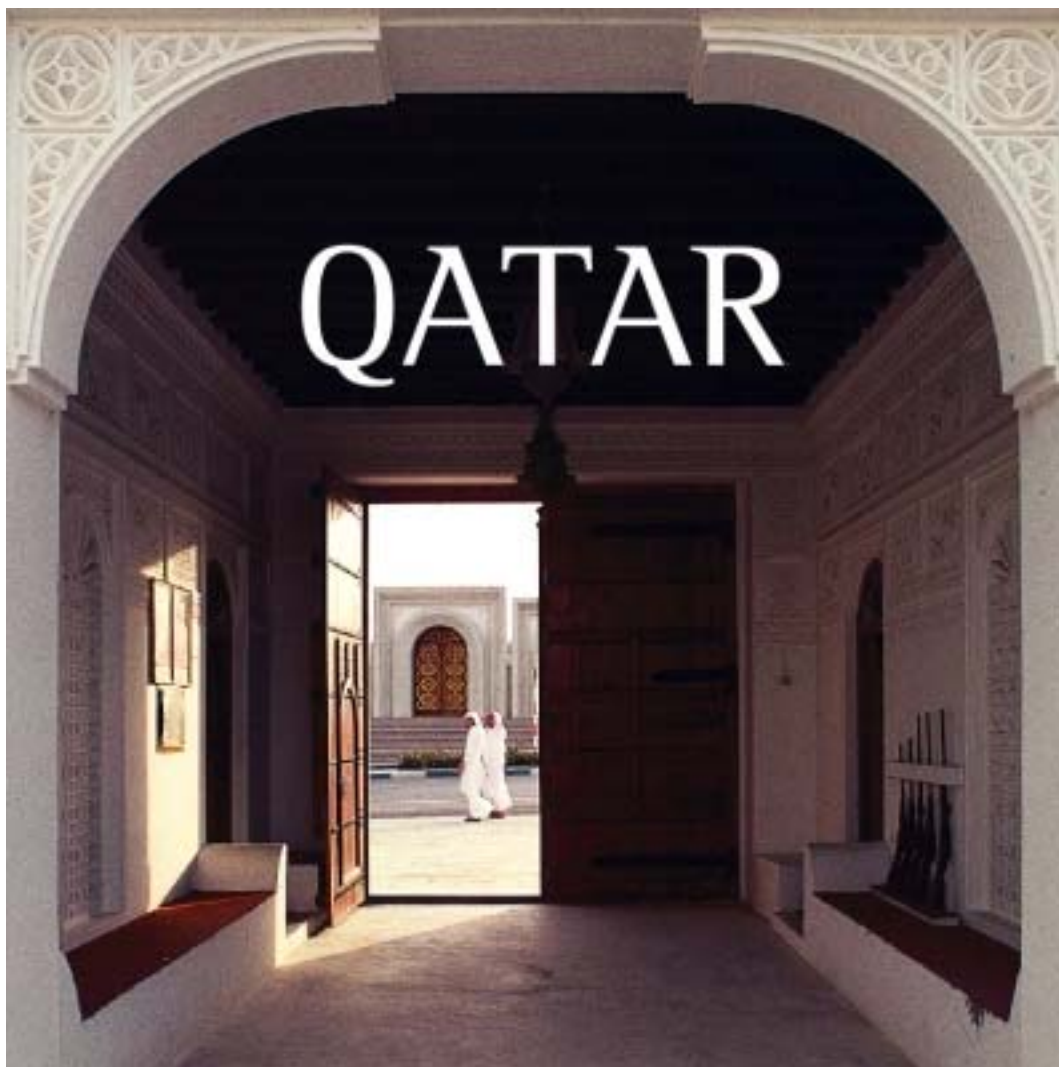


HISTORY OF QATAR



This text was taken from: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Qatar*. London: Stacey International, 2000.

The original text was just divided in historical phases to better fit the content of this web site.

