

**Relentless Warrior and Shrewd Tactician: Shaikh
Abdullah bin Ahmad of Bahrain 1795-1849 A Case
Study of Shaikhly Statecraft in the Nineteenth
Century Gulf**

Submitted by

Abdulaziz Mohamed Hasan Ali Al Khalifa

to the

University of Exeter

as a thesis for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies,

April 2013.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Glossary	vii
Table of Maps	ix
Transliteration and Terminology	x
CHAPTER I	1
Introduction:	1
Local Political Statecraft and Mechanisms of Political Survival for Arab Gulf Shaikhdoms in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Background	3
3. Subject of the Study	4
4. Political and Socio-Economic Conditions of Nineteenth Century Gulf Shaikhdoms and the Al Khalifa Shaikhs in Particular	5
5. Literature Review	8
6. Primary Resources	15
7. Significance and Aims	16
8. Outline.....	18
CHAPTER II	26
Early History and Foundation of the Al Khalifa Family as a Shaikhly Dynasty, 1600s- 1795	26
1. Introduction	26
2. Origins of the Al Khalifa	28
3. Migration to the Gulf and Formation of the Bani Utbah (al-Utub) Tribal Alliance...31	
4. Immigration to Qatar: Establishment of Zubarah and Dynastic Power	35
5. The Challenge of the al-Jalahma	42
6. The Rise of Zubarah.....	43
7. Escalating Tensions 1777-1782	45
8. Reign of Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad Al Khalifa, 1778-1782	47
9. Battle of Zubarah	53
10. Aftermath of the Battle	57
11. The Conquest of Bahrain	59
12. Conclusion	67
CHAPTER III	71
Joint Rule of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah: the Omanis, the Saudis, Rahma bin Jabir and the British, 1795-1825	71
1. Introduction	71
2. First Omani Invasion of 1801	73
3. Ousting the Omanis and Getting Entwined with the Saudis	77
4. Rescuing the Shaikhs and Expelling the Saudis	82
5. Rahma al-Jalahma, a Relentless Foe: Battles of Huwaila and Akhakkira	89

6. Rahma al-Jalahma Seeks Revenge: Second Omani Invasion of 1816	95
7. Battle of Maqta'a	99
8. Aftermath of the Battle	103
9. Beginning of British Involvement and the Death of Shaikh Salman	106
10. Conclusion	109
CHAPTER IV.....	114
Joint Rule of Shaikhs Abdullah and Khalifa bin Salman: Continued Conflicts with Saudis, Omanis and Rahma 1825-1834	114
1. Introduction	114
2. Dealing with the Threat of Rahma al-Jalahma: Death of Rahma al-Jalahma, 1826	116
3. Third Omani Invasion: Battle of Gazgaz	124
4. Repercussions of the Battle of Gazgaz.....	133
5. Facing the Renewed Saudi Threat.....	137
6. Conclusion	143
CHAPTER V	146
Sole Rule of Shaikh Abdullah, Rise of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa: Beginnings of Internal Troubles, Isa bin Tarif, Persians and Egyptians 1834-1842	146
1. Introduction	146
2. Threats.....	148
3. Misdemeanours of the Shaikh's Sons	151
4. Continuing the War with the Saudis	153
5. The Conspiracy of Shaikh Abdullah's Sons	154
6. The Battle of Huwaila	159
7. Ramifications of the Battle.....	161
8. Continued Troubles with Shaikh Isa bin Tarif.....	164
9. Persian Encroachments and Threats against Bahrain.....	168
10. The Egyptian Encroachment of 1839.....	171
11. Conclusion	177
CHAPTER VI.....	183
Shaikh Abdullah's Downfall and Death 1842-1849.....	183
1. Introduction	183
2. Background to the Civil War of 1842-1843.....	185
3. The Revolt of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and the Battle of al-Nasfah	187
4. The Conspiracy of Shaikh Ali, the Battle of Souq el-Khamis and the Return of Shaikh Abdullah.....	188
5. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa's Exile and Return	192
6. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa Retakes Bahrain: Takeover of Qatar and the Battles of al-Hunaynia and al-Saya.....	196
7. Reign of Shaikh Muhammad, Exile of Shaikh Abdullah and attempts to recapture Bahrain 1843-1847.....	202
8. The Siege and Loss of Dammam in 1844	207
9. Shaikh Abdullah Relocates to Naband.....	209
10. Shaikh Abdullah Leaves Naband	213
11. Relations between Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and Isa bin Tarif, 1843-1847	217
12. Last Days: Battle of Umm Suwayya 1847 and Death of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad 1849.....	220

13. Conclusion	225
CHAPTER VII.....	229
Conclusion.....	229
Appendices.....	240
Appendix I Chronology of Key Dates	241
Appendix II List of Battles	244
Appendix III List of Key People	248
Appendix IV A Family Tree of the Al Khalifa	256
Appendix V List of Treaties	262
Bibliography	265
I. PRIMARY SOURCES.....	265
II. SECONDARY SOURCES	270

Abstract

This study examines the political life of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Fatih Al Khalifa, the fifth ruler of the Al Khalifa dynasty and the third of that family to rule Bahrain. It is a political biography, examining the tactics used by Shaikh Abdullah and his family to fend off threats from various foes. Those tactics ranged from direct military combat, to entry into temporary protector-protégé relationships, to playing off one foe against another. His ability to employ such tactics effectively enabled him and his family to neutralize or defeat their foes. This study examines local statecraft tactics through the case study of one of the Gulf's greatest nineteenth century statesmen. It also looks at the reasons that resulted in Shaikh Abdullah's political downfall. Those reasons were domestic and external factors that the Shaikh seems to have either ignored or been unable to fully address. That inability and/or shortcoming in addressing those factors would have cost any Gulf ruler his rulership, not just Shaikh Abdullah, as similar aspects prevailed in the other Gulf shaikhdoms. The study examines the life of a political leader whose achievements have been played down, even neglected, by most modern historians in Bahrain and the Gulf. The reason for this neglect lies perhaps in the natural desire of the current ruling branch of the Al Khalifa family to discourage any potential future claim to the throne by the descendants of Shaikh Abdullah, who have lived in exile from Bahrain ever since Shaikh Abdullah's overthrow in 1843.¹

¹ Except for a brief period of time when there was reconciliation between the two family branches that lasted between 1863-1869. Then the family of Shaikh Abdullah returned to Bahrain but their involvement in the 1869 civil war resulted in their permanent exile from that time.

Acknowledgements

The making of this thesis was a long and strenuous journey that was a real life changing experience for me. That journey opened new horizons to me and taught me numerous invaluable skills and lessons. It also made me acquainted to many wonderful people. First of all, I am indebted to God who blessed me and enabled me to finish this tedious task and gave the patience and resilience to do so. I am also grateful to my father, God bless his soul, who, despite having passed away before I started this thesis, has instilled in me a belief in myself and my ability to succeed and overcome any obstacle with hard and smart work coupled with perseverance. Then I have to thank my mother, brothers and the rest of my dear family for all the help and support they offered me in completing this thesis. I also appreciate the help and guidance I have received from my supervisor, Dr. James Onley, in completing this thesis. His guidance was crucial in my completion of this thesis. I also have to thank Professor Gerd Nonneman, Professor Christine Allison, and Dr. Marc Valerie from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (IAIS) at the University of Exeter for their valuable supervision and mentoring during the course of the last four years. I am also thankful for the support I have received from the other staff of the IAIS and my colleagues. And last but certainly not least I have to thank my friends for their strong support. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Abdullah al-Sulaiti, Dr. Khalifa al-Ghatam, and Commander Sabah al-bin Ali for their fruitful insights, valuable suggestions, and the excellent feedback that I have received from them over the years in writing and constructing this thesis.

Glossary

- Abd* Slave in Arabic
- AH* Anno Hegirae. It is used in the Islamic Calendar which starts after the Hijra (immigration) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to Mecca.
- Awal* One of the historic names of Bahrain.
- Bani Utbah (Utub)* A tribal confederation of the ten families or tribes—the Al Khalifa, al-Fadhil, al-Sabah, al-Ghatam, al-Zayed, al-Roumi, al-bin Ali, al-Jalahma, al-Mua'awda, al-Nisif—also known as the *Utub*.
- Banya* Hindu Indian merchants who traded in the Arabian Gulf region. Many of them worked as agents for the British East India Company / British Government of India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- Bin* Arabic for ‘Son of’.
- Bint* Arabic for ‘Daughter of’
- Buggalow* A type large ship, native to the Gulf region and used for both commercial and military purposes.
- Buteel* A type of local midsize war vessel used by Gulf Arabs in the nineteenth century, known for its speed and maneuverability and was often used for scouting.
- Diyah* A sum of money paid to the family of a murdered by the family of the murderer in order to avoid more bloodshed, commonly known as ‘blood money’.
- Emir* Arabic for ‘Prince’, often used as a title for a Ruler.
- Farij/Fariq* Gulf Arabic for ‘neighborhood’; plural: *Firjan*.
- Ibn* A variant of *Bin* (‘Son of’), which can also be used to refer to a more distant ancestor than the direct father.
- Imam* Classical Arabic for ‘leader’. After the rise of Islam, it came to mean ‘religious leader’. Orthodox Muslim rulers who desired to be portrayed as leaders of their people in both politics and religion used this title, most notably the Al Saud.
- Khadim* Arabic for servant

- Khor* Arabic for 'lagoon'.
- Majlis al-Shura* Arabic for 'consultative council'. These councils were used by Arab Gulf rulers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. A *majlis* was where a ruler, his family, and other tribal chiefs and notables would congregate to discuss a matter of concern and to find resolutions for it.
- Mamluk* A polite Arabic term for a slave
- MT Dollars* Maria Theresa Dollars (or Thalers): silver coins that were the most commonly used currency in the wider Middle East region, including the Arabian Gulf, during the nineteenth century.
- PRPG* Political Resident in the Persian Gulf: the senior British political representative in the Gulf region.
- Rukum* A costume awarded by the Persian Government to people considered loyal friends or vassals.
- Sabaya* An Arabic term used for women and children who are captured in war and are susceptible to being treated as war booty.
- Shaikh* In classical Arabic this word means 'elder', but also it later took on new meanings. In the Arabian Gulf, it was and still is used for three types of people: a member of a ruling family, a tribal leader, and a religious leader.
- Sirbaz* Persian soldiers.
- SNOPG* Senior Naval Officer of the Persian Gulf: the title of the commander of Britain's Gulf squadron (initially belonging to the Bombay Marine, later the Indian Navy, later again the Royal Navy).
- Sultan* An Arabic regal title corresponding to 'King' or 'Emperor'. Its original meaning in classical Arabic was 'power' and/or 'authority'.
- Trucial Coast* The name of the western coast of the UAE until 1971.
- Utub* See *Bani Utbah* above.
- Wakil* Agent (spelt as *Vakil* by the Ottomans and Persians).
- Zakat* The Islamic equivalent of tithe. Saudi rulers often demanded it from others rulers of the Gulf and was often considered a sign of subordination.

Table of Maps

<i>Figure 1: Dependencies of the Al Khalifa Family in Qatar</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Figure 2: Battle OF Zubarahh 1782</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Figure 3: Conquest of Shaikh Ahmed of Bahrain 1783.....</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Figure 4: Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Fadhil Ousts Saudis from Bahrain and Qatar 1810.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Figure 5: Battle of Akhakkira 1811.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Figure 6: Battle of Maqta'a 1816</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Figure 7: Map of the Restrictive Line</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Figure 8: Death of Rahma Al Jalahma 1826</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Figure 9: Battle of Gazgaz 1828</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>Figure 10: Battle of Huwaila 1835</i>	<i>162</i>
<i>Figure 11: Shaikh Muhammad Bin Khalifa Captures Bahrain 1843.....</i>	<i>200</i>
<i>Figure 12: Battle of Umm Suwayya 1847</i>	<i>223</i>

Transliteration and Terminology

The transliteration of Arabic and Persian terms and names in this thesis follows that used by *IJMES* (the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*). Diacritical marks have been omitted because of software limitations. Names of places and people were spelled according to the contemporary British useage. Both terms for naming the Gulf region—the “Arabian Gulf” and the “Persian Gulf”—are used in this thesis. The title of *Imam* for the Saudi rulers of the first Saudi state has been used according to the tradition of the local historians of the region who addressed them with such a title.

CHAPTER I

Introduction:

Local Political Statecraft and Mechanisms of Political Survival for Arab Gulf Shaikhdoms in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

1. Introduction

In the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, before the British Empire assumed responsibility for the defence of the Gulf shaikhdoms, along with control of the rulers' external (and sometimes internal) political affairs, the rulers had to rely on their own means for the protection and preservation of their dominions. Many of today's royal and ruling Gulf families—most notably the Al Khalifa of Bahrain, the Al Said of Oman, the al-Sabah of Kuwait, the Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi, and the al-Qawasim (al-Qasimi) of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah—had established their authority and managed to protect their territories before the political ascendancy of the British in the Gulf region. The practice of local statecraft for self-defence, combining warfare with diplomacy, has been largely overlooked by contemporary academic historians, who tend to concentrate on the history of the area after the firm establishment of British hegemony in the late nineteenth century: the era of the *Pax Britannica* (the 'British Peace'). A close study of the mechanics of local statecraft in the days before *Pax Britannica* would give anyone researching into the history of the

Gulf a broader basis for his or her analysis. It would enable him or her to appreciate more of the elements contributing to the establishment of dynastic authority in those shaikhdoms—the foundation that, coupled with other external factors such as the *Pax Britannica* and oil wealth, later enabled the establishment and formation of the modern states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Some researchers have examined this period of history from the same perspective as this study, but they do not go into the level of detail offered here of how local rulers confronted external threats and how they safeguarded their domains.¹ For observers to understand the political origins of today's GCC states, and how their historical evolution affected and still affects their modern political and socio-economic structure and political stances, they should be aware of the early histories of the ruling families and the way in which they managed to establish their respective states. Such a knowledge is important for historical and political observers and analysts, as without it they will not have a full understanding of the modern political structure of the Gulf states and their societies then and now. This study is intended to supply some of that knowledge.

This study focuses on the history of Bahrain and its ruling family, the Al Khalifa. This family first established itself as a ruling dynasty in Qatar in the mid-1760s, annexing the islands of Bahrain in 1783. The islands were formerly governed by an Arab shaikh, a Persian protégé who acknowledged the suzerainty of the Persian Empire over his dominions both in Bahrain and in Bushire on the Persian littoral. As the British did not begin to exercise direct military and political hegemony over

¹ Good examples of these studies include the works of James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf. For further details, see James Onley, “The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century”, *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 30–92; James Onley, “The Politics of Protection: The Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century”, *Liwa: Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research* 1 (2009), 25–46; and James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, “Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study”, *History and Anthropology* 17 (2006), 189–208.

Bahrain until 1868, the Al Khalifa had to defend themselves and their dominions from several external threats for more than a century—yet little is known about how they did this. It is therefore important to shed some light on the Al Khalifa's strategies, tactics, triumphs and setbacks in this regard.

2. Background

Many shaikhs and rulers in the Gulf have played a key role the defence of their family's dominions, preserving the integrity of their polities. In the case of Bahrain, Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad Al Khalifa (Ruler 1795-1843) was the most-tested and most accomplished in diplomacy and war. He was an important political and military figure in the Gulf from 1795 until his death in 1849. During 1810-43, he was one of the most powerful rulers in the Gulf. Great though his importance is, he has been almost completely neglected, if not ignored, by modern historians. One reason for this neglect is that the pre-*Pax Britannica* period is less popular with historians, since there are fewer historical records to draw upon. Another reason that might have contributed to Shaikh Abdullah's modern-day obscurity is, dynastic politics in Bahrain. The long political career of Shaikh Abdullah ended with his overthrow by his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. A family feud ensued—a political and military struggle between the Shaikh, his sons and supporters on one side, and his grand nephew's family and supporters on the other. This conflict ended with reconciliation only several years after his death. His sons and grandsons returned to Bahrain, only to be expelled from it permanently when they organised, and failed to bring to fruition, a political scheme to win back the rulership of Bahrain.² The subsequent downplaying and neglect of Shaikh Abdullah's role in Bahraini history by the current ruling branch of the Al Khalifa and by Bahraini historians could lie in the natural desire of the King of Bahrain to discourage any potential future claim to the throne by Shaikh Abdullah's descendants, who have lived in exile from Bahrain since the nineteenth century.

² Although this dissertation is on the life of Shaikh Abdullah himself, I felt it necessary to give the reader a historical glimpse of what happened to his sons, to appreciate the significance of the outcomes of the coup against him as well to maintain good historical flow.

3. Subject of the Study

Shaikh Abdullah was an excellent military commander and a shrewd diplomat. These skills enabled him to play a crucial role in the defence and preservation of his dominions and the political position of his family. During his long political career, he played a key role in military confrontations and diplomatic manoeuvres, thwarting several foes who threatened his dynasty's existence. Those foes included Imam Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad Al Saud and his son Saud of the first Saudi state; Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad Al Said of Oman and Zanzibar and his son Sayyid Said; the notorious warlord Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma; Emir Turki bin Abdullah Al Saud and his son Faisal; the ambitious and rogue tribal Shaikh Isa bin Tarif al-bin Ali; and the Egyptian General, Khorshid Pasha, who was sent by his overlord, Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt, on an expedition into Eastern Arabia. He also faced persistent Persian threats and encroachments aimed at subduing Bahrain and its dependencies.

With so many foes and so many victories, it cannot be denied that Shaikh Abdullah played a paramount role in the efforts and achievements of the Al Khalifa family. Such a character must be of great importance and interest to any keen historian, but his illustrious and profound role has often been neglected by modern historians. This study aims to rectify this neglect and to accord the Shaikh appropriate acknowledgement of his role in the history of Bahrain, and of the Gulf region in general, in the first half of the nineteenth century.

4. Political and Socio-Economic Conditions of Nineteenth Century Gulf Shaikhdoms and the Al Khalifa Shaikhs in Particular

It is important to examine and have a clear understanding of the Political and Socio-Economic Conditions that the Gulf Shaikhdoms and its rulers in the nineteenth century. Such an examination of the aforementioned conditions in respect to the Al Khalifa family and Shaikh Abdullah in particular would be very beneficial in helping to understand the motives that prompted the Shaikh and some members of his family to take certain courses of action. The economic resources available to the Gulf Shaikhs, their families and peoples were very scarce at the time.³ Most of the economic activities at the time centered on pearl fishing and exportation, the exportation of dates, shipping and ship building.⁴ Bahrain had a similar scope of economic activities. However, Bahrain also had another economic source that was not widely available to the other Gulf Shaikhdoms. It had comparatively rich agricultural lands that provided the population with sustenance and numerous foodstuffs.⁵ Hence the population of Bahrain at the time had more protection against famines compared to their other Gulf brethren in times of economic hardships. In addition it to that it provided the Al Khalifa Rulers with a valuable source of income in resource limited

³ James Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century", *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 33–34

⁴ Onley, "The Politics of Protection", 34; Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745-1900*, (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1997), 63-90; Thomas M. Ricks, "Slaves and Slave Traders in the Persian Gulf, 18th and 19th Centuries: An Assessment" in *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Gervase Clarence-Smith (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1989), 60-64.

⁵ Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24-29.

Gulf. According to Kemball it provided the Ruler and his family with an annual income worth nearly £25,000.⁶

Nonetheless attention had to be given to Bahrain's greatest economic resource at the time, namely pearling. According to a report in 1818 the annual revenue that the Ruler of Bahrain received from the pearl trade was estimated at £157,500.⁷ That coupled with its agricultural and ample fresh water resources and its strategic location in the Gulf made it a natural entrepôt for trade and commerce. These economic numbers might seem small in the eyes of a modern observer. Notwithstanding note has to be taken to how relative those numbers compared with the other Gulf Shaikhs and Oman at the time. For example in 1874 Bahrain's exports was nearly equivalent to that of Oman and the trucional states combined.⁸ Hence it can be safely presumed that the Ruler of Bahrain at the time had relative economic wealth compared with his other neighbors in the Gulf and Arabia.

Nevertheless, such economic prosperity in a resource limited and economically poor region as was the Gulf at the time naturally attracted a lot of unwanted attention and envy from his neighbors. Therefore, as shall be seen in this thesis, the Shaikhs of Bahrain had to contend with both the Omanis and the Saudis, the major regional Arab powers at the time, to defend their economic wealth. They also had to contend with various Persian encroachments on their domains. Understandably, and in the faces of such danger the Shaikh Abdullah and his family had to use their economic resources

⁶ Lt A.B. Kemball, Asst. PRPG, "Memoranda on the Resources, Localities and Relations of the Tribes Inhabiting the Arabian Shores of the Persian Gulf", reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-1868* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 100.

⁷ Captain Robert Taylor, , "Extracts from Brief Notes Containing Historical and Other Information Connected with the Province of Oman; Muskat and the Adjoining Country; the Islands of Bahrein, Ormus, Kishm, and Karrack; And Other Ports and Places in the Persian Gulf", reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-1868* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 90.

⁸ Onley, "The Politics of Protection", 34.

wisely to have the necessary armed force to protect themselves and those same resources that afforded their wealth. They had to hire armed retainers in order to enforce their power and superiority within their domains and followers. Naturally that differentiated them from other tribal Shaikhs who only lead with the consent of their followers and often lacked the coercive power to enforce their will.⁹ They naturally also used such resources to be generous with their allies and peoples. Such generosity was needed to allow them to enjoy a decent level of popularity. Such popularity was important for any Shaikh, and especially the Shaikh Abdullah and his family in their precarious situation, to further his legitimacy and influence.¹⁰ The wealth the Al Khalifa had combined with the legitimacy and influence it must have brought them naturally enabled them to fight off their enemies. It enabled them to have a large fleet to defend their territories in addition to recruit a large number of armed tribal followers. However, when military confrontation with the enemy was seen as too risky if not futile they always had an option to buy him off. In other words they could apply to submit to their foe and become his protégés with the condition of paying him an annual tribute. Shaikh Abdullah and his family sometimes had to resort to such an option with the Omanis and the Saudis despite their former's victories against the latter in 1810, 1811, 1816, 1828. They also used such a tactic to deal with the Egyptians in the 1839 Egyptian Crisis.

However such economic prosperity also brought internal trouble for the Al Khalifa. It seems to have created internal jealousy and greed among them, especially in the younger generation at the time, to get even ever larger portion of economic and

⁹ Onley, "The Politics of Protection", 41; Peter Lienhardt, *The Shaikhdoms of Eastern Arabia*, ed. Ahmed Al-Shahi (London: Palgrave, 2001), 209-210.

¹⁰ Lienhardt, *The Shaikhdoms of Eastern Arabia*, 31 & 229.

political power. Such rivalry within Shaikhly families in Eastern Arabia and the Gulf seems to have been a natural occurrence.¹¹ Notwithstanding, it seems that it was abundance that at first enabled the heads of the family from 1766-1835 to withhold the family together was what caused greed and rivalry within the later generations. Apparently the sons of Shaikh Abdullah in the later reign of their father seem to have desired a larger share of power and wealth than what their other family members were willing to allow. Those family members and hence their tribals allies must have seen that the actions that the young Shaikhs were taking was jeopardize their political and economic position. No matter how powerful or able a Shaikh was at the time, including Shaikh Abdullah, he would not have been able to sustain his rulership without the support of his family.¹² In consequence it was Shaikh Abdullah's inability to remedy the folding of the aforementioned situation that in the end caused him to lose his rulership.

5. Literature Review

Of all the modern literature on Bahraini history, a single book is dedicated to examining the political significance of Shaikh Abdullah. This is *Abd Allah bin Ahmad Muharib Lam Yahda* [Abdullah bin Ahmad: A Restless Warrior], by Shaikha Mai bint Muhammad Al Khalifa. Yet even this is sketchy on the Shaikh's life and political significance. Most of it is concerned with different episodes in the Shaikh's life, extracted (almost verbatim) from various primary sources such as the *Records of the*

¹¹ Lienhardt, *The Shaikhdoms of Eastern Arabia*, 165-166.

¹² Lienhardt, *The Shaikhdoms of Eastern Arabia*, 22

Bombay Government (1856) and the *Gazetteer of The Persian Gulf* (1908-1915) by John Lorimer. It also draws on accounts of traditional local historians such as al-Tajir and al-Nabhani in addition to other more modern works. The book does not offer an analysed perspective of the life and political career of Shaikh Abdullah. Nonetheless, it should still be credited as the first modern historical work with the bold object of addressing the life of Shaikh Abdullah and his key role in shaping the political structure of the Arab states of the Gulf.

Another noteworthy work that acknowledges Shaikh Abdullah's life is by James Onley. His article, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century" (2004), examines the relationship between the local Arab rulers and the British Political Resident in the nineteenth century. Onley sheds light on some of Shaikh Abdullah's diplomatic manoeuvres to safeguard his dominions (Onley calls them 'protection-seeking tactics'). The article proves that Shaikh Abdullah was an able tactician, and Onley's examination of Shaikh Abdullah¹³ succeeds in illustrating the complexities faced by local Arab rulers of the period. However, Onley examines only one aspect of the Shaikh's political life—the relationship between the Shaikh's political situation and that of the British. Another of his works deals with the politics of local rulers at the time, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (2007).¹⁴ The work mainly discusses the network of local agents and collaborators built by the British to further their interests in the Gulf, especially Bahrain. The book gives us a unique glimpse into the roles played by such agents and their effects on relations between local rulers and the British.

¹³ Onley, "The Politics of Protection", 30-92. For the specific section on Shaikh Abdullah, see pages 67-71.

¹⁴ James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Nevertheless, it does not examine very deeply the political and military tactics that the local ruler used in protecting his domain from external threats.

There are few other historical works about the century preceding British ascendancy in the Arabian Gulf and the evolution of today's tribal/political polities. But none of them delve very deeply into the dynamics of local statecraft or explain how the local rulers protected their polities for the most part without direct help of a great power like Great Britain. Among the historians covering upon the early historical formation of the Arabian Gulf states is Ben J. Slot, who concentrates mainly on the history of Kuwait's formation into a polity. His book, *The Origins of Kuwait* (1991),¹⁵ explores the early history of Kuwait before it was settled by the Utub in the early nineteenth century. However, his account gives the reader only a brief (but good) scan of the early history of Kuwait and its settlement by the Utub. It does not examine in much detail the intricacies and dynamics of protecting the polity against external threats or the dynamics of local statecraft that accompanied it. Another work edited by Slot, *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity* (2005)¹⁶, is similar to the work above in that it opens with an article by Slot which discusses the historical beginning of Kuwait under the Utub. Another article in the book is written by Ulrich W. Haarmann, which covers the early historical resources of Kuwait.¹⁷ Notwithstanding, the rest of the book does not tell us much of local statecraft or self-defence in the first half of the nineteenth century. Slot also wrote *The Arabs of the Gulf, 1602-1784* (1993).¹⁸ The work starts with the situation after the ending of

¹⁵ Ben J. Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait* (Netherlands, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

¹⁶ Ben J. Slot, "Kuwait : The Growth of a Historic Identity, in *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity*, ed. B.J. Slot (London: Arabian Publishing Ltd, 2003), 5-29.

¹⁷ Ulrich W. Haarmann, "Two 18th-century Sources on Kuwait: Murtada b. Ali b. Alwan and Carsten Niebuhr" in *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity*, ed. B.J. Slot (London: Arabian Publishing Ltd, 2003), 30-48.

¹⁸ Ben J. Slot, *The Arabs of the Gulf, 1602-1742*, Trans. Ayda Khouri, Ed. Muhammad Mursi Abdullah (Abu Dhabi: Cultural Foundation, 1993).

Portuguese power in the region. It covers the competition among the Omanis, Persians, British and Dutch to dominate the region. Only Chapter 9 examines the rise of the Arab shaikhdoms on both the eastern and western littorals of the Gulf after the waning of Persian influence after the death of Nader Shah. Though the book is very informative, it still gives no in-depth examination of the mechanisms the local rulers used to safeguard themselves and their domains.

Other historical works that have dealt with this period and theme include those of Willem Floor and Frederick F. Anscombe. Anscombe's work is mostly concerned with the Ottomans in the Gulf and the way in which local Gulf polities emerged as independent countries after ridding themselves of Ottoman hegemony and seeking the protection of the British. This can be seen clearly in his book *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (1997).¹⁹ He focuses the period from the late nineteenth century till the early twentieth and examines how the local rulers of the eponymous states, mere shaikhdoms at the time, managed to switch their allegiance from the Ottomans to the British. Therefore it does not cover the historical period that this study addresses, from the mid-eighteenth century to the late nineteenth. Consequently, it understandably does not offer us a deep insight into the original formation of the dynasties that created those states, with the exception of Qatar which was under the control of the Al Khalifa. And it also does not give us information on their political exploits and self-defence measures before the ascendancy of the Ottomans and the British in the affairs of the Arab littoral of the Gulf. Floor's work is slightly different in its perspective. His book, *The Persian Gulf: Rise of the Gulf Arabs* (2007),²⁰ discusses only the history

¹⁹ Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf: The Rise of the Gulf Arabs: the Politics of Trade on the Persian Littoral* (Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 2007).

of the Arab shaikhdoms of the Persian littoral of the Gulf and their rise to power after the decline of Persian power and influence in that region. There is no deep examination of the mechanics of statecraft used by the rulers of those shaikhdoms to protect their polities.

There is of course the notable work of J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (1968).²¹ Kelly offers a deep examination of the relationship of Great Britain with the local powers on both littorals of the Gulf at the time, giving the observer a good overall idea of some of the dynamics of local statecraft and the way that local rulers used military confrontations and political alliances to safeguard their domains. It is, for all that, a study about the relationship of Great Britain with those local powers, so that Britain's role is constantly in focus. Consequently, Kelly's work does not venture very deeply into the mechanics of statecraft used by local rulers around the Gulf at the time.

Additional resources used in this thesis come from the writings of local Arab historians. Some of these historians such as Khalifa al-Nabhani, Nasser al-Khairi and Muhammad al-Tajir were not present as eyewitnesses of those events when they wrote their historical accounts in the 1920s. Nevertheless, they should not be discounted as they are the earliest Bahraini historians known to have written a documented account of those events from a Bahraini point, although the motive of each one of them was different. Al-Nabhani was commissioned to write his account on the request of the Al Khalifa ruling family. Thus it would be safe to say that his account represented the official view at the time of the history of the Al Khalifa in Bahrain. Nasser al-Khairi's account came as a reaction against the work of al-Nabhani. Al-Khairi clearly states in the introduction of his book that one of the main

²¹ J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968).

reasons that prompted him to write his account were the flaws that he said he found in al-Nabhani's account. Al-Khairi clearly expressed his great respect of al-Nabhani despite his disagreement with him and pointed out that quality of work that was produced by al-Nabhani was not what would have been expected from a man of his calibre. Al-Tajir on the other hand also states in the introduction of his book that he read both of al-Nabhani's and al-Khairi's account and tried in writing his account to remedy the flaws in both of them. Nonetheless, al-Tajir acknowledges that he received significant help from al-Khairi in writing his account and thanks him for it in his book's introduction. It should also be noted that a reader can easily notice that al-Tajir almost copied large parts of al-Nabhani and al-Khairi's account and he clearly points this out a few times of his text. Perhaps it should also be added that al-Nabhani and al-Khairi were Sunnis and al-Tajir was a Shiite and such different backgrounds for each of them could have affected the way they wrote their history. All three men based their works on the local oral tradition that was carried down about the incidents they documented. Al-Nabhani and al-Khairi in particular sought the accounts of various Al Khalifa Shaikhs to incorporate in their work. However, it seems that al-Khairi was more critical than al-Nabhani as his account usually points to the negative as well to a positive side of an issue and it seems that he did not just depend on the oral tradition he heard from the Shaikhs. Another local historian whose work was used in writing this thesis was the work of Uthman bin Abdullah Ibn Bishr. Ibn Bishr was an official historian of the Saudi Ruling family and wrote his historical work in the 1850s. It would be safe to say that Ibn Bishr based his account heavily on the Ruling family's official account of its history and that included their interactions and the conflicts they had had with the Al Khalifa and the rest of the Utub. From Oman we have the work of Humayd bin Muhammad Ibn

Ruzayq. Similar to Ibn Bishr, Ibn Ruzayq was the official historian of the Al Said ruling family of Oman and Zanzibar. Thus, his account is derived mainly from their point of view of how various historical events happened and developed. Abdulaziz al-Rasheed from Kuwait also wrote his history of Kuwait in the 1920s and his book is beneficial in obtaining information about the early history of the Al Khalifa family before their immigration from Qatar to Zubarah. He was not an official historian of the al-Sabah ruling family in Kuwait but his account was also based on the local oral historian tradition. Lastly we have the account of Shaikh Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Thani. His account, like the other above mentioned accounts, was based on local oral history and was documented in the 1950s. Some might argue that such documentations of local oral history cannot be reliable as primary sources that are based on sources that documented events as they happened. Nevertheless, no one can say that those accounts are completely unreliable. It is important to take into consideration that they represent the only local historical account available of the historical events of the Gulf in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Hence, it is important to use them to counterbalance the viewpoint seen in accounts that are based on the documentation of events by the British officials present in the Gulf at the time when they happened. If some may argue that some of those local historians might have been biased to the ruling families it could be retorted that those same officials could have been biased to the interests of their government. The cultural barrier also would have resulted in a local historian interpreting an event in a different manner than the way a British official would have interpreted it. Therefore, for all the above mentioned reasons, it was important to integrate those local historical accounts in this thesis. Instances where those accounts agreed and disagreed with the accounts documented in the letters, reports, and correspondence

of British officials who were present in the Gulf at the time are pointed out in this thesis.

6. Primary Resources

This study draws upon British, Arabic, Ottoman and Dutch sources, with the bulk of the primary sources coming from the British East India Company archival records: namely, the Government of Bombay records in the Maharashtra State Archives in Mumbai and the India Office records in the British Library in London. These records range from correspondence between British officials in the Gulf and India and the local Shaikhs to reports written or compiled by British officials. Chief among this latter group are the exhaustive books by John G. Lorimer and Jerome A. Saldanha, all published in the early twentieth century, as well as the much shorter reports by Warden, Hennell, Disbrowe, Seton, Stannus, Willoughby, Brucks, and others published in the first half of the nineteenth century. The main obstacle found in these publications is that very few of them cover the Al Khalifa and Bahrain before 1820. Their coverage of 1820-1850 is much better, but it is not as extensive as the late nineteenth century onwards. Notwithstanding, the subject of this study, Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, died in 1849 and this leaves a not very large number of British documents to work with. Other primary sources used in this thesis is a report that was written in 1756 by Baron Otto von Kniphausen for the Dutch East India Company in addition to an Ottoman document mentioning the arrival of the Utub (tribe of Shaikh Abdullah) to Basra in 1701. Other works that were included were the account that Niebuhr has written during his travels in the Gulf region in the 1750s and an account written by local Bahraini Cleric, Yusuf bin Ahmad al-Bahrani, who was an eye witness to an assault waged by the Utub against Bahrain in 1701.

7. Significance and Aims

This study is intended to be different from the works mentioned above. It distinguishes itself from the works of Mai Al Khalifa, James Onley, and traditional historians by studying the life and career of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad from two distinct perspectives.

First, this is the first study to provide a detailed, comprehensive account of Shaikh Abdullah's life based on a synthesis of local historical accounts, combined with historical records from British records in both Mumbai and London.

Second, this is the first study to analyse the importance of the political role played by Shaikh Abdullah and his family—a role that has been downplayed until now. It is the first to highlight his achievements and the methods he used to reach his goals as he played a crucial role in the regional politics of his time. His successes helped secure and solidify the position of political power that his family had achieved, enabling them to protect their domains from larger regional powers such as the Saudis in Najd or the Al Said of Oman, as well as from other local rivals. It is also the first to examine his skills in political negotiation and diplomacy to protect himself and his dominions from the grave threat of the much larger political forces of Persia and the troops of Muhammad Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt. Finally, it is also one of the first studies to shed light on the importance of local statecraft mechanisms used by local rulers to protect themselves and their polities from external threats.

Nonetheless, the limited availability of primary sources, both Arab and foreign, has hampered this study. Most historical sources come from the British who kept a close eye on Shaikh Abdullah, and carefully examined the regional events of in the Gulf. As any researcher on Gulf history will notice, the availability of British

primary sources on the Gulf (especially on Bahrain) increases dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly its closing decades. British material regarding the period before 1850 (and especially before 1820) is quite scarce in comparison to later periods. Even so, that should not stop researchers from trying to examine that period in depth, discerning and reconstructing the sequence of events, and analysing their importance to the historical development of the region.

The study is also the first to explain the reasons for Shaikh Abdullah's political downfall in 1843 — a downfall that is surprising, given his long and successful political career. He fell for a variety of reasons — all connected with the nature of the local politics prevalent among the tribal societies of the Gulf at the time. As anyone acquainted with the history of the Gulf region will know, the majority of inhabitants of the scattered towns of the time were 'sedentary Bedouins'. Even the ruling families had Bedouin roots. Those townsmen maintained (and still maintain) many of the Bedouin values of their ancestors despite living in towns and working in various professions to achieve their livelihoods. Many of those Bedouin values affected and influenced their ways of thinking, their actions and ultimately their politics. Thus, elements such as family feuds, the fear of loss of prestige and anger at personal insults were influential factors in politics. As this study will show, those elements were central to the political downfall of Shaikh Abdullah. His inability to restrain the insolence of his numerous sons created a rift between him and his family on the one hand and between him and his subjects and tribal allies on the other. This enabled his ambitious grand nephew to challenge him and ultimately to overthrow and exile him and his sons. The relative ease with which the Shaikh was overthrown, bearing in mind the numerous and dangerous foes and challenges that he had earlier succeeded in overcoming, is a classic case of how any disregard of the tribal and

social values of the time could make any ruler, no matter how powerful, pay a terrible price. This study then examines the numerous futile attempts of the Shaikh to retrieve his political power until his death in 1849.

The aim of this study, then, is twofold: first, to shed light on the mechanics of local statecraft of war and diplomacy used by the local rulers to protect themselves and their domains and, second, to give due credit to Shaikh Abdullah's important political role in the politics of the Gulf region. Knowledge and appreciation of such a role will greatly enhance the understanding of any historian or observer studying the history of the Arabian Gulf in the first half of the nineteenth century.

8. Outline

Chapter II examines the origins and history of the Al Khalifa family, from the late 1500s until the death of Shaikh Abdullah's father, Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifa in 1795. Its intention is to give the reader a sound historical background for the later chapters as well as an insight into local/tribal state formation in the eighteenth century Gulf. It leans towards a descriptive rather than an analytical perspective, although analysis does appear where appropriate. The chapter highlights the tribal origins of the patriarchal founder of the family, Khalifa al-Kabir, and his descent from the tribe of Jumaila. It describes his family's emigration from their ancestral lands in central Arabia to the shores of the Arabian Gulf, where they joined the Bani Utbah (Utub) tribal confederation before settling in the area that would become known as Kuwait. It examines the rise to precedence of the founder's son, Shaikh Muhammad, in Kuwait and his decision to relocate to the town of Zubarah in Qatar in the 1760s. Shaikh Muhammad established a power base that enabled him to turn Zubarah from a small and unknown town into a regional commercial hub,

eventually making it the capital of a new shaikhdom after defeating the Al Musallam family, the previous rulers of Qatar and vassals to the powerful Bani Khalid tribe. The chapter then examines the rule of his son, Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad, and the growing prominence that Zubarah gained during his reign. This prominence attracted unwanted attention and aggression from the Persian Governor of Shiraz and his deputy Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkooor, and their followers in Bushire and Bahrain. The chapter looks at the growing tensions between the Al Khalifa and the Persians that resulted in a bloody showdown at the Battle of Zubarah in 1782 during Shaikh Khalifa's absence on a pilgrimage to Mecca, thrusting the crisis upon the shoulders of his brother, Shaikh Ahmad, who managed to defeat the Al Mathkooor in a land battle near Zubarah. Shaikh Ahmad eventually decided to seize the opportunity that his victory granted him, launching a successful campaign against Bahrain in 1783, ousting Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkooor's forces and adding the isles to his family's domains. The chapter concludes with the death of Shaikh Ahmad in 1795 and the beginning of the reign of his eldest son Shaikh Salman, assisted by his brother Shaikh Abdullah, who is the subject of this study.

Chapter III covers the period of 1795-1821. It examines Shaikh Abdullah's role as the junior co-ruler of Bahrain and dependencies with his brother, Shaikh Salman, the senior co-ruler. It illustrates how local rulers and magnates at the time made and broke political alliances in a very volatile regional environment. It also reveals how political alliances were based on the principle of pragmatic interests of political players, none of whom hesitated to befriend past enemies when circumstances dictated. Shaikh Abdullah faced various external threats and challenges, described here. His problems started with the first, and successful, 1801 Omani invasion of Bahrain under the command of Sayyid Said bin Sultan Al Said,

who captured Bahrain from the Al Khalifa family. Shaikh Abdullah and his family managed to oust them in 1810 with the help of their new allies, the Saudis, only to fall victims to those same allies. However, the Shaikh and his family quickly recovered and managed to inflict a crushing naval defeat on the Saudis and their allies in 1811. The chapter then discusses how Shaikh Abdullah and his family faced a second invasion attempt in 1816. It was made by Sayyid Said bin Sultan Al Said, who had among his allies the Al Khalifa's greatest enemy, Shaikh Rahma bin Jabir al Jalahma. Shaikh Abdullah, the Al Khalifa and their allies managed to inflict a signal defeat on the invaders and succeeded in repelling the threat. The chapter then shows how the Al Khalifa, Bahrain, and its dependencies, became entwined with the expanding British Empire when they agreed to sign the General Treaty of 1820 which was under the pretext of banning piracy in the Gulf. The chapter ends with the death of Shaikh Salman in 1821.

