CHAPTER-I

CUT DOWN TO SIZE: OMAN UNDER THUWAINI BIN SAID AND SALIM BIN THUWAINI (1856-1868)
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Introduction

The period immediately following the death of Said bin Sultan was very crucial for the future of Oman's maritime empire. The fact that Said had divided authority among his sons further complicated matters. Said's position in the Gulf was weak because of the restrictions imposed by the British on the use of force in the waters of the Gulf by any of the powers in the region. Because Said had shifted his capital to Zanzibar, his influence in Oman itself had declined. During his lifetime, there were various challenges to his authority in Oman. From within the Al Bu Saidi dynasty, there were threats from the descendents of Qays bin Ahmad, a son of the first Al Bu Saidi ruler of Oman, Ahmad bin Said. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Wahhabis under the Saudi state in Najd had begun to conduct raids into Oman. They also began to intervene in Omani politics with the help of allies in Oman. Finally, there were tribal forces in interior Oman who challenged the authority of Said. All of these challenges became acute when Thuwaini bin Said became the ruler at Muscat after the death of Said bin Sultan.

This chapter will look at Oman under Thuwaini bin Said and his son Salim bin Thuwaini from 1856 to 1868. One of the biggest challenges that Thuwaini faced was the independence of Zanzibar under Sultan Majid bin Said. The British were an important factor in the dispute between Muscat and Zanzibar. During this period, Turki bin Said, a son of Said bin Sultan and ruler of Sohar, disputed Thuwaini's authority. Omani politics during this phase witnessed a strange concoction of alliances including the Wahhabis and conservative Ibadi elements attempting to overthrow the Al Bu Saidi's at Muscat. There were also strong tribal personalities like Salih bin Ali. Said bin Sultan's last act before his death was his attempt to secure his position in the Gulf. Said's successor at Muscat, who was also regent at the port during Said's long absences at Zanzibar, realised that Oman no longer had the kind of influence in the Gulf that it had during the late eighteenth century.
The Situation in the Gulf and the Makran Coast

Till 1854, the port of Bandar Abbas and its island dependencies of Qishm, Minab, Hanjam and Hormuz had been taken on lease by Oman on a long term basis from Persia. Muscat had the right to farm the customs at Bandar Abbas and the territory from this port eastwards until a place called Sudeij was under its control. Chahbar and Gwadur were directly under Omani control and the latter port had an Al Busaidi governor. These territorial possessions were a legacy of Oman's maritime strength in the Gulf during the eighteenth century. A number of factors led to the decline of Oman's influence in the Gulf during the early years of Said bin Sultan's rule. The prime reason was the restrictions put by the British on the use of the waters of the Gulf for military purposes by the powers in the region which was set down in a treaty signed between the British and the maritime tribes of the Gulf in 1853. According to scholars like Calvin Allen and Reda M. Bhacker, Oman's weakened influence in the Gulf was the major reason why Said bin Sultan shifted his base to Zanzibar. The Persians emerged in strength during the 1850s and began an eastward expansion which initiated a change in Oman's position in the Gulf. In 1854, the Persians expelled the Omani government and garrison from Bandar Abbas. Thuwaini who was ruling Muscat on behalf of his father recaptured it, but

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3 In May 1853, a treaty was signed between Arab maritime tribes in the Gulf, whose territories would today comprise the United Arab Emirates, and the British which sought to prevent warfare in the waters of the Gulf. In case of any aggression at sea, no retaliation was to be taken and reference was to be made to the British authorities who would ensure the peace at sea. The origin of this treaty was a truce entered into by the sheikhs of the tribes for a period of six months mainly around the waters of Bahrain in 1835. It was renewed during the following years for eight months annually until 1843. In 1843 the truce was renewed for ten years until the 1853 treaty for perpetual peace was signed. After this treaty, the territories of the sheikhs who signed the deal came to be called the Trucial Coast. Before the 1853 treaty, there was a treaty signed in 1820 between the British and the maritime tribes, the purpose of which was the prevention of piracy. Bahrain also signed the 1820 treaty with the British though it signed a treaty with British similar to the 1853 one only in 1861. The 1853 treaty was important for the British as a large number of British Indian subjects had invested in the pearl trade and suffered losses due to attacks by the maritime tribes.
5 Badger to Forbes, n. 1, p. 633.
it was retaken by the Persians.⁶ Said bin Sultan arrived from Zanzibar to Muscat to launch a counter attack against the Persians. But the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, Captain Felix Jones, who was seated at Bushire, prevented the Bani Yas tribe from joining the forces of Said in his campaign against the Persians.

As Said could not use all the resources at his disposal to stop the Persians, he was forced to conclude an agreement with the latter in very disadvantageous terms. The annual charge for the farm of Bandar Abbas was raised from 6,000 to 16,000 tomars. The islands of Hormuz and Qishm were ceded to the Persians. By this agreement Said bin Sultan bound himself and his successors to protect not just Bandar Abbas but also the islands of Hormuz and Qishm over which Oman had no suzerainty and also not to allow the agent of any foreign government to pass through these territories. The actions of the British Resident in the Persian Gulf ironically worked against the interests of the British as successive Sultans of Oman had allowed the British to establish and maintain a naval station at Qishm and also to construct a fort at Bandar Abbas. This incident was an example of how individual British officials often acted contrary to wider British strategic interests. George Percy Badger, who was in charge of the Muscat-Zanzibar Commission, in his letter to the Governor of Bombay, criticised the decision of the British Resident in the Gulf and reminded him that the Persians were the enemy of the British during this period.⁷

Another event that was to affect Oman’s territorial possessions in the region was the extension of a British telegraph line from India to Egypt across Persia and the Gulf in order to establish better communication with London. This resulted in rival claims over Gwadur were a telegraph station was to be established. The Khan of Kelat made claims over Gwadur. As the telegraph line approached Gwadur from Karachi, the Persians threatened and raided Gwadur in 1863 and the port was protected by a British detachment from a gunboat. Though attempts by the Persians to takeover Gwadur were thwarted,

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⁶ Wilkinson, n. 6, p. 354.
⁷ Badger to Forbes, 5th June 1861, Aden, MSA, PD, Vol. 38, # 1038, 1863, p. 175.
they made claims over Chahbar and Gwadur. The Persians finally waived their claims to Gwadur while concluding the Telegraph Convention of 1868, but the claims over Chabar remained. The British preferred that Gwadur be controlled by a friendly ally like Oman because of the presence of the telegraph station. While British protection was vital in maintaining Omani control over Gwadur, it created a situation where the British could easily prevent Omani access to the port if a hostile regime came to power at Muscat. It is noticeable here that Britain was only concerned with the issue of Gwadur while they were not interested in ensuring Omani control over Bandar Abbas and Chahbar. Prevented from defending its interests in the Gulf and on the Makran coast through the sea, Oman’s hold on its territories continued to weaken.

Dispute between Muscat and Zanzibar

Zanzibar was the most important territory of Oman’s maritime empire during the time of Said Bin Sultan’s death. The earlier Yarubi rulers and Al Bu Saidi rulers before Said bin Sultan had only appointed walis in the islands and ports in East Africa under Oman’s suzerainty and had not made attempts to bring that region under strong centralised control. It was Said bin Sultan who brought Zanzibar and its dependencies under his direct influence by waging a series of military campaigns so that he could partake of Zanzibar’s commercial prosperity. When Said’s influence in the Gulf declined, he shifted his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar. Zanzibar or rather the control over Zanzibar became an important issue in Al Bu Saidi dynasty politics after Said’s death in 1856. The politics of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty immediately after the death of Said bin Sultan was rife with uncertainty. While Said bin Sultan was the ruler of Oman and its territories, there was lack of clarity about who would exactly succeed him. Said bin Sultan had also divided authority in the same manner as his grandfather, Ahmad bin Said.

While Majid was given the responsibility of running affairs at Zanzibar, Thuwaini was the naib or deputy ruler at Muscat and Turki was the wali or governor at Sohar. The

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10 Badger to Forbes, n. 1, p. 632.
youngest son, Barghash was a constant companion of Said during the 1850s without any specific authority. Thus at the time of Said’s death, a dispute was bound to rise between his sons about who would succeed him. Said had died at sea on the way to Zanzibar. He had been accompanied by his son Barghash. When Said’s body was brought on shore, Barghash tried to use this opportunity to grab power at Zanzibar with the support of Abdullah bin Salim of the Barawina clan who had been taken as a hostage by Said during his travels to ensure the loyalty of his people. But Barghash bin Said’s attempt was defeated due to the timely intervention of the Baluchi commander of the Zanzibar garrison and Captain A. Hamerton, the British Consul and Political Agent at Zanzibar. Majid also had the support of Zanzibar ayaan (religious and tribal notables). In Zanzibar the Barawina were a powerful clan of the al-Harthi tribe of Oman who assumed positions as governors in Zanzibar and surrounding islands. They nurtured ambitions of their own and wished to make themselves independent from the Al Bu Saidi domination of the Swahili coast. It was to ensure the compliance of the Barawina, that Said bin Sultan used to carry Abdullah bin Salim as a hostage in his company. It was a Barawina revolt after the death in 1854 of Said’s son Khalid, who was the governor of Zanzibar that prompted Said to hastily conclude his negotiations with the Persians over Bandar Abbas and rush back to Zanzibar.

