CHAPTER-II

A BRIEF INTERLUDE AT MUSCAT FOLLOWED BY GREATER DEPENDENCE ON BRITISH PROTECTION: THE IMAMATE OF AZZAN BIN QAYS AND THE EARLY YEARS OF TURKI BIN SAID’S RULE (1868-1873)
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Introduction

In 1868, after a long period of rule at Muscat by Said bin Sultan and his descendents, a member of the Qays bin Ahmad collateral branch of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty came to power. But Azzan’s accession to power was not purely due to him belonging to the ruling dynasty. Azzan bin Qays becoming the ruler and more importantly Imam of Oman was the culmination of a long struggle between the Qays bin Ahmad and Sultan bin Ahmad collateral branches of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty. During this struggle, the Qays branch began to increasingly associate themselves with the Ibadi movement in the interior while the rulers at Muscat continued with their promotion of trade and overseas expansion. The members of the Qays branch including Azzan’s uncle began adopting the piety and simplicity required of Ibadi Imams with a view to placing themselves at the helm of the movement.

The fact that Said bin Sultan’s descendents had moved far away from being able to exert their rule without British help was proved when Imam Azzan bin Qays managed to conquer and unify almost the whole of Omani territory after a long gap despite non-recognition by the British. Moving away from dynasty politics, the period after the Imamate of Azzan bin Qays saw the beginning of a new phenomenon whereby the tribes in the interior increasingly began to organize themselves against the rulers at Muscat. After Turki bin Said grabbed power from Azzan bin Qays a series of tribal revolts and raids began to be conducted against Muscat.
Politics and External Relations under Azzan’s Imamate

The nature of the Imamate government of Azzan bin Qays determined its relations with the tribes in the interior, the Wahhabis and external powers like the British. The authorities in Muscat attempted to create a strong theocratic state which was centralised in contrast to the feudal setup that was maintained before, where beyond the confines of Muscat, the local chiefs in their respective territories had complete control. While important leaders of the regime like Said bin Khalfan Khalili, Salih bin Ali and Muhammad bin Sulaiman al Gharibi were given the responsibility of the different regions in Oman, Azzan bin Qays launched a series of military campaigns to unify the country and quell any opposition to the regime in Muscat. The fact that Azzan’s government was mainly composed of tribes belonging to the Hinawi confederation also determined its relations with the tribes of Oman. When an Ibadi theocratic establishment was formed and social restrictions were imposed on the cosmopolitan societies in Muscat and Muttrah, the British Home government in London believed that Oman had been taken over by the Wahhabis as in their knowledge the only such precedent had occurred when the Wahhabis took over in Najd in Central Arabia and surrounding regions. It was the British Indian government which corrected this notion by pointing out that Azzan’s people were different and in opposition to the Wahhabis.  

The Batina coast was the first region to be completely subjugated as Azzan’s allies had most influence there. Though it drew members from all the tribes, the muttawa of Azzan’s movement consisted of many members from the Yal Sad tribe which had a strong presence in the Batina coast. The governor of Mussnah Hamad bin Salim,

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surrendered to Azzan. In the beginning of 1869 Azzan set upon a military expedition to first put down opposition in the Samayil valley which was a strategic pass which linked Sharqiya with Muscat and its environs and was held by Ghafiri tribes. Azzan marched from Barka with three thousand men and two guns against the rebellious tribes of Wadi Samayil and its surrounding regions. He defeated most of the rebellious tribes including the Siyabiyyin. Azzan then met with Salih bin Ali who brought with him from Samad a contingent of 1,500 Hirth, Hijariyin, Habus and others at a junction called Nafa’ah and defeated the Nidabiyyin and Rahbiyin, who were sympathisers of the Siyabiyyin. From this campaign onwards, Azzan began collecting hostages from the dissenting tribes in order to ensure their compliance. Hostages were required from all the Ghafiri tribes in the region. Sayf bin Sulaiman, the sheikh of the Bani Riyam in the Jabal al-Akhdar or Green Mountain and some neighbouring Ghafiri sheikhs who escaped Azzan’s sweep during this time began plotting to aid former Sultan Salim in regaining his authority.

Salim during this period tried to instigate a rebellion against Azzan in Oman. Salim crossed privately from Bandar Abbas to Dubai despite receiving a warning against launching an attack by sea against Muscat from the British and then entered into negotiations with his old ally, the Saudi governor at Buraimi, Turki al-Sudairi in order to plan an attack against Azzan through land. Salim also received support from the Bani Jabir and Bani Riyam tribes. But Salim’s plan failed when the governor was assassinated during a visit to Sharjah in April 1869. Following this event, Salim made a trip through Oman by the way of Barka, Izki and Nizwa to the Ja’alan region and returned northwards via Birkat-al-Moz but received no support. When Azzan sent a force to intercept him, Salim returned to Dubai and went to Qishm island on exile.

The first exigency that Azzan’s government faced in Oman’s oversees territories was when the Ibadi conservative alliance took over Muscat in October 1868. The Persians had

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5 Landen, n. 3, p. 263.
6 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 483.
7 Landen, n. 3, p. 264.
begun showing increasing reluctance to grant the lease of Bandar Abbas to Oman since
the death of Said bin Sultan. It was only after much negotiation and British mediation that
the lease was granted during the times of Thuwaini bin Said and Salim bin Thuwaini.
When news broke out that the conservative rebels had taken over in Oman, the Persians
marched against Bandar Abbas with one thousand men and captured it. They terminated
the lease agreement of Bandar Abbas and it dependencies with Oman on the basis of a
clause in the agreement which gave the Persians the right to cancel the agreement if a
conquerer took over Oman. The Persians appointed Hajee Ahmad, who had served as
governor under Salim, as the Persian governor of Bandar Abbas. Hajee Ahmad
possessed considerable landed property in Bandar Abbas. Azzan’s government did not
desist in its attempt to wrest back Bandar Abbas. In September 1869, a former governor
of Bandar Abbas under Thuwaini captured the island port on the orders of Azzan after
hovering about in the region for many months waiting for an opportunity. But within a
few days, Hajee Ahmad had retaken Bandar Abbas and Oman lost the port for good.

Oman’s other maritime posessions were also not safe from threats. Azzan had managed
to install a governor at Gwadur but the latter could not win the loyalty of the locals. In
April 1869, Sayyid Nasr bin Thuwaini, a son of the former Sultan, Thuwaini bin Said by

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8 Telegram from Political Agent, Gwadur to Political Secretary to Bombay Government, 29 October 1868, MSA, PD, Vol. 83, # 1130, 1868, p. 184.
14 Landen, n. 3, p. 267.
a Baluchi concubine, escaped from surveillance from Muscat and captured Gwadur. Nasser’s success at Gwadur was attributed to his Baluchi connections on his maternal side.\(^{15}\) Sayyid Nasser’s action also led to the loss of the port of Chabar which was never recovered during the time of Azzan. After capturing Gwadur, Nasser tried to take Chabar but was preempted by Din Muhammad, the Baluch chief of Dashtyari who occupied the port.\(^{16}\) Din Muhammad was one of two local chiefs who were paid by Muscat for the protection of the port.\(^{17}\) These events had an impact on Omani-British relations during the time of Azzan. When the authorities at Muscat tried to send an expedition consisting of the brig Curlew to recover Gwadur, it was prevented from leaving Muscat harbour by the Political Agent, Herbert Disbrowe.\(^{18}\) He did so in accordance with the orders passed by the British Indian government after Azzan captured Muscat banning naval operations by any party at Muscat or anywhere else on the Omani coast. This included movements towards Zanzibar, Bandar Abbas, the Makran coast or anywhere else.\(^{19}\)

This incident saw the beginning of increasing problems between Disbrowe and the Imamate authorities over the latter’s movements at sea. Relations had already begun worsening over the issue of treatment of British Indian subjects in Muscat and other port towns of the Omani coast. In May 1869, the Muscat authorities transported munitions of war from Muscat to Barka to arm the fort at Barka despite the protests of Disbrowe. He then hauled down the British flag from the Political Agency and hoisted it in the gunboat Clyde. Disbrowe refused to come on shore in protest against the activities of Azzan’s government at sea.\(^{20}\) Disbrowe refrained from using force with the gunboats Clyde and


\(^{16}\) Lorimer, n. 4, p. 484.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p. 609.


