indeed, direct political control over the Sultan of Oman; and they would further agree to the zone of prohibition for the traffic in arms and ammunition being extended along the shores of Arabia as far as the southern limit of Muscat". The memorandum went on: "it is hardly necessary here to expatiate on the importance which has long been attached - and at no time, perhaps, more than of recent years - to the maintenance of British ascendancy in the Persian Gulf," and according to the sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Muscat occupied a commanding position at the entrance to the Gulf. "Indeed, so important is Muscat that it may be said that, while without it, it would be impossible to keep our hold on the Gulf, with it the control of the Gulf would cease to be so absolutely necessary to us as has hitherto been the case. Even apart, however, from its high value as a political asset, Muscat is far from being worthless from an economic point of view". Muscat possessed an excellent harbour, and its trade amounted in 1905-6 to 550,000L. It should grow enormously once the political conditions were stable, and 83% of its trade was with England and India, and 92% of shipping was British. The influence which the French once had in Muscat appeared to be coming to an end. Britain had no fear of any other power in Muscat, since their agreements were of a purely commercial nature. The Memorandum said "Once, therefore we were free so far as France was concerned, it would be possible for us to get the Sultan to

66. Arch. Eds., 1986, *Persian Gulf*, Vol. 6, p 76.

sign an Agreement to the effect that he would place his foreign relations in our hands and so prevent any other country from establishing a footing in the place." The memorandum was aware of the potentially dangerous Italian ambition to establish a consulate at Muscat. That project, however, was abandoned after a friendly British appeal. But a far more serious danger which threatened British influence was German ambition. "The German Government has recently displayed a desire to play a role in the Persian Gulf, no doubt in connection with their Bagdad Railway." How did that relate to Muscat? The Memorandum replied that the Germans had "already subsidized a line of steamers to Bushire, which calls at Muscat, and at any moment we may be confronted with the fact of a German demand for the establishment of Consular relations with Muscat, a step which would only too probably lead to the Germans proceeding to try and play a role in the politics of Arabia."

As far as the the arms traffic was concerned the French offer to the British would provide "the inclusion of the Arabian coast as far as the *frontier* [writer's emphasis] of Muscat in the zone of prohibition, which, it may be observed, is also the second of the two items in the British programme of the Arms Conference to which the chief importance is attached, the first being the placing of the Sultan of Muscat in such a position as will enable him to prohibit the importation of arms and ammunition into his dominions." The French, if they agreed to the inclusion of the Arabian coast within the prohibition zone, would be bound to prevent the export of arms from Jibuti. Therefore, the trade would disappear, since there was no longer any port in the neighbourhood to which arms legitimately could be exported. Consequently any vessel carrying arms within the zone, could be regarded as guilty of smuggling.

However the Memorandum then came to the crucial point concerning what the British would give up in the case of Gambia against what the French would give up in Oman. "There is still one more objection to the proposed bargain which remains to be considered. It is this: that whereas the French would be

giving us only certain intangible rights, we on our side should be giving them a real tangible property". It went on, "but this objection seems rather specious than real. It is easy to conceive of a case in which a mere right would be of much more value than an actual property. It might, for instance, be well worth a landowner's while to surrender a considerable farm for the purpose of extinguishing a right of a way under his drawing-room windows". So what was the "landowner's" purpose as regards Muscat? The Memorandum said, "by taking advantage of the French withdrawal from Muscat to obtain from the Sultan, as part of the arrangement we should conclude with him, a perpetual lease of Ras Musandum, [on the Strait of Hormuz] to the possession of which the Government of India have always attached great importance, but which we have hitherto been prevented from acquiring by the existence of the Anglo- French Guarantee of Independence [of Muscat] of 1862. "The Memorandum concluded that such an arrangement with the French would follow up the policy which the British Government for some time past had been pursuing. It would remove all possible friction between the two countries. "Muscat is a thorn in our flesh; the Gambia in that of France- they would both be got rid of. The regularization of our position at Muscat by means of an agreement with the French would, moreover, form a very suitable corollary to the recent regularization of our position in Persia by means of an Agreement with Russia." The Memo. urged that agreement with France was of great necessity, otherwise the arms smuggling to the north west frontiers from Muscat and from Jibuty would continue⁶⁷.

However, the Arms Conference in Brussels adjourned on 22 July till 24 November, and no significant measures were taken in respect to Muscat. Even before that took place the business community expressed their pleasure. On 17 July Hammer wrote to Purshotum that the conference had not taken any definite descision so "In the meantime we hear that other houses still continue to ship arms and ammunition to Muscat so that apparently the risk cannot be so very great. We

67. F. O. 428/2, Memo. by the British Plens., 22 June 1908.

however cannot take upon overselves any risk whatever considering the small profit on these transactions but sincerely hope that you will after all be able to send us some fresh orders"⁶⁸. But Moritz Magnus was absolutely happy for the end of the conference, and was more optimistic. On the same date he wrote to Purshotum: "The only object of the present lines is to be the bearer of the good news, that according to a telegram received to-day from our representative at Brussels, the Gun-Trade-Conference was adjourned, as officially advertised until autumn [sic] next, but as we think to an indefinite period." He said "Let us hope, they will never meet again!.

"We are convinced this news will be very welcome to you, & that on the other hand it will animate business by relieving all anxieties & pacifying [sic] the market"⁶⁹. It was suggested that the conference would be resumed in November but on 10 and 20 November Count De Lalaing suggested that the Conference should be postponed until 16 March 1909⁷⁰. Moritz Magnus commented "We hope that the market in Arms will revive soon again and anticipating your further agreeable news"⁷¹.

Section Four

Arms Traffic: Developments in the Gulf

While the Arms Conference was taking place in Brussels, the situation started to heat up, and serious developments took place in the Persian Gulf. In reaction to the British measures of suppression in 1908 the gun runners seemed to adopt a new method. Between 18 and 20 April, for the first time, fighting broke out between the British seamen of the cruiser *Proserpine*, who were on checking duty, and the Afghan gun runners. "During the encounter one Blue jacket was mortally and another dangerously wounded, and the officer in charge had

68. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 17 July 1908.

69. Moritz Magnus Junr. to Purshotum, 17 July 1908. Purshotum Private Papers.

70. F. O. Conf. Print on Brussels Conf., March 1909, (9406) Memo on Arms traffic; (9092) p. 7. Schwarte & Hammer to Purshotum, 25 Sept. 1908, Purshotum Private Papers.

71. Moritz Magnus Junr. to Purshotum 9 Oct. 1908, Purshotum Private Papers.

narrowly escaped". It was not stated how many of the gun runners were killed or wounded. However, their dhow containing arms, mostly of French manufacture, was captured. On the 19th, shots were fired on the British seamen near the shore of Persia in Banji, north of Jask, from the beach under the shelter of sand hills and palm trees along the half-mile front. The British crew were ordered to return to their boats, and as they were pulling back one British rating was shot dead. In further fighting between the British ships and the shore, Lieutenant Hamilton's arm was wounded, and another rating was killed by a shot through his lungs⁷². *The Times* commented that, "the gun running in the Persian Gulf and the adjacent coasts seems to have more connexion with the interminable raids on the Indian North-West Frontiers than most people are aware of. If the gun runners were to rely on their ability to hold their own, and keep to the Persian and Afghan sides of the frontier line, it is difficult to see what preventive measures we could take". *The Times* suggested that it was "desirable to try to anticipate arms runners by additional cruisers along the coast rather than wait till they are lost in the wilderness of the interior of East Persia"⁷³.

The events on the Gulf waters were reflected in House of Commons debates. On 29 July 1908, Mr Rees asked "whether the India Office had information to the effect that another large caravan of arms was in transit through Persian Baluchistan to the Afghan frontier; and whether it was proposed, by strengthening our patrol in the Persian Gulf, or by representation to the Sultan of Muscat, to deal with a state of affairs which was a menace to the North-West Frontier?" The Junior Minister at the India Office, Mr. T. Buchanan, answered the first question in the negative. He said "the last caravan of which the Secretary of State has information must have reached its destination some weeks ago. Every possible means is taken by action on the coast and otherwise to stop the traffic, and as was stated by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on June 30, the question of the

72. *The Times*, 11, 19 May 1908.

73. *The Times*, 23 May 1908.

traffic at Muscat is engaging the attention of the Conference now sitting at Brussels".

The gun running in the Persian Gulf, however, did not stop. The result of the successful smuggling of rifles and ammunition from the Persian Gulf was that prices had fallen remarkably in the towns of Afghanistan. *The Times* warned that the continuance of gun running would mean a formidable increase in the offensive strength of the Afghan nation in a few years⁷⁴. Throughout 1908 and 1909, gun smuggling went on, despite all measures taken by the British cruisers, and "private advice has been received from the Indian North-West Frontier, according to which the import of arms and ammunition from the Persian Gulf into the Afghan border is assuming such proportions that it is felt on the frontier that strong measures must be taken...". That brought the situation under official consideration⁷⁵. However the failure of the Brussels Conference to achieve any definite result, as was mentioned above, made the British Government take immediate steps. This made the government think of instituting more rigorous measures to prevent arms being imported into Asia by the Persian Gulf. *The Times* expected an increase in counter-activities, at an early date, as a result of discussion between the Home Government and the Government of India. It was expected that naval movements would have for their object the strengthening of the Persian Gulf patrol. Measures were also expected to protect the British Consulates and the telegraph stations on the Gulf Coast in case attempts to stop the importation of arms should give rise to excitement among the native population⁷⁶.