Until Said’s death, there had been a traditional manner in which succession was carried out in Oman. Rheda Bhacker in his work, Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar quotes the statement of Hilal bin Muhammad Albusaidi, the wali of Suwaiq, made in 1859 to British Consul of Zanzibar, Christopher Rigby regarding this traditional method of succession. According to Hilal, on the death of a ruler, his sons disputed the succession and the one who had most influence with the tribes or who showed signs of being an efficient leader was elected. No law of primogeniture was recognised. Certain events before the death of Said bin Sultan provided the British an opportunity to involve in the

11 Bhacker, n. 4, p. 179.
13 Bhacker, n. 4, p. 181.
practice of succession in Oman. Said had appointed his eldest son, Hilal as the governor of Zanzibar. When Hilal fell into disfavour with Said, the latter replaced him with Khalid. Hilal then went to London to win the support of the British, in response to which Said bin Sultan sent a letter to Lord Aberdeen, who was the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, stating that while Khalid would be the ruler of his territories in Africa, Thuwaini would be the ruler of all his possessions in Oman, the Gulf and the coast of Persia. Said did so in order to ensure that Hilal would not be favoured in any manner in the event of his death rather than try to ensure a formal partition of his territories. Nevertheless, these events finally ensured British involvement in any succession dispute after Said’s death. ¹⁵

It has been argued that Said himself did not consider the territories under Oman’s control as parts of a homogenous empire. But as long as the ruler of Muscat had the loyalty of the tribes in Zanzibar, he wielded political control over those areas. As Thuwaini was the ruler of Muscat, an inability on his part to win the loyalty of the local tribes in Zanzibar and enforce his control in that area would ultimately weaken the Omani state’s influence in East Africa. In 1856, Thuwaini bin Said succeeded Said bin Sultan as the ruler of Oman while Majid, with the support of the local elites became the ruler in Zanzibar. Thuwaini despatched Muhammad bin Salim Al Bu Saidi, the eldest son of Said bin Sultan’s elder brother, ¹⁶ as an emissary to Majid for an amicable settlement of the succession dispute. Muhammad bin Salim deceived both Majid and Thuwaini by delivering news favourable to each of them. Majid agreed that he would send Maria Theresa dollars 40,000 as an annual gift to Oman and promised that he was willing to send extra funds in the belief that Thuwaini recognised him as the sovereign of Zanzibar. Thuwaini agreed to the agreement with Majid in the belief that the said amount was a tribute from Zanzibar to Muscat and that Majid accepted him as suzerain of Zanzibar and its dependencies. ¹⁷

¹⁷ L/P&S/18/B150a, “Brigadier Coghlan’s Report”, “Chapter II: Arbitration of Government of India”, “Precis of Correspondence Relating to Zanzibar Affairs from 1856 to 1872”, “Chapter 3: The Zanzibar
Thuwaini was also made to agree to cease from hostilities with Turki bin Said, Thuwaini’s rival brother who was ruler of Sohar, and also to pay Turki MT$ 10,000 annually from the amount provided by Majid.\textsuperscript{18} The Wahhabis had demanded a yearly tribute of Maria Theresa $ 20,000 from Oman and Thuwaini had great difficulty in arranging the amount.\textsuperscript{19} Thuwaini was to pay MT$ 10,000 to the Wahhabis from money provided by Majid while he was to keep the remaining MT$ 20,000. Thuwaini was dependent on financial help from Zanzibar as the revenues of Muscat were much less than those of Zanzibar and Said bin Sultan had been in the habit of assisting the Muscat treasury with remittances from Zanzibar.\textsuperscript{20} There was also an understanding to divide the horses in Oman in a satisfactory manner between the two sovereigns.\textsuperscript{21}

Initially, Rigby claimed that Turki was given the money so that he could pay the tribute to the Wahhabis. He reported to his superiors that when Muhammad bin Salim was leaving for Muscat from Zanzibar, he was the paid the first half year’s allowance, which was MT$ 20,000, of which 5000 were for Turki, to enable him to pay the tribute due to the Wahhabi leader in Sohar. But Thuwaini did not pay the amount meant for Turki and he kept whole sum for himself.\textsuperscript{22} Rigby corrected himself later and stated that Majid could never insist Thuwaini to pay Turki any money as the latter two were on bad terms and the tribute to the Wahhabis were always paid from the Muscat treasury.\textsuperscript{23} Moreover, Turki continued to receive a small allowance of MT$ 1,200 per annum from the Muscat

\textsuperscript{18} Rigby to Anderson, n. 16, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{21} Heiskel Bin Yusoof, Acting British Agent at Muscat, to H.L. Anderson, Secretary to Bombay Government, 15 Dec. 1858, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 121, # 161, 1859, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{22} Rigby to Anderson, n. 16, p. 41.
treasury which had been the practice since the time of Said bin Sultan. This made it highly unlikely that Thuwaini would agree to such a huge increase in the allowance to Turki. 24 Rigby actively supported the claims of Majid and was very much against allowing Muscat to reassert its control over Zanzibar. Following these events Majid came under severe financial strain and was unable to meet his financial obligations in the second year. As a result, Thuwaini began collaborating for the first time with Majid’s rivals in Zanzibar like Barghash. Barghash began borrowing vast sums of money from Abdullah bin Salim the Barawina leader. To obtain these sums, Barghash entered into written agreements in which Thuwaini was declared as the guarantor of the loans. 25

In the summer of 1858, Thuwaini decided to conduct a naval expedition against Zanzibar to settle the dispute in his favour. But the expedition had to be postponed until the beginning of the next year. Thuwaini provided money to the chiefs of the tribes of Oman to collect an army and fleet for the expedition. 26 At the start of the monsoon in February 1859, Thuwaini together with 2,500 armed men sailed from Muscat towards Zanzibar. 27 Most of the tribal fighters were carried on nine bughlas which were merchant vessels and left earlier than the main expedition. 28 The rest of the expedition consisted of a frigate, a large corvette, a brig and a troop ship. But before he could reach the Swahili coast, Thuwaini was intercepted off Ras al-Hadd by a British steam frigate the Punjab commanded by Griffith Jenkins, which had been despatched by the Governor of Bombay, with Lt. Col. Russell, the Governor’s Military Secretary, on board. Receiving a message from the Governor which was in the hands of Colonel Russell, Thuwaini agreed to


25 Bhacker, n. 4, p. 183.

26 Yusoofto Anderson, n. 21, p. 4.

27 Minutes by Lord John Elphinston, Governor of Bombay, 10 Feb. 1859, Bombay, MSA, PD, Vol. 121, # 161, 1859, p. 41.

submit his dispute with Majid to arbitration by the British and set sail back to Muscat. Thuwaini’s timely arrival in Muscat prevented Turki, the ruler of Sohar, to proceed with plans to invade Muscat taking advantage of his brother’s absence.

Receiving the news of Thuwaini’s expedition, extensive preparations were made in Zanzibar to defend the island. Majid equipped five warships with good armaments, and collected a force of about 20,000 men, composed of irregular Arabs, Baluchis, Makrani soldiers and in addition, he had distributed 20,000 American muskets and carbines to the African tribes and Swahilis, the Comoro men and Negro slaves. Most of the Africans detested the northern Arabs from Oman who conducted the slave trade. The population of Zanzibar were scared of and suspected the loyalty of thousand of armed slaves who had assembled from the plantations in the interior of the island as their masters, who were mostly Barawina clansmen of the al-Harthi tribe, were suspected of supporting Thuwaini.

In this context, it is interesting to look at what Colonel Rigby had to say about Majid’s popularity in Africa. According to him, Majid was more popular than his father, Sayyid Said bin Sultan, on mainland Africa and his praises were sung even on the shores of the Lake Tanganyika which was 600 miles inland. It was in such heightened state of defensive preparedness that seven of the nine bughlas who formed a part of Thuwaini’s expedition reached the island of Lamu, the governor of which prevented them from landing. Those on board the vessels suffered from cholera and small-pox due to which

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many had died. Two other bughlas were forcibly prevented from landing on different points of the coast and were forced to go directly towards Zanzibar. When they were captured and brought to the port, the people on board were in half-starved conditions.\footnote{R/15/1/163, Rigby to Anderson, 22 March 1859, Zanzibar, PD, Vol. 35, 1859, “Chapter 3: The Zanzibar Connection”, in R.W. Bailey (ed.), \textit{Records of Oman: 1867-1947 Volume I Historical Affairs to 1871}, (Buckinghamshire, England, Archive Editions, 1988), pp. 74-5.} In this manner, Thuwaini’s expedition ended in failure and he had to reluctantly agree to British arbitration between him and Majid.