Hugh Rose from using force as he feared that British subjects on shore might be targeted in retaliation. On this issue, Lewis Pelly, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf had a different opinion. He advised Disbrowe that the orders of the British Indian government prevented movement by sea only between the coastline of Oman and other territories like the Makran coast and Zanzibar, and that it did not apply to movements along the unbroken coastline of Oman from Ras al-Had in the south to Sohar in the north. Pelly ordered Disbrowe to re-hoist the flag at the British Consulate.

In the same way as Azzan was not allowed to move by sea towards any of Oman’s territorial possessions situated away from its coastline, the British resolved to prevent an encroachment by sea into Oman by any of Azzan’s rivals like Salim or Turki. The British policy during this time was not to intervene in struggles between rival claimants to power who were actually resident in the country or in Muscat but to prevent entry by a rival through the sea into Omani territory. With regard to Turki, the British believed that with Salim’s expulsion the terms of the agreement which secured Turki’s withdrawal to India had ended. According to this agreement, Turki was not to return to Oman as long as Salim was the ruler. But the British believed that they had the right to prevent Turki from leaving for Oman to preserve the peace in the country. At the same time, if the majority of the chiefs or people of Oman wished to invite either Salim or Turki to take up power in Muscat, the British were ready to allow the invited person to return to the country.

Following the assassination of the Saudi governor of Buraimi Turki al-Sudairi at Sharjah the Naim tribe of the region who were disgusted with the former governor’s
tyranny, invited Azzan to take over Buraimi in July 1869.28 This was an opportunity for Azzan to wrest back Buraimi from the Saudis who had been controlling the outpost for many years, conducting raids into Oman from there and generally intervening in Omani politics. In fact, a short time before the invitation to Azzan had been extended, Abdul Aziz, a Saudi commander and brother of Turki al-Sudairi, had raided and plundered Sohar along with five hundred Wahhabis. He was also accompanied by the former Sultan, Salim who was then conducting a trip in Oman on an unsuccessful attempt to raise enough support for himself. Abdul Aziz had also led a raid against Sur in 1865.29 Turki had been replaced by another brother of his, Abdul Rahman bin Ahmed Sudairi as governor of Buraimi. Problems had already begun cropping up between the two sides as the Imamate authorities in Muscat imprisoned a messenger of Abdul Rahman named Zaid Zumaylee.30 Azzan went through the Batina district to collect troops for the campaign but he got no response. At Barka he got a letter from the Saudi Amir in Riyadh demanding the customary tribute. But having consulted with Khalili, Azzan decided to ignore the demand.31

Azzan was joined by Salih bin Ali who brought with him a contingent of 500 men from Ja’alan. With a total force 1,500 men which included the Naim tribe Azzan advanced against Buraimi which was defended by around sixty Wahhabis.32 Azzan also carried with him from Sohar one of the twenty 24 pounder guns that Said bin Sultan had acquired from America in 1842 for his corvette the Sultan. Azzan brought the gun along with spare carriage wheels, harness and tents. This gun was seen by Colonel Samuel B. Miles as defending Buraimi fort when he visited the place in 1876 as the Political Agent at

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29 Disbrowe to Gonne, 8 June 1869, Muscat, MSA, PD, Vol. 89-IV, # 970, 1869, p. 123.
31 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 484.
32 Disbrowe to Political Secretary to Bombay Government, n. 28, p. 502.
Muscat. There was very little fighting at Buraimi except with guns and the place was
taken by Azzan after the governor surrendered on 18th June 1869. The governor was
permitted to leave with men, horses and property. After he had taken Buraimi, Azzan
entered into an alliance with the powerful Sheikh of Abu Dhabi and secured his aid for
the protection of Buraimi. Azzan gained this help by paying him a portion of the tribute
that was earlier paid to the Saudis.

This understanding between Muscat and Abu Dhabi was reflective of the larger
alliances and the polarisation that had been taking place in the wider region of the
Buraimi and Dhahira districts of north-west Oman and the whole of Trucial Oman since
some time. It was in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that the Al Bu Falah
sheikhs developed control of the two heterogeneous tribal groupings of western Trucial
Oman, the Bani Yas and the Manasir. In the 1790s, the Al Bu Falah established their
capital in Abu Dhabi. They then acquired property in the Buraimi oasis and developed
close ties with the tribes in the region. The Al Bu Falah sheikhs of Abu Dhabi allied with
the Sultans of Oman became the leaders of the northern Omani groups opposed to the
Qawasim states of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaima of eastern Trucial Oman who had close
links with the Saudi state. The Falah’s hold over parts of Buraimi and their influence
among several Hinawi tribes further south in Oman was due to the influence of the Falahi
ruler Zayid bin Khalifa (ruled 1855-1909).

After securing his alliance with Abu Dhabi, Azzan tried to move against the remaining
chiefs of Trucial Oman. These in turn formed a defensive alliance against Azzan. Azzan
refrained from attacking the remaining sheikhs because of the alliance. Once he was sure
of Abu Dhabi’s loyalty, Azzan appointed a relative in charge of Buraimi and returned to

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33 R/15/6/349, “Notes on El Bereymi made by Col. Miles during his visit there in 1875”, No. 132/47, 1876,
34 Disbrowe to Political Secretary to Bombay Government, n. 28, p. 502.
35 R/15/6/36, Section 40, “Chapter II- (Sections 26-42): Question of Recognition of Syud Azan bin Gheis”,
Muscat. At the same time, Sharjah, one of the members of the defensive alliance in Trucial Oman turned traitor in favour of Azzan a short while after the alliance was formed. It was probably this Sheikh who murdered Turki al-Sudairi, the Saudi governor of Buraimi during the latter’s visit to Sharjah.\(^{37}\) The remaining members of the alliance affected the peaceful expulsion of the Sheikh of Sharjah and replaced him by a relative.\(^{38}\)

In the months of September and October 1869, Azzan set out on a military campaign to consolidate his authority in the interior of Oman. From his power-centre at Rustaq, Azzan attacked the Bani Shukayl tribe at Bahla and took over the fort. Salih bin Ali also attacked the Bani Shukayl in another area. Ibrahim bin Qays occupied Izki which had been in the hands of a prominent Ghafiri sheikh Ali bin Jabir. During the campaign against Nizwa which was held by Hamad bin Sayf al-Busaidi, Azzan called for help from Sayf bin Sulaiman whose Bani Riyam tribe held part of Nizwa. Salim bin Udaym of the Bani Ruwaha was appointed governor of Nizwa after it fell. Following these events, Azzan invited Sayf bin Sulaiman to Muscat on the promise of safe conduct. Azzan then seized Sayf as the latter had supported Salim’s efforts to regain power in Muscat. Sayf bin Sulaiman died a prisoner in Muscat. In November 1869 there was an uprising by the Banu Bu Ali in Ja’alan which was crushed by Azzan. He also successfully besieged the fort of Hazm which was controlled by the Yaariba the dynasty that ruled Oman before the Al Bu Saidi. While the Bani Bu Ali were given lenient terms, the Yaariba were wiped out.\(^{39}\) In this manner, Oman was united under one ruler after a long period of time.

The relations between Britain and Oman under the Imamate had not been warm ever since Azzan had grabbed power at Muscat. The character of the new government was viewed with suspicion by British officials and it was believed that policy of the Imamate


\(^{38}\) Section 40, Precis of Muscat Affairs, n. 35, p. 452.

\(^{39}\) Landen, n. 3, pp. 265-66.
was harmful to British interests. The British decided not to recognise Azzan’s Imamate. The personality of the Political Agent at Muscat was also an important factor that influenced British-Omani relations. Herbert Disbrowe who replaced Atkinson as the Political Agent made it clear in his correspondence to the Bombay government that his views differed from that of Atkinson and that he did not wish to maintain any contact with the Muscat government. On the other hand, Azzan in a letter to Pelly complained that whenever he sent forth any matter or complaints regarding British Indian subjects to Lieutenant Colonel Disbrowe, he neither settled the cases himself nor allowed any other person to do so. The prevention of an expedition from leaving Muscat to recapture Gwadur and the hauling down of the flag at the Consulate by Disbrowe over the issue of transportation of armaments from Muscat to Barka by the Muscat authorities further heightened tensions between the two sides. It was in such circumstances that Disbrowe got information that Nasir bin Thuwaini, the occupier of Gwadur planned to attack Muscat.

