

BIODATA

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Muscat and Gwadar: connections between seaboard communities during the XIX century

عشر التاسع القرن خلال الساحل مجتمعات بين اتصالات: وجواد مسقط
بفضل و عمان من سعيدي بو آل عن بإخلاف الدافع و حامية و بدعم البلوش قبائل قامت عشر التاسع القرن خلال
نم و القاري التضامن على الاعتماد بإمكانهم كان التقلدي، البدوي لمجتمعهم والعشائرية القبلية البنية
الجزيرة وشبه مكران بلاد
مرصد ، الجيوشكية للقبيلة لاهتمام مكانا عمان، سلطاني سيطرة تحت: الوقت نفس في جواد مدينة كانت
الهندي التلغراف للخط ومحطة الفارسي الاتجاه في مكران ساحل طول على البريطنانية للحكومة استراتيجي
الأوروبي
الوسطى أسيا قيادات فرض بهدف أفغانستان خلال من وروسيا أوروبا من قالبند من كبرى كميات استيراد تم
الخاصة الشركات من سرا الأسلحة استيراد تم حين في أفريقي، وشرق العربية، الجزيرة وشبه والخليج
الأوروبية
القرن من وليا العهود و 1890 بين. للأسلحة الأسواق أهم من كانت تجارية كموانئ ومسقط وبوشهر، عباس، بندر
الهندي المحيط ومنطقة الخليج لمنطقة الأسلحة لتجارة مركز مسقط أصبح العشرين
أفريقي وشرق الخليج ضفتي على هامد دورا الهند غرب من قائمة التجارية، المجتمعات وجود لعب
(Arabic transl. By Dr. Paolo Maggiolini, Catholic University, Milan, Italy)

Abstract

During the nineteenth century Baluch tribes protected, hid, supported and faithfully defended the Al Bu Sa'id dynasty of Oman, thanks also to the tribal structure and clan-family relationships of their society which, traditionally nomadic, could count on both Makran and peninsular, and continental solidarity. The town of Gwadar was at the same time: a dominion of the Sultans of Oman, a place of interest for the Gichki from Ketch, a strategic observatory for the British government along the coast of Makran in the Persian direction and a station of the Indo-European telegraph line. Large quantities of rifles were imported from Europe and from Russia through Afghanistan destined to enforce the leaderships of Central Asia, the Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa; while secretly arms were imported from European private companies. The trading ports of Bander Abbas, Bushire, and Muscat were the most important markets for arms. Between 1890 and the first decades of the twentieth century, Muscat became the centre of arms trade for the Gulf and the Indian Ocean area. And the presence of Asian merchant communities did play a significant role both on the Gulf shores and in East Africa.

Muscat and Gwadar: connections between seaboard communities during the XIX century

1.1. Introduction

The trading role played by Oman within international trade networks in the Indian Ocean and along the southern coast of Baluchistan dates back to time immemorial. Starting from the eighteenth century, Muscat became one of the principal entrepôts between the Gulf, western India and the Red Sea, and its importance grew still greater during the Al Bu Sa'id dynasty, whose political predominance over the littorals of the Indian Ocean lasted for about two centuries.

The coastal region of Baluchistan, that is Makran, generally known as Kech-Makran, to distinguish it from Persian Makran, represented one of these littorals. This region played a relevant role as an important link between the Middle East and Western India and its ports were part of the main commercial and financial networks and of the political and commercial relationships between Europe and the Orient. Two promontories of Gwadar and Ormara interrupt the coast of Makran; behind the coastal strip extends four mountainous ranges, which grow gradually towards the interior. The three chains of the Makran Range - southern, central and northern - enclose long narrow valleys, often isolated by sudden floods. The whole region is characterised by a marked aridity, temperatures rise steeply during summers and are generally mild during the winter; rainfall is scarce, and vegetation very poor, principally consisting of an ill-favoured, spiny scrub. During the nineteenth century the history of the Gulf and of the Indian Ocean was represented by many interwoven systems connecting merchandise, people and cultures, and, as stated above, one of them was the coastal strip of Baluchistan, the Makran. The relationships between Oman and Makran were always very close, not only with regard to the mercantile trades, but also under the strategic and military profile. The proof is given by the port of Gwadar, a natural port, well protected along the Makran coast, separated from Muscat only by a short sea inlet, remained an Omani *enclave* until 1958; the turreted palace of the *wali* of Oman is still towering above the centre of a modern Pakistani sea port, an imposing witness of what once upon a time was the heart of the thalassocracy of the Al Bu Sa'id, together with the two minor harbours of Pishukhan and Sûr; loved by these princes as an ideal place for hawking, it represented the best refuge when an Arab revolt was undermining their throne, and, besides personal safety, gave them the possibility to reorganise a counter-revolt. Information regarding the Makran is extremely scarce and, until the nineteenth century, is mainly based on oral tradition and the few details provided by the occasional, missionary or British official sent there by the East India Company and/or by His Majesty's government, both concerned with the trade and defence westwards of the colony par excellence, India herself.

At the start of the nineteenth century the Makran constituted a cultural entity quite distinct from the Indian region and was seen as being "other" also by the Persians Qajars: a frontier region, its very geography inhospitable by nature and, according to tales of the time, inhabited by warlike peoples, indomitable and famed - in available European archive documents - for their ferocity. Notwithstanding this, however, and thanks above all to the renewed political order of the Qajars and their frontier feudalism, the area continued to represent one of the main transit routes between the Iranian plateau and the Indus valley along which most trade passed, from east to west and north to south, by land and by sea.¹ Moreover, given its inhospitable geographical nature, it became the ideal refuge for rebels, bandits, pirates and fugitives. Here the Omani Arabs gradually imposed their power over the main coastal centres of the region.