Chapter IV focuses on Shaikh Abdullah's role from 1825 to 1834, when he was senior co-ruler with his nephew, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, the junior co-ruler. It discusses the need for a local ruler to attain military superiority over his foes in order to secure his domains against external military threats. Threats were always looming, as political alliances shifted and regional circumstances changed. Shaikh Abdullah faced three major external threats during this period. First, he had to eradicate the archenemy of his family, the infamous warlord Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma. The Shaikh finally neutralised that threat by launching an attack in 1826 in which Rahma was killed. The Shaikh's second threat was posed by Sayyid Said bin Sultan Al Said, Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar. Shaikh Abdullah finally succeeded in putting an end to Omani ambitions for Bahrain when he was able to rout Sayyid Said's troops at the Battle of Gazgaz during their invasion of Bahrain in 1828. The

third threat that Shaikh Abdullah's had to face during that period was the resurgence of the Saudis under Emir Turki bin Abdullah and his son Faisal. He must have realized that he could not deal with that threat while he was still in conflict with Sayyid Said. This probably prompted him to react to Saudi aggression by trying to appease them and showing them signs of homage. He continued this policy until he was able to establish a permanent peace agreement with Sayyid Said. The purpose of that agreement, as well as to safeguard Bahrain from any future Omani invasion, was to block any alliance by the Omanis and Saudis against the Utub of Bahrain. Once that was achieved, Shaikh Abdullah took a more militant stand against the Saudis. His strategy involved nearly constant naval blockades of the Saudi ports of Qatif and Uqair while engaging the enemy in sporadic land battles on the Arabian mainland. That policy ensured that the Saudis remained preoccupied with the safety of their possessions on the mainland, diverting them from their ambition to seize Bahrain. The chapter ends with the death of Shaikh Abdullah's nephew and co-Ruler, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, in 1834.

Chapter V examines the period between 1834 and 1842, when Shaikh Abdullah was assisted in the rulership of Bahrain and its dependencies by his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa bin Salman. The chapter starts with an analysis of Shaikh Abdullah's methods for dealing with threats from other local rulers. It then examines the difficulties that a local ruler at the time had to face when contending with domestic issues such as tribal insurgency and the dynastic and political intrigue that came with it. The chapter also discusses the local rulers' options for dealing with threats from much larger political forces—the British, Persians and Ottomans. The analyses are intended to give the observer a clear picture of the methods used by local rulers of the day to deal with such challenges.

The chapter gives the reader an idea of the misdemeanours of the sons of Shaikh Abdullah. It reveals how their irresponsible actions caused recurring troubles and embarrassments for their father and led to Shaikh Abdullah's overthrow. It goes on to examine Shaikh Abdullah's techniques in maintaining his warfare policy against the Saudis by keeping them at bay. He made them preoccupied with the defence of their dominions on the Arabian mainland in order to keep their ambitions for Bahrain and Qatar at bay. There is a description of Shaikh Abdullah's sons' conspiracy against him and its profound and troubling implications. The sons escaped to Qatar when their conspiracy was discovered, but once they had arrived, they conspired with the maternal uncle of three of them, Shaikh Isa bin Tarif Shaikh of the al-bin Ali tribe, to start an armed revolt in Qatar, where other tribes, including the al-bu-Ainain, joined them. This prompted Shaikh Abdullah to send his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, on an expedition against them. They met at the Battle of Huwaila, where the rebels were defeated, their allied tribes expelled and Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa's prestige and influence over the sons of Shaikh Abdullah's sons much enhanced. Nonetheless, the defeated rebels maintained a constant threat to Shaikh Abdullah and the maritime trade of Bahrain from their places of exile in the ports and on the islands of the Gulf.

Chapter V continues with a discussion on Shaikh Abdullah's way of dealing with the threat of Persian encroachment on Bahrain in 1838. The Prince Governor of Shiraz sent him a message, calling upon him, as a "Persian subject", to pledge allegiance to Qajar Shah of Persia. Shaikh Abdullah thwarted this threat through a series of tactical manoeuvres. First, he ended the hostilities between himself and the Saudi Emir and agreed to pay a small annual tribute. The Emir, as a *quid pro quo*, agreed to supply Shaikh Abdullah with any troops that the latter required if the

Persians did indeed attack Bahrain. The agreement between the Shaikh and the Emir also stipulated that the Shaikh would not be obliged to help the Emir in any endeavour the latter might undertake against the Sultan of Muscat and Zanzibar. A most probable reason for that clause was that the Sultan was an in-law to the Prince of Shiraz and the Shaikh might have sought to enable himself to defy the Persian demands and neutralise any possible Persian alliance with Sayyid Said.

Finally, the chapter examines Shaikh Abdullah's strategy for dealing with the 1839 Egyptian campaign in Eastern Arabia. The Shaikh was on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, Khorshid Pasha (the Egyptian commander) demanded that Shaikh Abdullah announce his allegiance to Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt. On the other hand, the British Resident in the Gulf forbade the Shaikh to enter into any treaty with the Egyptians without the Resident's advice and consent. The Shaikh, who must have felt that the Resident was meddling in his state affairs, responded that it was his business, and not the Resident's, whether or not he entered into treaties with other regional powers. He added that if the British insisted that he not enter into any treaty or alliance with the Egyptians, they should be willing to guarantee him protection against the latter. The Shaikh was unable to obtain such guarantee from the Resident, which prompted him to enter into an alliance with the Egyptians on terms beneficial to himself. Shaikh Abdullah successfully played on the Egyptian fear that he might enter into an alliance with Persia instead of with them. One of the negative outcomes of this episode was that it brought upon the Shaikh the anger and resentment of the British Resident in the Gulf. This would manifest itself later on, as the Resident would refuse to help Shaikh Abdullah when the latter was in dire need of assistance—an episode examined in Chapter VI.

Chapter VI examines the period between 1842 and 1849. It reveals more of the dynamics of dynastic struggle and tribal insurgency. Threats from within could undermine the authority of any ruler, no matter how powerful or successful in countering threats from foreign enemies and foes. It was in this period that the excesses of the Shaikh's sons caused a rupture in the internal cohesion of the Al Khalifa family. Many members of the family apparently feared that the political situation in Bahrain would deteriorate if, after the death of Shaikh Abdullah, one of his sons took over as ruler. One of these was Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, Shaikh Abdullah's grand nephew. This political climate enabled Shaikh Muhammad to unite most of his immediate family and clan in his cause to overthrow his grand uncle. After numerous battles and several twists and turns, Shaikh Muhammad was able to oust Shaikh Abdullah and his sons, establishing himself as the absolute ruler of Bahrain and its dependencies. Later, the British Resident's resentment against Shaikh Abdullah, described above, manifested itself when he refused to restrain some malcontent Utubs, who resided on the Persian littoral, from joining the cause of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. The British, who were unsympathetic to the cause of Shaikh Abdullah, tried to foil his attempt to ally himself with the Persians. Shaikh Abdullah did not give up: he tried to enter into an alliance with the tribal Shaikhs of the Trucial Coast, but the British foiled that attempt too. The Shaikh then entered into an alliance with the Saudis but Shaikh Muhammad foiled that.

Shaikh Muhammad tried more than once to reach reconciliation with his grand uncle but to no avail. Shaikh Abdullah's best chance of defeating Shaikh Muhammad was to enter into an alliance with his old foe, Shaikh Isa bin Tarif, Chief of the al-bin Ali tribe, even though both Shaikh Abdullah and Isa bin Tarif had their own political agendas, as we shall see. Shaikh Muhammad managed to defeat this alliance at the

battle of Umm Suwayya, where he faced the allied troops of the Shaikh Abdullah's sons and Isa bin Tarif, who was slain. The allies were surprised by an unexpected land attack from Shaikh Muhammad before the arrival of Shaikh Abdullah at the battleground. News of this defeat came as a shock to Shaikh Abdullah—according to Lorimer, it came as “the death blow of Shaikh Abdullah's hopes.”²² After this battle, Shaikh Abdullah went to Muscat to seek the help of his old foe, Sayyid Said. He died there, bringing to an end a life full of political challenges and intrigue.

Chapter VII is the concluding section of this dissertation. It highlights the most important themes and elements of the political life of Shaikh Abdullah, and illustrates the importance of those themes and elements and their effects on the modern history of Bahrain and the Gulf region in general. Of course, such implications are important for any historian who seeks to analyse, from a historical perspective, the political dynamics that created the modern geo-political structure of the Arabian Gulf region.

²² J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. I, historical, part II (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 878.

CHAPTER II

Early History and Foundation of the Al Khalifa Family as a Shaikhly Dynasty, 1600s-1795

1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the origins, history and rise to power of the Al Khalifa, the Royal Family of Bahrain. It provides the reader with an overall historical background to the family and its acquisition of political power and ascendancy in the eighteenth century. The chapter examines tribal and economic relations and their effect on the formation of political/tribal power at the time. It studies the tactics used by a contender aspiring to establish political power for himself and his family—for instance, deliberate intermarriage with a carefully chosen tribe could increase a contender's chances of power and provide the support and manpower needed to achieve the family's ends. The chapter highlights the way in which a local ruler could use local geopolitical circumstances to his advantage, and how economic rivalry and competition for trade could trigger armed conflict between local rulers—conflicts that expanded the territory of some at the expense of others. Shaikh Abdullah's story is a fascinating example of how a familial/tribal polity was established in the nineteenth century Gulf. This is important for any Gulf historians studying the formation of the current Arab Gulf states, as many of the original polities formed in this way were transformed into the modern GCC states we see today.

The chapter examines how the Al Khalifa managed to establish the roots of their current political position in Bahrain and the Gulf region in general. It tracks the movements and exploits of the heads of the family, starting with their migration from their ancestral home in Central Arabia to the shores of the Arabian Gulf in the late 1600s and ending with their conquest of Bahrain in 1783. The conquest was led by Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifa, known as Ahmad al-Fatih (the Conqueror), whose victory established Al Khalifa rule in Bahrain, a rule that still prevails there. The exploits of the Al Khalifa family heads discussed here include: the formation of the al-Utub (or Bani Utbah) tribal alliance and the establishment of Kuwait; the migration of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir (progenitor of the Al Khalifa family and father of Shaikh Ahmad) with other sections of the al-Utub from Kuwait to Qatar; the establishment there of the town of Zubarah as a commercial hub; and the eventual takeover of the peninsula by Shaikh Muhammad and his allies.

The chapter also discusses the reign of Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir, describing how the prosperity of Zubarah at this time made it a regional entrepôt and attracted unwanted attention from Persia and regional rivals. It goes on to examine the events that led to the attack on Zubarah by Shaikh Nasr al-Mathkoor, a vassal of Persia who ruled Bahrain and the town of Bushire on the Persian coast, and his repulse by Shaikh Ahmad. Finally, the chapter shows how Shaikh Ahmad, his brother's successor, launched a counterattack on Bahrain from his base on Qatar. The success of his attack enabled him to incorporate Bahrain into his family's domains and firmly established the rule over Bahrain that has continued to the present day.

The conquest of 1783 is a very important historical event, as it effectively placed the strategically-located islands of Bahrain under Arab hegemony. Had these

islands remained Persian at that time, the geopolitical structure of the Gulf region would have been very different today. From a historical perspective, Persian retention would probably have had made the spread of British influence in the Gulf region much more difficult. From a more contemporary perspective, it would have put the Arab states of the Gulf in a much more precarious geopolitical position vis-à-vis Iran than it is today.

2. Origins of the Al Khalifa

Al Khalifa is a patronymic derived from one of the heads of the family named Khalifa. Who was Khalifa and what is his tribal origin? What compelled him and his family to leave their ancestral homeland in the Arabian interior and move to the shores of the Gulf? According to local and family tradition, Khalifa, known in Bahrain as Khalifa al-Kabir (the Great), was a great-grandson of the famous Shaikh Faisal al-Jumaili, best known as a poet.¹ Faisal al-Jumaili ruled the town of al-Haddar in the region of al-Aflaj, a large fertile valley 330 Km southwest of Riyadh.² *Aflaj* means “water that runs from natural springs” while the name of the town that he ruled, *al-Haddar*, means “roaring torrent”. The area had been known as very rich and fertile from ancient times and had the largest ‘lake’ in the Arabian Peninsula. The abundant fertility of this area can be seen from the etymological roots of some of the place names. For example, there is an area known as *al-Gheel* (roughly “foamy soil”) and a couple of *asyah* (plural of *saih*), the local name for “surface-running ground water”. Another interesting fact about the al-Aflaj area is that the famous traveller and

¹ Nasser Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain Fi Tarikh al-Bahrayn* [The Necklaces of Pearl in the History of Bahrain] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 2003 [c.1924]), 212;

Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Ustoorah wal Tarikh al-Muwazi* [Muhammad bin Khalifa the Legend and the Corresponding History] (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1996), 778; the complete genealogy of Shaikh Khalifa al-Kabir is Khalifa bin Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Faisal bin Tammam al-Jumaili.

² Ali Abahussain and Abdullah Al Khalifa, *al-Bahrayn 'Abra al-Tarikh al-Juz'a al-Thani (Bahrain Through the Ages, Vol II)* (Bahrain: The Historical Documents Centre, 2008), 211.

Vizier to King Abdulaziz Al Saud, Abdullah Philby, visited al-Aflaj and believed it to have been a Phoenician area, having found what he identified as the remains of Phoenician graves.

Another noted fact about the ancestral homeland of the Al Khalifa is that the family carried certain place names from there and gave them to places in Qatar and Bahrain. Riffa in Bahrain is a good example, named after an area of the same name in al-Haddar. Even Qatar, once under the dominion of the Al Khalifa, has an area called Al Badea whose name exists in al-Haddar too. The Al Khalifa also named their chief fort in Zubarah Sabha, after their ancestral fort in al-Haddar, whose remains can still be seen today.³

The ancestors of the Al Khalifa family, then, lived in a large, rich, fertile oasis that provided them with comforts denied to neighbouring tribes. Why, then, did they leave their ancestral homeland and go out to face an uncertain destiny on the shores of the Arabian Gulf? Many hypotheses exist, and historical accounts differ greatly, sometimes even contradicting each other. The Bahraini historian Khalifa al-Nabhani acknowledges that the reasons prompting the family of Khalifa al-Kabir to migrate from their ancestral homeland are “unknown and mysterious”.⁴

One account holds that the area experienced a severe and prolonged drought, causing famine and making life very difficult in al-Aflaj.⁵ This is not readily acceptable, as al-Aflaj was considered one of the most fertile areas in Central Arabia, so even very difficult conditions are unlikely to have prompted the shaikhs of the area to leave while a large section of the population stayed behind.

³ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa*, 239-243; Abahussain and Al Khalifa, Abdullah, *al-Bahrayn 'Abra al-Tarikh*, 209.

⁴ Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya Fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluum, 1986 [c.1922]), 82.

⁵ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa*, 244.

Another theory can be found in the account of the Bahraini historian Nasser al-Khairi. He proposes that the family of Khalifa al-Kabir migrated because of the instability of the region of Najd, a very troublesome and volatile region before it came under the political control of the Al Saud family. Many Arabian clans there disliked it and sought to migrate to safer, more peaceful lands like the Gulf coast, Iraq and Syria.⁶ However, this explanation is not entirely satisfactory, as Najd was a troublesome region even during the times of Khalifa al-Kabir's ancestors. So what compelled him, his brother, kinsmen and followers to emigrate?

Other historians propose different reasons. The prevalent explanation is that the impetus to migrate arose from internal disputes within the Jumaila tribe. Apparently, those disputes escalated to armed conflict within different factions of Jumaila and their allies, including al-Duwasir. The histories of Mail Al Khalifa and Abdulaziz al-Rasheed, partially derived from various local oral accounts, claim that those disputes prompted the migration. According to these accounts, Khalifa al-Kabir's branch quarrelled with, and defeated, another branch of Jumaila. The losers sought revenge by allying themselves with a clan of the al-Duwasir tribe called Al Hasan.⁷ That alliance managed to defeat Khalifa al-Kabir's branch and forced them to face a new reality. Their choice was to remain in al-Haddar, under new conditions that they might have seen as demeaning, or to migrate. They chose the latter. Both these historians rely on the narration of Shaikh Ibrahim bin Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, son of the fourth ruler of Bahrain. This explanation may tie in with the drought theory: if a drought and famine had indeed occurred, it might have limited the

⁶ Nasser Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain Fi Tarikh al-Bahrayn* [The Necklaces of Pearl in the History of Bahrain] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 2003 [c.1924]), 211-212.

⁷ Mail Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Ustoorah wal Tarikh al-Muwazi*, 245; Abdulaziz al-Rasheed, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt* [The History of Kuwait] (Beirut: Dar al-hayat, 1978[1926]), 107.

normally abundant resources of the fertile valley and hence helped intensify the internal al-Jumaila disputes.

3. Migration to the Gulf and Formation of the Bani Utbah (al-Utub) Tribal Alliance

Nobody can set an exact date for the migration of Khalifa al-Kabir and his family, ancestors of the Al Khalifa, to the shores of the Gulf, nor is there a reliable detailed account of their entry into a compact that formed the tribal alliance known as *Bani Utbah* or *al-Utub*.⁸ Nevertheless, most historians agree that the migration happened in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁹ The path of migration took the heads of the family out of the central plateau of Najd to the oasis region of Hasa in Eastern Arabia. From there they travelled to the peninsula of Qatar.¹⁰ They remained there for several years, the probable period of the establishment of Bani Utbah tribal confederation. The Utub included tribes that were present in the region before the arrival of Khalifa al-Kabir and his family, and paramount among them was the al-bin Ali tribe.¹¹

⁸ Abahussain and Al Khalifa, Abdullah, *al-Baḥrayn ‘abra al-tārīk al-juz’a al-thani*, 202; Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa*, 246-247; Muna Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub; Al Khalifa Fi Al Bahrayn, 1700-1970* [The History of the Utub: The Al Khalifa in Bahrain, 1700-1970] (Bahrain: al-Mitb’ah al-Sharqiyah, 1991), 41.

⁹ There is evidence which can be found in local oral historical accounts and traditions and in a poem attributed to Faisal al-Jumaili the distant agnatic ancestor that suggests otherwise. In his poem Faisal denounces his adversaries who forced him and his clan to leave their ancestral home in al-Haddar and he describes his lament that when he arrived in Iraq no one knew who he really was and did not afford him the appreciation and respect that he felt he deserved. The aforementioned lament of Faisal is a very common cultural theme of the predicaments that Arab nobility had to face when fortune turns against them and they are forced to migrate to new lands. The aforementioned evidence suggests that the immigration of the ancestors of the Al Khalifa took place in the 1580s under the leadership of Faisal himself and first headed to Iraq. However the historical details become unclear after that only starts to resurface in the early 1700s. Nevertheless such evidence needs to be researched and studied more to be verified.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

Francis Warden claims that the formation of the Bani Utbah alliance took place in Kuwait in the year 1716 AD.¹² However, this contradicts other accounts such as that of Yousif al-Bahrani (1696-1772), a Shiite cleric born and resident in Bahrain. Al-Bahrani claims in his book *Lu'alu'at al-Bahrayn* that the Utub attacked Bahrain in 1112 AH (1701). This compelled the Shiite Shaikh of Islam in the island to ask help from the Huwala¹³ to repel those attacks.¹⁴ Al-Bahrani's account is confirmed by an Ottoman document that also dates to the year 1701. The Ottomans describe the Utub as a large force of nearly 2,000 households who owned nearly 150 ships armed with light artillery.¹⁵ It is a fair deduction that these two accounts clearly indicate that the Utub tribal alliance was firmly established by the late seventeenth century. According to the Ottoman account, the Utub left for Basra after their conflict with the Huwala and stayed there for an unspecified but short while before moving to and settling in the area known today as Kuwait.¹⁶ Hence, the earlier account of Francis Warden is probably more accurate about the date of the establishment of Kuwait than it is about the formation of the Bani Utbah tribal alliance. The Bahraini historian Nasser al-Khairi places the arrival of the Utub at Kuwait in the year 1120 AH (1708). Another Bahraini historian, Muhammad Ali al-Tajir, does not place an exact date on the arrival, but he does note that it was in the early twelfth Hijri century, which would make it in the early 1700s. However, both historians disagree on whether Shaikh

¹² Francis Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs"; (*Bahrein;*)", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections of the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series. Ed. R.H. Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 362.

¹³ A common term used for Arab tribes that lived on the Persian littoral of the Gulf.

¹⁴ Yousif al-Bahrani, *Lu'alu'at al-Bahrayn Fi al-Ijazat Wa Tarajum Rejal al-Hadith* [The Pearl of Bahrain in Licences and the Biographies of Men of the Hadith] (Bahrain: Fakhrawi Bookshop, 2008 [c.1768]), 425.

¹⁵ Ottoman document: Journal 713, Hukim 2518, 1113 AH (1701 AD), Mission Booklet 111; Letter of Ali Pasha Governor of Basra to Ottoman Sultan as cited in Ali Abahussain, "A Study of the History of the Utub", *Al-Watheeka* 1 (July 1982), 25-42; Quoted in B. J. Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 70.

¹⁶ B. J. Slot, *The Origins of Kuwait*, 71

Ahmad bin Muhammad, father of Shaikh Khalifa al-Kabir, was alive and one of the Utub leaders at the time of the settlement according to al-Tajir,¹⁷ or whether it was Shaikh Khalifa al-Kabir himself, not his father, who was one of the Utub leaders overseeing the settlement of Kuwait according to al-Khairi.¹⁸ Shaikh Khalifa al-Kabir in turn would have two sons, Shaikh Muhammad, who founded the dynasty, and Shaikh Fadhil, who founded the Al Fadhil family known in Bahrain today.¹⁹

The evidence cited above allows us to deduce that the heads of the Al Khalifa family migrated from their Central Arabian ancestral home, al-Haddar, to the regions of Hasa and Qatar in Eastern Arabia in the second half of the seventeenth century. It was there that they participated in the formation of the al-Utub tribal alliance, which established itself as a regional naval power. From there they migrated to the upper Gulf after clashes with other regional powers such as the Huwala Arabs. They tried to settle in Basra in Ottoman Iraq for a short while before they decided to leave; finally settling in Kuwait, a then barren and empty region, but one that afforded them a good

¹⁷ Muhammad al-Tajir, *Aqd al-la'al fi tarikh Awal* [The Necklace of Pearls in the History of Awal] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 1994 [1925]), 101.

¹⁸ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 212.

¹⁹ Bashar al-Hadi, *Al Fadhil al-Utub Wa Dawruhum al-Siyassi wal Ijtima'i fi al-Khaleej al-Arabi A'ala Madaa Thalathat Quroon 1700-2000* [Al Fadhil al-Utub and their Political and Social Role in the Arabian Gulf 1700-2000] (Bahrain: unknown Publisher, 2009), 20 and 32-33. Although the field of genetic genealogy is still young but it helped to further assure this agnatic relationship. There currently exists Y DNA genetic tests that compares between genetic the Y chromosomes of two males to establish if they have an agnatic relationship or not and if yes how far back in time..The author of this thesis whose full name is Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Hasan bin Ali bin Muhammad bin Khalifa bin Salman bin Ahmad al-Fatih bin Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir took such a test as did his friend Muhammad bin Hamad bin Nasser bin Abdullah bin Hamad bin Nasser bin Hamad bin Mubarak bin Khalifa bin Mubarak bin Khalifa bin Fadhil bin Khalifa al-Kabir as well as Salah bin Ali bin Muhammad bin Mubarak bin Hamad bin Mubarak bin Khalifa bin Mubarak bin Khalifa bin Fadhil bin Khalifa al-Kabir. The test confirmed that the three participants were agnatic cousins who shared a common ancestor roughly ten to twelve generations ago. The testing was done by Family Tree DNA (FTDNA) company. The results of the two individuals can be accessed through two public databases found at: http://www.familytreedna.com/public/Bani_Utbah_al-Utub/default.aspx?section=yresults,, http://www.familytreedna.com/public/Arab_T/default.aspx?section=yresults and at <http://www.familytreedna.com/public/Y-Haplogroup-K2/default.aspx?section=yresults>. Kit number for Abdulaziz Al Khalifa is E5174, Kit number for Muhammad Al Fadhil is M7046 and Kit number for Salah Al Fadhil is 233525. There are also results for other Utbi families in the Bani Utbah FTDNA project such as those of the Ruling family of Kuwait, the al-Sabah, al-Ghatam, al-Jalahma, al-Zayed, al-bin Ali, and al-Roumi.

naval base, in the early 1700s. The years between then and the mid-1700s were not very eventful ones for the Al Khalifa family, who were apparently heavily engaged in maritime commerce and the pearl trade. Those business activities and the relative stability offered by the port of Kuwait enabled the family to amass a very large fortune. That, coupled with their lineage, enabled them to enjoy a great deal of political power and influence within Kuwait. This is confirmed by a report made for the Dutch East India Company in 1756 that describes Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir as being wealthier than the paramount Shaikh in Grien (as Kuwait was known at the time), Mubarak bin Sabah.²⁰ It also states that both Shaikhs had equal power and authority over the Bani Utbah in Grien.²¹ Nevertheless, as the historical narrative reveals, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir did not remain in Kuwait for long after 1756, as he emigrated with his nephew Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil bin Khalifa and many followers to Qatar. At the time, Qatar was under the control of the al-Musallam family, vassals to the Bani Khalid in Hasa.²² It was in Qatar that Shaikh Muhammad succeeded in establishing the Al Khalifa as a dynastic political force in the Gulf region. He established the town of Zubarah as a commercial hub and then wrested control of Qatar from the al-Musallam family.

²⁰ This Shaikh is not mentioned in the modern official history of the al-Sabah family in Kuwait as one of the early rulers, although the family tree of the dynasty shows him as one of the sons of Shaikh Sabah I, founder of the al-Sabah dynasty as the ruling family in Kuwait.

²¹ Tido von Kniphausen and Jan van der Hulst, as quoted and reprinted in Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf: The Rise of the Gulf Arabs, The Politics of Trade on the Persian Littoral 1747-1792*, Chapter 2: *A Description of the Persian Gulf in 1756* [1756] (Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 2007), 34-35.

²² Fa'iq Tahbub, *Tarikh al-Bahrayn al-Siyasi, 1783-1870* [The Political History of Bahrain, 1783-1870] (Kuwait: Manshurat Dhat al-Salasil, 1983), 44; see also Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East vol ii*, Translated by Robert Heron (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2009 [1792]), 128. Niebuhr did not exactly say that the al-Musallam were rulers of Qatar but said: "Between the Territories of the Schiech (Shaikh) of Lachsa (Hasa), and the dominions of the Sovereign of Oman, are a numerous tribe, denominated Al Musallim, and possessing several considerable towns, the names of which are unknown to me."

4. Immigration to Qatar: Establishment of Zubarah and Dynastic Power

Why Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir migrated from Kuwait to Zubarah cannot be stated with absolute certainty. Traditional historical accounts vary. A possible reason, according to al-Nabhani's account, was that he was annoyed by the continued aggressions of the Bani Ka'ab Chiefs, who ruled Muhamarah on the Persian littoral opposite Kuwait.²³ Another possible reason is that Shaikh Muhammad, who had become a very rich and powerful man in Kuwait, had political ambitions that he felt he could not achieve by staying in Kuwait, so he chose to migrate. A new area would enable him to achieve his objectives and ambitions without damaging the family and tribal bonds between him and the al-Sabah family. Francis Warden differs, giving the reason for the migration decision as the desire of the Al Khalifa family head, who was also head of the mercantile branch of the Bani Utbah in Kuwait, not to share his accumulated wealth with the other Utub Chiefs in Kuwait. Allegedly, this prompted him to leave for Qatar where he managed to establish himself as an independent political chieftain.²⁴ Whatever the real reason or reasons driving Shaikh Muhammad to go to Qatar, it can be said with a fair amount of certainty that the migration took place after 1756. Shaikh Muhammad chose to relocate to an unspecified location near Zubarah, which at the time was a small town on the northeastern coast of Qatar, and make it his new home.

The inhabitants of Zubarah and its neighbouring towns and villages were a mixture of various tribes and clans. The largest and most prominent among them was the tribe of al-bin Ali, descending from the ancient Arabian tribe of Bani Sulaim, but

²³ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 82.

²⁴ Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 362-363.

also part of the Bani Utbah. They had emigrated from Kuwait at an earlier time and settled in Zubarah. The chief of the tribe at the time was Amr bin Juma'a bin Muhammad bin Ali.²⁵ After settling in Zubarah, Shaikh Muhammad apparently succeeded in gaining popularity and the respect of its inhabitants, and this was probably what prompted the tribes in and around the town to send him a delegation asking him to assume the role of chieftainship over them. Apparently, this offer worried Shaikh Muhammad, possibly because he feared that it would attract unwanted attention from and/or provoke the al-Musallam family who ruled Qatar at the time from their capital at Huwaila, also in northeastern Qatar. This family, as stated above, were vassals to the powerful Bani Khalid tribe that controlled most of Eastern Arabia at the time.²⁶ It is probable that this fear caused the Shaikh to refuse the offer, but the people of Zubarah tried again. They seem to have pointed out that his vast wealth and prestige among the tribes was not unnoticed by the wary eyes of the al-Musallam. They argued that if he came to live with them, their union would make them a force that the al-Musallam would have to reckon with. Shaikh Muhammad then decided to seek the advice of his nephew Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil and his other kinsmen and followers. They advised him to accept the offer.²⁷ It is quite possible that Shaikh Muhammad refused the initial offer made by them not out of fear of reprisals from the al-Musallam family, but because he was driven by another political motive—to test that the people of Zubarah really did want him as their Shaikh. He may have believed that immediate acceptance would have led them to take him for granted, so that he would have been unable to rally their support and obedience if he needed them in a dire political situation or in any endeavour that might have furthered his political interests and ambitions.

²⁵ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 215.

²⁶ Fa'iq Tahbub, *Tarikh al-Baḥrayn al-Siyasi*, 44.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 216.

Shaikh Muhammad told the people of Zubarah that he accepted their offer under certain conditions. We have no historical record of the precise details of these conditions, but there is agreement that their purpose was the well-being and common interest of all parties involved.²⁸ When Shaikh Muhammad arrived in Zubarah and became its Shaikh, he had a wife from the al-Sabah family with whom he had one son, Khalifa, as well as a wife from the al-bin Ali tribe with whom he had two sons, Ahmad—later known as Ahmad al-Fatih (Ahmad the Conqueror)—and Migrin. He now married a third woman, from the al-bu Kuwara clan, who gave him two sons, Ibrahim and Ali.²⁹ It is highly likely that this polygamy cemented the relationship of Shaikh Muhammad with the people of Zubarah and its tribes through a strong bond of blood and family.

Shaikh Muhammad probably realized that if he wanted to achieve any of his political ambitions he would need the tribal support that was then (and still is, largely) a very important political factor in the Gulf region. However, although he was an immigrant of noble lineage, he had no great tribal support in Qatar from his direct paternal line, so he would have raised it himself, by marrying into selected tribes. These tribes would be the ‘maternal uncles’ of his sons and would thus have probably felt obliged, even if not willing, to fight for him. In this way, he created a strong base of tribal support that would later be of valuable benefit to him and his successors. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir had five sons and a few daughters (his nephew, Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil, had five sons too), though we are sure neither of the number of his wives, nor from which tribes they came.³⁰ The progeny of the two men grew into two families, with today’s Al Khalifa springing from Shaikh

²⁸ Ibid, al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 83; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 216.

²⁹ Muna Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*. 53-54; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 217.

³⁰ Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil’s sons were Rashid, Ali, Mubarak, Muhammad and Faisal; he had seven daughters, too. For details see al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 214.

Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir, and today's Al Fadhil from Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil bin Khalifa al-Kabir. During the lifetimes of these two men, both families were under the leadership of Shaikh Muhammad.

According to al-Khairi, Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa adopted the policy of development in Zubarah. He funded the construction of a Grand Mosque and several smaller mosques. He also built and funded schools and constructed hostels for merchants arriving for trade in Zubarah.³¹ It is probable that his personal charisma and character made Zubarah an attractive centre of commerce, pearl trading and learning, and people from all over Qatar and Eastern Arabia sought to live there. With this impetus, Zubarah grew from a relatively small, unknown town to a large commercial hub in the region.³² Not surprisingly, this caught the unwanted attention of the al-Musallam, but Shaikh Muhammad, who appears to have been both cunning and wise, must have realized that diplomacy and shrewdness would achieve his goal. He probably pretended to submit to al-Musallam authority and kept paying them an annual tribute, showered them with gifts and fostered (at least on the surface) excellent relations with them. At the same time, he wasted no opportunity to sow discord among them and even deceive them when necessary.³³

The Shaikh probably used all of these tactics to buy the time for his town to grow in population and prosperity, and to increase his own financial ability and strength. That increased ability most likely enabled him to attract allegiance and fealty from an ever-increasing number of Qatari tribes. It was probably when he felt that his political position was secure that he built a formidable fort, which he named Sabha

³¹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 216-217.

³² Ibid, 217.

³³ Ibid, 217.

after his family's ancestral fort in al-Haddar³⁴ (the Zubarah fort also became known as Murair³⁵). Shaikh Muhammad also dug a water channel, guarded by fortified walls and watchtowers, to provide Zubarah with a secure and direct connection to the sea.³⁶ His apparent purpose was not only to make the town safe and secure its trade and livelihood, but also to prepare it for a long-term siege. The secured water channel would have made any land siege of Zubarah difficult while allowing small boats to smuggle provisions into the town with relative ease. The fort and its supporting outworks were completed by 1766 (1182 AH).

It was probably when Shaikh Muhammad had gained sufficient confidence in his strength that he dared to defy the al-Musallam family and suspend his annual tribute. The political situation in Hasa at the time might well have bolstered his decision, as internal conflict and quarrels over chieftainship had destroyed unity and weakened the powerful Bani Khalid tribal confederation, overlords of the al-Musallam family.³⁷ The al-Musallam would have been unable to call upon the Bani Khalid for support, being forced to rely solely on their sources and allies in Qatar to combat any threat. Shaikh Muhammad's tribute suspension naturally angered the al-Musallam, who threatened him with grim consequences if he did not stop his insurrection. The Shaikh remained defiant and the situation quickly turned hostile as armed conflict erupted between the al-Musallam of Huwaila and the Al Khalifa and their allies in Zubarah.³⁸ After a strenuous conflict, which the details of do not appear in written historical accounts, a final showdown took place near a town called

³⁴ The Sabha fort in al-Haddar still exists, but the one in Qatar was demolished by the Qatari government in the 1950s.

³⁵ It means "the bitter one" in Arabic.

³⁶ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 217-218.

³⁷ Ahmad Abu Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia* (London: Probsthain, 1988), 32.

³⁸ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 218.

Sumaisma, north of modern-day Doha.³⁹ It was in that battle that Shaikh Muhammad was finally able to destroy the forces and power of the al-Musallam family. After his victory, Shaikh Muhammad declared himself the ruler of Qatar and demanded submission and homage from the local shaikhs, all of whom acknowledged him and submitted to his authority.⁴⁰ This victory firmly established Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir as the founder of the Al Khalifa dynasty and ruler of Qatar. Zubarah served as the capital, becoming the political centre of a new shaikhdom whose ruler was interested in promoting its trade and commerce. See Figure 1.⁴¹

However, Shaikh Muhammad's economic ambitions were not easily achieved, as an unexpected political obstacle blocked his way, the first of several challenges to the Al Khalifa family's authority throughout its political history. That threat did not come from strangers but from people of the Bani Utbah. It came from the Shaikh's own tribal confederation—the al-Jalahma family.

³⁹ The name of the battle and its location come from undocumented oral sources by elders of the Al Khalifa family.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 218.

⁴¹ This map for the Al Khalifa dependencies of Qatar shows their control of the Peninsula at the time and is based upon a similar map done by James Onley in James Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century," *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 61.



Figure 1: Dependencies of the Al Khalifa Family in Qatar

5. The Challenge of the al-Jalahma

It is important to examine this early political challenge to the authority of the newly-established Al Khalifa dynasty, as the challenge and its ramifications caused recurring political and military threats from Rahma, the notorious warlord and archenemy of the Al Khalifa. The seeds of this enmity were sown during the episode described in this section.

Shaikh Muhammad's political success in establishing himself as the ruler of Qatar, coupled with his economic success in making Zubarah a commercial entrepôt, attracted the attention of his tribal cousins in Kuwait. After Shaikh Muhammad had left Kuwait, its politics rested in the hands of two families, the al-Sabah and the al-Jalahma. Tension, generated by political and economic rivalry, appears to have grown between them. The conflict persisted until the al-Sabah expelled the al-Jalahma from Kuwait altogether. The al-Jalahma sought and acquired refuge from their kinsmen in Zubarah. A few years later, however, they apparently tried to compete with the Al Khalifa for political power.⁴² Under the command of their chief, Jabir bin Athbi al-Jalahma,⁴³ the al-Jalahma moved out of Zubarah, settling at Ruwais, to the northeast. They increased and strengthened their fleet there before starting to engage in hostile activities against Zubarah and the Al Khalifa with naval attacks and raids.⁴⁴ Aggression like this would naturally have affected Zubarah's commerce and prosperity and put in jeopardy all Shaikh Muhammad's efforts to achieve his political and economic status. Shaikh Muhammad and his family must have felt compelled to crush this new threat before it developed into an all-engulfing danger. The Al Khalifa amassed a large force and successfully counter-attacked the al-Jalahma. During a

⁴² Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 363.

⁴³ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 218.

⁴⁴ Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 363.

fierce battle, many al-Jalahma men were killed, including their chief, Jabir bin Athbi, though his son Rahma managed to escape, along with some of his brothers.⁴⁵

Their victory over the al-Jalahma consolidated the Al Khalifa family's position as the chief political force in Qatar, but brought upon itself the animosity of a dangerous and resilient archenemy: Rahma, son of the rebel Jabir bin Athbi. As this dissertation reveals, Rahma would play an important role in the political and military challenges against the Al Khalifa family and Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Fatih in particular. Rahma is an important political icon, worthy of close examination by any student of the history the Gulf.

6. The Rise of Zubarah

With the al-Jalahma threat neutralised, Shaikh Muhammad resumed his efforts to advance the trade and commerce of Zubarah. The town, now the centre of a new shaikhdom, benefited commercially from some unexpected events that brought it, and the Shaikh, undreamed-of wealth. Zubarah was transformed into a very important town and regional trade hub, following the old Arab proverb "The fortune of some people lies in the misfortune of others."

Basra, the richest port city in the Gulf region and a major trade hub, was struck by plague in the spring of 1773. According to some estimates and reports, a death rate of between 3,000 and 7,000 people a day ended more than 200,000 lives in Basra and its neighbouring areas.⁴⁶ This figure would be astounding today; it was

⁴⁵ Ibid, al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 218, Francis Warden, "Sketch of the Proceedings (From 1809 to 1818) of Rahmah bin Jaubir Chief of Khor Hassan)", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 522.

⁴⁶ Abu Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia*, 86-87.

even more so then, and Basra's position as a commercial hub was compromised. Worse was to follow. On 16 March 1775, Karim Khan Zand, ruler of Persia, invaded Iraq, sending an army under the command of his brother, Sadiq Khan, to capture Basra. The city held out for more than thirteen months, but capitulated in April 1776, inaugurating a Persian occupation of Basra that lasted until 1779.⁴⁷

Shaikh Muhammad must have realized that much of the business traffic that went into the port of Basra would need another hub for its business activities, so he promoted Zubarah as a promising alternative trading hub and business centre. His success quickly made Zubarah a major commercial centre, especially as the merchants apparently found Shaikh Muhammad's lax trade laws, as well as a virtually non-existent tariff and tax policy, very attractive.⁴⁸ A proverb coined at the time reflects: *Kharab al-Basra A'amaar al-Zubarah* (Basra's demise is Zubarah's Splendour).⁴⁹

Events on the Arabian mainland may also have helped Zubarah's prosperity and population growth. Uraier bin Dujain, chief of the Bani Khalid tribe, the major power in Eastern Arabia, campaigned against his enemies in Najd. The campaign caused much damage in many Najdi areas and prompted many of its inhabitants, among them some wealthy merchants, to emigrate to Zubarah.⁵⁰ Shortly after the military campaign, its instigator died and a quarrel of succession erupted between his sons. This brought much instability to the area around Hasa, and many of its inhabitants, including scholars, poets, merchants and artisans, moved to Zubarah.⁵¹ Even people from Bahrain, which at the time was ruled, along with Bushire on the Persian littoral, by the Al Mathkooor family headed by the Persian vassal Shaikh Nasr,

⁴⁷ Ibid, 91-92; Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 363.

⁴⁸ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Ustoorah wal Tarikh al-Muwazi*, 252-253; Abu Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia*, 75.

⁴⁹ Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

were attracted by the thriving economic and social conditions of Zubarah. Many immigrated or at least shifted a large portion of their business to it.⁵² All these factors helped Zubarah grow into a magnificent town, both commercially and culturally, and its ruler, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, to become very rich and powerful. As we shall see, this civic and personal success aroused jealousy and unwanted attention.