It is worthwhile to dwell on the manner in which this crisis developed as it gives us a glimpse into the manner in which decision making was conducted in the British administrative system in the Gulf though the wider strategic ramifications of British involvement in Oman will be looked at in another chapter. On 15th October, 1869, Disbrowe requested the officer of the Clyde to take position under the Fort Jalali. But Disbrowe had not informed the local authorities of this matter. Noticing that the gunboat had changed its position, the garrison in the fort started firing at it with matchlocks and

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maintained it for half-an-hour. Under protest, Disbrowe stated to the Muscat authorities that he had asked the gun boat to shift its position in order to protect Muscat from enemy attack and asked Khalili to give an explanation for the garrison’s behaviour. At the time, Azzan and Salih were in Ja’alan province and Khalili was in charge at Muscat. In his reply, Khalili accused the boat of attacking the fort and said that Disbrowe should have informed Khalili of his intentions. At the same time, Khalili said that the firing had taken place without his knowledge.

Pelly was ordered to proceed to Muscat and arrangements were made for collecting a British naval force in case if reparation should be refused by the Muscat government. Pelly was however successful in gaining a written apology from Khalili. The apology however did not have any state seal on it. The Viceroy of India preferred that the state seal of Muscat be affixed on it but decided that Pelly was the best to judge regarding the matter. An oral apology was made by Sheikh Nasser, an envoy of the Muscat government and five other notables on board the British ship Dalhousie before Colonel Pelly, Disbrowe, and the commanders of the Clyde, Hugh Rose, and Dalhousie. Azzan himself made a written apology on 30th October, 1869 and the commander of Jalali fort

48 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 488.
was removed. The Bombay government opined that there was no need to bring in a theocratic authority like Khalili into state matters by getting the state seal affixed on his apology. Taking this advice, the British Indian government at Calcutta then ordered Pelly to accept Azzan's apology unconditionally and drop the demand for the affixing of the state seal on Khalili's written apology. But on the insistence of Pelly, which met with the approval of the Viceroy, Azzan's apology was accepted publicly in the British Consulate at Muscat. The apology was made by a deputation consisting of Azzan's brother Ibrahim bin Qays and Salih bin Ali. The apology was accepted by Disbrowe, Pelly and the all commanders of British naval vessels at Muscat port.

The British were not satisfied with Lieutenant Colonel Disbrowe's handling of affairs at Muscat and thought of removing him. Disbrowe and Pelly also did not share good personal relations. At the same time, they feared that if such a step was taken immediately after the incident involving the Clyde, it would be seen as a concession to the Muscat authorities for their apology. Therefore, the British initiated the change only at the end of 1869 by replacing Disbrowe with Major Way. Major Way was placed under the strict subordination of Resident and instructed not to correspond directly with the Bombay government unless in exceptional circumstances. After Disbrowe left, relations between the two sides improved. Even Pelly believed that Azzan should be

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55 Section 21, Precis of Muscat Affairs, n. 52, p. 447.
57 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 488-89.
58 Landen, n. 3, p. 269.
recognised.\textsuperscript{59} The British were forced to have a re-thinking on this matter because of possible competition from other European powers in gaining influence in the region. As the Suez Canal had opened, there were increasing number of ships of other European powers other Britain coming to the port of Muscat and recognising the government with honorary salutes. The British feared that Azzan might seek the support of some other European power if there was delay in recognising him.\textsuperscript{60}

The British government asked Pelly to make local enquiries regarding the stability of Azzan’s regime in order to take a decision regarding British recognition of his government. The British believed that it was not in their interests to continue to refuse providing recognition to Azzan’s Imamate. At the same time, they were cautious because of precedences like that of Salim where his instable government was given premature recognition.\textsuperscript{61} When the possibility of Saudi/Wahhabi invasion increased in the beginning of 1870, the British decided to postpone taking a decision on the matter of the recognition of Azzan’s government.\textsuperscript{62}

In the beginning of 1870, there were reports of the Saudi Amir or ruler Abdullah bin Faisal who was at at Oqair on al-Hasa coast was collecting a huge force of twenty thousand men to retake the frontier post of Buraimi which had been lost to Azzan in the previous year.\textsuperscript{63} The Saudis were thought to be planning a co-ordinated land and sea attack on Buraimi in which a number of boats, which were stated to be around one hundred, would disembark troops on the shores of the maritime tribes who had signed the treaty of the maritime truce as Buraimi, which was fifty miles from the sea-coast, was


\textsuperscript{61} Lorimer, n. 4, p. 489.


\textsuperscript{63} Lorimer, n. 4, p. 485.
accessible only from that part of the coast. The British thought of various means to prevent the invasion from taking place which included asking the maritime tribes on the Trucial Coast from preventing the Wahhabis from using their part of the coast. Azzan had very less success in attempting to recruit men in Barka for the campaign against the Wahhabis. At the same time the Bani Bu Ali, who had converted to the Wahhabi/Muwahiddun doctrine sixty years before had refused to join Azzan’s campaign when they learnt that it would bring them into conflict with the Saudis. The Saudi Amir also granted an amnesty to all of the Naim tribe who might return to their allegiance to the Wahhabis. At the end of January 1870, the Wahhabis force was collecting at Qatar and was five days distance from Buraimi. Except the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, none of the chiefs of the Trucial Coast showed any hostility to the Wahhabis.

The British panicked at these reports and were willing to provide immediate recognition to Azzan bin Qays if it could help in beating back the expected Wahhabi invasion. Pelly, who was then in Calcutta, was ordered to rush back to Muscat and provide recognition to Azzan leaving all other matters like treaties, convention, or claim to territory for future discussion. Claims to territories included Gwadur and outlying territories on the Makran coast, restoration of the lease of Bandar Abbas and the restoration of the Zanzibar subsidy which had been discontinued by the Sultan of Zanzibar. But as events developed further, the opportunity passed away. When Azzan bin Qays reached Buraimi accompanied by his brother Ibrahim at the end of February 1869, he got the support of Sheikh Zaid of Abu Dhabi, most powerful chief among the rulers of the Trucial coast and Muhammad Ali, the leader of the powerful nomadic tribe,
the Nairn. Azzan was also accompanied by Saud, the rebellious brother of Abdullah bin Faisal, the Saudi Amir.  

70 During the rivalry with his brother Abdullah, Saud sought the support of the Saudi state’s rivals like Bahrain and Oman.  

Ultimately, the Saudi Amir did not move from his halting place at al-Hasa and abandoned his plans to recapture Buraimi. Several reasons were attributed to the Saudi ruler’s change of plans. Abdullah was worried about a combination of rivals including his relatives in his capital Riyadh and his rival brother Saud who could either make use of his absence from the capital or attack him from the rear. The lack of rain and the non availability of water and grass for his horses and men along the line of march was another major deterrent to the Saudi ruler. The alliance between the chief of Abu Dhabi and Imam Azzan had made the latter’s position stronger.  

72 There was the threat of an attack on the Saudis by the British for harbouring a pirate from Bahrain and partaking of plunder obtained from Bahrain.  

73 As the crisis had passed away, Azzan returned half of the war tax that had been collected to meet the crisis.  

74 What ultimately saved the day for Azzan was the fact the second Saudi state had been severely weakened by infighting between the brothers Abdullah and Saud after the death of their father Faisal, the Saudi ruler at the end of 1865 and did not have the strength to wrest back Buraimi from Imamate Oman.  