On 4 March 1910, in the House of Commons, Mr Rees asked the Under-Secretary for India, "whether much of the ammunition shipped from Europe and from Muscat to Mekran coast of the Persian Gulf consisted of cartridges with expanding bullets; and if so, whether steps could be taken to check the export of such cartridges, the use of which was forbidden to our soldiers, upon whom they

74. *The Times*, 29, 31 July 1908.

75. *The Times*, 16, 29 Mar.; 7 Oct. 1909.

76. *The Times*, 18, 19, 26 Jan. 1910.

would be used in the event of any disturbance on the North-West Frontier?" Mr E. Montagu replied that a "very small portion of the ammunition captured has been found to consist of cartridges with expanding bullets," but he said "I fear that it is not practicable to check the export, but every possible precaution is taken to prevent them reaching their destination". On the same date, there was some related concern among members of the Commons about the German Baghdad railway project expressed in questions to the Secretary of State, Sir E. Grey⁷⁷.

On 2 November 1910, however, another fight took place in the waters of the Persian Gulf between the gun runners and ships of the East Indies squadron, patrolling the Gulf. A landing party from H. M. S. *Proserpine* was attacked by Afghans at Bris, more than 400 miles from Lingah, and two British officers were wounded. But more serious fighting took place at Dubai on the Omani coast, between the British seamen and Arab natives on the 24th, in which four Britons were killed, one was missing, and nine were wounded. Forty native persons were killed and wounded. This was a very dangerous and serious event. Major Cox, the Political Resident, did not rely completely on the reports he received, but he himself sailed to Dubai on 27 December with Rear Admiral Slade, on the cruiser H. M. S. *Hyacinth* to form an estimate of the situation⁷⁸. So, the gun suppression business seemed to create another episode of frontier expansion for Great Britain not only with the Afghanis but with the Persians and Arabs of the Gulf. The conditions there grew even worse. Gun runners in the north and south of Shiraz repeatedly cut the British telegraph lines. They not only prevented workmen employed by the telegraph authorities from repairing the line but also they beat them up and grabbed their horses and property. The line from Shiraz to Bushire was cut⁷⁹. In fact the situation became so complicated that it was very difficult to deal with. Lieutenant-Colonel C. C. R. Murphy, described the gun smuggling as a

77. *The Times*, 4 Mar. 1910.

78. *The Times*, 28 Dec. 1910.

79. *The Times*, 27 Dec. 1910.

"jig-saw puzzle, with pieces scattered about up and down"⁸⁰. In fact gun-running control encouraged gun-smuggling business in the region. The smugglers found their own way of hiding their guns within the hull of the ship, which was described by 'Haji' Williamson, one of the British secret agents, as an "ingenious method of hiding things"⁸¹.

The Times, however, though supporting the arms suppression policy, commented that fighting was not only affected by the political situation on the Persian Gulf but it was also linked with some developments in India which seemed to put the British Indian Empire under grave examination. A challenge was not coming from Afghanistan, this time, but from India itself. *The Times* said, "though the suppression of gun-running in the Persian Gulf has undoubtedly had its full provocative effect on the tribes of the North-West Frontier, yet there have not been wanting causes of unrest which, independently of gun running and of each other, have gradually been leading up to a frontier crisis". *The Times* went on, "Gun-running in its succeeding phases of toleration and of suppression by Government has provided first the means and then the pretext for a rising. In a sense, then it should be regarded more as the latest development in the situation than as the *Fons et origo* of the trouble". *The Times* based that on the judgement of the British political officers on the North-West Frontier and noticed "that an outbreak has, for the time being at least, been warded off reflects the highest credit on the tact and judgement of the frontier political officers. For not since 1897 has such a favourable opportunity for combined action occurred simultaneously all along the frontier. In nearly every quarter disaffection has been rife". This trouble was not only with the Afghan tribes and the Muslim Mullas of the Waziri tribe in Swat and Bajaur, but there were significant signs of revived activity of the Hindustani fanatics, a politico-religious sect which for 20 years now has been practically regarded as a cipher in Indian politics⁸². In fact

80. C. C. R. Murphy, *Soldiers of The Prophet* (1921), pp. 207-208.

81. Stanton Hope, *Arabian Adventurer: The Story of Haji Williamson*, (1951), p. 244.

82. *The Times*, 28 Dec. 1910.

very early in this century unrest began in India itself and there was agitation among the educated Indians for a greater share in the Government of India. That was even reflected in England. The Liberal Party, when it formed the government in 1906, expressed sympathy with Indian claims as expressed by the Indian National Congress founded in 1885⁸³. On 28 December 1910 Congress urged early extension of local self-government to make all local bodies elective⁸⁴. In the Persian Gulf meanwhile there were other serious developments with the extension of the Islamic movement (based in Egypt). At the same time no agreement was yet achieved between Great Britain and France regarding the arms trade, and the zone of prohibition. The Brussels Conference of 1910 did not even discuss the Muscat arms question. On 24 December 1910, two other British seamen died because of their severe injuries, after the Dubai clash of the previous November. However, the clash in Dubai was taken by the Egyptian Pan-Islamic Press as an example of Arab resistance to H. M. S. *Hyacinth's* forces at Dubai. It also suggested, that, "the Arabs believe that a departure from the British policy of nonintervention is contemplated, and they fear a partition of Persia, followed by annexation in Arabia". *The Times* commented on that; "these apprehensions have induced an increasing anti-foreign feeling, which has been intensified by the belief that our measures against the arms traffic are intended to lead to the disarmament of the Arabs, who cling to their rifles as their most cherished possessions." It went on, "nothing else would have produced this unprecedented opposition to the British forces"⁸⁵. On 21 January 1911, at Dubai, another fight broke out between the British seamen and the natives when the British searched for arms which were found buried: "the demeanour of the Arabs then grew increasingly threatening, and fire was opened simultaneously on four branches of the landing party, who appeared in danger of annihilation. The Arabs were under cover, and used soft nosed bullets, while the British were in the open till they

83. Landen, *Oman*, p. 266.

84. *The Times*, 30 Dec. 1910.

85. *The Times*, 29 Dec. 1910.

threw up rude entrenchments on the beach. When the flag-captain personally addressed the Sheikh and the *Hyacinth* shelled the town, the firing ceased. The Arabs laid out 37 dead, and their losses were probably heavier"⁸⁶. In Persia on 11 March 1912, and as result of arms captures by British warships destined to the Persian coast, tribesmen from the hinterland were reported to be marching on Lingah to attack the British consulate. The British sent one hundred and fifty men of the 7th Rajputs from Jask and Chahbar to be landed if necessary for the protection of the consulate and the European residents⁸⁷. Only one year later the arms suppression policy caused a far more serious political development to take place in the Indian Ocean and in the Persian Gulf and that was, *a revolution in Oman*.

Section Five

The Revolution Against The Sultan: The Election of The Imam of Oman, 1913-14

The direct cause of the above events was the arms trade checking in Oman by His Highness the Sultan Faisal bin Turkey. The Sultan established the Arms Warehouse in October 1912 for the regulation and control of the trade. But then he decided to suppress the trade.

J. E. Peterson realised that, "the period of rebellion from 1913 to 1920 is important in the history of Oman for a number of reasons. The restoration of the Ibadi Imamate, periodically revived since the beginning of the nineteenth century, was an accomplishment of this period that lasted forty two years." He went on , "but the method of its establishment presented a grave threat to the government of the Sultanate, weakened by fifty years of decline, and continually attacked by the religious zealots of the interior for its close relationship with the British." But he said, "the revolt of 1913-20 was essentially tribal in nature, with the institution of the Imamate superimposed on it in order to lend legitimacy and unity to the

86. *The Times*, 21 Jan. 1911.

87. *The Times*, 12 Mar. 1912.

uprising"⁸⁸.

In the third week of May 1913, alarmist reports reached Muscat that Shaikh Abdullah as-Saalimi, leader of the theological [*Le-m-taawa,h*] movement, had set up his son-in-law, Salim bin Rashed el Kharusi, as *Imam el Muslimeen* [the Imam of Muslims]⁸⁹. Sheikh As-Salimi regarded the arms warehouse as a subtle device of the English to deprive the Omani tribes of modern weapons, so that they might reduce the tribes to impotence and then ride roughshod over them. It is important to note that this claim is nearly similar to that of the Egyptian Pan-Islamic Press, above, that the suppression of the arms deprives the Muslims of the ability to defend their countries. However, at the beginning of the Imam election process, the major role was played by the Sheikh Himyar bin Naser al-Nabhani, a strong and influential prince of *el-Jabel el-Akhdar* [The Green Mountain] in Oman proper. He was responsible for calling an assembly of notables at his headquarters at *Tanoof* near *Nizwa* (the capital of the Interior) in May 1913, for the election of the Imam Salim bin Rashid al-Kharoosi [his origins from Wadi bani Kharoos, near Awaaby town]. The latter was selected because of his personal character, and "his impeccable lineage from a line of medieval Imams, his relationship to al Saalimi, and the close relationship that his tribe, the *Bani Kharus*, had with the *Bani Riyam*, the tribe of Sheikh Himyar⁹⁰. These two Omani tribes could form a huge army which would be at the Imam's disposal. The rebellion spread rapidly, and Nizwa was their first target. It fell about 5 June, and the Sultan's Wali at the town Saif bin Hamed al bu Sa'eedy, who refused to surrender, committed suicide, fearing to fall into the hands of the rebels⁹¹. The prestige that followed this success was enough to cause the Shaykhs [of *El-Ibbriyyin*, *El-ya,aakeeb Le-j-nebeh*, *El-Hijryyin*] to put themselves under the Imam. On 14 July 1913, in the House of Commons, Mr Mitchell Thomson asked

88. J. E. Peterson, 'The Revival of the Ibadi Imamate in Oman and the Threat to Muscat', 1913-1920, *Arabian studies*, 111 (1976), p. 165.