Already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Baluch populations could be found in the service of the Al-Ya'rubi in Oman,² as special troops. For the Arabs of Oman these Baluch corps, troops, constituted their military power, an indispensable tool in the conquest and maintaining of power. It was, however, with Al Bu Sa'id that the Baluch and the coastal strip of Makran became an institutional part of the Omani forces and power system.³ From the end of the eighteenth century, and for all of the nineteenth, it was these tribes of pillaging warriors who protected, hid, supported and defended the Al Bu Sa'id of Oman, thanks also to the tribal structure and clan-family relationships of their society which, traditionally mobile, could count on both Makran and peninsular and continental solidarity. From the accounts of travellers, explorers and British officials of the time, we see emerge among others the Hot, the Rind and the Nawshirvani.⁴ It was the Baluch who gave protection and refuge in their settled lands, faithfulness and military service to the Al Bu Sa'id of Oman when they began their rise to power in Muscat.

¹ H., Strasburger (1954). *Zur Route Alexanders Durch Gedrosien*. Hermes. 82/2: Verlag, 251-254; M.E.L., Mallowan (1965). *The Mechanics of Ancient Trade in Western Asia: Reflections on the Location of Magan and Meluhha, Iran*. British Institute of Persian Studies. 3, 1-7; F., Kashani-Sabet (2013). *Baluchistan: Nature, Ethnicity, and Empire in Iran's borderland*. The Journal of the Middle East and Africa. 4/2, 187-204.

² G., Rentz (1999). "Banu Kharus," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (hereafter, *E.I.*). IV. CD Rom Edition: Leiden, 1084; J.C., Wilkinson (1987). *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ B., Nicolini (2013). *The Role of the Baluch in the Persian Gulf, 19th and 20th Centuries*. in H.G., Potter (Ed.) *The Gulf in Modern Times: People, Ports and History*. New York, in course of printing.

⁴ S.B., Miles (1984). "Notes on the Tribes of 'Oman by L.C.S.B. Miles, 27 May 1881". in Sirhan I.S.I. Sirhan (Ed.). *Annals of Oman to 1728*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 94.

1.2. The town of Muscat

What was Muscat like then? From the descriptions of travel accounts by Europeans during the nineteenth century, the picturesque bay of Muscat was a semicircle, enclosed by the mountains and with rocks dropping to the sea on which fortifications had been built for keeping a lookout for enemies. The town was surrounded by hills and rung round with walls and, with a green valley beyond the shore, it was a pleasant place. The hinterland of Muscat is so mountainous that, in the nineteenth century, it could only be reached on camel or donkey-back. Just outside the town the coast was mainly desert, hilly and desolate. Water resources have always been scarce in Oman and, in the nineteenth century, the price of the famous sweet, clean water of Muscat was extremely high.⁵

Available descriptions of the time show a varied and vivacious world animating Muscat; merchants from all over travelled there, Arabs, Indians, Hebrews, Turks, Africans, Persians... The dwellings were *barasti*, huts with roves of palm-leaves, more spacious than those on the opposite shores along the coast of Makran, and mud houses, although there were also some in stone and madrepora. The suq of Matrah, near Muscat, spread over a large area, almost entirely built upon with dwellings and narrow and winding alleyways. Here, in the nineteenth century, every kind of merchandise could be found, silk and linen, spices, dates, coffee brought across the desert by caravans, pearls, green and black grapes, bananas, figs, butter, fowl, goats and cattle, and even delicious mangos imported mainly by sea. The rich Omani merchants wore long, wide robes of extraordinarily clean white cotton, with wide sleeves and waists bound by belts from which emerged their beautiful silver knives, the *khanjar*, and swords. The maritime city of Muscat, thanks to its strategic position at the entrance to the Gulf, was always held to be the best port of the entire Arabian Peninsula. The town is surrounded by volcanic hills, bare of any vegetation, which culminate in high mountain ranges, the highest peak being mount Djabal Akhdar (9000 ft.) where snow falls during the winter months. In the past even grapes were grown on its slopes, from which the Portuguese, during their presence there, made a wine called muscatel. From the earliest times, the port had always been a lively and bustling place. Its position, almost hidden among the rocks, made it an ideal harbour for merchants, sailors, adventurers and pirates who found their fruit and drinking water. During the nineteenth century it was densely populated, a true crossroads for trade between East Africa, the eastern shores of the Gulf and Western India. It was defended by the Marani and Djallali forts, built by the Portuguese in 1527. Towards the end of the eighteenth century Muscat was described by the British merchant and explorer Abraham Parsons as a quite cosmopolitan city, where the tolerance of the political leaders permitted flourishing trade and multi-religious, multi-ethnic coexistence⁶. Numerous caravans arrived there daily from the interior to unload ostrich feathers, animal horns, sheep and leather, honey and beeswax and to bear away knives, games, spices, rice, sugar, coffee and tobacco. The British explorer noted also that trade between Muscat and Mocha (al-Muqah) was extremely intense; the Omani city sent 20,000 bales of coffee to Basra, every year, destined for Constantinople. Trade towards the interior, instead, was mainly in Persian carpets and silk, pearls, Maria Theresa Thalers and Venetian sequins (zecchini). He further commented on the fact that the mangoes of Muscat were better than the Indian fruit, and that drinking water was taken on board ships by barges drawn by oxen as the land was too uneven for barrels to be rolled over it. Many merchants were semi-naked and attempted to cool themselves by the use of ingenuous fans since, as Parsons admitted, "Muscat is the hottest place on earth".⁷ Lastly, he also remarked on how many of the inhabitants were ill or in need of treatment. The assignment of a British resident there was, however, abolished as early as 1809 due to the deleterious impact of the Muscat climate on the Europeans; the Omani port therefore came under the British jurisdiction of Bushire.⁸