The only outcome of the crisis involving Oman and the Wahhabis was a postponement of the British recognition of Azzan’s government. Another incident similar to the firing on the Clyde occurred in Muscat in March, 1870. A boat of the British naval vessel Bullfinch was fired at from Jalali fort. But the manner in which this incident developed

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70 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 485.  
72 Pelly to Secretary to Bombay Government, Political Department, 18 August 1870, MSA, PD, Vol. 86, # 7, 1871, p. 149.  
was markedly different from the Clyde incident. The Muscat authorities immediately apologized for the incident. They also imprisoned the governor of the fort and dismissed the garrison.\(^{76}\) The garrison had fired at the boat because it was not carrying lights after dusk was the rule of the port. In the incident involving the Clyde, it was Khalili who had given a written apology and that too without the seal of the Muscat government. In the Bullfinch incident, Azzan bin Qays submitted an apology written personally by him along with the state seal.\(^{77}\) Major Way, the British Political Agent in Muscat at that time, handled the matter in a more conciliatory manner than Herbert Disbrowe. While the Imamate survived threats from the Wahhabis and from within Oman and its minor altercations with the British, its ultimate nemesis in the form of Turki bin Said was living under British protection in Bombay.

\[\text{The Imamate Administration and its Impact on Society}\]

John C. Wilkinson in his work on the Imamate practice in Oman has defined the Ibadi classification of Imams. Imams with full powers were termed as shari Imams and those with limited powers were called da‘if Imams. Azzan bin Qays was elected as a da‘if Imam in 1868. Theoretically, da‘if Imams did not have the right to wage an aggressive jihad for the expansion of the Ibadi community. They were appointed either for a specific purpose, like the defense of the community, or for a limited period of time. They could also be replaced if a better or even equal candidate appeared with the consent of all.\(^{78}\) By the time of the nineteenth century the possibility of expanding the Ibadi community through jihad had all but vanished. According to Wilkinson, in the modern period, an Imam is simply treated as an Imam.\(^{79}\) But Azzan’s Imamate showed certain characteristics of a difa‘i Imamate as is prescribed by Ibadi strictures. Abu‘l Hasan al-Bisyani, an Ibadi scholar of the eleventh century had laid down the precept that a da‘if


\(^{79}\) Ibid, p. 159.
Imam was sworn in on the condition that he would consult with the ulama on matters like use of public funds, the walis or governors he appoints, raising an army and passing judgement. But this restriction is only for a limited period of time. Bisyani advises that after a year, if the Imam has behaved wisely, then he can be confirmed and conditions will automatically lapse.80

In the first year of the short-lived Imamate, Azzan was busy conducting military campaigns to consolidate his power in Oman. Real power was wielded at Muscat by Said bin Khalfan al Khalili, the Ibadi cleric. But during the later period, Khalili’s power declined while Azzan’s personal control grew stronger. The leadership of the Imamate like the previous Ibadi Imamates of Oman was a combination of ulama or religious clergy and tribal leaders. Azzan and his brother Ibrahim bin Qays were the scions of the Qays bin Ahmad collateral branch of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty while Salih bin Ali was the tamima or paramount sheikh of the powerful Bani Hirth tribe. On the other hand, Said bin Khalfan Khalili and Muhammad bin Sulayyim al Gharabi as renowned clerics were the spiritual leaders of the Imamate. Khalili had held the ecclesiastical charge of Rustaq during the time of Hamud bin Azzan, Azzan’s uncle.81 All of the white turbaned muttawiah or religious enforcers were followers of Khalili.82 While there were muttawa from almost all the tribes of Oman,83 a disproportionate number of them came from the Yal Sad in the Batina. The muttawa were of two types. There were those learned in religion and those warriors who carried out the programmes laid down by the religious leaders. Khalili had also married his daughter to Azzan which also increased his influence.84

81 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 482.
84 Landen, n. 3, p. 257.
Before long, Khalili’s influence began to create dissensions between the leaders of the Imamate. In December 1869, there was a disagreement between Khalili on the one side and Azzan and Salih on the other. Khalili left Muscat with his family and went to Samayil. Ibrahim bin Qays was supportive of Khalili during this quarrel.\textsuperscript{85} In April 1870, there was again a difference of opinion between Salih and Khalili. Salih refused to go to the south-east of Oman to collect troops alleging that he did all the work while Khalili got the pay. He also complained that the rewards promised and expenditure incurred for past assistance had not yet been received. This disagreement was soon made up.\textsuperscript{86} However, Salih bin Ali continued to keep a distance from the administration of the Imamate.\textsuperscript{87} He and Muhammad bin Sulayyim al Gharabi opposed the land confiscation policy of Khalili.\textsuperscript{88} In the beginning the regime confiscated the property belonging to members of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty.\textsuperscript{89} Later this policy was extended to even the allies of the regime.\textsuperscript{90} By 1870 al-Gharabi returned to the Batina disenchanted with his lack of influence.\textsuperscript{91}

One of the major characteristics of the Imamate of Azzan bin Qays was the attempt to implement conservative social mores on the cosmopolitan population in Muscat and the settlements along the Batina coast. The use of liquor, tobacco and drugs were prohibited. Singing, dancing and playing of music were banned. The inhabitant’s outward appearances, including dressing and length of moustaches had to confirm to the rules imposed by the authorities. The muttawa or religious enforcers tried to make sure that society confirmed to their concepts of proper social behaviour. In the process, it created tensions between the regime and the different segments of Muscat’s diverse society. In

\textsuperscript{87} Landen, n. 3, p. 258.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, p. 260.
\textsuperscript{89} Kelly, n. 67, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{90} Allen, n. 82, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{91} Landen, n. 3, p. 258.
one case, the muttawa ordered a Banyan to draw his clothing so as to reach below the knees which resulted in an argument.\textsuperscript{92} The muttawa forcefully clipped the moustache of a Khoja Muslim as they felt it was too long.\textsuperscript{93} The inhabitants of Muscat were forced to attend mosques with regularity.\textsuperscript{94} Some of the actions of the muttawa went to extreme lengths. Khalili employed four women to go into the houses of Arab subjects and see if they were smoking or chewing tobacco. One of these employers caught a Siddi woman chewing tobacco. The Siddis were of African slave origin. The muttawa came and arrested her and cut out her under lip.\textsuperscript{95}

The restrictions imposed by the muttawa impacted different segments of Muscat's cosmopolitan population. Among the population of Muscat there were people of African slave origin called the Siddis consisting of almost two thousand. Before the Imamate had been established, every Friday afternoon large bodies of the Siddis used to regularly assemble and dance and sing to the sound of the Banjo drum.\textsuperscript{96} A variety of such African dances performed outside Muscat during the celebrations of \textit{Id al-Fitr} were seen and reported in the mid-nineteenth century itself.\textsuperscript{97} These practices were stopped due to the restrictions imposed by the muttawa. Such actions were not restricted to Muscat. In Burka, the authorities burned the tobacco of a Khoja Muslim merchant, Habeeb bin Dawood, who was a resident of Muscat. Some British Indian subjects were imprisoned at Saham, near Sohar, for shaving.\textsuperscript{98} While there were eleven coffee houses in Muscat in 1865, Disbrowe reported in 1869 that there were only five coffee houses among which only two were respectable. Coffee drinking and the use of tobacco being common among sea-faring people, most visitors to Muscat preferred to remain on their vessels when they

\textsuperscript{92} Disbrowe to Gonne, 12 May, 1869, MSA, PD, Vol. 86, # 757, 1869, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{93} Disbrowe to Gonne, 31 July, 1869, MSA, PD, Vol. 86, # 757, 1869, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{94} Lorimer, n. 4, p. 482.
\textsuperscript{96} Disbrowe to Gonne, 6 August, 1869, MSA, PD, Vol. 86, # 757, 1869, p. 175.
found that tobacco was banned on shore. On board their vessels, they had the freedom to
drink coffee and smoke their pipes. These visitors included people from Kuwait, Bushire
and other ports.99

The situation became more complex because some of the sections of this society like
the Banyans or Hindu merchants and the Khoja Muslims were British subjects. There
were two hundred and fifty British Indian subjects and their dependents in Muscat during
that time. When these British subjects were targeted by the muttawa, the British Political
Agent complained to the Muscat authorities which resulted in tensed relations between
the two sides. In one instance, Disbrowe, the British Political Agent threatened to remove
all British Indian subjects from Muscat and use a naval vessel for their protection if the
muttawa attacked them.100 The authorities in Muscat also asked the Disbrowe to issue an
order to British Indian subjects preventing them from beating drums or playing musical
instruments. Disbrowe refused to heed the request. Instead, he replied that if these
activities were restricted only during hours when it is unreasonable or caused disturbance
then an understanding could be reached between the two sides.101 Azzan in his reply
stated that music was to be banned at all time and no concessions would be made to
British subjects.102

The policies of the government also caused an economic crisis at Muscat. The fact that
the Zanzibar subsidy, was stopped further contributed to the economic woes of the
Imamate.103 The Islamic law of debtor and creditor was enforced which badly hurt the
interests of the British Indian traders who controlled the trade at Muscat. As tobacco was