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1 - First Qataris: the Dawn of Human Presence and Earliest Flint Stone Tools (before the 9th mill. BC)

Most authorities now agree that there is, at present, no conclusive evidence of Paleolithic man having inhabited the peninsula of Qatar. When the Arabian Gulf was dry, some 70,000 to 44,000 years ago, early man may have wandered what was then a marshy plain, but no signs of human occupation from this period survive.

This late date for the occupation of the whole of eastern Arabia, including Qatar, has only recently been accepted.

The pioneering Danish archaeologists who were the first to work in Qatar in the 1950s and 1960s saw no reason to dispute the assumption by their predecessors in the Middle East that the Arabian peninsula had been inhabited for some 55,000 years. The Danish prehistorian Holger Kapel classified a large collection of stone tools into four groups, and in 1967 he published the Atlas of the Stone Age Cultures of Qatar. 'A Group', which he considered the earliest, included massive, primitive-looking hand-axes found on ancient shore-lines far removed from today's coast. The three other principal Stone Age industries which followed culminated in 'D Group', containing superbly-crafted tanged arrowheads.

It was not until the excavations in Qatar by the French mission from 1976 onwards that an entirely new set of dates was assigned to Qatar's pre-history. Excavations at Al Khor on the east coast proved that 'A Group' was not a Paleolithic industry. The site under investigation contained hearths, tools, shells and fish teeth and yielded carbon 14 dates of 5340-5080 and 5610-5285 BC. Nearby was an area covered in flint tools and flakes, representing three clearly-defined levels of occupation. 'A Group' and 'C Group' tools in the same layer, together with a fragment of Ubaid pottery from Mesopotamia, showed that the 'A Group' tool-making industry could not have been either Paleolithic or earlier than the other groups.

2 - The Beginning of Agriculture (from the 9th to the 5th mill. BC)

The increase in rainfall which occurred between 8,000 and 4,000 BC made eastern Arabia a more hospitable place than it had been previously.

It is this period which saw the gradual emergence of Neolithic cultures throughout the Middle East. Domestication of animals and cultivation of plants evolved in Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. In Qatar, the wandering population of hunters and gatherers learned to harvest wild cereals. Two limestone querns found at Al-Da'asa on the coast south of Duhkan may have been used for the preparation of wild grains.

The making of pottery is thought to have begun around 6,000 BC. Pottery from Al Ubaid, a small site near the ancient city of Ur in Iraq, begins to turn up in Qatar less than a thousand years later. Early Ubaid pottery is thin, greenish in colour, and characterised by lively painted designs in red or dark brown. Since the discovery of Ubaid pottery in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in 1968, it has been found on over forty sites in Saudi Arabia, five in Qatar and recently at Umm al-Quwain and

Ras al-Khaimah in the northern Emirates. Clearly, people were able to travel long distances at that time, making short, coastal hops between settlements. The earliest craft were probably constructed of bundles of reeds lashed together, or of palm-frond ribs. Small inshore fishing craft made of palm-frond ribs, known as “shashahs”, were in use in the Gulf until a few years ago.

3 - The First Seasonal Settlements (from the 5th to the 4th mill. BC)

Between about 5,000 and 3,500 BC the coastal areas of Qatar and neighbouring lands were inhabited by a population which survived by hunting, gathering and fishing, living in temporary campsites to which they returned annually. Middens of shell and fish-bone accumulated at such seasonal sites. No trace of their shelters remain, but possibly they constructed palm-frond huts similar to the “barasti” which were widespread in the Gulf region until the oil era. Southern Mesopotamian fishermen working the rich fishing banks off the Arabian coast may have visited these sites from time to time to salt and dry their catch, bringing pottery with them and giving it to the local inhabitants or perhaps exchanging it for fresh meat.