From the accounts of certain European travellers in Arabia, the most imposing were the Baluch warriors, naked to the waist and armed with a knife and a double-handed sword, with fierce glares and of threatening presence. In 1825 the permanent bodyguard of the Omani sovereign, Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id, whose income amounted to 522,000 Maria Theresa Thalers⁹, of which 120,000 came from Zanzibar, consisted of 300 Baluch. At the time approximately 2,000 Baluch lived in Muscat, in the mud *barasti* outside the walls of the town. Their number was, however, forever growing. This was due both to the flexible nature of Omani power, as well as the intrinsic peculiarities of the Ibadi belief, factors which enabled the Baluch to insert themselves as a military force, and to the political and environmental persecution and threats under which they

⁵ P., Ward (1987). (Ed.) *Travels in Oman*. Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 4.

⁶ P. Ward, 8.

⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁸ J., Onley (2007). *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the nineteenth century Gulf*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹ M.R., Broome (1972). "The 1780 Restrike Thalers of Maria Theresa". Doris Stockwell Memorial Papers. 1. reprinted in *Numismatic Chronicle*. VII series. XII. London, 221-253.

had always suffered in their homeland. As far as their behaviour is concerned, the Baluch soldiers often ignored local disputes, preferring to steer clear of the different political factions that contended for power in Oman and, instead, simply obey the orders of whichever Arab prince offered the highest pay.¹⁰

Why, however, was it precisely the Baluch who were considered by the Omani Arabs to be the most trustworthy and safest military forces for their defence and for the numerous battles against their enemies, both at home and abroad, to the extent that they formed a military elite consisting of the bodyguard of the Sultan of Oman? If, on the one hand, the coast and islands of East Africa were of interest to the Portuguese in the context of the *carreira da India*, with implications and consequences in terms of political and commercial stability, on the other, the Al-Ya'rub Omani domination which included the East African littorals was characteristic of quite normal changes in dominion over the seas, without resulting in substantial alterations in commercial organization.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Al-Ya'rub tribe stood at the head of a flourishing mercantile reign which depended on the coastal cities and the principal islands of East Africa. The presence of Arab governors in the service of the Omani Arabs in the dominions of the Makran coast and in East Africa, was so as to control trade and impose taxes. This institution had its roots in the tribal system of exercising power, as well as in the political agreements with local rulers.

The rise to commercial power in the Indian Ocean of Holland and Great Britain, together with the retaking of Muscat and Mombasa by the Omani Arabs, where they could count on the consensus and support of the Swahili population, marked the start of the 'decline' for the Portuguese Empire in the East Indies.¹¹ Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Al Bu Sa'id defeated the Al-Ya'rub at Muscat¹² and were destined to extend their political and commercial power throughout the nineteenth century.

Ahmad bin Sa'id Al Bu Sa'id Al Bu Sa'id (r. 1749–1783), son of a coffee merchant from Sohar, was the leader of a new Omani dynasty. In 1784 Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id (r. 1792–1804), pretender to the throne of Oman, sought refuge in the desolate region of Makran, only a few nautical miles from Muscat. He journeyed to Tiz, a fortified village, and then turned towards Kharan where Mir Jahangir, the lead of the Nawshirvani tribe, espoused his cause. They went together to Kalat to confer with Nasir Khan I who, having declined Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id's request for military assistance in re-taking Oman, offered him a refuge for the duration of his temporary exile, the port of Gwadar, then an insignificant village of fishermen. This was to be a short-term concession that would cease once the struggle for power of the claimant to the Omani throne was concluded. It is therefore held that, towards the end of the eighteenth century, Nasir Khan I, khan of Kalat, granted the port of Gwadar to Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id in trust. Kalat's later claims to Gwadar were based on the fact that the grant of the jagir was never to be interpreted as permanent, but limited to the contingent need of Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id to seek refuge in Makran.

On the contrary, for the Omani sovereign, the grant meant naval protection of the coasts of Makran, which would be guaranteed by Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id once he came to power in Muscat. This, according to consulted sources, was the main reason for the trust which Nasir Khan I placed in the representative of the Al Bu Sa'id. From the reports of British officials of the time¹³ we may put forward the hypothesis that the Omani occupation of the port of Gwadar could be based on a *de facto* presence, there being no coherent or true evidence or testimony as to how this occupation began or of the events which led to Oman possessing this important strategic port on the Makran coast.

Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id used his base in southern Asia to mount naval expeditions in Arabia. One of the first acts of this Arab leader was to appoint Saif bin Ali as governor of Gwadar and to order him to build a fort in the most sheltered bay of the port. This governor, in compliance with Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id wishes, travelled with twenty men towards Chah Bahar with the excuse of a fishing expedition, took it by surprise overnight, overthrowing Shafi Muhammad, a Buledi who appears to have been betrayed by an Isma'ili, and annexing the land to the Omani territories. It must also be remembered that, in 1794, Sultan bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id obtained the rights to the revenue from Bandar Abbas and its domains, which then included Minab, the islands of Qishm, Hormuz and Hengam, from the Sheikh of the Beni Ma'in tribe, Mullah Husain, who owned the islands. From this moment on relations between Oman and Persia were inevitably destined to become hostile.

