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Neonates, infant mortality and the pre-Islamic Arabian amuletic tradition at Tell Abraq

D.T. Potts, D.L. Martin, K. Baustian and A. Osterholtz

“Marrying several wives is human; getting many children is divine” – Sumerian proverb

Introduction

Anyone who has followed the development of archaeological research in the UAE over the past 50 years would know that far more tombs have been excavated than settlements. From the first graves excavated by Danish archaeologists on the island of Umm an-Nar in the 1950s to the late pre-Islamic (Parthian–Hellenistic) burials uncovered in the past few years at Dibba, or the collective Neolithic burials at Jabal Buhais in the interior of Sharjah, a substantial number of prehistoric, Bronze Age, Iron Age and late pre-Islamic tombs have been investigated in each of the seven Emirates. Nevertheless, from many perspectives, our knowledge base is not entirely satisfactory.

One factor that cannot be ignored in attempting to make sense of these assemblages is tomb-robbing. Far from being a phenomenon of recent date, perpetrated by treasure-hunters or vandals seeking to desecrate the graves of unbelievers from the *jahalliya* or “time of ignorance”, tomb-robbing has been practiced extensively throughout the Near East for millennia by people seeking to “liberate” or recycle wealth - precious metal objects, jewellery, weaponry and other items of high value or functionality - deposited in burials. In addition, many communities have seen absolutely nothing wrong with re-using tombs that were built by earlier generations, thereby saving themselves considerable time and effort. This accounts for the presence of intrusive, Iron Age and later material in much more ancient tombs, such as the late pre-Islamic (Sasanian-era) inhumations from the 5th-7th century AD (dated by radiocarbon) inserted into monumental graves of the late 4th millennium BC at Jabal al-Emalah (Emirate of Sharjah).¹ Another type of intrusion, that may have post-dated an original inhumation by a matter of days, weeks, months or a year, was caused by secondary burial, i.e. the insertion of human remains into a tomb that may or not have been buried once and then exhumed in order to be reburied elsewhere. This typically occurred when the remains of an individual who died

away from his/her home or intended place of burial were brought back to be buried, either individually or in a communal grave, with others of his/her community.

While not constituting an act of robbery or vandalism as such, tomb re-use had a similar, taphonomic effect, namely, the disturbance and partial destruction of the older human skeletal material contained within a tomb. Thus, whether it was robbers crawling around inside a tomb in search of valuable objects, or Iron Age mourners pushing aside desiccated Bronze Age skeletons at the back of a burial to make room for yet another interment, both practices destroyed an invaluable biological record of an earlier era. And for this reason, although the number of excavated tombs in the UAE is high, the number of reasonably coherent, well-preserved assemblages of human skeletal remains recorded in those tombs is modest. This means that, in trying to assess the demographic, nutritional and pathological history of the populations represented in the excavated tombs of the UAE, bioarchaeologists or biological anthropologists often find themselves dealing with highly incomplete data-sets.²

None of this, of course, is news to archaeologists. Yet every now and then an assemblage is recovered which sheds light on an otherwise hidden segment of the UAE's ancient population. One such assemblage was discovered in the late 3rd millennium BC tomb at Tell Abraq (Fig. 1). Recent studies conducted under the direction of Prof. Debra L. Martin at the University of Nevada (Las Vegas), where the human remains from Tell Abraq are housed, have shed considerable light on many aspects of the site's ancient population but one group in particular, previously barely discussed in the archaeological literature of the UAE, has suddenly come to the fore, namely the children of the ancient UAE. In view of the fact that scarcely anything had been written on this particular segment of the region's Bronze Age population prior to the recent studies of Prof. Martin and her students, it is perhaps fitting to turn our attention to this forgotten portion of the population.



Fig. 1. View of the late 3rd millennium BC tomb at Tell Abraq, from the south.

Childhood and infant mortality in pre-Islamic Arabia

Dated by five radiocarbon determinations to c. 2200-2000 BC³, the tomb at Tell Abraq is a circular stone structure, c. 6 m. in diameter, with an internal dividing wall that separates the tomb into an eastern and a western, semi-circular chamber with a passage connecting the two chambers on the south side of the tomb. Based on a count of the right talus for adults resulting in 276 and a count of proximal right femora for subadults resulting in 127, the minimum number of individuals (MNI) contained within the tomb is 403. A further subdivision of age groups among subadults was achieved using length and morphological development to assess consistency with age groups among known reference collections.⁴ Of the 127 subadults, 28 were pre-term infants aged 6-9 gestational months (22%); 12 were neonates (1-30 days old) (9%); 46 were subadults under the age of 2 years (36%); and 32 were children 2-5 years old (25%).⁵ The relative rarity of individuals aged 6-18 years (only 9, or 7% of the population) suggests that life improved markedly for children who survived the initial challenges in their lives.⁶ A similar pattern has been documented in the slightly earlier Tomb N at Hili (Al Ain, Abu Dhabi) where 58% of the individuals interred were under 5 years of age, confirming that the greatest risk of succumbing to a childhood disease occurred between birth and 3 years of age.⁷

The archaeological and bioarchaeological literature on skeletal assemblages from tombs like Tell Abraq, Hili N or Jabal Buhais⁸ contains an enormous amount of information on disease, stress and trauma in the ancient populations of the region. An assessment of health among all of the children within the tomb revealed that the youngest infants may have been seriously affected by various forms of infection.⁹ Only the infants under the age of 2 years showed infectious lesions which could have been caused by *Staphylococcus* and *Streptococcus*, and/or placental malaria, and most of these were pre-term infants. This indicates that mothers who were likely suffering from illness during their pregnancies gave birth to very sick infants who failed to thrive. Thus what the bones of the 127 children interred in the Tell Abraq tomb reveal is that women sometimes gave birth prematurely to very ill infants, and even some full term births were compromised with maternal illnesses being passed to the infants. However, childhood illness may not have been of epidemic proportions because there are bones of children in the tomb that have no signs of bacterial infections or poor health suggesting they died from accidents or other ailments.

The identification of pathological evidence, some of which may represent the cause of death, in excavated skeletal assemblages also raises a host of cultural questions, several of which have been broached already in the bioarchaeological literature on Tell Abraq. Modern paleopathologists (specialists in ancient disease) would attribute the possible causes of infant mortality at Tell Abraq to cultural practices such as consanguinity, polygeny, early adolescent marriages of young girls and early age at first pregnancy, as well as endemic malaria. These are all factors known to increase the likelihood of spontaneous abortion, genetic anomalies, and developmental

problems.¹⁰ Unfortunately, it is very difficult to access factors such as these using archaeological evidence and while each may be classified as contributory or causative, there is another dimension of cultural praxis, including both prophylactic and reactive practices, that remains to be discussed, namely ancient medicine. Although this, too, is an arena extremely difficult to access via archaeological remains, there are several ways in which we may begin to examine the topic.

Insights from Babylonian medicine and the goddess-demon Lamashtu

Given that there are virtually no written sources from southeastern Arabia until the later pre-Islamic era, almost all of which are funerary inscriptions or coin legends, it is scarcely surprising that very little has ever been written about pre-Islamic Arabian attitudes towards disease, its prevention and healing. The little that is known of pre-Islamic medicine in Arabia is anecdotal rather than scientific and comes from the very end of the pre-Islamic era just.¹¹ On the other hand, there are iconographic indications that some of the beliefs surrounding disease that were current elsewhere in the ancient Near East during the Bronze and Iron Ages may also have been shared by the population of southeastern Arabia. While Arabia is not Babylonia, there is ample epigraphic and archaeological evidence from sites in Mesopotamia, such as Ur, and southeastern Arabia, especially Tell Abraq and Umm an-Nar, to demonstrate clearly that southeastern Arabia enjoyed close relations with its Babylonian neighbors (just as it did with Bahrain, parts of southern Iran and the Indus Valley). As such, it is worth exploring the literature on Babylonian medicine in order to see whether it can shed any light on practices further south in the Arabian peninsula.

Whereas Greek medicine focused on the role of humours in combating disease and attempted to manipulate “the body’s internal imbalances...through diet, purges, and responding to environmental factors (seasonal changes), regimen, and finally bloodletting”, Babylonian medicine considered disease “the result of the attack of demons or external factors”. Moreover, as Mark Geller has stressed, both medicine and magic must be understood as falling “under a single umbrella of ‘therapy’” in ancient Mesopotamia.¹² With respect to the division of duties, there were two relevant classes of specialists responsible for healing: the *asû*-physician, who oversaw the medical aspects of healing, and the exorcist, who looked to its magical aspects.¹³ Given that many diseases were believed to be “caused by the grip, Akkadian *šibtu*, of a certain demon”¹⁴, the deployment of magic and exorcism alongside medical remedies was, from a Babylonian perspective, entirely rational. As Walter Farber has stressed,

One could even speak of a dichotomy in Mesopotamian medicine between cause-oriented treatment, which largely consists of apotropaic and prophylactic measures against demon-induced illness in the widest sense, and symptom-oriented treatment, which would seem to be the normal procedure for dealing with diseases of ‘natural’

causes. Such symptom-oriented treatment is by necessity based on a belief that these symptoms are part and parcel of a particular disease which under positive circumstances can be eradicated by the alleviation or removal of just these symptoms. On the other hand, curing of symptoms would not have any lasting effect in demon-induced diseases since only the physical separation of perpetrator and victim could guarantee long-term healing of such ailments. Reversing the argument, one could say that the more apotropaic or prophylactic elements can be found in a Babylonian prescription or medical ritual, the more likely it will be that we are not looking at a definable disease of natural causes but rather at a general state of ill-health brought about by the destructive force of an evil demon.¹⁵

One demon — in reality a minor goddess — closely tied to pre-natal and infant morality was Lamashtu (literally “she who erases”), a daughter of the great sky god Anu (*mārat Ani[m]*). Lamashtu’s attributes included a hairy, anthropomorphic body; a lioness head; donkey ears; and talons instead of feet. Incantations against her malevolent influence have been known since the 19th century and a comprehensive study of them was published as early as 1902.¹⁶ While many afflictions have been attributed to Lamashtu in the scholarly literature, there is no doubt that her principal victims were unborn and newborn children.¹⁷ Yet although Lamashtu strikes the modern observer as a relentlessly negative force, *Atrahasis*, the Babylonian Epic of Creation, clearly reveals that her work was divinely sanctioned. According to *Atrahasis*, after its creation, the human population became so large that the noise it created disturbed the sleep of the great god Enlil, prompting him to cause a Flood intended to wipe out all of humankind. Through the intervention of Ea, god of wisdom, and Aruru, the mother goddess, some humans survived but in order to preclude the possibility of further disturbances by human noise, Enlil created Namtar, a plague demon, and Lamashtu who were “assigned the task of ensuring that the human population did not spiral out of control”.¹⁸ In this sense, Lamashtu should be considered “part of the divinely instituted world-order for postdiluvian humankind”, not a demon “at odds with the divine order and not part of it”.¹⁹

As Walter Farber has noted,

It becomes readily apparent that...there is still not the slightest indication in the corpus [of Lamashtu-related texts] to suggest that Lamaštu ever had an interest in attacking pregnant women or women in labor. Yes, she is shown watching them, counting their days, and trying to be on the spot at the very moment of birth. But the target of this is always the child, never the mother. It is also significant that there is no evidence that she ever was responsible for stillbirth: only after it is born does the child become of interest to her. Then, however, she makes every possible effort and uses every conceivable trick to snatch, kill and devour the baby. Her attack on the babies is thus aimed at instant death, and not at inflicting a potentially curable disease. The twisted limbs and faces of her victims are vividly described in some incantations, but hardly ever any symptoms usable for a diagnosis. Indeed, a comparison of her activities with SIDS, or Sudden

Infant Death Syndrome, a scenario in which any help comes too late, seems admissible. In a way, she thus produces a social *fait-accompli*, rather than a curable medical problem, which is underlined by the fact that she even prevents the dead children from getting a normal burial. No healing rituals for Lamashtu-afflicted babies are known, only prophylaxis and up-to-the-minute apotropaic measures are called for.²⁰

The thirteen incantations and nine ritual prescriptions against Lamashtu, known mostly from the library of Assurbanipal (685-627 BC) at Nineveh and written mainly in Akkadian²¹, were intended to “remove the gruesome demon and the illness she caused from the body of the child” or, in the case of an unborn foetus, from the pregnant mother over whom the incantation was recited.²² In several of the extant incantations Lamashtu addresses mothers, saying, “bring me your sons, that I may suckle them, let me put my breasts in your daughters’ mouths”.²³ Prophylaxis entailed the use of representations of Lamashtu in the form of plaques (often referred to as “amulets”) or figurines which objectified Lamashtu in order to nullify her powers. Rituals “for the production of amulets to protect a pregnant woman against witchcraft” are attested in the so-called “anti-witchcraft” literature from Babylonia.²⁴

Some Lamashtu amulets, like one in the British Museum illustrated here (Fig. 2), are realistic and show attributes such as snakes being grasped in each of Lamashtu’s hands/talons, above arms bent at the elbow; piglets suckling at her breasts; and a running quadruped (horse? donkey? mule?) beneath her leg talons. Others are highly stylized and schematic. Most, however, share certain compositional features, depicting Lamashtu in the center of the object, with the arms bent at the elbows; her forearms pointing upwards; and legs slightly apart. Talons may be shown in place of both feet and hands. By 1960 about fifty Lamashtu amulets were known and two decades later the number had grown by almost two dozen.²⁵

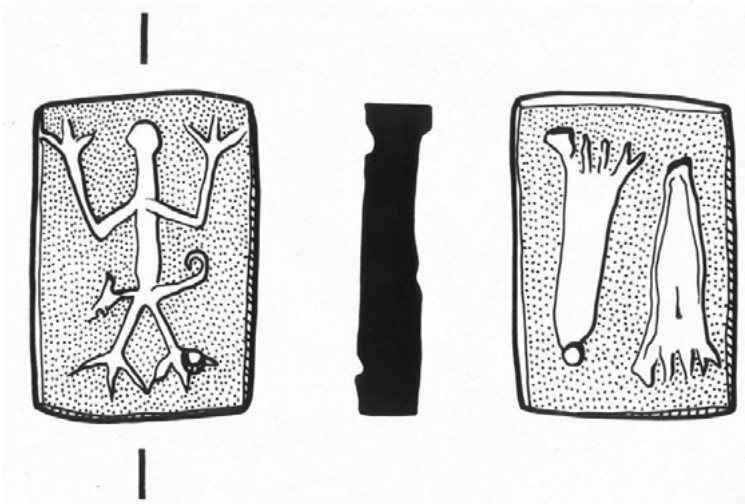


Fig. 2. Lamashtu amulet in the British Museum (ME 117759). © Trustees of the British Museum.

Lamashtu plaques/amulets and figurines illustrate all too well how difficult it is to understand such objects in the absence of written sources throwing light on their use. In fact, Lamashtu representations were meant to be treated like “prisoners”. According to one ritual, twelve loaves of bread were set before Lamashtu (i.e. her representation, whether a plaque or a figurine) and then doused with spring water. She was then presented to an image of a black dog, where she remained for three days. On the evening of the third day Lamashtu was destroyed with a sword and buried at the corner of a wall, surrounded by a mixture of flour and water. In another ritual Lamashtu was dressed with different clothes every day; the heart of a sacrificed piglet was put in her mouth; and incantations pronounced thrice daily. In yet another instance the incantation priest placed Lamashtu in a boat along with images of dogs and sent it on its way. A salve made of a variety of ingredients (temple doors, fish and pork fat, ashes, dirt, horsehide, butter and pitch [tree resin? bitumen?]) was rubbed on the child thought to have been afflicted by Lamashtu, more for magical than therapeutic purposes.²⁶

If one wishes to speak of an ‘archaeology of medicine’ with particular reference to Lamashtu, then a chronological discrepancy becomes apparent immediately. For although the earliest Lamashtu incantations in Sumerian date to the early 2nd millennium BC, by far the largest number of Lamashtu amulets and figurines from excavated context date to the 1st millennium BC.²⁷ It is impossible to say, at this point, what the cause of this discrepancy may have been. Perhaps it reflects a genuine increase in the prophylactic use of figurines and amulets in later Mesopotamian history, or perhaps it reflects an accidental absence of figurines and amulets from the earlier periods as a result of the vagaries of excavation. Whatever the case may be, by the 1st millennium BC Lamashtu seems to have been known throughout the entire ancient Near East.²⁸ In this light it is interesting to consider two objects from Tell Abraq, dating to the 1st millennium BC, that conform to this pattern, suggesting that the widespread fear of Lamashtu found in many parts of the ancient Near East extended to southeastern Arabia as well.

Lamashtu plaques at Tell Abraq?

Two small pendants found at Tell Abraq appear to be likely candidates for identification as Lamashtu plaques. The first object in question (Fig. 3) is a soft-stone pendant (c. 1.5 x 2 cms and .5 cm thick) pierced for suspension near the lower righthand corner, when viewing what I shall call the obverse (Potts 1991: 96, Figs. 136-137, TA 440). Carved on both sides, the obverse shows an anthropomorph with a thin body; elevated arms, bent at the elbows; and legs splayed. Both the hands and feet consist of three talons.²⁹ At the waist is an object which, on analogy with other, similar depictions on cylinder seals from Qidfa and Kalba (K4)³⁰, and a petroglyph (P47) in the Wadi al-Hayl, Fujairah (all in the UAE)³¹, appears to be a sword with a short, vertical near the grip and a curved end. The reverse shows two diametrically opposed

feet with a very clearly delineated big toe, two narrower toes, and a claw-like, two-pronged form indicating the fourth and fifth toes.

A second pendant (TA 439; 2.8 x 2.1 x .4 cms) shows a similar, though more stylized figure, seemingly grasping two trees from which it is suspended (Potts 1991: Figs. 138-139). The reverse of this is decorated with three incised vertical lines crossed by six horizontal-to-diagonal lines. It too is pierced, directly under the splayed legs of the anthropomorphic figure, when viewed from the obverse side.

When these objects were first published parallels were drawn with the corpus of known Lamashtu amulets. The general attitude of the anthropomorphic figure, with bent arms and spread legs, as well as its talons, clearly recall Mesopotamian representations of Lamashtu. What is, however, unusual in the case of the Tell Abraq pieces is what appears to be a sword at the figure's waist. While not canonical, the same feature is attested, though not at the waist, on an amulet of Late Bronze Age date from the Middle Elamite site of Choga Zanbil in southwestern Iran where Lamashtu is depicted wielding what has been identified as a sword

or dagger in her right hand, while holding a snake in her left hand.³² Moreover, one of Lamashtu's epithets, attested in the incantations against her, is "the sword that shatters the head".³³ In considering the examples, whether they come from Tell Abraq, Mesopotamia or Elam, it should be remembered that the corpus of published Lamashtu amulets shows considerable variety across space and time. In the west, examples have been found as far afield as Poggio Civitate in Italy; Byblos and Ras Shamra/Ugarit on the Mediterranean; and Carchemish near the north Syrian/Turkish frontier. In the east, examples are attested at Susa and Choga Zanbil in southwestern Iran.³⁴ As Walter Farber has stressed, depictions of Lamashtu from peripheral regions often diverge significantly from canonical representations found in Mesopotamia.