7. Escalating Tensions 1777-1782

Chief among those that envied Zubarah its success and splendour was Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkooor, Persian vassal and ruler of Bahrain and Bushire. Persia at the time was under the Zand dynasty, headed by Karim Khan Zand. Shaikh Nasr was by origin a Sunni Arab, descended from the Matareesh tribe whose roots were in Oman, but who had migrated to Bushire on the Persian littoral of the Gulf in about 1646. By the mid 1700s, the Al Mathkooor family became Persian vassals, first to the Afsharid dynasty of Iran and then to the Zand dynasty, and were the rulers of Bushire. In 1753, Al Mathkooor added Bahrain to their dominions and agreed to pay the ruler of Iran, Karim Khan Zand, an annual tribute of 4,000 tomans.⁵³ The Al Mathkooors took very little notice of the growing power of the Utub in Zubarah under the leadership of Shaikh Muhammad Bin Khalifa al-Kabir, and were not particularly alarmed at first by his 1766 seizure of political control in Qatar. Possibly they were indifferent because they controlled the strategically and economically stronger dominions of Bahrain and Bushire. That unconcern vanished with the rapid rise of Zubarah as a commercial centre in direct contention with Bahrain; even Bahrainis had started to view Zubarah as preferable to Bahrain as a commercial hub. There can be little doubt that such

⁵² Ibid, 56; Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 363-364.

⁵³ Tahbub, *Tarikh al-Bahrayn al-Siyasi*, 46.

success inflamed the envy of the Al Mathkoor family, who most likely viewed Zubarah as an annoying and unwanted economic competitor.

The wealth of Zubarah also caught the attention of Karim Khan Zand, founder of the Zand dynasty in Iran, who saw it as the possessor of the wealth he had tried to acquire by invading Basra. Those riches had evaded him and found a safe haven in Zubarah, so in 1777 he ordered his vassal, Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor, to invade Zubarah and add it to the dominions of the Persian crown. Shaikh Nasr launched a campaign to capture Zubarah in 1777, but failed completely and was forced to call the invasion off.⁵⁴ His defeat did not quench his desire, and he was anxious to try again. He was hampered by Karim Khan Zand's death in 1779 and the ensuing civil war of succession among factions of the Zand dynasty. He made a couple of attempts between 1779 and 1781, but all ended in failure.⁵⁵ This aggression must have increased the tension between the Al Khalifa and Al Mathkoor families, and it triggered, later on, a conflict that would end in a military showdown between the two families—a showdown whose outcome would have immense and profound geopolitical effects on the whole Gulf region.

Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir, founder and head of the Al Khalifa dynasty, died in 1778 (1192 AH) after a long, eventful and successful life.⁵⁶ He must have been a man of extraordinary calibre and ability to create a shaikhdom for himself and his family in a place where only two decades or so earlier he was a relative stranger from Kuwait. In that short period, he was able to make himself a chief, transforming a relatively unknown settlement on the shores of the Qatar to one of the most important commercial and cultural centres of its time.

⁵⁴ Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 363-364.

⁵⁵ Tahbub, *Tarikh al-Bahrayn al-Siyasi*., 46-47; Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 56-57.

⁵⁶ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 218.

8. Reign of Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad Al Khalifa, 1778-1782

Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir was succeeded by his eldest son, Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad Al Khalifa. Shaikh Khalifa is described by historians as a man of great integrity, intellect and sound character.⁵⁷ He was a well-known religious scholar and a well-read, capable jurist of the Maliki school of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam as well as a famous poet and patron of literature.⁵⁸ Such characteristics in the Shaikh would have naturally made him much beloved to his subjects and no less charismatic than his late father. In fact, while most people viewed him as a very pious man, others allegedly thought that he had the supernatural and paranormal powers associated with some Sufi mystics.⁵⁹ During his reign, he continued to pursue his father's vision. Zubarah continued to grow and develop economically and culturally, its leaders capitalising on the chaos and instability that had struck Basra and Hasa by marketing the town as a suitable alternative commercial hub. The reign of Shaikh Khalifa also witnessed further clashes with Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor, who was repulsed on every occasion.

These successes notwithstanding, another threat had emerged during the reign of Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad. It came not from the Gulf region, but from Najd, central plateau of the Arabian Peninsula. Wahhabism was an alliance between an ultra-conservative Hanbali shaikh, Muhammad bin Abdulwahab al-Tamimi, and a local shaikh in southeastern Najd called Mohammed bin Saud. Ibn Saud, founder of the Al Saud dynasty, was the ruler of a small town called Diriyah. Within a few years that religious/political alliance turned into one of the most formidable geopolitical

⁵⁷ Ibid, 218-219; Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 84-85.

⁵⁸ Abahussain and Al Khalifa, Abdullah, *al-Bahrayn 'abra al-tarikh al-juz'a al-thani*, 205.

⁵⁹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 218-219; Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 84-85.

forces in the Arabian Peninsula.⁶⁰ Shaikh Khalifa disapproved of Wahhabism from an ideological standpoint, although the political ramifications and threats that Wahhabism could bring upon his shaikhdом might have exacerbated his distaste for it. In one of his known poems, he criticised Wahhabism as: “*a Bida’h* (False or harmful innovation according to Islamic jurisprudence) *that has been unheard of, which accuses of blasphemy all mankind, even monotheists* (Unitarians)...” As history shall reveal, Shaikh Khalifa’s criticism and fear of the Wahhabi movement were well justified.⁶¹ The religious/political movement of Wahhabism was to have a profound impact on the history and geopolitical structure of the Gulf region, the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic world in general.

At the end of 1196 AH (1782 AD), Shaikh Khalifa bin Mohammed went to perform the Muslim pilgrimage (the Hajj) to Mecca, leaving his brother, Shaikh Ahmad, as the deputy ruler of Qatar during his absence from Zubarah.⁶² During that time, a series of seemingly insignificant events triggered a major shift in the fortunes of the Al Khalifa family. The people of Zubarah needed to import goods from Bahrain, including dates, vegetables and fruits, as well as palm fronds and other products that grew on the islands but not on the barren peninsula of Qatar.⁶³ Qatar-Bahrain relations were already tense because of the aggressions of Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor, but now religion came between the two shaikhdoms, their rulers and inhabitants. The people of Zubarah and other subjects of the Al Khalifa in Qatar were permanently at odds with the Shia farmers and traders of Bahrain, many of whose people adhered to the tenets of the Twelver Shiite sect. According to some historical accounts, many Bahraini Shiites were extreme fundamentalists, maltreating Sunnis

⁶⁰ Abu Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia*, 103-104.

⁶¹ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 84.

⁶² Ibid, 84-85; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 219.

⁶³ Ibid, 85; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 219.

who lived on the islands as well as those who came to Bahrain for trade or work.⁶⁴ The atmosphere must have been very tense, with frictions not only between the two shaikhdoms and their rulers, but also between the two communities. The scene was set for conflicts and turbulent clashes.

In late 1782, Shaikh Ahmad, regent in Qatar, had a servant called Salim,⁶⁵ a very close aide to the Shaikh, much beloved and trusted by him to undertake many tasks for his household. According to al-Khairi, Salim was Shaikh Ahmad's Chief Mamluk.⁶⁶ Among his tasks was the purchase of goods from the islands of Bahrain, and one day Shaikh Ahmad sent Salim to buy some goods for him from the island of Sitrah in Bahrain.⁶⁷ According to al-Khairi, who describes the inhabitants of Sitrah at the time as being "fanatical" Shiites, Salim, who was buying supplies ordered by Shaikh Ahmad, seems to have got into an argument with one of them. It seems that the argument quickly escalated into violence and the Shiite seller rallied support from his fellow Shiites. A mob formed and attacked Salim and the men accompanying him. In the ensuing fight, Salim was murdered, his companions sustained substantial injury and their merchandise was looted. On their return to Zubarah, Salim's companions told Shaikh Ahmad what had happened. Allegedly, the Shaikh's fury prompted a vow to avenge Salim's death.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 219-220.

⁶⁵ Al-Nabhani uses the word *Khadim*, which means 'servant' in Arabic, while al-Khairi uses the word *Mamluk*, 'owned man' in Arabic which is a much more polite word than the common Arabic word for a slave, *Abd*, although they carry the same basic meaning. al-Nabhani names him Ismael, while al-Khairi names him Salim, and al-Khairi's version's might be correct because Salim is a name commonly used by the descendants of the Al Khalifa family's servants, while Ismael is not.

⁶⁶ Such a good relationship between shaikhs in the Arabian Peninsula and their 'slaves' is very well-known and common, presenting a striking contrast to the relation of master and slave in the Western world.

⁶⁷ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 85; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 220.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

There are two different accounts as to what happened. The first, by al-Nabhani, states that the Shaikh immediately dispatched a small vessel filled with armed men to go to Sitrah and take revenge against the murderer of Salim. The warriors were accompanied by some of Salim's companions who would have known and recognized Salim's murderer. When the contingent landed in Sitrah, it tracked down the murderer and killed him—and five other Sitrah citizens. The murderer would naturally have cried for help from his fellow villagers, many of whom got involved as they tried to rescue him. The avenging party suffered no losses.⁶⁹

The second account, by al-Khairi, states that Shaikh Ahmad, although greatly upset at the news of Salim's death, decided not to take any drastic measures but to try to resolve the problem through diplomacy. He sent a delegation of notables on his behalf to Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoo, who resided in Bahrain at the time. The delegation carried a message describing events in Sitrah, and a request for justice for Salim's murderer and the return of the looted goods. Shaikh Nasr was indifferent to this request and referred the case to one of his judges, a fundamentalist Shiite who, according to al-Khairi, discarded the testimonies of the Sunni witnesses and ruled in favour of the Shiite defendants. When the delegation returned to Zubarah and told Shaikh Ahmad, their news prompted a "fit of rage," as al-Khairi puts it. In his anger, Shaikh Ahmad made a decision that would have severe repercussions. He organised a contingent of armed men and ordered them to raid Sitrah. They obeyed his orders, killed some Sitrah men and plundered the area, returning to Zubarah victorious and laden with war booty. When news of this reached Shaikh Nasr, he was naturally infuriated.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 85-86.

⁷⁰ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 220-221.

Shaikh Nasr's fury was probably compounded by his view of the Utubs of Qatar, under the leadership of the Al Khalifa family, as his inferiors. Up to that point, he had been the attacker, not the attacked. He apparently decided to put the Al Khalifa in their place, organising a major aggression against Zubarah unlike all that had preceded it. Shaikh Nasr assembled a large army and sailed to attack Zubarah. In that endeavour, he was assisted by the orders of the Persian Ruler, Ali Murad Khan, that the Shaikhs of Bandar Rig, Genowa and Dushistan on the Persian Littoral should supply Shaikh Nasr with troops. The troops, at least 2,000 strong, assembled in Bushire and sailed to help Shaikh Nasr.⁷¹ Shaikh Nasr's forces, under the command of his nephew, Shaikh Muhammad, reached the shores of Qatar at low tide.⁷² They anchored their fleet near Ushayrij on the northwestern coast of Qatar, whence Shaikh Muhammad Al Mathkooor marched with his troops (more than 4,000 soldiers according to some estimates)⁷³ overland towards Zubarah.

News of the Al Mathkooor campaign had reached Shaikh Ahmad in enough time for the people of Zubarah to prepare themselves for the approaching enemy. When the forces of the Al Mathkooor reached the outskirts of Zubarah, Shaikh Muhammad camped with his troops as if to lay siege to the city. He then sent a message to Shaikh Ahmad and the people of Zubarah, a peace offering with humiliating conditions for the Utub.⁷⁴ The Al Khalifa tried to broker a peace deal with less harsh conditions, but Shaikh Nasr's nephew remained defiant. The showdown attracted the attention of other political forces and rulers of the Gulf. Apparently, some of them felt sympathetic to the Utub and tried to mediate between the two

⁷¹ Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 364; Warden describes the commander of the Al Mathkooor troops as Shaikh Muhammad, the nephew of Shaikh Nasr. However, local historians such as al-Khairi and al-Nabhani note that those troops were under the command of Shaikh Nasr himself. In this part of the thesis, I will rely more on Francis Warden's account.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 58.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

warring factions. One such was the ruler of Julfar (now Ras al-Khaima), Shaikh Rashid bin Rahma al-Qasimi, who tried to convince Shaikh Muhammad Al Mathkoor not to demand such demeaning conditions, but in vain. Shaikh Muhammad persisted in demanding degrading and humiliating conditions not just from the Al Khalifa but also from the people who lived in their capital, Zubarah.⁷⁵ One of these unrealistic conditions was that Shaikh Ahmad, his family, and the people of Zubarah should surrender unconditionally. He also demanded that they offer him some of their slaves and women as *Sabaya*⁷⁶ for him and his troops.⁷⁷ Such unrealistic and degrading demands would certainly have angered the Utubs and the people of Zubarah and would have had the opposite effect to the one intended. Instead of being cowed into submission, they would have become even more supportive of the Al Khalifa and vehemently determined to fight the troops of the Al Mathkoor.

Was there any logical reason or explanation for Shaikh Nasr's and his nephew's unrealistic demands? It is very probable that Shaikh Nasr was not serious about them and wanted no peace-offering. Possibly he was not particularly concerned about the Sitrah incident. His real intention was probably to destroy Zubarah simply because it was a tiresome commercial rival to Bahrain. It is quite plausible that he thought of the destruction of Zubarah as a way to transfer its commercial traffic to Bahrain. As we have seen, Zubarah had become a major trade hub very rapidly and had attracted commercial traffic from the entire Gulf region, including Bahrain. Shaikh Nasr had tried to capture Zubarah earlier, under orders from Karim Khan Zand of Persia, but probably he was simply obeying orders and had no ulterior motive. This

⁷⁵ Hamad Al Khalifa, *First Light: Modern Bahrain and its Heritage* (London; New York: Kegan Paul International, 1994), 46; Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 58.

⁷⁶ An Arabic term that usually applies to women, children and slaves captured in war, a condition that might subject them to slavery. Such a practice was common before the advent of Islam, and the Islamic religion highly discourages it against non-Muslims, unless they practice it first, and explicitly forbids it among Muslims.

⁷⁷ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 86; Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 58-59.

attack seems to have been different. By late 1782, Zubarah had probably grown too rich and commercially attractive for Shaikh Nasr's taste, so that he was just looking for an excuse to invade it. The Sitrah incident and the great anger it generated among the Shia population in Bahrain might have been just the pretext that Shaikh Nasr was looking for. He took the opportunity to capitalise on public anger and recruit some of the populace as soldiers for an invasion. It is believable that all his conditions and demands hid his true intention—to destroy a rival commercial power by provoking the Al Khalifa into war. He was probably very confident of his forces and his ability to win the battle. Victory would have enabled him to capture and destroy the town and its port, stopping it from eclipsing Bahrain as a trading hub and commercial entrepôt. Shaikh Nasr seems to have failed to recognise, during previous encounters, the true strength of the Utub. His apparent mistakes—underestimating the Utub and overestimating his own capabilities—had dire consequences for him.

9. Battle of Zubarah

When all efforts for peace were exhausted, war loomed over Zubarah. Shaikh Ahmed and his people probably saw that it was useless to try to negotiate with Shaikh Nasr's nephew and were sure he was determined on conflict. The size of Shaikh Muhammad Al Mathkooor's force would have appeared daunting, but the consequences of failure on the fates of their women and children must have filled them with a zealous fighting spirit.⁷⁸ Shaikh Ahmed placed some of his troops on the hilltops and high grounds around Zubarah, keeping the main battle forces under his command on the outskirts of Zubarah. People from all over Qatar came to the support of their Shaikh, probably boosting morale for Shaikh Ahmad's side while having the opposite effect on the

⁷⁸ Ibid; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 222.

enemy.⁷⁹ After a few initial skirmishes, Shaikh Nasr's army launched a full-out attack against the forces of the Utub on 15 November 1782 (9 Dhul Hijja 1196 AH).⁸⁰ See Figure 2.⁸¹

Shaikh Nasr's nephew, Shaikh Muhammad, could not have chosen a worse date for his attack. First, it was a Friday, the day of worship and prayer for Muslims. For Shaikh Muhammad, a Muslim, to select it would probably have made him look impious, if not outright vile. Such a bad image may have made the Utub more eager to fight him, and maybe his own side lost some of their respect for their leader. The chosen day may have been bad, but the chosen month was worse. The Arabic month of Dhul Hijja, the last month of the Islamic year, is one of the four Hurum (forbidden) months in which the launch of armed aggression is forbidden in the Islamic faith. Worst of all was that 9 Dhul Hijja is the Day of Arafat. Arafat is the mountain where Muslim pilgrims from all over the world gather to perform one of the most important obligations of Hajj: to pray to God and meditate calmly. It is the most important day of the pilgrimage and the one that directly precedes Eid al-Adha (also known as *el Eid al-Kabir*, the Great Eid). Shaikh Muhammad's timing probably had a negative impact on the troops of the Al Mathkoor and may have boosted the morale of the Utub, who would have felt that they held the moral ground—Shaikh Muhammad must have looked bad to his own men and his enemies alike. For some unknown reason, Shaikh Muhammad Al-Mathkoor seems to have been oblivious to this gaffe.

⁷⁹ Hamad Al Khalifa, *First light: Modern Bahrain and its Heritage* (London; New York: Kegan Paul International, 1994), 47.

⁸⁰ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 222.

⁸¹ Based on a map done by Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in *Al-Dhue'a Al-Awal* [First Light] (Bahrain: Government Press of Ministry of Information, 1986), 98.



Figure 2: Battle OF Zubarahh 1782

When the two sides clashed, a vicious battle soon ensued. According to some historical accounts, Shaikh Ahmad and his men imprisoned the women of their tribe in a large warehouse filled with gunpowder and sprayed with oil. They kept a few men near the warehouse, telling them that if they saw the Utub defeated, they should set fire to the warehouse and then escape. The apparent purpose of this seemingly brutal act was to prevent the women and children from falling into the hands of the Al Mathkoor and their troops,⁸² a purpose that graphically illustrates the Utub fear for the fate of their women and children should they be defeated.⁸³ Even those accounts that do mention the warehouse plan describe a battle of a very vicious nature between the two armies. According to local accounts, Shaikh Ahmad and his troops managed to hold their ground and fought with such ferocity and valour that they struck terror into the hearts of the soldiers of the Al Mathkoor.⁸⁴ The course of the battle was certainly in Shaikh Ahmad's favour. His steadfast men succeeded in holding their ground, while their enemy, unable to break through the formations of the Utub, lost their fighting spirit quickly. It was probably at that moment that Shaikh Ahmad decided to deliver a killer blow. He ordered a section of his men, the al-bin Ali clan of nearby Fureiha, to strike Shaikh Muhammad's rear while the guardians of the high ground struck on either flank. Already in difficulty, the forces of Shaikh Muhammad were devastated by the savage, sudden attack and their formation disintegrated completely. Once they had they started fleeing in panic, the slaughter began. The troops of Shaikh Muhammad were far from their ships and this allowed the forces of the Utub to hunt them down and kill them.⁸⁵ Chief among the victims of this bloodbath was Shaikh Muhammad himself, and many Al Mathkoor soldiers were killed before they could

⁸² Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 86; Many elders of the Al Khalifa family recall this incident as part of the oral tradition and history of the family.

⁸³ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 222; Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Uttub*, 58.

⁸⁴ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 86-87; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 222.

⁸⁵ Hamad Al Khalifa, *First light*, 48.

reach their ships, moored near Ushayrij. Those that did reach them were transported to Bahrain. The Utub, led by Shaikh Ahmad and his family, had won a stunning victory.⁸⁶ There is, however, something about the warfare style of the Utub that makes it strangely different from all their other battles. Their ferocity was seen only in that battle, and in no other did they seem so intent on actively killing fleeing enemies.⁸⁷ A probable explanation for such behaviour is that the Utub felt gravely insulted by the degrading demands made by the Al Mathkooor regarding the former's women and children. That might have been the spur that drove them to fight their enemies viciously and mercilessly, in a state of frenzy.

10. Aftermath of the Battle

The Utub victory over the numerically superior and well-armed troops of the Al Mathkooor would have profound ramifications for the geopolitical structure of the Gulf region. First, it must have made the Utub realize how strong they really were. It seems that before that battle they had viewed their military strength as inferior to that of Shaikh Nasr. Nonetheless, their spectacular victory on that day may have made them realize their true abilities, while at the same time allowing them to believe that they could conquer the isles of Bahrain. Bahrain is a historically strategic location in the Gulf region, with fertile agricultural land, abundant wells, springs of fresh water, and one of the best pearl fisheries in the world. Such advantages made the capture and control of these islands very attractive and lucrative for any political power. The Utub were no exception.

⁸⁶ Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 364; Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 87; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 223.

⁸⁷ Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 59.

Shaikh Nasr must have been shocked by the humiliating defeat of his troops and the death of his nephew. Naturally, he would have been very angry and bent on revenge. Even in his anger, he probably recognised that his military strength was not adequate to defeat the Utub without help. He sought aid from his Persian overlords, crossing to his domain of Bushire on the Persian littoral to seek the help of the Persian government. Shaikh Nasr contacted the governor of Shiraz, but as we shall see, his pleas would be ignored. Persia was in a state of turmoil, caught in a violent and devastating civil war and unable to help Shaikh Nasr. After the 1779 death of the powerful ruler and founder of the Zand dynasty in Persia, Karim Khan Zand, his relatives fought a vicious civil war over his succession. One set of belligerents included his brother Zaki Khan and his two sons Mohammed Ali Khan and Abul Fath Khan, opposed by his other brother, Sadiq Khan, in alliance with his nephew Ali Murad Khan. Among the other seekers of the Persian crown and a major player in this civil war was Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar, future founder of the Qajar Dynasty of Persia. Such a situation made Shaikh Nasr's stay in Persia a dangerous waste of time and energy, especially as he seemed unaware of the danger that was now looming over his domain in Bahrain.⁸⁸

As we have seen, Shaikh Ahmad and the Utub had realized their military power and ramped up their ambitions. They were now probably considering themselves equal to the task of capturing the rich, wealthy isles of Bahrain from the hold of the Al Mathkoor family. They would have seen the internal situation of Persia as an opportunity for them to seize the initiative and attempt a conquest of Bahrain. Even so, Shaikh Ahmad apparently decided not to make a hasty decision while his brother, Shaikh Khalifa, ruler of Qatar, was away. He never returned, dying in Mecca,

⁸⁸ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 224; Willem Floor, *Rise of the Gulf Arabs*, 302-303, 305-306, 308-309.

probably from an infectious disease, after he had performed the Hajj.⁸⁹ When news of this reached Zubarah, Shaikh Ahmad was acknowledged as the new ruler of Qatar, third of the Al Khalifa dynasty to hold the post. He was ready to execute his invasion plan. After some consultations in what al-Khairi calls a *Majlis al-Shura*,⁹⁰ Shaikh Ahmad and his men set down the plans to invade Bahrain and to capture it from the Al Mathkooor family. At the same time, they agreed that they would pay any tribute demanded by the Persian government,⁹¹ even though they probably knew that Persia's naval force was weak, with her maritime support dependent on the navies of the Arab shaikhs controlling the Persian littoral. More likely than not, the Utub were confident of their ability to defeat or at the very least to buy off such shaikhs. Why, then, were they so cautious?. A possible reason is that the Utub did not want to have to compete for Bahrain with any of the shaikhs of the Persian littoral, and that a refusal to pay tribute would bring one or more of these shaikhs against them, sailing under orders from their Persian masters.

Persia's internal strife was certainly a major factor encouraging the Utub to attempt the capture of Bahrain. A second factor confirmed their decision: the internal situation of Bahrain itself. This is explained in the next section.

11. The Conquest of Bahrain

After Shaikh Nasr's defeat at Zubarah and his journey to Persia, the internal situation in Bahrain was one of instability and internal discord. The apparently long-running disputes and quarrels between segments of the population were now intensified, though the three major accounts seem confusing and contradictory. One states that the

⁸⁹ al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 84; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 219.

⁹⁰ Roughly, "Consultative Council".

⁹¹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 226.

problem was a quarrel between two different Shia factions that made up the bulk of the population of the islands at the time. The other states that it was a sectarian quarrel between a Sunni faction and a Shia faction. The third is similar to the first, but with different names for the belligerents and their urban centres. All accounts are presented in this section.

The first account describes a quarrel between the two main Shiite factions of Bahrain. The Northern faction was under the leadership of the Al al-Shaikh family with its headquarters in the town of Jid Hafis, while the al-bin Ruqayyah family led the Southern faction, whose headquarters were in the town of Tubli.⁹² There was great inter-factional rivalry, with the Northern faction having a slight edge because of their numerical and financial superiority. The Northerners habitually acted aggressively towards the Southerners, and violent clashes were frequent.⁹³ Shaikh Nasr's government was often too weak to stop the aggression of the Northerners against the Southerners, and anyway tended to ignore the problem, making no effort to establish peace and mutual respect between the two factions. Shaikh Nasr was probably more concerned with reaping the financial benefits of the pearl fisheries in Bahrain than with trying to bring about internal cohesion.⁹⁴

When Shaikh Nasr left Bahrain for Persia to seek help against the Utub, he appointed Sayyid Madan bin Sayyid Majid, head of the Al al-Shaikh family and the Northern faction, as the deputy ruler of Bahrain during his absence. The new authority probably heightened the Northerners' abusive, aggressive behaviour towards the Southerners. This extra aggression, as well as the perceived length of Shaikh Nasr's

⁹² Nasser Al-Khairi places the headquarters of the al-bin Ruqayyah in Tubli; See al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 224. Muhammad al-Tajir, on the other hand, places it at the town of Bilad al Qadeem; See al-Tajir, *Aqd al-la'al*, 104. I relied more on al-Khairi's account here because it agrees with oral history accounts recited by both Sunnis and Shiites in Bahrain.

⁹³ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 224-225.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 224; Tahbub, *Ta'rikh al-Bahrayn al-Siyasi*, 46-47.

absence, is probably what prompted Sayyid Salman al-bin Ruqayyah, leader of the Southerners, to contact the Utubs in Zubarah.⁹⁵ In his message, he explained the internal situation in Bahrain to Shaikh Ahmad, encouraged him to invade and promised that his faction would be their faithful allies and offer all the help they could muster. When Shaikh Ahmad received the message, he called a council with his family members and trusted advisers. After some deliberation, the men attending the council reached a decision to invade Bahrain.⁹⁶

Shaikh Ahmad assembled an army and set sail, with a fleet under his direct leadership, from Zubarah, determined to conquer Bahrain. They arrived near the coast of the island of Sitrah at dawn and defeated its small garrison. His troops then set out to take the village of al-Nabih Salih, where Salman al-bin Ruqayya and his followers came out to greet and accompany them. When the news reached Bilad al-Qadim, the people were naturally alarmed and sent an envoy to Sayyid Madan, deputy ruler of Bahrain, to warn him about the invasion. Sayyid Madan wasted no time in assembling the garrison under his command before marching to confront the invading forces of the Utub. The armies met on a plain, near the area known today as Souq al-Khamis, for a bloody and violent showdown.⁹⁷ A vicious battle took place and, according to al-Khairi, Sayyid Madan showed remarkable courage. However, the battle turned in favour of Shaikh Ahmad and his forces. As defeat looked certain for his troops, Sayyid Madan made a last attempt at retaliation but in that offensive he was killed by Shaikh Ahmad's forces. The death of Sayyid Madan must have destroyed what

⁹⁵ Al Khairi names him Salman; See al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 228. Al-Tajir on the other hand names him Ahmad; See al-Tajir, *Aqd al-la'al*, 104.

⁹⁶ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-la'al*, 104-105; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 226.

⁹⁷ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 226-227.

fighting spirit his troops retained, and all the survivors fled the battlefield. The defenders had been routed.⁹⁸

The second account gives sectarian tensions as the cause of internal squabbling in Bahrain. The Shiite faction was under the leadership of Hajji Madan⁹⁹ and based in the town of Jid Hafis. Their opponents were Sunnis, led by Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Majid, with headquarters in the town of Bilad al-Qadim.¹⁰⁰ The Sunnis of Bahrain were allegedly oppressed by the Shiites and Shaikh Nasr himself, whose main preoccupation appears to have been with reaping the benefits of the pearl fisheries; he seems to have been indifferent to their grievances. This prompted the Sunni faction to send a messenger to Shaikh Ahmad in Qatar, encouraging him to invade Bahrain and rescue them from oppression.¹⁰¹

The third account, by al-Tajir, is very similar to the first, but he names Sayyid Majid al-Jidhafsi (a Shiite) as the head of a faction whose headquarters were in Jid Hafis. He names Shaikh Ahmad bin Ruqayya al-Biladi (also a Shiite) as the head of another faction, headquartered at al-Bilad al-Qadim. He claims that the two men were maternal first cousins quarrelling over money and authority, but agrees with the first account that the man who led the battle against the forces of Shaikh Ahmad in Bahrain was Shaikh Nasr's deputy, Sayyid Madan al-Jidhafsi.¹⁰² It should be noted here that each of the three accounts might have a certain bias. It can be said that al-

⁹⁸ Ibid, 227.

⁹⁹ It is interesting to note here the difference of title, as Hajji is a title given to those who have performed the rites of Islamic Pilgrimage (Hajj), while Sayyid designates an agnatic descendant of one of the two maternal grandsons of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), namely al-Hasan and al-Hussain whose father Imam Ali also happens to be an Agnatic first cousin of the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁰⁰ The town of al-Bilad al-Qadim today is predominantly Shiite, so it seems odd that it was a Sunni stronghold then. Nevertheless, such things are known to have happened: the town of Arad used to be predominantly Shiite but is now considered a Sunni majority town.

¹⁰¹ Tahbub, *Ta'rikh al-Bahrayn al-Siyasi*, 48-49.

¹⁰² He names him Emir Madan al-Jidhafsi. According to al-Tajir, the mothers of al-Biladi and al-Jidhafsi were sisters. See also al-Tajir, *Aqd al-la'al*, 104-105.

Tajir might be biased against Shaikh Ahmad and his men because of his own sectarian background. Al-Tajir came from a Shiite family in Bahrain and his historical account is the one most accepted by them. He implies that the Utub conquest was a harsh affair. Tahbub and al-Khairi, both Sunnis, depict the conquest as glorious, portraying Shaikh Ahmad as a noble leader who committed no unnecessary cruelties during his conquest of the islands. Their sectarian backgrounds may have influenced their judgements and consequently their accounts. The truth may lie between the two distinct accounts. Even so, it is necessary to say that al-Tajir relies heavily on al-Khairi in writing his history of Bahrain, as he himself acknowledges at the beginning of his book.¹⁰³

After his victory over the forces of Sayyid Madan, Shaikh Ahmad proceeded with his forces in the direction of Manama. Although he had defeated the forces of Sayyid Madan (and killed him), he apparently knew that the family of Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor was in Diwan fort, Manama, the seat of government at the time. When news of the result of the battle of Souq al-Khamis reached Shaikh Nasr's family, they hid with a small force in Diwan fort. When Shaikh Ahmad and his forces reached the outskirts of Manama, he laid siege to the fort. It is likely that he did not want this siege to last long and wanted a quick showdown. He probably realized that the fort was lightly defended. One of the locals seems to have given him information that enabled him to achieve his purpose. The water supply of Diwan fort came from a little spring called al-Mishbir¹⁰⁴ that flowed out of the fort and irrigated date gardens to the north. Its cover had only a few holes to allow the access of sunlight and fresh air. The Shaikh assigned a small group of trusted and battle-hardened warriors the task of sneaking into the fort through this subterranean spring so they could open its doors

¹⁰³ See al-Tajir, *Aqd al-la'al*, 11-12.

¹⁰⁴ There is a district in the old city of Manama that still carries this name today.

from the inside and admit his troops. The “special forces” mission was apparently successful, and Shaikh Ahmad soon gained control of the fort. Another force loyal to Shaikh Nasr had taken refuge at the fort of Bahrain (known locally as the Portuguese Fort and was an old fort that was built by the portugese when they occupied Bahrain in the 1520s). Shaikh Ahmad besieged it, but it was much better fortified than Diwan, and it was not surrendered for a month, when the defenders presumably realized that Shaikh Nasr had had his day, especially as more Utub forces arrived from Qatar daily. They must have decided that their resistance was in vain and surrendered. The Utub conquest of Bahrain under the leadership of Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifa was complete.¹⁰⁵ See Figure 3.¹⁰⁶

Shaikh Ahmad and his forces had managed to conquer Bahrain with relative ease. There are no records of a public outcry against the invaders, and the battle of Souq al-Khamis seems to have been the only major confrontation apart from the two sieges. This might give us an insight into the state of Bahrain under the government of Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor, who had apparently failed to build a solid base of support for himself. It seems that he was more interested in using Bahrain as an economic generator than in nurturing support among its inhabitants. This is also clear from the fact that he did not make a single attempt to regain Bahrain from the control of Shaikh Ahmad. He might simply have feared Shaikh Ahmad’s military strength, but probably he was well aware that his popular support in Bahrain could not match that enjoyed by Shaikh Ahmad in Qatar. The people of Qatar (and all the Utub) who apparently supported Shaikh Ahmad enthusiastically, and Qatari tribesman made up the bulk of his force.

¹⁰⁵ Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 60-61.

¹⁰⁶ This map was drawn based on the accounts of al-Khairi and al-Tajir in addition to various traditional oral accounts.



Figure 3: Conquest of Shaikh Ahmed of Bahrain 1783

Shaikh Ahmed officially became ruler of Bahrain on 20 May 1783 (18 Jumada Al Akhira 1197 AH). That date was remembered by the saying *Ahmad sar fi Awal Khalifa*,¹⁰⁷ “Ahmad became a Caliph in Awal”.¹⁰⁸ Shaikh Ahmad displayed what can be described as benevolence and chivalry in his treatment of the family of Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkooor. He forbade any harm to be done to them and allowed them to return safely to Bushire, taking with them all their belongings.¹⁰⁹ This humane act may have other interpretations. It might have been highly influenced by religious and Bedouin values, but he might have reasoned that, if he imprisoned the family, Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkooor would have felt compelled, for reasons of honour, to launch an attack on Bahrain regardless of cost. He might have found sympathetic allies, and Shaikh Ahmad obviously did not want to give him such an opportunity. At the same time, Shaikh Ahmad must have needed to hold the moral high ground with his followers and men. He probably did not want to look as vile as Shaikh Nasr had when he attacked Zubarah. Shaikh Ahmad would go down in history as Ahmad al-Fatih (The Conqueror).¹¹⁰

Once he had become ruler of both Qatar and Bahrain, Shaikh Ahmad divided his time between his capital, Zubarah, and his newly acquired territory of Bahrain. He would spend the summers in Bahrain and the rest of the year in Zubarah. During his absence, a cousin, most likely Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Fadhil, was his deputy in Bahrain, bearing the title *Qa'im Maqam*.¹¹¹ During the rest of his reign, many of Shaikh Ahmad's subjects migrated from Qatar to Bahrain. The main reason seems to have been the attractive conditions of Bahrain, which boasted ample supplies of fresh

¹⁰⁷ In Arabic and Islamic tradition, each letter of the Alphabet corresponds to a number, and the calculation of letters in this phrase would equal 1197, the Hijri year in which the conquest of Bahrain happened.

¹⁰⁸ One of the historical names of Bahrain.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 227; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 87-88.

¹¹⁰ Ibid; Ibid.

¹¹¹ Al-Hadi, *Al Fadhil al-Utub*, 143-144; see also al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 228.

water and proximity to its agricultural lands and the pearl fisheries. Many settlers built *Firjan* (plural of *Fireej*, a neighbourhood or district) for themselves near the city of Manama. Others settled in the island of Muharraq and likely built the first block of the city of Muharraq, which would later become the seat of government of the Al Khalifa family. Shaikh Ahmad ruled Bahrain and Qatar for twelve years, dying in Bahrain in the early summer of 1209 AH (1795 AD). He left four sons. The older two, Salman and Abdullah, were adults, and both would become the rulers of Qatar, Bahrain and other dependencies. The younger two, Muhammad and Yusuf, were minors. Salman, as eldest son, succeeded his father in the rulership of Bahrain and Qatar with Zubarah as his capital.¹¹²

12. Conclusion

As this study shows, the history of the rise of the Al Khalifa family as a political dynasty is complicated and eventful. Their role in the region was, and is, a prominent one. Their rise to power in the late eighteenth century corresponds with that of the al-Sabah of Kuwait, the Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, the Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi and the Al Said of Oman. All these families are still in power, important players in the politics of the Arabian Gulf region and the wider Middle East. Bahrain was always at the centre of any regional change, conflict, commerce and politics. The progenitors of this family seem to have possessed certain characteristics that distinguish them from their rivals. Such characteristics probably helped them to gain political power and found a ruling dynasty in the region, and helped them succeed where others had failed.

First among such characteristics was the apparent pragmatism and industriousness of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir and his family. This

¹¹² al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 227-229.

chapter shows that they had learned the art of seafaring very quickly, so they must have been rapid adapters to new environments. Their pragmatism would prove very useful, as it probably gave them a lead in maritime activities over less practical immigrants. Such knowledge about sailing most likely enabled them to build a large fortune in a relatively short time. Abundant finances can bring much prestige and power, particularly in poverty-stricken Arabia before the discovery of oil. The Al Khalifa family would prove to be no exception. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir, the first and founding monarch of the dynasty, was successful in using his wealth, charisma and creative thinking to become a political leader. Such qualities most likely attracted many loyal followers who would happily fight under his name and who paved his path to rulership and the foundation of a dynasty.

The second characteristic that may have helped this family to succeed was their apparent internal solidarity and cohesion—between themselves as a family and even among their men. This would later prove to be crucial when they faced the numerically superior army of Shaikh Nasr at the battle of Zubarah. What probably helped in the achievement of cohesion between them and their men was their custom of having open *Majlises* with their followers, so that they were in direct contact with their subjects. That proximity would have made them sensitive, more aware of the needs of their people and able to forge strong bonds of internal solidarity. Good examples of the close relationship between the Al Khalifa family and their subjects is shown in what can be termed the polygamous marriage policy adopted by the founder of the family, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa Al Kabir. He would naturally have realized that, to cement his relationship with his new allies, he needed to ‘mix his blood’ with theirs. This probably compelled him to marry women from the al-bin Ali and al-bu Kuwara tribes, both of whom gave him sons. Arguably that was a wise

policy, probably making his allies feel they were his family members, as the sons of Shaikh Muhammad were viewed as their ‘nephews’. That would have probably made them fight through thick and thin for the sake of their father.

The third characteristic that may have helped the Al Khalifa against some of their enemies was the homogeneity of their subjects. The vast majority of the subjects of the Al Khalifa in Qatar were Sunni and had a tribal descent similar to that of the Al Khalifa. Their adversary Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor had followers from different ethnic and sectarian backgrounds. That may have weakened cohesion, so the followers of Shaikh Nasr may have not had the same depth of solidarity as that of the subjects of the Al Khalifa in Qatar—a major disadvantage.

The fourth characteristic that may have enabled the Al Khalifa family to reach prominence and defeat their adversaries was their financial strategy. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir focused on strengthening his economic position in Zubarah. He did not dare to challenge the rulers of Qatar at that time, the Al Musallam family, until he was confident of his financial position. His care for the economy of Zubarah allowed the town to grow to be a populous and rich settlement. That probably helped him gain more followers and allowed him to raise an army large enough to defeat the Al Musallam family and declare himself ruler of Qatar.

The fifth characteristic that may have helped the Al Khalifa family was ‘good fortune’ and ‘luck’ that presented the right opportunities at the right time and place. A good example of that can be seen in the weakening of the Bani Khalid, the strongest tribe in Eastern Arabia at the time. It ensured their inability to take revenge on Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir on behalf of their vassals, the Al Musallam family. They had even more good fortune when they were considering whether to attack

Bahrain. Karim Khan Zand had died, plunging Persia into state of chaos and civil war, denying Persian help to Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor after his defeat at Zubarah. That geopolitical opportunity must have encouraged the Al Khalifa to invade Bahrain secure from Persian retaliation, in their estimation. A second circumstance that may have helped them in their conquest of Bahrain was the internal discord between the people of Bahrain, whether factional or sectarian. Discord within Bahraini society ensured that, even if, for the sake of argument, the people disliked the Al Khalifa and their allies, they would have been unable to present a solid, united front against them. The conquest of Bahrain had lasting effects. From that date on, the islands of Bahrain were removed from the Persian sphere of influence. Bahrain became an 'Arab' country, entrenched on the Arab side of the Gulf both politically and culturally. Persian attempts to regain control of the islands continued but none succeeded. Consequently, the Utub conquest of Bahrain, under the leadership of the Al Khalifa family, had a profound impact on the geopolitical picture we see today in the modern Arabian Gulf region.

CHAPTER III

Joint Rule of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah: the Omanis, the Saudis, Rahma bin Jabir and the British, 1795-1825

1. Introduction

Shaikh Salman bin Ahmad Al Khalifa ruled Bahrain and Qatar from 1795 to 1825 AD. He became ruler upon the death of his father, Shaikh Ahmad “al-Fatih” Al Khalifa, in 1795. He was assisted in the task of rulership by his brother, Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, whose political role this study examines. Shaikh Abdullah was not a mere assistant or aide to his brother, but a junior co-ruler. His success in facing external threats to the Shaikhdom was of paramount significance in the history of the Al Khalifa dynasty and Bahrain.