The first Ubaid potsherds in Qatar were found by the Danish expedition at Al Da'asa in 1961 but not identified until later. Post-holes from shelters survived at the site, and a poignant find was a neat stack of domestic implements: querns, a grinder, a pounder, a slab of coral. Whoever piled them so carefully clearly intended to return, but never did so.

Ubaid pottery of a slightly later date than at Al Da'asa was found at Ras Abaruk by the British Expedition of 1973-4.

An area 200 metres square yielded not only potsherds but quantities of flint debris and tools amounting to an estimated 11,000 kilos. The amount, plus the bones of mammals, birds and fish, suggests that the site was of a hunting-gathering-fishing camp visited seasonally over many years.

French excavations on low hills at Al Khor in 1977-8 revealed more pottery from this period, as well as fragments of stone vessels. Between 1977 and 1981, eight cairn burials out of a group of eighteen were excavated, dating from the Ubaid period. Each consisted of an oval pit over which a low cairn of limestone slabs had been erected. Four skeletons in flexed position remained intact. The graves contained shells, and bone and stone beads, including seven of obsidian.

4 - Closer Relations with Mesopotamia (from the 4th to the 2nd mill. BC)

Contact between the people of southern Mesopotamia and those of the eastern Arabian coast, including Qatar, continued over centuries. During the middle of the 4th millennium the world's first walled towns were built in the fertile plain surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. By the end of the 3rd millennium Sumerian scribes began to make written records: pressing the triangular ends of reeds into clay tablets

to make cuneiform letters. Around the same time lived Menes, the Egyptian ruler who united Upper and Lower Egypt and so opened the way for the great civilisation that was to flourish for many centuries along the banks of the Nile. The link between Sumer and Egypt was almost certainly via the Gulf.

In the early 3rd millennium Sumerians settled on Tarut Island, off the Saudi coast some 100 kilometres north-west of Qatar. The earliest inscriptions mentioning 'the land of Dilmun' are understood to refer to the eastern coast including Tarut. Later, from 2450-1700 BC, Dilmun, a peaceful trading civilisation, was centred in Bahrain. Sumerian city states traded silver, textiles, oil and precious resins for building timber, stone and copper. The trade was channelled through the Gulf, and Bronze Age cultures sprang up and flourished along both coasts. Third millennium cuneiform tablets refer to Magan, centred in what is now Oman, and Meluhha in the Indo-Pakistan region.

That Qatar played its part in this complex trading network is evident from the presence of Barbar pottery, a product of the Dilmun civilisation, at two sites: a depression on Ras Abaruk peninsula, and a small island in the bay of Khor Shaqiq, near Al Dakhirah, where excavations by the Qatar Archaeology Project took place in 2000.

5 - The Influence of the Babylonian King Kassite (from the 2nd to the 1st mill. BC)

By about 1750 BC the local societies of the Gulf had entered a period of apparent decline. Southern Mesopotamia, which had previously acquired most of its foreign materials from the east and south-east, was now reoriented towards the north and west. Kassites from the Zagros mountains had assumed power in the middle of the 2nd millennium, and Dilmun became absorbed into Kassite Babylonia. The only archaeological site in Qatar dating from this period lies on the southern shores of the small island in the bay of Khor Shaqiq. Here, crimson and scarlet dyes were being produced from a species of murex, a marine snail. Elsewhere, the dye is known as 'Tyrian purple' owing to its large-scale production at the great city of Tyre in the Levant, and Khor Island is the first such site to have been discovered in the Gulf. The middens of crushed shells contain the remains of 3,000,000 snails. Quantities of coarse Kassite pottery was found, the remains of large vats used in the dye production. Scarlet and purple-dyed cloth was much in use in Kassite and post-Kassite Babylonia, its use was controlled directly by the ruler and was confined to immediate members of the royal family and to powerful religious figures. Khor Island provides the first evidence that this dye did not come exclusively from the west.