99 Disbrowe to Gonne, n. 96, p. 175.
100 R/15/6/2, Disbrowe to Gonne, 26 April, 1869, Muscat, “Chapter 6: His Highness Saiyid Azzan bin Qais
101 R/15/6/2, Disbrowe to Azzan, 13 August, 1869, Muscat, “Chapter 6: His Highness Saiyid Azzan bin
102 R/15/6/2, Azzan to Disbrowe, 14 August, 1869, Muscat, “Chapter 6: His Highness Saiyid Azzan bin
103 Kelly, n. 67, p. 114.
banned, traders of that commodity suffered losses. There was a general decline in trade at Muscat. Even the pay of the troops were in arrears. A few of the British Indian merchants removed their commodities and immigrated to Zanzibar or else decline to do business. Most of the Indians could not do so because they possessed landed property, claims or other immovable assets. The Indians were unable to sue Omani subjects for debts owed as most local merchants were unable to pay due to actual or threatened confiscation of their wealth. The revenue from the customs had begun declining after the Imamate removed Hindu merchants from the control of the customs. Khalili appointed Said bin Amr of the inland Hijariyin tribe as the in charge of the customs. Said’s inefficiency caused greater losses. The authorities decided to reverse their decision to keep the Indian merchants away from the customs. In May, 1869, the muttawa proposed to the Agent in Muscat of the firm Gopaldas Mowjee that he should take over the customs on their behalf. As the firm belonged to British Indian subjects, the Agent conferred the matter with the British Political Agent at Muscat who discouraged the former from accepting the offer. Finally, Khalili persuaded a Khoja, Sulaiman bin Jumah, to bid MT$ 95,000 for the customs on the understanding that a sizeable refund would be provided. After Jumah acted accordingly, Khalili paid nothing in return and threatened Jumah with a fine and imprisonment if he tried to get out of the deal.

It was in order to make up this loss of revenue that the Imamate began the confiscation of property. The grants and concessions provided to the various tribes in the interior were stopped. The Imamate began to earn enemies because of these policies. Sheikh Ali of the Bani Jabir was forced to give up an estate of MT$ 4,000. Sheikh Ali became alienated and he became a part of the Ghafiri coalition that organised in opposition to the

105 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 483.
106 Landen, n. 3, p. 259.
107 Disbrowe to Gonne, 21 May, 1869, MSA, PD, Vol. 89, #952, 1869, p. 66.
109 Landen, n. 3, p. 259.
government. A forced loan was imposed on the citizens. 110 A grant of MT$ 3,000 promised to the powerful Naim tribe by Khalili was denied to them which led the loss of their loyalty to the regime. 111 Heavy taxes resulted in a labour strike in Muscat in 1870. 112

The step that finally prompted the tribes of Oman to oppose the Imamate was Azzan’s attempt to centralise authority in the country in contrast to the feudal setup that prevailed under Said bin Sultan and his successors. In the latter situation, the powerful tribal chiefs were independent and their authority was not interfered with. They were never visited by the Sultans to whom they paid little or no revenue. They were, from time to time invited to Muscat, and received money or presents from the Sultans themselves. Azzan tried to curtail the power of the tribal sheikhs by appointing local governors or deputies. The practice of taking hostages was introduced to win the compliance of the tribes. 113 In the early stages, Azzan’s government was liked by the bedouins but disliked by the townspeople. 114 But Azzan’s attempt to centralise ultimately earned him the opposition of the tribes as well. 115 The first to revolt were naturally the Ghafiri tribes who turned against the regime in the winter of 1870-71. Eventually, the Hinawi tribes of Sharqiya and Ja’alan who were the erstwhile supporters of the Imamate also became disgruntled. 116 This was a perfect setting for Turki to launch his rebellion against Azzan in 1870.

**Turki’s Failed Foray against Azzan and Final Capture of Muscat**

In the beginning of March, 1870, Turki slipped out from India on a regular mail steamer without the permission of the British. He first went to Bandar Abbas and from there on to Dubai. He then asked for a loan from the British Resident in the Persian Gulf which was rejected. 117 From Dubai, Turki began attempts to win the support of powerful allies in

112 Ibid, p. 268.
113 Pelly to Secretary to Bombay Government, n. 83, p. 355.
115 Lorimer, n. 4, pp. 491-92.
116 Allen, n. 82, p. 55.
117 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 486.
his campaign against Azzan. The Wahhabi Amir refused to move against Oman during
this period. Leaving out Abu Dhabi who was an ally of Azzan, Turki had expectations
from all the other sheikhs of Trucial Oman. But the ruler of Abu Dhabi persuaded the
other sheikhs not to provide support to Turki. The other sheikhs promised help to Turki
if he could gain the support of Muhammad Ali, the Sheikh of the Naim tribe. But Turki
failed to get the latter's support and he decided to leave the Arab coast. But Turki's
mission to the Gulf was not a complete failure. Before leaving for Persia, Turki gained the
support of Hajee Ahmad, the governor of Bandar Abbas who sent him horses, camels and
powder to a small extent. The biggest supporter of Turki was Sultan Majid of Zanzibar.
In 1869, there were rumours of an expedition assembling at Mukulla on the Yemeni coast
in support of Turki and supposedly funded by Majid.

Majid coerced the Jenaba and Bani Bu Ali tribes of Sur and Ja’alan to give their
support to Turki by threatening that he would not allow them to visit Zanzibar for trade
purposes if they did not do so. Accordingly, the sheikhs of these tribes sent letters of
support to Turki. They were willing to take over Sur and from there proceed by land to
Muscat but were not ready to attack Muscat from the sea. Majid also promised presents
to all the sheikhs of Trucial Oman on behalf of Turki but not to the Abu Dhabi chief

118 R/15/6/36, Section 75, “Chapter VI- (Sections 72-159B): “Return of Syud Toorkee to Power”, “Chapter
119 IOR/P/438/11, Telegram from Pelly to Political Secretary to Bombay Government and Foreign
Secretary, Simla, 31 May, 1870, Muscat, FD, No. 224, “Government of India Foreign Department
Political Proceedings, December 1970: Affairs of Muscat and Oman”, “Personality and Consolidation
of His Position: Struggle against Turki b. Sa’id: Relations with Wahhabis and Princes of the Al Sa’ud
and Sheikhs and Tribes of the Gulf Emirates, 1870”, “Azzan b. Qais, 1868-1871”, in A. de L. Rush
120 R/15/6/36, Section 72, “Chapter VI- (Sections 72-159B): “Return of Syud Toorkee to Power”, “Chapter
121 R/15/6/36, Section 91, “Chapter VI- (Sections 72-159B): “Return of Syud Toorkee to Power”, “Chapter
122 R/15/6/2, Disbrowe to Pelly, 10 May, 1869, Muscat, “Chapter 6: His Highness Saiyid Azzan bin Qais
124 Bailey, n. 121, p. 467.
whose alliance with Azzan was well known.\textsuperscript{125} In May 1870, Azzan, his brother Ibrahim and Salih left for Barka to storm and take into direct control the fort of Hazm near Rustaq as the loyalty of the Yaariba tribe controlling it was under suspicion.\textsuperscript{126} Though it was short of supplies the fort was strong.\textsuperscript{127} The tribes of the Batina coast saw the fort of Hazm as a place of refuge for their families and security of their valuables during times of trouble and did not want it to fall into the hands of Azzan.\textsuperscript{128} Azzan besieged the fort, stopped provisions and aid from reaching them, and destroyed their harvest with the aim of starving them into submission.\textsuperscript{129}

In July 1870, the British received reports that Turki left Bandar Abbas with forty followers on board a British ship Mozuffer for Bombay. Turki was also accompanied by Sayf bin Sulaiman al-Busaidi, ex-governor of Muttrah and his son Badr.\textsuperscript{130} The father and


\textsuperscript{126} Hazm fort was built by the previous ruling dynasty the Yaariba during the reign of Sultan bin Sayf II (1711-19). It continued to be a Yaariba stronghold even after the dynasty lost power to the Al Bu Saidis until the reign of Imam Azzan bin Qays.