89. *Ibid*; Arch. Eds., *The Persian Gulf* 1986, p. 104.

90. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 167.

91. *Ibid*; Arch. Eds., *The Persian Gulf*, p. 104.

Grey whether he had any information about the rising in Oman against the Sultan and "whether any danger was apprehended at Muscat; and what steps are being taken to protect British interests?" Grey replied "there has lately been considerable unrest in Oman which has now come to a head, the safety of Muscat itself being threatened. His Majesty's ships *Philomel* and *Odin* are at Muscat and His Majesty's ship *Pelorus* was expected to arrive there on the 16th instant. A detachment of the 2nd Rajputs has proceeded to Muscat, but men will not be disembarked except in emergency"⁹². On 29 August a British force of 400 men of 102nd King Edward's Own Grenadiers had been despatched to Muscat. But August coincided with the fast of Ramadhan which seems to have affected the fighting, but it was expected that the fighting would resume when the fast ended and after the feast of *E,eed el- Fetr* which was due in September⁹³. *The Times* commented on the Omani uprising that "Apart from other British interests, the affairs of Oman of considerable importance to us on account of Muscat's being the chief centre from which the tribes on the North-West Frontier of India draw thier supplies of arms and ammunition. So long as nothing could be done at Muscat the costly and laborious efforts made by our sailors to stamp out the traffic were severly handicapped. A year ago the Sultan was persuaded to to issue regulations for the control of the trade in Arms. The importance of this question to the security of our Indian frontier explains the watchful care with which developments in Oman are followed by the Indian Government"⁹⁴.

Before going through the events of the revolution it seems necessary to have a look at events after the Brussels Arms Conference of 1908 in Muscat itself, before the Omani revolution occurred.

The agreement between Britain and France regarding the arms question in Muscat took six years to be reached from the time of the conference. It was not until 14 February 1914 that the two countries, exchanged notes respecting the

92. *Hansard*, vol. 55, 14 Jul. 1913, p. 240.

93. *The Times*, 30 Aug. 1913.

94. *Ibid.*

trade in arms and ammunition at Muscat. But, before that, some interesting developments took place in the matter of the trade there.

The arms trade, despite all measures taken by British naval power, managed to find its way to the dealers in the Gulf, and even to the Southern Persian coast. We saw also some examples of the armed resistance of the traffickers in the section above. To prohibit the arms trade in Oman the British suggested an essential plan which should be carried out, and that was to concentrate the trade only in Muscat. For that, on 10 February 1910 the India Office wrote to the Foreign Office that it was very important to regulate the export of arms by sea from Muscat. But it was not advisable to regulate the trade at the ports of Oman other than Muscat since the difficulties of effective control would be increased, and it would be impossible to secure the trustworthy agency required. It seemed essential to concentrate the legal export of arms at Muscat, and to endeavour to induce the Sultan not only to prohibit the export of arms from all other ports in his dominions except Muscat, but also to entrust the duties of issuing passes for export from Muscat to an official in whom the British Government could place confidence. Such an official should be lent to His Highness the Sultan for the purpose. His Highness could be encouraged to accept this proposal, by securing him a pecuniary grant⁹⁵. However in December 1910 the Sultan's relations with the British were overshadowed again with some doubts. An Omani boat (*Baden*), belonging to Pirandad Baluch, carrying date-leaf mattings &c. and dates belonging to the Sultan's subjects, was met at sea by a British man-of war on 18 November 1910, and was burnt together with all its cargo; cash that was on board was taken by the navy. Another *Baden*, belonging to Ramazan bin Shaker ez-Zedgali of Mutrah, was caught by one of H. M.'s ships in Khor Galak, and she too was burnt with all her cargo. The Sultan protested to Major Trevor, the Political Agent: "Are my subjects prohibited from dealing with

95. F. O. 428/8, I. O. to F. O., 10 Feb. 1910; F. O. to I. O., 16 Feb. 1910; Viscount Morley to Govt. Ind., 20 Feb. 1910.

the ports of Mekran and Persia? If they carry goods which arouse suspicion they are liable to search and scrutinisation. But when they carry allowable goods and are coming from Mekran and Persian ports to this side, then for what reason should they and their cargoes be burnt, and on whom will be the consequent losses?" The Sultan said "this practice is in contravention to the terms of the treaty, as will appear from the provisions of the 4th article thereof". His Highness concluded, "high-handedness like this has been continuously committed by His Majesty's navy, and this is what the *Sircar's* [phrase for the British Government of India⁹⁶] justice will not allow. Reply as to the result of this communication is requested from you. I hope the Government will not like such loss being caused to our subjects"⁹⁷. The Political Agent replied that "no dhow engaged in legitimate trade has been burnt, nor will be; only dhows which are proved to have landed arms have been burnt, and such dhows render themselves liable to punishment. The loss of the dhows is therefore due to the Nakhudas [Captains] engaging in illicit trade, and the Nakhudas are responsible for the resultant loss"⁹⁸. It is not clear however how this conflict was solved between the sultan and the British authorities.

Meanwhile in December 1910 both the Resident Cox and Admiral Slade urged on the Government of India "the importance of speedily coming to a permanent arrangement with France on the whole question." The argument adopted by them throughout was that the blockade had been very successful, both in checking the actual smuggling, and in reducing the dealers' business in Muscat to a barren one, but that the blockade was very costly, and it was desirable on this ground to be able to discontinue it as soon as possible. On the other hand, any relaxation of it before a permanent settlement was made would mean losing all the advantages gained by it, and it must therefore, be maintained till the settlement, if any, was effected. This, therefore, was a matter of continually increasing

96. This name perhaps used as a brief phrase for Viceregal.

97. F. O. 428/8, Sultan of Muscat to Trevor, 8 Zilhajj 1328, (11 Dec. 1910)

98. F. O. 428/8, Trevor to Sultan of Muscat, 9 Zilhajj, 1328 (12 Dec. 1910)

urgency⁹⁹. The Government of India sympathetically considered Cox's and the Admiral's views, and communicated to the Foreign Office the request to reopen negotiations with France "at the first favourable opportunity¹⁰⁰". The Foreign Office, on 29 December 1910, asked the Government of India to draw up their views as to how to proceed in the matter, in respect to four points: "(1.) The territorial concession they were prepared to make in India in return for French concession at Muscat. (2.) Whether any concession from France was worth having short of the Sultan's complete freedom to prohibit import of arms. (3.) If so, what? Would a State monopoly in Muscat, or control by the Government of India of customs suffice? (4.) Whether they consider any pecuniary compensation to the French Government or the French dealers in Muscat to be admissible"¹⁰¹. India consulted Cox, Trevor in Muscat, and Slade who proposed; "All our efforts in negotiating with France should aim at total prohibition of import and export; unless this were attained control of the customs by the Government official would not much affect the traffic. State monopoly of the trade was impracticable, as the Sultan would probably farm it [the customs] to the highest bidder, who was quite likely to be a dealer" [of arms]; any effective measure should limit arms importation to the Sultan's and his subjects' requirements, which must be fixed by joint agreement between France and Britain; arms should be restricted to Muscat only and only by steamship; "Shipments from Europe and elsewhere to be only in execution of *bona fide* orders issued and supported by a 'no objection statement' signed by both French and British representatives at Muscat"¹⁰². For the compensation they suggested a purchase of all stocks of arms actually in Muscat, or paying a "lump sum" to the French Government to be distributed among their merchants, and no French firm was left dealing with arms except *Goguer*. Apart from that any claim for compensation for loss of prospective profit should be met

99. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 196.

100. *Ibid.*

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*

with the reply that "although shipment (of arms for export) has been legal, the destination of arms has been notoriously illicit, and that both dealers and manufacturers are lucky to have made such heavy profit as they have, and are deserving of no sympathy"¹⁰³. Cox disliked the idea of any further discussion of compensation because that would open wide a field "in which claims for equal compensation would be made by British and Muscati, and even Belgian and German dealers"¹⁰⁴. In January 1911 the Government of India reintroduced their ideas of June 1910 for mutual territorial concessions on the Indian subcontinent. They proposed ceding to France about 138 square miles near Pondicherry with an annual revenue of over £18,000, in return for the French surrender of other settlements of about 88 square miles-including Chandernagore and the scattered "loges" with a value of £5,666 at 20 years' purchase¹⁰⁵. The French could be empowered in India to refuse the surrender of their nationals as a condition of surrendering Chandernagore. The Government of Madras expressed its readiness to cede an increased area near Pondicherry of 216 square miles containing 140 villages. "This area was comprised of 188 square miles with 113 villages in the Vilupuram taluk of the Southern Arcot district... and of 28 square miles in Cuddallor taluk with 27 villages"¹⁰⁶. When similar proposals to these had been made a year before the French Government had refused to surrender Chandernagore, which was a *sine qua non* with the Government of India¹⁰⁷. But this time the French share in India was to increase in a way attractive to the French in view of the railway which they had long wished to construct from Pondicherry to the British territory of Tirupapuhur. This was to be on condition that "the rates should be below the South Indian Railway Company's maximum rates, construction and jurisdiction should be British in British territory, and the