At the start of the nineteenth century the possessions of the Al Bu Sa'id included the island of Bahrain, the Makran coast with its important strategic-commercial enclave of Gwadar, certain sites along the Persian coast

¹⁰ G., Geary (1878). *Through Asiatic Turkey*, London.

¹¹ Although the Portuguese colonial empire was ousted by the Dutch about halfway through the 17th century, this did not prevent a Lusitanian presence from continuing in the trading and strategic centres of East Africa and the Indian Ocean. G., Papagno (2004). *I Portoghesi d'oro. Re, nobili, ebrei, mercanti e popolo nella formazione di un impero*. Diabasis: Reggio Emilia.

¹² C.F., Beckingham (1999). "Bu Sa'id," *E.I.* I, 1281.

¹³ J., Lorimer (1915). *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*. I. Historical. I, 601-22.

such as Chah Bahar,¹⁴ the island of Socotra, the Curia Muria isles, Zanzibar and nearby ports on the Sub-Saharan African coast. In this way and not without numerous and cruel struggles for power, such as – among the countless acts of piracy – the two attacks on Sur and Gwadar in 1805 by Shaikh Sultan, the leader of the Qasimi of Ras al-Khaimah and the immediate retaking of the centres by the Omani fleet, the Al Bu Sa'id achieved their greatest extent of expansion.¹⁵ In effect, following the affirmation of Omani rule, Gwadar became a richer place than the nearby harbour villages of Pasni and Jiwani, so much so that even an American ship called there to purchase bales of wool.

Thanks to the examination of available sources, both printed and manuscripts, combined to the field work, at this point we may put forward a hypothesis in explanation of the initial query: why was it precisely the Baluch who the Omani Arabs considered the most dependable and safest forces for their protection and for their battles against both internal and external enemies, to the point that they constituted a military elite? The answer lies in the creation of a terminus for a growing commercial network and in the availability and loyalty of the Baluch troops, together with the deeply interconnected longtime relationships with Oman.

1.3. Asian merchant communities in Muscat

Among the many Asian merchants trading at Muscat and in the Persian/Arab Gulf there were the Bhatta, originally from Rajastan (from Bhatti, Subhatta, Hindu warriors of the Vaishnavit caste). Another group of Bhatta were the Kutch, again Hindus who, in the seventeenth century enjoyed great prestige at Muscat and who were exempted from taxation by the Arabs. Together with these groups of merchants, there were also the Khoja, who were Isma'ilis. In foreign and sea-going trade mainly Muslims were employed (Bohra and Khoja) while Jainists and Hindus (Banya and Bhatta) were dominant in the banking and finance fields. Of these, only 18% were Hindus. The rest were Khojas, Memons and Bohras. These merchants were vividly described by European explorers of the nineteenth century, who took note of their complexion, fairer than that of the Arabs, their fine features, long moustaches but no beards and a Chinese pigtail at the base of a shaved head. Stress was also laid on the elegance and sumptuousness of their attire, silk tunics with long, ruffled sleeves, a clear sign that they were not involved in any form of manual labour.

The role of these merchants was one of the essential and deciding factors in the extraordinary development which occurred in Muscat during the nineteenth century, where they were extremely active. They were called banyan¹⁶ (vaniya, in Gujarati vaniyo, man of the merchant caste, from the Sanskrit vanij, merchant, later Anglicized as banyan, a term used to indicate Hindu as opposed to Muslim merchants). There were, moreover "money tasters" and sarruf moneychangers (from whence we have the English shroff) called mushrikun by the Arabs, polytheistic but easily included in the Islamic institution of aman (protection).¹⁷ In their accounts and in the communiqués of the East India Company representatives, the British used the term banyan to identify both the Hindu castes and the Indian Isma'ili communities (this mix up being quite frequent). The presence of the Isma'ili Khoja (khawajahs) community in goes back around the fifteenth century. Socially cut off from the Arabs, strictly endogamous but occasionally intermarrying with the autochthonous populations, and mainly involved in boat-building, in the nineteenth century the Indian Isma'ilis formed one of the largest groups, numerically, in Oman. However, from the start of the nineteenth century, it was the Hindu banyan who held and increased an uncontested financial superiority. There were, moreover, also Arab communities from the Hadramaut involved in both the religious and the commercial fields.¹⁸

1.4. The port of Gwadar

The role played by Gwadar within the framework of the main trade coming from East Africa had been crucial. In front of Gwadar port there is Ashtola Island, explored by McGregor in 1877-78. It is a wild and beautiful island, with a high mountain that ends in a plateau. Here people tell the legend of the white horse of the Prophet, as remembered by the presence of a shrine. Guater (also Gwadar, Pers. Govater) is a little known locality at the southeastern corner of Iran on the border with Pakistan. Gwatar (Gwuttur) (25° 10' N. 61° 33' E.) must not be confused with Gwadar (25° 6' N. 62° 19' E.). Since the British Commission definition of the borders in 1871-2 Gwatar bay, on the eastern shore, remained within the Persian borders; while

¹⁴ With the death of Sultan Bin Ahmad Al Bu Sa'id, Oman lost Chah Bahar in 1804, but then retook it after a short interval. In 1809 its revenue amounted to 5000 rupees a year and went in its entirety to the Sultans of Oman.

¹⁵ C.E., Davies (1997). *The Blood Arab Red Flag. An Investigation into Qasimi Piracy 1797–1820*. Exeter: Exeter University Press.