son combine would play important roles in Turki’s capture of Muscat and in his administration respectively. The British suspected that Turki’s plan was to divert the ship to the Omani coast. Pelly was asked to overtake him and warn him against attacking Muscat. But Turki returned to Bandar Abbas.\footnote{R/15/6/36, Section 84, “Chapter VI- (Sections 72-159B): “Return of Syud Toorkee to Power”, “Chapter 7: Precis of Muscat Affairs (1869-1872), in R.W. Bailey (ed.), Records of Oman: 1867-1947: Volume I: Historical Affairs to 1871, (Buckinghamshire, England, Archive Editions, 1988), p. 347.} In August, Majid sent to Bandar Abbas three bills drawn on the firm of a merchant in Bombay by the name of Jairam Sewjee for one and half lakh dollars in favour of Turki’s cause. One bill of twenty thousand was for Turki’s immediate use. The second one of thirty thousand was to be paid if Turki captured Sur. The last bill of one lakh dollars was to be paid to the Wahhabi Amir if he took Sohar. This coincided with the landing at Sur of Turki’s supporters consisting of four boats of Persians and Baluchis joined by a detachment of Ja’alan tribes.\footnote{R/15/6/36, Section 92, “Chapter VI- (Sections 72-159B): “Return of Syud Toorkee to Power”, “Chapter 7: Precis of Muscat Affairs (1869-1872), in R.W. Bailey (ed.), Records of Oman: 1867-1947: Volume I: Historical Affairs to 1871, (Buckinghamshire, England, Archive Editions, 1988), p. 465.} The British warned the firm in Bombay that honouring the bills would make them liable to prosecution as it would be abetting waging of war against Muscat with which Britain had peaceful relations. The firm replied that it had no interest in supporting Turki’s expedition but it would be a breach of contract if it did not honour the bills and would involve loss of credit and commercial honour of the firm.\footnote{R/15/6/36, Section 97, “Chapter VI- (Sections 72-159B): “Return of Syud Toorkee to Power”, “Chapter 7: Precis of Muscat Affairs (1869-1872), in R.W. Bailey (ed.), Records of Oman: 1867-1947: Volume I: Historical Affairs to 1871, (Buckinghamshire, England, Archive Editions, 1988), p. 469.}

Turki’s followers in Sur who numbered around two hundred were joined by Ali bin Khalfan, the Sheikh of the Bani Bu Ali tribe and they together occupied the portion of the town which lied southward and eastward of the creek. When Pelly visited the port to review the situation, Ali bin Khalfan and his people declared their support for Turki while the Jenaba still professed support for Azzan. The Jenaba and the few Banias of Sur complained to Pelly that Ali bin Khalfan and his people had placed an embargo on all craft proceeding to the sea from Sur in order to ensure that all sea-faring men would be detained on shore so that they would be available when Turki arrived. The supporters of

Turki claimed that this embargo had the permission of the British government. Pelly in a statement to the residents of Sur refuted this declaration. Major Way, the Acting Political Agent at Muscat warned both the supporters of Turki and those of Azzan in Sur against harming the British Indian subjects at the port. The two sides in return assured the Agent that British Indian subjects in Sur would be safe. In the meantime, the officials of the Persian Gulf Residency intercepted Turki with forty followers on a bughla about thirty miles to the north-west of Muscat on 27th August 1870. It was on its way from Hormuz to Sur But the British Indian government relaxed the restrictions it had

134 Pelly to Secretary to Bombay Government, n. 83, p. 354.
enforced before and provided instructions to Pelly that Turki should not be stopped from proceeding if he was alone or had only a few followers.139

Turki finally landed at Khor Fakkan in September and from there he left for Buraimi through Fujairra. He was joined on the way by the Bani Qitab and at Buraimi by the Naim who had turned against Azzan.140 One factor that worked in favour of Turki here was the reward offered by Majid to the Saudis for attacking Azzan as a result of which the Saudis had begun instigating the Naim and other tribes of the north-west against Azzan.141 The Naim controlled all the forts in Buraimi except the main one which was under the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, Azzan’s ally in the region.142 Turki was also joined by the sheikhs of Dubai, Ajman and Ras al-Khaima.143 Sheikh Zayid of Abu Dhabi arrived at this time to render assistance to the Burairni garrison. Several engagements took place which ended with the victory of Shiekh Zaid.144 Faced with defeat, the Sheikh of Dubai abandoned Turki.145 Most of the Turki’s force consisted of aids from the sheikhs of Trucial Oman, the Naim tribe and some people from Khor Fakkan. None of the other tribes of Oman were with Turki.146

140 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 486.
141 Pelly to Secretary to Bombay Government, n. 83, p. 355.
142 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 486.
143 Landen, n. 3, p. 273.

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Meanwhile, Azzan and his brother Ibrahim brought the siege of Hazm to a successful conclusion after several months.\textsuperscript{147} Azzan, Ibrahim, Salih bin Ali and Faisal bin Hamud were trying to subjugate the Jenaba and other tribes of Dhahira province in south-west Oman adjoining Buraimi. They then laid siege to and took Abriyin and Aynayn, two of the principal forts in the region. Azzan then resumed the siege of Hazm fort. From Aynayn, Azzan took his forces to Yankul with the intention of proceeding to the relief of Buraimi. But when he realised that Sheikh Zaid of Abu Dhabi could manage to hold on against Turki, Azzan moved on the attack the Dank fort which was held by some of the rebellious Naim. Before the taking of Abriyin and Aynayn forts, Azzan had promised the Hinawi tribes from Sharqiya province who were with him some amount of money and to remove Sheikh Salih and Khalili from power. This was evidence that Salih had developed bad relations with his Hinawi allies in his own province. When called upon to renew his promise after arriving at Yankul, Azzan pleaded inability to do so. As a result, the leaders of these tribes along with all of their men deserted Azzan whose force was thereby reduced to two thousand men.\textsuperscript{148}

By the time Azzan reached Dank in the beginning of October, he had doubled the number of his troops to four thousand. He also had two pieces of artillery under a Persian officer. When the force entered a pass near Dank, they were surrounded by Turki's force, attacked and were completely routed.\textsuperscript{149} Turki had used his numerically inferior forces in a more tactful manner.\textsuperscript{150} Azzan lost around three hundred to four hundred men which included the tamimahs of three major Hinawi tribes, the Hajriyin, Habus and Yal Sad.\textsuperscript{151} The wounded included Muhammad bin Sulayyim al Gharabi, one of the leaders of the Imamate. After the battle Azzan first fled to Kabura and from there to Sohar. Ibrahim bin Qays fled to Sohar directly. Sheikh Salih fled to Barka from where he proceeded to Muscat. Faisal bin Hamud took refuge in Yankul.\textsuperscript{152} The Battle of Dank as it came to be called was a turning point in Turki's campaign against the Imamate. This did not mean

\textsuperscript{147} Lorimer, n. 4, p. 486.
\textsuperscript{148} Way to Gonne, n. 144, p. 364.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid, p. 365.
\textsuperscript{151} Kelly, n. 67, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{152} Way to Gonne, n. 144, p. 365.
that Turki's campaign against Azzan was smooth from here on. But the myth of invincibility of the Imamate was shattered. After the engagement, Turki went to Adam and Muzabi. At Muzabi he left a large number of forces under Sulaiman bin Sayf, the Sheikh of the Bani Riyam tribe who dwelled in Jabal al-Akhdar or Green Mountain. He had received the support of the tribes along the route. From Muzabi, Turki went through Ibra and Bidiya to Ja'alan to win the support of the Bani Bu Ali and Bani Bu Hassan tribes who were both rivals and belonged to the competitive Ghafiri and Hinawi confederations respectively. With support from these tribes, Turki captured Sur at the end of October, 1870.153

Turki's supporters at Muzabi who numbered around five thousand captured a place called Birkat al-Moz, plundered a caravan of provisions and ammunition sent by Azzan for the garrison of the fort of Zuki, laid siege to Nizwa fort and closed the passes beyond the Samayil. One consolation for Azzan during this time was that the garrison of Hazm fort surrendered through the intervention of Muhammad bin Sulayyim al Gharabi on the condition that the Muscat government would in the future nominate a certain portion of the garrison.154 The situation in Dhahira and Buraimi regions also stabilised in favour of Azzan. The principal fort in Buraimi was continued to be held by the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi. The Naim and Duru tribes tendered their submission to Azzan through the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi and offered to surrender Dank to him.155 On the other hand, most of the tribes of Sharqiya and Ja'alan began to flock to the standard of Turki. This included the Jenaba, Wahiba, and also disaffected elements of Hinawi tribes like the Hajariyin, Habus, and Bani Bu Hassan.156 Immediately after Turki captured Sur, Major Way, the Acting Political Agent at Muscat, visited him at Sur and got an assurance from him that Muscat would not be attacked from the sea.157 But Turki continued to face problems. The death

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156 Kelly, n. 67, p. 115.
of Sultan Majid in October 1870 ended the financial support that Turki had received from Zanzibar.\textsuperscript{158}