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*

105. Tuson, *British Policy*, B 196...

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

net earnings should be shared on a mileage scale"¹⁰⁸. The Foreign Office was informed about these proposals, and at the same time that in Muscat large quantities of arms were being imported in anticipation and by way of compensation¹⁰⁹. In January 1911 the French agreed to negotiate. M. Cambon put forward his reply to the British proposals: "The French Government were disposed to make no concession without receiving compensation in the Gambia. An increase of territory in India near Pondicherry would not suffice, and in French public opinion, would not compensate even for the cession of Chandernagore"¹¹⁰. But Grey observed that "the cession of Gambia, or any part of it would raise as much outcry in England as the cession of Chandernagore would in France...His Majesty's Government was not prepared to bring Gambia into the question at all"¹¹¹. However, the British 'Pondicherry Card' in India did not seem to attract the French as much as the 'Gambian Card' in Africa. The British Government also tried to use the 'Morocco Card' to persuade the French to co-operate in arms suppression in Muscat. They urged the French "that French consent to the suppression of the arms traffic in the Persian Gulf would naturally be regarded as a fair set-off against the British consent (then given) to a renewal of the mandate to France and Spain to suppress the contraband trade in arms in Morocco"¹¹². The 'Morocco Card' did not help either; the French replied that they had no interest in Morocco, and "the question in the Persian Gulf resolved itself into one of compensation for the French Government"¹¹³. As the British Government knew by this time, half of the arms stock in Muscat was now in French hands. In September 1911 the French proposals to exchange territories developed further. They asked for cessions "in Nigeria and the Gold Coast Colony, and according to the extent of the cession made there, she was prepared

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*

to make corresponding concessions in connection with Cheik-Said, Muscat, and certain islands in the Indian Ocean, and possibly also in the Pacific"¹¹⁴. It was noticed that the French did not mention the compensation of Pondicherry in India. However nothing came of these proposals, and the negotiations failed.

In Muscat a problem closely related to the arms trade, as we saw before, was the Sultan's customs. One of the main reasons which made the British Government try to control Muscat's customs was the arms flow through them. The British Government was alarmed by reports that the Sultan might give the lease of his customs house farm to two prominent arms dealers, Ali Musa Khan and Seyyid Yusuf-ez-Zuwawi, one of whom was mainly responsible for the Afghan traffic. This would be a strong source of displeasure to the British Government. It is interesting that the Muscat Custom House question of the last century again began to emerge.(see chap. 5). To deal with it might cause complications in the arms trafficking issue. To avoid that problem a proposed loan of 275,000 rupees, for three years, to the Sultan of Muscat might be given by the Government of India on condition that he should borrow an Indian custom-house official. But the Government of India was conscious that His Highness was 'very touchy' at that time on the question of customs, as he attributed the reduction of his receipts and his financial difficulties to the British¹¹⁵. The Sultan's income because of the blockade of the arms trade at sea seemed to suffer, and when he was communicated with by the Political Agent in respect to the customs, the Sultan asked for 13,000 rupees urgently, He had no option but to give his customs to the new farmers. The Government of India agreed to transfer to the Sultan the amount he requested but the hope of getting the Sultan to appoint an official borrowed from the Government of India was doubtful¹¹⁶. At the same time it was

114. *Ibid.*

115. F. O. 428/8, I. O. to F. O. , 16 Jan. 1911; Govt. Ind. to Crewe, 8 Jan. 1911; Crewe to Govt. Ind., 9 Jan. 1911; I. O. to F. O., 16 Jan. 1911; Govt. Ind. to Crewe, 14 Jan. 1911; I. O. to F. O., 18 Jan. 1911; I. O. to F. O., 25 Jan. 1911; Cox to Govt. Ind., 30 Dec. 1910.

116. F. O. 428/8, I. O. to F. O., 9 Feb. 1911; Resid. to Govt. Ind., 30 Dec. 1910; Cox to Govt. Ind., 8 Jan. 1911; Govt. Ind. to Cox, 10 Jan. 1911; Cox to Govt. Ind., 6 Jan. 1911; Govt. Ind. to Cox, 11 Jan. 1911; Cox to Govt. Ind., 11 Jan. 1911; Govt. Ind. to Cox, 16 Jan.

believed by the Persian Gulf Residency that control of customs by India would not affect the arms traffic question until the prohibition of imports had been arranged, after which some proper control over customs might be necessary to render the prohibition effective. So the aim should be total prohibition of import and export of arms. The Residency's most important suggestion was "management by a British official of Muscat and Mutrah custom-house, and the establishment under same official of a regular bureau for the storing and issue of arms under an effective system of registration and marking." It was also suggested that payment of compensation to the Sultan for loss of revenue and for compliance with above measures should be made¹¹⁷. It was discussed whether the Government of India's attitude towards the Sultan should remain friendly or the reverse, and whether to proceed in suppressing the trade completely despite the Sultan's will, and to stop his subsidy if necessary. But the Sultan should break off his relations with Ali Musa and Company, arms dealers, and co-operate with the British by introducing an effective sales registration system, and imports under the British 'friendly supervision and by other means'. Reports, however, reached the Government of India that Ali Musa Khan was using the Sultan's steamer for arms trafficking to other Omani ports. The arms trafficking was a source of income to the Sultan as was known to the Government of India. Now it had to decide which alternative policy it intended to adopt towards him¹¹⁸. The British policy towards the arms trafficking now started to take explicit shape. The Government of India had the idea of making "an endeavour to conclude negotiations with the Sultan of Muscat, in order that his co-operation in controlling the traffic may, so far as is compatible with treaty rights, be secured. The time is now opportune, and our proposal is to take action without regard in any way to the question of revising the commercial treaty". India's opinion was also that it was undesirable that the Political Agent

1911.

117. F. O. 428/8, Cox to Govt. Ind., 22 Jan. 1911; I. O. to F. O., 14 Mar. 1911; Cox to Govt. Ind., 3 Feb. 1911.

118. F. O. 428/8, Cox. to Govt. Ind., 28 Apr. 1911.

should be associated with the representative of the Sultan who was in charge of the bonded house, that they would lend a British official, who should be in the service of Faisal and paid by him, though the salary might be paid indirectly by India. If India thereby secured the cordial co-operation of Faisal, they were prepared to make him an offer of a maximum one *lakh* a year, apart from the subsidy already paid, and if he could be induced to utilise the first payment for the liquidation of his debts, most of which were due to the dealers in arms, they would make payments annually in advance. But how could the arrangement be made? It "would be a personal one to the present Sultan, and it would be made clear that, in the event of His Highness not acting up to the terms of the arrangement, payment would be withheld. If His Highness can be induced to accept our terms, it is our hope that the necessity of purchasing the stocks of arms in Muscat at the time may be avoided"¹¹⁹. The Foreign Office approved the proposition to communicate with the Sultan to establish a warehouse for the deposit of arms. It was suggested also that it would be helpful to obtain from His Highness an undertaking to conclude no fresh treaties with foreign Powers without the consent of His Majesty's Government but this should stand over for subsequent consideration. It was an attempt to limit his foreign relations¹²⁰. Percy Cox, the Sultan's old friend, went to Muscat, and met with the Sultan in November 1911. The Sultan expressed his complaints about the British blockade operations which caused him losses. He declared that as long as the attitude of the British towards him remained friendly, he had not the least idea or desire to pursue a course opposed to their wishes or calculated to disturb cordial relations. He would be prepared for absolute prohibition of arms, in spite of the French treaty, if the British Government would guarantee him against the consequences. He was also prepared to place his interests in British hands if both the British and the French Governments saw fit to settle matters between themselves. The British Government should agree as to

119. F. O. 428/9, Govt. Ind. to Crewe, 10 Jul. 1911.

120. F. O. 428/9, F. O. to I. O., 11 Aug. 1911.

financial and other conditions, which could be discussed. His Highness was ready to co-operate in respect to the latest British proposals, if they did not contravene the rights of other powers in treaty with Oman. On the arms question, the Sultan suggested that he be allowed to address the French Government by himself, to explain the harmfulness to his interests of the traffic. He expressed his desire for complete prohibition of imports, and hoped for the willingness of the British Government to compensate his losses, urging them not to stand in the way of his wishes and interests. But Cox, in his letter to the Government of India dated 11 November, disliked the Sultan's idea because he thought that it would lead to claims by the French Government for compensation for their own subjects¹²¹. The Sultan accepted the British decision that one *Lakh* rupees per annum would be fair compensation for the future, but he asked for separate lump sums for the loss of about 80,000 dollars he had suffered during the last two years, or rather the debts which he had been obliged to incur. Also he asked for some relief to be given to his subjects trading in arms. To prepare for the arms suppression Cox suggested India use the press; some news could be leaked to Reuter about the arrangement for the suppression or regulation of Muscat arms traffic. Cox believed that this "will have the effect of deterring manufacturers from sending out further consignments, while dealers in Muscat will be frightened into quickly depleting their stocks by returning them to Europe, or sending them to Yemen or other such destinations", unobjectionable to the British Government. The British Government also should be prepared with a reply to any enquiry which the French Government might make¹²². However, even before that suggestion of Cox's was

121. F. O. 428/9, Cox to Govt. Ind., 11 Nov. 1911. Cox was the designer of the arms prohibition measures in Muscat. In January 1910 when he was on holiday in England he had suggested to the Government that the Sultan should be persuaded "by an offer of pecuniary compensation, to limit the export of arms from Muscat to consignments destined for other ports in Oman or other "non prohibited" ports; these to be guaranteed by a system of passes, the control of which should be in the hands of a British officer. Any Dhow failing to produce such a pass, whatever her destination, was to be *ipso facto* liable to seizure by British warships even in Muscat waters; see Tuson, *British Policy*, A7.