It is relatively easy to associate the sword with the destructive power of Lamashtu and, in addition to noting the associations of Lamashtu with swords or daggers in canonical

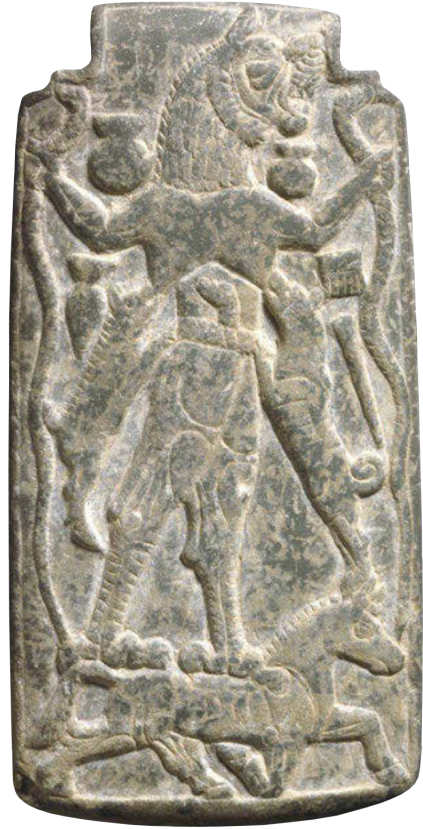


Fig. 3. Soft-stone amulet from Tell Abraq (TA 440).

representations, one is tempted to compare the representation of a sword with the surgical instruments - shears or scissors (Akkadian *si/erpu*), chisels (Akk. *imū*), and knives (Akk. *quppū, karzillu, naglabu*), sometimes compared to a sword (Akk. *patru*) - attested in Babylonian medical texts, the misuse of which was known to result in fatal wounds.³⁵ Whereas Babylonian Lamashtu amulets are thought to symbolically represent the poison used to kill unborn and newborn children by depicting scorpions, snakes and centipedes³⁶, the southeast Arabian population may have taken a different view and visualized Lamashtu's destructive power iconographically in the image of the sword.

Conclusion

At Tell Abraq, many of the subadults “exhibit active periosteal reactions” suggesting “that newborn mortality was at least in part due to nonspecific systemic infections”.³⁷ Faced with infections, many of which could lead to death, and a significant risk of infant mortality, the population of the ancient Near East did not, in the first instance, seek a medical cure or strive for prophylactic measures in the modern sense, but attributed the catastrophe threatening their offspring to the interference of demons. This belief system gave rise to a rich body of incantations that were copied, preserved and performed over millennia. Integral to these magico-medical rituals was the manufacture of and role-play associated with figurines and amulets. These objects were as important as verbal incantations in seeking to release a child or its mother from the grip of Lamashtu. The bioarchaeological record preserved in the late 3rd millennium BC tomb at Tell Abraq attests to the death and burial of over 100 neonates and young children. The presence at the site of two stone pendants interpreted here as Lamashtu plaques or amulets, albeit in contexts post-dating the sub-adult skeletal remains remains by over a millennium, offers a window on an ancient Arabian approach to dealing with infant mortality that partook of a much more widespread, ancient Near Eastern belief in the role played by Lamashtu in this most precarious phase of human existence. The ancient population at Tell Abraq appears to have subscribed to a compelling explanation for why some pregnancies were difficult and why some newborns failed to thrive that was based on a widely held, pan-Near Eastern belief in the power of Lamashtu. Ancient Near Eastern medicine involved much more than ‘medical’ explanations and cures, in the modern sense of these terms. The demon Lamashtu was held responsible for a range of health problems, particularly in the case of infants and newborns, and prophylaxis involved ritual, representation and incantation. These intangible elements of pre-modern medical thought are important to bear in mind when assessing the bioarchaeological remains found at archaeological sites in the ancient Near East, for disease and its treatment is cultural, not simply biological.

Endnotes

1. D.T. Potts, "Late Sasanian armament from southeastern Arabia", *Electrum* 1 (1997): 127-137. Abbreviations used here: *AAE* = *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*; *DB* = L. Weeks, ed., *Death and burial in Arabia and beyond: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series 2107, 2010).
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8. H.-P. Uerpmann, M. Uerpmann, S.A. Jasim, H. Kiesewetter and A. Uerpmann, *Funeral monuments and human remains from Jebel al-Buhais, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates*. (Sharjah: Dept. of Culture and Information, 2006); D.L. Martin, "Bioarchaeology in the United Arab Emirates," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 18 (2007): 124-131; A.U. Kutterer, "Remarks on Neolithic burial customs in south-east Arabia," *DB*, pp. 1-10.
9. K. Baustian, *Health status of infants and children*, p. 60.
10. K. Baustian, *Health status of infants and children*, p. 60ff.
11. E.g. the story of al-Hārith b. Kalada, an Arab at the medical academy of Jundīshāpūr in southwestern Iran during the reign of the Sasanian king Xosrow I (r. 531-579) or the body of so-called "Prophetic medicine" (*al-ṭibb al-nabawī*) from the time of the Prophet Muhammad. See G.A. Saliba, "Science before Islam," in A.Y. al-Hassan, M. Ahmed, and A.Z. Iskandar, eds. *Science and technology in Islam, Part 1* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2001), p. 37.

12. M.J. Geller, *Akkadian healing therapies in the Babylonian Talmud* (Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science Preprint 259, 2004), p. 4.
13. M.J. Geller, *Ancient Babylonian Medicine: Theory and practice* (Oxford/Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 56.
14. W. Farber, "Lamaštu - Agent of a specific disease or a generic destroyer of health?" in I.L. Finkel and M.J. Geller, eds., *Disease in Babylonia* (Groningen: STYX Publications, 2007), p. 137.
15. W. Farber, "Lamaštu - Agent of a specific disease or a generic destroyer of health?", pp. 138-139.
16. D.W. Myrhman, "Die Labartu-Texte. Babylonische Beschwörungsformeln nebst Zauberverfahren gegen die Dämonin Labartu", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 16 (1902): 141-195. Note the name Lamashtu (Lamaštu) was originally read "Labartu". Cf. F. Thureau-Dangin, "Rituel et amulettes contre Labartu", *Revue d'Assyriologie* 18 (1921): 161-198. The etymology of the name is unclear but see W. Farber, "Lamaštu", *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 6 (1980-83): 439 for some suggestions.
17. W. Farber, "Lamaštu - Agent of a specific disease or a generic destroyer of health?" pp. 139-140.
18. J. Scurlock, "Lamashtu", in R. Bagnall, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Ancient History*, (Oxford-Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 3865.
19. H.S. Kvanvig, *Primeval history: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic: An intertextual reading* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 508.
20. W. Farber, "Lamaštu - Agent of a specific disease or a generic destroyer of health?", pp. 141.
21. D.W. Myrhman, "Die Labartu-Texte". Cf. W. Farber, "Lamaštu", p. 440.
22. D.W. Myrhman, "Die Labartu-Texte", p. 148, "Diese grausame Dämonin und die von ihr verursachte Krankheit aus dem Leibe des Kindes zu entfernen ist die Aufgabe der vorliegenden Beschwörungen".
23. F.A.M. Wiggermann, "Dogs, pigs, Lamaštu, and the breast-feeding of animals by women," in D. Shehata, F. Weiershäuser and K.V. Zand, eds., *Von Göttern und Menschen: Beiträge zur Literatur und Geschichte des Alten Orients. Festschrift für Brigitte Groneberg* (Leiden: Cuneiform Monographs 41, 2010), p. 407.
24. T. Abusch and D. Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 184.
25. O. Muscarella, Bronze and iron, p. 352, citing H. Klengel, "Neue Lamaštu-Amulette aus dem Vorderasiatischen Museum zu Berlin und dem British Museum", *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 7 (1958-1960): 334-355 Cf. H. Klengel, "Weitere Amulette gegen Lamaštu", *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 8 (1961): 24-29; W. Farber, "Lamaštu", pp. 439-446; A. Green, "Beneficent spirits and malevolent demons: The iconography of Good and Evil in ancient Assyria and Babylonia", *Visible Religion* 3 (1984): 80-105; J. Scurlock, "Baby-snatching demons, restless souls and the dangers

- of childbirth: Medico-magical means of dealing with some of the perils of motherhood in ancient Mesopotamia”, *Incognita* 2 (1991): 135-183; F.A.M. Wiggermann, “Dogs, pigs, Lamaštu, and the breast-feeding of animals by women,” pp. 407-414. E. Götting, “Exportschlager Dämon? Zur Verbreitung altorientalischer Lamaštu-Amulette,” in J. Göbel and T. Zech, eds., *Exportschlager: Kultureller Austausch, wirtschaftliche Beziehungen und transnationale Entwicklungen in der antiken Welt* (Berlin: Humboldts studentische Konferenz der Altertumswissenschaften, 2009), p. 437, noted 85 Lamaštu-amulets (presumably including plaques) published as of 2009.
26. D.W. Myrman, “Die Labartu-Texte”, p. 150.
 27. W. Farber, “Lamaštu”, pp. 441-442.
 28. W. Farber, “Lamaštu”, p. 445.
 29. Hence she is said to have “feet of Anzu”, a reference to the talons of the mythical Anzu-bird. See B.R. Foster, *From distant days: Myths, tales, and poetry of ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1995), pp. 400-404. For the Anzu-bird in ritual sources see F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian protective spirits: The ritual texts* (Groningen: Cuneiform Monographs 1, 1992), p. 159; for the iconography, see I. Fuhr-Jaepfelt, *Materialien zur Ikonographie des Löwenadlers Anzu-Imdugud* (Munich: Scharl & Strohmeyer, 1972).
 30. D.T. Potts, “Cylinder seals and their use in the Arabian Peninsula”, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 21 (2010): 34, cat. nos. 94-95.
 31. M.C. Ziolkowski, “A study of the petroglyphs from Wadi al-Hayl, Fujairah (UAE)”, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 9 (1998): Fig. 101.
 32. E. Götting, “Exportschlager Dämon?”, p. 444, Abb. 2.
 33. E. Götting, “Exportschlager Dämon?”, p. 440.
 34. W. Farber, “Lamaštu”, p. 442.
 35. P.B. Adamson, “Surgery in ancient Mesopotamia”, *Medical History* 35 (1991): 430-431.
 36. W. Farber, “Lamaštu”, p. 442; E. Götting, “Exportschlager Dämon?”, p. 440.
 37. Baustian and Martin, “Patterns of mortality”, p. 57.

Scholars and Amazons: Researching Women Travellers in the Arabian Gulf

Penelope Tuson

Introduction

In a book on seventeenth-century English travellers to the East the literary historian, Gerald MacLean, concludes with a short Epilogue entitled ‘What about the Women, Then?’ The women, as he himself admits, are few in number.¹ MacLean’s comments highlight the lack of information on female travellers during the early modern period. Women journeyed both eastward and westward, in the company of diplomats and merchants. They travelled on the trade routes through the Red Sea, Arabia and the Gulf region. They took with them beliefs and customs which were often misunderstood and feared but sometimes admired and copied by their host societies. At the same time they absorbed the culture of their adopted communities. Ideas were exchanged in the public and political sphere but also in the more intimate, and often more openly receptive and influential, female domestic sphere.

The archives of the British connection with the Arabian Gulf provide the foundation, although of course not the only source material, for most studies of Gulf history from the early-seventeenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Since they were first made widely available in the 1970s the British records have been explored and exploited, argued over and critically reassessed by both post-colonial critics and historians. New, ground-breaking studies have been published which have delved beyond the old-fashioned imperial and political histories which originally provided the basis for study, albeit from an imperial and overtly Western perspective.² Women, however, have not been at the forefront of research subjects. They held no official offices, except in the higher ranks of the imperial hierarchy as ‘accompanying’ persons; they almost never produced official reports; and if they appeared in the archives it was more often - for example, when captive or destitute - as problems for British officials.³

When, a decade ago, I researched and published my study of twentieth-century imperial wives and female travellers to the Gulf, I found, like Gerald MacLean, that the stories of women were difficult to locate. I endorsed the opinion of the feminist historian, Clare Midgley, that the history of women and imperialism continued to be regarded as of marginal significance, ‘a special interest area’ which could ‘safely be

left to female historians'. Women were simply absent from the archival mainstream of imperial history. We were, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously wrote, 'groping in the margins of history'.⁴ More recently, researching a book on women's travel writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I concluded that, for the earlier period at least, not enough has changed. Women's history in general has matured and moved into the mainstream. The study of imperial history has been enlivened by studies of memsahibs and missionaries and by debates on the portrayal or silencing of the 'colonial woman'. At the same time, however, in otherwise scholarly general accounts of imperialism and politics, women are still frequently lumped together under a single index entry 'women'.

Before the twentieth century the story of women travellers in the Gulf region is, to a large extent, one of absence and frustration. Local women tend to be doubly silenced, often written into travel accounts as exotic creatures glimpsed en route to the more important business of politics and diplomacy. There is still much more research remaining to be done. The elusive histories of some of the women described below illustrate the difficulties and challenging methodology required for researching women's history in the records of European relations with the Arabian Gulf and beyond.

The Untold Lives of Early Women Travellers in the Gulf

A growing number of historians have referred to the scarcity of information on women in the first encounters between European travellers and the Islamic world. The vast and detailed archives of the East India Company from 1600 onwards, for example, contain an enormous amount of material on trading missions to the Gulf region. However, they have so far revealed only tantalising and patchy information on women. At the same time the published works of contemporary male travellers tend to be anecdotal and unreliable in their references to female experience.

Women had, of course, been travelling Eastward since the Crusades. Noblewomen, for example, journeyed long distances for diplomatic marriage alliances and women of all ranks travelled as pilgrims. Women also accompanied sailors, merchants and adventurers although at this point the narrative becomes considerably more nebulous and anecdotal. Some work has been done, for example by Alison Games and by Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar but women are still to a large extent marginal, rather than a primary object of study, in these otherwise illuminating and important studies of cross-cultural encounters. Those studies which have been published in fact serve to emphasise how little we actually know.⁵

Generally, the prevailing view of the early seventeenth century was that travel, for its own sake, was not an activity to be undertaken by women. In 1617, for example, Fynes Moryson published an account of his journeys to the East and included advice for aspiring travellers. While foreign travel was good and profitable, he noted, not

all persons were fit for it: not women, nor feeble persons, nor the aged, nor those too young; but men of middle years who had a good foundation of the arts and sciences and were of 'so ripe discretion as they can distinguish between good and evil'.⁶

The first twelve East India Company Voyages set out between 1601 and 1613, sailing via the Arabian coast and putting in variously at Mokha, Aden and Socotra. British factories (trading stations) were established at Mokha in 1618, Gombroon (Bandar 'Abbas) in 1623, and Basra in 1635. Unlike the Dutch East India Company, the English Company at first forbade their servants to take their wives with them overseas. The rule was abandoned in the 1660s but it is clear that before then some women ignored the ban and travelled. In addition merchants frequently established short-term and long-term relationships with local women, sometimes taking them back home as wives and sometimes marrying in spite of having left a first wife and family behind in England. Marriages were usually to members of the local Christian populations, often Armenian. The most well-known is probably that of the East India Company merchant William Hawkins given a Christian Armenian wife by Jahangir at the Mughal Court at Agra, in 1610. She is described in documents simply as the daughter of a courtier. She set off with Hawkins on his return voyage, via the Arabian coast, to England but arrived alone after Hawkins died on the journey. 'Mrs Hawkins' (the only certain name we have for her) would have been one of the first women from Mughal India to reach England and she made the journey three times. On her first visit to London she petitioned the East India Company for her deceased husband's outstanding wages and the Directors concluded that a generous response to a 'stranger' would enhance their reputation on their trading routes. Mrs Hawkins then married another merchant, Gabriel Towerson but was abandoned by him in India, after which she again asked the Company for compensation but this time unsuccessfully.

The account of Hawkins' marriage and the experiences of his wife were first published by the great East India Company historian and archivist, Sir William Foster, and they have been made more widely available in a recent article by Amrita Sen. There is, unsurprisingly, no account by 'Mrs Hawkins' herself but she appears in official East India Correspondence, filtered through the lens of the Company's commercial interests and in her husbands' reports to the East India Company, some of which were reprinted by Samuel Purchas in *Purchas His Pilgrims*, published in 1625. Much of the material quoted in recent accounts of early East India Company activity in Arabia, India and further East, is drawn from Foster's work, in particular from his multi-volume transcriptions of correspondence printed as *The English Factories in India as well as his Early Travels in India*, all published in the early part of the twentieth century. There are also the individual journals published by the Hakluyt Society.⁷ References to women tend to be anecdotal and second, if not third or fourth-hand.



Hondius' Map of the Turkish Empire from Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, London 1625. The Arcadian Library

The late Anthony Farrington took up where Sir William Foster left off and meticulously and comprehensively transcribed and analysed all the East India Company Records relating to the Company's venture in Japan during this period, including Ships' journals, diaries and East India Company correspondence, showing the complex relationships between men and women and presenting an enormous amount of information, not only about the Company's aims and activities but also about society in Japan during the same period and about cultural relationships. In particular he detailed the famous history of the Company's merchant, William Adams, his eventual status as *hatamoto* (a direct retainer of the *shogun*) and his English and Japanese wives and families. Farrington's work reinforced Alison Games's argument that cosmopolitanism was central to trade relations and that while some men merely tolerated the new experiences, others delighted in new languages, fashions, people and food.⁸ Sadly, nothing similar has been done on the original archives relating to the Company's activities in the Arabian peninsula, for example the Mokha trading post or the shipping ports of call on the southern Arabian coast and into the Gulf. Yet clearly women were travelling these routes in both directions.

In 1613, for example, the same year that the unnamed wife of William Hawkins arrived in England, the *Twelfth Voyage* of the East India Company Voyage also set sail,

taking with it one of the most flamboyant and intriguing of early-seventeenth century women travellers, a woman whose story encapsulates the problems and potential treasure trove of information available if only we were able to unearth it. Lady Teresa Sampsonia Sherley was a Circassian noblewoman from the court of Shah 'Abbas I. She had been converted to Catholicism by the Carmelites and had taken the name of Teresa on her marriage to the Elizabethan adventurer and diplomat, Robert Sherley, five years earlier. Teresa Sherley is doubly interesting as a woman who travelled, both geographically and culturally, eastward and westward. She made the journey between Persia and Europe five times before finally settling in Rome after the death of her husband in 1628. On the 1613 voyage, the East India Company ship put in for two weeks in Dhufar in the southern Arabian Peninsula where the passengers reported that they were treated hospitably by local fishermen.⁹

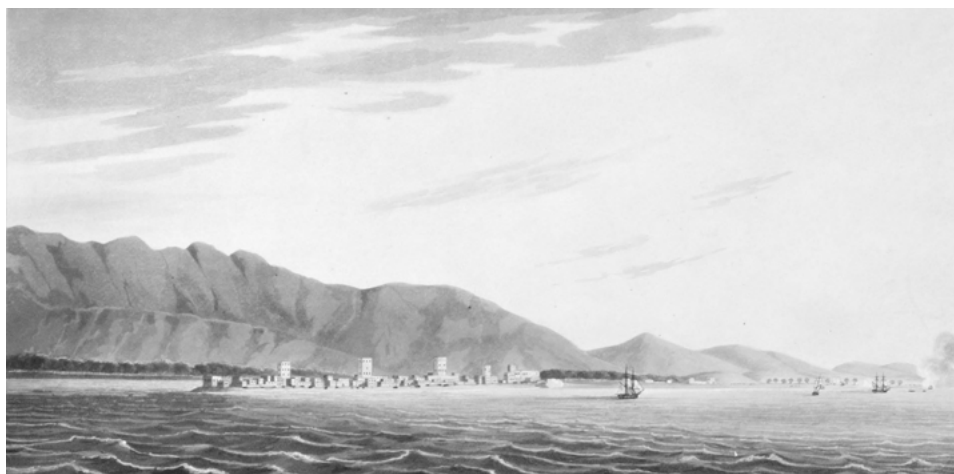
The major European sources for Teresa's life are the predictably semi-hagiographic accounts in the Vatican and the Carmelite archives, conveniently assembled and edited by H. Chick in his monumental *Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia*, published in 1939, which although sometimes contradictory and patchy, reveal her as a woman whose courage and adventurous spirit were at least equal to those of her husband. At the same time they present a narrative which conforms with the perspective of European Catholicism.¹⁰ Her story has also been overshadowed by the partly self-created myth of the Sherley brothers whose travels and exploits became the subject of numerous contemporary biographies as well as subsequent historical studies.¹¹

On her first journey westward in 1608 Teresa is recorded as having saved her husband's life after the couple were attacked and Sherley tied to a tree. Teresa, described then as 'a true Amazon', is said to have fought off the attackers with a sword snatched from one of them with which she 'proceeded to thrust and cut and kill some of the band, putting to flight the rest'.¹² After almost two decades of similarly courageous and seemingly endless journeying, the Sherleys left England for the final time in 1627, again travelling via the Gulf on another East India Company ship, *The Star*. After Robert Sherley died in Persia, in July 1628, Teresa eventually found her way to Rome, where she devoted herself to charity and religion until her death in 1668, outliving her husband by forty years. She was buried at the Carmelite church of Santa Maria della Scala, where the inscription on her tombstone described her, as she undoubtedly would have wished to be remembered, as 'Theresia Sampsonia Amazonitis'. The contemporary travel-writer, Thomas Herbert, thought that Robert Sherley was 'the greatest Traveller of his time' but he was even more admiring of 'the thrice worthy and undaunted Lady Terezia'.¹³

Lady Sherley does not have a voice of her own and her story is difficult to piece together. The known sources are European and mainly ecclesiastical and there are no readily accessible Gulf sources. There can be no doubt, however, that she was a courageous and intrepid traveller as well as a loyal and resilient companion. She serves as a reminder that very few women travellers had either the opportunity or means to record their journeys and experiences, even when they set out as the

wives of ambassadors and diplomats. More importantly, however, Lady Sherley is splendid confirmation that women, as well as men, were travelling Westward as well as Eastward and bringing with them knowledge and culture from the courts and countries of Asia and the Middle East.