On 3 November 1870, Turki began his march from Sur using the inland route through Kamil and Bidiya instead of the coastal one. But he was soon deserted by most of his followers and he had fall back on Sur.\textsuperscript{159} Azzan began preparations for the defense of Muscat and Muttrah in anticipation of Turki's assault. But enough people could not be found for the defense of the two places. The garrisons of Muscat and Muttrah put together consisted of only eight hundred people.\textsuperscript{160} To meet Azzan's expenses in Dhahira a heavy tax was levied which badly affected the labour class resulting in a strike by workers. The disturbances in the south led to the closure of the date trade from the south to the coast.\textsuperscript{161} Trade had come to a stand-still and all British Indian traders at Muscat sent all their valuable property on board the ships and they became ready to leave at short notice.\textsuperscript{162} The Muscat authorities notified to all people who had shipped goods without its sanction that they would not be allowed to re-land shipped property without payment of customs duty at the same rate as if the goods had been newly imported into the country. Major Way believed that as this rule was contrary to the treaty signed between Muscat and the British it would not apply to British citizens. But he preferred not to notice it until a British subject was charged.\textsuperscript{163}

During the preparations for the defense of Muscat and Muttrah there was one final incident which heightened tensions between the Imamate and the British. Once the probability of an attack by Turki against Muscat increased, the Bombay government in January 1871, provided instructions to the officials in the Gulf that the permission provided to the Muscat authorities to reinforce their garrisons on the coast by sea was to

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\textsuperscript{158} Landen, n. 3, p. 273.
\textsuperscript{159} Wedderburn to Aitchinson, n. 157, p. 368.
\textsuperscript{160} Section 104, Precis of Muscat Affairs, n. 155, p. 472.
\textsuperscript{161} Way to Gonne, n. 144, p. 365.
\textsuperscript{162} Section 104, Precis of Muscat Affairs, n. 155, p. 472.
\end{flushright}
be withdrawn as a state of war existed in the territory of Muscat and it was necessary to maintain a neutral position between the combatants. Azan refused to agree to the new order. When Azzan tried to send some reinforcements to Muttrah despite a warning from the Political Agent, his boat was stopped by a boat from the British steamer the Quantung. When the boat made two more attempts to leave the harbour, the Quantung struck the boat and sunk it. But unlike the incident of the firing on the Bullfinch, Azzan personally apologised for the incident immediately after the incident which settled the matter promptly.  

At the end of 1870, Turki finally set out from Sur for launching his attack against the Imamate. He divided his forces into two and led the main body through the interior route passing through the northern parts of the province of Ja’alan to Samad in the Sharqiya where Salih bin Ali was entrenched. From Samad he planned to go through the Samayil pass to reach Muscat. He sent the rest of his forces including the rival Bani Bu Ali and Bani Bu Hassan tribes up the coastal route to attack Muscat under the leadership of Sulaiman bin Sayf, Turki’s assistant and ex-governor of Muttrah. By the middle of January 1871, Turki was near Samad with a force of three to four thousand men about to attack that place. On the twelveth of January, Sayf bin Sulaiman had taken Qurayat on the coast between Muscat and Sur. Salih had successfully blocked Turki at Samad. On the seventeenth, Sayf advanced from Qurayat to Ruwi above Muttrah. Azzan bin Qays and his brother Ibrahim were busy preparing the defences of Muttrah and Muscat. On the the thirtieth of January, Sayf attacked Azzan bin Qays at Muttrah and gained possession for Turki of all but two forts. Both Azzan and Sayf were killed during the attack.


167 Lorimer, n. 4, p. 492.
While Khalili continued to hold the Jalali and Mirani forts at Muscat, the troops of Sayf bin Sulaiman entered both the towns of Muttrah and Muscat. Ibrahim bin Qays fled to the Batina coast, all the forts of which were under the control Azzan’s followers. When Pelly arrived in Muscat, Khalili suggested that Ibrahim should be regarded as the Imam and successor of Azzan, that he should continue in his present position and that the new Muscat government would pay the British Indian government one-fourth of the revenue of Muscat port. Pelly gave a non-committal reply to the request. On the third of February, Turki entered Muttrah with five hundred camelmen. The next day the governor of Muttrah received pardon from Turki and surrendered the fort of the town to Turki. On the evening of the fifth, Turki entered Muscat. Turki asked Pelly to mediate between himself and Khalili. He said that his situation was precarious as he had less money to hold his force together. He wanted to move to the interior and the Batina coast after taking possession of the forts of Muscat while his force was still together. Turki also told Pelly that his expenses were increasing each day as tribes were pouring into Muscat due to the death of Azzan and Turki’s presence in Muscat.

As a result of mediation by Pelly firing on both sides were stopped and representatives of the two sides met in the British consulate at Muscat. An agreement was reached between the two sides and Khalili surrendered the forts to Turki. According to the agreement, Khalili was not be held accountable for serving the Imamate, the property confiscated during the reign of Azzan would remain in the hands of the present owners, all claims against the regime would be regarded as settled, and that Turki would pay the salaries of the troops of the former Imamate. These terms were to be applicable to all of Khalili’s compatriots in the former government. Pelly and Major Way appended their signatures to the agreement merely as witnesses and made it clear that they had no

168 Section 107, Precis of Muscat Affairs, n. 166, p. 473.
liability to ensure that the stipulations of the agreement were carried out. But in the same month, Khalili was accused of sending money to Ibrahim bin Qays to raise a force against Turki. He and his son were seized and thrown into Mirani fort. Khalili soon died in prison and his son met the same fate within twenty-four hours. Foul play was suspected in the death of the two. With this sordid episode, the Imamate of Azzan bin Qays was brought to an end.

The situation of Azzan’s Imamate is an example of the level of British influence over Oman during the second half of the nineteenth century. Azzan was a ruler who was able to exert his influence over all parts of Oman after a long period of time. Even Said bin Sultan was not as successful as Azzan in extending his authority in the interior regions. But Azzan was not able to impose his authority on Oman’s oversees territories. Britain used its influence to extend the terms of the maritime truce of Trucial Oman to the waters of Oman as soon as the Imamate assumed power and thus blocked Omani access to its territories in the Gulf and Makran coast. The difference of opinion on this matter between the Supreme Government of India and the Bombay government will be discussed in a different chapter. But what was clear here is that Oman could have access to its territorial possessions abroad only at the mercy of the British. While imposing the terms of the maritime truce, the British were partial to Turki as when he and his followers were not arrested when they were intercepted at sea before their landing at Khor Fakkan. At the same time, Azzan was prevented from arming his fort at Muttrah just before the attack by Turki. After Azzan was deposed and Turki came to power, the British quietly lifted the restrictions on movements by sea. In the words of the Foreign Secretary of the British Indian government

We shall probably never have so good a chance again of receding from a false position.\textsuperscript{172}


In this manner, the sole government at Muscat that tried to assert its autonomy during the late nineteenth century was brought to an end. The Sultanate of Turki that followed the Imamate was noted for the compliant attitude towards the British.

The Early Years of Turki bin Said’s Rule

When Turki came to power at Muscat in the beginning of 1871, the whole of Oman had still not come under his control. Most of Batina coast from Shinas to Musnah was ruled by Ibrahim bin Qays from his headquarters at Sohar while Rustaq was under the command of Ibrahim’s cousin, Faisal bin Hamud.173 Buraimi had fallen into the hands of a small body of Wahhabis from the Naim tribe who were fighting amongst themselves.174

In April 1871, Turki began preparations to capture Sohar. During this time, Abdul Aziz bin Said, another son of Said bin Sultan returned to Muscat.175 He was to play an important role in Omani politics during the rest of the nineteenth century. Abdul Aziz had made an attempt to capture Gwadur in January 1870 but had failed.176 Turki’s people besieged Sohar fort during these months. Abdul Aziz proceeded to Sohar in June 1871 but he refused to assume command of the siege of Sohar on behalf of Turki and returned to Gwadur.177 Finally Turki himself besieged Sohar in August 1871 with a battery of three guns. A breach was made in the walls of Sohar and Turki planned to make an assault. That was when some of his followers from the Al Bu Rashid tribe interceded and offered terms of agreement which was accepted by Turki. According to this agreement, Ibrahim bin Qays retained Sohar and the coast line from Sultan to Khabura. The remaining district and ports including Suwaiq and Mussnah were retained by Turki.178

Turki was forced to conclude peace as there was a chance of the Al Bu Rashid deserting

173 Lorimer, n. 4, pp. 492-93.
176 Section 77, Precis of Muscat Affairs, n. 60, p. 462.
if he had refused.\textsuperscript{179} There was temporary reprieve for Ibrahim in Sohar because of this agreement.