In subsequent reports that Rigby wrote to his superiors in India, he complained that the French had taken advantage of British absence in Zanzibar after the death of Hamerton in July 1857 and during the whole of the summer of 1857 when the British were engaged in fighting the mutiny in India. They were accused of convincing Majid that the British had lost India and would never come back to Zanzibar.\footnote{Bhacker, n. 4, pp. 183-4.} The French were also thought to be active in instigating Majid’s enemies in Zanzibar like Barghash and the Barawina. During the investigations of the Muscat-Zanzibar Commission, these accusations against the French were proved to be not wholly right or at least not as true to the extent as claimed by Rigby.\footnote{L/P&S/18/B150a, “Brigadier Coghlan’s Report: Subordination of Zanzibar to Muscat”, “Chapter II: Arbitration of Government of India”, “Precis of Correspondence Relating to Zanzibar Affairs from 1856 to 1872”, “Chapter 3: The Zanzibar Connection” in R.W. Bailey (ed.), \textit{Records of Oman: 1867-1947 Volume I Historical Affairs to 1871}, (Buckinghamshire, England, Archive Editions, 1988), p. 113.} In response to Thuwaini’s threats against Zanzibar, Majid organised corresponding opposition activities in Oman. Majid provided money, guns and ammunition to Turki bin Said, the ruler of Sohar, when Turki began challenging Thuwaini.\footnote{Rigby to Anderson, 1 December 1859, Zanzibar, MSA, PD, Vol. 96, # 17, 1860, p. 43.}

In the aftermath of Thuwaini’s unsuccessful expedition against Zanzibar, Muhammad bin Salim once again arrived in Zanzibar in April, 1859 as Thuwaini’s envoy to collect the money that Majid had promised earlier. The subsequent events after this, including Muhammad bin Salim’s failed attempts on the orders of Thuwaini to instigate a rebellion against Majid in Zanzibar and Barghash bin Said’s revolt against Majid which was crushed with British help have been looked at in a detailed manner in Reda Bhacker’s
works. What is important for this work is the fact that a leader of the rebellious al-Harthi faction in Zanzibar, Salih bin Ali, escaped to Oman after the failure of Barghash’s rebellion. Salih bin Ali was to play a very important role in Omani politics in subsequent decades.

In June, 1860, the British formed a commission to arbitrate in the dispute between Muscat and Zanzibar and Brigadier General V.M. Coghlan, the Political Resident at Aden, was appointed to head it. The other members of the commission were Reverend P. Badger, a medical officer and Hormuzd Rassam who was the British Agent at Muscat on a temporary basis. The Commission immediately started its work on the issue and submitted two reports on the dispute in 1860. During its investigations, the Commission confirmed that Majid had succeeded Khalid on the latter’s death in November 1854 as subordinate ruler or governor of Oman’s African territories under Said bin Sultan. At the same time, Coghlan believed that Said did not want to divide his empire and that Zanzibar was a subordinate governorship under a paramount sovereign in Oman. The fact that Said bin Sultan had shifted his court to Zanzibar did not mean a change in the situation where the parent territory Oman, had primacy over Zanzibar. Also, according to the practice of succession that was followed in Oman, no ruler had the right to appoint his successor. On the ruler’s death, the most capable member of the family either put himself forward or was elected by the tribes. In this context, Majid had no right to claim himself as the sovereign of Zanzibar as being according to the wishes of Said bin Sultan as this was not the established practice.

36 Bhacker, n. 4, pp. 186-88.
40 Ibid, p. 110.
Even though the Commission initially rejected Majid’s claims of sovereignty and were against partition, they finally decided to divide Oman’s territories as the inevitable solution to the dispute between the two sides. In Bhacker’s opinion, Rigby’s activities in Zanzibar and his reports to the his superiors had contributed to such an inevitability and the state of matters between Muscat and Zanzibar had reached such a stage that Rigby’s successor in Zanzibar, Coghlan could only recommend partition to Lord Canning, the Viceroy of India. Thuwaini once complained that Britain’s partiality towards Zanzibar was because of Rigby’s lengthy reports.\(^{41}\)

On 2 April 1861, Lord Canning announced the partition of the Omani empire into two Sultanates. Zanzibar was obliged to pay to Muscat an annual subsidy of MT$ 40,000 and arrears of two years which was MT$ 80,000. Majid agreed that the first instalment of the amount, MT$20,000 would be paid on April, when south-west monsoon set in and MT$20,000 would be paid in September-October, when the annual accounts were made up and the revenue from the customs was received.\(^{42}\) The subsidy was not be seen as a tribute but in adjustment of the unequal inheritance of the two branches of the families ruling at Muscat and Zanzibar, and as compensation for the abandonment by rulers of Oman of their claims over Zanzibar. The separation of Muscat and Zanzibar was provided international acceptability when Britain and France signed an international convention on 10\(^{th}\) March 1862, in which both countries pledged to respect the sovereignty of Muscat and Zanzibar. The British government in India came to know about this agreement only a decade after it was signed.\(^{43}\)


According to Bhacker, British officials like Rigby were actively involved in trying to effect a separation between Muscat and Zanzibar as they were astonished with the huge amount of customs revenue generated at the port and resultant prosperity of Zanzibar. Separation would entail greater control over the smaller Sultanates and ensure British domination in the western Indian Ocean region. Henceforth, Muscat would only be one of the regional actors of the Gulf divorced from any maritime hegemonic ambitions. At the same time, there is a need to look at Oman’s relations with East Africa from a new perspective which will give us fresh insights into Oman’s domestic politics subsequent to 1856, the nature of its interaction with the Indian Ocean, and its relations with the British. We shall turn to these aspects in the last section of this chapter.

The Capture and Release of Turki bin Said

Among the various challenges to his authority that Thuwaini faced in Oman, was one from within the dynasty. Ever since the death of Said bin Sultan, Turki bin Said, the ruler of Sohar, had refused to accept his half-brother, Thuwaini’s authority. During the dispute between Muscat and Zanzibar, Majid had provided support to Turki. It was only after the partitioning of Oman’s territories and end of Muscat’s efforts in the direction of Zanzibar that Thuwaini could effectively try to consolidate his authority in Oman. The first threat that he tried to put down was that of Turki’s. When the Canning Award was declared in 1861 and Thuwaini was proclaimed as the sole ruler of Oman, Turki disregarded British advice and declared himself as independent. At this point, Thuwaini had called for help from the Wahhabis but none arrived. The contest between Thuwaini and Turki took place in the context of increasing British involvement in Omani domestic affairs as compared to the earlier British interventions which were mostly related to Oman’s overseas affairs. This was because of the change in the British administrative system in the Gulf that took place in the aftermath of the partitioning of Oman’s empire. As Said bin Sultan had shifted his administration to Zanzibar, British Political Agents were placed in Zanzibar while Muscat only had non-British ‘native’ agents on temporary basis. In

1861, after the separation of Zanzibar from Muscat, the British felt the need to appoint a proper representative at Muscat.

Senior Lieutenant W.M. Pengelley of the Royal Indian Navy was appointed as the Political Agent at Muscat in 1861. When he arrived at Muscat to take charge, Thuwaini was making preparations to launch an expedition against Turki at Sohar. The Sultanate's army during this time was loosely-organised which maintained a large garrison in Muscat and smaller garrisons in the forts of the major towns along the Batina, as well as in the interior whenever the Sultan had control there. Since the askaris or mercenaries were responsible to the Sultan alone, few of them were recruited from the tribes. This is with the exception of standing levies from certain tribes long regarded as allies, such as the Hawasina, the Bani Umr and the Bani Bu Hassan. Instead, most mercenaries were deliberately recruited from among non-tribals like Baluchis. Pengelley mediated between the two brothers and Turki promised to meet Thuwaini at Seeb, a town on the coast, about twenty-five miles north of Muscat, in July 1861 if Pengelley provided him an aman or pledge of safe return to Sohar. When Thuwaini promised to honour the pledge, Pengelley provided the pledge of safety to Turki.

Even after arriving at Seeb, Turki did not appear for the meeting with Thuwaini. Thuwaini inquired from Pengelley if he had the right to arrest Turki and if the aman was still in place. Pengelley replied that as Turki had not kept his promise he had withdrawn his pledge. Two of Thuwaini's armed vessels captured Turki's bughla and escorted it to Muscat and Turki was placed in closed confinement. Learning that the people of Sohar would not accept any new wali that Thuwaini might appoint, he decided to capture the

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town by force. He despatched five ships including the corvette *Rahmani* to Sohar. Thuwaini's ships were accompanied on land by a force of about a thousand cavalry and infantry. When the force reached Sohar, the forts were manned and the guns were ready but the town was entirely deserted. In response to Thuwaini's order, the town was surrendered peacefully. Thuwaini appointed his son, Salim, then about 22, as the *wali* of Sohar.49

Pengelley's actions in Oman were criticised by the Bombay government who stated that Pengelley's withdrawal of the *aman* was a breach of trust and hurt British credibility in the region.50 In February 1862, Lieutenant Pengelley was replaced by Major Green as Political Agent at Muscat. Soon after Major Green's arrival, Sayyid Turki was released from close confinement and was granted an allowance. Thuwaini managed to remove an immediate threat to his authority in 1861. But there were far serious challenges within Oman which would have graver consequences.