Almost two centuries later, in the Spring of 1809 another 'undaunted' woman, the Armenian wife of a British officer at Bushire, Lieutenant Robert Taylor, was taken captive in the Gulf with her baby son during the famous attack on the British boat, the *Minerva*. The vessel and its surviving crew and passengers, were taken to Ras al-Khaimah. The contemporary British accounts of the incident are somewhat inconsistent but the story has been investigated in recent studies of the maritime incidents.¹⁴ Most of the passengers seem to have been released by the local Al Qasimi Shaikh, after some of the men were 'forcibly' converted to Islam. The imagined fate of Mrs Taylor and two other women on the boat was reported in scandalised prose by the *Asiatic Annual Register* as 'too painful to enlarge on'.¹⁵



Ras al-Khymah (Ras al-Khaimah) from Richard Temple, *Sixteen Views of Places in the Persian Gulph, Taken in the Years 1809-10*, Bombay 1811. The Arcadian Library

In October the Acting British Resident at Bushire, William Bruce, received a letter from Mrs Taylor in Bahrain, where she had been taken by a local Arab man who had 'purchased her'. She asked Bruce if he could pay the thousand-dollar ransom demanded by her captor. Bruce also received a letter from the man himself who said that 'he had been induced to purchase her, to prevent her from falling into other hands who would never have parted with her'. Bruce passed on the request to the Bombay Government, adding that 'the dictates of humanity' urged him to find some means of rescuing the unfortunate woman and infant. The British authorities remained unmoved and told Bruce to pass on the bill to Lieutenant Taylor and ask him to reimburse the gov.¹⁶ Mrs Taylor just about surfaces in the archives because she was caught up in an important

maritime skirmish and then became the subject of a monetary transaction on the part of local British agents. Her plight, however, was evidently not regarded as an official responsibility or a suitable cause for government spending.

A decade later there is also the intriguing story of Anne Thompson, who played an extraordinary and little appreciated role in one of the more important events in the history of British relations with the Gulf. She was the wife of the flamboyant Captain Thomas Perronet Thompson who in 1819 was serving in the Gulf with the 17th Light Dragoons, as interpreter to the commander of a British expedition put together to subdue and negotiate treaties with the Rulers of the Gulf Coast. Anne, who had run away from home to marry Thompson against her parents' wishes, accompanied him to Ras al-Khaimah and played a significant part in the production of the important 1820 'General Treaty' between the British and the local rulers. In a letter to her family she described 'the office' she held in the expedition:

I beg leave to inform you that it was that of Political Secretary. I used to think it was rather hard that the Military Secretary should wear a cocked hat and Saxon plume, and get 400 rupees a month to boot, while I had nothing - but thus is merit rewarded. All the copies of the Treaty signed, sealed and delivered to the different chiefs were in my hand-writing.¹⁷

The Emergence of Travel Writing by Western Women¹⁸

When Lady Mary Wortley Montagu set off on her travels to the Islamic world in 1717-18 she claimed to be the first Christian woman to have undertaken the journey for a century.¹⁹ She may not have been justified in such a grand assertion and clearly she was not the first woman to have travelled East. However, the claim can certainly be made on her behalf that she was the first woman to have published an extensive account of a Western female encounter with Islamic culture, albeit posthumously. Her 'Turkish Embassy' *Letters*, as they are generally referred to, were not printed until 1763, a year after her death, but they challenged contemporary male travel-writers by claiming to be more open-minded, less confrontational and more elegantly written.²⁰ The first edition was introduced with a note by the philosopher and polemicist, Mary Astell, commending Mary Wortley Montagu's graceful style and making the even bolder claim that women could travel with 'much better purpose' than men and provide much more accurate accounts of their subjects. 'I confess', she wrote, 'I am malicious enough to desire, that the world should see, to how much better purpose the LADIES travel than their LORDS';

... that, whilst it is surfeited with *Male-Travels*, all in the same tone, and stuff with the same trifles; a lady has the skill to strike out a new path, and to embellish a worn-out subject, with variety of fresh and elegant entertainment. For besides the vivacity and spirit which enlivens every part, and that inimitable beauty which spreads through the whole; besides the purity of the style, for which it may be justly accounted the standard of the English tongue; the reader will find a more true and accurate account of the customs and manners of the several nations, with whom this lady conversed, than he can in any other author.²¹



A Bedouin Arab, Ali Sukhlávi of Kawed from Helen Mackenzie, *Illustrations of the Mission, the Camp and the Zennana*, London 1856. The Arcadian Library

Mary Wortley Montagu was a scholar who could rival the best contemporary male travel writers. Described by a recent biographer as a ‘Comet of the Enlightenment’, and firmly located in the intellectual milieu of the early-eighteenth century she was also a woman with Renaissance-like preoccupations and learning. When she sailed from England en route to Istanbul in August 1716, at the age of 26, she was travelling as an ‘accompanying person’ with her husband’s diplomatic mission. However, she could hardly be described as a silent partner. She had eloped with Edward Wortley Montagu, against the wishes of her father, two years earlier. Intellectually precocious and partly self-educated she was proficient in Latin, Greek and French, a poet and writer who had already published an essay in the *Spectator* and whose friends included the satirist Joseph Addison and the poet Alexander Pope. She was an advocate of education for girls, believing that prejudices stemmed from ignorance and she herself claimed to have always been ‘delighted in romances and books of travels’ and ‘charmed with the thoughts of going into the East’ and ‘going farther than most other people go’.²² In letters to her family and literary associates, Lady Mary recorded her experiences and her opinions in great detail and with elegant style. Opinionated, energetic and flamboyant, they present a seductive, sophisticated and challenging vision of the European encounter with the Orient and they set a standard to which many subsequent writers aspired but few ever achieved.

In Belgrade, where the Wortley Montagus lodged in the house of an eminent scholar, whom she refers to as Ahmed Bey, she said their conversations had tempted her with references to new languages and new books and opened up the possibility of different cultural attitudes to social relations, in particular, to the position of women in society. She told Alexander Pope that her host had:

... explained to me many pieces of Arabian Poetry, which I observe are in numbers not unlike ours, generally of an alternate verse, and of a very musical sound... I really believe I should learn to read Arabic if I was to stay here a few months. He [Ahmed Bey] has a very good library of their books of all kinds; and, as he tells me, spends the greatest part of his life there... I have frequent disputes with him concerning the difference of our customs, particularly the confinement of women... He has wit and is more polite than many Christian men of quality. I am very much entertained with him.²³

Her ‘intimate daily conversations’ with Ahmed Bey, she wrote, gave her ‘opportunity of knowing their religion and morals in a more particular manner than perhaps any Christian ever did’. He explained to her many aspects of Islam and assured her that if she took the trouble to learn Arabic she would be very well pleased with reading the Quran ‘which is...the purest morality delivered in the very best language’.

Mary Wortley Montagu is best known for her accounts of Muslim women’s lives. She admired the way women dressed, believing that less-revealing and more

comfortable clothes gave them more freedom of movement. She even took to wearing eastern costume after she returned to England. She also applauded the economic independence given to women under a legal system which allowed them to keep their own financial assets when divorced and she recognised the fundamental importance of financial security in relation to more superficial restrictions on women's lives. Lady Mary's opinions on women's 'freedoms' were very much influenced by her own privileged yet economically dependent status in early-eighteenth century England.²⁴ However, she was genuinely impressed by the different customs she encountered on her journey East. Furthermore, she claimed that earlier European male travel writers had built up a body of fake literature about areas of society of which they had no real practical knowledge; and her book was later sold on the same premise, with the phrase 'drawn from sources that have been inaccessible to other travellers' incorporated in the title. Her comments on earlier writers, in effect, constitute a critique of the back catalogue of the most popular western late-Renaissance travel writing. In a letter written in 1717 to an Italian intellectual, the Abbé Antonio Conti, she argued that most Western travellers had been ill-informed about the East:

Tis certain we have but very imperfect accounts of the manners and religion of these people. This part of the world being seldom visited but by merchants, who mind little but their own affairs; or travellers, who make too short a stay to be able to report any thing exactly of their own knowledge.²⁵

She went on to criticise many of the most eminent Western travel writers of the early modern period, including the much-praised diplomat and author Paul Rycaut, while at the same time acknowledging that she had read their works and appreciated their learning.²⁶

The editor of the most complete, three-volume, publication of Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, Robert Halsband, described their 'literary skill and intellectual sophistication' as well as their 'expansive tolerance' and concluded that they contributed greatly to the exchange of ideas between the Islamic world and Christian Europe.²⁷ Although her critique of earlier writings was part of her own mechanism for establishing female authorial status, Lady Mary highlighted an outrageous gap in the canon of European travel writing on the East. Not only was there next to nothing published by women, but women were largely absent from the historical narrative.

Western women's travel writing about the East begins with Mary Wortley Montagu and her 'Turkish' Letters look forward to the great Arabian adventures and narratives of Lady Hester Stanhope, Lady Anne Blunt, Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark. With the help of her commentator, Mary Astell, she established a technique which could be used by aspiring women travel writers intent on publication and often in need of a justification for independent travel. In the early-nineteenth century increasing numbers of British women travelled via the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf, together with

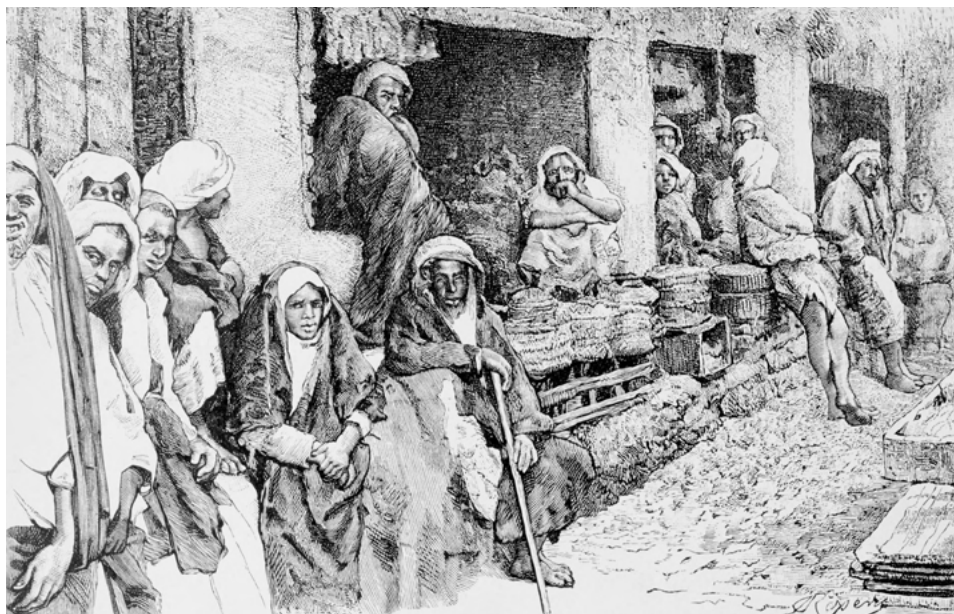
husbands, brothers and fathers, on the 'journey out' to India. With the development of the overland route and, subsequently, the new itineraries used for steam navigation, women's accounts of meetings with local women during stops in Hudaydah, Mokha, Aden and other ports in the region became subjects of travel books and memoirs, often but not always, providing admiring and appreciative descriptions of women's lives. At the same time, for more adventurous and unconventional European women, travel came to be an escape from the chains of domestic life as well as an essential source of finance. Among a surprising number of women travellers into the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula some are famous, others less well-known. They travelled as journalists, archaeologists, missionaries, intelligence officers and simply aristocratic explorers. They all provided fascinating accounts of their encounters with Arab life in the Gulf and beyond.

Before Gertrude Bell, perhaps the most notable woman archaeologist to travel to the Gulf was Jane Dieulafoy. Born in Toulouse in 1851, Dieulafoy is best known for her excavations of the palaces of Darius I and Artaxerxes II at Susa, the ancient capital of Persia north-east of Basra, carried out with her husband, Marcel Auguste Dieulafoy. After accompanying Marcel Auguste to the Franco-Prussian war and obtaining permission from the War Department to wear soldier's uniform and to fight, Dieulafoy continued to dress in male clothes, even to the extent of obtaining authorisation from the government to appear in public in male dress. The frontispiece of one of her books depicts her with a short haircut and wearing a man's jacket.²⁸



Portrait of Jane Dieulafoy from Jane Dieulafoy, *La Perse; La Chaldée et La Susiane. Relation de Voyage*, Paris 1887. The Arcadian Library

The Dieulafoys travelled by sea via Aden and Muscat and their account of their work, together with Jane's superb photographs was published in 1888 in *À Suse: journal des fouilles*, which described the places they passed through in the Gulf and also included an account of the pearl fisheries in Bahrain. The book was translated and published in 1890 in the United States where Dieulafoy was well-known and popular.²⁹ In 1886 Dieulafoy was awarded the Légion d'honneur for her discoveries and archaeological work. She was described by *Le Temps* as 'one of our most distinguished and courageous explorer-travellers'. In the years before the First World War she campaigned for the formation of a women's volunteer corps to replace men in non-combatant sections of the army. She died in 1916, eulogised by the *New York Times* as 'the most remarkable woman in France'.



Bazar de Bahreïn from Jane Dieulafoy, *A Suse: journal de fouilles*, 1884-1886, Paris 1888. The Arcadian Library

Contemporaries of the Dieulafoys, the British couple, Mabel and Theodore Bent, were amateur archaeologists but well-educated and experienced travellers. In 1889 they excavated the famous burial mounds in Bahrain and Bent put forward his thesis that the Phoenicians might have originated there. Between 1893 and Bent's death from malaria in 1897 the couple made seven separate journeys through southern Arabia, to the Hadhramaut, the island of Socotra, and to Muscat and Dhufar. Bent died soon after returning from the last trip and their accounts of the journeys (his 'notebooks' and her 'chronicles') were edited by Mabel and published in the *Geographical Journal* and in her book, *Southern Arabia*, illustrated with her own photographs and published in 1900 under their joint authorship, and with Bent's earlier publications listed on the title page.³⁰ The book's geopolitical significance was acknowledged the following year when the British government recommended to their Agent in Muscat, Percy Cox, that he should read it before travelling around Oman on a mission to assess the extent of the Sultan's territorial authority.³¹ The first part of the book describes the expeditions to Bahrain and the Bents' stay in Muscat, en route to Persia. Their most important journey, made in 1894 at the instigation of the British government, was into the Hadhramaut, previously only explored any distance inland by the German, Baron Adolf von Wrede, in 1843. Mabel Bent, who took the first photographs of the region, travelled in European dress and was the first European woman to visit the area. Despite speaking very little Arabic, the couple travelled comfortably with an Indian surveyor assigned to them by the local British authorities, a Greek servant, a botanist from Kew and an Egyptian naturalist. Mabel was unimpressed by the Hadhrami

women, with their dyed faces, and girls who behaved like 'bold hussies', peering into their tents at night. Not surprisingly the Hadhramis were not particularly impressed by the Bents.³² Nevertheless, *Southern Arabia* provided a vivid and readable survey of the geography, history, topography and people of a region previously unknown to Europeans and it was not superseded until the British colonial Government of Aden's surveys in the 1930s. Returning via Muscat the Bents also went inland into Dhufar and investigated the origins of the incense trade.

One of the most well-known travellers into the borderlands of Empire was Isabella Bird. Intrepid and courageous, she was also a prolific author whose popularity enabled her to fund her travels with the income from her writing. Born in Yorkshire in 1831, the daughter of an Anglican clergyman, she grew up in an educated, middle-class family with a commitment to philanthropy and missionary work and she received a wide-ranging education in arts, sciences and literature. She famously suffered from chronic ill-health and in 1854, on the advice of her doctor, she set off on a lifetime of travel which she found miraculously improved her physical well-being. In 1889, at the age of almost sixty, after setting up a hospital in India in memory of her husband, Bird met Major Herbert Sawyer, an Indian Army intelligence officer about to embark on a military reconnaissance of the Bakhtiari region of south-west Persia, and the two of them, Sawyer over twenty-years younger than Isabella, agreed to ride together. Isabella would assist him with survey work while at the same time offering medical help to local people. For its time, it was an extraordinary arrangement, which drew Isabella into the geopolitics of the Gulf region and simultaneously secured her reputation as a serious and spirited traveller.

Isabella Bird's account of the expedition, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, was published in two volumes in 1891.³³ Written in the form of letters, the book describes the journey, from her arrival at the British Residency at Bushire, where she was entertained by the 'genial hospitality' of the Resident, Lieutenant-Colonel E. C. Ross, and his family. Ross, who had been in the post since 1872, had by now become an expert on the economy and politics of the Gulf region and supplied Isabella with detailed trade statistics for her book. From Bushire she sailed up the Gulf to the Shatt al-'Arab and Basra, where she boarded the steamship *Mejidieh* for the journey further up-river to Baghdad. Among the other, all-male, passengers was George Nathaniel Curzon, the future Viceroy of India, who was returning from his own survey of the Karun river, the last stage of a journey through Persia intended to familiarise himself with the topography and politics of the borderlands of India. Curzon's expeditions and travel writings would continue to intersect with those of Isabella and his presence on the steamer and as a fellow traveller in Isabella's book firmly located her alongside the central players in a region of strategic importance in European imperial diplomacy.

Curzon's book went to press at the same time as Isabella's and he advised her on some of the details. *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* was published at Christmas 1891. Curzon's two-volume work, *Persia and the Persian Question*, meanwhile was

not published until May 1892 and, although it received favourable reviews, it was criticised for being too long, too self-important and too tiring to read.³⁴ Isabella's book, on the other hand, received more than a hundred 'admiring reviews', including one by Curzon himself. She said that it was a 'lurking satisfaction in having vindicated a woman's right to do what she can do well' and was delighted that reviewers 'made no puerile remarks on the feminine authorship of the book, or awarded praise or blame on that score'.³⁵

In 1892 Isabella Bird was elected Fellow of the Scottish Geographical Society and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, one of the very first group of twenty-one women admitted to the latter society. Bird was one of the very few women whose writing was listed in the extensive bibliography of publications produced by J. G. Lorimer in his great *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* and she was consistently referred to in later years in British government reports on the region and in the transactions of the learned societies.³⁶ Together with Lady Anne Blunt, whose work was also admired by Lorimer, Bird's Arabian Gulf travels represented a fitting turning point in the pioneering work of Western women travellers up to the end of the nineteenth century and a foretaste of the work which would be done by Gertrude Bell and others after the First World War.



Portrait of Lady Anne Blunt in Arab costume from Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd*, London 1881. The Arcadian Library

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The Third River*

Michael Quentin Morton

For the sheikhs of the lower Arabian Gulf, the advent of the oil age was a mixed blessing. The region was undoubtedly poor after the pearl trade had gone into decline. Dubai was a port with strong trading links with India, but otherwise the littoral economy was weak. Oil would address these problems and, indeed, provide unimaginable wealth, but it would also bring immense changes that would threaten to destroy the traditional way of life. The sheikhs, for their part, would react in different ways to the challenge.¹

Of course, all this lay in the future—in the 1930s no one knew if there was any oil in the region. The Trucial Coast was a collection of seven independent sheikhdoms that today forms the United Arab Emirates. Away from the coast, it comprised mainly desert, with settlements and date plantations around the oases of Liwa and Al Ain, uncertain boundaries, and fringed on the east by the Omani mountain range. The sheikhdom of Abu Dhabi was by far the largest, with a size of about 25,000 square miles. Abu Dhabi village—for that is what it was—lay on a barren island that outsiders rarely visited. The only building of note was the ruler's palace, otherwise the village was a quiet fishing settlement on the shore of the Arabian Gulf. The ruler, Sheikh Shakhbut Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, was an intelligent and conservative man. The youngest of his three brothers, Zayed, exerted great influence over parts of the interior, especially around the Buraimi oasis.