This chapter gives us the first detailed study of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, showing the process of definition of his political role and demonstrating its significance in the history of the Al Khalifa family and Bahrain. Shaikh Abdullah’s efforts to neutralise the external threats against his family’s domains give us a fascinating example of how an Arab Gulf ruler in the early nineteenth century went about such a task. The first threat was that of an Omani invasion in 1801: the family felt that they could not resist by force, so had to enter into an unfavourable diplomatic deal in which Bahrain submitted to Oman, although the Al Khalifa and their allies

were allowed to keep Qatar and their estates in Bahrain. Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah had to give up their brother, Shaikh Muhammad, as a hostage to the Omani ruler, Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad Al Said of Oman and Zanzibar—Sayyid Sultan insisted on such a condition to guarantee that the Al Khalifa and the Utub did not try to attack Bahrain in his absence. Bitter though they must have been, they were able to oust the Omanis, with Saudi help, when circumstances changed. However, the *Saudis* apparently had their own ambitions and wrested both Bahrain and Qatar from the hands of the Al Khalifa. They too took hostages—shaikhs Salman and Abdullah and their cousin Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa—and held them in the Saudi capital, Diriyah. The family managed to get out of this predicament, kick the Saudis out of Bahrain and Qatar and rescue the three hostage Shaikhs, surprisingly with Omani help. Even then, the Saudi problem was not finally resolved until the battle of Akhakkira in 1811. A violent naval battle off the northwestern coast of Qatar between the Utub fleet under the command of Shaikh Abdullah himself and the Saudi fleet under the command of Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma and Ibrahim Ibn Ufaisan. The battle ended with an important victory for the Utub, who crushed the Saudi forces. That victory secured Shaikh Abdullah and his family from any further serious threats or intrigues from the Saudis for several years.

The Omanis then threatened Bahrain again, encouraged to invade by the machinations of Rahma bin Jabir. Shaikh Abdullah and his family chose to resist such Omani intrigues, and the conflict culminated in the 1816 battle of Maqta'a. Shaikh Abdullah was the chief strategist in organising the Bahraini resistance, relying on the assistance of two of his nephews, Shaikhs Khalifa and Ahmad, sons of his brother, the ruler Shaikh Salman. With their help, Shaikh Abdullah executed a defence plan that lured the Omanis into a trap of false security. At the *moment juste*, Shaikh Abdullah

switched to offensive mode, catching the Omanis by surprise. The battle ended with a signal defeat for the Omanis, their Sultan and Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma.

The events in this chapter conclude with the second official treaty between the British and the Al Khalifa after the 1816 friendship treaty between them. The 1820 treaty came in the aftermath of the British destruction of the centre of power of the Qawasim of Ras al-Khaima in 1819. The British launched that offensive because of what they saw as piratical acts by the chiefs of the Qawasim. The Al Khalifa apparently joined that treaty to exempt their ships from taxation at the hands of the Qawasim of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, fellow signatories to the treaty, who controlled the Strait of Hormuz and levied tax on all who passed through it.

The chapter presents an illustration of how local rulers in the early nineteenth century Gulf had to deal with a series of threats that compromised the integrity of their domains. It reveals how they had to face the grim reality of changing political allegiances, shifting alliances and unexpected turns of events.

2. First Omani Invasion of 1801

Shaikh Salman enjoyed peace of mind only for the first few years of his rulership before serious external threats arose. The first was the growing Saudi threat of the Wahhabis, under the leadership of the Al Saud family, whose head was Imam Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad Al Saud. By 1794 (1208 AH), the Saudis had extended their territories into Eastern Arabia and had captured Hasa and Qatif.¹ That naturally alarmed the Al Khalifa and the Utub, as the Wahhabi forces advanced ever closer to

¹ Nasser Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain fi Tarikh al-Bahrayn* [The Necklaces of Pearl in the History of Bahrain] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 2003 [c.1924]), 229.

Bahrain and Qatar. Soon, Prince Saud, son of Imam Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad, began to lead raids into Qatar.²

In 1798 (1212 AH), Shaikh Salman and the Al Khalifa seem to have decided that it would be safer to change their headquarters and the seat of government from Zubarah in Qatar to Bahrain. Shaikh Abdullah made the island of Halat Bu Maher, off the coast of Muharraq, his headquarters and built a fort on the remains of an older one. Shaikh Salman, on the other hand, first settled in the village of Jaou on the central eastern coast of Bahrain before moving to Riffa, in the centre of the island, where he too built a fort on the remains of an older one.³ The family's motives seem to have been tactical. They must have realized that, even though the Saudi ground troops outnumbered their own, the Al Khalifa had the upper hand when it came to fleets and naval warfare. The move increased the security of the Al Khalifa and their allies if a military conflict with the Saudis should arise between them and the Saudi forces. In the event, the first external threat came not from the Saudis but from foes from further afield.

As explained in Chapter II, there were groups in Bahrain that had been supporters of Bahrain's ruler, Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkooor. Members of those groups would naturally have lost much of their power and prestige after the Al Khalifa conquest of Bahrain in 1783, a loss that would have angered some of them into a resolution to reverse the situation in their favour. That disgruntled group contained mostly wealthy Shiite families. They secretly contacted Shaikh Nasr in Bushire on the Persian coast, and encouraged him to recapture Bahrain. Shaikh Nasr and his covert

² Ibid

³ Ibid, 229-230; Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabiya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluum, 1986 [c.1922]), 89-90.

allies and sympathisers in Bahrain must have realized that the Utub and the Al Khalifa had a strong hold on Bahrain and that ousting them would be very difficult. That became especially true after Shaikh Salman and his family made Bahrain their permanent headquarters and the seat of government. Shaikh Nasr and his allies therefore needed to seek help from a powerful ruler and ally if they were to recapture Bahrain. The conspirators approached Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad bin Said al-Busaidi, ruler of Muscat and Oman, offering him a large annual tribute if he would help Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor to recapture Bahrain. The offer seems to have been accepted, as Sayyid Sultan prepared his fleet and troops and then launched a campaign to seize the islands of Bahrain in 1801 (1215 AH).⁴

When the news of the approaching Omani invasion reached Shaikh Salman, he and Shaikh Abdullah determined to stand up to the Omanis and fight them,⁵ but received a disappointing reaction from their allies and followers. Their men were reluctant to fight the army of Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmed, who had gained considerable fame for his successful conquests in Eastern Africa.⁶ The Shaikhs must have realized that coercing their men to fight might have resulted in dire consequences, so they were probably prompted to seek an alternative policy, one that could have saved at least some of their domains. They sent an envoy to Sayyid Sultan, before he could reach Bahrain, with a message stating their willingness to be placed under his 'suzerainty' and their desire to meet and discuss the terms and conditions of the proposal. It seems likely that Sayyid Sultan was wary at the beginning, possibly

⁴ Ali Abahussain and Abdullah Al Khalifa, *al-Bahrayn 'abra al-tārīk al-juz'a al-thani [Bahrain Through the Ages]*, Vol II] (Bahrain: The Historical Documents Centre, 1991), 254. It also appears that Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad had sought to forge an alliance with the Wahabees to capture Bahrain and an agreement was apparently reached. For details see Letter from Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Bombay Government, 14 August 1801, Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 113(3), 4498, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁵ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 231.

⁶ Ibid; Muna Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Uttub; Al Khalifa fi Al Bahrayn, 1700-1970 [The History of the Uttub: The Al Khalifa in Bahrain 1700-1970]* (Bahrain: al-Mitb'ah al-Sharqiyah, 1991), 87.

suspecting a ploy by the Al Khalifa to trick him, lead him away from his fleet and then possibly assassinate him. He refused the offer, instead inviting Shaikh Salman and members of his family aboard his ship to discuss the conditions of suzerainty. The Shaikhs responded by giving Sayyid Sultan further assurances that they meant him no harm, stating that their sole intention was to reach an agreement beneficial to both parties. The assurances of the Shaikhs seem to have worked, as Sayyid Sultan agreed to meet them and the shaikhs of their tribal allies in Manama.⁷

At the meeting, the Al Khalifa brokered a deal with Sayyid Sultan in which they and their tribal allies would be allowed to keep their estates in Bahrain. They also managed to secure for themselves free access to the pearl fisheries. In return, they would relocate to Zubarah on the Qatari coast. Those conditions were acceptable but the Shaikhs agreed only very reluctantly to another—that Shaikh Muhammad bin Ahmed, the brother of the Shaikhs, would be kept as a ‘guest’ in Muscat. Sayyid Sultan most likely wanted to ensure that the Al Khalifa and their allies would not attempt to recapture Bahrain after he left. The Shaikhs did, however, convince Sayyid Sultan not to give Bahrain to Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkooor, but to install one of Sayyid Sultan’s own men as local governor. Sayyid Sultan probably already held such an intention anyway, but the persuasion of the Al Khalifa may have made sure of the outcome. The Al Khalifas’ probable object, of course, was to foil the conspirators’ plot at least partially, and in this they were successful. Sayyid Sultan appointed his

⁷ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 231-232. In a letter from the Naib (Deputy) of Sayyid Sultan in Maskat, Shaikh Saif bin Muhammad, to the Bombay Government we have a different version of events. It states that Sayyid Sultan, who also had military support from the Saudis, faced fierce resistance and first had to defeat the Utub at a fierce naval battle. He then lands his forces in Bahrain and had to fight another difficult land battle from which he emerged victorious. However it seems that Shaikh Salman was able to hold his troops together and sought a peace agreement with Sayyid Said in which the latter agreed to extend his protection for the life and property of the Utub in Bahrain in return for submission which indeed took place. For more details see Letter from Naib of Imam in Muscat to Bombay Government, 14 October 1801, Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 115(3), 5623-5624, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

brother Sayyid Salim (other sources name either one of his two sons Sayyid Said or Sayyid Majid) as local governor. The local Omani governor constructed the fort of Arad on Muharraq Island to serve as his headquarters in Bahrain.⁸

Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah and the rest of their family now returned to their dominions in Qatar. Many of their tribal followers relocated with them, returning to Bahrain only for pearling and commerce. According to David Seton, around 4,000 people crossed to Qatar.⁹ In Zubarah, the Shaikhs, naturally resentful, started thinking of a way to recapture Bahrain from the hold of Sayyid Sultan and to free their brother Shaikh Muhammad. They must have realized, of course, that any rash or reckless movement could bring more peril to them and make their political position even more precarious. Years passed before circumstances changed and presented an opportunity for the two Shaikhs, along with their family and tribal allies, to recapture Bahrain from the Omanis. As the next section relates, new circumstances arose that helped the Al Khalifa and their allies to achieve that goal.

3. Ousting the Omanis and Getting Entwined with the Saudis

In 1223 AH (1808 AD) Shaikh Muhammad bin Ahmed, the brother of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, died in Muscat.¹⁰ No available historical account indicates the cause of death—there are no hints that the Shaikh was killed or murdered but no confirmation that he died of natural causes either—but Muhammad's death rendered him useless as a hostage. Another factor favouring the Al Khalifa ambition to oust the

⁸ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Ustoorah wal Tarikh al-Muwazi* [*Muhamad bin Khalifa the Legend and the Corresponding History*] (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1996), 159-161.

⁹ Captain David Seton Diary, Bahrain, November 23, 1801, in *The Journals of David Seton 1800-1809*, ed. Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), 38; also see David Seton, *Bombay Diaries*, Diary 119/16-119/18.

¹⁰ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 91.

Omanis was the latter's religious persuasions, different from those of any sect in Bahrain. The Bahrainis, though nearly all Muslim, were divided into two main sects, Sunni and Shiite. Both sects revere the Prophet Muhammad's household (of whom his agnatic cousin and son-in-law, Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, was a paramount member), though the Shiites revere them in a way that is seen as exaggerated by the Sunnis. The Omanis, on the other hand, mostly adhere to the Ibadi sect of Islam and are highly critical of Imam Ali. Some Ibadi extremists do not revere the family of the Prophet very highly. Such sectarian differences could have prompted a degree of tension and incohesion between the Omanis and the people of Bahrain—a potentially useful situation for the Al Khalifa and their tribal allies if they were to try to recapture Bahrain. It probably prompted them to find and recruit supporters within the islands.

Important though these advantages were, it was the internal situation in Oman that was probably the most important political factor favouring the Al Khalifa. Oman suffered from political instability and was enmeshed in troubles.

In 1804, the ruler of Oman, Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmed, was killed in a skirmish with the Qawasim of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaima. This caused a succession issue between his son, Sayyid Said, who would later be Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar, and Said's paternal uncle, Sayyid Qais bin Ahmed, governor of Suhar. That conflict was settled after some violent clashes and an agreement was reached. Sayyid Said would have the domains of Muscat and its dependencies in addition to the overseas dependencies in Eastern Africa and Gwadar. Sayyid Qais would have the domains of internal Oman, though Sayyid Said managed to gain complete control of Oman later.

No sooner had Sayyid Said settled his dispute with his uncle than he was faced with an invasion by the Saudis, under the leadership of the Wahhabi commander

Mutlaq bin Muhammad al-Mutairi. Al-Mutairi led his troops into the strategic al-Buraimi area in 1807 (1222 AH) and amassed support from the tribes of the area, including the powerful al-bu-Ali tribe.¹¹

The Saudi forces now had enough support to grow in numbers and strength, prompting al-Mutairi to make further incursions into Omani territories. Alarmed, Sayyid Said amassed a large army and marched to meet the Saudi commander in a bloody showdown at the battle of Azka. The battle resulted in a spectacular victory for the Saudi forces and Sayyid Said was forced to retreat. Apparently not satisfied with one victory, al-Mutairi followed it up with further incursions into Oman, finally sacking the town of Mutrah, only two miles or so from Muscat. The Saudi advances eventually caused Sayyid Said to succumb to the Saudi commander. He offered to pay an annual tribute to the Saudi Imam in Diriyah, Najd, on condition that the Saudis retreated to al-Buraimi. The Saudi commander agreed and returned to al-Buraimi. The return was short-lived, however, and soon the Saudis started launching new raids into Oman. The Saudi commander, Mutlaq al-Mutairi, was killed in one raid, but his son Said assumed command of the Saudi forces and continued in his father's footsteps. Sayyid Said did not stop the raids and only managed to expel the Saudis from al-Buraimi in 1810 (1225 AH) with the aid of Britain.¹²

All these factors helped Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah to recapture Bahrain with the help of their allies. They appear to have decided to recruit an ally on bad terms with the ruler of Oman, so very logically made an alliance with the Saudis. Both Shaikhs, along with notables from their family and from Qatar, went to Diriyah to meet the Saudi Imam Saud bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud. They arranged to provide the

¹¹ Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 90-93.

¹² Ibid

naval transport and expertise to recapture Bahrain, while the Saudi Imam provided them with soldiers and protection from any future Omani invasion in exchange for a yearly tribute from Bahrain. Imam Saud sent an army under the leadership of Ibrahim Ibn Ufaisan. By late 1809 the allied troops of the Utub and the Saudis crossed over to Bahrain, where they defeated and expelled the Omani governor and his garrison. Once Bahrain was secure, however, Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah received an unpleasant surprise: Ibn Ufaisan refused to surrender Bahrain to them, claiming that he had no orders from Imam Saud to do so.¹³

The Al Khalifa now had a predicament. They had succeeded in removing one problem only to replace it with another by having helped the non-seafaring Saudis to cross into Bahrain. The Shaikhs apparently decided to retreat to Zubarah and correspond with Imam Saud regarding the actions of Ibn Ufaisan and the agreement they had brokered in Diriyah. Before they could even send a delegation, however, a Saudi contingent under the command of Sulaiman bin Saif bin Touq approached Qatar. Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah seemingly decided not to confront this army, possibly because they did not want to aggravate the already difficult situation with the Saudis. Instead, they appear to have decided to wait and see what that army would do. It entered Qatar and marched towards Zubarah. The Shaikhs chose to stay in the well-fortified town and sent an envoy to Ibn Touq to enquire about his arrival. Ibn Touq sent a message to the Shaikhs informing them that he meant them no harm. He explained that he was only an envoy from Imam Saud and desired the Shaikhs to meet him outside Zubarah, apparently to discuss an important message that he was carrying from the Imam. However, as soon as the Shaikhs reached Ibn Touq, he took them

¹³ Ibid, 92-93; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 91-92.

hostage and informed them that they must travel to meet Imam Saud in Diriyah.¹⁴ By this ruse, Ibn Touq had managed to capture Zubarah and subdue the rest of Qatar. He sent his hostages, Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, with many notables of Qatar and Bahrain, to Imam Saud in Diriyah. On arrival, the Imam separated Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah and their cousin Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Khalifa from the rest of the hostages, whom he freed and allowed to return to Qatar.¹⁵

Maybe the Shaikhs believed the false promises of Ibn Touq so readily because they may have feared inflaming the situation further. They may have reasoned that the Saudis refused to withdraw from Bahrain because they were wary of the Utub, whose seamanship would have given them an advantage over the Saudis had they been allowed to resettle in Bahrain—they might have suspended the payment of the annual tribute. Aware of this Saudi fear, Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah probably thought that their refusal to meet Ibn Touq outside Zubarah might have made the Imam's fears look more certain and inflamed his suspicions to the extent that he mounted a Saudi invasion of Qatar. The two Shaikhs probably decided to take the risk of meeting Ibn Touq outside Zubarah to alleviate some of the Saudi suspicions. They probably also believed that the almost puritanical Wahhabi doctrine of the Saudis would be a guarantee against treachery. They were wrong but, as the next section reveals, the three Al Khalifa Shaikhs were rescued and the plans of Imam Saud were foiled in a remarkable manner.

¹⁴ Muhammad Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal* [The Necklace of Pearls in the History of Awal] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 1996 [c.1924]), 107.

¹⁵ al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 92; J.B Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 126. However, Kelly mentions only the names of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah and not that of Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa.

4. Rescuing the Shaikhs and Expelling the Saudis

News of the Shaikhs' detention in Diriyah must have been distressing when it reached the Al Khalifa and Al Fadhil families and their allies. They would have started conspiring to liberate themselves from the Saudis and to rescue the imprisoned Shaikhs. At one of the darkest moments in the history of the Al Khalifa, into the arena stepped a man of the utmost courage, loyalty, bravery and cunning, ready to execute a dramatic rescue. Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil was an agnatic cousin of the Al Khalifa and a nephew of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, who were his maternal uncles.¹⁶ Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Fadhil devised a plan and told the Al Khalifa that he accepted responsibility for its execution. He had apparently realized, as we shall see later, that the Saudis were unaware of the close agnatic relationship between the Al Khalifa and Al Fadhil families. Probably deciding to use this ignorance in his favour, Shaikh Abdul Rahman created a plan in which he would play an overt role while the Al Khalifa remained covert.

Shaikh Abdul Rahman pretended to arrange to go to India for the purposes of trade and commerce, an action that would not raise Saudi suspicion, as he wanted no attention from the Saudi governor of Zubarah, Sulaiman Ibn Touq. Once Shaikh Abdul Rahman had sailed from Zubarah, he headed hastily to meet an old foe—none other than Sayyid Said, Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar—at Muscat. When they met, Shaikh Abdul Rahman asked the Sultan for help to expel the Saudi forces from Qatar and Bahrain. In return, he made a commitment to the Sultan that, should they succeed, he would guarantee that Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah would pay him an annual

¹⁶ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 238-239; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 108. According to the Al Fadhil family, the name of Shaikh Abdul Rahman's mother was Shaikha Amna bint Ahmad al-Fatih Al Khalifa. See also Bashar al-Hadi, *Al Fadhil al-Utub Wa Dawruhum al-Siyassi wal Ijtima'i fi al-Khaleej al-Arabi A'ala Madaa Thalathat Quroon 1700-2000* [Al Fadhil al-Utub and their Political and Social Role in the Arabian Gulf 1700-2000] (Bahrain: N.P, 2009), 171.

tribute of 9,000 MT Dollars.¹⁷ The Sultan, of course, had not forgotten that the Al Khalifa and the Utub had not so long ago been allied with the Saudis against him. It was at that delicate point that Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Fadhil displayed his abilities as a shrewd, diplomatic and cunning negotiator.

The Shaikh apologised for his relatives' action and claimed that he had advised them against it from the very beginning.¹⁸ He almost certainly capitalised on the Sultan's probable feelings of resentment at what the Saudis had done in their invasions and raids on Oman, and probably also took advantage of the Sultan's anger against the Qawasim, the Saudis' allies on the coast of Oman. The Qawasim, allegedly, were responsible for the untimely death of the Sultan's father, Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad.¹⁹ Shaikh Abdul Rahman most likely used their connection with the Saudis to manipulate Sayyid Said into helping to fight the Saudis—now a common enemy. If these indeed were his tactics, he was probably able to leverage Sultan Said's anger and desire for revenge against the Saudis, presenting himself as a 'tool' to accomplish it. The Sultan did not supply the Shaikh with troops, but instead gave him a large sum of money, two large cannons, a number of war vessels loaded with ammunition and some experienced military tacticians.²⁰ Shaikh Abdul Rahman thanked the Sultan for his generosity and sailed from Muscat to the coast of Persia,

¹⁷ Ibid; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 239-240. AL-Khairi uses the word *Riyal* or more precisely *Riyal Faransi* (French Riyal) was used by Arabs of the Gulf and the Peninsula to mean Maria Theresa Dollar.

¹⁸ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 239.

¹⁹ Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 105.

²⁰ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 239-240. See also letter from Sayyid Said to Government of Bombay, 7 November 1822, Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 20 (82), 67-71, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India. In his letter Sayyid Said complains how the Utub stopped paying the annual tribute that was agreed upon in 1820 and recounts the history of his relations with them and mentions the incident in where Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Khalifa (Al Fadhil) came to him and asked for his help to free Bahrain from the Saudi Occupation of Bahrain and how he helped Shaikh Abdul Rahman in that endeavor.

where he met the Chief of the Nussor tribe, Shaikh Jubara, who helped him recruit mercenaries from Persia.²¹

After organising his troops, Shaikh Abdul Rahman sailed from Persia back to Zubarah. Before his arrival, he informed the sons of the imprisoned Shaikhs, their families and their allies in Zubarah of the night of his attack. He coordinated with them a double offensive (internal and external) to be executed against the Saudi garrison of Sulaiman Ibn Touq. On the agreed date, Shaikh Abdul Rahman's fleet approached the coast of Zubarah and fired its cannons at the garrison of Ibn Touq. At the same time, the Al Khalifa and their allies in Zubarah surprised the Saudi troops with a swift internal attack. The Saudis were understandably oblivious to what was happening to them and their garrison rapidly surrendered to the Utub.²² After the spectacular success of the first part of his plan, Shaikh Abdul Rahman proceeded to pursue the second. See Figure 4.²³

²¹ Fa'iq Tahbub, *Ta'rikh al-Baḥrayn al-siyāsī, 1783-1870* [The Political History of Bahrain, 1783-1870] (Kuwait: Manshūrāt Dhāt al-Salāsīl, 1983), 80.

²² al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 240-241.

²³ This map was drawn based on the account of al-Kairi in addition to various traditional oral accounts.

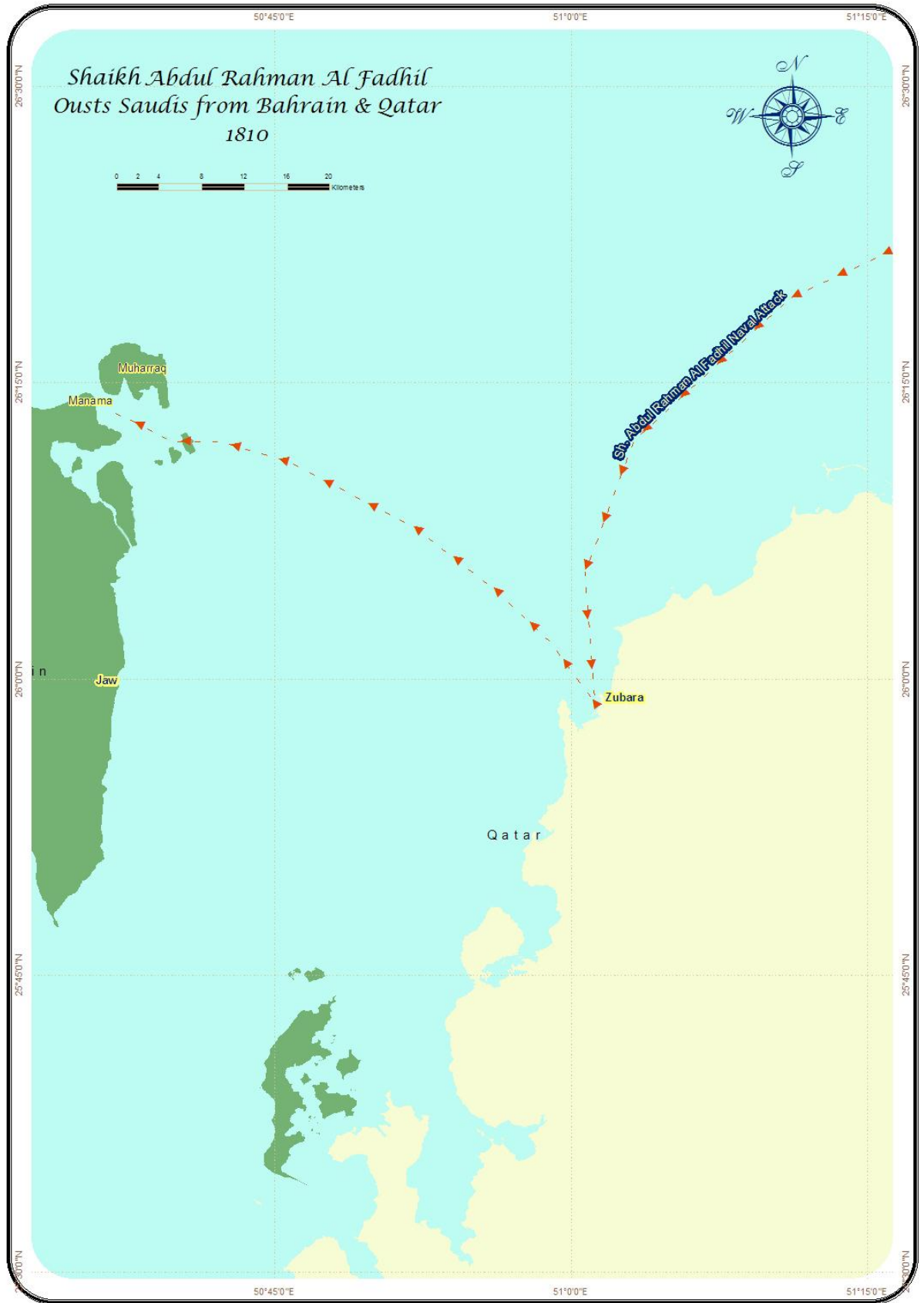


Figure 4: Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Fadhil Ousts Saudis from Bahrain and Qatar 1810

Fewer than three days later, he and his family and allies sailed with their naval forces to Bahrain. His fleet crossed Khour al-Qulaia (the Lagoon of Qulaia'a) and docked opposite Hoorā, on the outskirts of old Manama.²⁴ From there the Shaikh started firing at the Diwan Fort in Manama, headquarters of the Saudi garrison under the command of Ibn Ufaisan. That must have surprised and severely alarmed the Saudis. Their plight was probably exacerbated because Shaikh Abdul Rahman had made contact with his tribal allies inside Bahrain and with other groups of inhabitants. Nearly all the inhabitants of Bahrain were allegedly upset at the unpleasant treatment they received from the Saudis. Just as he had earlier in Zubarah, Shaikh Abdul Rahman launched a massive external attack while his internal allies were ready to attack when needed. The Saudis were defeated and surrendered Diwan Fort under the condition that they would be allowed to leave Bahrain. Shaikh Abdul Rahman insisted on taking some hostages to guarantee their cooperation. The Saudis agreed and the Shaikh took the Saudi commander, Ibn Ufaisan, in addition to sixteen other men. The rest were allowed to leave Bahrain.²⁵

This account demonstrates that speed and good coordination were paramount in catching the Saudis off guard and facilitated their defeat by the forces of Shaikh Abdul Rahman. The Shaikh probably realized that any delay in overcoming the occupying Saudi forces would have enabled the Saudi Imam in Diriyah to rescue them. He needed a quick victory and a substantial political gain. Shaikh Abdul Rahman must have transferred the rest of the family and the clan to Bahrain to ensure their safety, recognising that to have remained in Zubarah would have placed the three

²⁴ Please note that due to extensive reclamation in Bahrain, the sites of battles and naval stand-offs might appear very close to shore or even on dry land.

²⁵ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 240-241; Uthman bin Abd Allah Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd Fi Tarikh Najd* [The Title of Glory in the History of Najd], Vol I (Riyadh: Matabi al-Qasim, 1965 [c. 1854]), 182,183.

hostage Shaikhs in peril. The move to Bahrain gave him an advantage over the Saudis: even if the enemy launched a counter-offensive, they could do so only by land, as they lacked the necessary means to wage naval warfare. With Sayyid Said as his ally, Shaikh Abdul Rahman had no fear of attack by sea. The relocation of the Al Khalifa, the Utub and their allies from Qatar to Bahrain placed the Utub in a very safe and strong position against the Saudis—an excellent position from which to negotiate.

News of the Saudi defeats in Zubarah and Bahrain must have shocked Imam Saud bin Abdul-Aziz in Diriyah, apparently prompting him to summon the three Al Khalifa hostages for discussions. Allegedly, the Shaikhs pretended that they were not fond of Abdul Rahman Al Fadhil and talked about him as if he was a total stranger who had usurped their family's rulership. To complete the ruse, they apparently pretended that they were worried about the fate of their young, inexperienced sons in the hands of that 'stranger'. They also blamed Imam Saud for having installed weak governors who could not defend 'his' domains in Bahrain and Qatar.²⁶ They probably did this to persuade him to release them, saying they would try to oust that 'usurper' for Imam Saud. The Imam had good reason to be suspicious of the proposals of the three Al Khalifa Shaikhs. He sent a delegation of some of his trusted men to meet Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil in what can be described as a 'fact-finding mission'.²⁷ Imam Saud most likely wanted to test the honesty of what the imprisoned Al Khalifa Shaikhs told him.

The Saudi delegation met Shaikh Abdul Rahman in Bahrain. The latter pretended to be indifferent and cold to the plight of the three imprisoned Shaikhs. To make the scenario even more convincing, Shaikh Abdul Rahman brought forward the

²⁶ al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 94.

²⁷ Ibid.

young sons of the captive Shaikhs, led by Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman. He told the Saudi delegation that they were now the rulers of Bahrain and Qatar and not their fathers, who were dead as far as he was concerned.²⁸ Shaikh Khalifa and the other young Shaikhs probably orchestrated this with Shaikh Abdul Rahman to trick the Saudis into believing that the hostage Shaikhs were worthless assets that no longer need to be held. The Saudis were probably suspicious, but seemingly found it useless to keep on arguing with Shaikh Abdul Rahman and the other young Al Khalifa Shaikhs. They returned to Diriyah, and told Imam Saud what had happened.

Imam Saud then had a meeting with Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed, his brother Shaikh Salman and their cousin Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa. The three Shaikhs reiterated their sorrow that their inexperienced sons had been tricked by Abdul Rahman and told the Imam that they would try their best, if released, to bring the domains of Bahrain and Qatar back under Saudi control, with themselves as faithful vassals. The Imam apparently took the bait, as he saw that the three Shaikhs were useless to him as hostages. He released them under the condition that if they should succeed then they would remain loyal vassals to him.²⁹ The three Shaikhs returned safely to Bahrain amidst rejoicing from their kinsmen and allies. The Shaikhs were especially thankful to Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Fadhil, whose role in rescuing them and their domains had been of the utmost importance. Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah then released Ibn Ufaisan and the other Saudi captives, gave them presents and told them to inform Imam Saud, on their return, that they respected him but would never accept him as their overlord.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid, 94-95.

²⁹ Ibid; Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd*, 182-183; Tahbub, *Ta'rikh al-Bahrayn al-siyāsī*, 79-83.

³⁰ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 109.

This story demonstrates that Shaikh Abdullah and his family were very resourceful in playing political tricks on their adversaries to achieve their objectives. They used the friction between the Omanis and the Saudis to set one foe against the other, and thus rid themselves of both adversaries. The story seems fantastic to modern readers, but is widely believed in Bahrain today and by local historians such as al-Khairi, al-Tajir and al-Nabhani, who disagree on only a few details. It appears that the trick that the three Shaikhs played upon Imam Saud was to convince him that they were worthless as hostages to him. They made it seem as if their own children had turned against them and that their dominions in both Qatar and Bahrain were out of their hands and those of the Saudis. At least in releasing them he might have retrieved the Saudi hostages and maybe secured them as loyal vassals. However, that one last hope never materialised.

5. Rahma al-Jalahma, a Relentless Foe: Battles of Huwaila and Akhakkira

A new problem awaited the three Shaikhs after their departure from Diriyah. It came from an old enemy, Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma, thirsting for revenge and, as this section reveals, a truly relentless foe. Rahma was probably keeping a close eye on the exploits and vicissitudes of the Al Khalifa. When Shaikh Abdul Rahman expelled the Saudi forces from Bahrain and Zubarah, Rahma probably found out (or even guessed) the Saudis' probable ignorance of the close family ties between Shaikh Abdul Rahman and the imprisoned Shaikhs. Once he had that knowledge, he wasted no time in going to Diriyah to present himself as a local ally to the Wahhabi cause of the Saudis in Eastern Arabia. He probably also wanted to bring to the attention of Imam Saud the plot against him by Shaikh Abdul Rahman and the Al Khalifa. More likely

than not he sought to persuade the Imam to hold them, putting pressure on Shaikh Abdul Rahman and his allies to surrender. Rahma may have even sought to persuade the Imam to kill the imprisoned Shaikhs if Shaikh Abdul Rahman did not capitulate.³¹ Rahma was to be disappointed, as he reached Diriyah only to find that the Shaikhs had already been released. Saud would naturally have been upset and angry when he discovered he had been tricked. Upon Rahma's advice, he sent a fast cavalry contingent to try to apprehend the three Shaikhs before they reached the shores of the Gulf. The horsemen failed.³²

When news of this came back to Diriyah, Imam Saud appears to have decided to send an army to bring the Utub back under his yoke. Rahma, who had offered his services to the Imam as a viable Saudi ally, was invited to join the Imam's army as chief lieutenant to the commander, Ibrahim Ibn Ufaisan. The army marched from Diriyah to Qatar, heading for the town of Huwaila in the northeast of the peninsula. When news of the approach reached Abahussain, governor of Huwaila, he sent a message to Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, who sent a relief force. All of that resulted in the 1810 battle of Huwaila, ended with a relatively easy Utub victory, to the great disappointment of Imam Saud.³³ The victory was probably easy because Imam Saud had underestimated Utub strength and had not sent a large enough force.

To defeat the Utub, Imam Saud needed a new strategy. It seems that he and Rahma, with some other confidants, decided to raise a much larger army. To fight prolonged battles in the barren lands of Qatar, while the Al Khalifa were secure in Bahrain, was no longer feasible. Instead, the Saudis would launch a direct naval offensive upon the isles, menacing the Utub in the centre of their economic and naval

³¹ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 244.

³² Ibid; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 95.

³³ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 110; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 244-246.

power base. If that strategy were successful, it would practically dismantle the political power of the Utub and their hold on their dominions. The Saudis, whose soldiers were accustomed only to land battles, needed Rahma's ships and naval expertise. This strategic thinking led to one of the fiercest and most decisive naval battles in the nineteenth century history of the Arabian Gulf: the battle of Akhakkira.

Once Rahma al-Jalahma and the Saudis had matured their plan, Imam Saud set out to execute it. He raised a large army, again under the command of Ibn Ufaisan and Rahma al-Jalahma, which left Diriyah for Qatar. Once there, it headed towards a town called Rubaija, west of Zubarah, where Rahma encouraged the local tribes to join the Saudi army, warning them of the dire consequences for anyone who opposed the Saudis.³⁴ Many local tribes would have joined the Saudis out of fear, conviction or greed for loot. Using these methods, Rahma soon assembled a large fleet to carry the Saudi invasion army to Bahrain.

When news of Rahma al-Jalahma and his Saudi allies reached Bahrain, Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah were naturally bemused and allegedly outraged. The outrage spread beyond the circle of the Shaikhs to the allied tribes and the people of Bahrain, who had had enough of the supposed maltreatment of the Saudis and were utterly appalled by Rahma's alliance with them.³⁵ It is likely that Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah sought to use this popular anger and resentment to their advantage, playing on their people's emotions. Popular resentment was almost certainly exacerbated by the brief Saudi occupation of Bahrain, as Sunnis and Shias alike had probably suffered from maltreatment. The atmosphere therefore made it easy for the Shaikhs to kindle rage and a fierce fighting spirit. They raised a large army and prepared their

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

fleet for one of the most decisive naval battles in the history of Bahrain. Rahma must have caught wind of their preparations, as he assembled and prepared his own fleet rapidly, probably to retain the advantage of initiating the offensive. Rahma and his allies assembled their fleet near Khor Hassan in northwestern Qatar, sailing for Bahrain as soon as they were ready.³⁶ Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, in all likelihood, were in a race against time to sail with their fleet so they could destroy the Saudis at sea, before they set foot in Bahrain. They most likely realized the grave danger that could have resulted if such a situation had occurred. The Shaikhs probably knew from their spies that the Saudi army was very large and would be difficult to defeat after a successful landing in Bahrain. At the same time, they must have realized that when it came to naval warfare, the Utub's greater experience, better and larger ships and better weaponry gave them the upper hand. Therefore, it seems that the main objective of their strategy was to meet the Saudi fleet midway between Bahrain and Qatar and force them into a naval battle instead of a land battle.

The Shaikhs' plan worked and the Bahraini fleet, under the command of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed, blocked the Saudi fleet's advance and forced it to battle. The two fleets met in a maritime area known as Akhakkira, a few miles north of Khor Hassan³⁷. See Figure 5.³⁸

According to al-Tabatebai, the Vizier to Shaikh Salman bin Ahmad, the Utub fleet numbered between sixty and seventy ships.³⁹ The battle took place in April 1811 (Rabi al-Awwal 1226 AH) and ended with the defeat of Rahma and the Saudis.⁴⁰ According to al-Tabatebai, the battle lasted from dawn to dusk and was incredibly

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 110

³⁸ Map based on one done by Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Sulaiti.

³⁹ Abdul Jalil al-Tabatebai to Ni'mat Allah Abood, January 3, 1812 (19 Dhul Hijja 1226 AH). Quoted in *Lughat al-Arab*, Part 10 of year 6, October 1928, 740-741.

⁴⁰ Ibid; Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 26

fierce. Five Utub ships and three Saudi vessels were burnt, but the resilience of the Utub enabled them to defeat their foes and the battle ended with the utter defeat of the Saudis, whose whole fleet fell into the hands of the Utub. The Utub lost nearly 700 men, while the losses of the Saudis were also high.⁴¹ According to the Najdi historian, Ibn Bishr, the battle resulted in over 1,600 casualties and the destruction of numerous ships.⁴² Shaikh Abdullah and his men had won a spectacular victory, but at a terrible price.

According to oral tradition, people in Bahrain and the northern shores of Qatar ate no fish for several weeks or even months. They allegedly often found little bits of human parts, such as ears, fingers and eyes in the fish they caught. Among the notable Utub casualties was Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah, his brother Shaikh Ahmad, Shaikh Duaij bin Jabir I Al Sabah and Abahussain, the governor of Huwaila.⁴³ Rahma and Ibn Ufaisan barely managed to escape in a little boat (other accounts have them swimming on a piece of wreckage) to the coast of Qatar.⁴⁴ Rahma also lost a hand and an eye in the battle. The battle over, Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah had some relief from the political and military turmoil that had marred their lives. The shaikhs divided the islands between themselves. Shaikh Abdullah made the island of Muharraq his base and thus founded what is known today as the city of Muharraq. Shaikh Salman on the other hand based himself on the main island of Bahrain and founded the city of Riffa.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Abdul Jalil al-Tabatebai to Ni'mat Allah Abood, 740-741

⁴² Ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd*, 191.

⁴³ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 111; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 248.

⁴⁴ al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 97.

⁴⁵ Abahussain and Abdullah Al Khalifa, *al-Bahrayn 'abra al-tārīk*, 265-267; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 111; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 249-250.



Figure 5: Battle of Akhakkira 1811

The battle of Akhakkira is historically very significant. The Utub proved themselves, beyond doubt, as a formidable regional power to be taken seriously by their foes. One immediate result was that the Al Khalifa and the Utub secured themselves from any further Saudi attacks. That security was further consolidated with the Saudis becoming busy with their war with the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha. That war lasted till 1818 and ended with the defeat and destruction of the first Saudi state.⁴⁶ The need did not arise to worry about another threat from the Saudis until 1834 (1249 AH), as shall be later seen.

The victory also gave Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, as well as their family and subjects, a breathing space. They had a chance at last to enjoy the benefits of their lands after the turbulent years of the Omanis and Saudis. The two Shaikhs and their allies were able to develop their interests in commerce and pearling and to lead peaceful lives. The period of calm, however, did not last very long.