**The Campaign against the Wahhabis and the Assassination of Thuwaini bin Said**

During the time of Thuwaini, the biggest external danger that Oman faced was from the Wahhabis of the Najd province in Central Arabia. The Wahhabis under the Saudi state had begun conducting devastating raids into Oman in the beginning of the nineteenth century when the first Saudi state was at the zenith of its influence. The route that the Wahhabis used to invade Oman was from the Najd to Al-Hasar and from there to Buraimi.51 At the time of the second Saudi state which came up after 1819, there were various dynastic struggles among the Saudis which prevented the Wahhabis from launching against Oman the devastating onslaughters of the past. At the same time, the

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Wahhabis who had entrenched themselves in the frontier post of Buraimi continued to meddle in Omani politics with the help of their allies within Oman. As the only well-watered locality in northern Oman and located at the crossroads of the principal routes from the west and from the Gulf coast into Oman proper, Buraimi had great strategic value. It was from Buraimi that the Wahhabis conducted occasional raids against settlements along the Batina coast. The greater danger was an alliance of all the disparate forces in Oman against the Sultan. And this is what exactly happened during the time of Thuwaini. The conservative Ibadi forces in the interior and the Wahhabis became united in their opposition against Thuwaini. The muttawiah or religious enforcers among the Ibadi were angered by the loss of Zanzibar which they believed happened due to the feebleness of Thuwaini. They also resented the curbing of the slave trade by the British.

According to J. B. Kelly, the Wahhabis and conservative Ibadi saw common concern on the issue of the slave trade and opposed Thuwaini’s acceptance of British diktat to ban the trade. This is very much possible as a large number of slaves were imported to the Najd from the Batina coast. Wendall Philips writing in the 1960s, stated that slaves seized or purchased from the Makran coast of Iran and Pakistan were landed along the Batina coast and taken through or around Batina for eventual sale in Saudi Arabia. In his article on the slave trade in the western Indian Ocean, Gwyn Campbell has pointed out that most slaves to West Asia initially originated from the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Slaves from the Makran coast of Iran joined these only in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore the slave route mentioned by Philips is also possibly the route that was used for bringing in East African slaves during the nineteenth century. R. G. Landen has stated that African slaves brought to the Batina were landed at Wudam. When the trade in East African slaves ended in 1902, it was replaced by captives from

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Baluchistan who were brought to Wudam and sold as slaves. The East African slaves landed at Wudam during the nineteenth century would then have been transported along the route mentioned by Wendell Philips which passed from the Oman coast through Buraimi each year en route north of Liwa oasis and south of Qatar. The fort at Hamsah in the territory of the Al Bu Shamis section of the Naim tribe was believed to be the main clearing house for the slave trade.

In order to get a clear understanding of the role of the Wahhabis in Omani politics, it is important to understand their influence among some of the tribes in certain regions of Oman. The Wahhabis had most influence in the frontier region of Buraimi in north-west Oman where they had established themselves. Some of the major tribes like the Naim, including their former sub-section the Al Bu Shamis, who had broken off and become completely independent from the Naim, had converted to the Muwahiddun/Wahhabi doctrine. As these tribes were spread out in the areas surrounding Buraimi including the Omani district of Dhahirah and neighbouring areas of what was then called Trucial Oman (presently the UAE), the Wahhabis had influence in these frontier regions of Oman. The Wahhabis were also influential in the districts of Sharqiya and Ja‘alan in the south-eastern parts of Oman as the powerful Bani Bu Ali tribe of the Ghafiri confederation had also converted to the Wahhabi doctrine. The Bani Bu Ali along with its powerful Ghafiri ally, the Jenaba had influence in the neighbouring port of Sur and its environs as the capital of the Bani Bu Ali, Bilad Bani Bu Ali, was only forty miles south of Sur. This helped the Wahhabis to exert their influence over the area. These pockets of Wahhabi influence in Oman were important factors in Omani politics during the time of Thuwaini.

That the Wahhabis were actively supporting the Ibadi elements in Oman became clearly evident in 1864. In that year, Thuwaini decided to deal with Azzan bin Qays II, the ruler of Rustaq who continued the rivalry with the ruling branch of the Al Bu Saidi.

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56 Landen, n. 44, p. 121.
57 Philips, n. 54, p. 89.
60 Ibid, p. xcvi.
Azzan bin Qays was becoming a powerful player in the Ibadi movement. At the close of 1864, Thuwaini tried to move against Azzan in Rustaq. Azzan was saved by his ally, Turki bin Ahmed al Sudairi, the Wahhabi governor at the Buraimi oasis who threatened Thuwaini with an attack on Muscat if he continued with his plan. Sayyid Thuwaini at once sought British mediation and asked for assistance. Colonel Pelly, the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, was ordered to report on the situation. Pelly went on a journey through Najd to Riyadh, to meet the Saudi ruler. On returning from his journey, Pelly went to Muscat in April 1865. Colonel Pelly offered to mediate between the two sides but received no reply from the Wahhabis who were demanding an increased tribute and threatened an invasion if their demands were not met. In August 1865 the customary Wahhabi mission arrived in Muscat and demanded four times the usual tribute, i.e. M.T. $160,000 instead of M.T. $40,000. Thuwaini, on the advice of Colonel Disbrowe, the Political Agent at Muscat, paid the usual amount and sent a message to the Saudi Amir that as to the rest he awaited the result of Colonel Pelly’s offer of mediation.

The Wahhabis continued to conduct raids against settlements along the Batina coast. They usually came down from the mountain passes upon the coast and raided the towns. The biggest Wahhabi involvement that took place in Oman was at Sur which finally necessitated British intervention. The Wahhabis had already intervened once in the neighbouring province of Ja’alan in favour of their allies, the Bani Bu Ali. At Sur, the Jenaba, who had revolted violently against the Sultan sought Wahhabi assistance from Buraimi. The Wahhabis and their allies, the Bani Bu Ali, joined the rebellious Jenaba, attacked the town of Sur, looted it and killed one Indian. On being enquired by the British regarding the reason for the attack on Sur, the Saudi ruler replied that there was an agreement between the Saudis and the British during the time of Saud according to which the Saudis would not oppose the British at sea or oppress their subjects while the inhabitants on the land and coast would be subjects of the Saudi state. No evidence of the

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61 Kelly, n. 53, p. 112.
63 Landen, n. 44, p. 245.
existence of such an agreement was found in the records of the British Indian government and the British Residency in Bushire, Persia. 64

The Sultan achieved the withdrawal of the Wahhabis after paying them MT $10,000 and Rs. 6,000. 65 Lewis Pelly, the British Resident in the Gulf, demanded the payment of M.T. $27,700 compensation from the Jenaba for losses sustained by British subjects in Sur and sent H.M.S. Highflyer with an ultimatum that full payment must be made within twenty-four hours. 66 As payment was not received on time, the ship bombarded the Saudi-controlled settlements of al-Qatif and al-Dammam on the al-Hasa coast. 67 In the attack on Sur, the forts were bombarded and all the boats of the Jenaba were confiscated or destroyed. 68 Pelly, who ordered payment of such a large amount of money at such short notice was subsequently criticised by the government of Bombay. 69 The Wahhabi Amir eventually accepted Colonel Pelly's offer of mediation apparently on condition the British government undertook to enforce the award. In February 1866, the Saudi ruler sent a further letter agreeing that the Jenaba were guilty of the outrage at Sur and recognised his responsibility in recovering damages from them. 70

During this period, Thuwaini began to organise an expedition against the Wahhabis with British encouragement in the beginning of 1866. 71 In retaliation, the Wahhabis conducted a raid against Saham near the port of Sohar in 1865 which led to the death of an Indian merchant. Colonel Disbrowe in Muscat observed that the raiders were mostly from the frontier tribes of Oman rather than Wahhabis from Najd itself. 72 The British provided two eighteen-pounder guns and ammunition to Thuwaini for the campaign

64 Secretary to Government of India to Secretary to Government of Bombay, 24 Jan. 1866, Fort William, MSA, PD, Vol. 45, # 1 & 885, 1866, p. 19.
65 Landen, n. 44, p. 245.
66 Bailey, n. 62, p. 211.
67 Landen, n. 44, 245.
68 Bailey, n. 62, p. 211.
70 Bailey, n. 62, p. 211.
71 Kelly, n. 52, p. 113.
72 Pelly to Gonne, 5 Jan. 1866, Sohar, MSA, PD, Vol. 45, # 1 & 885, 1866, p. 22.
against the Wahhabis. Thuwaini was under financial strain while organising the expedition. He was thinking of selling the Zanzibar subsidy of half a year and also expecting a portion of the next year’s revenue from Bandar Abbas in advance. Turki bin Said offered his assistance to Thuwaini against the Wahhabis and he was placed in charge of the navy. Salih bin Ali, the tamimah or paramount sheikh of the al-Harthi tribe was prepared to support Thuwaini’s expedition against the Wahhabis. As part of the expedition, Thuwaini, his son Salim and Turki arrived in Sohar fort in February, 1866. On the night of 13 February, 1866, Thuwaini was assassinated by his son Salim, who shot dead his father while he was asleep.

Azzan bin Qays II, conservative Ibadi elements like Said bin Khalfan al-Khalili, and the Wahhabis were the forces who were responsible for instigating Salim to murder his father. While Turki’s actions were direct and open against Thuwaini, Azzan had proceeded in a more clandestine manner. After assassinating his father, Salim imprisoned Turki in Sohar fort and rushed to Muscat to declare himself as the new Sultan. Turki was soon after released by the intervention of Lewis Pelly. Thuwaini was buried in a vault in Sohar fort itself. Thuwaini’s death coincided with that of the Saudi ruler Faisal which brought an end to the ongoing Saudi-Omani contest though the Wahhabis still continued to control Buraimi.