¹⁶ C.H., Allen Jr. (1978). "Sayyids, Shets and Sultans: Politics and Trade in Muscat under the Al Bu Sa'id, 1785–1914". Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Washington, 128; M.R., Bhacker (1992). *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar. Roots of British Domination*. London: Routledge, 209. For further linguistic aspects, see the A., Lodhi (2000). *Oriental Influences in Swahili. A Study in Language and Culture Contacts*. Goteborg.

¹⁷ S., Blanchy (1995). *Karana et Banians. Les Communautés commerçantes d'origine indienne à Madagascar*. Paris.

¹⁸ W.G., Clarence-Smith & U., Freitag (1999). *Hadrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean 1750 – 1960*. Leiden: Brill.

Gwadar, on the western shore, about fifty miles west of Gwatar,¹⁹ is today part of Pakistan. Gwadar is a small port on the neck of a hammer-headed promontory on the Makran coast, about 250 miles east of Muscat;²⁰ it included the Persian town of Gwatar, the Persian port, and the whole sandy peninsula of that name, covering an area of

¹⁹ B., De Cardi (1951). "A New Prehistoric Ware from Baluchistan". *Iraq*. 13/2. Autumn, 63-75; 164; L.G., Potter (2008). "The Consolidation of Iran's frontier in the nineteenth century". in R., Farmanfarmaian (Ed.). *War and Peace in Qajar Persia: implications past and present*. Oxford, 125-148; 139.

²⁰ R., Hay (1954). "The Persian Gulf States and Their Boundary Problems". *The Geographical Journal*. 120/4. Dec., 433-443.

about 307 square miles;²¹ it has been one of the main routes of communication between the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent, together with a strategic role within trades from East Africa and from the Arabian Peninsula, directed to Central Asia and vice versa.²² One of the earliest detailed source that specifically names Gwatar/Gwadar within Gedrosia region is Anabasis Alexandri by Arrianus of 325 B.C.²³ Together with Pasni, a fishing village on the Makran coast - today in Pakistan - , Gwadar was attacked and burnt by the Portuguese in 1581.²⁴ In 1739, Taki Khan, Nader Shah's general (1736-1747), captured it. In 1784 Mir Naşir Khan I (1749-95), the *khan* of Kalāt, granted as a *jagir* (lease), a temporary grant of land exempted from taxation the port of Gwadar to Sa'īd Soltan b. Aḥmad Al bu-Sa'īd of Oman (r. 1792-1804) who ruled on Muscat, on a trust basis.²⁵ In 1784 half of the revenues on Gwadar belonged to the Gički family of Makran;²⁶ while Gwatar was nominally under the Persian influence through Jadghal Baluch tribe chiefs.²⁷

On the occasion of the construction of the Indo-European Telegraph Line, investigations made by the Makran, Sistan and Persia Boundary Commission, directed by Sir Frederick Goldsmid (1818-1908),²⁸ juridical-territorial claims were advanced.²⁹

On 24 January 1862 Mir Faqir Mohammad Bizenjo, chief of the Bizenjo tribe of Makran and ally of the Khan of Kalat, who was representative of Kech, signed a treaty with Goldsmid for the safety of the passage of the telegraph line through Makran; the representative also granted to Goldsmid the safety of the lands belonging to Mir Bayan Gički, chief of the Gički family. At the beginning of 1863 Ebrahim Khan, the Persian military governor of Bampur, wrote letters to Sa'īd Towayni Al bu-Sa'īd of Oman (r. 1856-66), grandson of Sa'īd Soltan b. Aḥmad Al bu-Sa'īd of Oman, and to the Omani Arab deputy (*wālī*), named *Mahomed*,³⁰ of Gwadar suggesting not to give their approval to the prosecution of the telegraph line to the British before a Persian consent. Numerous raids followed, and the British were obliged to send forces to protect their political agents in Gwadar.³¹ Only in 1868 the Persian Government accepted to give up its rights of sovereignty on the oasis of Kech and on Gwadar as part of the Kerman province: it was better for British India to border with Persia than with a tribal territories such as of Kalat.³²

In 1863 Reverend George Percy Badger was put in charge of the Boundary Commission to investigate on the intricate question of the borders in this area;³³ he considered politically advisable that Gwadar remained within Omani hands, with a well armed fleet strong enough to defend it, rejecting the hypothesis of restoration to the Khanate of Kalat, who was unable to protect this important strategic port against Persian claims.

During the second half of the nineteenth century Gwadar was at the same time: an *enclave* of the Sultans of Oman, a place of interest for the Gički family from Kech Makran, a strategic observatory for the British Government along the coast of Makran in Persian direction, and a station of the Indo-European Telegraph Line. On 24th September 1872, joined by the Persian Commissioner Mirza Ma'sum Khan, the British Boundary Commission fixed the demarcation of the frontier, starting from the bay of Gwatar to the west of Gwadar, between Persia, Makran and Sistan.³⁴ Only on 8th September 1958, and for three million pounds, the request of the Khans of Kalat to restore the *jagir* (lease) on Gwadar granted from Mir Naşir Khan I of Kalat to the Al Bu-Sa'īd of Oman, was finally satisfied. The price for a town, the price for an important harbour and a strategic base that has belonged to the Omani Sultans since 1784. Since that period, close relationships subsisted between the Al Bu-Sa'īd of Oman and the Baluch tribes of the coastal area of Makran.

²¹ R., Hughes-Buller (1986). *The Gazetteer of Baluchistan (Makrān)*. [1st ed. Quetta 1906.]. Quetta, 280.

²² J.A., Saldanha (1905). *Persian Gulf Précis. Précis on Makrān Affairs*. I. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 19.

