PREFACE

The nineteenth century history of Oman has already been the subject of certain works. When the time came for a selection of a topic for PhD. research, Oman was a natural choice. This was because of the fact that I had spent my childhood in Oman which had led to my general interest in West Asia. The late nineteenth century was more preferable than any other period because of the changes that were taking place in the political and economic situation of Oman. But the debate on Oman’s situation during this period appeared to be closed with the works of Calvin Allen and Reda M. Bhacker. The question was what could a new work put forward apart from the arguments that had already been brought out in previous studies? This was when my attention was drawn to the wide body of literature on the societies in the Indian Ocean littoral. These works have looked at maritime communities rather than states to explain the dynamic of this vast region. Omani history has been mostly explained from the perspective of the ruling dynasty. The purpose of this work is to identify elements other than the state which would have influenced the politics and economy of Oman during the late nineteenth century. It is also an attempt to place Oman in the world-system debate and understand the nature of Oman’s economic decline in the late nineteenth century beyond the explanations that have been already provided.

The first three chapters will cover the domestic politics of Oman from 1856 to 1900 in a detailed manner. Non-state elements which influenced Oman’s domestic politics will be identified and their links with East Africa will be looked at. The Ibadi Imamate that lasted from 1868 to 1871 will not be seen merely as a product of dynastic rivalry or a combination of Ibadi conservative and tribal machinations. The role of non-state elements in the Imamate which had connections beyond Oman will be studied. The fourth chapter will try to understand the nature of British imperial influence in Oman with particular focus on the political and cultural role of British India. The last chapter will then see how the various elements like the ruling dynasty, the British, the Indian merchants and the non-state networks can be placed in the modern world-system.