122. F. O. 428/9, Cox to Govt. Ind., 14 Nov. 1911.

carried out, His Excellency's presence in Muscat, and the frequent visits of His Highness the Sultan to the Political Agency gave rise to much conjecture among the arms dealers as to what the nature of the negotiations might be. The main dominating idea in Muscat was that, "the British and the French Governments have come to terms with a view to suppress the arms trade, that the French arms merchants will be compensated, whilst the remainder will probably have their goods confiscated." This caused a tendency among the native and other arms dealers to get rid of their surplus stock at any cost, and the situation in Yemen had offered them an opportunity of disposing of a small quantity to sundry boats of that territory¹²³.

However, the Government of India agreed that the Sultan might address the French Government regarding the arms traffic, and agreed to the conditions which the Sultan attached to the proposal for a bonded warehouse¹²⁴. So steps were taken to prepare for further negotiation with the Sultan to remove any obstacle, bearing in mind that the Sultan might accept a British official to manage the suggested warehouse or allow it to be managed by both the Political Agency and a high level person from the side of the Sultan. However, the India Office, though they were aware of the need to supervise the efficiency of the warehouse, did not want to wait till that could be achieved. Probably they did not regard it as that much of an obstacle since the principle was agreed about. So they suggested letting it be known to the press, which could say that: "It is understood that a new arrangement has been devised by the Sultan of Muscat for regulating the export of arms and ammunition, which it is believed will effectually stop the illegitimate trade with those countries which have prohibited it¹²⁵". Cox asked the Government of India for details, to be submitted for the approval of the Government, of notices and regulations for the establishment of the special arms

123. F. O. 428/9, Lieutenant Wauton (Naval Intelligence Officer) to Cox, 14 Nov. 1911.

124. F. O. 428/10, Govt. Ind. to Crewe, 28 Dec. 1911.

125. F. O. 428/9, Govt. Ind. to Crewe, 19 Jan. 1912; Govt. Ind. to Crewe, 29 Jan., 2 Feb. 1912; I. O. to F. O., 6 Mar. 1912.

warehouse which were being discussed by him with the Sultan. The Sultan asked the British Government whether he could be permitted to notify a total prohibition, subject to three months notice¹²⁶. However matters were all settled locally and internationally, and the British Government committed itself to undertake full responsibility to render the Sultan all necessary support in dealing with objections other powers might raise. The British Government did not obtain, any more than in the past, any right to take action in the Sultan's territory. Friendly understanding between the two parties was established as to suitable arrangements for supplying the *bona fide* requirements of the Sultan's subjects and his administration, and to confirm the promise to compensate him¹²⁷. It was hoped that these measures would stop the illicit traffic, as there was no other free port in the Gulf at which the European traders could land their arms¹²⁸. On 23 May 1912 Cox submitted to the Marquess of Crewe the suggested notification which the Sultan would issue for the arms warehouse regulation, and accordingly the Sultan prepared to take the next step to issue it on 4 June 1912.

"On and after the first September next all arms and ammunition imported into Muscat territory will be taken direct from the steamer to the Control, and all dealers in Muscat territory will be required to deposit in the Warehouse stocks remaining in their hands on that date. Any trader offending against this regulation will, in addition to other penalties, render all future consignments of arms arriving in his name liable to confiscation". The notification went on to explain the purpose of the warehouse as a matter only of regulation. "No arms will be allowed to issue from the Warehouse without a licence, nor until duty has been paid thereon in the usual way. The licences will be prepared by the superintendent, and countersigned by the Sultan, and will not be granted to traders, but only to approved individual purchasers or

126. F. O. 428/9, Cox to Govt. Ind., 11 May 1912.

127. F. O. 428/9, Cox to Govt. Ind., 23 May 1912.

128. Arch. Eds., *A Collection of First World War Military Handbooks of Arabia 1913-1917*, Vol. 1. (1988), p. 49.

European alignments, but the French did not carry out their threat. The arms problem was not solved until 1913; when in June M. Poincare and M. Pichon visited London for negotiation with the British Government, it was believed that an arrangement would be reached by which the arms traffic could be controlled without injuring any legitimate interest of French industry¹³². *The Times* announced on 2 October that an agreement had been practically reached between France and Britain according to the newspaper's own information. "A London telegram to *le Temps* says that the question may be regarded as all but settled". *The Times* welcomed the news, and pointed out that the "supply of arms to the tribes-men of the North-West Frontier of India has been carried on through Muscat, where French treaty rights made it impossible for Great Britain to suppress the traffic in the same direct way as at other places". The arms suppression, for peace, on the frontier, was urgently necessary. *The Times* went on: "various efforts were made to arrange matters with the French Government. They were unsuccessful, and a state of things continued which at times threatened to diminish the cordiality of the Entente". As regards the Sultan of Muscat, *The Times* said "A way out seems to have been found". He was "persuaded to issue on 12 July last year a proclamation regulating the traffic in arms....an 'Arms Warehouse' was established in Muscat in which all arms and ammunition were to be deposited". Last December in the House of Lords, Lord Morley had explained, *The Times* said, that "the enforced depositing of imported arms in the warehouse was in the French view, tantamount to confiscation. In the English view the goods were merely bonded,.....the British Government would continue to use every effort with the French Government to bring them actively into line with us". The principal difficulty in the negotiations was the nature of the price to be paid for French involvement in the regulation. "At one time the French Government seemed disposed to insist on territorial compensation for the surrender of what it regarded as its rights under the Treaty of 1862, but they do not seem to have

132. *The Times*, 30 Aug. 1913.

pressed this view"¹³³. On 3 January 1914 *The Times* announced an "Anglo-French agreement" regarding Muscat's arms trade. "The French Government undertakes to offer no further opposition to the measures adopted some months ago by the Sultan of Muscat for putting a stop to this trade measures which that [the French] Government considered to be an infringement of the French Convention of 1844 with Muscat". For those French firms whose interests had been affected thereby, the French Government would arrange an indemnity¹³⁴. On 4 February 1914 the agreement was signed in London between Britain and France¹³⁵. The latter agreed to be placed on the same footing as subjects of H. M. as regards the trade in arms and ammunition of war in Muscat. The French also eventually declared to the British that they "wished to give Great Britain a proof of their firm friendship, and also they have become convinced of the dangers which would be presented by the organisation of contraband of war in regions adjoining the distant possessions of the European powers"¹³⁶. Such an agreement had been the most probable outcome because of their continuing need to face the German challenge. Thus ends a very long and exhausting dispute over Muscat between the two countries. We now return to the effect of the Sultan's regulations on the domestic political position in his country.

Section Five

The Events of the Revolution

The Sultan's regulations caused a serious rebellion against him in Oman, beginning with the election of *El Imam el Kharusy*, who was the first Imam of the twentieth century in Oman¹³⁷.

133. *The Times*, 2 Oct. 1913; see also *Times*, 16 Feb. 1913.

134. *The Times*, 3 Jan. 1914; see also *Times*, 7 Apr. 1914.

135. Arch. Eds., *Collection First World War*, p. 49.

136. Treaty Ss. no. 9, *Exchange of notes between His Majesty's Government and the French Republic respecting the Trade in Arms and Ammunition at Muscat*, 4 Feb. 1914, H. M. S. O. [Cd.7361]; *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1914.

137. Phillips, *Oman History*, p. 156. Dr. Mahmood Ali Al Dawood, in his Arabic book *AlKhaleej Al-Arabi...*, (*The Arabian Gulf...*) on p. 93 mentioned an Imam as *Imam Abdullah bin Saleh* [?], who led the revolution of 1895 against the Sultan. There was no such person of this name and the revolution of 1895 was not led by any Imam, but by the

The warehouse seriously began to affect the arms traffic in general, and the Omani of the interior in particular¹³⁸. For the Omanis the arms trade was a matter of business. Its trafficking was a source of a considerable income, therefore beneficial for every one because it increased their ability to import essential and leisure commodities which improved their living conditions. The Sultan's warehouse gave him the monopoly of the import and export of arms in and out of Oman, thus depriving the Omanis of this income¹³⁹. This caused Omani anger and fear; the spark which ignited the revolution against him¹⁴⁰. The entire Arab and international world became involved in this controversy.

The revolution spread like fire in straw. After the fall of Nazwa on 5 June, Izky and Awabi fell on the 20th into the hands of the rebels. Five days later, the Sheikh *E,yseh bin Saleh el Harthy* arrived to join the rebellion, whose principal temporal leader so far was Sheikh Himyar bin Nasser En-nabhani, of Bani Riam. Sheikh *E,yseh* then took over the leadership and managed to persuade most of the *Bani Ruwahah* to join the rebellion¹⁴¹. It was the first time since the Omani civil war of the eighteenth century, 1720-1740, that the Omani tribal factions, Hinawis and Ghafrys, had united against the regime in Muscat¹⁴². "The fall of Izky encouraged Sheikh Isa bin Saleh al Harthi, who was of Hinawi persuasion, to espouse openly the cause of the Imam."

The Sultan's situation was strained because of the unexpected retreat of the

Alharthy tribe leader, Sheikh Saleh bin Ali, father of Sheikh E,yesh, and there are some arguments that it was a plan by the Sultan of Zanzibar, Hamid bin Thuwainy, to overthrow Sultan Faisal in his desire to reunite Oman with Zanzibar under his rule.

138. *Diplomatic and Consular Reports...*, 1912-13 on the Trade Of Muscat. [Cd. 7048-14] H. M. S. O. 1913, p. 7.