²³ D.H., Roberts, F.M., Dunn, D., Fowler (Eds.) (1997). *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*. Princeton, 187.

²⁴ A.W., Stiffe (1897). "Ancient Trading Centres of the Persian Gulf: IV Maskat". *The Geographical Journal*. 10/6. Dec., 608-618; 610-12; S., Badalkhan (2000). "Portuguese Encounters with Coastal Makran Baloch during the Sixteenth Century. Some References from a Balochi Heroic Epic". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Third Series. 10/2. Jul., 153-169.

²⁵ E.C., Ross (1868). "Captain's Ross Reports about Mekran, 1865-68". *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*. new series. 111: Byculla, 113; V.F., Piacentini and R., Redaelli (2003). *Baluchistan: Terra Incognita. A New Methodological Approach combining Archaeological, Historical, Anthropological and Architectural Studies*. Oxford: BAR, 33-49.

²⁶ M.R., Broome, op cit.

²⁷ H., Pottinger (1819). *Relazioni di un viaggio in Belouchistan e in una parte della Persia*. Milan: Sonzogno. 3 vols. 2, 30; C. Macgregor, *Wanderings in Baluchistan*, London, 1882, p. 24; M. Rubin, "The Telegraph and Frontier Politics: Modernization and the Demarcation of Iran's Borders", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, vol. 18, n. 2, 1998, pp. 59-72.

²⁸ F.J., Goldsmid (1867). "Notes on Eastern Persia and Western Beluchistan". *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*. 37, 269-297.

²⁹ S., Soli (2006). "Communications, Qajar irredentism, and the strategies of British India: The Makran Coast telegraph and British policy of containing Persia in the east (Baluchistan)", Part I. *Iranian Studies*. 39/3. Sept., 329-351.

³⁰ R., Leech (1844). "Notes taken on a Tour through part of Baloochistan in 1838 and 1839 by Haji Abdun Nubee of Kabul". *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*. 13 part 2, 667-706; 702.

³¹ C.P., Harris (1969). "The Persian Gulf Submarine Telegraph of 1864". *The Geographical Journal*. 135/2, 169-190.

³² A., Khazeni (2007). "On the Eastern Borderlands of Iran: The Baluch in Nineteenth Century Persian Travel books". *History Compass*. 5/4, 1399-1411.

³³ G.P., Badger (1863). *Memorandum by the Rev. G. P. Badger on the Pretensions of Persia in Beloochistan and Mekran, drawn up with especial reference to her Claim to Gwadar and Charbar*. London, 1-8.

1.5. Arms and Ammunitions

The traffic of arms and ammunitions between the port of Gwadar and the town of Muscat in Oman did concern British officials for a long period, and interesting documentation has been found in the Baluchistan Archives based in Quetta, which largely complemented the British Records of the I.O.R. (India Office Records). Therefore, we are trying here to re-reading some of the numerous events through little known Archive documents object of research in Quetta, revealing some aspects of the British perspectives and strategies of this historical period.

We wish to take into consideration some aspects of the volume and of the extent of the traffic of arms and ammunitions within the areas under nominal control of the Omani leadership: between the end of 1800 and the first decades of 1900 large quantities of weapons were traded from Europe via sea and from Muscat directed north to Afghanistan and south to East Africa.

Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the delineation of borders between Baluchistan and Persia necessitated control by the British Intelligence Agencies of the continuous illegal arms traffic entering Baluchistan internal market at Gwadar port, dominion of the Omani Sultanate despite numerous agreements with the British Government.

During a long period of time the groups beyond the North West Frontier of India succeeded in obtaining rifles from the Arabian coast. Arab dhows used to brought them across the Gulf and adjacent waters, and caravans of camels conveyed them to their destinations through the mountain passes of Baluchistan.³⁵

Thanks to the connections between the two countries, the Omani presence in the Makran region eased the control of the local trade and of the regional and tribal mechanisms of power. The strategic role of the port of Gwadar in the illegal traffic of arms and ammunitions coming from Europe to the Gulf and directed to East Africa, and Central Asia, had been essential.

Since 1800, when Sa'id Sayyid bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id of Oman (r. 1806-1856) received the model of a 74-gun ship as a present from the visiting British envoy, Major-General John Malcolm (1769-1833), from the start he recognised the importance of cultivating British friendship. And this was a relationship valued too by Britain.³⁶

At the beginning of the twentieth century "*the temptation to deal in arms was enormous*".³⁷ Arms carried from Europe were mostly the Maxim³⁸, Gardner machine-guns and Martini-Henrys rifles.³⁹ Rifles originally cost 3 pounds and were sold to 30-35 each. It's interesting considering here that in South-Central Asia in many occasions local corps, like the Levy forces in Baluchistan, sold privately their arms than reporting to British officials that they simply lost them.⁴⁰ The rifles were taken by the Arabs, carried on the dhows and from Baluchistan ports were directed to western India ports.⁴¹ Secret dispatches on arms trade were sent from the North West Frontier arms trade committee to the Secretary to the Government of India. And communications were exchanged from north to south and from the Agents in the Gulf ports to India, as well as from East Africa to India. Large quantities of rifles were imported from Europe and from Russia through Afghanistan destined to enforce the leaderships of Central Asia, the Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa; while secretly arms were imported from European private companies. The trading ports of Bander Abbas, Bushire, and Muscat were the most important markets for arms. Between 1890 and the first decades of the twentieth