No evidence of Iron Age settlement has yet been found in Qatar, although elsewhere in eastern Arabia Iron Age villages have been uncovered, whose inhabitants were cultivating dates and cereals. Camels had been domesticated, first as milk animals and some time later as beasts of burden, as early as the 3rd millennium, and it may be that some of the inhabitants of Qatar had by this time become nomadic pastoralists, herding not only camels but also sheep and goats.

The climate was now much drier than in the Neolithic period.

6 - Alexander the Great and the Seleucid Period (from the 1st mill. to the 3rd century BC)

Much later the use of the camel as a riding animal developed, and in the 9th century BC camel-riding Arab warriors make their first appearance. They were the descendants of the Amorites, a people known to the Sumerians and the Hebrews.

By the 6th century BC nomads and settlers were becoming interdependent, not only for the exchange of commodities but for the operation of overland trade, using camels, which was augmenting the traditional trade routes.

Alexander the Great conquered Persia in 326 BC, and then went on to enter the Indian sub-continent, having a substantial fleet constructed near present-day Karachi. He then ordered his Cretan admiral Nearchos to explore the coast of Arabia, in preparation for a proposed conquest of the region. The exploration took place, probing the entrance of the Gulf at Ras Musandam. But Alexander's sudden death, three days before the campaign was due to begin, ended the plan of conquest.

His vast empire was divided among his generals. The eastern portion was taken by Seleucis Nictator, who set up his capital at Seleucia on the west bank of the Tigris. At this time the city of Gerrha, on the eastern coast of Arabia not far from Qatar, became a major centre for both land and sea trade between Arabia and India. Pottery fragments from this period, known as Seleucid, occur in some quantity at Ras Uwainat Ali on the west coast of Qatar and a nearby cairnfield on Ras Abaruk, consisting of over 100 burial mounds - the largest such concentration in the country - has been provisionally dated to the Seleucid era.

7 - Classical Period: the Graeco Roman, Partian and Sassanian Influences (from the 3rd century BC to the 7th century AD)

There is further evidence of human activity in Qatar during the Graeco-Roman period in the form of a fish-processing complex, again at Ras Abaruk. A stone building consisting of two rooms and a third open to the sea is located on an old shore-line on the north-west of the small peninsula. Nearby is a mound of fish-bones, and several hearths.

Some large smooth pebbles, possibly used as hammers, originate outside Qatar, suggesting that the site probably represents a temporary station where fishermen from elsewhere landed to dry and preserve their catch.

Around 140 BC, the rise to power of the Parthians, a Persian people, had begun to interrupt Graeco-Roman trade between Europe and India via the Arabian Gulf, and the Red Sea became again the main link between Rome and the East. But in 225 AD the Parthians were overthrown and the second great Persian empire, that of the

Sassanid dynasty, was established. They established their capital in Mesopotamia at Ctesiphon and reversed the practices of their predecessors, controlling the trade of both the Gulf and the Indian Ocean and forcing the decline of the Red Sea as a rival commercial route. By 570 AD they succeeded in extending their control as far as the Yemen. Both sea and land trade routes were arteries, not only of trade, but of cultural influence.

The Sassanids traded a vast range of commodities and it is possible that Qatar contributed two luxury items: purple dye and pearls, to Sassanid trade.

A number of areas in Qatar provide archaeological evidence of the involvement of local people with the outside world during this period. At Mezruah, north-west of Doha, an oval burial cairn contained two skeletons, one with an arrowhead embedded in a bone of the forearm. A fine iron sword and some iron arrowheads lay in the grave, which also contained an almost intact Sassanian glass.

An intriguing feature was the hamstringing of camels around the grave: early literature refers to the sacrifice of camels around the grave of a hero, and also of horses. Near Umm-el-Ma' on the north-west coast a small settlement contained fragments of glassware and pottery including 'Sassanian-Islamic' glazed ware, and a fragment of red, polished ware dating to the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD. Such finds are evidence of a standard of living well beyond subsistence level.