139. R. W. Baily, (Ed.) *Records of Oman, 1867-1947*. vol. 11 Arch. Eds., 1988, p. 558.

140. Bannerman, *Unity and Disunity*, pp. 217-249.

141. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 168; Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, p. 104; Nabil M. Kailani, 'Politics and religion in Uman', *Historical Overview*, (Inst. Mid. East Stu.) 10 (1979) p. 573; Ronald Wingate, *Not In The Limelight*, (1959), p. 77; Murphy, *Soldiers*, p. 129; Holden, *Farewell to Arabia*, (1966), p. 227; James Morris, *Sultan In Oman*, (1957), p. 23; D. G. Hogarth, *Arabia*, (1922), p. 124; Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, (1975); G. E. Hubbard, *From The Gulf To Arat*, (1916), p.28; Clement, in his book *Oman Reborn Land* (1908), on p. 46, identified The Imam AlKharusy as Imam 'a Khamisi', and also Sheikh *Saleh bin Ali* as 'Salil' bin 'Alil'. This has proved very misleading.

142. Peterson, *Revival*, pp. 165-167.

Bani Bu Ali (of the *Sharqeyyeh* Ja,lan) of the Sultan's forces from Bidbid to Wateyyah [*lu-Teyyeh*] and of the [*Shuhuh*] (of [*Massendem*], on the Strait of Hormus) from Nakhla to Sohar. Even so, despite this setback the Sultan's two sons, Saiyids Nader and Hamad, managed to hold out in the forts at Samail and Nakhal respectively"¹⁴³. Samail, however, fell into the hands of the rebels in July. This town had a commanding position on the road between Oman proper and the el Batneh coast, a development which caused a real threat to Muscat¹⁴⁴. All the Sultan's efforts to resist the revolt failed despite his recruitment of 500 [*Shihuh*] and 600 of Bani Bu Ali. On 6 July the Bu Ali returned to Muscat without orders to do so, leaving the road into the capital dangerously open¹⁴⁵. On this occasion the British Government became directly involved in the defence of the Albu Sa,eed's regime, more than at any time in Oman's previous history¹⁴⁶. Major Murphy, of the Intelligence Department, arrived from Bushire at Muscat on 2 July, to study the situation, and if necessary to arrange for landing troops for the defence of Mutrah and Muscat. On 6 July, the Political Resident at Bushire and the Agent at Muscat, both received an official appeal for help from the Sultan. On 9 July, on the fast mail, 256 soldiers of the 2nd Queen Victoria's Own Rajputs arrived at Muscat from Bushire. They disembarked and camped at Jabrooh in Mutrah¹⁴⁷. The command of the defence of Muscat was entrusted to Lt. Col. F. A. Smith, the Officer Commanding troops in the Persian Gulf, who, on the next day, stationed himself at Bait-al-Falaj fort between Mutrah and Ruwi¹⁴⁸. On the following morning, the Sultan, accompanied by Major S. G. Knox, the Political Agent, visited the troops, and their commanders Hill, Mellor and Ballard, and the

143. Baily, *Records*, vol 2, p. 559.

144. Phillips, *Oman History*, p. 157.

145. Murphy, *Soldiers*, p. 130.

146. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 165.

147. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 168.

148. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, p. 104; Bait al Falaj Fort now includes the office of the present Deputy Prime Minister for National Security (Fahar bin Taimur), a College for Defence, and a Museum opened by His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos bin Sa,eed, the present Sultan of Oman on 11th December 1988; Oman Daily Newspaper, Mond. 12 Dec. 1988-No.2765.

naval and the military intelligence Officers¹⁴⁹. At the same time the British Government did not ignore the French on this occasion. "The political Agent called on the French consul and in conformity with the Anglo-French Declaration of 1862 on the independence of Muscat and Zanzibar, took his colleague into his confidence and informed him of the landing of British troops at the Sultan's request for the defence of Muscat and Mutrah. The intimation was well received and no hint of any objection was offered¹⁵⁰". However, letters on 11 July had been sent to the rebel leaders by the Political Agent, warning them not to attack Muscat and Mutrah, in view of the important interests of the British subjects in those two towns. The Imam replied by a letter, received on the 21 July 1913, posted in Muscat the previous day. "Major Knox notes that this reply was dated 14th July and deduces that the method of its delivery by post proved what had been suspected before, namely that the Imam had many friends and sympathisers in Muscat itself". However, the Imam's letter stated that the Sultan had been deposed by the '*Ulema*', but he refused to abdicate. He warned the Political Agent, "and you are a company (i.e. associated) of this Government. It is incumbent on you to refrain from the affairs of the Moslems, and it is necessary you should not do us injury¹⁵¹". The Sultan established his headquarters, and a force of 250 men, under *Mozaffer bin Sulaiman bin Suwailim* Wali of Sohar, at Sib on 15 July. His Highness was very confident of support from surrounding tribes. But soon, on 26 July, it became clear to him after returning to Muscat, leaving his son Taimur in charge of Seeb, that he could not depend on the support of some of these tribes. For example, the Bani Jabir [Jabry] tribe and es Syabyeen [Seyaby] supported the Sultan, because they wanted only money and ammunition, but after receiving them they refused to meet his enemies, and the position of the *Le-Jenebeh* and the *Bani Bu-Ali* was similar. The Sultan evidently had not realised the extent of his, and his son's unpopularity, but he did so when all his

149. Gertrude Bell, *The Arab War* (1940). pp. 31-32.

150. Baily, *Records*, p. 559.

151. *Ibid.*

hopes had been dashed!

The Sultan however, communicated with the Imam and the revolt leaders to try to settle matters. The reply came that if peace needed to be achieved, "(a) the agreement on arms between the Sultan and the British must be scrapped; (b) Wadi Semail, Nakhal and Sur should belong to the Imam exclusively; (c) Customs duties at all ports should be reduced to the rates in force in the days of Imam Azzan; (d) the Sultan and his sons should promote good and prohibit evil to the best of their ability"¹⁵². The Sultan rejected the Imam's terms, but he weakened his position still more in the interior of the country. On 4 August Nakhal was taken by the rebels, and Ahmed bin Ibrahim, of the Albu Sa'eed ruling family, was persuaded by his father's old ally *Eyseh bin Saleh* to make his allegiance to the Imam. Ahmed, who became Minister of Interior during the reign of Sultan Sa'eed bin Taimur 1932-1970), was the son of Ibrahim and grandson of Imam Azzan, (see Ch. 3, Sec. 2, 3)¹⁵³. The situation became bleak and unmanageable. During the ceasefire, in August, 400 British troops arrived in response to the request of the Sultan as mentioned above. On 3 September men of 102nd King Edward's Own Grenadiers under the command of Lt. Col. S. M. Edwardes arrived to reinforce the British garrison¹⁵⁴. On 18 September, *The Times* made a lengthy article and regarded the revolution in Oman as to cause perplexity to the British Government which had all the picturesqueness of a minor rebellion in the Middle East. "It is one more symptom of the new stirring of the spirit and searching of heart which after centuries of isolation, is again bringing the Arabian peninsula into the arena of international politics"¹⁵⁵. *The Times* linked the Omani rising with that of Ibn Saud's victories in Arabia, "If Ibn Saud could conquer half Arabia why should not old claimants revive their efforts to seize the tottering throne of Oman"¹⁵⁶? But from the defence's side *The Times* said "The best defence of

152. *Ibid.*

153. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 169.

154. Arch. Eds., *Persian Gulf*. p. 105; Baily, *Records*, p. 561.

155. *The Times*, 18 Sep. 1913.

156. *Ibid.*

Muscat are still its own formidable mountains. They form an almost impregnable landward barrier to this Arabian Gibraltar, and only by one difficult path can access be gained to the regions beyond". *The Times* went on, "We have very special interest at Muscat, based chiefly upon document drafted in 1891-2, the contents of which are well known to the foreign Governments concerned. Fourteen years ago a British squadron entered the harbour and threatened to blow the Sultan's palace to bits if the rights acquired under this agreement were violated." *The Times* said "The Sultan at once gave the desired undertaking, and ever since has maintained the most cordial relations with the British Government. He had acquiesced in all our wishes about the pledges he has made to us. These very pledges have been used as a pretext to influence his subjects against him. He is now in a position of embarrassment and danger, and not unnaturally looks to us for aid"¹⁵⁷. *The Times* wrote details about the Sultan's retreat in disarray to his capital. Despite that the rebels in the beginning did not dare to attack the coast, because they had a 'wholesome dread' of the British warships guns but they are not likely to refrain for ever from following up their victories. *The Times* regarded the concerns of this uprising as seeds of an awkward difficulty for Great Britain¹⁵⁸.

The Imam sent a letter to the Political Agent on 2 October, explaining why the revolution had occurred and making some interesting points: "We inform your honour that the people of Oman have agreed by common consent to depose their Sultan, and have assembled to rise against him disliking the innovations he has brought about in Islam," the Imam said, "by contravening the *Shari'a*'s [Islamic law] commands and committing what was forbidden therein and setting the people against one another". Thereby, His Holiness said, "disturbances are rife in the country and the order of things is disturbed, crimes have been committed, blood has been shed, property looted, legal punishment dispensed with and rights

157. *Ibid.*

158. *Ibid.*

destroyed". Thereupon, he said, "the Moslems felt shame for the sake of their religion and were angered on account of what they saw of corruption. So they assembled and agreed on this happy (rebellion) and hoped thereby to secure the reform of their country and people"¹⁵⁹.

In the midst of this revolt and in the evening of 4 October 1913 Sultan Faisal, after a dramatic life, unexpectedly died of dropsy. He was about 48 years of age and was succeeded by his son, His Highness Sayid Taimur.