It appeared to be an uncomplicated picture but, when it came to oil exploration, a strange and confusing story emerged. On Abu Dhabi island where only brackish water was recovered from shallow pits, Sheikh Shakhbut was eager to find a good water supply, having heard about Major Holmes' work drilling for water in Bahrain. When the British suggested a water survey, Shakhbut agreed. As with Qatar, Anglo-Persian took the lead and, in 1934, geologist Peter Cox crossed the Gulf from Abadan. On 3 December, he arrived off Abu Dhabi on the sloop HMS Lupin but soon realised that a more extensive survey would be required. However, he made a brief report on the oil prospects of the region, which he viewed as promising, and recommended further investigation. Back in London, Chief Geologist Norval Baker was unimpressed. 'Lack of seepages and structures are adverse,' he wrote.²

* This article is an extract from the NCDR's forthcoming book titled "The Third River: An Aspect on Oil Development in the Middle East, 1887–1979" by Mr. Michael Quentin Morton.



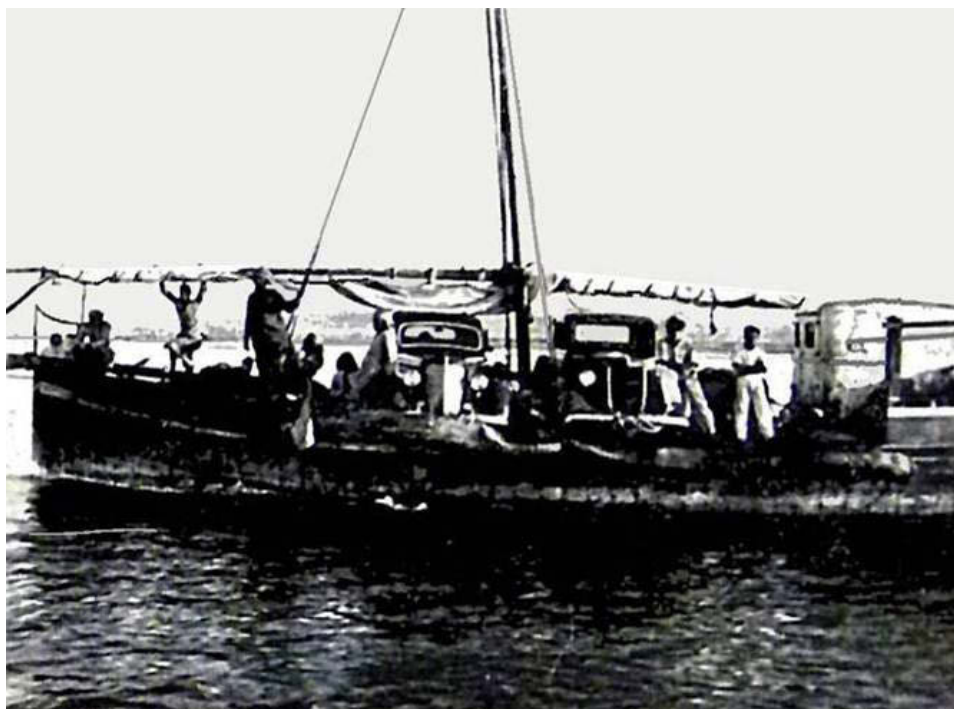
A group of sheikhs with Sheikh Shakhbut at the centre. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, Accession No. 2004.130.17650.1.

There was some reluctance among IPC's higher echelons to become involved in the Trucial Coast. John Skliros, whose knowledge of the region was limited, was not enthusiastic about committing his company to further exploration, quoting political problems as another complication.³ Meanwhile, Cox had returned to Abu Dhabi in March 1935. The rains had come and Shakhbut's interest in water had waned—it was clear that the cost of drilling a water well (30,000 rupees, about £305,000 today) was well beyond what he was prepared to pay. His real interest lay in oil exploration—he knew about the Qatar negotiations and how much other Arab rulers had received for oil rights. He also hinted at the possibility of the American oil company, Socal, searching for oil in his territory. Cox completed a short survey of the coastal area, including a visit to Ras Sadr that added little to the company's knowledge of the regional geology. Intriguingly, Sheikh Shakhbut visited Baghdad that summer, explicitly for health reasons but possibly to discuss the oil situation with Iraqi officials and other oil companies.⁴

It was difficult to dismiss the region as an oil prospect, therefore IPC decided to pursue its interest, choosing Petroleum Concessions Ltd (PCL) as its vehicle. In theory, it should have been a straightforward matter but attempts by the British Groups in IPC to exclude the French and American Groups from the Arabian Gulf brought more confusion and delay.⁵ As a stopgap measure, Skliros encouraged Anglo-Persian (now renamed Anglo-Iranian) to 'snap up' concessions along the coast with a view to transferring them to PCL when the time was right.⁶ On 5 January 1936, Haji Williamson obtained a two-year option for Abu Dhabi on a down payment of 7,000 rupees and 3,000 rupees a month (£30,500 and £13,000 today). On 30

September, another IPC associate company, Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) Ltd (PDTC), was incorporated to explore the area.

The next survey began on 25 November 1936 when geologists Jock Williamson and David Glynn-Jones landed from the Gulf mail steamer at Dubai. The sheikh, Sheikh Saeed Bin Maktoum, accompanied them on the first part of their expedition, taking in some hunting on the way.⁷ Next, they visited Abu Dhabi island and the Buraimi oasis where Jebel Hafit, the most significant geological feature of the region, stood. However, on returning to Abu Dhabi, they found the going too difficult along the coast, and therefore loaded their vehicles onto a dhow and sailed eastwards to access Jebel Dhana and Khawr al-Udaid.⁸ Further inland, they were unable to penetrate the Liwa oasis or the Rub al-Khali, and the company ruled out an aerial survey on safety grounds. On 7 May 1937, they departed from Dubai and returned to Iran, where they disbanded.



The geologists hired two launches for the work, one to carry the cars and equipment.
(source: T.F. Williamson, IPC).

In their reports, Williamson and Glynn-Jones alluded to the issues that would make exploration on the Trucial Coast so difficult—a harsh desert terrain, logistical problems, a lack of fixed boundaries and inter-tribal conflicts.⁹ In the Abu Dhabi desert, sand buried most of the rocks, thus denying the geologists a vital piece of

the petroleum jigsaw puzzle. There were a few rocky outcrops such as Jebels Hafit, Dhanna and Ras Sadr, all of which the geologists had seen. In 1938, Williamson was able to visit the Buraimi area (more of which later) and write a report about the geology.¹⁰ However, until the advent of geophysical surveys after World War II, the possibilities for further geological work in Abu Dhabi were limited.

The arrival of Major Frank Holmes, whom PCL had engaged to complete agreements with the Gulf sheikhs, complicated matters somewhat. Holmes was widely mistrusted among the British establishment for his dealings in Bahrain and Kuwait, and his appointment as the oil company's representative on the Trucial Coast was unwelcome. 'I am sure that if Holmes comes to the Gulf there will be the usual atmosphere of confusion and intrigue which he creates wherever he goes and which sooner or later gives us much unnecessary trouble', the Political Resident observed.

Indeed, the prophecy came true. The person who bore the brunt of the intrigue was Haji Williamson, accused on flimsy evidence of working against the interests of PCL. On 27 July, the Political Resident wrote that it was 'undesirable that [Haji] Williamson should be employed anywhere on the Arab coast'. Williamson, who had left two months before, retired to his family in Iraq, never to return to the Trucial Coast. However, he retained the confidence of the oil companies and many sheikhs. Holmes himself proved dilatory and was relieved through ill health, having achieved little.¹¹

Despite this distraction, the company signed a number of concession agreements. Once Sheikh Saeed Bin Maktum of Dubai had agreed terms with PCL in May 1937, other sheikhdoms of the Trucial Coast followed suit. The ruler of Sharjah signed on 17 September and the sheikh of Kalba the following year (although Kalba was incorporated with Sharjah in 1952). After the departure of Holmes and Williamson, it fell to Basil Lermite to pick up the threads along the coast.

Sheikh Shakhbut proved to be rather more resilient than his counterparts. He expected the same terms that Ibn Saud had obtained from Stephen Longrigg for the western Arabia concession in July 1936, which included payment in gold.¹² In this, the sheikh was simply holding out for what he believed was rightfully due to him and his people. The oilmen, on the other hand, did not know how much oil—if any—lay beneath the desert sands of Abu Dhabi. Therefore, there was a large element of risk, but if they did not act, others might move in. The oil prospects of the region improved dramatically in March 1938 when Casoc struck oil at Dammam in Saudi Arabia. Reports of a Casoc survey party pushing south towards the sheikhdom served to remind IPC of a rival interest.¹³



Abu Dhabi in the early 1960s, before the oil wealth had begun to make a major impact. (source: BP Archive)

In the event, Longrigg completed the company's business in Abu Dhabi on 11 January 1939. He signed an agreement with Sheikh Shakhbut for a 75-year concession. The company agreed to make a down-payment of 300,000 rupees (£1.2 million today) and annual payments of 100,000 rupees (£400,000), increasing by 25 per cent every four years. Upon the discovery of oil, a royalty of 3 rupees (£12) per ton would replace the annual payments. These terms were similar to those agreed by other governments up and down the Gulf, although less favourable than those for Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The remaining sheikhdoms did not sign agreements until the end of the war: Ras al-Khaimah and Umm al-Quwain in 1945, Ajman in 1951 and Fujairah in 1953.¹⁴

No one has fully explained the reasons for Sheikh Shakhbut's change of heart. The British government no doubt applied some pressure by reminding the sheikh of his treaty obligations to act only on their advice and negotiate only with PCL. Members of Shakhbut's family, always keeping a close eye on developments, may well have played a part. There is the obvious fact that the impoverished sheikhdom was in need of the income that oil payments would bring and Sheikh Shakhbut must have realised he would not get a better deal. So perhaps a combination of these factors persuaded him to sign the agreement.

Upon obtaining the sheikh's agreement, the company decided to proceed 'with a view to the discovery of commercial oil, and not merely to keep the sheikhs quiet'.¹⁵ Unfortunately, owing to logistical and tribal difficulties, the company achieved little before the outbreak of World War II, when activities were suspended.

There is an interesting postscript to this story. In January 1943, Basil Lermite set out from Bahrain on a dhow with 25 boxes of silver, being the company's annual payment to Sheikh Shakhbut. But the sharp-eyed sheikh had spotted an ambiguity in the wording of the agreement. When Lermite arrived, he was astonished to find Sheikh Shakhbut demanding more and refusing to accept the rupees that he offered. Lermite departed, taking his box of rupees to Dubai and then back to Bahrain. Presently, Shakhbut won the argument and Lermite returned, with the original 25 boxes of silver, and 25 per cent more.¹⁶

In the Omani desert, a few miles inland from Nafun, lies a groundwater seepage in the Wadi Jurf. On approaching this spring, one can see streams of glistening salty water on the surface of dolomitic rocks fringed by ribbons of black algae. To the untrained eye, it looks black, suspiciously like crude oil in fact. It might be easily mistaken from the distance for an oil seepage. Indeed, the subsequent rumour of a seepage on the south Arabian coast that reached the ears of Anglo-Persian managers in Abadan in the early 1920s might have originated here.

Until then, the history of geological exploration of that country had been slender. A few British explorers had ventured to the Buraimi oasis and other places, but the interior of Oman was largely unknown to Westerners, and remained shrouded in mystery. There had been visits in 1901–2 by members of the Geological Survey of India (GSI) to look for coal. In 1904, the GSI dispatched geologist Guy Pilgrim to examine the region for signs of oil. He reported that the oil prospects of Persia were more encouraging than on the other side of the Gulf. There matters rested until the 1920s.¹⁷

It required the arrival of Major Holmes to revive British interest in the oil prospects of Oman. In 1925, Anglo-Persian received reports that Holmes, acting for a rival firm, was discussing an oil concession with the sultan of Oman. The British authorities were anxious. 'We feel,' wrote the Political Resident, 'we cannot afford to remain inactive in that direction for fear lest...we may eventually be faced with a situation similar to that at Bahrain and Hasa where as a result of delay we found Holmes well dug in and difficult if not impossible to dislodge.'¹⁸ Anglo-Persian thus obtained a two-year exploration permit from the Sultan through its exploration arm, the D'Arcy Exploration Company. The agreement ominously stated that certain parts of the territory were 'not at present safe for its operations', a reference to the volatile situation in the interior.¹⁹



Members of the 1925–6 D'Arcy expedition to Oman: left to right, an assistant, K. Washington Gray, a guide, George Lees, 'Haji' Williamson. (source: Royal Society of Asian Affairs)

This situation had developed over a number of years. The most recent rulers, Sultans Taimur and (from 1932) his son Said, came from a long line of sultans who claimed to rule the interior of Oman, but in fact their hold on the interior was tenuous. The geologists would have to face a variety of tribes, some amenable, others hostile, and negotiate their way with the help of local guides and boxes of silver Maria Theresa dollars, still a valued currency in Arabia at this time. Then there was the physical task of gaining access to the interior, which comprised rugged mountains and barren desert. An exploration permit was no guarantee of success.

In November 1925, a D'Arcy survey party arrived in Muscat. Led by Captain Eccles, the party included geologists George Lees and K. Washington Gray, with Haji Williamson as their guide. With regard to the geology, Lees noted a number of hogback anticlines (possible indicators of oil) breaking the flatness of the Dhahira plain. He also recognised the difficulties that lay ahead: formidable mountains and deserts, and the 'independent spirit' of the tribes.²⁰ Indeed, when Lees and his party landed on the coast opposite Nafun Island on 27 January 1926 to investigate the reported oil seepage, the 'natives proved sullenly hostile... They could not gain any information from them, not even the names of topographical features. They

professed complete ignorance of any oil seepage or bitumen deposit.' Writing a few years later, Bertram Thomas remarked that the 'geological party was greeted by a hail of stones'.²¹

With no firm indications of oil, the company allowed the two-year exploration permit to lapse. However, when PCL became involved in negotiations on the Trucial Coast, a move into Oman was a logical step in extending the 'circle' of IPC group concessions, and the opportunity to approach the geologically interesting Jebel Hafit and Hajar range from both sides was tempting. In 1937, the company instructed Basil Lermite to obtain the necessary permits. He travelled to Muscat and obtained a 75-year concession for Oman for another associate company, Petroleum Development (Oman and Dhofar) Ltd. The next year, company geologists Henry Hotchkiss and Lester Thompson arrived in Sharjah and carried out a number of aerial reconnaissances of the Trucial Coast and Oman, although certain parts of central Oman were closed to them.

Later in the year, Hotchkiss and Thompson set out on a survey of the interior, departing from Khabura on the Batinah coast. They were camel-borne, riding with their escorts in a convoy across a fertile plain and arriving at the entrance to a narrow valley that is the Wadi Hawasina, about 15 miles from the coast. It was at this point that hostile tribesmen attacked their caravan. As far as the geologists could discern, this was the latest episode in a tribal feud; the Hawasina men shot one escort through the thigh and another escort's camel from beneath him. Thompson described what happened next:

Sheikh Mudhaffar Bin Sulaiman, Wali of Sohar, was with us as personal representative of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. He had a bodyguard of some 40 armed men, but the Hawasina tribesmen numbered something more than 200. By this time, the tribesmen were quite hysterical and beyond powers of argument, so, acting under the Wali's direction, we retreated, he protecting our rear from a possible follow-up attack...²²

They proceeded by a different route to the town of Dhank, and thence south-west to the edge of the Rub al-Khali (the Empty Quarter), before skirting the great desert in a north-westerly direction towards Jebel Hafit.

Here they met up with Jock Williamson and David Glynn-Jones, who were working for PDTC on their surveys of the Trucial Coast. These two had experienced considerable delay on their journey from Sharjah. Initially, an obstinate sheikh of the Bani Kitab tribe had blocked their progress. Then leading sheikhs of the Al bu Shamis and Naim tribes refused to allow them to cross their territories. This required further negotiation with the sheikhs until they reached a compromise. The party eventually met up with Thompson and Hotchkiss in the village of Hafit, some 18 miles south of Buraimi.²³



A camel caravan travelling through the mountains of Oman in the 1930s.
(source: Mary Evans Picture Library)

Now, having met up with their colleagues, their entourage had swelled to include several important sheikhs and more than 100 armed retainers. According to Williamson, the tribes did not seem to appreciate that the geologists needed to spend more time on their survey, and considered their escort obligations met; they wished to go home.

Since further negotiation would take months, things were looking bleak. Thompson and Hotchkiss returned to the Batinah coast, suffering another ambush on the way. ‘With every thicket and date palm grove bristling with rifles, I kept my eyes to the front,’ wrote Thompson.²⁴ This allowed him no time to do any geology. Meanwhile, Williamson was increasingly uncomfortable in Buraimi. They needed money to pay the sheikhs to allow them to pass through the tribal lands, but this never arrived. Moreover, the presence of a British political officer with his party was making Sheikh Mudhaffar suspicious about their motives. Was this simply a geological party or something more? It was time for Williamson to return to Sharjah.²⁵

All these problems—tribal conflicts, independent sheikhs and the lack of security—would recur on a wider scale in the post-war years. For the time being, they were sufficient to deter further exploration of the region. However, Thompson’s brief report left the door ajar:

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I do not wish to convey that there is any dogmatic condemnation of the area. In respect of the area where we have outcrops, the possibilities of accumulation at economic depths are negligible. But to the westward there is a good chance of a thickening of the section. Should this prove to be the case, and favourable structural conditions be found, there may be valuable oil deposits.²⁶

The Sultan had also granted an oil concession for his southern province of Dhofar in 1937. Thompson and Hotchkiss subsequently carried out an aerial reconnaissance and brief land survey around Murbat. This revealed little of petroleum interest, apart from a spot along the beach to the west of the town. Here they found a dark stain in a section of lower sandstones between two shale beds that gave a definite odour of petroleum. A local guide told them he had extracted a small bottle of oil from this place and had given it to Basil Lermite, who had sent it to Kirkuk for analysis, but the results were unknown. For Thompson and Hotchkiss, there was no more to do in Murbat, and the rugged interior blocked any further investigation.²⁷

Another piece of the concession jigsaw fell into place in 1936 when Stephen Longrigg acting for PCL gained the concession for western Arabia. Ibn Saud granted the concession for a 60-mile strip in Hejaz and Asir. An associate company, Petroleum Development (Western Arabia) Ltd, had an office in Jedda to operate the concession. Geological parties explored the territory but the results were unpromising and the conditions difficult. Norval Baker, who was a member of a party that travelled down the coast, wrote:

I vividly recall how our faces were crusted with sand and perspiration to the extent that we recognised each other only by the sound of our voices and the knowledge that no one else was within a hundred miles of us.²⁸

In 1937, a survey party obtained the Imam of Yemen's permission to survey to the north of Hodeida. Test drilling carried out in the Farasan Islands in the Red Sea in 1937–8 yielded negative results, and the company abandoned the concession in 1941.²⁹

In 1938, PCL obtained a permit from the governor of the Aden Colony to explore the hinterland, which was a loose collection of territories under British protection. This region, officially named the Aden Protectorate but known rather more loosely by the geologists as the Hadhramaut, was unpredictable and potentially dangerous for any survey party. Using its Short Scion Senior monoplane, the company carried out an aerial survey of the hinterland. However, studies on the ground were restricted to the coast and the Hadhramaut Valley because the 'local objections' of tribesmen prevented access to the area around Shabwa. For similar reasons, the reputedly 'wild' Mahra country was out-of-bounds. With the advent of World War II, however, all such considerations became academic.³⁰



Sultan Said Bin Taimur, Ruler of Muscat and Oman, 1932–70. (source: Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

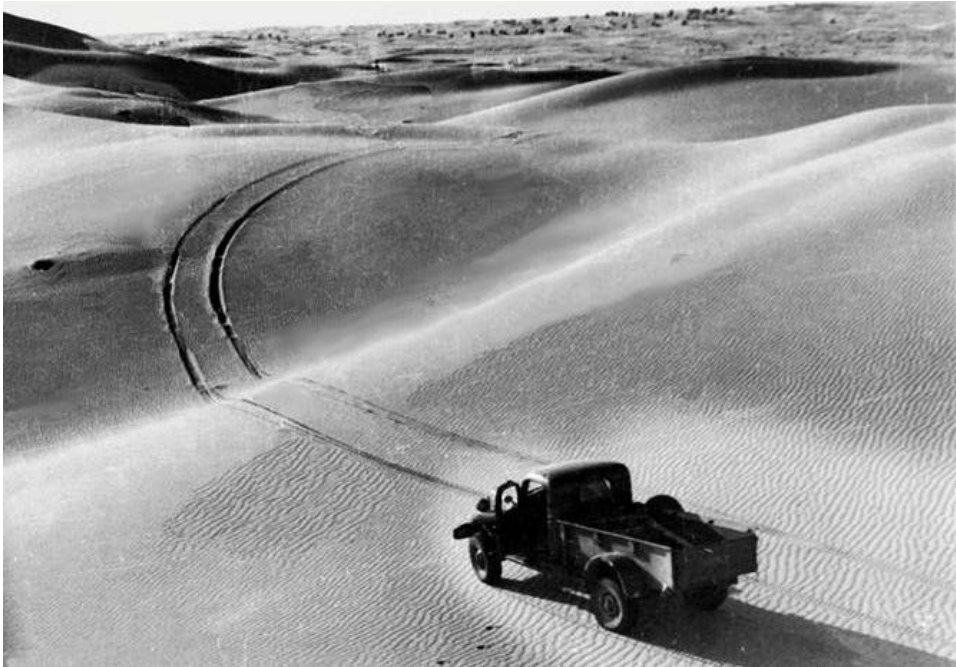
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Even by the late 1950s, it was not certain that the company would find oil in any great quantity in the deserts of the Trucial Coast. As Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi gloomily remarked:

The British have drilled for oil here and have found nothing. I know the Americans. They have found oil for Saud, and they found oil for the Khalifas of Bahrain and... found oil in Kuwait for the Sabahs. So don't you think I should throw out the British and bring in the Americans?²³¹

It was a rhetorical question, of course. Sheikh Shakhbut knew all about IPC's international composition, his treaty obligations and the oil concession that bound him to the 'British'. His words were an expression of genuine frustration at years of disappointment. They also echoed a certain admiration among Arabian potentates for the Americans' expertise in finding oil. The sheikhdom of Abu Dhabi had been in difficult financial straits since the decline of the pearl trade in the 1930s. Although the concession payments and work provided by the oil company brought some relief, its circumstances were meagre.