6. Rahma al-Jalahma Seeks Revenge: Second Omani Invasion of 1816

After his humiliating defeats at the hands of the Al Khalifa, Rahma retreated for a while and lay low, nursing his desire for revenge. He sought help from the Saudis again, but Imam Saud, who had suffered huge losses at Akhakkira, was understandably unwilling to stage a counter-offensive against the Utub so soon. They may also have hesitated to help because they were themselves under serious threat from abroad. The Ottoman Sultan had instructed Muhammad Ali Pasha, Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, to invade and destroy the Saudi State in 1811. A settlement was

⁴⁶ Francis Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Wahabee Tribe of Arabs", *From the Year 1795 to the Year 1818*", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series. Ed. R. Hughes Thomas ((Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]) 436.

reached between the Saudis and Tusun Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali and commander of his army in 1815. However conflict was renewed in 1816 and the Saudis were so preoccupied by the Egyptian troops under the command of Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali, that they could spare neither resource nor power to help Rahma.⁴⁷

Rahma, apparently too weak to attack the Al Khalifa directly without allies, resorted to using spoiling tactics. He waged raids on coastal villages and towns in the domains of the Al Khalifa family. He intercepted and hijacked commercial ships plying between those domains.⁴⁸ His aim was probably not to gain money from piracy, although he did so, but more of an attempt to damage the economy and commerce of Bahrain and its dependencies, and thus the financial interests of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah. At some stage, Rahma probably realized the futility of his tactics, as he was not inflicting major damage on the Al Khalifa. He needed a new strategy, and devised a plan that many would consider diabolical. It is solid historical proof that Rahma al-Jalahma was a cunning tactician and political chameleon who had no problem in changing his ideologies to reach his political goals. Rahma had allied himself with the Saudis, probably presenting himself as an ardent, staunch supporter, a believer in the Wahhabi/Salafi interpretation of Islam, a credible Saudi vassal in Bahrain and Qatar. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to ally himself with another force, whose religious interpretation of Islam was in direct conflict with that of the Wahhabi Saudis—Sayyid Said bin Sultan Al Said, Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar. Sayyid Said's family had risen to political power as Imams of the Ibadi sect of Islam in Oman. The alliance between Rahma and the Sultan would bring about the second Omani invasion of Bahrain.

⁴⁷ J.B.Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 135-136; Tahbub, *Ta'rikh al-Bahrayn*, 128-129.

⁴⁸ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 112.

Rahma al-Jalahma seemingly decided to seek help from the powerful Sayyid Said,⁴⁹ perhaps seeing an opportunity to use that power. Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah had ceased paying the yearly tribute of 9,000 MT Riyals that Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil had promised to the Sultan. And Rahma would have wasted not a moment in trying to capitalise on the breach of agreement. He had an audience with Sultan Said in Muscat, at which he displayed what al-Khairi called “the arts of cunning and deception”.⁵⁰ In that meeting, Rahma used the pretext of the suspended annual tribute to incite the anger of the Sultan. He probably also pointed out that the Al Khalifa would be unable to elicit any new alliance against Oman from the Saudis.⁵¹ It seems that he presented Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, their family and allies as a deceitful, untrustworthy lot, while presenting himself as a trustworthy ally who would be a loyal vassal if the Sultan helped him oust the Al Khalifa and their allies from Bahrain.⁵² Rahma’s tactics seem to have been successful in encouraging Sayyid Said to invade Bahrain and recapture it from the Al Khalifa, and he may well have been helped in his encouragement by a close advisor and confidant of the Sultan known as Muhammad Ibn Khalaf, a Shiite dissident from Bahrain. Khalaf had been one of the conspirators who encouraged Sayyid Sultan, father of Sayyid Said, to invade Bahrain in 1801. He escaped from the islands when they were recaptured by the Utub, probably fearing retribution. Muhammad Ibn Khalaf most likely wanted his revenge too, so encouraged the Sultan to invade Bahrain.⁵³ This, of course, became very beneficial for Rahma and helped him to convince the Sultan to adopt his plans.

⁴⁹ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. I, historical, part II (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 791.

⁵⁰ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 252

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 791.

⁵³ Humayd ibn Muhammad Ibn Ruzayq, *al-Fateh al-Mubin Fi Sirat al-Sadah al-Busai'diyn* [*The Clear Conquest in the Story of the Busai'di Sayyids*] (Oman: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, 1977 [c. 1857]), 530.

Hence, we have a historical anomaly in which an Ibadi, a Shiite and a previous ally of the Wahhabi Saudis all agreed on a political decision.

It worth commenting here that Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah apparently made an imprudent decision when they suspended the payment of the tribute, as an enemy like Rahma could use it against them. The Shaikhs' frugality or 'love of independence' might have prevented them from seeing the political consequences of such a decision. The Sultan might also have made a mistake. If Rahma had secured Bahrain, he could have rebelled against the Sultan. Possibly, however, the Sultan was only using Rahma as a pawn to seize Bahrain, in the same way that his father had used Nasr Al Mathkoor.

When news of the impending invasion reached Bahrain, it must have alarmed the two Shaikhs and their men, but their reaction was very different from that of the 1801 Omani invasion. They decided not to surrender Bahrain easily and not to allow panic to take control of them as it had in the previous invasion. It seems that their victories against the Saudis had boosted their confidence, though they probably understood that they would need a different strategy against the Omanis. In naval warfare, the Saudis had been inferior and the Utub had taken full advantage. Sayyid Said and the Omanis were certainly not inferior at sea. The Sultan had one of the largest fleets and native naval forces in the area, surpassed only by the British Indian Navy. The Shaikhs most likely appreciated the fact that defeat by the Omani fleet was quite possible and would have disastrous consequences. Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah therefore apparently decided to take a different course of action against the Sultan. They would allow him to land in Bahrain without harassment. They probably knew that Bahrain was his main interest, and that he had no interest in Zubarah or Qatar. They need not, therefore, expend valuable sources in securing either from

Sayyid Said, but would face him in a land battle in Bahrain, where they probably concentrated most of their forces.

7. Battle of Maqta'a

In the late summer of 1816 the Sultan, accompanied by Rahma al-Jalahma, landed with his troops on the eastern shores of Bahrain. He captured the island of Sitrah and its fort. The Sultan was probably surprised that there was no serious resistance—he and his troops remained for three days on the island of Sitrah⁵⁴ without seeing anyone. Allegedly, this prompted the Sultan's sarcastic remark to Rahma, "Are your Utub dead?"⁵⁵ Rahma apparently did not take that comment lightly as he too was an Utubi, telling the Sultan that they should meet them the next day. He was most likely aware from an informant that the Utub forces were camping near a village called Jid Ali.⁵⁶ Rahma might well have worried that a ploy was being woven against him by the Shaikhs. If he did, he was proved correct when the battle started.

The following day, Utubi war banners appeared and a large army under the command of Shaikh Salman bin Ahmad approached.⁵⁷ At low water Sayyid Said, Rahma al-Jalahma and their forces crossed from Sitrah to the main island to meet the forces of the Utub.⁵⁸ The sons of Shaikh Salman, Khalifa and Ahmed, played a critical role in this battle and proved themselves prudent commanders. The prominence and prestige they gained here was later passed to their sons and, as we shall see in later chapters, played a vital role in the political history of Bahrain against

⁵⁴ Please note that the shape of the islands has changed drastically because of the reclamation of many areas in Bahrain. Before the reclamation, Sitrah was an island easily reached by foot from the main island of Bahrain at low water, as the strait between Sitrah and the main island became shallow or dried out.

⁵⁵ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 112; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 99.

⁵⁶ Ibid; *ibid*.

⁵⁷ al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 100.

⁵⁸ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 112-113; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 253.

the sons of Shaikh Abdullah. Rahma's probable fears about a hidden ploy of the Al Khalifa proved to be correct. When the battle started, the Utub forces held their ground for a while and then began a slow retreat, probably a tactic agreed on beforehand between Shaikh Salman and Shaikh Abdullah. The Utub's retreat must have naturally encouraged the forces of Sayyid Said and Rahma to push further into the mainland—away from their ships and into an ambush. Shaikh Salman had apparently placed a large cavalry force under the command of his sons, Shaikhs Khalifa and Ahmad. It was hidden behind some thick date gardens opposite the coast of Sitrah. At the right moment, he apparently signalled for the hidden cavalry forces to strike. Naturally, the Omanis were caught by surprise and some of their formations broke. As local accounts narrate, Shaikh Khalifa played a vital role in exerting unyielding Bahraini pressure on the Omanis, and it was that battle that gave him such high prominence in the eyes of Bahrainis and the Utub.⁵⁹ Shaikh Abdullah's next move made matters even worse for the Omanis.

After the Omanis had been pulled away from their ships into the interior of the main island, Shaikh Abdullah's fleet arrived, sandwiched the docked Omani fleet between the island of Sitrah and his cannons, and opened fire.⁶⁰ That was a killer blow. Omani forces ashore panicked and disintegrated into a frantic retreat to try and save their ships. As military science acknowledges, an army in disorganised retreat is in a far worse situation than a defeated army that retains its formation. The panicking, retreating troops of Sayyid Said were easy targets for the forces of Shaikh Khalifa and Shaikh Ahmad. The Sultan and Rahma barely escaped with their lives, as did other Omani contingents. The battle ended in complete rout for the forces of Sayyid Said,

⁵⁹ For more details see, al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 100; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 112-113; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 253-255.

⁶⁰ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa*, 174.

who lost two of his relations and principal sirdars.⁶¹ The battle was apparently vicious and resulted in substantial fatalities. Among the notables of Bahrain killed were Shaikh Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Muhammad Al Khalifa, Shaikh Salman bin Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Khalifa and Qassim bin Dirbas al-bin Ali. On the other side, Sayyid Hamad, brother of Sayyid Said, was killed.⁶² See Figure 6.⁶³

Shaikh Abdullah's military ability shines in this battle. He had most likely estimated the naval strength of his foe correctly, so chose, with his brother, a land and sea battle scenario that suited their needs, tricking the Omanis into landing in Bahrain and engaging them on the ground, so they were deprived of any naval advantage they might have had. The delay in fielding the Utub defence was possibly an intentional ploy conceived by Shaikh Abdullah and his family, who wanted to make the Sultan and his troops believe that the Utub were frightened of them. That would have made them overconfident and lowered their guard, committing a fatal error. Shaikh Abdullah revealed himself a prudent strategist. His accord with his brother and two nephews tempted the Omani army away from their ships in pursuit of the retreating ground forces, so he could encircle their docked ships and nearly wipe out the Omani fleet. The Shaikh's strategy allowed the Utub to gain a spectacular victory without incurring significant casualties in lives and ships in an unpredictable naval battle with a formidable foe.

⁶¹ Francis Warden, "Historical Sketch of Uttoobee Tribe of Arab; From the year 1795-1818", in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol. I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 29; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 792

⁶² al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 113; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 256; Ibn Ruzayq, *al-Fateh al-Mubin*, 530.

⁶³ This map was drawn based on the accounts of al-Nabhani, al-Khairi and al-Tajir in addition to various traditional oral accounts.



Figure 6: Battle of Maqta'a 1816

8. Aftermath of the Battle

Sayyid Said barely escaped the battlefield, no doubt in an angry and bitter mood. He naturally would have felt that he must avenge himself and his brother, Sayyid Hamad, who was killed in the battle. He headed to Kangoon on the Persian coast and entered in a correspondence with the Prince of Shiraz. He apparently tried to solicit military aid from him. The Persians first obliged but then apparently lost interest for unknown reasons and started delaying the promised supply of troops. They also demanded that the Sultan deliver one of his brothers, Sayyid Salim, as a hostage in Shiraz. Such actions and demands offended Sayyid Said and he abandoned the enterprise altogether and returned to Masqat.⁶⁴ He must have felt disgruntled at his defeat and the duplicity of the Persians that seemingly hindered any short term possibility of getting even with the Utub. However, coincidence came to his aid. Some of the notables of Bahrain were on a commercial trip to India at the time of the Omani invasion and the battle of Maqta'a. Consequently, they were naturally unaware of those events when they stopped in Muscat on their way home to Bahrain. They were Shaikh Muhammad bin Migrin bin Muhammad Al Khalifa, Shaikh Abdul-Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil, Sayyar bin Qassim al-Mua'awdah and Muhammad bin Saqr al-Mua'awdah.⁶⁵ As soon as the Sultan heard of their arrival, he ordered their immediate arrest. They were imprisoned in a castle called Burj Mooza al-Jalali, residence of the influential Lady Sayyida Mooza bint Sultan, sister of Sultan Said.⁶⁶ The Sultan, who in all likelihood was still bitter and angry after the Bahrain defeat, considered killing the notables as a form of revenge, but they were saved by the intervention of Sayyida Mooza, who had influence over her brother. She allegedly discouraged the Sultan from killing his

⁶⁴ Letters from from Captain William Bruce, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Bombay Government, 20 August and 16 September 1816, Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 432(12), 2171-2172, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁵ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 99; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 113.

⁶⁶ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa*, 175; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 113.

hostages, convincing him that such an act would bring him neither glory nor benefit, but would portray him in a very poor light. She advised him to launch another counter-offensive against Bahrain instead.⁶⁷

When news of the imprisonment of the four notables reached Bahrain, Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah were naturally angered and appalled, and they called a meeting with their closest aides. Most of the men, apparently full of confidence after their recent victory, suggested invading Muscat and freeing the Bahraini hostages by force. Reason, however, took hold over passion. Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman convinced the two Shaikhs and the rest of the audience that an invasion would be a reckless endeavour.⁶⁸ It would subject them to a risky battle with the Omanis on their own soil and would have made Bahrain and Zubarah vulnerable to attack from Rahma al-Jalahma.⁶⁹ News also reached the Shaikhs that Sayyid Said might ally with the Prince of Shiraz against them,⁷⁰ so they decided to take a more diplomatic approach.

By choosing the diplomatic approach, the two Shaikhs probably sought not only the safe return of the hostages, but also to alienate Rahma al-Jalahma. Perhaps they realized that the latter had instigated the last Omani offensive, and concluded that by a yearly tribute to Sayyid Said plus a generous *diyah*⁷¹ for the death of his brother, they would be able to prevent the Sultan from attacking them in the future. Such an offer would also alienate the Sultan from Rahma. With that achieved, and with no Saudi threat, the Shaikhs probably intended to free themselves so they could pursue Rahma and neutralise his threat. This, as we shall see, is exactly what happened. The

⁶⁷ Ibid 175-176; *ibid*; Ghazal, *Tarikh al-Utub*, 100.

⁶⁸ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 259-260.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 260.

⁷⁰ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs; (Bahrein;)", in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-186*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 31.

⁷¹ A sum of money, commonly known as blood money, paid to the family of a murdered person by the family of the murderer in order to avoid more bloodshed.

two Shaikhs had proved themselves apt strategists, skilful in alienating one foe in order to deal with another.

Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah sent an envoy to Sultan Said before he had finished preparing for another invasion of Bahrain. He apparently convinced the Sultan that the Shaikhs sought peace and cordial relations, while all earlier bloodshed could have been blamed on the dubious schemes of Rahma. The Sultan agreed to meet an Utubi delegation for further discussions of the peace deal on the island of Qais, off the Persian coast. The Shaikhs sent a delegation headed by Shaikh Ahmed bin Salman Al Khalifa, Shaikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Khalifa and Sayyid Abdul-Jalil al-Tabatebai, among other notables.⁷² After lengthy negotiations, the Utub agreed to pay the Sultan an annual tribute of 30,000 German Crowns, which the Sultan then reduced to 18,000 Crowns. Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman was the guarantor of the peace. He pledged that the tribute would never be suspended as long as he was alive and able.⁷³ Consequently, Sultan Said released the imprisoned Bahraini notables and relations between the Utub, headed by Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah, and the Sultan returned to peaceful and cordial terms.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, that peace did not last.

⁷² al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 101; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 260.

⁷³ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 260.

⁷⁴ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 31. See also letter from from Sayyid Said of Oman to General Sir William Kier, 28 April 1820, Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 483 (5), 3036-3039, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India; letter from William Bruce, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to Bombay Government, 28 April 1820, Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, Vol. 483 (5), 3055-3057, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

9. Beginning of British Involvement and the Death of Shaikh Salman

Shaikh Salman's final few years were peaceful, and he and his brother Shaikh Abdullah had some peace of mind at last. Until the death of Shaikh Salman in 1825, the Shaikhdom faced no major external threats. That period, however, witnessed the beginning of British involvement in the affairs of the region and in Bahrain. Its beginning can be traced to 1816 when the British, through the East India Company Resident in Bushire, Lieutenant William Bruce, appointed a native agent in Bahrain. The exact date of the appointment of the agent is unknown, but it was probably not much later than 1816. In that same year, Lieutenant Bruce and Shaikh Abdullah signed a friendship treaty that would guarantee safe access for Bahraini ships to the ports of British India under the condition of reciprocal treatment for British ships visiting Bahrain.⁷⁵

The second major interaction with the British was the signing of the peace treaty of 1820. After the destruction of the Qawasim stronghold in Ras al-Khaima in December 1819, the British drew up an agreement known as the General Treaty of 1820. Its stated aim was to prohibit piracy in the region and provide maritime peace.⁷⁶ That treaty signalled the beginning of British hegemony in the Arabian Gulf region and, as such, is a key historical point in the region's history. One of its outcomes is that it demarcated the Gulf region by an imaginary line, known as the Restrictive Line that stretched from al-Khafji south of Kuwait to Ras al-Khaima. The Gulf Arabs of the Arabian littoral were able to resort to naval depredations in the event of a conflict

⁷⁵ James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 56.

⁷⁶ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa*, 84-86.

west of that line but not east of it. Such a measure was meant to provide a safe maritime route for British shipping and trade. See Figure 7.⁷⁷

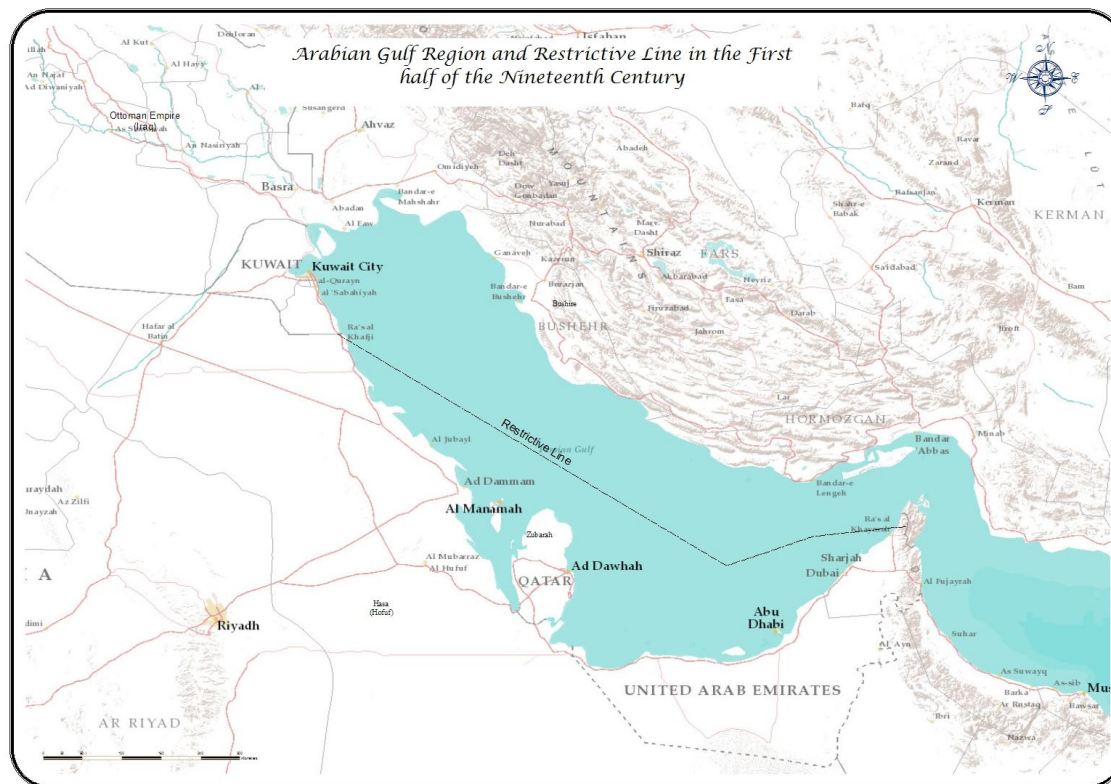


Figure 7: Map of the Restrictive Line

More likely than not, the British did not draw up that treaty merely to stop piracy in the region. They probably saw it as an excuse to intervene and meddle in the internal affairs of the local rulers—not for the gain of regional wealth, but for the gain of the Gulf’s strategic position. The Gulf provided a vital waterway for global trade. Controlling it would have given British India a buffer zone that would put any enemies seeking to attack British India at a safe distance.⁷⁸ The British must have recognised that the region was arid, poor and sparsely populated, but they also saw

⁷⁷ This map is based upon a similar map which can be found in J.B.Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 866-867.

⁷⁸ James Onley, “Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection”, *Occasional Paper 4* (Doha: Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2009), 11.

that, under the control of another rival colonial power, it would be an excellent base from which to attack British possessions and interests in India. British India was regarded as the 'Jewel in the Crown' of the far-flung colonies of the British Empire. The British required only the Shaikhs of what was known as the 'Trucial Coast' (now the UAE) to sign the agreement. Despite that, Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah were interested in joining and voluntarily offered to sign it. The probable motive was to secure the maritime trade of their dominions in Bahrain and Qatar. Little did they know that by signing such an agreement they would open the door for continued and unwanted involvement by the British in their internal affairs, to be witnessed by some of their descendants. The Shaikhs sent their *Wakil* (Agent), Sayyid Abdul-Jalil bin Yaseen al-Tabatebai, to Ras al-Khaima to sign the treaty on 5 February 1820. The Shaikhs subsequently signed it in Bahrain on 23 February 1820.⁷⁹ The Shaikhs' reason for not going to Ras al-Khaima in person was perhaps that they wanted to differentiate themselves from the Shaikhs of the Trucial Coast.

Shaikh Salman bin Ahmed died in 1825.⁸⁰ According to local sources his death was caused by a pandemic that swept Bahrain.⁸¹ With the death of Shaikh

⁷⁹ Lt A.B Kemball, "Chronological Table of Events with the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein), From the Year 1716 to 1844", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence: Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985 [1856]), 142; Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 31. Details of the treaty can be found in *Records of Bahrain 1820-1960* vol I (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 191-198. IOR: R/15/1/740. Francis Loch gives a detailed account of his meeting with Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah in Riffa at that time. Loch had accompanied the British Resident in the Gulf, Captain W. Bruce, on their visit to Bahrain when the Shaikhs signed the 1820 agreement. Details of the account can be found in Sir Charles Belgrave, *The Pirate Coast* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1966), 150-162.

⁸⁰ Letter from Governor in Council, Bombay, to the Court of Directors, 2 July 1825, in *Records of Bahrain 1820-1960* vol i (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 276. IOR: L/P&S/6/177. See also letter from Lt. Col. E.G.Stannus, PRPG to Bombay Government in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, 10 March 1825, vol. 26 (211), 74, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁸¹ al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 101; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 114. Please note that local accounts place his death at 1236 AH (c.1821), The aforementioned contemporary British sources have placed his death in 1825. The latter shall be used in the chronology of this thesis despite that in the next

Salman, Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed became the senior co-ruler of Bahrain and Qatar.⁸² His nephews, Shaikhs Khalifa and Ahmed, sons of Shaikh Salman, became junior co-rulers.⁸³ The ascendancy of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed over the domains of the Al Khalifa family in Bahrain and Qatar ushered in a new era in the history of Bahrain and the region. It was an era of numerous military conflicts that often ended in violent stand-offs, but there were many diplomatic endeavours, as well.

10. Conclusion

The events of this chapter illustrate the various methods employed by local Arab rulers in the nineteenth century Gulf region to defend their domains against external threats. Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah used the protector-protégé dynamic against both Omanis and Saudis. It was a tactic used by local rulers in the Gulf before *Pax Britannica* was established at the end of the nineteenth century. A ruler would seek the protection of another ruler, who would provide military assistance against the former's enemies. In return, the protector expected some kind of subservience from the protégé. That subservience usually came in the form of tribute payment or relinquishment of some of the protégé's power and/or independence.⁸⁴ James Onley uses the term *dakhala* ('entering' the protection of another) for such a practice which comes from the Arabic word for protégé, *dakheel*. In his article, "The Politics of

chapter it shall be seen that Shaikh Abdullah alone, without any mention of Shaikh Salman, entered into a peace deal with Rahma in 1824.

⁸² Muhammad bin Ahmad Al Thani, *Lamahat Min Tarikh Qatar* [Glimpses from the History of Qatar], ed. Nasser bin Ali Al Thani (UAE: Ministry of Economy, Office of Intellectual Classifications, 2006 [c. 1953]), 119.

⁸³ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 101; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 114.

⁸⁴ James Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century," *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 30-92; James Onley, "The Politics of Protection: The Arabian Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century", *Liwa: Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research* 1 (2009), 30-36; James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study", *History and Anthropology* 17 (2006), 199-202; Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 1-3.

Protection: The Arabian Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century”, he argues that *dakhala* was a very common custom in Arabia at the time with deep cultural roots. The major difference between such a system and between what is known in the west as racketeering is that the protector was bound to protect his protégé by a strong cultural code of honor.⁸⁵

Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah used such a tactic to protect themselves from the Omanis by allying with the Saudis. When circumstances changed, their nephew, Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid, allied on behalf of the Al Khalifa with the Omanis against the Saudis. It still took a violent military confrontation for Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah to secure themselves from the Saudis. Sometimes local rulers could not rely on their protector and had to defend themselves alone. That was what happened at Akhakkira, a battle that marked the beginning of a series of major military successes for Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad. The Al Khalifa faced a major naval invasion by the Saudis and Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma, and only by defeating them in battle could they secure themselves against the Saudis for some time. It is interesting to note that Sayyid Said of Oman did not come to the rescue of the Utub, his protégé. The reason for this neglect is unknown, but it may well have prompted the two Shaikhs to suspend their protector-protégé relationship and stop paying tribute. That suspension culminated in the battle of Maqta’a, where the Al Khalifa and their allies defeated Sayyid Said and routed his army. Al Khalifa success was achieved by using alternative forms of political tactics to safeguard their domains. Those tactics ranged from seeking protection to military standoffs. The local rulers of the time faced continued political uncertainty that forced them to switch from one tactic to another.

⁸⁵ More details can be found in James Onley, “The Politics of Protection: The Arabian Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century”, 30-36.

Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed played an important role during the reign of his brother Shaikh Salman bin Ahmed (1795-1825). It was one of paramount importance and vitality. Shaikh Abdullah was one of the 'pillars' on which the Al Khalifa family depended to maintain and intensify its hold on its dominions. With his brother Shaikh Salman and their family, Shaikh Abdullah succeeded in his policy of setting rival regional powers against each other. The goal of this policy, of course, was to let their foes weaken each other by fighting and military assaults. A good example of this was in Shaikh Abdullah's ability to incite his two main regional foes, the Saudis and the Omanis, to fight each other for the Shaikh's sake. In essence, Shaikh Abdullah used the power of one foe to further his interests against the other. He did that by presenting himself as an ally to one foe and using that enemy's power to fight the other foe. For instance, he used the Saudis to oust the Omanis from Bahrain, despite the difficulties it caused him and his family later. His nephew, Shaikh Abdul Rahman Al Fadhil, employed a similar tactic when he used the Omanis to get rid of the Saudis.

Shaikh Abdullah had the ability to choose the appropriate tactic and/or strategy for the appropriate foe. In the battle of Akhakkira, for example, the Shaikh most likely recognised his advantage over the army of Rahma and Ibn Ufaisan when it came to naval warfare. He must have realized that if their army had indeed managed to land in Bahrain, the outcome would be unpredictable, so he calculated that the best strategy was to intercept them at sea and force them to engage his superior fleet in a naval battle in which the odds were in his favour. He succeeded by mobilising his troops very quickly, probably forewarned by an efficient network of spies that enabled him to prepare to face his enemies in good time.

Another example of the Shaikh's ability is his face-off against Sayyid Said of Oman at the battle of Maqta'a. Shaikh Abdullah probably realized that his naval

advantage over the Saudi forces could not be counted upon when facing the strong naval forces of the Omanis. That realisation prompted him to change his strategy and engage the Omanis in a land battle—a very prudent military decision. He neutralised Omani naval superiority, if in fact it existed. Presumably, the Shaikh also intended to delay the appearance of his troops before the Omanis for three days, making the Sultan and his troops lower their guard through overconfidence. If that was true, it certainly facilitated the task of his brother Shaikh Salman as he drew the Omanis away from their ships. That in turn facilitated the task of Shaikhs Khalifa and Ahmad, sons of Shaikh Salman, in their surprise cavalry attack against the troops of the Sultan. Meanwhile, Shaikh Abdullah destroyed large sections of the Omani fleet at very little risk to himself. Naturally, that made the Omani forces panic and retreat in a disorganised manner. That, of course, resulted in their ultimate defeat.

Shaikh Abdullah was not only a man of war and politics, but of peace too. He sought to promote the commercial interests of his subjects. This is clearly illustrated in the 1820 treaty he and his brother, Shaikh Salman, concluded with the British. The British had imposed the treaty on the rulers of the Trucial Coast, after their campaign against the Qawasim in 1819. The British sought by this treaty to ban piracy in the Gulf and thus guarantee the safety of their commercial ships and those of British India. The Shaikhs of Bahrain had no obligation to sign the treaty, but Shaikh Abdullah and Shaikh Salman probably believed that by voluntarily signing it, they would help secure and promote the trade of their subjects in Bahrain and Qatar. Possibly by protecting them from any depredations the Qawasim, who controlled the Strait of Hormuz, could have launched.

Shaikh Abdullah was clearly a pivotal element in solidifying the rule and position of the Al Khalifa family. He was capable and prudent in both military and

diplomatic arenas. He knew the appropriate tactic to use for each foe, and the time to use it to best advantage. At the same time, he sought to advance the economic welfare of his subjects by willingly joining a treaty that would safeguard their trade. All this clearly indicates that Shaikh Abdullah is a historical figure well worthy of study by anyone who seeks to understand the history of the Gulf in the early modern period.

CHAPTER IV

Joint Rule of Shaikhs Abdullah and Khalifa bin Salman: Continued Conflicts with Saudis, Omanis and Rahma 1825-1834

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the role played by Shaikh Abdullah in repelling external threats against the dominions of his family in Bahrain and Qatar between 1825 (the death of Shaikh Salman) and 1834 (the death of Shaikh Khalifa, Salman's son). During that period, Shaikh Abdullah was the senior co-ruler of Bahrain and its dependencies in Qatar and the Arabian mainland. He shared power with his nephews, Shaikh Khalifa and his brother Shaikh Ahmad, the junior co-rulers, who faithfully supported their uncle against many challenges from foreign adversaries. Some of those challenges were resolved through diplomacy, others through fierce military confrontations. The chapter analyses Shaikh Abdullah's important role in neutralising all the threats against his authority, revealing his actions as vital to the survival of the Al Khalifa family to the present day.

This chapter illustrates how a local Arab ruler used both military confrontation and diplomatic manoeuvres to repel external threats. Although some political situations obliged him to fight to safeguard himself and his Shaikhdom, his skill lay in knowing when to strike and when to submit (temporarily) to those in a stronger

political position. Shaikh Abdullah provides a remarkable example of this skill in his dealings with the Saudis and the Omanis, as he combined confrontation and submission in the manner described in this chapter. Many local rulers needed to use these strategies and tactics to maintain their rulerships. If he appeared too submissive and timid, he might have encouraged his foreign protector, other external foes or even internal challengers to take advantage of the situation. On the other hand, if he was too confrontational, not knowing when to attack and when to hold back, he risked losing his domains to his enemies. Realising that he could not fight more than one enemy at a time, he sometimes needed to temporarily to submit to one foe in order to fight another and neutralise the threat. Before he could fight the Omanis, Shaikh Abdullah needed to get rid of Rahma, and before he could focus his energy and resources against the Saudis, he had to neutralise the Omanis. As a local ruler, he needed to segregate his risks, weigh the practicality and necessity of dealing with each, then decide which to face immediately and which to postpone. Failure to follow this strategy risked grave consequences for any Gulf ruler, no matter his military or financial strength.

Shaikh Abdullah's first task was to remove the threat to the safety and integrity of the Al Khalifa's domains posed by Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma. He tried every possible way to resolve the conflict peacefully, but all his efforts were in vain, and violence ensued. Even Rahma's death did not end the matter, as his son Bishr sought to avenge his father's death by forming an alliance with an old foe of the Al Khalifa family. Bishr's actions led to an invasion of Bahrain, the third by the rulers of Oman and the second by Sayyid Said bin Sultan. Shaikh Abdullah won that battle, and the Omani Sultan never again attempted to invade Al Khalifa territory. The Shaikh and his family had effectively secured Bahrain against any Omani attempts at

achieving hegemony or control. The Shaikh's troubles were not over, however. He and the rest of the Utub now faced the threat arising from the revival of Saudi power in central Arabia under the command of Emir Turki bin Abdullah Al Saud, founder of the second Saudi state.¹ Shaikh Abdullah found himself facing a foe so dangerous that he was compelled to formulate a strategy that combined diplomacy with warfare. He confronted the Saudis militarily when there was a good likelihood of victory, while in unfavourable political circumstances he stifled his deep resentment of Saudi hegemony, resorting to diplomacy and temporary submission.

The following sections describe Shaikh Abdullah's great ability as a military leader and a diplomat skilled in political manoeuvres. He used those skills with considerable efficiency against many enemies eager to dispossess his family. His successes protected the integrity of his family's dominions and ensured Bahrain's independence from both Saudi and Omani hegemony. He played a paramount role in crystallising the position of the Al Khalifa family and the Utub as Bahrain's political rulers. If not for him, Bahrain might today be part of Saudi Arabia or Oman.

2. Dealing with the Threat of Rahma al-Jalahma: Death of Rahma al-Jalahma, 1826

Shaikh Abdullah used various methods to deal with the problems, annoyances and threats of Rahma bin Jabir. Rahma had been defeated, as had his ally the Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar, Sayyid Said, in the battle of Maqta'a in 1816. The subsequent peace accord between the Sultan and the Al Khalifa family had the effect of isolating

¹ Turki bin Abdullah probably chose the title of Emir instead of Imam, used by his predecessors, so as not to incense the Ottomans. He probably figured that his predecessors' mistake was to challenge the Ottomans in religious leadership of the Sunni Muslim world. It led to their demise, and he certainly would not have wished to repeat their error.

Rahma, leaving him with no strong allies to aid him in his quest to invade Bahrain and destroy Al Khalifa authority. His isolation was deepened by the fall of the Saudis, defeated by the Governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, and his troops in 1818.² Rahma probably realized that he himself did not have the necessary force to launch an outright attack that would oust Shaikh Abdullah and his family. This may have prompted him to take a fresh approach and use different tactics.

Rahma relocated to the town of Dammam on the east Arabian coast, just opposite Bahrain and close to Qatif. From there he started attacking, looting and extorting tribute from the people of Qatif and Hasa. Of course, Bahrain's maritime trade and that of its dependencies in Qatar were not exempt from Rahma's attacks and harassments,³ which he probably perpetrated for two reasons. First, the money, booty and tribute that he collected provided him with the financial means and ability to recruit mercenaries, as well as enabling him to amass provisions and arms for his next showdown with Shaikh Abdullah. The second reason was that harassment of trade in Shaikh Abdullah's domains would naturally have weakened the family and its allies financially.

Shaikh Abdullah first tried peaceful means to solve the problem of Rahma al-Jalahma. On 22 April 1822, he sent an agent to the British Resident in the Gulf.⁴ The agent asked the British Resident to mediate in the dispute between Shaikh Abdullah and Rahma, with the object of a return to their relative positions in *status quo ante*

² Francis Warden, "Historical Sketch of the Wahabee Tribe of Arabs; From the Year 1795 to the Year 1818", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series. Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]) 436.

³ Nasser Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain Fi Tarikh al-Bahrayn* [The Necklaces of Pearl in the History of Bahrain] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 2003 [c.1924]), 261.

⁴ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttooabee Tribe of Arabs(Bahrein;)", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985 [1856]), 373.

bellum.⁵ The British Political Agent in Basidu agreed to assume such a role and sent instructions to the British Resident in Bushire to mediate between the two parties. However, the instructions carried strict conditions, specifying that the British Government would take no responsibility for enforcing the conditions of any deal struck between Rahma al-Jalahma and Shaikh Abdullah.⁶

The British Government, understandably, had a vested interest in peaceful maritime trade over land and sea routes in the Gulf region. Even so, it seemed unwilling to take any risks or responsibility for military intervention between two local Shaikhs unless British trade was harmed or threatened. Realising this, Rahma al-Jalahma probably refrained from attacking British vessels to avoid the wrath of the British fleet and to deprive Shaikh Abdullah of the ability to convince the British that Rahma was a pirate to be put down by force. The British arranged a meeting between Shaikh Abdullah and Rahma al-Jalahma at Basidu, fifty miles east of the Strait of Hormuz. The meeting was unsuccessful because the acting Political Agent, Colonel Kennet, was unable to reconcile the differences between the demands of the two men. Lorimer states that each man had unreasonable expectations of the other, though he does not specify either their expectations or their reasons for unacceptability.⁷

Shaikh Abdullah, apparently undaunted, remained resilient and optimistic about brokering a peace deal with Rahma. He probably knew quite well that Rahma lacked the military power to take Bahrain and its dependencies on his own, but he also seems to have been aware that Rahma's activities damaged his dominions' economic activities. It is likely that the Shaikh acknowledged the imprudence of trying to settle

⁵ Ibid; the phrase is Latin and roughly means 'the state in which things were before the war'.

⁶ Lt S. Hennell, "*Historical Sketch Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs*", 373.

⁷ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. I, historical, part II (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 851.

his conflict with Rahma through military means. Had he attempted to do so, Rahma would have simply relocated to the Persian coast, entering under the protection of the Governor of the Persian province of Fars.⁸ The Shaikh would then have drained his resources on wild goose chases trying to bring him to battle. Safe maritime commerce, the Shaikh would have reasoned, depended on minimising the tensions between himself and Rahma. The Shaikh used no more force, eventually concluding a peace agreement brokered by the British Resident in the Gulf, Lt. Col. E.G. Stannus, on 7 February 1824.

The agreement's general terms concentrated on three points. First, that Rahma and his dependents, and Shaikh Abdullah and his, should abstain from future mutual aggression and co-exist peacefully as friends. Second, that Rahma should return some of the boats and goods that he and his men had looted from Shaikh Abdullah's ports and subjects. Third, that Rahma would withdraw his protection from the Abu Sumait tribe, who had apparently carried out depredations against Shaikh Abdullah and his domains,⁹ and allow Shaikh Abdullah to punish its members, unhindered by Rahma. Shaikh Abdullah probably thought that, with this agreement, he had succeeded in pacifying Rahma and ensured the safety of trade in his dominions. He was wrong. Peace did not last long, though we do not know the exact date on which it faltered and died. Nonetheless, Rahma returned to his old ways and once again put at risk the maritime trade and activities of Shaikh Abdullah's subjects. The British Resident in Bushire tried, backed by the Bombay Government to settle to resolve the issue of

⁸ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Ustoorah wal Tarikh al-Muwazi* [Muhammad bin Khalifa, the legend and the corresponding history] (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1996), 267-268.

⁹ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 374 ; E.G. Stannus, *Peace Agreement between Shaikh Abdullah b. Ahmad of Bahrain and Rahma b. Jabir of Khaur Hasan, February 1824*, in IOR: P/385/4, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 219-227.

Rahma's depredations and the troubles they caused for the peoples of Bahrain, Qatif, and Qatar. Nonetheless those efforts were not successful.¹⁰

By late 1826, Shaikh Abdullah's patience with Rahma seems to have been exhausted.¹¹ His communications with the British Resident in the Gulf and that gentleman's missives to Rahma had no effect in persuading Rahma to change his ways.¹² The Shaikh apparently decided that his only means of resolving the conflict was to use force. He would have known just how shrewd an enemy Rahma was, and that only a comprehensive plan would defeat him. He was also aware that the people of Qatif and Hasa were as seriously inconvenienced by Rahma as he was, and decided to turn this to his advantage. He contacted the Shaikhs of Hasa, members of the Al Humaid family and chiefs of the powerful Bani Khalid tribe.¹³ Shaikh Muhammad bin Urair Al Humaid and his brother Shaikh Majid, Hasa's ruler, were probably easily convinced that Rahma's annihilation would benefit both and could be achieved by their cooperation.¹⁴ The two Shaikhs devised a plan. Shaikh Ahmad bin Urair, Shaikh

¹⁰ Letter from Political Resident in the Gulf, Lt. Col. E.G. Stannus, to Bombay Government, October (date not clear) 1825; Letter from Bombay Government to Political Resident in the Gulf, Lt. Col. E.G. Stannus, December (date not clear) 1825, in vol. 26 (211), 320-321, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

¹¹ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoabee Tribe of Arabs", 376.

¹² For further details, see the letter from the Resident in the Gulf, Lt Col. EG Stannus, to the Government of Bombay Government on 12 November 1826. See also the translated copy of a letter from Shaikh Abdullah to the British Resident on 19 October 1825 in IOR: P/386/3, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960 Vol I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 290-296.

¹³ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 261.