73 Secretary to the Government of India, to Secretary to the Government of Bombay, 17 Jan. 1866, Fort William, MSA, PD, Vol. 45, #1 & 885, 1866, p. 16.
74 G. Rozario, in charge of local duties at British Political Agency at Muscat, to Pelly, December 1865, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 45, #1 & 885, 1866, p. 5.
75 "Brief Precis of the History of Syud Toorkee", 30 April 1866, MSA, PD, Vol. 43, #327, pp. 374-375.
76 Telegram No. 3780 from Pelly to Political Secretary to Bombay Government, 22 Feb. 1866, Gwadur, MSA, PD, Vol. 43, #327, 1866, p. 2.
77 "Brief Precis of Toorkee", n. 75, p. 375.
79 Landen, n. 44, p. 246.
Muscat under Sultan Salim bin Thuwaini

As soon as Salim assumed power he was beset with problems. Salim had trouble getting immediate recognition from the British because of the manner in which he had attained power.\textsuperscript{80} Salim sent some envoys to Bombay to persuade the British to recognise his government. Despite opposition from British officials in the Gulf like Pelly, the envoys were successful in their mission.\textsuperscript{81} Salim obtained British recognition in September, 1866. One consolation that Salim gained because of the British was a respite from the Wahhabi threat to the state of Muscat. Because of the British retaliation against the Wahhabis for the raid against Sur in 1865, the Saudi ruler came to terms with the British and agreed to maintain friendly relations with Muscat. The Saudi ruler wished to communicate directly to Salim rather than through his governor at Buraimi which had been the practice that was followed.\textsuperscript{82} Even before Salim came to power Oman’s influence was rapidly declining. The weak legitimacy of Salim due to the circumstances in which he became Sultan provided Oman’s external detractors an opportunity to deny it any advantage and further decline its influence. Majid, the ruler of Zanzibar refused to pay the subsidy due to Muscat, as he regarded Salim as a parricide.\textsuperscript{83} The British agreed to receive the subsidy from Majid and transmit it to Salim.\textsuperscript{84} Majid finally paid the arrears in 1868.\textsuperscript{85} The Persians in 1866 claimed that Oman had voided the 1856 agreement because of the manner in which Salim grabbed power. British mediation led to a new

agreement between Persia and Oman which to the latter was more unfavourable than the 1856 agreement. Bandar Abbas was leased to Oman for eight years on an annual rent of 30,000 tomars. The lease applied to Salim and his descendents only and if a conqueror took Oman, then Bandar Abbas would revert to Persia.  

Salim’s assumption to power was immediately challenged by Turki bin Said. Turki began to organise an expedition against Muscat and as a part of this effort approached various parties for assistance. The Wahhabi commander at Buraimi refused to heed Turki’s request for assistance and even warned him against pursuing his agenda. Salim tried to portray himself as an Ibadi puritan. Because he had an understanding with Ibadi ulama personalities like Said bin Khalfan al-Khalili, the latter withheld supporting Turki bin Said’s campaign against his nephew. The British anticipated Turki’s plan of action and had resolved to defend Salim. Initially, the chief of Dubai provided shelter and support to Turki. After the British warned the tribal chiefs along the coast against providing support to Turki, the chief of Dubai withdrew his support. Turki had to leave Dubai in May, 1867. He proceeded to Yankul near Sohar whose chief aided him. During this period, the British informed Salim that they could defend him only from the sea while he had to make his own arrangements from land. This was in accordance with the agreement of 1834 between Oman and Britain. 

With support from the chief of Yankul, Turki captured Sohar and temporarily occupied it but was driven out of that town and he took refuge in the frontier regions near Buraimi. After wandering for a period of time, Turki finally found significant support among the powerful Bani Bu Hassan tribe of the Ja’alan region. Very soon a coalition  

86 Landen, n. 44, p. 249.  
88 Wilkinson, n. 6, p. 236.  
91 Lorimer, n. 8, p. 479.
was formed between the Bani Bu Hassan and other Hinawi tribes of the neighbouring
Sharqiya region like the Bani Hirth, Bani Habus and Bani Hajariyin. In August, 1867,
Turki of bombardment from the sea and non-recognition if he was successful in capturing
Muscat.\footnote{Lorimer, n. 8. P. 479.} Turki received this news as he was just about to attack Muttrah. He halted at
Wuttayiah and began negotiating with Salim. Turki demanded the district of Sohar. But
Salim was already in a state of panic and refused to accept any terms or put forward his
own proposals. Turki was in a dilemma as he wanted to gain the maximum out of Salim
while he feared British retaliation at the same time. Turki began increasing his demands
and they ranged from the town of Burka and Sohar principality to the whole Sultanate
leaving Muscat and Muttrah. Realising that Salim was in a weak and confused position,
the rebel forces lead by Turki disregarded the warning from the British and captured
Muttrah. Turki’s men plundered the inhabitants of the town and this caused a delay of
four days.

During this delay, several hundred men of the Ghafiri tribes of the Bani Bu Ali, Hashim
and Jenaba came to the assistance of Salim in Muscat. When Turki appeared with his
troops before Muscat there was a clash with the defenders and he suffered nine casualties.
Though the number of defenders was small it was enough to dishearten his fighters. As
numerous reinforcements were reaching Muscat, some of Turki’s allies began negotiating
with Sultan Salim. A chief of the Bani Hirth and three chiefs of the Bani Hajariyin were
bought over by the Sultan and deserted Turki while others of the Bani Habus and Bani Bu
Hassan began negotiating. This led Turki to abandon the siege of Muscat on the night of
sixth September 1867 and fall back on Muttrah. Salim continued buying Turki’s
supporters until the latter had very few left. On ninth September, Colonel Lewis Pelly
arrived at Muscat from Bushire on board the Mayfrere and then sailed on to Muttrah.
Initially Turki refused to heed Pelly’s invitation to come aboard the Mayfrere. After a
second British ship, a large frigate named Octavia arrived at the shores of Muttrah, Turki
came to meet Pelly on board the *Mayfrere*. Turki agreed to withdraw from Oman and reside in British India in return for a pension of 7,200 $ per annum provided by Salim from the Zanzibar subsidy. Muttrah was evacuated by the Hinawi rebels and Turki left Muscat on eleventh September, 1867 in the *Octavia* and took up residence in Bombay.

There are certain hints in the records which point to close relations between the British and Turki during the time of the latter’s departure from Muscat. This was to have important consequences for Oman-British relations in the late nineteenth century. Before Turki left for India, he asked Lewis Pelly if his claims over Muscat would be reconsidered by the British if Salim was toppled by the tribes in the interior. Pelly did not give an affirmative answer to Turki but gave his opinion in his report to the Bombay government that Turki’s claims should be reconsidered in such an eventuality. The exact nature of the agreement that was reached between Turki and the British is not known. But during the attack against Muscat by Ibadi conservative forces from the interior under Azzan bin Qays II, Atkinson who was the Political Agent wrote to Pelly that according to the law of succession Turki was to be the successor if Salim was toppled. He then refers to the convention of September 1867 as being the basis for his statement. Salih bin Ali’s role in Turki’s uprising is not clear. According to most contemporary sources, Salih bin Ali did not provide his support to Turki’s expedition against Muscat. Turki supposedly managed to convince only some of the al-Hirth to join his coalition against Muscat. But Atkinson’s letter to the authorities at Bombay mentioned that Salih was a part of Turki’s campaign against Muscat but deserted the latter at a crucial stage after he received a share of the plunder of Muttrah. After Turki’s departure to India, Salim tried to seize Salih. Salih barely escaped from Muscat and first fled to the Batina. He then fled to Rustaq, to the safety of his ally Azzan bin Qays

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94 Atkinson to Gonne, n. 92, pp. 281-90.
95 Lorimer, n. 8, p. 479.
96 Pelly to Gonne, 10 September, 1867, Muscat, MSA, P.D., Vol. 44, # 1168, 1867, p. 131.
97 Atkinson to Pelly, 21 September, 1868, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, # 1130, 1868, p. 49.
98 Landen, n. 44, p. 250.
100 Landen, n. 44, p. 251.
before finally reaching his home territory of Sharqiya.\(^1\) This was to be a turning point in the history of the relations between Salih bin Ali and the Sultans at Muscat as Salih spent the rest of his life fighting the Sultans.

As soon as Turki left the shores of Oman, Salim faced a new threat in the form of his maternal uncle, Ahmed bin Salim who began collecting rebels in Mussnah. When Salim began moving against his uncle, Ahmed declared that he no hostile intentions. The situation remained calm until January, 1868, when news was received of the renewed resistance by Ahmed. Salim once again organised an expedition which was this time noticeably joined by Turki bin Sudairi, the Wahhabi commander of Buraimi. At the same time, Salim sent his Wazeer, Hajee Hamad to Ja’alan to pacify the Hinawi tribes there and prevent them from joining Ahmed bin Salim. An agreement was reached between Salim and the Hinawi tribes at Ja’alan. No action took place at Mussnah as an arrangement was made between Salim and his uncle. During this period, Salim’s able wazir, Hajee Hamad had to leave for Bandar Abbas as there was a new threat from Persia.