Abu Dhabi was the largest of the seven sheikhdoms on the Trucial Coast and this is where PDTC concentrated its efforts in the post-war years. However, extensive wind-blown sand and mud flats covered most of the Tertiary rocks in the territory. This severely restricted the geologists' range of work. Early exploration, both onshore and offshore, relied heavily on geophysical surveys to locate potential oilfields. In 1946, PDTC began surveys that continued until 1950 when the huge sand dunes



A Dodge Power Wagon in the desert, Nakhl Sibaiyis, Trucial Coast, 1948. (source: Norman Falcon, RGS)

of the interior proved too difficult for the vehicles. Three years later, using special equipment including helicopters, they resumed. Land transport had improved and crews were able to complete the gravity coverage of Abu Dhabi using vehicles such as Dodge Power Wagons equipped with low-profile balloon-tyres.

There were other problems, however. When the company tried to site a well at Jebel Ali on the coast, members of the survey party found themselves embroiled in a dispute between two warring factions. Tribesmen from Dubai faced equally large numbers from neighbouring Abu Dhabi across a rocky foreshore. After a lengthy parley, the tribal leaders told the oilmen to go away and come back in a week's time. By then the dispute would be over, everyone would have gone home and the survey could proceed—which is exactly what happened.³²

The climate and terrain were arduous and a good supply of labour difficult to find. A local diet of fish and rice gave the local workmen little stamina.³³ PDTC spudded in its first well at Ras Sadr on the coast in February 1950, but the signs were not encouraging. A political officer summed it up thus: 'As the drill sinks deeper at Ras Sadr, so do the sheikh of Abu Dhabi's hopes of being quickly enriched by the discovery of oil.'³⁴ The well was abandoned at 13,000 feet and cost the company £1 million (£25 million today).³⁵ The next well at Jebel Ali also proved dry.

The spotlight turned to western Abu Dhabi but a boundary dispute with Saudi Arabia closed parts of the area to oil exploration, forcing PDTC to drill the Murban No. 1 well several miles from the preferred site. Heavy equipment and materials were landed at Zubaya on the coast. The company set up a base camp at Tarif, some 70 miles south-west of Abu Dhabi town, sited on a small hill overlooking the shore, and laid out a landing strip on a nearby stretch of *sabkha*, enabling Doves as well as larger Dakotas to land.

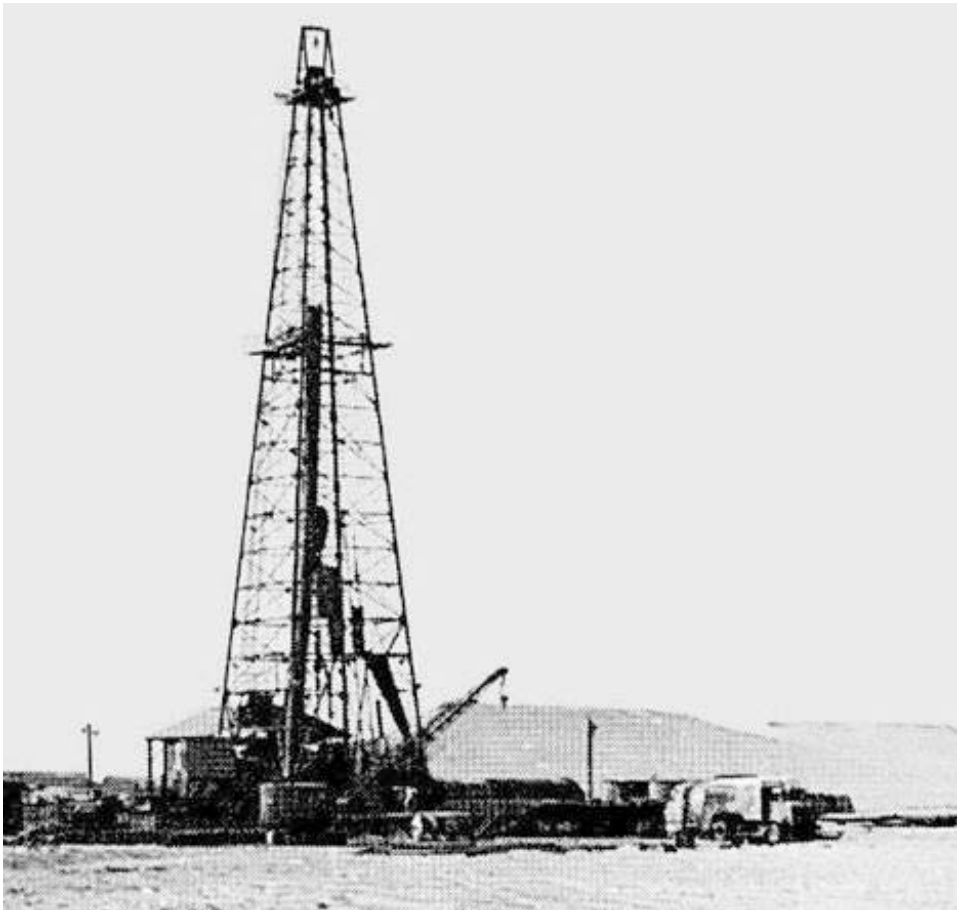
As with the early days of aviation in the Levant, the Gulf has its share of hair-raising stories, and many veterans recall the name of Johnny Barkell in this regard. He was a company pilot who would often fly low looking for sharks, dolphins, rays and whales in order to relieve the tedium of flights along the Gulf. His speciality was to swoop on flocks of migrating pink flamingos. Passengers would hear him yell 'flamingos' before he put his Dove into a steep roll or dive to give them a 'bird's eye view' of the birds flying alongside. On one such flight in a Rapide, a stone kicked up on take-off and ripped the fabric covering the lower wing on one side of the plane. By the time they were half-way to Bahrain, much of this wing had lost its fabric and was trailing yards of flapping cloth. When Barkell noticed the problem, he made a dash for Bahrain, landing the aircraft with the lower wing almost stripped bare.

In the summer of 1954, the Murban well reached a depth of 12,588 feet and drilling ceased. This allowed the company to test some of the oil and gas shows that had appeared higher up in the hole. Gavin Johnston, an experienced ex-Shell petroleum engineer, conducted the testing on 6 August. The first two or three tests gave salt water with only a little oil; the next test gave gas with a very high concentration of

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hydrogen sulphide, which was extremely poisonous. Before the operators could shut in the well, a fitting failed and the gas leaked into the cellar. Johnston went down to shut off the leak but was overcome within seconds, followed by a second man who also succumbed. The rescuers put on their breathing equipment, but by then it was too late to save them.

The company plugged and abandoned the well. The senior palaeontologist in Dukhan, Max Chatton, later examined the well cuttings and wireline logs. The well had suffered from a large amount of shale debris falling into the hole and, when the debris was screened out, one of the subterranean rock formations—the Thamama limestone—showed signs of fluorescence under ultra violet light, a sure sign of oil.³⁶ IPC chief geologist F.E. Wellings observed, ‘When we remember that...hundreds of wells were drilled through the Thamama without any oil shows, the discovery was quite an important one.’³⁷ However, at the time of its abandonment, no one fully



The ill-fated Murban No. 1.(source: IPC Soc. Newsletter)

understood the result of Murban No. 1. Geologists did not consider the Thamama formation particularly significant as an oil reservoir. The focus of exploration turned towards the region where they might find productive Jurassic Arab reservoirs. PDTC resumed its drilling programme in western Abu Dhabi where it had identified two more seismic structures, Gezira and Shuweihat.

In January 1955, the well at Gezira was spudded in. This was in the middle of the Sabkhat Matti, 1,000 square miles of flat salt and gypsum crust on a layer of sand. For nine months of the year, the crust was dry, firm enough to support heavy vehicles but, after rain, it became a quagmire and impassable, making it difficult to keep the camp and the rig supplied. On one weekend, for instance, six trucks and the two bulldozers sent to winch them out were mired in the *sabkha* and the company had to lay a steel plate to get them out. On another occasion, when the well site ran short of food, the company dropped supplies from a Dakota and borrowed one of Shell's helicopters to get people in and out. Exploration remained hazardous. In 1955, a two-man gravity team was taking a gravitometer in a Bell helicopter to the next location to take a reading when it crashed, causing them and the pilot serious injuries.

After the company abandoned Gezira as a dry hole at a depth of 12,500 feet, there were lengthy discussions about where to site the next well. One proposal was to return to Murban and try again, since the first well had shown traces of oil and gas. However, Wellings decided to try Shuweihat on the Gulf shoreline. As drilling proceeded, Aramco announced that their wildcat wells in Saudi Arabia had revealed the extent of the Ghawar oilfield in Saudi Arabia. At some 150 miles long and an average of 10 miles wide, this was by far the largest oilfield in the world.³⁸ By contrast, the situation on the Trucial Coast was bleak and, in November 1957, the company abandoned Shuweihat at a depth of 12,360 feet.



A workhorse of the company, the de Havilland Dove, delivering passengers and supplies to the rig at Gezira, Abu Dhabi, 1955. The pennant-shaped logo of the Iraq Petroleum Transport Company adorns the aircraft's tail. (source: John Vale)

The pressure was on, and the arguments about where to site the next well resumed. There was a three-hour meeting in the Dukhan guest house attended by Wellings, the head of exploration, Hermi Van der Platts, and Frank Ryland, who was general manager of services and planning for the IPC group. According to Mike Gardiner, who was also present, Ryland acted as a moderator in what became a heated discussion. Wellings was convinced that there was oil in the limestone layers of the Arab formation somewhere on the Trucial Coast, these being the main producing intervals in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The local geologists and geophysicists were not convinced, however, again arguing that the focus should return to the Murban structure where there had been some oil and gas shows. Wellings wanted to drill the next well at the other end of the Trucial Coast at Juweisa in the sheikhdom of Sharjah, in the western foothills of the Oman mountains. When it was apparent that neither side was going to back down, Ryland ended the argument by saying that the company would go and drill Juweisa but if that was dry, then the next well would be at Murban.

Having overcome the logistical problem of moving the equipment from one end of the Trucial Coast to the other, the company began drilling at Juweisa but the rig was soon in trouble. The drilling bit encountered difficult rock formations and, to keep the rig operating, the company had to airlift some 200 tons of materials, cement and equipment from Umm Said to Sharjah. This included a 42-foot steel tube that was too long to fit into the cargo hold of a Dakota. Engineers devised an interesting solution: they removed a panel from the nose section of the plane, which then flew with six foot of tube protruding from the front. However all these efforts, though valiant, were in vain and the company eventually abandoned the well at a depth of 12,915 feet.

At the time of American journalist Wanda Jablonski's visit to Abu Dhabi in 1957, the record of exploration was bleak, hence Sheikh Shakhbut's gloomy remarks. The company had drilled (there and in Oman) what she described as 11 'exceedingly dry holes'.³⁹ But fortune was about to change for the better. The IPC partners, British Petroleum (formerly Anglo-Iranian) and CFP, had formed their own operating company, Abu Dhabi Marine Areas Ltd (ADMA), to explore the offshore areas. In September 1958, the company struck oil at Umm Shaif-in the same rock formation that had shown oil traces at Murban No. 1, the Thamama group of limestones. The discovery made a compelling case for returning to the Murban structure, which was only 50 miles south of the new oilfield.

Therefore, the company having already decided to return to the Murban structure upon the failure of the Juweisa well, recommenced drilling there on 18 October 1958. To celebrate the spudding in of the well, Murban No. 2, the company invited Sheikh Shakhbut and members of his family for an Arab-style lunch at the Tarif oil camp, bedecked with flags for the occasion. The sheikh arrived in a Cadillac at the head of a convoy of Land Rovers in which his retinue travelled. They toured the well site and sat on armchairs placed on the drilling platform for their comfort as tribesmen with rifles and hawks clambered over the rig. Yet, despite this event, the well proved no more successful than its predecessors had been. The well went as far as a gas zone at 10,600 feet, having tested oil in several formations on the way down, but found nothing of commercial value.⁴⁰



Right to left, Sheikh Shakhtub, Paul Ensor, general manager of QPC, and Sheikh Zayed.
(source: IPC Soc. Newsletter)

In May 1960, just as all hope of finding oil seemed to be fading, Murban No. 3 struck oil. On testing, it flowed 40° API oil at 8,000 barrels per day, an astonishing discovery, which was confirmed by later seismic surveys as a giant oilfield. As with ADMA's offshore find, the oil came from several porous limestone zones of the Cretaceous Thamama group. In 1962, the company followed this discovery with

another giant oilfield at Bu Hasa, which lay some 25 miles south-west of the Bab-Murban seismic dome.⁴¹

Although the majority of the IPC Groups already had enough oil, they nevertheless decided to export the crude oil from Abu Dhabi provided the company could produce it at a competitive price; at the time, this was only a few cents per barrel.⁴²

On 25 July 1962, PDTC became the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company (ADPC). On 14 December 1963, the first commercial oil shipments began from Jebel Dhanna. In 1965, a new concession agreement required the company to relinquish a certain amount of territory over a 15-year period—PDTC had already relinquished its other concessions on the Trucial Coast. In 1966, ADPC signed a fifty-fifty oil-sharing agreement with Sheikh Shakhbut, followed by ADMA in 1966. In the same year, Sheikh Zayed succeeded his brother and ushered in a new age of rapid economic growth.

The geophysical work continued, with three seismic crews on contract from the General Geophysical Company, comprising up to about 120 people and 36 vehicles of various kinds, including six mobile shot-hole rigs. In a typical day, they drilled 1,500 shot holes, and laid out over 1,000 geophones with cables that transmitted data to instruments in the field. The data was then sent to London for processing and interpretation.

A typical camp had air-conditioned caravans arranged in a semicircle around the central mess tent. This served as a dining room, bar, operations room, darts hall and general community centre. At the height of summer, the field party would break up for leave, giving the mechanic a chance to overhaul the vehicles. It could be a lonely existence for the seismic crews: the only visitors were the ADPC supervisor or the occasional Defence Force patrol. From 1960, the most famous field party, Party 19, surveyed the Murban-Bab and Bu Hasa areas, moved south-eastwards and subsequently covered most parts of Abu Dhabi. The company discovered large oilfields at Asab in 1965, Shah in 1966 and Sahil in 1967. The crews completed operations in 1971, and shipped their equipment to Saudi Arabia.

By any standards, these were remarkable developments. In 1971, when the British withdrew from the Gulf, Sheikh Zayed became President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federation of the Gulf sheikhdoms, and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) came into being. Sheikh Zayed stopped short of full nationalisation, taking the view that the UAE would benefit from the oil companies' expertise and thus avoid all the difficulties that Iraq had experienced. ADNOC went on to take a 60 per cent interest in the ADPC and ADMA concessions, and incorporated two operating companies. All the while, the original IPC partners retained shares in Abu Dhabi oil—making them the longest running IPC concessionaires of them all.

The history of the company is also about wives and families having to settle in unfamiliar surroundings and make the most of their situation. In 1966, the main body of ADPC staff and families was living in Manama, Bahrain, prior to their move to Abu Dhabi. Hoping to give the wives a taste of life in Abu Dhabi, the company arranged a daytrip to the island. One of the wives, Heather Morton, described their mixed feelings when they first set eyes on the desert town:

We were continually told what beautiful houses we would be living in and, indeed, they were very pleasant. They were newly built and close to the seafront—this was before the corniche had been built and the shore was only a short walk away. However, I think some of the wives who had only lived in Qatar and Bahrain were a bit dismayed by the lack of facilities and barrenness of the place. Nevertheless, we were happy to move there in the autumn of that year, and conditions began to improve quite quickly.⁴³

The houses, long since demolished, stood on the present day site of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company office on the seafront of the city.



A seismic party crosses the Abu Dhabi desert, 1971. (source: IPC)

In those days, the modern city of Abu Dhabi was yet to emerge. The town, such as it was, comprised the Qasr al-Hosn fort, surrounded by sand and set apart. A few buildings of stone and cement stood in the town, with a sprinkling of modern buildings and metalled roads among the barasti huts and sandy tracks. Modern health care was lacking and eye diseases were common among the local population. The airport was a strip of *sabkha* marked by oil drums and flares, which were lit up for (rare) night landings. There were a few stores and suppliers—Jashanmal and Sons and Gray Mackenzie, for example. A primitive stone causeway guarded by a watchtower connected the island with the mainland, and driving to Dubai or Al Ain meant a tedious journey following tracks in the sand.⁴⁴ It was not until 1967 that Abu Dhabi built a new runway to accommodate modern jet airliners, and a modern bridge with a dual carriageway.

In November 1966, ADPC set up a school for company children in Abu Dhabi. Elizabeth Collins was its sole teacher. The school catered for those children who were too young to attend boarding school in the UK. It was situated in a small building near the general manager's house. For the families, the best time of year was Christmas. In a ritual inherited from Dukhan, Land Rovers carried children to the airport where one of the company employees dressed as Santa Claus would arrive by plane to dole out a sackful of presents. Heather recalled the occasion when her husband Mike played Santa at the general manager's house in Abu Dhabi. One of the children ran up to him, declared: 'I know who you are!' and gave the name of someone else, to amusement of the watching guests.