8 - The Rise of Islam (from the 7th to the 15th century AD)

By the end of the 7th century Islam had spread throughout the whole of the Arabian peninsula, ending the paganism practised by much of its population. Politically, the 3rd to 7th centuries AD had seen a reversal in the fortunes of the Arabs of eastern Arabia. The trading opportunities they had once enjoyed had reverted to the control of the Sassanids, Byzantines and others. The call to embrace Islam came in 627-9 AD and the Christian governor of the Hasa Oasis in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia quickly adopted the new faith and sent a delegation to the Prophet in Medinah. Others followed suit. Within a short time Islam had helped to do away with the old tribal rivalries by teaching the equality and brotherhood of all Muslims. This new ideology was to provide an inspiration to Arab Muslims and introduce a new era of expansion and exploration, as Islam was taken to the furthest corners of the civilised world.

In 750 AD the Umayyid dynasty, based in Damascus, was overthrown by the Abbasids, who were descended from the uncle of the Prophet. The capital was relocated to Baghdad and this had far-reaching political and economic implications for the Gulf as, inevitably, trade benefited from the wealth and sophistication of the Abbasid empire. This was the golden age of trade in the Gulf, which was to last until the 10th century. Merchants traded with India, China and East Africa and the port of Suhar in Oman rose in importance. This period of adventures by merchant seamen gave rise to the stories of Sindbad the Sailor. The demand in Abbasid Baghdad for pearls undoubtedly enriched the pearl fishers and merchants of Qatar; however, few accounts of Qatar's fortunes exist from this period. The geographer Yaqut al Hamawi,

who died in 1229, referred to rough red woollen cloaks being exported from Qatar, and also commented that the markets for horses and camels in Qatar were renowned.

The inland settlement of Murwab near Zubara dates from this period. It consists of some 250 houses, a fort and two mosques. The fort is the oldest in the country and was built on the site of a still earlier fort which was destroyed by fire. The style of both is similar to forts in Iraq dating to the 8th to 9th centuries. Sherds of fine quality ceramics and glassware give a hint of the relative affluence of the town-dwellers. Two other smaller settlements in the area are contemporary. Murwab is the only sizeable ancient settlement in Qatar not situated on the coast.

In the 13th century AD the island of Hormuz, at the mouth of the Gulf, established itself as a new maritime power and by the mid 14th century had gained control of Gulf trade.

The Gulf entered into a new period of prosperous commerce and Hormuz became famous among the European trading nations.

9 - The Portuguese Influence (from the 15th to the 17th century AD)

In 1498 the Portuguese confirmed a direct sea route to India by rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and they set out to create a new maritime empire.

Their aim was to divert the rich trade from India and the Far East to Europe via the Cape, away from the Red Sea and the Gulf. Amid scenes of extraordinary brutality on the part of the conquerors, one by one the Arab ports fell to the Portuguese. In 1515 Hormuz was captured by Admiral Albuquerque and, shortly afterwards, Bahrain. In 1520 Qatif in eastern Saudi Arabia was sacked. Throughout the 16th century, Hormuz remained the base from which the Portuguese controlled the Gulf as far as Bahrain.

Meanwhile, in the northern Gulf, the Ottomans from Turkey had established power, taking over Basra in Iraq between 1534 and 1546 and making several unsuccessful attempts to dislodge the Portuguese from their strongholds. But eventually the task of maintaining control over the Indian Ocean routes, so far from home, proved beyond the resources of the Portuguese. In 1622 the Safavi ruler Shah Abbas 1 of Persia, allied with Britain, ousted the Portuguese from Hormuz.

Fort after fort fell to the allies, and the Portuguese were finally expelled from Muscat in 1650. They continued to trade in the Gulf, as did the Venetians, but their days of power were over.