In marked contrast to the situation of the Imamate, the British provided recognition to Turki’s government in June 1871. Issues like the lease of Bandar Abbas, Oman’s possessions on the Makran coast and the Zanzibar subsidy were kept aside for later discussion.\textsuperscript{180} But Turki’s position did not become completely secure because of British recognition. He continued to face problems from rivals like the former Sultan Salim and also Abdul Aziz. Salim landed at Sur in February 1872 but had to flee to the interior to the territory of the Bani Bu Hassan when Turki pursued him.\textsuperscript{181} The biggest headache that Turki faced was at Gwadur. British recognition did not allow Turki to reassert his authority over that port. On the other hand, Gwadur became a target for his rivals like Abdul Aziz who wanted to secure a base for directing operations against Oman. After rejecting the command of the siege of Sohar, Abdul Aziz had straight away left for Gwadur in June 1871 and occupied that port which had been vacated by Nasir bin Thuwaini who left for Zanzibar.\textsuperscript{182} Turki was told by the British that he could not expect any help to regain Gwadur or Chabar but that he would not be prevented from sending vessels or men to these territories as a part of his own effort to recapture them.\textsuperscript{183} Once he established himself at Gwadur, Abdul Aziz made several attempts to capture Chabar as well.\textsuperscript{184} These efforts were finally met with success, when Abdul Aziz captured Chabar in


\textsuperscript{181} Lorimer, n. 4, p. 493.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid, p. 608.


January 1872. But in March 1872, Abdul Aziz was expelled from Chabar by a Persian army and he abandoned both Chabar and Gwadur and left for Bombay.\footnote{Lorimer, n. 4, p. 609.}

After Abdul Aziz left, Turki sent his wazir Thuwaini bin Muhammad and three hundred Wahhabi mercenaries to take possession of Gwadur on 8th May 1872.\footnote{R/15/6/2, Captain S. B. Miles, Assistant Political Agent at Gwadur, to Commissioner in Sind, Kurrachee, 13 May, 1872, Gwadur, “Chapter 23: Gwadur”, in R.W. Bailey (ed.), Records of Oman: 1867-1947: Volume V: Territorial Affairs II, (Buckinghamshire, England, Archive Editions, 1988), p. 502.} Turki tried to get the lease of Bandar Abbas renewed through the British who tried to persuade the Persians through their minister at Tehran.\footnote{R/15/6/5, Under Secretary to Government of India, to Secretary to Bombay Government, Simla, 24 October, 1872, No. 2160, 1872, “Chapter 24: Bandar Abbas, Charbar and Relations of the Sultanate with Persia (Iran)”, in R.W. Bailey (ed.), Records of Oman: 1867-1947: Volume VI: Foreign Relations, (Buckinghamshire, England, Archive Editions, 1988), p. 73.} The Persians made it clear to the British that they were not interested in renewing the lease of Bandar Abbas to Turki.\footnote{Lorimer, n. 4, p. 499.} With regard to Chabar which had been occupied by a Persian army, the British told Turki that they could not aid him in recovering the port.\footnote{R/15/6/36, Section 216, “Toorkee’s Application about Zanzibar”, “Continuation of Narrative of Muscat Affairs, June 1873 to July 1874: Section I”, “Chapter 8: Precis of Muscat Affairs (1872-1892), in R.W.} Thus when the dust settled after the turbulent years of the Imamate, the only overseas territory that Oman continued to control was Gwadur. An advantage that Turki obtained during this time was the renewal of the Zanzibar subsidy which he gained because of the signing of the anti-slavery treaty in 1873. Turki gained a more favourable than Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar who refused to sign an anti-slavery treaty with the British.\footnote{Lorimer, n. 4, p. 499.} Because the British Home government in London had provided Majid, the former Sultan of Zanzibar with an assurance that he would not have to pay the subsidy to Muscat, the British Indian government had no hope of recovering the subsidy from Zanzibar.\footnote{R/15/6/36, Section 216, “Toorkee’s Application about Zanzibar”, “Continuation of Narrative of Muscat Affairs, June 1873 to July 1874: Section I”, “Chapter 8: Precis of Muscat Affairs (1872-1892), in R.W.}
the subsidy.\textsuperscript{192} Because of the refusal by Zanzibar, the subsidy was shared by both the British Home government in London and the British Indian government.\textsuperscript{193}

The subsidy strengthened Turki's financial position and he began to use it to his advantage. Turki attacked Sohar for a few days in July 1873 and entered into negotiations with Ibrahim through the mediation of Muhammad bin Ali, the chief of the Naim. As a result, Ibrahim gave up Sohar in return for five thousand dollars and monthly allowance of one hundred dollars and also on the condition that Ibrahim would reside in or near Heebee and not approach further east.\textsuperscript{194} The entire coastal strip of the Batina came into the hands of Turki because of the agreement. But Turki continued to face challenges from rivals like Salim and Abdul Aziz. Salim tried to unsuccessfully capture Sur in October 1872.\textsuperscript{195} At the end of 1872, Salim left Sur on a native craft for Bombay. Pushed out of Oman because of lack of support, both Salim and Abdul Aziz concentrated their efforts on Gwadur. In late July 1873, Abdul Aziz tried to capture Gwadur but did not succeed. In September 1873, Abdul Aziz was captured at sea near Sur by the Political Agent, Major Mockler who deported him to Karachi.\textsuperscript{196} Salim managed to capture Gwadur for a few days in December 1873 but could not retain it and he escaped to the island of Qishm.\textsuperscript{197} Before Ibrahim had surrendered Sohar to Turki, he had received the fort of Hazm from

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{196} Lorimer, n. 4, p. 494.
\item \textsuperscript{197} Ibid, pp. 613-14.
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\end{footnotesize}
the hands of his cousin Faisal bin Hamud who controlled Rustaq. 198 Thus Ibrahim bin Qays began building a new base away from the coast and continued to be of prominence in Omani politics. 199 In September 1873 Ibrahim’s position was further strengthened when he obtained the fort of Rustaq from Faisal bin Hamud for $2,200 and certain date groves. Faisal himself withdrew from public life after this arrangement. 200 While Turki continued his attempts to consolidate his power in Oman after 1873, his rivals continued to build independent bases of power. In fact, events after 1873 proved that Turki’s reign in Oman was not going to be smooth.

Conclusion
Under Imam Azzan bin Qays, Oman had an opportunity to become strongly united after a long period of time. Within a short span of time, Azzan managed to put down all opposition within interior Oman and even managed to drive out the Wahhabis from Buraimi. But this did not mean that Azzan could enforce similar control over Oman’s remaining maritime territories like Bandar Abbas and Gwadur. In fact, Azzan’s experience proved that no ruler in Oman could hope to continue to control Oman’s oversees possessions without the approval of the British. Also, the fact that Muscat’s trade was in the hands of Indian merchants who were not tolerated by his theocratic regime badly weakened Oman’s financial position. Ultimately, Azzan’s attempt to centralise authority in Oman earned him the displeasure of the tribes in Oman who turned against him and provided the opportunity to Turki to topple the Imamate.

The assumption of power by Turk bin Said in Oman was the beginning of a new stage in Omani-British relations. Unlike Thuwaini and Salim, Turki had received British help

198 After the time of Imam Azzan bin Qays, the fort of Hazm became a hereditary possession of the Qays bin Ahmad collateral branch of the Al Bu Saidi dynasty.
on a personal basis even before he became Sultan and had slipped from custody in India to seize Muscat with the tacit approval of the British. As a result, Turki and his successors were completely indebted to the British. The early years of Turki’s rule saw the shrinking of Oman’s external possessions to a few miles around the port of Gwadur. The access to the Zanzibar subsidy provided by the British allowed Turki to push back Ibrahim bin Qays from the Batina coast. But Ibrahim managed to create a new base in the Batina region itself while Turki’s other rivals like Salim bin Thuwaini and Abdul Aziz bin Said found less success. The events after 1873 proved that Turki’s attempts to consolidate his authority in Oman were not going to be smooth.