Immediately following the wazir’s departure, there was a domestic threat from the Hinawi tribes as they were not satisfied with the manner in which Salim implemented the terms of the mutual agreement. But during their march towards Muscat, the Hinawi tribes were met with a rival Ghafiri tribe, the Bani Jabir, at the Samayil Gap and after a small engagement managed to march through the pass and camped at a place called Ghobra. They negotiated with Salim from here though there was no agreement as they kept on increasing their demands. In the meantime, they proceeded to Mussnah and fell out with Ahmed bin Salim who bought peace by agreeing to pay 4000 $ to them. From here, the Hinawi rebels departed in small detachments towards Ja’alan but none of these groups were spared. They were attacked and suffered considerable losses. The threat from Ahmed bin Salim and his Hinawi supporters ended in this manner.\(^2\)


\(^2\) Atkinson to Gonne, n. 92, pp. 291-303.
The Ibadi Conservative Alliance against Salim

But Salim's troubles were by no means over. A conservative Ibadi alliance led by Azzan bin Qays II began moving against Salim in 1868. The crux of the Ibadi alliance was the relation that existed between the Qays bin Ahmad collateral branch of the Al Bu Saidis on the one side and the Ibadi ulama and muttawa on the other. The Ibadi muttawa or religious enforcers were mainly composed of the Yal Sad tribe which was the second largest tribe in Oman. Muhammad bin Sulaiman al-Gharibi, one of the Ibadi clerics of the Ibadi coalition against Salim belonged to the Yal Sad. Azzan's family had close relations with the Ibadi ulama especially that of the Batina region even from the time of Qays bin Ahmad. In September 1861 the Yal Sad and the Bani Jabir with the support of Qays bin Azzan II revolted against Thuwaini and murdered Sayyid Hilal bin Muhammad the wali of Suwaiq. Qays lost his own life in the engagement. According to some accounts, Hilal and Qays had killed each other in the engagement. Azzan bin Qays II succeeded his father to become the ruler of Rustaq and in time became the leader of the Ibadi coalition against Salim bin Thuwaini.

At the time when the rebels began moving against Muscat, their number was not very considerable. In fact the British expected some of the prominent leaders of the movement like Salih bin Ali to desert Azzan. The Hinawi tribes of Ja‘alan did not allow any of their own to join Salih bin Ali. They even tried to induce him to abandon his plans. On the other side, Salim had managed to alienate most of the tribes of Oman by the time of Azzan's uprising. During the uprising by Salim's uncle Ahmed bin Salim at Mussnah, the Bani Jabir and other Ghafiri tribes at the Sumayil Gap had tried to stop the Hinawis. Instead of rewarding and recognising their efforts, Salim imprisoned their Sheikhs for failing to stop the Hinawis. Though he speedily released them, these tribes remained estranged to Salim at the time of Azzan's insurgency. The Bani Jabir had allowed the rebels to pass through the Samayil Gap. The fact that the two most warlike of the Ghafiri tribes, the Bani Bu Ali and the Jenaba were at war with each other and were not

103 Kelly, n. 53, p. 113.
104 Lorimer, n. 8, pp. 472-73.
105 Landen, n. 44, pp. 252-53.
capable of coming to Salim's assistance further weakened his position. Therefore, at the
time of Azzan's attack, there were very less Ghafiri tribes supporting Salim.

In stead he had about two hundred men of the Bani Habus and Bani Bu Hassan tribes
who were Hinawis to defend Muttrah and garrison Muscat. Ironically, the leaders of these
two tribes were in opposition to Salim during the previous two years and had participated
in Turki's revolt. Salim's weakness was proved when he depended on people he did not
entirely trust to negotiate on his behalf with the rebels. He sent Sayyid Hilal to Samayil to
negotiate with Said bin Khalfan al Khalili. A week before that Salim had blamed Sayyid
Hilal of inducing Khalili to join the rebellion. Salim also sent Saif bin Sulaiman - a man
whom he removed in the previous year from the governorship of Sohar for corresponding
with Azzan bin Qays- to negotiate with Salih bin Ali and raise troops from the Hinawis
for the defence of Muscat.

On the twenty second of September, 1868, the defenders of Burka fort surrendered to
Azzan. An invitation to repent was sent by the coalition to Salim. Salim, expecting
British and Ghafiri help refused to heed to it. Muttrah near Muscat was captured on the
twenty ninth. Azzan entered Muscat on the first of October, 1868. Salim immediately
withdrew into one of the two forts constructed by the Portuguese in Muscat. Muscat town
and all the other fortifications were in the hands of Azzan. Salim had already stationed
his family on board his ships Caroline and Prince of Wales. The rebel forces looted the
palace and captured one of the two eighteen pounder guns that the British had given to
Sultan Thuwaini bin Said for the campaign against the Wahhabis. In the beginning, the
British refused to intervene on behalf of Salim. They decided that in case of an election
by the tribes it would be preferable for Turki bin Said to be elected. The British, who
believed that the Hinawi tribes of Ja'alain continued to support Turki, hoped that Salim
could hold on for a day or two so that these Hinawi tribes could reach Muscat and

106 Atkinson to Pelly, 21 September 1868, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, # 1130, 1868, p. 49.
108 Landen, n. 44, p. 252.
109 Telegram from Atkinson to Political Secretary to Bombay Government, 2 October 1868, MSA, PD, Vol.
     83, # 1130, 1868, p. 8.
110 Secretary to Bombay Government, to Foreign Secretary, 31 October 1868, Poona, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, #
thereby increase the chances of Turki. On the other hand, the British feared that an immediate surrender by Salim would result in Azzan assuming control of Muscat.111

A disagreement developed between G. Atkinson, he British Political Agent and Consul at Muscat and Colonel Lewis Pelly, British Resident of the Persian Gulf over what policy to adopt during the crisis. Pelly favoured capturing rebels under Azzan off the coast of Muscat and bombarding Muscat in favour of Salim. Atkinson feared that, British Indian subjects, who had not been harmed until then, would be attacked by the rebels if the British bombed Muscat. Once such event took place, he felt that the Indians would be attacked in the future if there were no British ships or force to protect them. He appeared to be vindicated when news was received from Sidab that British Indian subjects were detained by Azzan’s men. This happened after the British had fired at Muscat. In this context, Atkinson suggested to the authorities in Bombay that Muscat Agency be independent from the Bushire Residency as the British Resident there might not have experience of the affairs of Muscat. This could also help save expenses in the form of expenses for travel and also coal for the steamers.112

After unsuccessful negotiations with the rebels under Azzan, Salim retired to his ship and proceeded to Bandar Abbas. The flag of Muscat was changed from the red of the Sultanate to the white of the Imamate.113 In an election held in Muscat, Azzan bin Qays was elected Imam.114 While Azzan bin Qays was the Imam, actual power was portioned between the other leaders of the rebellion. Said bin Khalfan Khalili controlled Muscat and surrounding districts while Muhammad bin Sulayyim al Gharabi was in charge of Sohar, Burka districts and up to Kabura. The districts from Sumail to Sur were under Salih bin Ali al Harthi. The rebels handed over the customs to Khalili who was to appoint a man on his part to collect them.115 Before Salim bin Thuwaini, the British had never been called to render assistance to defend the capital of Muscat from attacks by rebels

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111 Atkinson to Pelly, 1 October 1868, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, # 1130, 1868, p. 47.
112 Atkinson to Gonne, 15 October 1868, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, # 1130, 1868, p. 93.
113 Atkinson to Gonne, 21 November 1868, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 84, # 1348, 1868, p. 43.
114 Telegram from Pelly to Political Secretary to Bombay Government, 31 October 1868, Gwadur, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, # 1130, 1868, p. 4.
from within Oman. Thuwaini bin Said can be described as the last Al Bu Saidi Sultan of the nineteenth century who had some kind of legitimacy without having to resort to calling for British help to defend his administration from domestic attacks. Imam Azzan bin Qays cannot be regarded as a continuation of the line of the Sultans as he was mainly supported by the Ibadi conservative alliance.

The East African Slave Trade, the commercial networks of the al-Harthis and the quasi-independent status of Sur

One of the central characteristics of studies on Omani history is the argument that there was always a separation between the interior and the coast. The interior was described as being tribal, conservative and culturally homogenous in comparison to the coast which was cosmopolitan, culturally diverse and open to the outside world. The interior was thought to have its own Imamate form of government which was tribal and religious in orientation while the coast was under the control of the Sultanate. This distinction has been more or less maintained by most scholars while looking at Omani history. Mark Speece has also pointed out that the distinction was not just political and cultural but also economic with each entity having its own particular kind of market system. While it is beyond the scope of this work to look at the situation before 1856, the evidence on the second half of the nineteenth century points to much closer links between the interior and the coast than previously imagined. Most of the works on Omani history have looked at the events in the interior in terms how they affected the ruling Al Bu Saidi dynasty. Before looking at the evidence, the question that has to be answered is why Omani history came to be looked at in this particular manner. The answer lies in the kind of sources that were used to study and understand Omani history.

Apart from the few works in Arabic that deal with the history of Oman in an extensive manner, the major source for the nineteenth century history of Oman are British colonial records. While being invaluable in terms of providing brilliant insights on the major


events and personalities of the time, it has be remembered that the records consisted of
reports by officials who were mostly concerned with the interests of the British Empire
and the affairs of the Sultans at Muscat and Zanzibar who were British allies. As such, it
can be said that Omani history has been written with the prime attention going to the
Sultans at Muscat. Such histories have engendered a state-centric “grand narrative” where
events like the partitioning of Oman’s empire in 1856 and the establishment of an Ibadi
Imamate at Muscat in 1868 are the major events of the narrative. But Oman was also a
major Indian Ocean power from at least the second half of the seventeenth century with
the ascent of the Yarubi dynasty. It has developed vibrant links with regions of the Indian
Ocean littoral like the Western Indian coast and East Africa. It must be expected that
there would have been strong trade and cultural networks, not necessarily as a part of the
state, linking Oman with these other regions.