Sheikh Zayed visited St Andrew's Church on the seafront to mark its dedication on 15 February 1968. Visitors arrived from Sharjah, Dubai, Das Island and a large contingent in a specially chartered aircraft from Qatar, many of whom stayed with various ADPC families. Shortly after 4 p.m. Sheikh Zayed arrived, a trumpet fanfare was played by the band and children formed a guard of honour. The Archbishop in Jerusalem, the Most Reverend Campbell McInnes, welcomed the ruler and made a small presentation. The sheikh left shortly afterwards and the service continued with the archbishop dedicating the various areas of the church.

In the autumn of 1968, the company school amalgamated with Al Khubairat Community School; Elizabeth Collins was its first headmistress.⁴⁵ By this time, Heather's youngest son was old enough to attend school, therefore she was in a position to accept an offer to start a nursery class for children aged four to five, and she started teaching at the new school. A building adjacent to the main school block housed her class. At the start, she had a huge room in which the children during their spare time were able to ride around on tricycles. Later they moved to a smaller classroom nearer the main building.

Many years later, when Heather had retired with Mike to Wales, she read in her local newspaper that the headmaster of Welshpool High School was about to take up the post of headmaster of Al Khubairat School:

I wrote to him explaining my small part in the early days of the school. He wrote a very nice reply and told me that he would post my letter on an Al Khubairat notice board for the children to read. I had, in a sense, come full circle.

In 1966, Joyce Standring, arrived in Abu Dhabi with her husband John, a senior stratigrapher with ADPC.⁴⁶ She was not allowed to work as a nurse for the company because of its policy not to employ wives. However, Dr Philip Horniblow, the director of health for the Abu Dhabi government, heard of her previous nursing experience. Since his brief was to develop a national health service for the country, he invited her to join his staff.

At that time, the only facility available for health care was a small, square, concrete building situated on the outskirts of the town next to the *sug*. It comprised two rooms for consultation, four other rooms into which only men were admitted, a small storeroom and a room used as a minor injury 'theatre'. Open drains ran along the corridor.

The only medical staff were a Syrian doctor, a Pakistani who administered medical care and a local orderly. They treated only the male population for their ailments. There were no facilities available for females, including children. Should any medical help be required for them, the male members of the family would ask at the clinic for medicines to take back home to their womenfolk.



Heather Morton lines up in honour of Sheikh Zayed's visit to St. Andrews Church with the Archbishop of Jerusalem, 15 February 1968. (source: D.M. Morton collection)

When it became known that there was a woman working in the clinic, the women (many of whom were pregnant) tentatively started to appear, together with their children, to seek treatment. Joyce converted the small storeroom into a consulting/delivery room. This was the beginning of medical and obstetric care for women in Abu Dhabi.

After a few months, she persuaded the doctors to allow her to convert one of the rooms adjacent to the room into a ward, separated from the male rooms, where mothers and babies could be looked after for a few days after delivery. This service rapidly developed into a form of community care, where Joyce would attend deliveries at the clinic or in the desert. Often, during the night, a Land Rover would arrive at her house with a request to attend a pregnant woman in her barasti village. In time, the development plans for Abu Dhabi included a multi-purpose hospital on the outskirts of the town with services for women and children. Sheikh Zayed formally opened this hospital, known as the Central Hospital, in 1968.⁴⁷

The oil wealth created a city beyond recognition. Today, it is almost impossible to locate the places of the past—but in these stories we can glimpse how it was, a picture of an emerging society that is not revealed in balance sheets, production rates or the photographs of glossy magazines.



The Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Shakhbut (centre), with IPC managing director Christopher Dalley on his left, after turning the valve at the newly built oil terminal at Jebel Dhanna to symbolise the first flow of onshore oil on 21 March 1964. Ibrahim Arrayedh, standing to Shakhbut's right, was head of PCL's translation department but is also remembered today as a prominent Bahraini poet. (source: IPC)

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The Eucalyptus tree planted by Shaikh Zayed in 1962 in the garden of Hafeez Khan's house in Al Ain standing tall 50 years on

“50 Years in Al Ain Oasis – Memoirs of Khabeer Khan”*

Abdul Hafeez Yawar Khan Al Yousefi

First Impressions

Arriving in the UAE was like stepping back into the Stone Age. The climate allowed very little to sustain life. I took a deep breath, as if this would help me to make sense of it all. The dusty hot air filling my lungs did nothing other than to reinforce my apprehensions at that time. Being a graduate, with a degree in agriculture in particular, furthered my feelings of alienation when I saw no fertile land, no river with gushing sweet water, but endless sand dunes that rose into the horizon to blur the line between the earth and the sky. But with my faith in God Almighty, and in His wisdom, I believed He had cause to send me here, and that there must be a higher purpose behind His design. I was also consoled by the fact that the letter of invitation for me had come from the Ruler of Abu Dhabi himself – at least, that was my initial impression! In an instant, all my worries and apprehensions disappeared and I was ready to take up the challenge and pursue my goal. I was fortunate to be equipped with the specific expertise and was blessed to receive guidance and help from the most memorable personality in the land of my destination whom I learnt to respect and revere. Shaikh Zayed had a dream of a prosperous future for his country and his people, and I arrived with a mission to serve him.

I came to Abu Dhabi in 1962 from a newly independent state of Pakistan, which as part of India before independence in 1947, had developed a system of modern education under the British colonial rule. But with India and Pakistan emerging as free countries after the near debacle of Britain in the Second World War, it was only natural that in good time the British also withdrew from their protectorates such as the Trucial States, as indeed from their colonies elsewhere.

As Britain readied itself to pull out through the 1960s, new qualified immigrants of non-European origins from the former British colonies were yet to start arriving in the Trucial States. I was, as such, the first proud immigrant with any expertise to arrive in Abu Dhabi in 1962. However, after Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan took over as the Ruler of Abu Dhabi from his brother Shaikh Shakhbut in 1966, there began a large influx of expatriates into the Emirate. I joined Shaikh Zayed’s dream project of turning his desert lands into blooming green gardens four years prior to that. This was an era

* This article is an extract from the NCDR’s forthcoming book titled “50 Years in Al Ain Oasis – Memoirs of Khabeer Khan” by Mr. Abdul Hafeez Khan Al Yousefi.

that can truly be described as an extension of the dark ages when time stood still, and Abu Dhabi remained hidden in obscurity, locked away as it were from the rest of the world. Back then, there was little need felt for human or infrastructure development under such a state of perpetual obscurity. I came here as the first qualified expert, invited by Shaikh Zayed to share my expertise in the agricultural sector. Shaikh Zayed was obsessed with greening his desert lands and seeing to the wellbeing, development and prosperity of his people. I use the word 'obsessed' here because I do not know a word beyond obsession to describe his passion for his land and his people.

The more I reflect on it, the more I realize that my story of coming to Abu Dhabi was rooted in the continuation of the long history of my brethren in faith. My ancestors came from the line of the later ruling Yousufzai tribe in Afghanistan and settled in the region of Bihar in what was then British India. After India's independence and the creation of the independent dominion of Pakistan in 1947, my family opted for Pakistan. But I was destined to come to Abu Dhabi and Al Ain at the invitation of the 'Ruler of Abu Dhabi', who I understood as per the signature on my contract, was Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. But subsequently, I came to know that he was not the 'Ruler' then, but the Ruler's Representative in the Eastern Province of Abu Dhabi. My appointment was arranged via the American University of Beirut where I was studying for my post-graduation. The time had come when a premonition from destiny and the tradition of migration in Islamic history conspired to bring me to the place I proudly call home today.

The Majlis and the Mirage

"Oh my God, we've crash landed!" I'm afraid this was my first thought as the small commuter plane of Gulf Aviation hit the ground. It took a while to realize that we had actually landed at Abu Dhabi. This was because looking out of the window upon landing just showed gravel on the ground and no tarmac, no runway as one was accustomed to seeing at airports. As the plane abruptly came to a halt, a cloud of dust ensconced the landing strip. Stepping out, there was little semblance of an airport: no terminal building, just a shade by the wayside in what appeared to be total wilderness. Strong gusts of wind blew moist sand particles into the face, blurring the flat desert view that extended into eternity, as it were, as the eye tried to adjust to the sharp midday glare and met with a sea of dancing mirages. A red and white Abu Dhabi flag hoisted upon a pole was the only indication that this was indeed Abu Dhabi. A lone date palm standing tall at a distance was the only welcome sign.

September 7th 1962, was the date I landed here. The air was sticky and damp, and mercury too seemed to be in a competition with the sweltering humidity. This was the farthest you could get from Beirut, the glamorous Paris of the East, with rising green hills to the east and the blue, azure waters of the Mediterranean in the west and the fresh autumn scent of Cyprus permeating the air. Clearly, I had little clue about the geography of Abu Dhabi before my plane touched down on its arid surface. It was just a dot on the Gulf Aviation map that I saw before boarding the plane in Bahrain,

the only place where I came across a map that showed the place called Abu Dhabi. But here I was and there was work to do, hopefully.

Before that, when I went back to Karachi from Beirut after accepting in principle the offer made by the chief of the British Middle East Development Division to go to Abu Dhabi on one year's contract as an agriculture expert, friends and family members could not comprehend why I would accept such an assignment. Nobody had heard of Abu Dhabi. No atlas had it marked as a place. Did it even exist? Those closer to me even reprimanded me for leaving Beirut without having anything in writing from Jack Eyre, the British officer who had supposedly facilitated my engagement with the British Political Agent in Abu Dhabi. "Where's the appointment letter?" they asked. I had none to show.

This got to me after a while, and so I decided to write a letter to the British Political Agent in Dubai for some odd reason as I had heard the name of that town. So I mailed my letter to the address that read: 'The British Political Agent, Gulf, Dubai'. That was all I knew – an address, and the vague terms of the contract that I was promised but which had not arrived. Earlier, I had been introduced in Beirut to Colonel John Edmond Hugh Boustead, the Political Agent based in Abu Dhabi, as he broke his journey there on his way to England on a holiday. Boustead had told me that I was to be placed not even in Abu Dhabi where he was based, but in a place called Buraimi Oasis, somewhere off the coast of the 'Arabian Gulf'. I was informed that the Political Agent would be on leave for some two and a half months, and during his absence from Abu Dhabi, there would be no other person whom I could contact in his stead. I knew little about the area which the British officers in Beirut called "the Persian Gulf", and can recall now that they seemed to be in a hurry to get me there. This was around the summer of 1962. I had told them that I would first go back to Pakistan and consult friends and family, and wait for the contract that they had agreed to send.

It was only the next day after having posted that letter with the flimsy address that I received a telegram from the Acting Political Agent in Abu Dhabi, through the British Middle East Development Division in Beirut. It stated my employment contract was on the way and should reach me any day. Upon receipt of the contract, the telegram directed me to contact the British High Commission in Karachi for them to make the necessary arrangements to transport me to Abu Dhabi. The contract papers, when they arrived, bore the signature of the 'Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan'. This was the first time that I heard the name of the 'Ruler of Abu Dhabi'. It all sounded like a good adventure, meeting the Ruler himself, of the place called Abu Dhabi. I took the documents to the British High Commission a couple of days later and presented them to an officer there. I remember the first thing I asked the officer was to tell me where exactly Abu Dhabi was. I admitted that I could not find it in any atlas.

Just then, someone sitting in the room came forward and declared, "I know Shaikh Zayed. I served in the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) and saw Shaikh Zayed valiantly

fight off Saudi occupation forces from Buraimi Oasis area alongside his tribesmen and the Scouts in 1955. He is a very brave man.” The gentleman, a Pakistani for sure, went on to praise the Shaikh profusely. He seemed to know everything about Abu Dhabi, and informed me that it was not Shaikh Zayed, but his elder brother, Shaikh Shakhbut, who was the Ruler of Abu Dhabi. However, he hastened to add, “Well, I don’t know, that was a while back, maybe now Shaikh Zayed is the Ruler of Abu Dhabi.”

I then persisted with my inquiry directed at the British officer, curious to learn anything he could tell me about Abu Dhabi. He laughed and said, “Well, it may not yet be in an atlas, but it is the latest oil-rich place in the Arabian Gulf, and soon to be a very happening one.” He told me they had struck oil in Abu Dhabi just the year before. He explained somewhat hurriedly the location and history of the Trucial States. ‘Well, here at least were two people who know something of Abu Dhabi,’ was the thought that somewhat consoled me. There were no direct flights to Abu Dhabi from Karachi. I was sent to Bahrain where I had to stay for two days. I was put up at the BOAC Hotel there, which was named after the British Airlines. In those days, only British officers or the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) could take such flights to Abu Dhabi. I boarded the small commuter plane at Bahrain for Abu Dhabi, via Doha, and finally landed there.

“Welcome to Abu Dhabi, brave man,” came a greeting flying my way as I stepped out of the plane. There was only an odd shed at some distance in the vast open ground beyond which could be seen a few Land Rovers parked haphazardly as soon as one disembarked. “You must be Mr. Abdul Hafeez Khan?” A tall gentleman in fatigues and a solar hat extended his hand, and introduced himself as Gordon. He was the Acting British Political Agent. His friendly countenance told me he must be the deputy of Col. John Edmund Hugh Boustead while the latter was on leave. The title of ‘Sir’ in Boustead’s name was a later addition after he was knighted for his services; but it never replaced the Colonel, a rank of which he was immensely proud. So much so, that on his letterhead the title of Colonel preceded that of Sir

“You go to Buraimi from here, my friend,” Mr. Gordon informed me, adding, “but not before you’ve met the Ruler of Abu Dhabi this evening.” The name of another destination was thrown my way as we settled into the Land Rover and drove off westwards, away from the sea. We were going to the Political Agent’s office which was one of the very few permanent structures in the desert that lay ahead, somewhat close to the Ruler’s fort, and a small cluster of thatched-roof hamlets nearby, which passed for the town that was Abu Dhabi. En route, the first question I asked Mr. Gordon was, “So, who is the Ruler of Abu Dhabi? Is he Shaikh Zayed who signed my appointment letter?” He laughed, and explained that Shaikh Zayed was the Deputy Ruler and filled in for his elder brother whenever he went away. “Shaikh Shakhbut is the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, who was on a hunting trip to Iran when your appointment letter was issued. It was signed by Shaikh Zayed instead. The elder Shaikh has returned home only last night and we will meet him tonight. However, you’ll be based in Buraimi, with Shaikh Zayed, for that’s where he needs you,” Gordon explained.

As planned, we met the Shaikhs at their *Majlis* the same night, and Shaikh Zayed promptly made preparations for me to be conveyed to Buraimi. A Land Rover was arranged through Mr. Abdul Jalil, who was Shaikh Zayed's key man and in charge of making all necessary arrangements at his behest. Mr. Abdul Jalil eventually came to own the Mercedes agency in Abu Dhabi, and is remembered as the late head of a very famous family now. The house I was to live in was also built under orders from Shaikh Zayed through him. So, on that first night in Abu Dhabi, it was Mr. Abdul Jalil's responsibility to have me safely transported to my destination – Buraimi Oasis, the former name for the cluster of nine oases villages, six of which belong to Abu Dhabi, and three to the Government of Muscat and Oman.

I had no idea how far that was or in which direction we were heading. Frankly, it could not get worse than what I had seen so far. At least Buraimi is an oasis, I consoled myself naively, which at the very least meant water and plantation, the very reason I was called here. The Land Rover was set to scale the sandy surface of the flat island that was Abu Dhabi, kicking up as much dust in its trail as the horse power afforded it. Mercifully, it was a moonlit night, and looking ahead to the shining, rising dunes that touched the horizon in front of us, it seemed the heat and dust of the day had settled for the cool, gentle breeze of the night ahead of us. The sand was all immersed in silver hues as the moon shone bright. The vehicle slowed down as we approached what looked like a running stream of water, not a mirage, because the gleaming moon above was reflected on its tranquil surface.

A somewhat weather-battered watch tower stood as a silent witness to the left of us, as we drove though the shallow water used by camels to dip their hooves into the stream during daytime to carry themselves and their cargo or masters over to the territory where these beasts had no rivals – until, of course, the Land Rovers, with their deflated tires, challenged their supremacy. They must hold the proverbial camel grudge against these beasts of metal and smoke.

We crossed the creek that divides the capital from its hinterland. I had never seen a landscape so surreal and enchanting at the same time. It was the stuff legends are made of. Granted that I was adventurous by nature to have ventured here rather recklessly, and hitherto so unperturbed, yet what I saw ahead of me was truly entrancing. The soft bumpy ride in a vintage Land Rover, over shimmering sand dunes bathed in moonlight, was like a lullaby to a child after that rude, bumpy landing of the plane in blazing heat and dust. Was I in deep sleep or in wonderland with eyes wide open? I could not tell. The appeal of mystical lands from Gulliver's Travels faded in front of the magical realism of the moonlit desert that lay before me.

An Oasis called Buraimi

We entered Buraimi at daybreak. I was taken to what appeared to be a hotel-cum-restaurant. It turned out to be a mud-lined building between what is now the city



Shaikh Zayed in conversation with Hafeez Khan



Shaikh Zayed in discussion with Ahmed Khalifa Al Suwaidi, Abdur Rahman Al Derwish and Hafeez Khan

centre of Al Ain and the *nakhal*, the date palm plantation. The upper floor of the building served as a guest house for Shaikh Zayed's guests. It was run by a young Emirati boy by the name of Musabbeh, who looked after the Shaikh's guests. There were carpets on the floor and pillows and beddings in the lodging.

Shaikh Zayed came to meet me two days after my arrival in Buraimi. I was told a proper house was being constructed for me in the vicinity, which was to be the first properly built house anywhere in the Abu Dhabi region as its walls were constructed of concrete blocks entirely. The roof, however, was laid over with wooden planks resting on tree trunks as beams, which were then covered and sealed with earth placed over them. When I arrived at the site of the house, the windows were being installed. It was going to take another two weeks for the three-room house, with built-in washrooms, to be completed. Next to it, and as part of the same property, a structure with a similar accommodation was being built as a guesthouse, the walls of which were much thicker because here they used mud bricks instead of the concrete blocks. The fixtures, and even the window panes, all had to be brought in from very far away, in fact, from abroad. Not that they could not afford to build modern houses; the truth is that the local people despised anything that confined them. They liked to live as close to nature as they could, in the midst of the open expanse of the land and the sky. Thus my house can certainly claim to be the first proper structure to be erected in Al Ain.

It was clear from the outset that Shaikh Zayed wanted his trees planted first before starting to build a new, modern city here. There were no roads, just the vast expanse of flat land with odd lime rocks rising out of nowhere here and there amidst a scattered array of small farms and the main *nakhal* sitting between the *afalaj*, underground water channels, that according to a legend amongst the local populace, come from a mysterious source deep inside the Omani mountains.

Historically speaking, the *falaj* system existed in the Al Ain region as early as 1,000 BC, making it the oldest, according to Dr. Walid Yasin Al Tikriti, Adviser of Archaeology at the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in Al Ain. In an exclusive interview with *Gulf News* (16th March, 2003), Dr. Al Tikriti observed that the *falaj* system in Iran was generally considered the world's oldest, but not a single Iranian *falaj* goes back to this period. The *falaj* system is a network of underground water channels that was mainly used for irrigation in the Al Ain region. It existed mainly in the arid zones where people devised the underground channels to bring water from distant sources to their land. "It was a highly mature capability based on the people's skills in engineering, water exploration, digging, and maintenance," remarked the archaeologist.

Dr. Al Tikriti paid tribute to Shaikh Zayed for his initiatives for water search, restoration of *falaj* system and preservation of heritage and cultural assets of the country. "*Falaj* is the most precious heritage and the nation must be proud of having used such a sophisticated system in ancient times." Shaikh Zayed, as the governor of Al Ain, was

the first person to declare water a free commodity for all in 1946, as water rights used to be sold earlier. He also launched a program for the restoration and renovation of water resources including the *falaj* system that provided the lifeline to the region's present thriving agricultural boom. The Al Ain region has been home to many tribes, and many of them were highly skilled in the construction of *falaj* systems. The first known tribe that was considered masters in this art was Al Awamir. Besides the *afalaj*, wells were also dug in the Buraimi Oasis area to start farmland at variable distances. Back in the early 1960s, sweet water was struck by digging the ground some twenty feet only; however, the perennial *afalaj* remained the main lifeline.