¹⁴ In letter exchanges between Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, Shaikhs Muhammad and Majid bin Urair, and Rahma bin Jabir on the one hand and the British Resident in the Gulf, Lt Col. E.G. Stannus on the other about the issue of Rahma al-Jalahma, one can clearly realize how much loathing Rahma had brought upon himself because of his depredations. For further details please see: Letter from Shaikh Muhammad bin Urair to Lt Col. E.G.Stannus on 19 September 1825; Letter from Shaikh Muhammad bin Urair to Lt Col. E.G.Stannus on 2 October 1825; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to Lt Col. E.G.Stannus on 19 October 1825; Letter from Lt Col. E.G.Stannus to Shaikh Muhammad bin Urair on 1 November 1825; Letter from Lt Col. E.G.Stannus to Rahma bin Jabir on 1 November 1825; Letter from Rahma bin Jabir to Lt Col. E.G.Stannus on 2 November 1825; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to Lt Col. E.G.Stannus on 3 November 1825; Letter from Lt Col. E.G.Stannus to Rahma bin Jabir on 4 November 1825; Letter from Shaikh Majid bin Urair to Lt Col. E.G.Stannus on 5 November 1825; Letter from Lt Col. E.G.Stannus to Shaikhs Muhammad and Majid bin Urair on 6 November 1825; Letter from Lt Col. E.G.Stannus to Rahma bin Jabir on 7 November 1825; Letter from Rahma bin Jabir to Lt Col. E.G.Stannus on 7 November 1825, in IOR:

Majid's brother, marched upon Rahma's stronghold in the fort of Dammam. When Rahma saw the army approaching, he did not hesitate to confront it and a fierce battle ensued.¹⁵ However, what Rahma did not know was that he was facing a coordinated attack involving both the Al Khalifa and the Al Humaid. Just as the battle was raging between him and Shaikh Ahmad bin Urair, a fleet commanded by Shaikh Abdullah reached the shores of Dammam.

Shaikh Abdullah landed with a contingent of his army and joined the battle. He left the rest of his army in the ships under the command of his nephew, Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman, whose task was to destroy Rahma's ships and prevent him from escaping by sea. Rahma and his troops were caught by surprise as Shaikh Abdullah attacked their rear flanks while they were busy fighting Shaikh Ahmad bin Urair's army to their front. What must have alarmed Rahma even more was that he saw the rest of the Bahraini fleet attempting to destroy his ships. Reacting quickly, he passed the command of the land troops to his son Bishr and hurried to rescue his ships from Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman's fleet.¹⁶ Rahma and Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman fought a hard naval battle, but once Rahma realized that most of his ships were being easily destroyed and that he was fighting a losing battle, he fled in his buggalow *Ghatroosha*.¹⁷ Shaikh Ahmad followed, determined to capture Rahma at any cost, and after a long chase grappled his ship to *Ghatroosha*. Probably seeing that his chances of victory and escape were both gone, Rahma torched his ship's magazine and blew

P/386/3, reprinted in *Records of Qatar, Primary Documents 1820-1960 Vol I 1820-1853*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1991), 196-211.

¹⁵ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 261-262.

¹⁶ Ibid, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 262.

¹⁷ Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya Fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabiya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluum, 1986 [c.1922]), 102. A buggalow was a large ship, native to the Gulf region and used for both commercial and military purposes.

up himself, his crew and their vessel¹⁸ in a dramatic finale to the life of the Al Khalifa family's ardent and resilient foe. See Figure 8.¹⁹

His son Bishr was defeated by the joint forces of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad and Shaikh Ahmad bin Urair. He surrendered the fort of Dammam unconditionally to Shaikh Abdullah, who pardoned and freed him,²⁰ probably because he wanted to avoid inflaming the animosity between the al-Jalahma and the Al Khalifa any further. He must have wanted to extinguish any likely future troubles and vendettas, but if he did, he was yet again disappointed, although he became ruler of Dammam as well as of Bahrain and Qatar.²¹ He returned to the people of Hasa a large quantity of the booty that Rahma had taken and stored in his castle.

¹⁸ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 376; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 263; Letter from E.G Stannus, Resident in the Persian Gulf to the Government of Bombay, December 14, 1826, in IOR: P/386/17, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-1868* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 302-304; Muhammad bin Ahmad Al Thani, *Lamahat Min Tarikh Qatar* [Glimpses from the History of Qatar], Ed. Nasser bin Ali Al Thani (UAE: Ministry of Economy, Office of Intellectual Classifications, 2006 [c. 1953]), 119.

¹⁹ This map was drawn based on both the report of E.G. Stannus, PRPG at the time as well as the accounts of al-Khairi, al-Tajir and al-Nabhani in addition to various traditional oral accounts.

²⁰ Lt A.B Kemball, "Chronological Table of Events with the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein), From the Year 1716 to 1844", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R Hughes Thomas ((Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 144; Lt S. Hennell, "The Proceedings of Rahma bin Jabir, 1809-1826, Sketch of the Proceedings of Rahmah bin Jaubir Chief of Khor Hassan", in *Records of Qatar, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-1853*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1991), 132.

²¹ Al Thani, *Lamahat Min Tarikh Qatar*, 119.

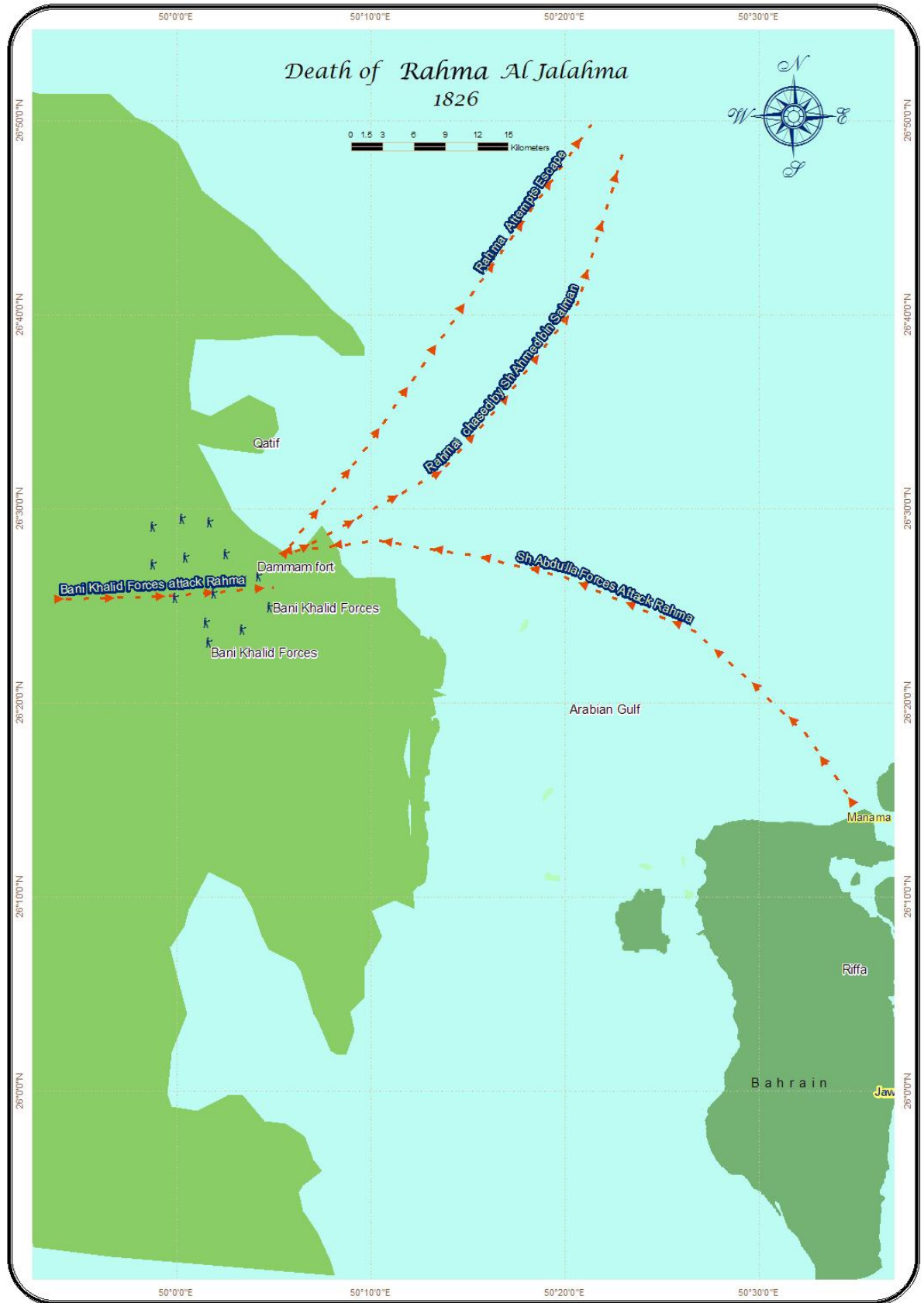


Figure 8: Death of Rahma Al Jalahma 1826

The victory relieved the Al Khalifa of a major external threat to their security that had lasted decades. Shaikh Abdullah played a vital role in thwarting and eliminating that threat. His instincts and first approaches had been peaceful, with the apparent intention to safeguard his dominions' trade and commerce with the least possible cost and sacrifice of human life. Only after all peaceful efforts had failed did the Shaikh resort to force, though when he was compelled into military engagements, such as the battles of Akhakkira and Maqta'a, he succeeded in engaging and defeating his enemies in an efficient manner. He took full advantage of the fact that Rahma had many enemies with grudges against him, orchestrating an alliance with Hasa's rulers, the Al Humaid family. That strategy enabled the Shaikh to catch Rahma off guard, attacking him front and rear, and in the end defeating him. Nonetheless, as we are about to see, this was not the last of the external threats of Shaikh Abdullah's long political life. A new and dangerous threat was about to arise from an old foe.

3. Third Omani Invasion: Battle of Gazgaz

After the violent showdown between Shaikh Abdullah and Rahma al-Jalahma, the Utub and the people in their dependencies entered into a period of peace and quiet during which they practised their trade safely, though their peace was short-lived. As we saw in the previous chapter, Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman, Shaikh Abdullah's nephew, was the guarantor of the peace deal between the Utub and the Sultan of Oman. Shaikh Ahmad guaranteed payment of an annual tribute from the Al Khalifa, and Shaikh Abdullah could not suspend it for fear of embarrassing his nephew.²² According to al-Khairi, Shaikh Ahmad suffered an (unspecified) terminal illness and died at the Palace of Rubaija in Qatar less than a year after his bloody showdown with

²² Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 261.

Rahma al-Jalahma. His death effectively removed Shaikh Abdullah's scruples so that he suspended the Omani tribute forthwith.²³ That suspension led directly to the third Omani invasion of Bahrain under the Al Khalifa and to one of the bloodiest battles the region had seen during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Why did Shaikh Abdullah stop paying the annual tribute? The obvious economic advantage aside, there is a reason that historians might overlook or at least play down. According to al-Khairi, Shaikh Abdullah, his family and the rest of the Utub regarded the payment as a disgrace,²⁴ particularly as they were the people that had beaten the Sultan in 1816. Nearly all agreed that payment should cease,²⁵ though the decision to stop it cannot be considered politically pragmatic. Since the defeat of the first Saudi State by the Egyptians in 1818, the Al Khalifa had had only the Omanis to worry about. The other regional powers and shaikhs in the Gulf lacked the necessary naval power or arms to threaten them seriously. It would have been more sensible to pay the nominal tribute and avoid any possible Omani retribution.

To understand the logic behind Shaikh Abdullah's decision, it might be useful to analyse it from another perspective. The Al Khalifa and the rest of the Utub were probably adhering, on a collective psychological and sociological level, to Bedouin values. The term *Bedouin*, in this case, is not restricted to nomadic Arabs but includes those who were settled but lived in close proximity to, and were of the same stock as,

²³ Ibid, 263-264.

²⁴ Ibid; Another possible explanation for why Shaikh Abdullah and his men decided to stop paying the tribute can be inferred from Jerome Antony Saldanha (ed.), *Précis of Correspondence Regarding the Affairs of the Persian Gulf, 1801-1853* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906; reprinted Archive Editions, 1986), 105-106. In it can be seen that the British authorities were aware of several attempts by the Sultan of Oman to form a covert alliance with Persia against Bahrain. But, those attempts did not yield any alliance. Notwithstanding, it is quite possible that those designs that the Sultan to accomplish with Persian assistance might have leaked to Shaikh Abdullah and the Utub. If that indeed did happen it must have made them feel contempt to the Sultan and desirous to shake off his yoke.

²⁵ Ibid.

nomads. The settlers shared at least some of the nomads' social values and personal attributes. According to Bedouin values, it is a disgrace for a man to come under the yoke of another or to pay a tribute or even a tax to anyone. A man in such a situation should fight or, if faced with impossible odds, emigrate.²⁶ The disgrace would be intensified if a man paid tribute to someone not much more powerful than himself.

Shaikh Abdullah's suspension of the tribute did not lead to an immediate Omani offensive. The trigger to inflict retribution upon Shaikh Abdullah and the Utub was pulled by Bishr, Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma's son.²⁷ Pardoned by Shaikh Abdullah after the battle in Dammam, Bishr was apparently not content to reform. In all likelihood, he was intent on avenging his father. It seems plausible that he saw an opportunity to exact his revenge as soon as he learned of Shaikh Abdullah's decision to suspend the annual Utub tribute to Sayyid Said. Sailing to Muscat in Oman, where he had an audience with Sayyid Said, Bishr managed to convince the Sultan to invade Bahrain and, like his father before him, offered his aid and services.²⁸ The Sultan, who had suffered defeat at the hands of the Utub twelve years earlier in the battle of Maqta'a, apparently did not want to repeat his past mistakes. It seems likely he knew that he was facing a formidable opponent and that victory could be gained only after a great deal of careful preparation. He took all the time he needed—more than a month, according to al-Khairi and al-Tajir—to gather and prepare his forces for the intended invasion of Bahrain.²⁹

²⁶ Ali al-Wardi, *Dirasa Fi Tabeat al-Mujtama'a al-Iraqi* [A Study in the Nature of Iraqi Society] (London: al-Warrak Publishing 2007[1965]), 85-87.

²⁷ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 264; Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya Fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluum, 1986 [c.1922]), 103; Muhammad Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal* [The Necklace of Pearls in the History of Awal] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 1996 [c.1924]), 116.

²⁸ Ibid; ibid; ibid.

²⁹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 264-265; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 116.

Naturally, news of the Sultan's preparations would have forewarned Shaikh Abdullah and his men, and the Shaikh devised a defensive strategy for Bahrain that resulted in a spectacular victory for the Al Khalifa and the Utub. The Shaikh's strategy was twofold: sea and land defence, with naval defence of the islands under his direct command. Dividing the fleet into two sections, he assigned the first to guard the northeastern approaches in case the enemy invaded from that quarter. The second section was placed in the shallow lagoon between Manama and the island of Muharraq. The Shaikh also assembled a number of small vessels, which he filled with stones and sand and hid at Sitrah and other small islands, ordering their crews to be ready to carry out his instructions on receipt of the appropriate signal.³⁰ Those small vessels were to play a paramount role in the forthcoming battle.

Shaikh Abdullah entrusted land defence to the junior co-ruler, his nephew Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman. The plans called for the refortification of the towns of Manama and Muharraq,³¹ whose forts were repaired and staffed by large reinforcements from all over the dominions of the Utub, including Qatar.³² Shaikh Khalifa divided the land forces into three sections. The soldiers in the first section were placed behind the walls of both towns, to guard them from unexpected attacks or a siege, should Sayyid Said's forces defeat the Bahraini force that opposed their landing. The second section, mainly cavalry, was hidden in date groves around the village of Mahooz (southwest of Manama), in the Diwan fort and in surrounding villages.³³ The riders were to be a decisive factor in Shaikh Abdullah's victory.³⁴ The third section of the army, armed mostly with rifles, was placed outside the walls of

³⁰ Ibid, 267; *ibid.*

³¹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 265-266; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 116.

³² Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 378; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 267.

³³ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 116; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 266.

³⁴ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 379.

Manama, in Muharraq, on Sitrah Island and in other places scattered across the country. Their main task was to engage the enemy from a distance once it had landed, and to delay its advance as long as possible before starting a slow retreat. That retreat was apparently calculated to draw enemy forces close to the date groves concealing the cavalry. Once the enemy forces were close enough, the cavalry would charge and surprise the Omanis. A double cannon shot was the agreed-upon signal to indicate where the enemy forces had landed, calling the scattered Bahraini troops to rush to their comrades' aid. The plan also included the provision of 200 small boats to aid in the rapid, flexible transfer of battle forces from one location to another.³⁵

The ingenuity and efficiency of Shaikh Abdullah's military strategy in facing the impending Omani invasion is quite evident. It contains elements of both boldness and caution, and reveals that the Shaikh took all necessary precautions in preparing to face the renewed threat of Sayyid Said. Bahrain was protected from seaborne attack from the east and southeast, particularly the Khor al-Qulai'a area with Sitrah, Manama and Muharraq on three sides of it. On the northwestern axis, north of Muharraq Island, both major naval routes—those most vulnerable to an Omani strike—were safeguarded. An attack from the south was highly unlikely, because the shoal water would hinder the navigation of large ships. An attack from the west was also unlikely, as it would have required the Omanis to sail around the north side of Bahrain in a large arc, giving the Utub forces ample time to prepare for them. Such a manoeuvre would have also placed the Omani forces far from Bahrain's urban centres of Manama and Muharraq, whose capture was vital for an Omani victory. Shaikh Abdullah, with the aid of his nephew Shaikh Khalifa, organised a ground defensive strategy that ensured that the land forces were well distributed to defend the country.

³⁵ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 266; Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 116.

Those forces were also coordinated by the cannon shot signals, and could be transferred easily by small boats. Shaikh Abdullah's defensive strategy was comprehensive, thorough and left nothing to chance. It enabled him to gain a decisive victory over his seemingly superior adversary.

Sayyid Said's fleet reached Bahrain on 31 October 1828, anchoring close to the Khor al-Qulaia'a, south of Juffair.³⁶ The Sultan sent an envoy to persuade Shaikh Abdullah to resume payment of the annual tribute in order to save himself and his country from the Sultan's wrath and avoid bloodshed. Shaikh Abdullah refused, apparently having gained confidence from his last showdown with the Sultan.³⁷ That might explain his defiance and willingness to engage the Omanis in battle. On 9 November, the Sultan's forces moved and gathered around an area called Ras Gazgaz, near the village of Juffair. Shaikh Abdullah ordered two cannon shots as a signal to the scattered troops to move to that area. As the Omani troops started to come ashore near Ras Gazgaz, battle was joined.³⁸ Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, leading his contingents of infantry, ordered them to fire their rifles and engage the Omani forces.³⁹ The Bahraini forces successfully held their ground and held off the Omani advance before starting the gradual retreat called for in Shaikh Abdullah's plan.⁴⁰ That strategy appears similar to the one the Al Khalifa had employed twelve years earlier at the battle of Maqta'a. However, the Bahraini troops at Ras Gazgaz seemingly held their ground for a much longer time, possibly because Shaikh Abdullah expected the Omanis to see through his plan if it was repeated in a similar manner. The delay in

³⁶ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 378.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 268; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 117.

³⁹ Letter from Assoo the Agent in Bahrain to Major D. Wilson Resident in the Persian Gulf on 16 November 1828 in IOR: R/15/1/42, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960 Vol I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 310-311.

⁴⁰ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 268-269.

retreating would ensure that the Omanis took the bait and fell into the trap. See Figure 9.⁴¹

Just as they had at Maqta'a, the Omanis took the bait and pursued the retreating Bahraini troops. When Shaikh Khalifa had drawn them close enough to the date groves, he signalled his hidden cavalry to attack. The Omanis were caught between the cavalry's quick strikes and the infantry, who instantly turned their retreat into a massive counterattack that scattered the Omani forces.⁴² Nevertheless, the Sultan was not overwhelmed. He managed to reorganise his troops quickly and held his ground. The battle was still raging when distressing news reached Sayyid Said. Shaikh Abdullah, who had not taken an active role at the beginning of the battle, moved in with his fleet. He sandwiched the Omani ships between his seaborne cannon and the shore of Juffair. Upon seeing his fleet's predicament, the Sultan hastily rushed to defend it. He was carried off the battlefield by his Nubian retainers and then swam a considerable distance to reach the safety of his ship, but was wounded on the sole of his foot by a spear as he swam.⁴³

⁴¹ This map was drawn based on both the account contained in the letter of the native agent in Bahrain to the PRPG at the time as well as the accounts of al-Khairi and al-Tajir in addition to various traditional oral accounts.

⁴² Ibid, 269-270.

⁴³ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 379.

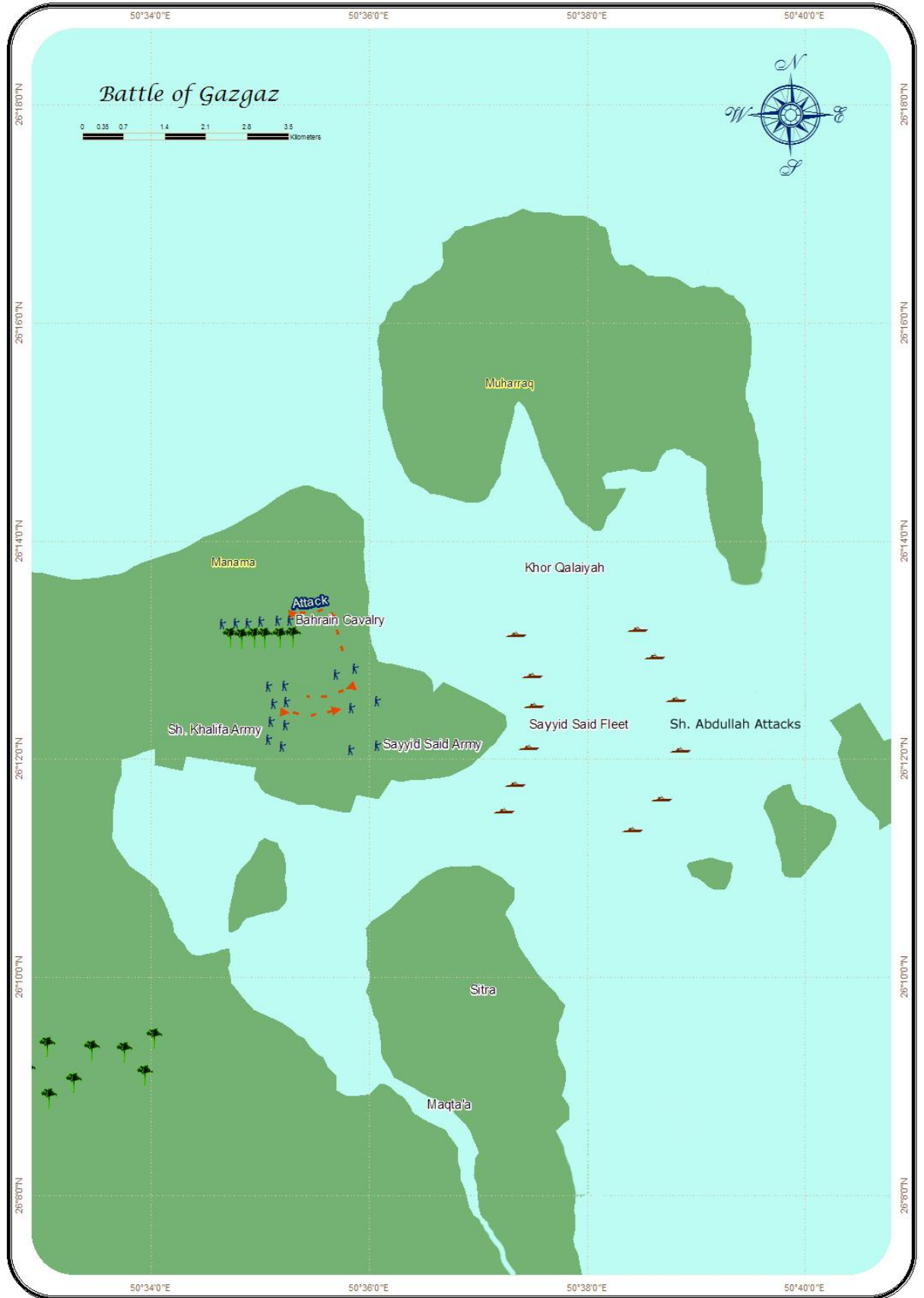


Figure 9: Battle of Gazgaz 1828

The Omani reverse was exacerbated by their own allies, the Abu Dhabi tribe of Bani Yas under Shaikh Tahnoon.⁴⁴ They had fled the battle scene earlier, spreading panic through the rest of the Omani troops. Then, when the Omanis started their eventual retreat, the Bani Yas plundered their allies, preventing many Omani soldiers from reaching their boats.⁴⁵ Understandably, the morale of the Sultan's troops plummeted and panic spread among them.⁴⁶ Again as they had at Maqta'a twelve years earlier, they disintegrated into a disorganised and dangerous retreat, which resulted in their ultimate defeat.⁴⁷ By that time, the Sultan was fully occupied with trying to save his fleet from the wrath of Shaikh Abdullah, but he was to receive yet another shock. As part of his plan, the Shaikh had assembled a number of small vessels, which were filled with sand and stones and well hidden. During the land battle between his nephew and the Sultan's forces, the Shaikh deployed boats into the lagoon. He dumped their ballast to 'reclaim' part of the shallows so thoroughly that the Sultan's navy could leave the lagoon only through a narrow, well-guarded gap, so all would-be escapees had to pass under the guns of Shaikh Abdullah's ships.⁴⁸ Those that ran the gauntlet suffered heavy casualties; those unable to escape became prisoners of war.⁴⁹ Local sources estimate that the Omani death toll numbered 3,000 men,⁵⁰ but the more modest British estimate was in excess of 500, not counting the numerous Omani troops drowned or killed during trying to escape through the

⁴⁴ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Government of Muskat", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 196.

⁴⁵ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 378-379.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Letter from Assoo the Agent in Bahrain To Major D. Wilson Resident in the Persian Gulf on 16 November 1828, 310-311; Letter from the Agent in Sharjah To Major D. Wilson Resident in the Persian Gulf on 28 November 1828 in IOR: R/15/1/48, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960 Vol I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 317-318; Humayd ibn Muhammad Ibn Ruzayq, *al-Fateh al-Mubin Fi Sirat al-Sadah al-Busai'diyn* [The Clear Conquest in the Story of the Busai'di Sayyids] (Oman: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, 1977 [c. 1857]), 537-538.

⁴⁸ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 271; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 117-118.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 272-273; *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 104; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 118.

narrows.⁵¹ According to al-Khairi, it was at that moment that some of Shaikh Abdullah's men sought his permission to capture the Sultan in his moment of weakness, but the Shaikh forbade it 'out of the nobility of his character'.⁵² Those of the Sultan's troops who could not escape surrendered to Shaikh Abdullah and his forces. The Shaikh spared their lives and released them. However, he confiscated their weapons and valuables as war booty and sent them away with a written message for Sayyid Said.⁵³ In it, Shaikh Abdullah warned the Sultan against invading Bahrain again, stating that he had let him escape as a gesture of respect.⁵⁴ With this decisive victory, Shaikh Abdullah ended Omani designs on Bahrain. His careful planning and masterly organisation of his forces enabled him to defeat an enemy with far larger forces—Sayyid Said had the forces of an empire that included Oman, possessions in East Africa and on the southeastern coast of Iran.

4. Repercussions of the Battle of Gazgaz

The Battle of Gazgaz had a profound effect on Bahraini-Omani relations. Not only did Shaikh Abdullah's decisive victory end Oman's continual threat to Bahrain, it also immensely elevated the status, prestige and prominence of the Utub among the rulers of Eastern Arabia. The Al Khalifa family's fame and prestige peaked after their victory against the Sultan, and the surrounding tribes came to hold them in high esteem.⁵⁵ That battle instantly ended the Omani threat against Bahrain and its

⁵¹ Letter from Assoo the Agent in Bahrain To Major D. Wilson Resident in the Persian Gulf on 16 November 1828, 310-311; Letter from the Agent in Sharjah To Major D. Wilson Resident in the Persian Gulf on 28 November 1828, 317-318; Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 379.

⁵² Ibid; 272; *ibid*, 118.

⁵³ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 273.

⁵⁴ Ibid; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 118.

⁵⁵ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 277.

dependencies, although it took another year before a permanent peace deal with Oman and its Sultan was reached.

After the battle, British authorities in the Gulf were apparently eager to ensure that such bloody confrontations would not recur, presumably because they threatened the safety of maritime trade in the region, which had strong connections with British possessions in India. The British Resident tried to persuade Shaikh Abdullah to make peace with the Sultan, but the Shaikh would agree to do so only if the British Government guaranteed any peace deal between him and the Omanis. The Resident, believing that his superiors would issue no such guarantee, abandoned further attempts at mediation.⁵⁶ Shaikh Abdullah was apparently still worried about Sayyid Said, possibly because he had heard that the Sultan might have been planning another attack. If that was true, it could well have been the reason that Shaikh Abdullah felt compelled to take a more proactive strategy. To do so would have been very logical as he had probably gained confidence from his victory at Gazgaz. Therefore, On 21 March 1829, a fleet of seven large vessels sailed for Muscat under Shaikh Abdullah's personal command.⁵⁷ Apparently, the primary objective was to cruise against the coasts of the Sultan's territories, to convey the message that the Bahraini fleet could strike the Sultan's capital. As soon as Sayyid Said was aware of the approach and designs of the Utub fleet, he sent two frigates to meet them and a small skirmish ensued, with no fatalities on either side. On its way home again, while still close to Muscat, the Bahraini fleet attacked and captured a commercial buggalow from the town of Mirbat, Dhofar, on the Arabian Sea. That must have infuriated the Sultan, who immediately sent two ships to intercept the assailants. They met near Cape Mubarak. Shaikh Abdullah ran his fleet into shallow waters and used his Mirbat prize

⁵⁶ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 380.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 379.

as a shield to protect his ships from the Omani cannons. The Mirbat vessel's cargo was looted and, under cover of night, Shaikh Abdullah altered his ships' course and returned safely to Bahrain.⁵⁸

That new development, of course, must have alarmed the British Resident in the Gulf. The treaty against piracy, drawn up between Britain and Bahrain in 1820 had, as the British saw it, been openly violated. The British authorities reacted angrily and the Gulf Resident sent two warships to Bahrain. He made it clear that if Shaikh Abdullah did not remunerate the value of the captured vessel's cargo, about 8,000 Indian Rupees, violent measures might be taken against him. The threat worked and the Shaikh paid the amount demanded.⁵⁹ It seems that the British authorities at the time did not look at that incident as an act of privateering between two nations at war. Had they done so, the Shaikh's action would not have been a breach of the 1820 agreement, as the agreement did not ban maritime warfare or privateering. The British chose to regard it as an act of piracy for another reason. They feared, quite possibly, that if such acts of privateering continued unchecked, tensions between Bahrain and Oman would have escalated even further. Such an escalation could have threatened the safety of maritime trade and possibly even given an excuse for other rulers in the Gulf to violate the terms of the 1820 agreement, perhaps on the pretext of joining in the privateering raids on the side of Oman or Bahrain.

The taking of the Mirbat buggalow was more likely to have been motivated by political than by financial reasons. It was probably a demonstration of Shaikh Abdullah's ability to threaten trade passing in and out of Omani ports, a severe economic threat that could have pushed the Sultan to seek British intervention and

⁵⁸ Ibid, 380.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

help. Another possible reason for the Shaikh's action could have been his desire to convince the British authorities in the Gulf that continuing animosity between Bahrain and Oman was counterproductive to Gulf security and maritime trade. Holding that belief, the British government might have been persuaded to guarantee a peace deal between him and the Sultan. If that was indeed Shaikh Abdullah's logic, it turned out to be flawed.⁶⁰

It was not the British authorities in the Gulf, but a local chief, Shaikh Muhammad bin Nasser of Bushire, who finally managed to mediate a peace deal between Shaikh Abdullah and the Sultan.⁶¹ It was concluded on 2 December 1829 and stipulated that the Shaikh of Bahrain and its dependencies should pay no tribute to the Sultan of Oman and that neither party should interfere in the other's internal affairs. There was also a verbal agreement in which both parties promised mutual assistance should any enemy threaten either of them. Shaikh Tahnoon of Abu Dhabi was also admitted to the treaty. However, Shaikh Abdullah insisted that the al-Bu Sumait tribe, who resided mainly at Asilo, on the Persian coast, be excluded from the treaty.⁶² The reason appears to have been the existence of an alliance between that tribe and Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma, and the exclusion would have given the Shaikh a free hand to chastise them. The 1829 deal secured peace between Bahrain and Oman, and no threats of Omani invasion have ever again arisen. Shaikh Abdullah, of course,

⁶⁰ For more details on the issue between Shaikh Abdullah and the Sayyid Said and its repercussions see Letter from Major D. Wilson, Resident in Gulf to William Newnham Esquire, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 13 August and 5 September 1829 enclosing notes of a conference with Haji Abdul Ameer, agent of Sayyid Said regarding negotiations of Peace between Shaikh Abdullah and the Sayyid on 23 August 1829 and translation of a note from Haji Abdul Ameer to Major D. Wilson on 24 August 1829; Letter from Resident in Gulf, Major D. Wilson to Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad on 24 August 1829; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to Resident in Gulf, Major D. Wilson on 29 August 1829; Letter from Resident in Gulf, Major D. Wilson to Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad on 4 September 1829; Major D. Wilson to Sayyid Said bin Sultan on 4 September 1829 in IOR: R/15/1/42, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960 Vol I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 339-351.

⁶¹ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 856.

⁶² *Ibid.*

deserves considerable credit for this. His efforts and resilience had played a major role in attaining such security for Bahrain. He was still not free from external threats, however. The next threat, as we shall see in the next section, arose from the revival of another old foe, the new Saudi Emir Turki bin Abdullah Al Saud. He had succeeded in restoring the Al Saud family's authority in Najd, thus establishing the Second Saudi State.

5. Facing the Renewed Saudi Threat

No sooner had he secured himself and his dominions from the threat of the Omani than Shaikh Abdullah had to turn and face the revived strength of old foes who were encroaching upon and threatening his domains. That renewed threat came from the Saudis, who were returning to power after the 1818 destruction of the First Saudi State at the hands of Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt. One member of the Al Saud family, Turki bin Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Saud, had escaped capture and deportation to Egypt. He managed to hide among the Bedouin tribes of Najd, lying low as he waited for an opportunity to expel the occupying Egyptian forces and reclaim his family's throne. After five years of hiding, Turki bin Abdullah started actively to gather supporters and oppose the Egyptians. By 1824, he had succeeded in capturing Riyadh, ousting the Egyptian garrison and proclaiming himself the new Saudi ruler. In early 1830 his son, Prince Faisal bin Turki, defeated the Bani Khalid tribe under the command of the Al Humaid family, rulers of Hasa, at the battle of Sabya, returning Hasa to Saudi rule.⁶³

⁶³ Gebran Chamieh, *Al Saud Madhihim wa Mustaqbaluhum* [Al Saud Their Past, Their Future] (London: Riad el-Rayyas & Associates Ltd, 1986), 69. See letter of Political Agent in Persian Gulf, Major David Wilson, to Bombay Government, 4 May 1825, enclosing a letter from the native agent in Bahrain to the Political Resident, 26 April 1825, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 47 (432), 1-2, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India. In his letter the agent explains the new

These developments would naturally have worried Shaikh Abdullah. The revival of Saudi authority in Najd was a sign of renewed external threats against Bahrain and its dependencies. The memory of the battle of Akhakkira and the ordeals associated with it were probably still fresh in the Shaikh's mind, and by the end of 1830 his suspicions were confirmed by the arrival of an envoy from the new Saudi Emir. His message stipulated that the Al Khalifa family should resume the payment of Zakat (Islamic tithe).⁶⁴ Emir Turki's grounds for his demand were possibly that Zakat had been paid to his predecessors, and the right to receive it had devolved upon him. Emir Turki also demanded 40,000 German Crowns as compensation for a number of horses belonging to the Saudi garrison that had once occupied Bahrain. His final demand was that the fort of Dammam, which was among the Al Khalifa possessions on the Arabian mainland, be surrendered to Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma.⁶⁵ All of those demands, especially the last one, were naturally unwelcome to Shaikh Abdullah and his family. The Shaikh could have refused them and prepared for a military confrontation with the Saudis if it came to that. He had ample experience of fighting and beating the Saudis, and he had battle-hardened troops from his recent showdowns with Sayyid Said and Rahma al-Jalahma. Nonetheless, the arrival of such unwelcome news seems to have dissuaded him from violence. Allegedly, word reached him that

developments that were happening at the time in Eastern Arabia and how the new Saudi Emir, Turki bin Abdullah Al Saud, managed to defeat Bani Khalid and take over the provinces of Hasa and Qatif. The agent explains that how the new Saudi Ruler starts to pursue a policy of political friendship and appeasement by sending presents to both Shaikhs Abdullah and Khalifa of Bahrain, Shaikh Jabir bin Abdullah of Kuwait, and also to Daud Pasha in Baghdad. In another letter that the Political Resident sends to the Bombay Government, 17 June 1830, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 47 (432), 3-5, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India, the PRPG echoes the same message that the native agent expressed in his letter about Emir Turki bin Abdullah. He mentions that he is not as strict as his predecessors, including the matter of smoking tobacco which the Emir seemed to not be so strict about prohibiting, and made public that any pilgrim who desires to travel to Mecca via Najd is welcomed and will be under his protection. Nevertheless, this friendly approach seems to have only been a political maneuver until he was able to consolidate his rule in Eastern Arabia. As shall be seen later on his position changed dramatically towards the Utub of Bahrain to one of confrontation.

⁶⁴ Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 381.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 381.

Sayyid Said might well ally himself to Emir Turki if Bahrain took arms against the house of Saud.⁶⁶ The prospect of such an alliance between the Saudis and the Omanis understandably worried the Shaikh. Despite his previous military successes, he would have found it extremely difficult to face two strong foes at the same time. Diplomacy was the path to take.

Shaikh Abdullah's first action was an attempt to implicate the British authorities in the Gulf. He endeavoured to persuade them to intervene with the Emir on his behalf, placing Bahrain under the umbrella of British protection. The British were not persuaded,⁶⁷ being at that time apparently wary of intervening in the internal affairs of the Arab coast's local rulers. That policy underwent radical change in less than fifty years. Realising that his efforts with the British were going nowhere, Shaikh Abdullah seemingly decided to deal with the Saudi threat in his own way. He sent a close relative to Riyadh, the new Saudi capital, to negotiate a deal that would carry favourable terms for the Al Khalifa and the rest of the Utub. The envoy was successful, securing a deal with Emir Turki. Shaikh Abdullah would acknowledge the Saudi Emir's supremacy and pay him an annual Zakat. On the other hand, the Emir was bound to provide Shaikh Abdullah with assistance and protection if the latter faced any external threat.

Even so, some of Emir Turki's actions made Shaikh Abdullah wary. The Emir allowed Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma, along with his tribal allies of the al-bu Sumait, all on bad terms with Shaikh Abdullah and the rest of the Utub, to settle on the island of Tarut, opposite Qatif and close to the Dammam fort.⁶⁸ Shaikh Abdullah's suspicions of Emir Turki's intentions proved to be well founded, as Bishr al-Jalahma

⁶⁶ Ibid, 381.

⁶⁷ J..G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 856.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 856-857; Lt S. Hennell, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 381-382.

attempted to invade Bahrain in January 1832. Shaikh Abdullah easily thwarted him, but took no punitive action against him, probably to avoid offending the Emir of Najd.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, other factors worked to the Shaikh's advantage. Later in the same year, Bishr al-Jalahma had a major quarrel with the people of the coastal town of Qatif on the Arabian mainland. The quarrel culminated in Bishr destroying his own fortress and departing to Muscat with his dependents and followers.⁷⁰ Naturally, the Shaikh would have been greatly relieved. The removal of such an immediate threat allowed him to make plans to shake off Saudi hegemony. His first success was to induce Sayyid Said to remain neutral in the event of any confrontations between Bahrain and Emir Turki. With that achieved, the Shaikh used money and promises to organise a 'consortium' of mainland tribes disgruntled with Saudi authority.⁷¹

In 1833, the Shaikh seems to have convinced the Awamir section of the Bani Khalid tribe to launch assaults on Saudi dominions in Hasa. Supplied and financed by Shaikh Abdullah, they harassed the Saudi forces extensively. Emir Turki appears to have been unable to retaliate immediately, and early in 1834, Shaikh Abdullah took a proactive role and started to launch direct offensives, blockading the ports of Qatif and Uqair.⁷² The Saudi leader, no doubt alarmed and angered, dispatched an army under the command of his son Faisal to rescue the Saudi domains on the Gulf littoral. On hearing of the Saudi advance, Shaikh Abdullah assembled an army and led it to Qatif in person. The Saudi army marched to meet them and a violent battle ensued.⁷³ According to Muhammad al-Tajir, the people of Qatif became very agitated after

⁶⁹ Lt A.B. Kimball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs" (Bahrein:)", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 382.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 857.

⁷³ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 119.

nearly forty days of hostilities, allegedly terrified that the victor would plunder their town. Being Shiites, they favoured the more tolerant Al Khalifa and their allies over the Saudis, who had meted out harsh treatment to them. That probably induced them to send an emissary to Shaikh Abdullah, offering to surrender their town to the authority of the Al Khalifa if the Shaikh would protect them and spare their lives and property. The Shaikh agreed and added the town to his domains and dependencies.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, al-Tajir does not explain the events surrounding the surrender, so we do not know what happened to the town's Saudi governor. It is quite possible that the inhabitants betrayed him and facilitated the capture of their town by Shaikh Abdullah. The war continued unabated. Prince Faisal appears to have been resilient and refused to give up easily.⁷⁵ That said, an unexpected turn of events forced him to return to Riyadh. His father was murdered by Faisal's cousin Mashari bin Abdul-Rahman Al Saud and Faisal understandably became preoccupied with avenging his father and ousting the usurper.⁷⁶ According to Lorimer, Emir Turki's assassination by his nephew was engineered by Shaikh Abdullah, who allegedly celebrated Turki's death publicly by firing guns and showing other signs of joy when news of the assassination reached Bahrain.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid, p 120.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 105; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 282.