Coming back to the period of our focus, it is important here to identify such networks in
Oman and understand the role that they would have played in Oman’s domestic and
overseas politics. The most extensive links that Oman has developed across the ocean is
with the Swahili coast. It was not just the slave trade that fuelled the commercial
importance of Zanzibar in the early nineteenth century as there were various other
commodities like ivory which were brought from interior Africa and traded at the port.
We have already seen how Said bin Sultan shifted his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar
when he began to lose his influence in the Gulf. But when it comes to East Africa,
African specialists have chosen to view the Omani state as a colonising power which
drastically skewed the traditional economy of Zanzibar and introduced divisive tribal
politics with its encroachment in the nineteenth century.118 But there had been Omani
migrations to Zanzibar even before the seventeenth century. Even before Said decided to
pay more attention to Swahili coast, there were Omani networks which had already
gained political and commercial influence on Zanzibar island, the surrounding islands
and the adjacent coast. The most powerful of these groups were the Mazaria, the
Barawina and the Banu Nabhan. The Mazaria based in Mombasa provided the stiffest

Institute, Vol. 9, (2003), p. 519; Austen, n. 132, p. 650
resistance to Said's attempt to politically dominate the region and were eventually decimated.

It was precisely because of this reason that Said bin Sultan could not depend on the support of earlier Omani migrants to Zanzibar who were influential. To compensate for this weakness, he tried to create a parallel elite structure which would support him by bringing in tribal elites from Oman itself. Notable among the latter was Sheikh Nasser bin Ahmed al-Riyami. While resistance against Al Bu Saidi rule by Omanis of Swahili origin, both during the time of Said and also Majid, are well documented, our concern here is to understand the influence of these parallel non-state networks within Oman. The port in Oman that traded with Zanzibar the most was Sur. Quite naturally, Sur became the centre in Oman of the slave trade from East Africa since the eighteenth century. Sur had achieved autonomy to a certain extent from the Sultans at Muscat. Mark Speece in his article on the dual economic system in Oman, one for the interior and one for the coast, has provided a set of diagrams showing the nature of the market networks in Oman. According to him, Muscat was linked to the international trade networks while Muttrah was the distribution centre for domestic trade. While having their own links with international markets like the Gulf, India and Yemen, all of the other subordinate ports on the Omani coast were connected to Muttrah. From Muttrah, trade was channelled to these subordinate ports from where it normally followed a route up a wadi into inland markets. In the diagram, certain subordinate ports like Liwa, Wudam, Tiwi and noticeably Sur are not directly linked to Muttrah but are connected via a secondary port. But what makes Sur unique is that it is shown as the only port that had direct trade relations with Africa.

Said bin Sultan understood that the subduing of Sur and the province of Ja'alan located along the waterways from Muscat to East Africa, was necessary for the Sultanate state to benefit from trade of East Africa. In a joint campaign with the British in 1829, Said defeated the Bani Bu Ali tribe of Ja'alan and burnt their port town of Ashkara just before

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120 Speece, n. 117, pp. 496-97.
he shifted his administrative centre to Zanzibar. In Oman, Sur had monopoly over the trade from Africa which included the slave trade. According to Gwyn Campbell with regard to the slave trade, the usual practice was trans-shipment. Long-distance slave cargoes were generally transported to important coastal entrepots where they entered the regional distribution networks that carried them overland or by sea to other markets. He then provides the example of the slave trade to the Gulf in the mid-nineteenth century where the slaves were first shipped to Oman and other regions around the Persian Gulf. From Sur, the slaves were shipped to the Batina coast from where they were transported across land to the Najd along the route that was discussed in the earlier section on the Wahhabis. Slaves were also transported to the northern portions of the Gulf like Basra. While children and young women were more valued in these markets, there was also demand for male slaves in specific sectors like pearl fishing and the military. The most influential tribe in Sur was the Jenaba belonging to the Ghafiri confederation. S.B. Miles provided the appellation “Suris” to the Jenaba and described them as owning dhows engaged in trade between Zanzibar and Basra. He also describes them as the “terror of the Indian Ocean” engaged in piracy and slave trading. The Bani Bu Ali tribe had influence over the whole of Ja’alan province and the port of Sur including the four sections of the Jenaba located in the town. The Bani Bu Ali were described as the principal smugglers of slaves from Zanzibar to Oman.

While Ghafiri tribes of Ja’alan and Sharqiya provinces like the Jenaba and Bani Bu Ali were influential in Sur, the Bani Hirth of the Hinawi confederation in Sharqiya traded with Zanzibar through the same port. In fact, the major Omani-Arab slave traders on the Swahili coast belonged to the Hirth and it was the most powerful Omani tribe in Zanzibar. There had been large number of migrants from Sharqiya belonging to this

122 Campbell, n. 55, p. 294.
123 Ibid, pp. 297-98.
124 Miles, n. 51, p. ciii, p. 429.
125 Kelly, n. 53, p. 115.
tribe to Zanzibar and as mentioned before, the earlier al-Harthi migrants had organised themselves into the Barawina clan who became the elite on the island. Here there is a complication if this issue is viewed through the prism of Omani tribal history. Works on Oman are replete with the rivalry between the Hinawi and Ghafiri confederations since the civil war of the eighteenth century which spelled the doom of the previous Yarubi dynasty. The “Hinawi-Ghafiri dichotomy” is thought to have determined the contours of the tribal history of Oman and Imamate politics at least until the Sultanate prevailed over interior Oman with British help in the twentieth century. The al-Harthis would not have been able to trade through Ghafiri-controlled Sur if there hadn’t been some level of cooperation between the two sides. The Bani Hirth and the Hijariyin transported their produce from Sur to Bombay, Aden and Zanzibar by hiring the boats of the Jenaba and the Bani Bu Ali. There is a need to classify the roles of the Bani Hirth and the Ghafiri tribes of Sur in the slave trade. While the al-Harthi’s would have been the major traders, the Jenaba and Bani Bu Ali would have been involved in the transportation of slaves from Zanzibar to Sur on their locally manufactured dhows called *sambuk*. The only scholar who has referred to the links between the interior Sharqiya tribes and the port of Sur is Graeme Bannerman.

Colette Le Cour Grandmaison has provided information on the social stratification that existed among Omani Arabs in Zanzibar. The earlier al-Harthi migrants to Zanzibar, who virtually controlled the slave trade, acquired wealth and social prestige by the time of the nineteenth century. Many of them like the Barawina, occupied important positions as governors and clerics. In the middle of the nineteenth century, these earlier migrant elites turned to the highly successful plantation economy especially cloves and adopted a sedentary lifestyle. The newer al-Harthi migrants to Zanzibar who were also involved in

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128 Miles, n. 51, p. ciii.

the slave trade continued to move back and forth between Zanzibar and Oman. They were dependent on their more influential tribesmen for accommodation and help to conduct their trade. But the newer migrants could not earn as much wealth as the earlier ones due to the high cost of the biannual monsoon voyages between Oman and the Swahili coast. This new wave of migration began towards the end of the eighteenth century and lasted till the end of the nineteenth.¹³⁰ To acquire further wealth and prestige, the newer immigrants had to organise caravans to acquire slaves and ivory from the interior. But very few profited from such ventures because of the increasing costs. This has created, according to Grandmaison a hidden social stratification with the older and newer al-Harthi immigrants becoming members of two different social classes. This was mainly reflected in the marriage alliances of the two groups.¹³¹ Ralph A. Austen has also drawn attention to the different occupations of the two groups, the earlier migrants involved in the sedentary plantation economy and the later ones being traders who organised slave and ivory caravans.¹³² The differences in the settlement patterns of Omanis in East Africa were reflected right down to the twentieth century. John E. Peterson identified three types of ‘Zanzibaris’ who migrated from Zanzibar to Oman in the 1960s because of political disturbances. While the first and second categories consisted of Zanzibaris whose ancestors were born in Oman and those whose parents were born in Oman respectively, the third category consisted of Zanzibaris of Sur and Sharqiya who frequently travelled between Oman and Zanzibar and whose families were split between the two locations.¹³³

The British attempt to curb the slave trade would have affected the newer al-Harthi migrants more than older influential ones like the Barawina. It was true that the plantation owners were also in need of slaves, but the British inspection of dhows along the Swahili coast would have made it harder for al-Harthi traders to transport slaves to

Oman. During the trading seasons of 1861, 1862 and 1863, dozens of dhows laden with hundreds of slaves were seized in the waters of Africa and Arabia. Because of this reason, the motives of the two groups of al-Harthis to rebel against Majid soon after the death of Said bin Sultan would not be exactly the same. While the Barawina wanted to politically challenge the Al Bu Said as they had been doing since the time of Said, Salih bin Ali al Harthi, who was a leader of the newer immigrants who maintained connections with Oman, would have opposed the pro-British Sultan because of vital commercial reasons besides political ambitions. With such a perspective, the reasons for the disturbances in Zanzibar soon after Said bin Sultan’s death become more obvious. There is the understanding that the nineteenth century demand for African slaves in West Asia was generally low as few sectors there experienced economic development as compared to the growth in the plantation economy of Zanzibar. But this would have not in any way lessened the losses of the al-Harthis because of the monopoly that they had over the slave trade to the Gulf from East Africa.