10 - The British Influence (from the 17th to the 19th century AD)

Between 1630 and 1700 the Dutch East India Company, set up in 1602, dominated Gulf trade, along with the English East India Company which had been formed two

years previously. Portuguese trade had been monopolised directly by the crown, but this was a new era of 'merchant adventurers' from Holland, England and later, France. Ottoman power was gradually weakened. In 1620 the Persians took control of Basra; even so Ottoman authority persisted in a reduced form until 1680, when it yielded to the ascendancy of the indigenous Arabs under the leadership of the Bani Khalid, who dominated eastern Arabia.

As for Qatar itself at this time, life continued to centre around the immemorial activities of pearling and fishing, with bedouin pastoralists grazing the interior. The main east coast settlements were Al Wakrah, Al Bidda' (later to become Doha), Al Huwailah and Al Ghuwairiyah. Al Huwailah emerged as the principal pearling port of the early 18th century.

On the north-west coast Murair fort was built in 1768 to protect Zubara from land attack, and the following year a ship canal two kilometres in length - a remarkable engineering achievement for the period - was dug from the sea to the fort, to facilitate the unloading of supplies. Zubara remained vulnerable from the sea for the next hundred years.

Meanwhile, in 1745 Sheikh Mohammed bin Abd al Wahhab began preaching adherence to orthodox Islam, and this led to a powerful reformist movement which swept the region. It was taken up by the Al Saud of Najd, who reached Al Hasa in 1793, replacing the Bani Khalid. Zubara gave shelter to some of the refugees from Al Hasa, and as a consequence of this Zubara was besieged in 1795 by the Saudi commander, along with Al Huwailah.

By 1820 the British had grown concerned that turbulence in the Gulf could interfere with their trade with India, where they had become the imperial power. Their intervention among the ruling sheikhs resulted in a General Treaty of Peace.

The following year Qatar was deemed to have broken the new treaty and the East India Company's cruiser Vestal bombarded Doha with their cannon, setting the town on fire - although few of the inhabitants of Doha knew of the treaty's existence. The first Maritime Truce taking effect from 1832, and brokered by the British, helped to outlaw warfare during the pearling season from May to November, and the truce was generally popular. But in 1841 a further bombardment of Doha was launched by the British. A more serious breach, however, was to take place in 1867 when Doha and Wakrah were sacked by a combined force of ships and men from Bahrain and Abu Dhabi. The following June the Qataris, although outnumbered, courageously counter-attacked Bahrain.

11 - The Emergence of the Al-Thani and the Beginning of Modernity (from the 19th century to 1939 AD)

The upshot of this conflict was the receipt of compensation by Qatar, and the emergence of Sheikh Mohammed bin Thani Al-Thani as the most influential man in the country. Sheikh Mohammed had recently moved from Fuwairat to Doha. The

family stemmed from the Arab tribe Tamim, whose descent is traced back to Mudar Bin Nizar in the eastern parts of the Arabian peninsula.

The treaty ratified on 12 September 1868 effectively marked the end of interference on mainland Qatar by the country's neighbours, and the consolidation of Mohammed bin Thani's status as the internationally recognised ruler of his country.

The eclipse of Saudi power in the later 19th century led to renewed interest of the Ottomans in the Arabian peninsula. They sent a deputation to Doha to persuade Qasim, the son of Mohammed bin Thani, to accept the Turkish flag. The British did not intervene, but made it clear they recognised no Turkish rights to Qatar.

The following year, 1872, saw the arrival of Turkish troops in Doha and the occupation of a fort. For the next forty years Qasim bin Mohammed Al-Thani charted a course between the Ottomans and the British. Qasim was a man of courage, tenacity and skill, and managed to maintain his position as the chief personage and recognised ruler of Qatar while balancing the two super-powers. But he resented Turkish interference in Qatar's internal affairs and their increasingly oppressive demands for tribute.