⁷⁷ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 857. It is strange that none of the leading local Bahraini historians (al-Khairi, al-Nabhani and al-Tajir) mentioned this. If Shaikh Abdullah had indeed instigated this murder, some of them would surely have mentioned it. Ibn Bishr, considered by many the prime local historian for the Al Saud, never mentioned this detail either. A possible explanation for the omission is that it would have been important for Ibn Bishr to concentrate on Faisal's accession to the throne, or that the mention might have embarrassed the Al Saud family. The latter explanation looks likely, considering that Ibn Bishr wrote his history with the most likely purpose of glorifying the Al Saud family and might have felt it necessary to downplay any of their defeats, setbacks and shortcomings. However, it is strange that the local Bahraini historians did not mention this detail. A possible explanation can be found by looking at the time at which they were writing, the 1920s. At that time, relations between the Al Saud and Al Khalifa families were good, and it would not have been politic to bring up facts capable of upsetting relations between the two families. We also have to consider that the Saudi monarch at the time, King Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul-Rahman Al

Once Prince Faisal had left for Najd, Shaikh Abdullah seized the opportunity to capture the island of Tarut from the Saudi garrison guarding it, bribing some of the soldiers.⁷⁸ That acquisition ended the Qatif war with the Saudis. The Shaikh had not only thrown off Saudi control but had also added the town of Qatif and the island of Tarut to the dependencies ruled by Bahrain.

With the war over and its booty still being distributed, an event occurred that would have profound ramifications. Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, Shaikh Abdullah's nephew and junior co-ruler, had an intense dispute with some of Shaikh Abdullah's sons over the division of some war booty.⁷⁹ That seems to have upset Shaikh Khalifa so much that he developed a severe fever and died.⁸⁰ Kemball points out that "vicious and oppressive conduct" by Shaikh Abdullah's son towards Shaikh Khalifa had caused his death on 31 May 1834.⁸¹ Shaikh Khalifa's eldest son, Shaikh Muhammad, succeeded him,⁸² but Shaikh Abdullah did not accord the new co-ruler all of his father's prerogatives and powers.⁸³ It was not until a year later that an event, discussed in the next chapter, helped Shaikh Muhammad to increase his power and prestige and to emulate the position of his father. Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman's death and Shaikh Muhammad's succession ushered in a new period of turbulence for Bahrain and its inhabitants. It removed any check on the insolence of Shaikh Abdullah's sons, which

Saud, was Emir Turki's great-grandson; he enjoyed a cordial relationship with Shaikh Isa bin Ali and later with his son, Shaikh Hamad, both of whom ruled Bahrain at the time. This was no time to revive old tensions between the two families.

⁷⁸ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 857.

⁷⁹ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 119-120.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 120; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 283.

⁸¹ Lt A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 384.

⁸² Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 120.

⁸³ Lt A.B. Kemball, "Chronological Table of Events with the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 146.

kept increasing until it culminated in conflict and feud within the Al Khalifa family.⁸⁴

Subsequent chapters discuss those events in detail.

6. Conclusion

This chapter examined how Shaikh Abdullah succeeded in thwarting external threats. Had he failed to do so, the political map of the Gulf today might be very different. The Al Khalifa family's retention of its political position owes a great deal to this man's efforts and successes. Without them, Bahrain might today be part of Saudi Arabia, under the al-Jalahma family's rule, or even an overseas dependency of Oman. For every threat he faced, Shaikh Abdullah's varied choice of strategies and tactics enabled him to overcome his foes and achieve his objectives. Such strategies demonstrate his skills as a military commander, diplomat, strategist and tactician.

The Shaikh's first threat came from his old enemy, Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma. The Shaikh seems to have realized that Rahma alone was too weak to pose any real threat, either to his person or to his possessions. On the other hand, he probably also realized that Rahma could inflict major damage to the economy of Bahrain and its dependencies by naval harassment of Bahraini commercial fleets. That realization gives the most likely reason for the Shaikh's decision to pacify Rahma at any cost and under all circumstances. The Shaikh first tried to achieve a diplomatic solution by drawing up a peace agreement with Rahma. He succeeded in inducing the British authorities in the Gulf to help him do this; they were reluctant at first but finally agreed. The Shaikh achieved peace with Rahma at his second attempt, but Rahma failed to honour his commitments, so the Shaikh took a more confrontational approach. He demonstrated his shrewdness by managing to form a coalition with the

⁸⁴ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 857.

Bani Khalid tribe, also on poor terms with Rahma, on the mainland. This enabled him to organise a stealthy attack, by both land and sea, on Rahma's mainland fortress. Rahma, taken totally by surprise, could not escape, and took his own life after a desperate attempt to flee. This violent conclusion enabled Shaikh Abdullah permanently to eliminate the threat of Rahma, and though his son, Bishr, tried unsuccessfully to walk in his father's footsteps, the al-Jalahma family's ambition to rule Bahrain was destroyed.

When dealing with the Omani threat, the Shaikh's military tactics were also successful. At the Battle of Gazgaz, he managed to lure the Omanis into fighting a land battle, thus depriving them of any naval advantage. After defeating them on his own turf, he pursued a strategy of securing a perpetual peace, thus stopping the Omani threat permanently. He became the aggressor, attacking the Omanis in their own territories. There are two possible reasons for this. First, that he wanted to make the Omani Sultan feel threatened by the knowledge that the Shaikh would no longer take only defensive stances, but could also attack—the Shaikh would have considered that an excellent way to persuade the Sultan to seek perpetual peace. Second, that the Shaikh purposely tried to alarm British authorities in the Gulf, to induce them to pressure Sayyid Said of Oman into concluding a peace treaty. That did not work, as the British authorities in the region refused to be drawn into local politics. Even without British help, the Shaikh still managed to achieve his objective. The Sultan eventually agreed to perpetual peace with Shaikh Abdullah and the Utub under the brokerage and mediation of Shaikh Muhammad bin Nasser of Bushire. That treaty stands as a testimony to the Shaikh's skill in mixing diplomatic and military tactics to reach his goals.

The last threat discussed in this chapter came from the resurgent Saudis. No doubt recalling his clashes with the First Saudi State, the Shaikh determined to deal with the re-emerging threat at all costs. However, prudence seems to have persuaded him not to confront the Saudis while the possibility of their alliance with Sayyid Said existed. He therefore paid tribute to the Saudi Emir until he was certain of the Sultan's neutrality. Once that was achieved, the Shaikh orchestrated a consortium of tribal allies who were disgruntled with the Saudis. When all was ready, he shook off Saudi hegemony by stopping his tribute payments and attacking Saudi possessions on the mainland. His reason for doing so might have been that he realized that Bahrain, with its rich pearl banks, ample supplies of fresh water, date groves and strategic position, was the jewel in his dependencies' crown. Harassing the Saudis on the Arabian mainland would occupy them with the defence of their possessions, and keep them from even thinking of invading his. If this indeed was the case, the Shaikh proved himself an able and very successful strategist.

CHAPTER V

Sole Rule of Shaikh Abdullah, Rise of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa: Beginnings of Internal Troubles, Isa bin Tarif, Persians and Egyptians 1834-1842

1. Introduction

This chapter examines Shaikh Abdullah's reign between 1834 and 1842. It was a period during which the Shaikh ruled Bahrain and its dependencies with the help of his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. Shaikh Muhammad had succeeded his late father, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, as co-ruler in 1834, albeit without the same authority. In the period covered in this chapter, Shaikh Abdullah contended with four threats to his rulership. Three of these were external, and the Shaikh successfully protected himself against all of them. The fourth was internal; it was the last threat of his long political career, and the one that he was unable to defend himself against.

This chapter illustrates how an Arabian Gulf ruler dealt with major external threats from much larger and stronger political forces. The Saudis this time posed the least threat compared with the other two which were much greater. Shaikh Abdullah could not rely mainly on military means against adversaries with such strength. Therefore, he used various schemes of political and diplomatic manoeuvring to wriggle out of danger. Rulers of his day would play one power against another,

seeking protection and alliance from one power to use against another. Another tactic was to place oneself under the protection of another power to safeguard persons and property from outside danger—a practice known as *dakhala*, examined at length in the works of James Onley. As Onley clearly points out, the practice of *dakhala* was an important mechanism that the Shaikhs in the Gulf used to protect themselves and hold their domains intact.¹ As can be seen in this study, Shaikh Abdullah used such a tactic, as well as the other two, quite extensively.

Arabian Gulf rulers in the first half of the nineteenth century needed to succeed against internal challenges as well as external ones to secure their position.² Therefore this chapter also studies their methods to combat internal threats to their authority. Threats like these came from ambitious tribal chiefs among allies or even from aspiring members of a ruler's own family, including his sons. Shaikh Abdullah's political undoing stemmed from his inability to diffuse such internal threats. He was incapable of curbing the insolence of some of his sons. That led to tribal revolts in Qatar, trouble with the British and their native agent in Bahrain, and an internal Al Khalifa family revolt. It resulted in Shaikh Abdullah losing his position as ruler of Bahrain, Qatar and other Arabian mainland dependencies, as described in the next chapter. The next section details the threats to Shaikh Abdullah from 1834 to 1842.

¹ James Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century", *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 67-68; James Onley, "The Politics of Protection: The Arabian Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century", *Liwa: Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research* 1 (2009), 25-46; James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study", *History and Anthropology* 17 (2006), 199-204.

² Onley and Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf", 193-199.

2. Threats

The first external threat of the period was a hangover from the time of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman. It came from the Saudis, whose new leader, Emir Faisal bin Turki bin Abdullah Al Saud, continued to pose a menace to Shaikh Abdullah's domains. The Shaikh dealt with that threat by imposing naval blockades on the Saudi ports of Qatif and Uqair among other military manoeuvres. This strategy helped him not only to guard himself against the Saudis, but also to gain allies and thus the means to combat other threats.

The Persians posed the second external threat. In 1836, the Persian government, represented by the Prince of Shiraz, claimed that Bahrain belonged to Persia. This was no idle claim, as the Persians had the Sultan of Oman as a prospective ally who could easily have supplied them with the necessary naval forces and military expertise for an expedition against Bahrain. The Shaikh managed to defuse that threat through political manoeuvring. He used his old adversaries, the Saudis, as new allies to neutralise Sayyid Said of Oman and deny Omani aid to the Persians. The prospect of fighting Bahrain's navy alone, with the Saudis against them too, cannot have been an attractive one for the Persians.

Within two years, the third external threat rose. It came from the Egyptian forces of Muhammad Ali Pasha, who in 1838 launched a military campaign under the command of General Khorshid Pasha. The Egyptian aim was to overthrow the rule of the Saudi Emir Faisal bin Turki in Najd, Central Arabia. And to replace him with Khalid bin Saud as a vassal Emir, loyal to the Egyptians. The campaign in Najd was successful, and by 1839, Khorshid Pasha had advanced into Eastern Arabia and occupied the regions of Hasa and Qatif. His apparent intention was to continue the

advance, adding Bahrain and the other domains of Shaikh Abdullah to the expanding Egyptian realm.

Two political factors made the Shaikh's position even worse. First, the Egyptian advance had renewed Persian interests in Bahrain, so Khorshid Pasha offered Egyptian protection for Shaikh Abdullah's domains. Second, the British authorities, although not ready to guarantee him security, demanded that he notify them before he placed himself under Egyptian protection. The Shaikh was standing on a knife-edge. His response was to enter secret negotiations with, and send mixed messages to, all three parties—Egyptians, British and Persians. This ploy enabled him to conclude a very beneficial deal with the Egyptians that ensured the Shaikh's retention of complete internal control over his domains. At the same time, Egyptian protection was secured by the Shaikh's payment of a small annual tribute—there was no requirement even to station an Egyptian Agent in Bahrain. That deal seems to have angered the British Government, who, as we shall see, considered replacing Shaikh Abdullah with another Shaikh, more favourable to their cause, who would at least abstain from helping Shaikh Abdullah to fight enemies and pretenders.³

The fourth, internal, threat to Shaikh Abdullah proved to be his greatest challenge. After the death of his nephew, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, Shaikh Abdullah's sons felt free to meddle in Bahrain's rulership. Their father, apparently weakened by old age, was unable to restrain them. Their insolent behaviour had devastating consequences for Bahrain and Shaikh Abdullah. Their actions included extorting tribute from traders and terrorising the inhabitants of Bahrain, so that people feared for their own safety and that of their property. That led to an exodus from

³ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. I, historical, part II (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 866; Onley, "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century", 86

Bahrain of many merchants and wealthy individuals, weakening the country economically and diminishing Shaikh Abdullah's income. The Shaikh's sons inflicted extortion even on people under British protection, such as the *bania* traders from India. That certainly brought unwanted British attention, adding even more to the ruler's difficulties. His sons also sought to oust their father and harassed other members of their family. Tribes traditionally loyal to the Al Khalifa family, chief among them the prominent al-bin Ali tribe, were stung to rebellion. Shaikh Abdullah, however, managed to put down the unrest and had the rebel tribes and clans exiled from Qatar.

The effect of his victory was that, for more than three years, Shaikh Abdullah had to contend with the threat of the exiled al-bin Ali tribe under the leadership of Shaikh Isa bin Tarif. Shaikh Abdullah tried reconciliation, but when his efforts failed, he defused their threat by befriending the ruler of Abu Dhabi, who had granted a safe harbour to Isa bin Tarif and his followers. The Shaikh seems to have heard that the ruler and Isa bin Tarif had had a disagreement and apparently used that knowledge to his own ends. The upshot was that the ruler of Abu Dhabi gave Isa bin Tarif the choice of living peaceably in his domain or leaving with his followers. That effectively denied Isa bin Tarif and his followers a port from which they could launch their attacks against the Shaikh's domains and commercial trade. At the same time, it deprived them of the aid of an ally.

Once their father had pardoned them after their defeat in Qatar, the sons resumed their old habits of harassing and extorting money from traders in Bahrain. Even their own relations were not spared. Their actions alarmed Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa bin Salman, grand nephew of Shaikh Abdullah and governor of Manama. He was apparently concerned about the fate awaiting his family and domains if, after

Shaikh Abdullah's death, his unruly and troublesome sons took all the reins of power. The family was about to be shaken to its core, as the next section reveals.

3. Misdemeanours of the Shaikh's Sons

The death of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman in 1834 seems to have been the trigger for the troublesome actions of some of the sons of Shaikh Abdullah. Up until that time, the combined authority of the two Shaikhs had probably been sufficient to inhibit any inherent unruliness in the younger men. Once one of the co-rulers was dead, the sons may have felt that their father had gained absolute power, unassailable by any relatives outside the immediate family—a power that they could abuse with impunity, especially as their father's authority was apparently weakened by old age and could be defied. Each of the Shaikh's sons, and some of his older grandsons, commanded between one and three hundred armed retainers and followers. They set about acting very viciously towards the inhabitants and merchants of Bahrain.⁴ Their excesses and insolence, combined with Shaikh Abdullah's apparent inability to restrain them, resulted in the ruin of the Shaikh's political career, as shall be seen later on.

In that same year of 1834, the British Native Agent in Bahrain was grossly insulted by some of the Shaikh's sons, who were also extorting money from other members of the Hindu British community.⁵ The agent apparently owed money to Shaikh Abdullah for some business transactions, and some of the Shaikh's sons appear to have wanted to seize it, in direct opposition to the wishes of their father. They used ill-treatment and vicious tactics to coerce the Native Agent into paying

⁴ Lt A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein;)", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas ((Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 392.

⁵ James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140-141.

them large sums of money.⁶ Strangely, Shaikh Abdullah could not protect the agent from the aggressions of his sons, who took full advantage of this inability to indulge in aggressive behaviour. They inflicted repeated assaults upon the British Native Agent.⁷ Naturally, such mischief brought unwanted anger and attention from the British Resident in Bushire, David Blane. A naval contingent of two sloops of war was dispatched to Bahrain under the command of the Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf (SNO PG). After spending nearly eleven days in Bahrain, the commander of the Gulf squadron managed to convince Shaikh Abdullah of the necessity of punishing those responsible for harassing the British Native Agent. The harassers were three slaves who belonged to Shaikh Abdullah's son, Muhammad.⁸ The commander demanded that the three men be flogged aboard either the British vessel or one of the Shaikh's vessels.⁹

The Shaikh's sons' irresponsible behaviour and actions clearly placed their father in an embarrassing and difficult situation with the British Resident in the Gulf. They seemed to have lacked any vision or sense of the gravity of their actions, or of their effects on the position and political power of their father. The Shaikh, who had earlier in life demonstrated his ability as a resilient and powerful military commander and politician, seemed unable to stop or control the behaviour and demeanour of his sons. Most local historians attribute the Shaikh's apparent powerlessness over his sons not to a weakness of his character, but to old age. They also cite the loss of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, who would have aided his uncle in curbing the sons' excesses, as

⁶ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 383.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj*, 141.

⁹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 383.

well as the malice of his 'ill natured sons', a trait that would bring the old Shaikh further unwanted and unexpected troubles.¹⁰

4. Continuing the War with the Saudis

When it came to tackling the Saudi threat, Shaikh Abdullah used a strategy of containment. It involved keeping the Saudis at bay and far from Bahrain by continually taking the offensive on the eastern shores of Arabia. The Shaikh seized the opportunity provided by the absence of Faisal bin Turki, who had returned to Najd to avenge the murder of his father, Emir Turki bin Abdullah. The Shaikh used bribery to gain the fortress of Tarut, a dependency of Qatif, which gave him an extra annual income of 30,000 MT Dollars from taxes levied on the farmers of Tarut's rich date groves.¹¹ Shaikh Abdullah also encouraged some tribes, such as the Amayir, to join him in attacking the Saudis. The Amayir tribe obliged, attacking Hasa and Qatif, parts of their possessions that had been taken by the Saudis. They were, however, soundly defeated by Omar Ibn Ufaisan, the Saudi governor of Hasa, and forced to retreat to Tarut.¹² Even with that setback, the Shaikh had succeeded in turning Saudi attention away from Bahrain and Qatar and towards Tarut and Qatif.

Saudi politics had undergone radical change since the murder of Emir Turki bin Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Saud in 1834. Faisal bin Turki soon avenged his father's murder by killing the usurper, Mishari bin Abdul-Rahman Al Saud, the

¹⁰ Nasser Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain Fi Tarikh al-Bahrayn* [The Necklaces of Pearl in the History of Bahrai] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 2003 [c.1924]), 284-290; Muhammad Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal* [The Necklace of Pearls in the History of Awal] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 1996 [c.1924]), 120-122.

¹¹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 383-384.

¹² *Ibid*, 384.

victim's maternal nephew.¹³ After establishing his position as the new and legitimate Emir of Najd, Faisal bin Turki redirected his attention towards reclaiming Qatif and Tarut. In 1835, he launched a campaign to regain Tarut from Shaikh Abdullah, but the campaign ended in failure. Despite his success in repelling the invaders, Shaikh Abdullah apparently decided to maintain his pressure on the Saudi forces by imposing a strict blockade on the ports of Qatif and Uqair and plundering Saudi vessels at sea.¹⁴ Although his strategy failed to gain a definite advantage, it wore down his enemies' forces and allowed him to alleviate the Saudi threat. It is likely that the Shaikh planned to let the conflict drag on, exhausting the Saudi forces to the point at which he could execute a killer blow. Whether or not this was the case we shall never know, as the Shaikh's attention was distracted by new troubles, caused by his sons, as described in the next section.

5. The Conspiracy of Shaikh Abdullah's Sons

The sons of Shaikh Abdullah, already heaping troubles and embarrassment on their elderly father by harassing the merchants and inhabitants of Bahrain, compounded their malice by conspiring to overthrow their father and take control of Bahrain and its dependencies.¹⁵ Nasser Al-Khairi gives us a detailed and vivid description of the start of the troubles in 1250 AH (1835 AD). Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa wanted to marry a young lady from the Al Fadhil, his maternal cousins, against the wishes of Shaikh Ali, a son of Shaikh Abdullah, who apparently wanted to marry her himself. Shaikh Ali was supported by his brothers, and it seemed that conflict would erupt

¹³ Lt A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of Wahabee Tribe of Arabs", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 442; Gebran Chamieh, *Al Saud Madhihim wa Mustaqbaluhum* [Al Saud, their Past and their Future] (London: Riad El-Rayyes & Associates, Ltd., 1986), 70.

¹⁴ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttooabee Tribe of Arabs", 384.

¹⁵ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 285; Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 120-121.

between the young Al Khalifa Shaikhs. Shaikh Abdullah stepped in to halt the family conflict. He issued an edict stating that, since Shaikh Muhammad was the first to ask for the young lady's hand and since she was his maternal cousin, then it was he who should marry her, not Shaikh Ali. Both al-Khairi and al-Nabhani tell us that Shaikh Ali and his brothers Ahmad, Nasser, Muhammad and Mubarak were all deeply angered.¹⁶ The sons protested loudly, showing great disrespect and disdain for their father's ruling. Shaikh Abdullah, who must have been surprised and alarmed by their reaction and impolite attitude towards him, replied just as harshly. He threatened to punish them by banishment from Bahrain if they did not show appropriate respect for him, obey his edict and cease their unruly ways. According to al-Khairi, this firm stance scared his sons into submission and silence.¹⁷ Nevertheless, as history reveals, their apparent submission concealed the seeds of a rebellion.

The sons of Shaikh Abdullah devised a plan to overthrow their father and rule in his place over Bahrain and its dependencies. According to al-Khairi's account, they went on a hunting trip south of the village of A'ali in Bahrain. It was a subterfuge to hide their main purpose of conspiring freely in a secluded place, to devise a plan for their intended coup.¹⁸ Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, upon whom his grand uncle Shaikh Abdullah depended for the running of the government, apparently became very suspicious of his cousins' intentions because his brother Shaikh Ali, with whom Shaikh Muhammad was not on good terms at the time, was in the party.¹⁹ Shaikh Muhammad may also have had his suspicions about his brother because the latter's mother was the sister of the mother of three of Shaikh Abdullah's sons, Shaikhs

¹⁶ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 284; Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya Fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabiya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluum, 1986 [c. 1922]), 106.

¹⁷ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 285.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Muhammad, Ali and Ahmed. According to al-Khairi, Shaikh Muhammad spied on their camp and surprised the conspirators by his sudden armed entry. He scolded them harshly and made it clear that he was fully aware of their conspiracy. He threatened them, warning them to abandon any plans for mischief against their father if they cared for their safety. He then stormed angrily out of their camp and, as al-Khairi's account goes, was especially angry with Shaikh Ali.²⁰

The conspirators were no doubt very surprised at the ease with which Shaikh Muhammad had discovered their conspiracy.²¹ It must have impelled them into frantic action for fear of their father's reaction. They apparently decided to escape to Qatar where they would be in a better position to devise a plan to face their father and his grand nephew. On arrival, they headed towards the town of Huwaila. Their apparent purpose was to meet Shaikh Isa bin Tarif, chief of the powerful al-bin Ali clan.²² Isa bin Tarif was the maternal uncle of three of the sons of Shaikh Abdullah, Shaikhs Muhammad, Ahmad, and Ali. He warmly welcomed the renegade sons of Shaikh Abdullah, assuring them that they would have a safe refuge from any retribution by their father.²³

Although the renegades had arrived as asylum seekers, they did not simply rest in the safety of their refuge in Qatar. Isa bin Tarif appears to have taken a preliminary role as mediator between the father and sons, though the sons seem to have convinced him to espouse their cause. Perhaps Isa bin Tarif already had some hidden political ambitions and was taking advantage of the situation. His political actions between 1843 and 1847, examined in the next chapter, tend to confirm this

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² His full genealogy is Isa bin Hamad bin Tarif bin Muhammad al-bin Ali.

²³ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 286.

theory. Isa bin Tarif and the renegade sons took a joint decision to invade Bahrain and overthrow the government of Shaikh Abdullah.²⁴ They concluded an alliance with the tribe of al-bu Ainain and other Bedouin tribes of Qatar.²⁵ British records mention a rebellion by two of these tribes in alliance with the sons of Shaikh Abdullah,²⁶ but give no reason for it. We must rely on local historians such as al-Khairi, al-Tajir and others to provide a valuable insight into the detailed cause or causes of the rebellion. The rebels solicited the aid of the Saudi Emir Faisal bin Turki, who sent several hundred of his followers with instructions to aid the rebels and acknowledge their command. One of the sons of Shaikh Abdullah, Shaikh Ahmad, started attacking and plundering boats belonging to Bahrain.²⁷ The British Political Resident in the Gulf, naturally alarmed, warned Shaikh Ahmad bin Abdullah and demanded restitution from him. Shaikh Ahmad must have realized the danger he was bringing upon himself and his comrades and that he might jeopardise their cause, so he complied without hesitation.²⁸ Matters did not stop there, though. Shaikh Ahmad bin Abdullah even went so far as to approach the Sultan of Oman, Sayyid Said bin Sultan, his father's old enemy, to seek his help in invading Bahrain. Surprisingly, Sayyid Said not only declined Shaikh Ahmad's offer, but also sent one of his sons, Sayyid Hilal, to try to

²⁴ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 121; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 286.

²⁵ Letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf, November 30, 1838, in., IOR: L/P&S/5/375, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol. I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 397; Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Central Arabia*, 857-859.

²⁶ For details, see Letter from Captain S. Hennell, PRPG to I.P Willoughby Esquire, Secretary to the Government of Bombay 11 December 1838; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf, November 30, 1838; Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to G.B. Brucks Esquire, Commodore of the Squadron of the Indian Navy in the Persian Gulf, 10 December 1838 in IOR: L/P&S/5/375, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960 Vol I 1820-1868*, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993),393-400. Also see J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 857-858.

²⁷ Lt A.B. Kembal, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 384-385.

²⁸ Ibid.

mediate between Shaikh Abdullah and his renegade sons. Sayyid Hilal did not succeed.²⁹

It is difficult to understand why Sayyid Said did not take advantage of the conflict between Shaikh Abdullah and his sons by inflaming matters even further. Such a course of action would have further weakened the internal stability of the Al Khalifa family and the rest of the Utub. It would have given Sayyid Said an excellent chance of taking revenge for his earlier defeats at the hands of Shaikh Abdullah by invading Bahrain. If successful, his enterprise would have added a valuable country to his numerous domains. It is possible that Sayyid Said subscribed to the traditional view in Arabia at the time that to inflame a father-son conflict is an evil and despicable act. He may have been deterred by the idea of his image in the area might have suffering if he took such a step. On the other hand, he was an expansionist, constantly looking, to safeguard and expand his domains. Sayyid Said's natural inclination would have been to harness the internal conflict between the Utub to his advantage and to make further gains for himself and his dynasty. There might, however, have been a third explanation, that he was preoccupied with internal issues of his own. If that indeed was the case then it is quite probable that the Sayyid saw that meddling in the internal conflicts of the Utub might have brought undesired outcomes. That would have been especially true if Shaikh Abdullah had won and then sought to chastise anyone who joined in the rebellion against him.

²⁹ Ibid.

6. The Battle of Huwaila

The old Shaikh would naturally have been upset and deeply angered at the news of the rebellion spearheaded by his sons and in-laws. Their treason in soliciting aid from the rulers of Najd and Oman must have upset him even more and filled him with resentment. He tried to calm matters down and appease his sons in order to end the chaos and avert bloodshed, but he was ignored.³⁰ Thus he was forced to take harsher and more drastic measures. He summoned his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, and appointed him commander of an army to quash the rebellion in Qatar and to defuse the threat of his sons. Shaikh Muhammad, who had apparently managed to reconcile Shaikh Ali, with their grand uncle, took his brother with him on the campaign.³¹

Shaikh Muhammad's fleet sailed to the southeastern coast of Qatar, where he landed his forces near the town of Wakrah and divided them into two sections. He commanded the first section, a land army, while his brother, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa, was given command of the naval section.³² From Wakrah, Shaikh Muhammad marched his troops to the town of Huwaila, the bastion of the rebels, in northeastern Qatar. Shaikh Ali sailed with his naval force around the coast to the same destination.³³

Wakrah seems to have been a strange choice for a landing because the march to Huwaila was so long. Shaikh Muhammad could as easily have disembarked at Sumaismah or al-Khor on the southeastern coast of Qatar, or at Zubarah or Furaiha on the northwestern coast, giving his troops a much shorter march. His decision gives

³⁰ al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 121.

³¹ al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 286.

³² Ibid, 286

³³ Ibid, 286-287.

rise to a suggestion that the rebellion was not restricted to Huwaila and its vicinity. It may have extended to other parts of northwestern, north and northeastern Qatar. If that was indeed the case, it illustrates the difficulties faced by Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad and his grand nephew. Shaikh Muhammad's strategy seems to have been to surround Huwaila on its landward side and to blockade it by sea. When he arrived, he found the rebel troops fully assembled, ready for combat and under the command of Shaikh Ali bin Abdullah. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa issued a final warning to the sons of Shaikh Abdullah and their rebel comrades. He called upon them to stand down their troops to avoid a bloodletting. He also promised them that he would mediate between them and their father if they heeded his warning and complied with his demands.³⁴

His warnings were ignored. Shaikh Ali bin Abdullah and his brothers became even more defiant.³⁵ Shaikh Muhammad therefore went on the offensive and ordered his troops to charge the rebel army. A fierce battle ensued. Shaikh Muhammad fought fiercely and succeeded in dealing a devastating blow to the enemy forces, substantially weakening them, just as Shaikh Ali and his naval force arrived. The fleet started bombarding the town, the ships and boats docked in its harbour. This apparently caused the morale of the rebels to collapse. Their forces were defeated and Shaikh Muhammad made the rebellious sons of Shaikh Abdullah his captives. The defeated al-bin Ali tribe and their allies asked Shaikh Muhammad to grant them amnesty and to reconcile them with Shaikh Abdullah. However, the victor was unrelenting and strict. He insisted, accepting no compromise, that the al-bin Ali and their allies should abandon Huwaila and leave Qatar immediately. They had no option but to comply, and once they had left, Shaikh Muhammad ordered the town of

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Huwaila to be razed to the ground. Shaikh Abdullah's sons were offered two options. They had to choose between banishment from both Qatar and Bahrain, or to accept his offer as a mediator between them and their aged father. They chose mediation, and Shaikh Muhammad's efforts resulted in reconciliation.³⁶ Peace and calm returned to the Al Khalifa family, at least for a time. See Figure 10.³⁷

7. Ramifications of the Battle

The crisis that culminated in the Battle of Huwaila, the first internal armed clash between family members of the Al Khalifa, entailed significant consequences for Shaikh Abdullah and his family. The conflict was not between brothers or cousins, as is historically common in ruling dynasties, but between sons and their father. It led to an internal rebellion by tribes that had traditionally been loyal to the Al Khalifa, such as the al-bin Ali and the al-bu Ainain. It also set a precedent for later animosity and conflict between the Al Khalifa and the al-bin Ali under the leadership of Shaikh Isa bin Tarif. That led to fracture in the al-Utub tribal confederation itself, to which both Al Khalifa and al-bin Ali belong.

One might argue some similarity with the clashes between the Al Khalifa family and the al-Jalahma family under the leadership of Rahma bin Jabir. Three facts clearly differentiate that dispute from the conflict with al-bin Ali. First, the al-Jalahma was a much smaller clan than the al-bin Ali was. Second, there is scant evidence that Rahma was aided in his endeavours by anyone in the al-Jalahma family aside from his immediate relations, while most of the al-bin Ali were under the command of their Shaikhs, all obedient to their chief, Shaikh Isa bin Tarif. Third, with their large

³⁶ Ibid, 287-288.

³⁷ This map was drawn based on the accounts of al-Khairi.

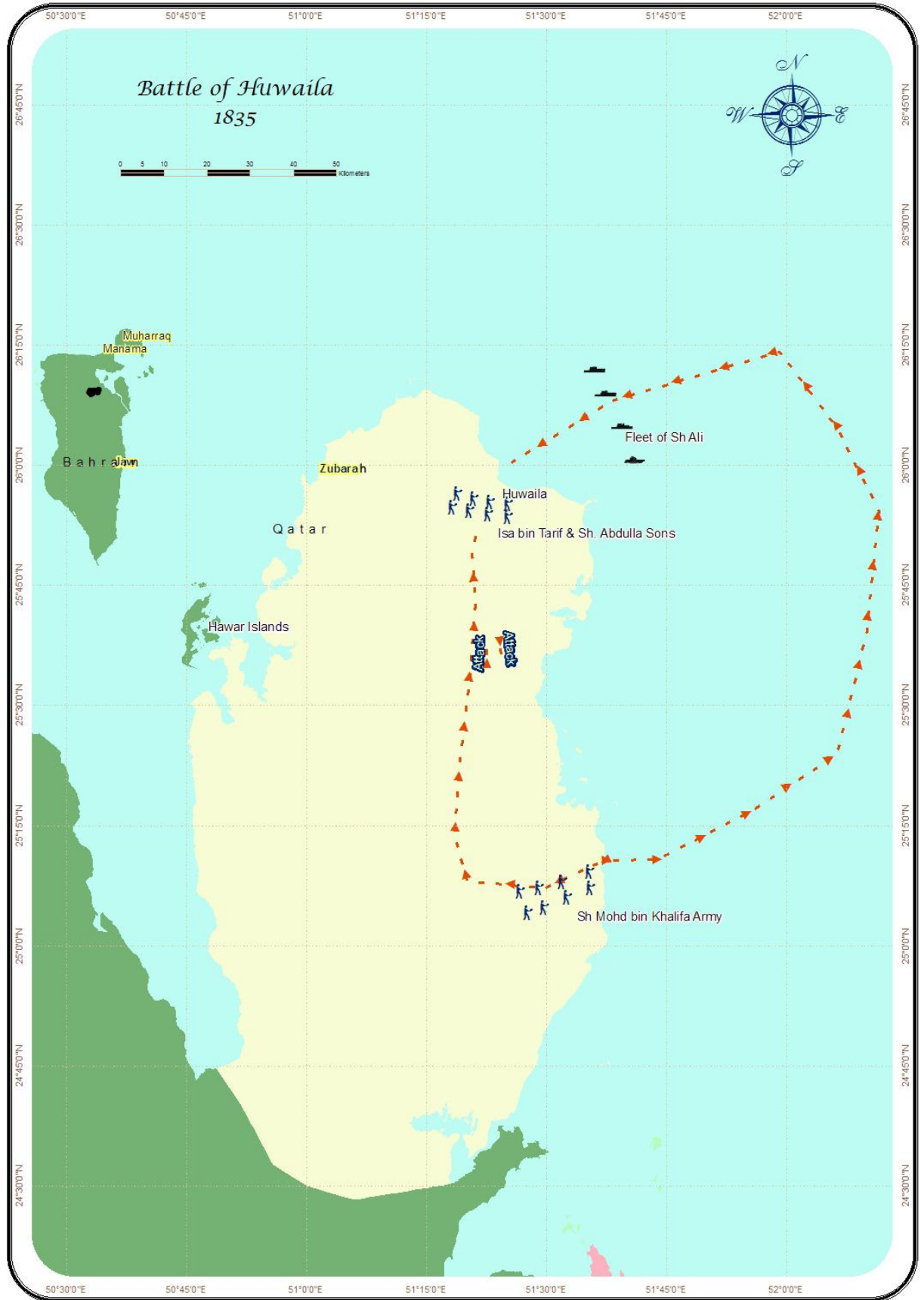


Figure 10: Battle of Huwaila 1835

numbers of ships, slaves and other capital resources, the al-bin Ali were able to recruit allies from other tribes such as the al-bu Ainain and even mercenaries from nomadic tribes. Rahma, on the other hand, could recruit only Baluchis to add to his slaves and what aid he could procure from alliances with the Emir of Najd and the Sultan of Muscat.³⁸ Large or small, these tribal frictions were serious for Shaikh Abdullah. He had to contend not only with external forces such as the Saudis, Ottomans, Egyptians, Persians and the British, but also with the internal forces of tribes who had traditionally been his loyal subjects and allies.

Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, grand nephew of Shaikh Abdullah, was young and did not have the authority and influence of his father, the late Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman. Nevertheless, the battle and its outcomes affected his political position and stature. Shaikh Abdullah, facing a rebellion by most of his sons, was probably wary of sending another son to fight his own brothers. He may well have felt unable to trust any of them. It must have seemed that there was no one to turn to but his grand nephew.

The Battle of Huwaila was the first major test for Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa as a military commander and leader of a military expedition. The young Shaikh had to face the powerful al-bin Ali tribe under the command of Shaikh Isa bin Tarif, who was probably an experienced military commander. On top of that, the enemy was supported by the al-bu Ainain, other allies and Bedouin mercenaries, and

³⁸ This is according to oral traditions in Bahrain, not just from the Al Khalifa family but from other Utubi families such as al-bin Ali. The oral account is supported by evidence of Rahma visiting Bushire at the end of 1826, not just to visit the British Resident but also to recruit men. After his visit, Rahma left Bushire for Damman with at least twenty-five or thirty Baluchis. See also Francis Warden, "Sketch of the Proceedings of Rahmah bin Jaubir Chief of Khor Hassan", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 528.

by a Saudi contingent of several hundred men. Given the forces ranged against his untested skills, the fact that he defeated them must have significantly boosted his image and stature. He would certainly have gained confidence in his competence as a military commander. His victory against the rebels would have elevated his personal prestige, not only among his family but also among the tribes and clans living in Bahrain, Qatar and near Dammam. The opposite would have been true of the sons of Shaikh Abdullah. Their failure would have diminished their prestige in the family as well as among the other tribes and clans. That leap in confidence, as shall be seen later, was the probable cause of Shaikh Muhammad's aspiration to the position of his late father. If such aspirations and ambitions were indeed real, then we may assume that they might have led Shaikh Muhammad to view himself as the logical and legitimate successor to his great-uncle, especially as the misconduct of Shaikh Abdullah's sons would have ruled them out of succession in the eyes of their family and tribe.

8. Continued Troubles with Shaikh Isa bin Tarif

After their defeat at the battle of Huwaila, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa forced the al-bin Ali tribe and their allies, the tribe of al-bu Ainain among them, to leave Qatar. The banished rebels resettled near the town of Abu Dhabi on the coast of Oman, now part of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They took refuge under its ruler, Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhboot Al Nahyan.³⁹ It was at that time that Shaikh Isa bin Tarif, leader of the al-bin Ali, started planning revenge against Shaikh Abdullah. Shaikh Isa bin Tarif apparently feared that his movements against Shaikh Abdullah might have

³⁹ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 858; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf, 30 November, 1838, in, IOR: L/P&S/5/375, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain*, 397-398.

been regarded by the British as piracy. Such a prospect must have worried him as it may have brought British retribution upon him. This probably prompted him to correspond with the British Resident in the Gulf, asking permission to wage war and initiate hostilities against the maritime trade and territories of Shaikh Abdullah and his family. The Resident refused, on the grounds that Isa bin Tarif and his followers were established in a port that was at least neutral if not friendly to Shaikh Abdullah.⁴⁰ The conditions for commencing hostilities against the Shaikh of Bahrain, the Resident said, were that Shaikh Isa should either persuade the ruler of Abu Dhabi to declare his willingness to take responsibility for the Shaikh's actions, or make an open alliance with him against Shaikh Abdullah.⁴¹ Disquiet evolved between the banished rebels in Abu Dhabi and Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad. The British were probably worried about maritime safety in the region and wanted to end the conflict as soon as possible.

Between 1835 and 1838, the British Resident in the Gulf tried to mediate and conclude a peace between the two conflicting parties. The matter certainly got more intense when Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhboot took to the cause of the rebels. Nevertheless, that did not deter the efforts of the Political Resident in Bushire.⁴² Stubbornness on both sides made this impossible, according to British records. The British Resident, probably realising the futility of his efforts, told both leaders that he would step back from their conflict and offer neither interference nor mediation. This effectively freed the two factions to commence hostilities against one another. The Resident gave the belligerents a deadline to withhold hostilities that would have

⁴⁰ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoabee Tribe of Arabs", 385.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See letter from PRPG, to Bombay Government, 1 September 1836; Letter from Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhboot of Abu Dhabi to Captain S. Hennell, acting PRPG, 14 October 1836; Letter from Captain S. Hennell to Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhboot, 25 October 1836; Letter from PRPG, to Bombay Government, 4 November 1836, 1-10 in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 78 (854), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

passed at the end of the pearling season and that also coincided with the end of the month of Ramadan, roughly 18 December 1838.⁴³ Once that date had passed, the two belligerents would be free to fight each other.