The Political Agent replied to the Imam. He first informed him of Sultan Faisal's death, saying that it had been a source of gratification to him to note from the friendly communication which His Highness the new Sultan, Taimur had shown him "that a pillar of the Abadhi religion, Shaik Abdulla bin Humaid As-salmi, has not ceased to offer his counsels of wisdom and humanity, and this encourages me in the hope that the clouds which have unfortunately arisen between the people and the ruler in the latter days of Sayid Faisal bin Turki may be dispelled and the tribes may reach a good understanding with his successor"¹⁶⁰.

After the death of Faisal a new situation had emerged and some calmness returned. Sultan Taimur was not interested in confrontations with the rebels and decided to initiate some reforms in Muscat, for example, prohibiting prostitution, public alcohol drinking and smoking. He warned the local authorities at Mutrah of the consequences of corruption, for example, and taking bribes. Justice was promised for everyone in the society. These reforms were part of the rebels' demands¹⁶¹. Despite this he did not touch the main reason for the rebellion, the arms selling. However, this gave a good chance for Abu Dhabi to play a positive role in the matter. On 3 November His Highness Sheik Hamadan bin Zayid [bin] Khalifah [Al Nehyyan] of Abu Dhabi arrived in Muscat to attempt mediation between the Sultan and the Imam. On 18 November Sheik Hamdan bin Zayid, accompanied by certain chiefs of *Hhawasenah*, and *Bani bu HHasen*, left for Seeb

159. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 169.

160. Arch. Eds., *Records*, p. 561.

161. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 170.

to meet Sheikh *E,yseh bin Saleh* for a peace conference there. But the remaining rebel leaders refused to join. However, Sheikh Hamdan's efforts to achieve peace negotiations brought some results¹⁶². On 9 December Sheikh E,yseh bin Saleh and his brother Ali paid a visit to His Highness the Sultan at Muscat and were treated with much honour and respect. A hollow truce was agreed to enable both sides to think over matters, and it was agreed that neither party should break the peace for a period of two months. Abu Dhabi in fact succeeded in bringing calm to the situation, and peace for Oman. His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zaid's efforts were so successful that the presence of the wing of the 2nd Rajput Light Infantry was no longer considered necessary at Bait al Falaj. They were sent to Bombay by steamer on 29 December. Sheikh Hamdan remained in Muscat till the end of the year 1913.

Towards the end of January 1914, and about four months after the death of Sultan Faisal, the leader of the religious party, Sheikh Abdullah bin Humaid as-Salmi, also died. After January 1914 no significant developments took place till April when H. M. S. *Fox*, and H. M. S. *Dartmouth* bombarded Berka and Qurayyat. This action may have provoked the rebels but it was not until August 1914 that hostile activities started again. By the end of 1914, around November and December, the Imam worked to recruit men in a desire to attack Muscat, and the Sheiks who joined the movement undertook to supply quotas of men at their own expense. Now it looked as if the rebels did not mean merely to threaten; it looked as if they meant business at last. The authorities in Muscat regarded the situation as a serious threat requiring serious measures. What makes this event of great significance is its coincidence with the First World War of 1914. How far was it a coincidence, and how did Britain react to it?

162. Archs. Eds., *Persian Gulf*, Vol. VII. (1912-1920), p.105, has a misleading reference to Khalifah, who was grandfather of Shaikh Hamdan, giving him as a family title 'Hamdan al Khalifah', mixing up a title, which is not for the rulers of Abu Dhabi, but Bahrain. The title of Abu-Dhabi's rulers is Al-Nahayyaan; the mistake is repeated on p. 103; and in Baily, *Records of Oman* vol. II p. 561, identifying the (Sultan) Saiyid Faisal as Saiyid 'Fazal' bin Turkey.

Conclusion

The arms suppression policy in fact brought political loss to Britain all over the Gulf. The aim of limiting frontier conflict in the north of India failed, while conflict was extended to the Gulf, and dangerously so in Oman. On the Indian subcontinent it appeared that the Indian National Congress had become far more dangerous than those nomad aggressive Afghan tribes and the Baluchis against which the arms suppression policy was aimed. The emergence of Germany in one sense served the interests of British policy in the Gulf and India. The appearance of German power threatened not only Britain but its two great opponents, France and Russia, whose interests forced them into general cooperation with Britain. Had it not been for events in Europe France and Russia could have been expected to exploit the dramatic events in the Gulf, Persia and Oman regardless of British interests. France stood to gain from the uprising in Oman, as did Russia from conditions in Persia and Afghanistan. So the First World War served Britain in the Gulf because her entente with her rivals France and Russia became an alliance. At the same time the German alliance with the unpopular Turks weakened their influence with the Arabs to Britain's advantage. All these coincident complications did something to reduce the dangers to which the British position in the Gulf, Oman and Persia had become exposed in the early years of the twentieth century. As one writer pointed out, British supremacy in the Gulf "was a flash in the pan; not the inevitable result of a steady program of historic advance, but an accident of war. Within a few years it had disappeared; Britain could not retain control over the regional powers"¹⁶³.

163. Alvin J. Cottrell (ed.), *The Persian Gulf: a General Survey*, (Baltimore, Md. 1980), p.59.

FINAL CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

On 7 January 1915, 300 rebels gathered at *Muthaddemat* in *Sayh-edhaby*, (now called *El-Aamerat*, where a satellite station is currently situated), and on the following day *Lu-wteyyeh* was raided (where the Oman police stables and Khowlah Maternity Hospital are now). The Imam and Sheikh *Himyar* of the *Jabal-el-Akhdar* (the Green Mountain) reached *Bosher*, and the Sheikh E,yseh made his way to *Le-Khuwair* (where most of the Governmental buildings are situated now). It was said that Himyar had been the sword arm while E,yseh had been the brains of Omani rule. As a result all the outposts of the capital Muscat came under rebel control, and from the land the city was surrounded, while the rebel forces increasingly concentrated at *Lu-wteyyeh*. Colonel Edwardes suggested to the Sultan that in order to protect Mutrah, a section of the outpost line nearest the sea should be taken by those of the Sultan's forces armed from the A,amree tribes. The rebel attack on the capital's outposts was started early in the morning of 10th January. The protection of Mutrah was assigned to a small picket of the A,amrees who took up position on the west hills of *Daarsait*, on the east of *Saih-el-Maalah* but soon fled in panic at the sound of gunfire. At 6.30 p.m. another small picket stationed on the heights of A,yint behind the Eastern hills of *Darsait* on the west of Mutrah, was driven out, after two hours shelling. The hills fell under rebel control at night and the situation became most dangerous. The following morning on the 11th, early at 6.30, Colonel A. C. Edwardes gave orders for the hills to be retaken and cleared of rebels. A serious engagement took place between the Omani rebels and the British army. Captain S. B. Coates was wounded in the heavy fighting but managed to keep going. Due to the modern machine guns, and to better training of the British troops, the rebels, who were mainly tribal, were defeated after heavy fighting. The ridges and the passes were cleared and the rebels retreated to Sad Ruwi (now on the roundabout of two junctions from *Al-Nahdah* Hospital to *Seyh-El-Dhaby* and to *lu-wtayyeh*). Sheikh

defeated⁴. The Sultan proposed pursuing the rebels, but he was dissuaded from such a risky course by the Political Agent. A month later, the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who had become very familiar with the Muscat question during the Brussels Conference of 1908, tried to persuade the Sultan to come to terms with the Imam. This suggestion probably arose from the circumstances of the First World War. The Viceroy offered the services of the Political Agent as mediator. The situation of the rebels in Oman, however, was still very strong and they were holding the key points in the country. Their defeat in Muscat was only partial, since they still ruled most of the country, with the Sultan isolated in his two towns, Muscat and Mutrah.

The rising moreover assumed a religious character with the Imam preaching a *Jihad*⁵. The rebels' heavy losses aroused resentment which would be difficult to allay⁶. Since, according to the Kur'aan, fighting was 'imposed on Muslims for the cause of God' and 'those who fight in the cause of God, and die are alive, and with their Lord', the Imam would not need much effort to convince the *El-Muslemeen* to fight against the *Al-kuffar* (blasphemers), and to convince them that their death would constitute martyrdom. At the same time, during the First World War, British ships were not, as was usual in peace time, within a few hours call of Muscat⁷. The Omani Imam seems not to have relied only on local support but tried to cash in on the international situation during the war, and to search for alliances. British sources reported that early in the war, probably in 1914, the Imam of Oman wrote to the Imam Yahya [Hameed-ud^deen?] of Yemen and to the Turkish Wali there, Sa'eed Basha, asking for their assistance. He wrote to them again in 1916, repeating his first request. The Imam of Yemen

4. Murphy, *Soldiers*, p.135; Peterson, J. E., 'The Rival of The Ibadi Imamate In Oman And The Threat To Muscat 1913-1920', *Arabian Studies*, III (1976), p. 171; G. J. Eccles, 'The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman' *J. C. A. S.* 14 (1927), p. 23.

5. It seems that the Jihad was not always to defend Islam against other religions but it could be also used against local Muslim rulers if their government was believed to be based on injustice or breach of Islamic laws.

6. Bell, *Arab War*, p. 22.

7. *Ibid*

and the Turks replied to him that he might expect the arrival of 10,000 men from the Turkish army, stationed in Yemen, to come by sea. Three messengers from Yemen arrived in Oman via Mukalla in Hadramaut (now South Yemen) and then via Sur on the Eastern coast of Oman. In March 1917, it was reported that three Turkish Agents travelling in Oman tried to stir up the Omanis to attack the British. But it appeared that there were differences between the Turkish aims and those of the Omani Imam⁸.