Two months after I took possession of the house that was specially built for me, my furniture arrived in December 1962. It was flown in, and arrived in sets of two – one meant for my personal dwelling, and the other for my guesthouse located in the same compound right next to my family abode. This was also part of the local custom. The Arabs value privacy and family life above all else; there is to be no breach of one's family's privacy at the cost of one's guests or the friends one may wish to entertain. These are some of the finest values in human civilization which Arabs have intrinsically evolved, respected and preserved through the ages. Because of our respect for, and by embracing the noble Arab tradition, I dare say, mine remains an open house to this day. Friends and family, neighbors and acquaintances, are welcomed with open arms. My wife and I are indeed very proud that we are part of this tradition.

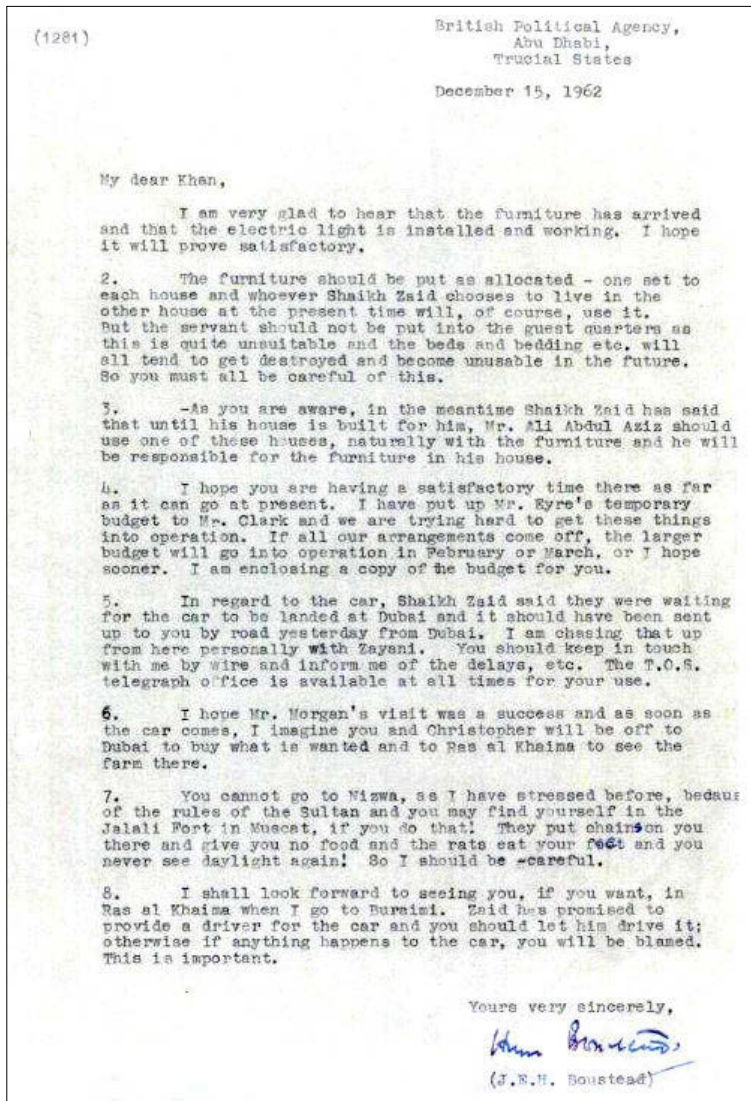
As my furniture arrived, so did the guidelines from one who was to become a very dear friend, a mentor and a guide no less, in my formative years here. Colonel Hugh Boustead, quoted below, was kind enough to officially record for me the significance of the furniture and the beddings that had been specifically ordered for me – more to make me feel wanted, than to entice me to stay on. What he and I would have counted as basic necessities, carried a deeper significance for me, and possessing them became a privilege. This was because very few people in those days had such items here, and also because they had to be imported, piece by piece. In that sense, I am especially grateful to Shaikh Zayed as well as the British Political Agent for their kind gesture. The idea behind it was poignantly underscored by Col. Hugh Boustead in a letter dated December 15, 1962, so as to leave no ambiguity regarding the proper use of the amenities provided.

The Ruler may of his own accord sit on the bare sand and break bread with fellow Bedouins under a date tree, but his station and stature had to be respected. The following points from the letter are worth reproducing here, as they laid down the specifics, the do's and don'ts of the utilization of the furniture provided:

“The furniture should be put as allocated – one set to each house and whoever Shaikh Zayed chooses to live in the other house at the present time will, of course, use it.

... As you are aware, in the meantime Shaikh Zayed has said that until his house is built for him, Mr. Ali Abdul Aziz should use one of these houses, naturally with the furniture and he will be responsible for the furniture in his house.”

50 Years in Al Ain Oasis - Memoirs of 'Khabeer Khan'



Letter from Hugh Boustead, British Political Agent in Abu Dhabi, informing Hafeez Khan that his furniture has arrived. December 15 1962

Mr. Abdul Aziz was the tutor engaged by Shaikh Zayed for his young son, Khalifa, who rose to become the President of the UAE after his illustrious father. The young Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed used to come to my house to take his lessons from his tutor, and he continued doing so for a considerable length of time. When I look back and recall those days, it fills me with much pride and honor for having the opportunity to host both the first ever President of The UAE (God bless his soul), and his successor, the ruling President of our country right from his formative years.

In the same letter, Boustead assured me that a car meant for my use, a Land Rover, had landed in Dubai and would be dispatched to me with a driver. In the event of a delay, he advised that I could use the TOS telegraph office to keep him informed of the situation. "The TOS telegraph office is available at all times for your use," he wrote in a reassuring manner. Also, as a piece of friendly advice in the same letter, he warned me: "Zayed has promised to provide a driver for the car and you should let him drive it; otherwise if anything happens to the car, you will be blamed. This is important."

However, what amazed me most even at this very early stage was that Shaikh Zayed personally took charge of my expenses out of his sense of honor for having invited me here as the budget for my salary and perks had not been officially approved. He sought to address my concerns immediately as he did not want me to leave, and made the necessary funds available from his own budget given to him by the Ruler for managing the affairs at Buraimi.

The British Political Agent had requested Shaikh Zayed to employ a dedicated interpreter. Two days after my arrival in Buraimi, one Mohammed Zain, a native of southern India, was introduced to me as my interpreter. He came from the hospital in Buraimi, (which is now the Oasis Hospital), where he used to work as an interpreter because of his ability to speak both in Arabic and English. It was through him that I used to converse with Shaikh Zayed. Had he not been there, life would have been much more difficult. But, at the same time, I could sense that while Zain was a source of reassurance for me, Shaikh Zayed could not bring himself to be totally at ease with the arrangement. The wise Bedouin in him somehow could not accept the involvement of a third person in his discussions with the one he had chosen to seek expert advice from in a field in which he was passionately interested. Not surprisingly, Zain remained between us for just 11 months. One day, I woke up to find he was not around anymore. Shaikh Zayed, through his dismissive body language, conveyed to me that Zain had left. Someone later told me that Shaikh Zayed gave him a substantial money grant and convinced him that he could live happily ever after in Dubai or some other distant place.

For weeks and months before Mohammad Zain left, Shaikh Zayed repeatedly stated that we should not need an interpreter at all. He insisted that we could communicate through English, or even Urdu, my mother tongue, although both of us knew that we could not. Such was his desire to connect with people at the personal, one-on-one level. Thus, thrown into the deep end of the pool, I had no choice but to learn Arabic as we went along. Had the interpreter stuck around, there would have been little motivation for me to even try to learn a new language. I had lived in Beirut, but because I was at the American University, the need for learning Arabic never arose. After Zain left, Shaikh Zayed, in his wisdom, hired no formal teacher to teach me his language. In his heart of hearts, I dare say now, he had bestowed on me the honor of befriending him. He sought, and cultivated in me, a confidant that he could speak to as and when he pleased.

Through my experiences over the years, I came to learn that an interpreter, or a formal teacher teaching me proper, standard Arabic, would have been an irritant in Shaikh Zayed's scheme of things. To this day, my Arabic remains faithful to the colloquial dialect that I picked up from the most authentic source that could be. Years later, when Shaikh Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the father of the present Ruler of Dubai, Shaikh Mohammed Bin Rashid, came to meet Shaikh Zayed in Al Ain, and heard me speak in the chaste colloquial dialect, he asked me rather admiringly, "Who taught you (this) Arabic?". I respectfully pointed to Shaikh Zayed and responded: "Why, he is my teacher!"

Meanwhile, as I was in the process of settling down, and the delivery of my car was still pending, I needed to travel urgently in order to transport 12 full crates of plants that had arrived at Dubai harbor on a ship called Dumra. Shaikh Zayed immediately gave me his own car, complete with the state flag raised on its bonnet. His driver, Hamad Al Muhairi, drove me to Dubai to bring back the plants to Al Ain, with the same care that he would have taken for Shaikh Zayed's own children; and upon our return, we saw Shaikh Zayed eagerly awaiting the arrival of the plants with the same fatherly affection. He had given me a barwa, the customary signed written order or request, addressed to the Captain of Dumra to release the plants to me. The text of the said barwa read as follows:

From Zayed Bin Sultan to the Respectable Captain of the Dumra Ship: Hereafter, please handover the boxes of trees which you have to our agriculture advisor, Mr. Abdul Hafeez Khan.

With many thanks and Salam,

(Signed) ZAYED BIN SULTAN

21 Rajab 1382 (c. Dec 24, 1962)

المحترم
من زايد بن سلطان الـخليفة قطبي الـركب رافره
اما بعد الرجاء من جنابك ان تـسلم الصناديق
اشجار الـذي معكم لنا بيد عبد الحفيظ خان
خبير الزراعة معنا ولكم منا جزيل الشكر وسلام
زيد بن سلطان
٢١ رجب / ١٣٨٢

A barwa signed by Shaikh Zayed requesting the Captain of the ship Dumra to hand over the crates of plants to Hafeez Khan

The Eastern Bank, Limited,
INCORPORATED IN ENGLAND
WHOLLY-OWNED SUBSIDIARY OF THE CHARTERED BANK (INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER 1881)
ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO
"THE MANAGER"
TELEGRAMS ADDRESS EASTERTIDE

Abu Dhabi, 17th Dec. 1962
TRUCIAL STATES.


The British Political Agency,
ABU DHABI.

Dear Sirs,

12 CRATES DUMRA A/C
SHEIKH ZAID (EX BOMBAY 12.12.
62)

We refer to your verbal requests to discover the whereabouts of these plants and enclose a copy of a letter addressed by M/s M. Devappa & Son to the State Bank of India Bangalore explaining the position.

Yours faithfully,


I.D. FYFE
MANAGER

Enc.

Letter from the Eastern Bank Ltd. to the British Political Agency in Abu Dhabi concerning the whereabouts of 12 crates of plants ordered by Shaikh Zayed. 17 December 1962

50 Years in Al Ain Oasis - Memoirs of 'Khabeer Khan'

(1281)

AGU DUBAI,
Trucial States

December 26, 1962

Dear Mr. Khan,

Christopher tells me that everything has arrived, which is very satisfactory. You had better make the best plans possible for planting them out.

2. Have you discussed the future of this with Mr. Eyre as policy? For the present moment, I feel sure that until the next planting season they need to be under your immediate supervision, and under any other circumstances, probably more than half of them will die from lack of treatment and care. Presumably in the next planting season, they will still be suitable for planting out, if Mr. Eyre agrees that that is the policy. So will you please deal with this in accordance with the best horticultural practice, write and tell Mr. Eyre what you are doing NOW, and send a copy of the letter to me here, for information. You had better send the letter any way here for urgent posting. Please do not delay over this writing.

3. Shaikh Zaid should be back with you in a day or two, and difficult as it is, you must keep tabs on him. In the meantime, I am sending you a letter for him, asking him to give you all help possible and telling him the importance of keeping these trees alive. Presumably you will have to employ some more labour for this and will have to tell him so. I have also said this in my letter, pointing out that this only a temporary measure for a few days.

4. Will you please make sure and wire me at least two or three days before you go to Ras al Khaima? I want to go there myself and would like to be there with you and talk to Mr. Morgan about our difficulties in your presence. So wire me your suggested dates.

5. I have been awaiting a wire from you about your movements for some days. You are back in Buraimi and Christopher is already down here before I receive any news at all for practically a week. I had asked you to wire me your proposals when you had got the plants and your E.T.A. Buraimi. Please keep in mind that you must keep touch with me here and let me know what is happening.

6. Give Ali my regards and tell him that I have tried to get his demands for him from the Headmaster at Dubai.

A very happy & successful New Year to you both.

(J.E.H. Boustead)
Colonel

Yours sincerely

Hugh Boustead

Mr. Abdul Hafiz Khan,
Agricultural Officer,
BURAIMI.

Letter from Hugh Boustead advising Khan to make the best possible plans for planting the saplings that arrived. December 26 1962

It was from amongst this first batch of the imported trees that Shaikh Zayed, with his own hands, planted a Eucalyptus in the garden of the house that was constructed for me under his orders. The tree belongs to the swamp gum family (*Eucalyptus regnans*), the same species of hardwood trees of which the tallest tree in the world standing at 101 meters, is a native of Tasmania, Australia, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, 2010. Fifty years on, that tree is standing tall in my garden, as fragrant as ever. I light it up every night to cherish the memory of those first days in Al Ain spent under the noble guidance of Shaikh Zayed. A commemorative plaque has been put by me in front of the tree especially for posterity's sake.



Mr. Khan's most precious possession - the Eucalyptus tree in his garden which he lights up every night to cherish the memory of Shaikh Zayed

The arrival of the new plants kept me very busy planning and planting them over the coming days. But what amazed me at this stage was Shaikh Zayed's personal interest and active involvement in the tree planting project. At times, he would hold one end of the measuring tape, and I would hold the other end, to measure the space between the placing of two plants. Then we moved on to the next one, and so forth. He never tired, and willingly lent a hand in planting the trees, just as he did in other development projects. The inimitable manner in which he brought his personal touch of caring and passion to the work at hand, made one forget the arduous nature of the job, as well as worries about the basic luxuries of life, precious little as they may have been, which one was missing in those early days. To cite an interesting example – the apparent non-availability of a barber in Al Ain, until one fine day I ran into one by chance. He turned out to be a lad from Sialkot in Pakistan, called Allah Rakha, who had somehow ended up in Buraimi Oasis. He must have been the

first barber in Al Ain who ever came this way. One wondered how the local people managed before that. Surely, there must have existed some indigenous arrangements. With some help from his first regular client, the paper work was sorted out, and Allah Rakha managed to start a small barber's shop with a thatched roof in the *souq* area. For years thereafter, he used to come to my house regularly to take care of my family's needs.

Still in those early days and months, there remained reasons for frustration for a 25-year-old, educated and technically qualified person like myself having to live in Buraimi Oasis. Though the house had been installed with all possible amenities and comforts (there was an electric generator, a hand pump to replenish the overhead water tank, a servant-cum-cook to take care of daily needs, a number of desert coolers to keep the house cool, etc.), there was literally nothing to do after one got done with the work at the farms or the tree plantations along where the future thoroughfares were to be built. Most of all, it was the lack of company, of friends and likeminded people, that was beginning to affect me.

There was nobody to speak to in Buraimi, let alone find friends who shared a similar background or culture as my own. As I did not speak Arabic, I could not befriend the locals. So, one day out of desperation, I wrote to Col. Boustead, who had spent considerable time in Oman, to arrange for me to visit a friend that I knew was living in Nizwa in Oman in those days. There was no way I could have attempted to go there on my own at a time when communications were scarce, even boundaries were not decisively marked, and there existed few ways and means to travel between the Trucial States and Oman, especially if one was not a native. But the British Political Agent put a decisive end to my plans. However, as time passed by, what in all honesty kept me here more than anything else in those early and very long days and months, was the unfailing support and encouragement that I received at all times from none other than Shaikh Zayed himself.

Winds of Change

In those early days in Al Ain, among the very few number of people I could count as friends and acquaintances was Dr. Pat Kennedy of the Kennedy Hospital, (which later became the Oasis Hospital), with whom I could converse in English. His wife, Dr. Marian Kennedy, was also with him along with the other medical staff, including the Canadian paramedic Gertrude Dyck, who came to be popularly called 'Doctura Latifa'. Out of sheer passion for serving humanity, she, like the Kennedy couple, had opted to come and settle down in Al Ain. Gertrude arrived here the same year as I did. 'Doctura Latifa' was a very kind lady, always willing to help the patients who came to the hospital, often going out of her way to do the needful. At the Jahili Fort, there used to be stationed the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS), mainly British officers, with whom I could converse. The soldiers were all Arabs, mostly recruited from native tribes who did not speak English. This

practically sums up the number of expatriates present in Al Ain for years before Shaikh Zayed became the Ruler of Abu Dhabi in 1966, after which expats started arriving in large numbers.

Shaikh Zayed has always been very kind to me, and I was drawn to his magnetic personality. I could sense the warmth in his voice and in his demeanor despite our initial interaction through the interpreter. He used to come to my house at all times, and start discussing ideas and projects that were on his mind. Besides meeting him at work, where he often turned up unannounced, we mostly met in my house or in the evening *Majlis* at his palace, along with other tribal people and chiefs in audience. He was very down to earth and caring, attentive to one's needs and wants, and readily giving orders on the spot. A man, a secretary of sorts, was always present, ready to write down a *barwa* at his command, (which was the colloquial term for an order or instruction, but always written in a very polite tone so as to sound like a request) which he promptly read and signed to get the needful done. He attended to everyone's needs at the very personal level.

In those early days, the chiefs of the tribe or even Shaikh Zayed himself, were not used to addressing big gatherings. Two Shaikhs would talk in confidence to one another, respecting the privacy involved. Shaikh Zayed never disappointed his people in their expectations of him. He guarded the secrets they would share with him. Those were different days altogether. The Ruler was the only permanent indication of there being any government; he was the government. Yet, when it came to Shaikh Zayed, he was also one among his people and fitted that dual role admirably well. Totally selfless and dedicated to uniting his people, like his grandfather, his namesake, Zayed the Great, he too had drunk deep from the well of Arab honor and tradition. Admirably brave and independent, honest to the core, and one who believed in justice and equality, Shaikh Zayed had no equal in the land who could match his valor, passion, and determination to improve the fate of his people.

His '*Majlis*', or the daily audience he held at whichever palace he may be at a given time, was open to all – from the tribal chiefs to ordinary folks, Bedouins, and those who came to seek his assistance or help in resolving disputes. They all stood equal before him as he did before them, right from the time he served as the Deputy Ruler in the Abu Dhabi sector of the Buraimi Oasis. Shaikh Zayed was a unique personality, and his style of governance inspired respect amongst his people, his guests and visitors alike. His hospitality too was a leaf out of fairytales. Since the *Majlis* was by declaration an 'open house', its hospitality was also extended to all who came at a given time. Ordinary people, foreign emissaries, dignitaries, tribal folks, friends and family, all were welcome. The coffee kettle was never found away from the stove; *qahwa* was served to all and sundry throughout the duration of the *Majlis*, with dates making the rounds alongside drinks. In the *Majlis*, under orders from the Ruler, the Ruler's retainers served his guests just as well as they served the Ruler. Nobody ever went away empty handed; many indeed left taking more than they had expected to receive.

According to the age-old Bedouin tradition which not many followed once they became Rulers, Shaikh Zayed took decisions based on the sheer merit of a given case and dispensed justice with transparency. There was never any friction when two opposing parties came to him for adjudication or even to resolve their feuds. Because he mastered the essence of Bedouin statecraft, he resolved disputes in such a sagacious manner that in the end it turned into a win-win situation for the adversaries involved. Compared to his rule in Al Ain and the Eastern Region, there was little change in his modus operandi after he succeeded Shaikh Shakhbut in 1966 to become the Ruler of Abu Dhabi.