³⁵ T.T., Jeans [Rear-Admiral] (1928). *The Gun-Runners*. London: Blackie & Son; Brig.-Gen. R., Harding (1936). *Terror of the Desert: A Tale of Gun-Running in the Persian Gulf*. London: J. Murray. Baluchistan is today divided between Iran and Pakistan. The Pakistani province of Baluchistan forms the largest province of Pakistan. It covers 44 % of the land surface, but has a population of only 4.5 million (around 4%); making it the least populated province of the country. About half of this population lives around Quetta, the provincial capital of Pakistani Baluchistan, located in the northern part, close to the border with Afghanistan. To its north and west, thousands of kilometres of barren desert and stark mountains form the borders with Iran and southern Afghanistan, while due east it is divided from the rest of Pakistan by the Kirthar and Sulaiman mountain ranges. Onwards the south, along the Arabian Sea, there are 600 kilometres of desert sandy beaches of the Makran coast. The Baluch are today a people of about six million individuals, scattered mainly across Pakistan, the south-east of Iran, Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates, where they form a large immigrant community.

³⁶ C.E., Davies. op.cit., 55.

³⁷ T.T., Jeans. op. cit., 47.

³⁸ In 1881 the American inventor, Hiram Maxim, visited the Paris Electrical Exhibition. While he was at the exhibition he met a man who told him: "If you wanted to make a lot of money, invent something that will enable these Europeans to cut each other's throats with greater facility." Maxim moved to London and over the next few years worked on producing an effective machine-gun. In 1885 he demonstrated the world's first automatic portable machine-gun to the British Army. Maxim used the energy of each bullet's recoil force to eject the spent cartridge and insert the next bullet. The Maxim Machine-Gun would therefore fire until the entire belt of bullets was used up. Trials showed that the machine-gun could fire 500 rounds per minute and therefore had the firepower of about 100 rifles. The Maxim Machine-Gun was adopted by the British Army in 1889. The following year the Austrian, German, Italian, Swiss and Russian armies also purchased Maxim's gun. The gun was first used by Britain's colonial forces in the Matabele war in 1893-94. In one engagement, fifty soldiers fought off 5,000 Matabele warriors with just four Maxim guns. The success of the Maxim Machine-Gun inspired other inventors. The German Army's *Maschinengewehr* and the Russian Pulemyot Maxima were both based on Maxim's invention. Website Spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk.

³⁹ In 1879 the Gardner Machine Gun was demonstrated for the first time. A two-barrelled weapon operated by crank which loaded and fired each barrel in turn. The feed system was a grooved strip into which the rims of a box of cartridges could be slid, after which the box was removed. In public trials the gun fired 10,000 rounds in 27 minutes. This impressed military leaders from Britain and the following year the British Army purchased the gun. Website Spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk.

⁴⁰ G., Pastori (2004). *Il Pomo della Discordia. La politica imperiale della Gran Bretagna, il Baluchistan e il Great Game*. Milan: ISU.

⁴¹ The Martini-Henry rifle was the British Empire's first breech-loading military rifle that was not a conversion of a muzzleloader. The Snider conversion of the old Enfield muskets of the 577 family had been going on since 1865-66 and was just a temporary solution until the Army had found a reliable breech-loader that could serve the Crown's soldier all over the world. The British found this rifle in 1871 when the 45 calibre Martini-Henry rifle was adopted along with the famous cartridge 577/.450. A 577/.450 Martini-Henry Mk-IV "Long Lever" converted from a 402" calibre Enfield-

century, Muscat became the centre of arms trade for the Gulf and the Indian Ocean area.⁴² And the presence of merchant communities, coming from western India did play a significant role both on the Gulf shores and in East Africa.

The arms trade was a true menace to the British predominance on the region as British officials were aware of their uses against them. These concerns reflected as well in British defence policies of the epoch; while the importance of Muscat, as above described, lied in its port and in its impacts on the economy of the town and its surroundings. Therefore, the Government of India realized that the unrestricted traffic of arms in the Gulf might seriously lead to a critical situation *vis-à-vis* the tribal entities in the region; to this regard, the Brussels Arms Conference signed with France of 1908 proclaimed the Muscat, in agreement with the Sultan of Oman, a prohibited port.

It's redundant here considering the ineffectiveness of this international act. To give an example, a French merchant, Mr. M. Goguyer, by the year of his death in 1909, had collected a considerable fortune reputed to be around £40,000. He store at Muscat no less than 100,000 arms of different kinds, and no less than 100,00 rounds of ammunitions. The difficulties of dealing with this situation were, therefore, great. It was necessary seizing cargoes on the high seas during their transits in dhows from the Arabian coast to Makran. To this regard, Major-General Tucker agreed in July 1901 that the traffic of arms could be stopped only on the Makran coast. And later in 1912, the annual subsidy paid to the Sultan of Oman by the Government of India was increased by 100,000 rupees.⁴³

The success of the merchants from Muscat in the arms trade - both Hindu and Muslims - could be identified in three factors: 1) their traditional relationships with main Indian Ocean littorals and ports; 2) their connections with major arms markets in Central Asia; 3) their contacts with Western European firms. Amongst the many, the Kutchi Bahttias were recognized as one of leading communities trafficking in arms from Zanzibar and Jibuti (in French hands) to Muscat, between the Gulf and East Africa.⁴⁴ And here again the role of Asian merchant communities arose.

The arms were purchased from European firms and shipped to Muscat where they were unloaded and stored in warehouses where local customers came to buy. Once sold, arms were loaded on the dhows directed to other Gulf ports. British authorities concentrated all their attempts to abolish this trade: in 1898 all British subjects in Muscat were obliged to register all arms transactions. Arms trade prosecuted through Arab agents acting on behalf of Indian merchants.