While the al-Harthis’s supposedly appeared to be supporters of Barghash bin Said, it became obvious later on that their intention was to displace the entire Al Bu Saidi dynasty. When Thuwaini realised that the al-Harthis had appropriated the money that he had sent to Zanzibar to instigate a rebellion, he seized a ship belonging to the Barawina leader Abdullah bin Salim. Abdullah himself was suspected of being put death while in prison by Majid. The attempts of the al-Harthis’s to protect their political and commercial interests in Zanzibar ultimately failed. But the British attempts to curb the slave trade or the partitioning of Oman’s empire did not totally sever the links between Oman and the Swahili coast. The separation was only political and trade and

134 Kelly, n. 53, p. 112.
135 Campbell, n. 55, p. 296.
136 Bailey, n. 38, p. 113.
cultural contacts remained. The need to migrate from interior Oman to Zanzibar in fact increased as according to the report of the Canning Commission, the revenue of the government at Muscat was half that of Zanzibar in 1861. There was steady migration from Oman to Zanzibar after 1861. Despite the attempts of the British the slave trade to the Gulf continued vibrantly. Over two million slaves were exported from East Africa between 1830 (when the first restrictions began to be imposed) and 1873. On the maritime slave routes in the Indian Ocean, profits were as high as one thousand per cent by the second half of the nineteenth century.

The quasi-independent status of Sur also helped the al-Harthis to continue their trade with Oman. The Sultans of Oman in the nineteenth century could never fully subjugate Sur. Sur’s leaders of the Jenaba tribe had long been in disagreement with the Sultan and had refused to pay taxes to Muscat. As far as Salih bin Ali was concerned, nothing could compensate the loss of political influence in Zanzibar and the unhindered commercial links between Oman and the Sawahil in the period before British influence in the western Indian Ocean. In the initial period after his return from Zanzibar, Salih bin Ali was supportive of the Sultans at Muscat. What is interesting is that Salih supported Thuwaini’s campaign against the Wahhabis when most of the conservative Ibadi personalities were willing to co-operate with the Wahhabis against Thuwaini. This could be because of the co-operation that existed between Thuwaini and Salih to win back Zanzibar where Salih had strong interests. Salih was also supportive of Salim in the initial stages of the latter’s rule.

The conventional understanding is that Salih turned against Salim because the Sultan tried to seize him suspecting his hand in Turki’s rebellion. But viewed against the backdrop of the al-Hathi’s interests in Zanzibar, the effective break between Salih and the Sultan could have happened because the latter had become dependent on British support.

140 Landen, n. 44, p. 240.
141 Cambell, n. 55 pp. 295-96.
142 Ibid, p. 298.
143 Bailey, n. 58, p. cxi.
to maintain his rule which in turn would have decreased the chances of Muscat making efforts in the future to re-assert control over its former territories on the Swahili coast. An Ibadi conservative alliance which was not dependent on British support would be a good alternative to weak Sultans for the purpose of reviving efforts in the direction of Zanzibar. As will be evident in later chapters, Salih did not cease in his efforts to regain influence in Zanzibar during the rest of the nineteenth century.

The area of Indian Ocean studies, pioneered by the likes of M.N. Pearson, Ashin Das Gupta and K.N Chaudhuri have in recent times identified the cosmopolitan character of Indian Ocean maritime communities. Engseng Ho, in his work on the Hadrami sayyids, the descendents of the Prophet Muhammad from Hadramaut in Yemen, have contrasted maritime communities like the Hadramis, Gujaratis and Bohras with European colonial powers in the manner in which they engaged with the Indian Ocean. While European traders brought their states along with them and created empires, communities like the Hadramis settled in the cities and towns, developed social relations with the local communities and became a part of the cultural fabric.144 By entering into marriage alliances with local women all across the Indian Ocean, the Hadrami sayyids have become what Engseng Ho has termed 'local cosmopolitans' by creating networks in which the foreign and the local co-exist.145 Have Omanis been able to create their own kind of cosmopolitanism in the Indian Ocean region?

Compared to the Hadramis who have created networks extending from East Africa to South-East Asia, Omani influence in the Indian Ocean is limited. Despite having links with regions like East Africa and the western Indian coast, Omani networks are not as far flung as that of the Hadramis. A possible reason for this could be that most Omani Arabs belong to the Ibadi sect while the Hadramis being Sunni Muslims belonging to the Shafi school were accepted in the wider Muslim communities of the Indian Ocean. Also being members of the Prophet's family provided the Hadrami sayyids with extraordinary authority and charisma. As the Ibadi doctrine was very much suited to the tribal structure

of interior Oman, being an Ibadi was as much racial and ethnic as being religious. Patricia Risso has mentioned the separate identity that Omanis maintained in East Africa. Omani Ibadis in East Africa are described as having had a sense of racial superiority connected to their Arab identity. In nineteenth century East Africa, Ibadis had their own masjids (mosques) and qadis (judges) and it remained a close sect as compared to the wider number of Shafi Muslims. Omanis were believed to have required their slaves to become Shafi when they converted to Islam. Also, the Ibadis in East Africa built no Friday mosques as only a properly elected imam could lead the juma prayer.  

This did not mean that Omanis did not develop their own cosmopolitan identity in the western Indian Ocean. The large number of Omanis of Zanzibari (those who fled the island after the revolution in 1964 and their descendents), Gujarati and Baluchi origin are a legacy of Oman’s maritime heritage. Their sense of separateness did not prevent the Omanis from leaving their cultural imprint on Zanzibar. According to Erik Gilbert, of the fourty-five mosques founded in Zanzibar in the nineteenth century, twenty-two were either founded as Ibadi mosques or were converted to Ibadi mosques. Ships sailed between Zanzibar and Muscat through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each monsoon brought an influx of over 120 Arab ships into Zanzibar. While all of those were not from Oman, close to half came from Muscat or Sur. During this period, mail passed between Oman and Zanzibar. British navy ships on anti-slavery patrol found letters on the dhows intercepted by them. The dhows brought a large number of Omani Arabs to Zanzibar each year. They had to wait for many months before making the return journey due to the nature of the monsoon system. These ships brought symbols of Arab material culture like dates, ghee, dried shark, rugs, mats and clothes. They also brought tribal feuds which had their origins in Oman but affected the sailors who often belonged to opposing tribes. There were many Suri families during this period which were split between Oman and Africa.

148 Ibid, pp. 167-68.
149 Peterson, n. 133, p. 46.
In the Indian Ocean region certain individuals personify the cosmopolitan characteristics of their respective communities. Sayyid Alawi and Sayyid Fadhl, the father-son duo of the Malabar region in present day Kerala, South India, belonging to the Hadrami sayyid lineage and locally referred to as the Mamburam Thangals are characteristic of such individuals who can draw upon resources much beyond their local or regional influence. After he was deported from Malabar for anti-British activities, Sayyid Fadhl was for a time the ruler of the Dhofar region before it was annexed by Muscat in 1879.150 Most works have described Salih bin Ali as a conservative Ibadi leader in interior Oman. But if viewed from the perspective of Indian Ocean studies, Salih bin Ali is resurrected here as an Indian Ocean cosmopolitan who had influence in East Africa even while being the tamimah of the Bani Hirth in the Sharqiya province in interior Oman.

While looking at Omani non-state networks the importance of archival sources do not decrease. In fact it becomes more important as the histories of the Omani state and non-state networks like that of al-Harthis become intertwined from 1856 onwards as both sides have to come to terms with the paramount power of the British empire in their own respective ways. The archival material gives us hints on the manner in which the parallel non-state networks reacted to the changing conditions even while giving prime attention to the Sultans at Muscat and Zanzibar.

Conclusion

Said bin Sultan’s death occurred at a time of rapidly declining Omani influence. The squabbles among Said’s sons following his death led to British mediation and the partitioning of Oman’s empire. As long as Zanzibar was under the control of the Sultan’s of Muscat, the necessity to enforce direct control over interior Oman was not felt. With the loss of Zanzibar and along with it a huge source of income with the partition of 1861,
Thuwaini began attempts to quell the different opposition groups within the interior. But this attempt was fraught with risks. The support that Thuwaini had provided to the British for preventing the slave trade had earned him powerful enemies which led to his assassination in 1866. Thuwaini’s son, Salim was used as a tool for the purpose, and the latter became Sultan. Salim continued to face the opposition that his father had. He was the first Al Bu Saidi Sultan who had to depend on British support for the defense of his capital from tribal attacks on a regular basis.

During this period, links were forged between Turki bin Said and British officials stationed in the Gulf. This relationship hinted to the development of a new stage in Omani-British relations after 1871. There was also active involvement of the Hinawis of the Sharqiya region, especially the al-Harthis, in opposition activities against Muscat. While these activities have been described as typically characteristic of tribal societies, a closer look will show that they point to the continuing attempts by the al-Harthis to get greater economic and political access to East Africa.