Matters came to a head when the Ottoman Wali of Basra, Nafiz Pasha, paid a visit to Qatar in 1893, accompanied by 300 cavalry and a regiment of infantry. Qasim retired to his fort at Wajbah, some 15 kilometres west, and declined the Wali's invitation to visit Doha. On 26 March 1893 Nafiz Pasha made a surprise attack at night on Qasim's headquarters, but the Qatari warriors bravely routed the attackers, who withdrew to Doha Fort.

The Ottoman defeat was a landmark. Qasim's reputation and popularity were firmly established. Although he went into semi-retirement soon afterwards, allowing his brother Ahmad, and later his son Abdullah, to deputise for him on many matters, he continued to exercise control over broad policy. He constructed roads to connect the main towns of the country, and set up religious schools and one secular school. On his death at an advanced age in 1913, Abdullah succeeded him.

In 1915 the last of the Turks left. By this time Britain and Turkey were fighting on opposite sides in the First World War. The Anglo-Qatari Treaty of 1916 guaranteed British protection of an independent Qatar from both land and sea attack on the premise of Qatar's neutrality in the World War, and secured the establishment of postal and telegraphic services in Qatar. The World War left prevailing authority in the region with the British. Meanwhile, nationalistic movements were arising in countries bordering the Gulf.

The 1930s saw a time of severe economic hardship when the Western world was in the grip of a recession and the demand for pearls fell. In 1933 the Japanese developed the cultured pearl, dealing a crippling blow to the Gulf pearl industry from which it never recovered. The population of Qatar at this time dropped steeply.

At this low ebb in the fortunes of Qatar, a new hope appeared. Although the possibility of the existence of oil in the region had been realised as early as 1908, when oil was discovered in southern Iraq, followed by a treaty in 1913 with the ruler

of Kuwait securing for British companies rights to oil exploration, little happened in the southern Gulf for many years. It was not until the American oil company Socal struck oil in Bahrain in 1932 and then negotiated a concession with Ibn Saud, that the British began to take an active interest in the oil potential of the Arabian peninsula. They focused their attention on Qatar.

News of the attractive terms offered by Socal to Ibn Saud reached Qatar, and the British had to convince Abdullah that he should favour the more modest offer made by the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC).

No one was yet to know the true potential of the oil which lay beneath their territory and any geological evidence was largely the preserve of the oil company, which took care not to exaggerate to Abdullah his country's potential. However, he proved a shrewd negotiator, and was able to extract from the British various concessions, including further guarantees from external attack. On 17 May 1935 a document was signed granting the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, a participator in IPC, exclusive rights for production, refining and marketing of petroleum, as well as for natural gases and other by-products. After a series of down payments, Abdullah was to receive royalties of 3 rupees per ton.

12 - The Contemporary Development of Qatar (from 1939 AD up to now)

Oil was finally discovered at Dukhan in October 1939, but the Second World War put a stop on production. In 1942 the three appraisal wells were sealed and the company's staff packed their bags: prosperity was to be delayed. Meanwhile, there was more hardship, with the sharp fall in revenue from pearling, and food shortages. Many Qataris temporarily emigrated. It was not until December 1949 that the first ship left the shores of Qatar bearing a consignment of crude oil.

By 1944 Sheikh Abdullah had handed over much of the management of the country's affairs to his son Hamad, a popular leader, respected for his faith, ability and breadth of vision.

Yet Hamad himself suffered ill health, and died in 1948, while his young son Khalifa was still being prepared to succeed in his role. Ali, Hamad's eldest brother, was appointed ruler in 1949 when Abdullah abdicated because of old age, with Khalifa bin Hamad as the Heir Apparent. In 1960 Ali abdicated in favour of his son Ahmad, with Khalifa as Deputy Ruler. Then in February 1972 Khalifa assumed power from his cousin, endorsed by the ruling family and the people of Qatar. The country had become formally independent of Britain's protectorate role in the September of the previous year. In June 1995, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani acceded to power.