Moreover German intervention and encouragement to the rebels in Oman were alleged⁹. The Germans who were in alliance with the Turks, were accused of provoking the disturbances and outrages against British authorities in the region, and of undermining British influence and prestige by every means within their power. They even claimed that William II had been converted to the Muslim faith and had changed his name to *Haji Ghuloom!*.

German propaganda was so effective that it induced the Prime Minister of Persia to sign a secret treaty promising Germany the full support of the Persian government. This was so dangerous that it obliged the British Government to intervene in Persian affairs¹⁰.

In Oman the unrest may have been assisted by German agents¹¹. The Germans soon began to exploit the situation. Their "agents were reported among the tribes originating, it was said, from Dar al Salam and distributing money through Sur and Sharqyyah"¹². If that was true, then it is interesting to note that the Omani people had left behind their French friends and became allies of the Germans, but in fact the evidence for this is slight. Even if it was true the British would have to take some blame for it, as they did not realize the consequences of their policy. Their only method of persuasion was the exercise of power, and their interests were so manifestly selfish.

8. Arch. Eds., *The Persian Gulf*, vol. vii, 1912-1920. p. 47.

9. John Marlowe *The Persian Gulf In The Twentieth Century*, (1962) p. 76.

10. Terence Creagh Coan, *The Indian Political Service*, (1971) pp. 228-229.

11. *Ibid*; Murphy, *The soldiers*, p. 134.

12. Peterson, *Revival*, p. 172.

In a confidential letter, dated 14 October 1920 to the Government of India, R. E. Wingate, the Political Agent at Muscat, wrote that "a brief perusal of the treaties and engagements with the rulers of Muscat will show that our influence has been entirely self-interested, has paid no regard to the peculiar political and social conditions of the country and its rulers, and by bribing effete Sultans to enforce unpalatable measures which benefited none but ourselves, and permitting them to misrule without protest has done more to alienate the interior and to prevent the Sultans from re-establishing their authority than all the rest put together". He said, "it has been support wrongly applied, in money and not in essentials, interference in external affairs which must have seriously reacted upon internal peace and no palliative except money which was thrown into the sea or worse by those into whose hands we put it". He declared that, "the result was that we were reduced to the absurd position of supporting by armed force under our treaty obligations a ruler against whom most of his subjects were in open rebellion, who was theoretically independent and yet who would be driven into the sea in a day if it were not for us¹³".

But there was still time left for concession, and to do what was necessary to bring about agreement between the Sultan and the Imam after seven long and exhausting years. The Imam had lost one of his major supporters, Sheikh Himyar bin Nasser, whose son Sheikh Sulaiman bin Himyer, was an inexperienced boy (Sulaiman later fought against Sultan Sa'eed bin Taimur during the 50s at the time of the Jabel war). Moreover, the Imam's leadership of the revolution did not make him immune to political opposition in his own area, especially given characteristic Omani intolerance of their rulers. The Imam was murdered in Al Khadrah on 21 July 1920. It was stated that the cause of his assassination was an insult to one of his guards. But it was said that the real reason was that he angered the tribes against his rule and that of his brother, by imposing penal *zakats* (taxes) on them. A new Imam was elected. He was Imam Mohammed bin Abdullah el Khalily,

13. Baily, *Records*, vol. 3, p. 199.

(relative of the present high *Mufty* of Oman Sheikh *Ahmed el-Khalily*) and during his period of office a peace conference took place in es-Seeb in 1920, between his party and the Government of the Sultan.

"This is what has been agreed upon in the settlement between the Government of Sultan Sayid Taimur bin Faisal and Sheikh Isa bin Ali al-Harthi on behalf of the Omanis who sign their names here through the mediation of Mr. Wingate, I. C. S., Political Agent and His Britannic Majesty's Consul, Muscat, who is authorized by his government in this respect to be a mediator between them." The Agreement stated four conditions for the Omanis. 1- On all commodities brought from Oman to Muscat, Mutrah, Sur and the coast towns nothing more should be taken than 5%. 2- for all the Omanis there should be safety and freedom in all the coast towns. 3- All restrictions on entry to and exit from Muscat, Mutrah and all the coast towns should be removed. 4- The Sultan's Government should not protect criminals who flee from the justice of the Omanis and that they may be returned if asked for and that the Sultan's Government should not interfere in their internal affairs."

The sultan's conditions; "1- All the tribes and sheiks should remain in peace and amity with the Government of the Sultan and that they should not attack the coast towns and should not interfere in his Government. 2- All travellers to Oman on their lawful business should be free and there should be no restriction on trade, and travellers should be safe. 3- All criminals and evil men who flee to them should be turned out and should not be protected. 4- The claims of merchants and others against the Omanis should be heard and decided as is just according to the shar,a".

The agreement was signed on 25 September 1920 by Sheikh E,yseh bin Saleh on behalf of *Imam el Muslemeen* Mohammed bin Abdullah el-Khalily, and other tribal leaders, and signed by the Wazeer Mohammad bin Ahmed on behalf of H. H. The Sultan¹⁴. This treaty seemed to establish implicitly two

14. For more details about the Seeb treaty see *Records of Oman*, vol. 3, p 198 f-211, an

Governments, one for the Imam and another for the Sultan. *The Times* called it "autonomy to the people of hinterland"¹⁵. The Imamate was to exist in Oman till the fifties, when the last Imam Ghalib bin Ali, who had succeeded the Imam el Khalily, revolted against the Sultan Sa'eed bin Taimur, in a dispute because of an oil rights exploration concession by the latter to an oil company into an area regarded as belonging to the Imam, thus breaching the Seeb agreement. The Imam was forced into exile in Saudi Arabia. He used the Seeb agreement as evidence of Oman's independence, involving various foreign powers in long debates in the UN assembly in New York throughout the 50s and the 60s.

An interesting point is that there was no mention in the agreement of the arms trade, probably because matters had changed in the seven years since the Omanis had revolted against the establishment of the warehouse.

It may be recalled that in the 13th century the sea coast of Oman was part of the Kingdom of Hurmuz, while Oman proper remained under the local Imams, while from the mid-16th century till the mid-17th century the Hurmuzian kingdom was dominated by the Portuguese, while Oman proper remained unscathed. Greater Oman enjoyed unity only under the Ya'aarebeh Imams. Now in 1920 political conditions seemed to have reverted to the days of the Hurmuzians and the Portuguese. The Omani Sultans, like their earliest predecessors, were left to rule the coastal towns, and the Imams ruled the interior of the country till the 1950s, when Sultan Sa'eed bin Taimur of Muscat, with British assistance, defeated the Imam Ghalib bin Ali of Oman, and forced him into exile. Thus Oman was again unified under the sultanate.

Britain realized the risks of continued turbulence in Oman from which altogether unexpected events might flow. The international situation after the First World War was transformed. New challenges to Britain had emerged, not France now but Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union and the U. S. A. There was

Arabic version of which also can be found.

15. *The Times*, 20 Jan. 1920.

also the expansion of the Saudi State, and the modern fanatic Islamic and Arab national movements during the 20s. Oman seemed to have become part and parcel of an extended North-West Frontier, active no less on the North-West of India (Afghanistan) than to the North of the Gulf, and then the Middle East as whole. The main danger was to come from Turkey and Germany, till after the Second World War, when the danger to British interests appeared to come from the Soviet Union during the 50s, and until the early 80s, in other words from the cold war to the Glasnost and Perestroyka of Mr Gorbachov. The Gulf itself now became important for Britain less for its strategic position in relation to India than for its mineral wealth. Oil reserves were quickly tapped, the first Anglo-Iranian Oil Company agreement having been signed in 1914. British policy in the Gulf started to concentrate on defending the oil wealth from any greedy power which might become interested in wresting it from British hands. After the Second World War, the danger to the oil reserves was seen as coming from the Soviet Union, despite the fact that the Soviets themselves had plenty of oil. However, despite oil becoming the first item on the agenda for Britain in the Gulf, the Gulf's strategic position between the West and the East, acquired further significance for Britain, especially after their withdrawal from India, and after the creation of Pakistan on the old North-West Frontiers of the Indian Empire during the late 40s. So if there should be any danger from the Afghans, it would no longer threaten India but rather Pakistan. The Russians themselves were still far from the warm waters of the Indian Ocean but they were not so far from the Persian Gulf. On the whole eastern coastline of the Gulf is situated Iran, the country behind whose north-eastern border lie the southern Republics of the USSR, and we saw (in the introductory chapter) how the situation in Georgia affected Persia during 1630s and subsequently its position in the Gulf. This made the Gulf strategically important to Great Britain and even for all other European powers, on account of the sea and air routes between east and west throughout the whole period of the Cold War. Despite Britain's role in many progressive political changes in the

Persian Gulf countries during the Cold War, British influence was increasingly replaced by that of the USA, in some parts. The Gulf countries, including Oman, followed Western policy in general against the USSR and were caught up in the Cold War era. Whether the Persian Gulf will remain important for Great Britain and the west as a whole after the end of the Cold War era and the German reunification, what the implication of the new international situation will be for the situation in the Gulf countries, and which of them will be crucial to international developments are questions for the future. One thing seems clear. The quasi-feudalism, absolute monarchies and dictatorships of the region offer a fertile breeding ground for religious, political, and national fanaticism alike, with potentially catastrophic effects at local and international levels.

Continuance of the British-Omani relationship would be one stable element in a rapidly changing world, and would be of mutual benefit to the peoples of both countries in numerous ways. The British can learn from the Omani experience of the complexity of Islam and of a society with mixed religious and cultural traditions. The Omanis can learn from the British experience of the Welfare State and of democratic institutions at local and national level.

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