In the confidential sources from which frontier tribesmen obtain arms and ammunitions of 1902, Major-General Tucker explained to the Secretary to the Government of India that the centre of the Gulf arms trade was Muscat and it was computed that about 35,000 rifles and fowling pieces were imported each year. He added that no less than twelve firms, having houses in England and from Liéges and Antwerp in Belgium, were deeply implicated in the trade. According to Brigadier General H. H. Austin's testimonies, during the first decade of the twentieth century Arabs, Persians, Baluch and others were free to purchase rifles and pistols quite openly in Muscat town, and disposed them as they pleased.⁴⁵

The trade promised lucrative returns, and for this reason Muscat gradually developed into the 'Arms Emporium of the Middles East', and the Sultan of Oman, Faysal bin Turki (r. 1888-1913),⁴⁶ received licences granted for the importation of arms, and the commissions paid to him on each consignment landed in his territory, by steamers from Europe laden with them. French, German and Belgian firms chiefly supplied the arms required by the merchants at Muscat; but more than one British firm - the London merchant company of Hammer and Schwarte for example, which sold the Martinis - did not abstain from a similar practice, although this was done possibly in ignorance of the serious results likely to follow their action. It's worth remembering that only a small segment of the population benefited from the great profits of this trade: the Omani Sultanate raised tariffs on arms up to the 6%, although treaties limited duties at the 5%, and the merchants were in high competition among themselves.

1.6. Conclusion

Within the relationships between Muscat and Gwadar how did the creation of an Omani *enclave* originate in Makran and last for such a long period - as mentioned above - that is from about 1748 to 1958? In order to try to find historical and political answers to these two questions, we have to take into consideration a number of factors, starting from the different social and ethnic structures of the two countries and their major features and characteristics. As already stated, close connections always existed between the two countries, the Omani presence in the Makran region eased the control of the local trade and of the regional and tribal mechanisms of power.

Reports made by British Political Agents and explorers of Baluchistan referred to their Presidencies in India about the nature of the relationships among the different tribes of the region. These testimonies changed time and time again the reports, differing about the nature of the relationships among them and with the bordering countries and monarchies, such as Persia, Oman, and the Khanate of Kalat.

⁴² J.G., Lorimer. *Appendix: The Arms and Ammunition Traffic in the Gulf of Persia and Oman*. 1. part 2, 2556-93; B.C., Busch (1967). *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*. Berkeley and Los Angeles; C., Allen. op. cit., 156-158.

⁴³ Essential Records A.G.G.'s Office. Main Heading Confidential. Basta n. 23-2-12. vol VII, 1901-1912, 289-297.

⁴⁴ B., Nicolini (2008). *A Glimpse to Indian Merchant Communities in Zanzibar during 1800: the Topan Family through British Archive Sources*. K.K. Prasad & J.P. Angenot (Eds.). TADIA The African Diaspora in Asia: Explorations on a Less Known Fact. Papers Presented at the First International Conference on TADIA in Panaji, Goa in January 2006. Bangalore: Jana Jagrati Prakashana, 579-592.

⁴⁵ H.H., Austin (1926). *Gun Running in the Gulf and Other Adventures*. London: J. Murray, 12.

The case of Gwadar is of particular interest as the town, its port and the surrounding territory were granted during the second half of the nineteenth century as a *jagir* - a temporary grant of land exempted from taxation - from the *khans* of Kalat to the Al Bu Sa'id of Oman. From a *jagir* Gwadar soon assumed the status of an *enclave* of the Sultanate of Oman. Gwadar, together with the ports of Sur and Jiwani, soon became an important centre for fisheries; fish was, and is still today, exported to Europe and along the main routes of the Indian Ocean; shark fins were a favourite, and the oil was principally kept for use on the timbers of the native crafts. The seasons in Makran, as stated above, are very variable as regards rainfall, which causes great fluctuations in the trade between Gwadar and the interior, but the principal commodities, wool and goats hair were exported; another item was supplied by the useful bush named *pesh*, a species of aloe which grows in abundance throughout this part of the country; from its leaves were manufactured bags, matting and a variety of useful domestic articles, whilst the stones of its fruit called *koner* were exported in quantities to Muscat, from where they were sent to Mecca and made into Islamic *subha*. Therefore, the sea represented the main ecological, economic and commercial source of survival for the people of Makran; in fact they lived on fisheries with small boats.

From August to December 1875 Sa'id Turki Al Bu Sa'id resided in Gwadar; he ordered the construction of a small fort also at Pishukan, on the western border of the Omani *enclave*. Sa'id Turki Al Bu Sa'id had a particular affection for Gwadar, where he used to spend long periods of recovery. But he also had to face a succeeding series of revolts and raids, this time coming from some elements of the Rind tribes. In 1877 Sir Charles Macgregor touched at Gwadar with the task of completing geographical and topographical information. He described Gwadar as a village of mud huts, with a squared fortress in the middle, with 5000 inhabitants and about 2500 boats, some of them large for trade with Maskat, Bandar Abbas, Bombay and the coast of Malabar. The roads to the interior, when open, were those leading to Kej and to Panjgur, the two main oases. According to the British explorer Macgregor, Persia never had juridical rights on possessions of lands in Baluchistan, despite her numerous raids into this region during phases of political instability and uncertainty. After two centuries, on 8th September 1958, and for three million pounds, the request of the *khans* of Kalat to restore the *jagir* granted from Nasir Khan I to the Al Bu Sa'id of Oman, was satisfied; although the multiple contacts and exchanges between these seaboard communities and realities did prosecute - and continue today - beyond political frontiers.

Milan, November 2013

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