Where did such wisdom come from? Over the years, I have spent long hours reflecting in private as I marveled at Shaikh Zayed's innate genius. Claud Morris in his book titled *The Desert Falcon*, which was also translated into Arabic and published in the UAE in 1975 under the title of *Saqr Al Sahra*, attributes it to Shaikh Zayed's study of the Holy Quran in his young years. According to him, Shaikh Zayed studied the Holy Book for two years, i.e. from age seven to nine, but retained the values and wisdom it preached for the rest of his life. This was the only formal education he received, Morris stresses, and was self-taught thereafter. There are millions of Muslims, young and old, who have read the Quran. What was it, one may ask, that Shaikh Zayed did to utilize the Divine wisdom contained in the Holy Book and succeeded so well? My own conviction tells me, having known this great man from very close quarters for over forty years, that he applied the Divine wisdom to the best of his abilities, which many of us fail to do. He was compassionate and generous in equal measure when it came to helping his people.

His sense of social justice and pride in Arab values dictated the course of his action, especially when it came to building self-esteem amongst his people. That is why he insisted that each one of them have a house of their own to live in, have farmland to cultivate as a matter of birthright. His people came to love and respect him because they were being bestowed with favors they had never known before. That was why, over a period of time, they came to trust him and his vision for their development, for education of their children, and for sharing the fruits of development with them and their children.

Each tribe was allotted land in a certain quarter of Al Ain where each adult member of that particular tribe acquired ownership rights of land for farming purposes, and also received generous help to cover necessary expenses. That is why the local tribes did not oppose development or resist the modern way of life for which the older generation had to make many major adjustments. In the beginning, when houses began to be constructed, many felt suffocated having to live in such confined spaces, with toilets and washrooms having been built within the lodgings. They had never experienced this lifestyle before. Some from the remote areas did not know that their animals were not to live with them inside, and that these structures were meant only to house them. Others may have wondered how their

camels would fit inside a certain room. The simple tribal people, with their pastoral nomadic lifestyle, were by their very nature, averse to being pinned down in one place, and behind closed doors within the confines of four walls. Although the project involved some changes in lifestyle that the people of the region have been accustomed to for generations, they trusted Shaikh Zayed's vision for them, for they saw him take keen interest in their affairs at the personal level. 'We don't know these things, but he must be right because we trust him and he pays so much attention to our needs.' This must have been the thought in their minds which made them take the virtual quantum leap into the unknown. Theirs was the generation which took that gigantic leap into an unforeseeable future and covered the journey in decades that took many generations to be achieved elsewhere in the world. It fills my heart with pride to have witnessed what Shaikh Zayed chose to do with the new-found oil wealth - making sure its fruits trickled down to his people, individually and collectively.

Shaikh Zayed's extraordinary ability of reaching out to everyone he cared about made his own people, and those he invited here to help him, realize his vision. On a personal level, he shunned pomposity in every shape and form. A strong sense of Bedouin egalitarianism and love for his land and the very people he ruled, never left him. His people and his trees were his most valuable resources, as he used to say. Shaikh Zayed had an unshakeable faith in this philosophy of life and a resolute will to educate and modernize his people, and make 'a thousand flowers bloom' in the desert.

In regard to his passion for greening his country, he started talking to me about it as if this was his sole passion. His was a multifaceted personality, one that absorbed many passions simultaneously and pursued them tenaciously. For the promotion of agriculture, he used the development funds available to him very generously. When I arrived in Al Ain, Ted Morgan was the British officer in charge of agriculture based in the experimental farm run under the British government at a place called Dig Daga in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah; there was no one in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi or in the adjoining Emirates with a matching assignment, which made me the first agriculture expert to start work in that field here. Ted Morgan used to visit Al Ain off and on to meet Shaikh Zayed, which is how I also got to meet him in those days. There were over a hundred farms in the Buraimi Oasis area, spread over about three acres each, when I came here. I used to visit those farms one by one. Shaikh Zayed and I simultaneously worked on planting trees along the roads at a time when no roads existed. It was his suggestion that we plant trees in the median because he wanted dual carriageways built eventually. That was how we started the road projects. First there came the trees, then the asphalt. Today, one can see those first trees that were planted in Al Ain in the green belts between the roads, and alongside the dual carriageways and highways leading out of Al Ain. That was the only way to keep the desert sands at bay and from encroaching on the roads.

The idea of building roundabouts at the crossroads and creating green spaces within those roundabouts was also born in those early days. In doing so, again, the objective was to break the visual monotony of the desert landscape that spread into eternity around the new city Shaikh Zayed wanted to build in Al Ain. The green space thus created with minimal landscaping was modeled after the colonial-style cantonments that existed in Pakistan and India, especially around Karachi, which also sported an arid landscape. It not only beautified the surroundings and provided relief to the eye from the glare of the desert-surrounded moonscape that was the natural geography of Al Ain back then, it was also an exercise in aesthetics that was after my own heart. The shimmering landscape at the height of summer in Al Ain was a strange mix of the shades of grey-turning-white-turning-ochre-turning sun-orange and everything that lay in between. A round cake of green created at the crossroads appeared from a distance no less pleasing than a lotus floating amidst murky waters, with a hundred mirages making waves in the desert around it as strong winds blew on a mid-summer afternoon!

'Give me agriculture and I'll give you civilization'

Those words were prophetic coming from a Ruler who wanted his people to grow trees and vegetables as a prerequisite to their march forward to modernity. Shaikh Zayed insisted that the farmers should learn to grow vegetables. There used to be no vegetables here as part of the people's diet at the time. Before coming here, Col. Sir Hugh Boustead had told me back in Beirut, in the summer of 1962, that I had to order the plants and vegetable seeds, etc. right then so they would be there by the time I arrived – that meant three months in advance. But it made sense because the plants had to be ordered from overseas. There were not very many native species in the Trucial States that could be transplanted, so new plants would invariably have to be imported. The same was true for vegetable seeds. Boustead had come to meet me with a proper brief to explain what exactly Shaikh Zayed wanted. So whilst in Beirut, I had placed the order for the plants long before coming to Abu Dhabi. This was the shipment that arrived in Dubai in December on board the ship called Dumra which I had brought back in Shaikh Zayed's car. However, the twelve crates did not include the seeds; there were just plants ready to be planted.

I had not ordered the seeds because I knew that there was a company in Beirut by the name of Asgrow; they used to sell good seeds and had quite a variety. I wrote to them to inquire about their stock and they promptly responded that I should tell them what I wanted, and they would readily provide whatever seeds were needed, be it cabbage, carrots, radish, etc. That was encouraging to start with. Once I placed the order for the seeds while transplanting the plants that had arrived in Al Ain, the vegetable seeds started arriving within a month or so. I started taking them to the farms myself and instructed the farmers on how to sow vegetables, something they probably had not even seen before.

But to my utter amazement, I came to realize that Shaikh Zayed knew exactly when was the right time to sow the seeds, raise the seedlings and transplant them. He used to tell me, “Khan, look *t’ulu’ surraiya; gburub surraiya*” (now is the prime of the sowing season; now it ends). As the season began, he used to say, “This is the time. You plant a dry stick into the soil and it’ll grow leaves.” He had the unmistakable passion and excitement of a child, but with the keenness and maturity of a wise man. I was the agriculture expert who knew what to do and when, but he was the indigenous genius when it came to identifying the right season on this soil. He was never wrong in his assessment of the season, and always stayed involved throughout the process.

The local farmers however, were used to growing only alfalfa for camel fodder! It was the easiest thing to grow. Once it grew, it needed to be chopped from the top to make it grow back and be of use for a few times at least. Some also grew water and musk melons, which were considered enough that the people needed to grow to meet their basic needs. But Shaikh Zayed’s vision went much beyond, and he thought his people needed and deserved much more, especially in view of Abu Dhabi’s in-coming oil revenues. For him, this was the opportune moment to start investing in his people and in trees.

The farmers had to be shown how to grow vegetables, not for their livestock’s consumption, but for their own. I had some labor at my disposal, mostly Omani and Baluchi people; the latter used to come from Gwadar to Oman and then on to Al Ain where they could find work. The growing season starting in September/October, was the time to plant seeds. My foreman, Saeed, was of great help. He assisted with the distribution of seeds and also explained to the farmers how to sow, water and take care of the seeds when they sprouted.

Once the vegetables started growing, concerns were raised regarding their utility. The local people did not know why they were being asked to grow and consume them. They had no taste for vegetables, nor did they know how to eat or cook them. Someone was needed to explain them how to peel and cook the vegetables and also convince them that eating these was good for their health and well-being. Shaikh Zayed, of course, knew the benefits of vegetables, the need to have a balanced diet with a mix of essential minerals, protein and carbohydrates. That was precisely why he wanted his people to know and learn how to grow crops and vegetables so that they did not lag in health or fitness.

In fact, I was advised by Shaikh Zayed to seek help from Dr. Pat Kennedy in order to bring the people round to the idea of having vegetables. The people trusted the doctor very much, and as the staff and nurses at the hospital were extremely friendly and caring, they were also trusted and their advice followed. The idea worked, and Dr. Kennedy and his staff started by ‘prescribing’ vegetables along with the necessary medicines to the prospective patients. They were told that if they ate enough vegetables, they would stop suffering from many of their ailments and a shield against

avoidable diseases. In Al Ain, we also helped set up a small vegetable market once the fresh produce was ready, which put locally grown vegetables on proper display and gave the people a choice of which vegetable to eat on a given day.

Before this, the traditional diet contained only a few indigenously grown herbs, if any greens at all. The people ate dates, drank goat's or camel's milk, and when available, had fresh fish, or settled for the dried variety. Thus there was no proper, balanced and varied food available in the modern sense of the word. Of course, camel and goat meat were there, but how often could one have that? Rice, flour and beans etc. all came from overseas, and were therefore, expensive. These had not become the staple food here just yet.

With the growing of vegetables, the insects and pests also came to claim their share from the new crops that were introduced to the soil here. Quite a bit of new biodiversity was in the process of taking shape. Because we had started from scratch, there was no concept of using insecticides, pesticides and herbicides as yet, which thereafter, had to be imported. In good time, the stocks started rolling in, and the techniques of using these toxins, how and when to use them, what quantity would be effective, and at which stage of the crop they should be applied, etc., had to be taught in a systematic, step by step manner. As insecticides were poisonous, proper care had to be taken and necessary precautions had to be taught in handling them. These being licensed products elsewhere in the world, their sale and distribution were strictly regulated. Here too, they had to be somehow regulated and proper operational systems put in place. However, until those measures were undertaken, we devised a scheme of ordering the pesticides through the TOS based in Al Ain.

In those days, two very basic and common insecticides and pesticides were Endrene and Aldrene. They used to come in a liquid form in five-gallon canisters. Endrene was used for spraying, for which the manual spraying devices had to be bought and provided alongside. Hand spraying machines had to be brought from Dubai where, like most other things, they came by ship from overseas. For soil-borne diseases, control of unfriendly larvae and pests, Aldrene was the right poison which had to be administered into the soil in precision dosage via the irrigation process. Most importantly, the farmers needed to be taught the necessary techniques and procedures.

It soon became evident that they were learning something new every other day, thanks to Shaikh Zayed for putting his people on a learning curve. All the prerequisites, including seeds, plants, insecticides and the applicable tools were provided to the poor and simple Bedouin farmers free of cost. Given their basic knowledge of growing Alfalfa or melons, they were totally in awe of the modern farming techniques. It was a two-pronged task that these simple people were suddenly confronted with: how to grow the right produce and grow it correctly on the one hand; and thereafter, how to consume the vegetables and alter their eating habits on the other. Hundreds of years

of learning were forced upon them to be comprehended and adapted to in a short span of a few months or years at best.

All this was going on between 1962 when I arrived here, and 1966 prior to Shaikh Zayed becoming the Ruler of Abu Dhabi. One used to wonder where the money for agricultural development came from since the budget for it had not been granted in the first place by the then Ruler. The visit by the British agriculture expert, Jack Eyre, from Beirut and the perpetual presence of Col. Boustead in Abu Dhabi, who also had ample interest and experience in agricultural developments from his Oman days, were of great solace and help to me. Another source of encouragement was Sir William Luce, the British Political Resident based in Bahrain, who also used to visit here and stress the need to expedite developments, especially in the field of agriculture.

During one such visit, Shaikh Zayed, Jack Eyre and Col. Boustead went to Shaikh Shakhbut and explained to him how important it was to develop agriculture along modern lines, citing the successful implementation of similar projects in Oman. Unfortunately, the request was turned down by the Ruler in 1963. This could have dealt a serious blow to Shaikh Zayed's passionate commitment to agriculture. That original budget was severely curtailed, but Shaikh Zayed, in his capacity as the Deputy Ruler, later came up with a revised budget for the project from the funds allotted to him for the development of the Eastern Province. Shaikh Shakhbut loved Shaikh Zayed, and there was no question of refusing anything that his brother wanted from him. He gave generously to Shaikh Zayed for the development of Al Ain and the surrounding region. Thus, under that overall development head, Shaikh Zayed revised the urgently needed extra amount for agriculture, and made a condensed budget which was made available right away. In those days, Indian rupees used to be the de facto currency here, but the notes printed for the Trucial States had a different reddish color to distinguish them from the currency meant for circulation in India.

Within a few months of my appointment, my remuneration package was enhanced by twenty-five percent by Shaikh Zayed once agricultural projects started being implemented in right earnest and he could see his dream being fulfilled. It so happened that the British agriculture expert, Ted Morgan, who was based in Ras Al Khaimah, and who used to visit Shaikh Zayed in Al Ain as related earlier, had told him once how much he was earning. That got Shaikh Zayed thinking, and he deemed it proper that his personal agricultural adviser, working in a similar capacity in Al Ain, should make just as much and not less. He was obviously pleased with the ongoing development work, and being generous and fair, he never failed to take the right decision and reward the deserving person. This he did without waiting for the proverbial 'right time'. For him everything was 'now or never'. To take a ballpark figure, anything near a hundred pounds sterling per month used to be a fortune back then. If one made over and above that amount, it raised quite a few eyebrows. With no modern shopping malls around, one simply did not know what to do with that kind of money in those days. It just sat

in a bank account and added up. But that was later, when the first bank, Eastern Bank (now Standard Chartered), opened its branch in Al Ain in 1963.

In my early days, there were just two provision merchants in Al Ain,- Shaibani and Abdullah Zarooni. The latter was a big merchant and he used to supply to Shaikh Zayed's household. My provisions also came from his store. Most of the provisions like meat, rice, lentils came from India at that time. To acquire these provisions, it sufficed to give the list to my servant with my signature under it. When I did not receive my salary for the first month, I informed the Political Agent and he was a bit taken aback. He said something to the effect, "have no worries, I'll get it sorted right away." And he did. Since there was no bank in Al Ain, Shaikh Zayed asked Abdullah Zarooni to keep aside a certain amount of cash alongside the provisions every month. Zarooni was a merchant who was supposed to sell his merchandise, not pay people's salaries. But there was no system or government mechanism in place until the opening of that first bank here. When it was established, I was the twelfth person to open my account there, and still have the same account number!

Sir Hugh Boustead, while visiting Al Ain, wrote a note to the bank manager telling him that from then on my salary, and that of my staff, would be dispensed through the bank. He dictated the note to his secretary, Salim Musa, to be sent to the bank manager, with a sub-note stating that my staff's salary should also be paid in cash to me every month to be disbursed among them. He signed the note and directed that it be shown to Shaikh Zayed and his signature also obtained. Fortunately, that was a rather quick and simple solution. The salary of a typical agriculture staff in those days was anywhere between Rs.50 to Rs.100, at the most, around Rs.150. The prevailing exchange rate then was Rs.13.33 to a pound sterling. It may not have been a lot of money, but it could buy one a considerable amount of provisions that was available in those days! For example, sugar used to be one rupee per maund (a maund was equivalent to four seers/kilograms).

Our salaries were credited into our bank accounts by debiting Shaikh Zayed's account. All of my staff's salary amounted to just a few thousand rupees. The number of hands required varied from season to season, and also depended on Shaikh Zayed's instructions regarding the tenure. Shaikh Zayed used to authorize the hiring of manpower for a particular project by issuing a *barwa* and labor was hired accordingly. Rates varied for different types of work like digging pits and planting the trees along the roads, or for working on the farm, etc. Thus matters related to job specialization and the remuneration to be paid for particular types of jobs, were agreed upon through consultation with Shaikh Zayed.

Shaikh Zayed's vision for his country of the future must have developed during his travels to Europe and America where he witnessed firsthand the progress and prosperity achieved. As far back as 1955, he had gone to New York to plead the case for Buraimi at the United Nations. He absorbed what he saw: tree-lined avenues in

the cities and inter-city highways, etc. and must have reflected in his mind and laid out a master plan of sorts for his own country should he have the means. With the export of oil in 1962, the sky was the limit to Shaikh Zayed's imagination. The incoming oil revenues seemed like a heaven-sent opportunity for him to start translating his dream into reality.

Such was his obsession with plants and trees, that even before any construction started, he was not only ready, but on the scene to lend a hand in planting the trees. Roads and houses, he realized, would take time to construct. But the planting of trees was of primary concern to him because when roads were built and houses and neighborhoods constructed, his trees would be tall enough to promise shade and offer some nice, soothing landscaping in public places. This is precisely how it turned out over the years. Shaikh Zayed's love and passion for plants and trees was well known, and nobody dared touch a tree once it was planted because they were well aware of his uncompromising stand on the felling of trees. The term 'environment' was yet to be given the meaning that it has acquired today; but he did everything back then that modern-day environmentalists now say must be done to save the planet and its habitats.

When I look back at those times, working hard in the desert environment to make anything grow, I recall the challenges that confronted me which I wanted not only to meet, but beat! I was determined to work day and night to get the job done, and hopefully excel in what I had set out to do. Vested with responsibility and trust from Shaikh Zayed, I seriously got to thinking about the kind of trees and plants that I should be importing and planting here in this harsh, inhospitable environment. Foreign agriculture experts had come and gone, telling Shaikh Zayed that he was trying to fight against nature. They even discouraged him by underscoring that nothing worthwhile would grow here in the desert, and that he would never see this place become green given its sheer expanse and scarcity of water resources. I may venture to add here that the turning point came when instead of challenging his dream, I expressed my willingness to do my best and see what we could achieve. This must have been the first good news to his ears in a long time, and from then onwards, there was no looking back.

I started by visualizing the kind of plants that would look good once the roads were built and construction of buildings were completed. I did not have to go very far. The majestic Bottle palm trees growing in Karachi appeared before my eyes. But the realization that they would not survive the strong and exceedingly hot desert winds here, came as a rude shock and dashed my hopes.

The hot and strong wind that used to blow here all day in summer was known as *Mahab*, the colloquial term for ferocious wind. While mulling over this matter, I realized that I was passing through the area where the Hilton Hotel now stands, and suddenly the date palms in the oasis caught my sight. 'Bingo!' I exclaimed. These date

palms have been here for hundreds of years and survived the *Mahab*. Furthermore, they are a source of sustenance and provide a lot of fruit. Why not plant these in the medians? Why kill a tree so delicate and bewitching as the bottle palm and dilute its charm by removing it from its natural environment and bringing it here in the desert only to die? I think Shaikh Zayed's love and passion for trees, especially their wellbeing, was beginning to rub off on me. 'No I shall not kill a tree,' I said to myself. Besides we have solved the riddle. Date palm is not endangered here, hence date palm it should be!

I became so excited that I raced straight to the palace in my Land Rover. I was told Shaikh Zayed was in Hili. So I continued to drive, not willing to wait for his return to Al Ain. He saw me right away. I told him the plan, which put a smile on his face, and he exclaimed 'Why not, Khan? By all means, do plant the date palms in the median. Get the plants; get as many as you want and start the good work today.' Shaikh Zayed's enthusiasm and wholehearted supported convinced me that day in no uncertain terms that we could truly make Al Ain the Garden City that he wanted it to be!



Shaikh Zayed visiting the Agriculture Exhibition in Al Ain with Khan and others. Late 1960s



Shaikh Tahnun Bin Mohamed, Ruler's Representative in the Eastern Region and Dr. Mattar Al Nuaimi, General Manager of Al Ain Municipality viewing exhibits at 'My Garden Cities' contest



Dr. Mattar Al Nuaimi, General Manager of Al Ain Municipality with Mr. Hafeez Khan



Hafeez Khan proudly points to the commemorative plaque on the Eucalyptus tree planted in his garden by Shaikh Zayed



The Eucalyptus tree with the commemorative plaque put up by Hafeez Khan has acquired an iconic status symbolizing Shaikh Zayed's 'Green Legacy'