Shortly before the official date of resumption of hostilities between the two parties, Shaikh Abdullah sent an envoy, his vizier, Haji Bu Shihab, to the British Resident, Captain S. Hennell, with a peace initiative. The Shaikh was willing to allow the al-bin Ali, the al-bu Ainain and their allies to return to Bahrain, and to give them compensation for their boats and properties—as long as the British Resident would act as a guarantor. Haji Bu Shihab made it clear that Shaikh Abdullah was powerful enough to defeat the fugitive rebels but that he desired to avoid bloodshed.⁴⁴ The Resident, who would have naturally been wary of being dragged into guaranteeing any peace deal, refused, but tried once again to broker an accommodation between Shaikh Abdullah and Shaikh Isa, in order to avoid hostilities that might involve other rulers in the Gulf region. Haji Bu Shihab even conceded that if Isa bin Tarif refused to return to Bahrain, Shaikh Abdullah would not object to his people resettling on the coast of Qatar.⁴⁵

Isa bin Tarif refused all Shaikh Abdullah's offers of peace and reconciliation. Hostilities began, but before matters escalated, Shaikh Abdullah managed to defuse the situation. He deprived his foe of the use of the port of Abu Dhabi as a base from which to launch his attacks. Shaikh Abdullah apparently became aware that relations between Shaikh Isa bin Tarif and Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhboot, ruler of Abu Dhabi,

⁴³ I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to Bombay Government to Governor General, 25 February, 1839, in IOR: L/P&S/5/375, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain*, 428.

⁴⁴ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 387; Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to Government of Bombay, 11 December 1838, in IOR: L/P&S/5/375, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain*, 395-396.

⁴⁵ I.P. Willoughby Secretary to Bombay Government to Governor General, 25 February 1839, in IOR: L/P&S/5/375, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain*, 429.

were becoming strained.⁴⁶ That most likely prompted Shaikh Abdullah to befriend the latter. Gifts and presents were exchanged between the two rulers and soon a peace treaty was signed as well. Shaikh Isa bin Tarif was now denied the port of Abu Dhabi and was forced to leave, along with his followers, at the end of the pearling season.⁴⁷ According to local historians, the exiles relocated to the island of Qais near the Persian coast.⁴⁸

Shaikh Abdullah had succeeded in resolving the conflict with the al-bin Ali tribe and their allies through political and diplomatic methods rather than by force of arms. That state of peace prevailed for a few years. He would probably have beaten his enemies if he had gone to war with them, but almost certainly had his reasons for choosing other methods instead. More likely than not, he believed that continued tensions with the al-bin Ali tribe would further weaken the Bani Utbah, mother tribe of the Al Khalifa, al-bin Ali and other families and clans. He must have hoped that, over time, he could heal the 'psychological wounds' and reunite all factions of the Bani Utbah. His desire to avoid hostilities may also have been rooted in his disinclination to make more enemies. Historically, there had been no friction between the Bani Utbah, led by the Al Khalifa, and the Bani Yas, led by the Al Nahayan. Shaikh Abdullah probably did not want war with Shaikh Isa bin Tarif to upset that state of affairs. His original, failed efforts to reconcile with the al-bin Ali had involved the successful neutralising of the Bani Yas, but a new war with Isa bin Tarif and his followers could have brought them back into conflict with him.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Letter from, Native Agent in Bahrain, Mirza Muhammad Ali, to PRPG, 7 February 1839, 70, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 64 (1060), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁴⁷ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoabee Tribe of Arabs", 388.

⁴⁸ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al*, 121; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 287.

⁴⁹ For further details on the issue of conflict between Isa bin Tarif and Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad see following letter exchanges: Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to Shaikh

9. Persian Encroachments and Threats against Bahrain

As if dealing with Arab problems on the western side of the Gulf was not enough for the Shaikh, he faced a renewed threat from the Persians. In 1836, he received a communication from the Governor of Shiraz calling upon him as a “Persian subject” to submit to the Qajari Shah. His probable alarm at this encroachment would have naturally been exacerbated by his belief that the Persians would solicit aid and support from Sayyid Said of Oman if he did not comply with their demands.⁵⁰ The Shaikh could easily have believed that, as he must have known that Sayyid Said was married to at least two Persian princesses, at least one related to the Prince of Shiraz.⁵¹ Such liaisons would have understandably made the Shaikh very wary of the possibility of the Sultan of Oman coming to help his in-laws and join them in an invasion of Bahrain.⁵²

Abdullah bin Ahmad on 28 October 1838; Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 11 November 1838 enclosing Letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf on 18 October 1838;; Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 26 November 1838; Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to Commodore G.B. Brucks, Commander of the Gulf Squadron on 26 November 1838; Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 27 November 1838; letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf on 30 November 1838 enclosing letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to Commodore G.B. Brucks, Commander of the Gulf Squadron on 10 December 1838; Letter from John Croft Hawkins to Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf enclosing letter from Lt. Sharp, commander of East India Company Brig of War Tigris on 20 December 1838 ; Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 24 December 1838, Summary of correspondence, 1836-1838, by I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 25 February 1839; Minute by James Farish, Governor of Bombay on 25 February 1839 in., in IOR: L/P&S/5/375, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain*, 393-413.

⁵⁰ Lt. A.B. Kembell, “Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs”, 385; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 858.

⁵¹ Mai Al Khalifa, *Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Ustoorah wal Tarikh al-Muwazi* [Muhammad bin Khalifa the legend and the corresponding history] (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1996), 165-166.

⁵² Such Persian claims over sovereignty over Bahrain and attempts to take control of it were not the first and apparently were not the last as well. In 1822 an agreement was drawn up between the Prince of Shiraz and Captain William Bruce, the British Resident in Bushire. Among other matters in the agreement that Captain Bruce signed, it acknowledged British recognition over the sovereignty of Persia over Bahrain. However, it must be made clear that Captain Bruce did indeed sign that agreement without any authorization and/or consent from the British government at Bombay. When news of the action taken by Captain Bruce reached the Bombay government its reaction was one of disapproval. It refused to acknowledge that agreement that Captain Bruce concluded with the Prince

The Shaikh decided to stand up to the Persian demands by turning his ongoing quarrel with the Saudi Emir of Najd, Faisal bin Turki, to his advantage. That quarrel was a continuation of the Shaikh's differences with the Emir's late father Turki bin Abdullah. Shaikh Abdullah most likely realized that Faisal and his subjects in Hasa were exhausted by his continued blockade of the ports of Uqair and Qatif, and took reconciliatory steps. He offered to lift his blockade and to pay a nominal tribute of 2,000 MT dollars a year to the Saudi Emir. In return, the Emir would supply Shaikh Abdullah with the troops and other resources necessary to defend Bahrain and its dependencies from any external attack. Emir Faisal welcomed the offer, as the lifting of the blockade would have allowed him to concentrate on thwarting Egyptian incursions on the western frontiers of his domains. The settlement with Shaikh Abdullah was quickly reached.

At the Shaikh's insistence, the treaty included a clause denying the Emir's right to any Bahraini help if he should decide to send any naval expeditions against Oman.⁵³ This appears to have been a political precaution. Understandably, the Shaikh would not have wanted to be dragged into unnecessary military adventures that the new young Saudi Emir might attempt against Sayyid Said. The Shaikh, as we saw earlier, had agreed to peaceful and cordial relations with Sayyid Said after a period of fierce military engagements. Hence, that extra clause in the treaty between the Al

of Shiraz on the grounds that it was done without its knowledge, agreement, and consent and that it rejected that claims that Persia had had over Bahrain on a matter of principle and that it could not come up with any proof whatsoever on such claims. For more details please see Jerome Antony Saldanha (ed.), *Précis of Correspondence Regarding the Affairs of the Persian Gulf, 1801-1853* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906; reprinted Archive Editions, 1986), 143-150. In fact in a letter from the Government of Bombay to Lt. John MacLeod he is clearly instructed to explain to the Prince of Shiraz that the British Government had no prior knowledge of the actions of Captain Bruce. And that Muscat, Bahrain, and the other Arab Shaikhdoms on the Arabian side of the Gulf are considered to be independent entities as per the 1820 General Treaty. See also letter from Government of Bombay to Lt. John MacLeod, 12 November 1822, in *Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary*, vol. 29 (91), 374, Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁵³ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 385; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 858.

Khalifa and the Al Saud would have sent an indirect message of goodwill to Sayyid Said. Its likely intent was to dissuade him from joining the Persians against him. Shaikh Abdullah apparently knew that the Persians were not well endowed with naval power at that time, so would need an ally like Sayyid Said to attack the Shaikh. Sayyid Said, the Shaikh probably reasoned, would have realized that the Shaikh was capable of joining forces with the Saudi Emir against him. He must have also realized that such an attack was quite possible if the Sayyid allied himself with the Persians against Bahrain and Qatar. Sayyid Said must therefore have reasoned that the Shaikh's alliance with the Emir placed him in a much stronger position and appreciated the indirect message conveyed by Shaikh Abdullah's insistence on not being obliged to join any Saudi cause against Omani interests. As far as Sayyid Said was concerned, the Shaikh's treaty with the Emir made it very unwise to join the Persians in their encroachments upon the Shaikh's domains.

By allying with the Saudis and simultaneously maintaining good relations with the Omanis, the Shaikh not only strengthened his position against the Persians but also deprived them of a valuable ally whose assistance would probably have been necessary for any adventures against Bahrain. The political manoeuvring must have worked well, as available historical accounts mention no Persian attacks or expeditions against Bahrain and its dependencies at that time.⁵⁴ The manner in which the Shaikh extracted himself from such a predicament reveals him to have been a skilled political strategist, not just an able military commander.

⁵⁴ Ibid. It can be clearly seen that there are no further accounts of any possible Persian aggression against Bahrain and its dependencies.

10. The Egyptian Encroachment of 1839

By 1839, another wave of trouble was approaching Shaikh Abdullah and his domains. Khorshid Pasha, an Egyptian general of Muhammad Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt, was sent by his overlord to overthrow the rule of Emir Faisal. The Pasha's intention, given success, was to install a pretender, Khalid bin Saud, as the new Emir of Najd, thus bringing the region under Egyptian hegemony.⁵⁵ Khalid bin Saud had been captured at the fall of Diriyah in 1818 and taken to Egypt, where he lived until 1836.⁵⁶ Muhammad Ali Pasha would have wanted an Emir in Najd of whose loyalty he could be assured. By doing so, he would have ensured firm Egyptian hegemony over that region. Such hegemony would have given Egypt firm control and authority over central and eastern Arabia. Khalid bin Saud, whose long captivity in Egypt had probably put him under its cultural and political influence, seemed the perfect vassal for Muhammad Ali to use.⁵⁷ Khorshid Pasha was successful in his mission. He defeated Faisal bin Turki, captured him and his immediate family and sent them into exile in Egypt. He then installed Khalid bin Saud as the new Saudi Emir of Najd before continuing his campaign and bringing Hasa and Qatif under the control of the new Emir.⁵⁸

Shaikh Abdullah doubtless feared for the safety of his domains when he heard the news, but worse was to come. First of all Emir Khalid and Khorshid Pasha sent letters to Shaikhs Abdullah bin Ahmad and Muhammad bin Khalifa in which they

⁵⁵ His full genealogy is Khalid bin Saud bin Abdul-Aziz bin Muhammad bin Saud; he was the brother of Abdullah bin Saud, the last Imam of the First Saudi State before it fell in 1818.

⁵⁶ Chamieh, *Al Saud Madhihim wa Mustaqbaluhum*, 70-71.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ For further details see Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 18 December 1838, 17-18; Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government enclosing letter from the native agent in Bahrain, 21 January 1839, 27-29 B; Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 25 January 1839, 43, 45-47; Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government enclosing letter from the native agent in Muscat, 30 January 1839, 19, 21-22 in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 64 (1060), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

demanded that the payment of tribute by Bahrain and its dependencies to the government of Najd would be resumed.⁵⁹ However, when Omar Ibn Ufaisan, one of the generals of the former Emir, Faisal bin Turki, sought and received asylum in Bahrain the new Emir made other demands.⁶⁰ He ordered Shaikh Abdullah surrender Ibn Ufaisan, the fort of Dammam and the island of Tarut. The Shaikh might well have felt that conceding them would simply lead to further demands and the severe weakening of his own power and authority.⁶¹ His fears would have been deepened when he heard that Khorshid Pasha had sent a letter to the British authorities in the Gulf. The Pasha notified the British of his intention to invade Bahrain and incorporate it into the realm of the new Saudi Emir.⁶² The British opposed this, telling the Pasha that the grounds on which he based his intention to invade Bahrain were invalid.⁶³

The Shaikh was in an uncomfortable position, especially as the threat from Isa bin Tarif had yet to be defused. Shaikh Abdullah made a new overture to the Persian government. Receiving it favourably, the Prince of Shiraz sent an envoy called Haji Qasim, escorted by ten *sirbaz* (soldiers), with a *rukum* (dress of honour) for Shaikh Abdullah. The Persian intention was that Haji Qasim should remain in Bahrain as the

⁵⁹ See letter from native agent in Bahrain to PRPG, 29A.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 29-29A

⁶¹ Any local Arab Gulf Shaikh would have felt the need to safeguard his domains. Had Emir Khalid only asked for the payment of a tribute, Shaikh Abdullah might have agreed with relative ease. The demand for the surrender of Dammam and Tarut must have sparked intense fear and resentment in the Shaikh's heart towards the new Saudi Emir. For further information on the relations of Arabian Gulf shaikhs see Onley and Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf", 199-202.

⁶² For details see letter from Khorshid Pasha to PRPG, 9 February 1839, 156-158, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 64 (1060), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶³ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoabee Tribe of Arabs", 387-388. In correspondences between the British Foreign Secretary at the time, Lord Palmerston and to Colonel Campbell, the British Consul General in Egypt. Lord Palmerston intimates to Colonel Campbell that it is absolutely necessary to make it clear to Muhammad Ali Pasha that the British Government would view as very counterproductive to their mutual relations if the Pasha is truly intent on expanding his domains to the Arabian side of the Gulf. Lord Palmerston explicitly mentions Bahrain by name and clearly states that the British government at the time suspected that the ultimate purpose of Muhammad Ali's expedition against eastern Arabia was to take possession of Bahrain. For more details see Letters from Lord Palmerston to Colonel Campbell, 29 November 1838 & 15 January 1839, 93-97; See also letter from Bombay Government to PRPG, 1 April 1839, 187-188, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 64 (1060), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

Persian agent on the islands. He would have been responsible for the collection of the annual tribute that Shaikh Abdullah was supposed to pay to the Persians.⁶⁴ At exactly that time, Shaikh Abdullah succeeded in defusing the threat posed by Isa bin Tarif in the manner described earlier. He was now free of the internal threat and of the threat that came from across the Gulf, and was able to concentrate his power and energy on thwarting the impending threat of the Egyptians.

The Shaikh first sought advice from the British Resident in Bushire, Captain S. Hennell on how to deal with this new Egyptian threat. The Resident replied that he was unable to advise Shaikh Abdullah on any course to take in dealing with the Egyptians and that the Shaikh should pursue the policy that suits his own interests.⁶⁵ Later on the Shaikh sought British protection against Egypt, but the Resident could offer him neither a guarantee of safety nor a definite pledge of support and assistance.⁶⁶ Instead, he solicited a promise from the Shaikh that the latter would notify the former before placing himself under the protection of any foreign power.⁶⁷ Such an outcome appears illogical to a modern observer and would have understandably made the Shaikh very uncomfortable. He probably agreed, against his

⁶⁴ Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government of Bombay, 15 March 1839, 199-202, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 64 (1060), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India. See also Lt. A.B. Kemball, *Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs*, 388.

⁶⁵ See letter from Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to PRPG, 26 January 1839; Letter from PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, 11 February 1839, 74-75, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 64 (1060), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁶ In a letter from the PRPG to the Bombay Government the Resident states that he did not receive any request from Shaikh Abdullah to receive British protection but that the Resident supposed that the Shaikh was seeking protection because he asked for the Resident's advice in dealing with Khorshid Pasha. The Resident then comments on the pros and cons of having Bahrain being placed under British protection and later supplants with his letter a general report about Bahrain and its resources and conditions. For further details see letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 22 February 1839, 131-137, and subsequent report, 2 March 1839, 139-145; Later on the Resident received a letter from the Bombay government in which he was instructed to offer the Shaikh of Bahrain British protection but not to make any final deal without having the final consent of his superiors in Bombay, for further details see letter from Bombay Government to PRPG, 1 April 1839, 147-148, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 64 (1060), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁷ Lt. A.B. Kemball, *Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs*, 388-389.

will, in the hope of being able to secure British protection in the future.⁶⁸ Shaikh Abdullah, denied protection from the British, declared himself a tributary of the Egyptians and placed himself under their protection. The Shaikh's deal with the Pasha was reasonably advantageous to Bahraini interests. The nominal annual tribute, a trivial 2,000 MT dollars, safeguarded the integrity of his domains and his authority over them. At the Shaikh's insistence, no agent of the Pasha would reside in Bahrain.

This move must have been a most unpleasant surprise for the Persians. The British Resident, who first heard of it from the Pasha, must have been equally surprised and perhaps a little dismayed. Shaikh Abdullah defended his action to the Resident by stating that he had made that choice only after he had given up all hope of receiving protection from the British. He went on to say that his situation was exacerbated because his Bedouin subjects on the Arabian mainland had proclaimed their submission to Khorshid Pasha. He claimed that he feared that the Pasha would use them against him if he did not cooperate. The Shaikh also informed the Resident that he disliked Khorshid Pasha and was willing to repudiate his agreement with him. However, that was provisional on his receipt of the fullest written assurance by the British government that it would protect him from any external aggressor. According to the Resident, the Shaikh also told him that he would be happy for his domains to become dependencies of Great Britain if he received such assurances—though he

⁶⁸ Mai Al Khalifa, *Abdullah bin Ahmad: Muharib Lam Yahdaa* [Abdullah bin Ahmad: a Restless Warrior] (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 2002), 130. The British did not offer a guaranteed protection. They sent a ship of war, the *Wellesley*, to the Arabian Gulf so as to discourage any invasion attempts entertained by Khorshid by its presence. Instructions were also given to the ship's captain, Rear Admiral Sir Fredrick Maitland, that if Shaikh Abdullah applied for British protection through him that the Admiral should listen to the Shaikh's request. Nevertheless, it seems that he was not granted the authority to offer any official British protection to Shaikh Abdullah. For more details see letter from from R. Jenkins, East India House at London, to Governor in Council at Bombay enclosing letter from Jenkins to PRPG, Major S. Hennell, and the Political Agent in Turkish Arabia, Lt. Col Robert Taylor, 13 June 1839, 89-94 in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 67 (1063), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

declined to commit such a statement to paper.⁶⁹ Shaikh Abdullah had obtained freedom from Egyptian threat for a trifling price, and had no need to become a dependant of the British Empire unless such an action would provide him with cast iron protection.

Shrewdness and cunning had brought Shaikh Abdullah protection from the Egyptian threat. This was not some local difficulty. It was a very real threat from the imperial forces of Muhammad Ali Pasha, the man who had nearly toppled the Ottoman Empire. The Shaikh probably reasoned that, given his limited resources and forces, no matter how brave they were, military action would have been an act of utter recklessness. He therefore needed help and protection from another empire. His previous experience of the British probably told him from the very beginning that the British would not, or could not, offer any guaranteed protection to a local ruler like him. They had been reluctant to guarantee any peace deals between him and Rahma bin Jabir and Sayyid Said of Oman, so why would they guarantee any solid protection for him and his domains against the forces of Khorshid Pasha? Nonetheless, he probably also realized that the British themselves would have been alarmed at the new Egyptian encroachment. Rahma and Sayyid Said did not pose such threats against British interests as Egyptian dominance in the Arab Gulf and Eastern Arabia would have done, so it was logical for Shaikh Abdullah to try to solicit some kind of protection from them. He had, of course, also sought, and this time received, protection from the Persians, but they lacked the naval power to protect him (or to attack him, for that matter). The British had that power, but they would not protect him. Why, therefore, did he seek protection from both powers at the same time? One probable reason was that, if each power was convinced of his dire need for protection,

⁶⁹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoabee Tribe of Arabs", 388-389.

neither would suspect him of parleying with the Egyptians. Another likely reason, it can be assumed, was that he wanted to use the Persian protection he had received, as well as the possible interference and protection of the British, as tools to bargain with the Egyptians. If that was indeed the case, his negotiations worked very well. He neutralised the threat from the Egyptians and gained their protection for a tribute of a mere 2,000 MT dollars a year. As he did not have to endure the presence of an Egyptian agent in Bahrain, he had also prevented any foreign interference in the internal affairs of his territories. However, the Shaikh's insistence on the absence of a resident Egyptian agent may also have been a ploy to appease the British. He probably wanted to keep the door open for future cooperation with them. His political acumen had brought him rewards that could not have been won militarily.

The result was not perfect in every respect. The British, who had refused to give Shaikh Abdullah a guaranteed assurance of protection before the fact, were incensed by his alliance with the Egyptians. He was considered by them to have "forfeited the friendship of the British Government".⁷⁰ In all likelihood the British were trying to have a firmer grip on the Gulf region to safeguard their domains in India and the maritime trade route. Hence, it is highly probable that they desired the local rulers of the gulf to behave like protégés and succumb to any instructions given to them by the British. Nevertheless, in the case of Shaikh Abdullah they were unable or unwilling to give him what every protégé desires the most, protection, which the Egyptians were more than willing to offer. Therefore, they must have seen that the choice made by Shaikh Abdullah in making himself a protégé of the Egyptians instead of them as detrimental to their interests of obtaining hegemony over the Arabian Gulf region. The British seriously entertained the possibility of replacing

⁷⁰ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 866.

Shaikh Abdullah with another Shaikh who was more favourably disposed towards them. They also considered not restraining Sayyid Said of Oman should he attempt another invasion of Bahrain.⁷¹ Shaikh Abdullah may have angered Great Britain by his alliance with the Egyptians, but without guaranteed British protection, it was his only option if he was to protect himself, his family and his country.⁷²

The Egyptian expedition of 1839 was the last serious external threat Shaikh Abdullah faced. By 1840, the Egyptian forces of Muhammad Ali Pasha had left Eastern Arabia, Hasa and Qatif, relieving the Shaikh of further concern about them. It was not until early 1842 that Shaikh Abdullah had to face the next serious threat to his political position and authority, as we shall see in the next chapter.

11. Conclusion

Ruling shaikhs in the Gulf faced frequent political challenges and threats during the first half of the nineteenth century. They needed to be one step ahead of their foes at all times, remaining constantly alive to any threat to their authority. They could not afford to tolerate dissent from family members or tribal allies, as any laxity would

⁷¹ Ibid. Further details on how the British at the time viewed the actions of Shaikh Abdullah can be seen in the following correspondences: Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 10 April 1839 enclosing letter from Lt T. Edmunds, Assistant Resident in the Gulf, regarding the state of affairs at Bahrain and the stations and condition of the Egyptian forces in Najd under Khorshid Pasha; Letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to Khorshid Pasha on 10 April 1839 in *Records of Bahrain*, 433-473, IOR: L/P&S/5/375. Also see letter from Captain S. Hennell, Resident in the Persian Gulf to I.P. Willoughby, Secretary to the Government of Bombay on 30 May 1839 enclosing an undated letter from Khorshid Pasha to Captain S. Hennell, a translation of the agreement between Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad and Khorshid Pasha on 27 May 1839 and letter from Captain S. Hennell to Khorshid Pasha on 29 May 1839 in *Records of Bahrain*, 474-490, IOR: L/P&S/5/376.

⁷² It is quite possible that Shaikh Abdullah was suspicious of the British and did not trust them. Khorshid Pasha claims, in a letter to Muhammad Ali Pasha, his overlord in Egypt, that Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad detested the British, believing they were meddling in the internal affairs of his Shaikhdom in order to control it, and that they had been trying to control Bahrain for at least thirty years. For more details, see Letter from Khorshid Pasha to Muhammad Ali Pasha on 27 February 1839, Abdeen Archives, Folio No 267, Document No 40 as quoted in Fa'iq Tahbub, *Ta'rikh al-Bahrayn al-siyāsī, 1783-1870* [The Political History of Bahrain, 1783-1870] (Kuwait: Manshūrāt Dhāt al-Salāsīl, 1983), 331-334.

have brought ruin upon the shaikhdom and its ruler. From time to time, they would become entangled with other powers, regional and international, usually by force of circumstance and unwillingly. Realising that resolution by military means would be futile and reckless, a ruling Shaikh would either try to seek the aid of an ally, or to ‘enter’ (*dakhala* or *zabana*) into a protector-protégé relationship of a more powerful ruler, or to play one power against another, as James Onley has shown.⁷³ Such was the grim political reality of the Arabian Gulf at the time, and Shaikh Abdullah presents a good example of the rulers of his day. During the period 1834–1842, he occasionally took military action against the Saudis, though he more usually resorted to diplomatic tactics. He used both protector-protégé and play-off tactics very efficiently in his dealings with the British, the Egyptians and the Persians.

Shaikh Abdullah successfully repelled all the external threats mounted against him and his domains. He demonstrated his agility as a political leader by using a range of tactics and strategies, both military and diplomatic, at the appropriate times and places. Against the internal threat to his reign—the irresponsible and unruly conduct of his sons—he proved ineffectual. Against the Saudi threat, Shaikh Abdullah employed a mixture of strategies to achieve success and prevail. Commencing direct military conflict, by garrisoning Qatif and Hasa, for instance, would have taken a long time and exhausted his resources. Instead he chose a military strategy of indirect engagement. In those circumstances, the strategy appears to have been necessary to retain his domains of Dammam and Tarut and to contain the Saudis. He initiated a naval blockade on the Saudi ports of Qatif and Uqair, combining it with sporadic land

⁷³ James Onley, “The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century,” *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 30-92; James Onley, “The Politics of Protection: The Arabian Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century,” *Liwa: Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research* 1 (2009), 25-46.

skirmishes. That offensive strategy consumed few resources and enabled him to take advantage of his superior naval power to maintain extended blockades and debilitate Saudi resources. The outcome was complete success for the Shaikh. He did not simply alleviate the threat of the Saudis but also turned them from enemies to allies against other possible foes, simply by paying them a nominal annual tribute.

The Shaikh was also successful in denying renewed Persian claims to his domains in 1836. He seems to have carefully analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the claimants, realising their lack of naval resources meant they would need the help of Sayyid Said of Oman, the only naval power in the Gulf that could match his own. Because even the prospect of such an alliance would have been detrimental to Bahrain and its dependencies, the Shaikh changed his confrontational stance with the Saudi Emir into one of friendship and alliance, as explained in the previous paragraph. By lifting the blockade of the Saudi ports, he not only made the whole of his forces available for defence against the Persians, but also had the use of a contingent of soldiers supplied by the Emir. The same treaty averted the risk of being entangled in an armed Saudi-Omani conflict. As we have seen, the Shaikh insisted on a clause releasing him from any obligation to help the Saudis should they engage in conflict with the Omanis. This clause sent an indirect message to Sayyid Said: the Shaikh was quite capable of joining forces with the Saudis against him, but as he chose not to so, he would appreciate it if Sayyid Said would reciprocate by refusing to support any Persian action against Bahrain and Qatar. The overall effect was that the Shaikh had deprived the Persians of a vital ally, as without Oman they had no serious chance of success against Bahrain. The Persian threat was neutralised. Had he failed, the geopolitical scene in the Gulf region today might look very different. Bahrain, even Qatar and the Arabian coast opposite Bahrain as well, could have been part of

Iran. Today's Western and Arab interests in the Gulf might well have been in a very precarious position.

Shaikh Abdullah's last external threat came from the growing empire of Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman Viceroy and *de facto* ruler of Egypt. His forces, under the command of his general Khorshid Pasha, toppled the Saudi Emir Faisal bin Turki in 1838. In his place, the Egyptians installed another member of the Al Saud, Khalid bin Saud, thus ensuring a faithful ally in Central Arabia. Khorshid Pasha's next intention was to expand his master's territory and influence to Bahrain and its dependencies in Qatar, Dammam and Tarut. Shaikh Abdullah's alarm at this new threat from the west must have been intensified when he learned (as he probably did) that the Pasha was corresponding with the British about his ambition. The Shaikh applied to the British for protection against the Pasha, but was not only denied it but was forced to agree to notify the British before placing himself and his domains under the protection of any foreign power.

The Shaikh was equal to the complexities of the situation. His actions were immediate, decisive and shrewd, aimed at spreading confusion among the three major powers in the Gulf at the time: Britain, Persia and Egypt. He probably decided that the protection of his domains should take precedence over British interests or favour. He solicited, and received, the aid and protection of the Persians. The Shaikh no doubt realized that this sort of action would excite the attention of the British but would not provoke them substantially or raise their suspicions. By distracting them with the new liaison with the Persians, he was able to conceal the fact that he was engaged in secret talks with Khorshid Pasha. That same liaison gave him bargaining power with the Pasha, enabling him to conclude his agreement with the Egyptians on terms favourable to Bahrain and its dependencies. His endeavour succeeded so well that

Shaikh Abdullah not only spared his domains from direct Egyptian domination but also procured Egyptian protection without direct Egyptian interference, as there was to be no Egyptian *Wakil* (Agent) in Bahrain. The price for all this was a more or less trivial annual tribute. The Shaikh's success in safeguarding himself and his domains from the Egyptians would have unwanted consequences, however. He had angered the British, who denied him the help he needed when new internal problems arose, as we shall see in the next chapter. The Shaikh could be criticised for entering into good relations with the Egyptians, thus incurring British resentment, but he was probably exercising the best possible option open to him. Military confrontation with the Egyptians, without solid and guaranteed British protection, may well have had unwelcome consequences.

The final part of this chapter's conclusion deals with Shaikh Abdullah's internal problems with his unruly sons and his in-law, Shaikh Isa bin Tarif, the chief of the al-bin Ali tribe. It is notable that the Shaikh was not as successful on that internal front as he was with all the external challenges of his long political career. Local historians al-Khairi and al-Tajir offer the only logical explanation: Shaikh Abdullah was weakened by old age and was unable to restrain his family's insolence and excesses. Another reason may have been that the Shaikh, an able leader against external threats, was so overcome with emotion and sentiment that he could not act decisively and rationally to nip their excesses in the bud. Whatever the reason, the Shaikh's weakness had dire consequences for the Al Khalifa family and the Bani Utbah tribal confederation, causing a major tribal schism. It encouraged Shaikh Isa bin Tarif, the maternal uncle of some of Shaikh Abdullah's sons, to engage in a revolt against the authority of Shaikh Abdullah. The apparent object of the revolt was to dethrone Shaikh Abdullah and install his sons as rulers, although it is possible that Isa

bin Tarif himself was the prime mover, seeking to increase his own political power or even to install himself as ruler. Events examined in the next chapter substantially support this hypothesis.

Despite his failure to curb the excesses of his sons, Shaikh Abdullah did curb the ambitions of Isa bin Tarif. With the help of his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, he defeated Isa's forces and banished him and his supporters from Qatar. During subsequent attempts at reconciliation with Isa bin Tarif, Shaikh Abdullah managed to deprive him of an ally and of the use of a port from which he could attack Bahraini interests. The Shaikh achieved this by befriending the ruler of Abu Dhabi, home port of the banished rebels, so that they were forced to leave Abu Dhabi and go to the island of Qais, relieving the Shaikh of their annoyances for some time at least.

The events examined in this chapter reveal Shaikh Abdullah as an able political and military leader. He protected himself and his domains from all external threats. For each enemy and situation, he apparently knew when to use direct confrontation, when to lay prolonged sieges backed up with skirmishes, and when to employ political cunning and shrewdness. Contemporary historians, looking through modern eyes at his life and career, might accuse him of slyness, inconsistency, violence and deceit. However, in doing so they would not be looking at the man as a whole, and would not be able to appreciate the geopolitical and social circumstances of his day. The Shaikh was driven by a set of values that was quite acceptable, if not praiseworthy, in Arab societies of the first half of the nineteenth century. It is safe to say that by the standards of his day, Shaikh Abdullah had excelled in his role. His success should be as worthy of praise and appreciation by modern scholars as it most likely was by his contemporaries.

CHAPTER VI

Shaikh Abdullah's Downfall and Death 1842-1849

1. Introduction

This chapter examines how a ruling shaikh could lose his rulership in the nineteenth century Gulf. It looks at the end of the political career and life of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. A ruler could lose his authority by neglecting one or more external and internal factors. Among the internal factors was his relationship with his family, tribal allies, governors and merchants. The external factors included his relationship with the British authorities in the Gulf and other regional powers. A ruler had to maintain a balanced, healthy relationship with all political players or he risked losing his rulership.¹ Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad's weaknesses in the internal factors, namely his relationship with his family, tribal allies and merchants, paved the way to his downfall. His situation was perhaps exacerbated by the British refusal to support him; they even gave indirect moral support to those who rebelled against him. We can derive from this chapter the difficulties and risks to authority that faced Gulf rulers of this period.

The previous chapter described the mischievous acts of Shaikh Abdullah's sons and his inability or unwillingness to restrain them, to the detriment of his political authority. These acts placed him in an uncomfortable position with the

¹ For more details see James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study", *History and Anthropology* 17 (2006), 193–206.

merchants in Bahrain, both foreign and local. His family and allies must have worried about the state of affairs that would come about if his unruly sons were to succeed him. This chapter tells more of this story, examining the dynastic difficulties that led to further deterioration of the hierarchy of leadership and eventually to civil/dynastic war. The leader of the rebellion against Shaikh Abdullah was his grand nephew Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, the junior co-ruler. He was able to defeat Shaikh Abdullah with relative ease apparently because of the actions of the former's sons, actions that alienated many of Shaikh Abdullah's supporters, even among his own family. The chapter goes on to describe Shaikh Abdullah's attempts to regain his position of power. Both Shaikh Abdullah and his rival grand nephew had many intrigues with the regional political powers in the Gulf, among them the British, the Persians, the Sultan of Oman and the Emir of Najd, ruler of Kuwait. Among other political players were the Shaikhs of the Trucial Coast and internal power brokers within the dominions of the Al Khalifa in Qatar, Bahrain and the Arabian mainland. This part of the chapter gives the reader a clear picture of the dynamics of political power in the Gulf region at the time.

All Shaikh Abdullah's attempts failed. After his last serious threat to his grand nephew, an alliance with Isa bin Tarif, chief of the al-bin Ali tribe, who led a failed yet dangerous uprising against Shaikh Muhammad, Shaikh Abdullah left for Zanzibar, seeking the assistance of Sayyid Said, Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar. It was on that journey in 1849 that Shaikh Abdullah passed away in the port city of Masqat after a long and eventful life of political intrigue and violent military showdowns.

2. Background to the Civil War of 1842-1843

Local historians like al-Khairi give us a detailed account of the internal course of events in Bahrain at the time and explain how the mischievous actions of the Shaikh's sons and grandsons led inevitably to the old man's political downfall. After the battle of Huwaila in 1835 and the apparent submission of his sons, the dominions of the Shaikh seemed calm. By 1252 AH (1836), Shaikh Abdullah spent most of his time in Qatar, visiting Bahrain only when necessary. According to local accounts such as that of al-Khairi, this was for health reasons, as the "clear air" of Qatar was regarded as better for the old Shaikh's health than that of the islands.² Shaikh Abdullah made his son, Shaikh Muhammad bin Abdullah, his deputy. According to al-Khairi, it was then that the trouble started, particularly because of the aggression of the followers and servants of the young Shaikhs, which became so bad that many people left Bahrain for places of greater safety.³ Contemporary British accounts confirm this story, describing some of the misdeeds of the sons of the old Shaikh and their effect on the value of Bahrain's trade, which very nearly halved in only a few years. The sons, or their followers, committed outrages such as the looting of commercial ships bound for Bahrain.⁴ Such actions must have naturally caught the attention of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa bin Salman, the Shaikh's grand nephew. The relations between Shaikh Muhammad and his cousins were most probably strained after his battle against them in Huwaila.

Relations between Shaikh Muhammad and his grand uncle had apparently become strained too. In 1840, after the departure of the Egyptian general, Khorshid

² Nasser Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain Fi Tarikh al-Bahrayn* [The Necklaces of Pearl in the History of Bahrain] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 2003 [c.1924]), 288.

³ Ibid, 288-289.

⁴ Lt A.B Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 392-393.

Pasha, the people of Hasa in Eastern Arabia sent an envoy to Shaikh Abdullah, inviting him to appoint his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, governor of Hasa, for protection against the Saudi Emir Khalid bin Saud. Shaikh Muhammad wanted to accept, but Shaikh Abdullah objected. The old Shaikh's objections were probably based on a fear that such a move might provoke the anger of the Saudi Emir, hence bringing unwanted trouble upon himself and his domains. Despite the marked difference of opinion, the two Shaikhs managed to reconcile with one another.⁵ The Hasa argument was probably not serious enough to bring about a severe schism between them, as some historians seem to suggest. Even so, the continued mischief of the sons of Shaikh Abdullah must have had a negative effect on Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and probably inflamed his irritation and anger concerning the internal economic and political situation in Bahrain.

Matters between Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and the sons of Shaikh Abdullah came to a head in early 1842 (late 1257 AH), when the continuous harassment had started to affect the trade of Manama, a port under the control of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. It apparently prompted him to complain to his grand uncle, but Shaikh Abdullah did not respond. The reason for such neglect was, as al-Khairi puts it, that the Shaikh "...was unable to control the unruliness of his sons".⁶ Shaikh Muhammad continued to complain, but still his grand uncle did nothing. Most probably, it was then that Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa gave serious thought to overthrowing Shaikh Abdullah's government. According to al-Khairi, he saw himself as the rightful heir as he was the grandson of Shaikh Salman, the elder brother of Shaikh Abdullah. It is also highly likely that the young Shaikh never forgot that his

⁵ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. I, historical, part II (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915), 867.

⁶ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 290.

father, Shaikh Khalifa, had died because of the actions of Shaikh Abdullah's sons, whose unruly conduct and attitude had never ceased. He must have baulked at the thought of living, with his family, under the authority of such individuals once the old Shaikh had passed on.⁷ According to al-Khairi, all those reasons led the young Shaikh to pre-empt such an unpleasant future by overthrowing his grand uncle.

3. The Revolt of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and the Battle of al-Nasfah

When Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa decided to overthrow Shaikh Abdullah, he consulted his immediate family members. His brothers Ali, Duaij, Salman and Rashid agreed to his plans, as did the rest of the descendants of Shaikh Salman bin Ahmad and other members of the Al Khalifa family. However, two uncles of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, Shaikh Muhammad bin Salman and Shaikh Humood bin Salman, chose to side with their uncle, Shaikh Abdullah.⁸ Once Shaikh Muhammad was sure of his allies, he declared his revolt. It apparently came as a surprise to his old grand uncle in Qatar and his sons, Shaikh Muhammad's cousins, in Muharraq.⁹ Shaikh Abdullah wasted no time, however, and stealthily moved to crush the mutiny. The old Shaikh, along with his sons, grandsons and followers, assembled their troops in Muharraq. From there they crossed to the island of Manama, where Shaikh Muhammad's forces were based. The forces met at al-Nasfah near the village of Sanad, and fought a fierce battle that ended with the defeat of Shaikh Abdullah. According to al-Khairi, most of Shaikh Abdullah's men fought half-heartedly, and

⁷ Ibid, p 289-290.

⁸ Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya Fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabiya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluum, 1986 [c.1922]), 107.

⁹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, p 291.

many deserted to Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.¹⁰ They have possibly been alienated by the appalling reputation that the sons of Shaikh Abdullah had made for themselves, so that they changed their allegiance to Shaikh Muhammad. It is probable that they shared the hard feelings that the young pretender must have harboured towards his cousins.

After his defeat, Shaikh Abdullah, his family and the remainder of his followers retreated to the settlement of Hoorā near old Manama, whence they crossed back to Muharraḡ. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa sent an emissary to Shaikh Abdullah, demanding the old man's abdication in his favour. He also demanded that the troublemakers among his sons and grandsons should leave Bahrain and relieve the islands from their mischief.¹¹ The old Shaikh, surrounded and in a weak position, probably decided that trying to fight his grand nephew would have been futile. This must have prompted him to leave Bahrain altogether, with his sons, to Dammam, the only place that still recognised his authority. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa allowed him to go with his portable possessions and his family.¹² Shaikh Muhammad now declared himself ruler of Bahrain and Qatar. As we shall see in the next section, matters did not rest there.

4. The Conspiracy of Shaikh Ali, the Battle of Souq el-Khamis and the Return of Shaikh Abdullah

Shaikh Muhammad started by changing the political structure of the Al Khalifa rule. The new ruler perhaps realized the precarious nature of the joint rule tradition, and sought to end it by centralising his authority. He made his brother, Shaikh Ali, the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 292.

¹² Ibid.

governor of Manama and commander of the fleet, while making it clear to his family members that each had a natural limit to their authority—sole rulership was his alone.¹³ All of his family seem to have adhered to that new arrangement with the sole exception of Shaikh Ali, who tried to convince his other brothers and uncles to oppose the new policy, though apparently in vain. His subsequent acceptance of his brother's new policy must have been pretence, as he was working against him behind the scenes. Plots to overthrow a current ruler, like Muhammad bin Khalifa's against his grand uncle (and Shaikh Ali's against his brother, as we are about to see) were common in the Arabian Gulf before the *Pax Britannica*.¹⁴ All rulers had to take precautions to safeguard their power, as none was ever absolutely secure in his position; this insecurity was a major source of political instability. Shaikh Abdullah's failure in that regard cost him his rulership and Shaikh Muhammad almost met a similar fate at the beginning of his rulership; he was saved only by good fortune.

Shaikh Ali wrote to Shaikh Abdullah, suggesting that the old leader should invade Bahrain from Dammam and overthrow Shaikh Muhammad with his, Ali's, help. The two Shaikhs would then be co-rulers with the same level of authority and an equal share in the revenue of Bahrain and its dependencies. Shaikh Abdullah was naturally delighted and promptly seized his unexpected opportunity. He agreed to Shaikh Ali's proposal, and began to gather Bedouin troops from the Bani Murrah and other tribes on the Arabian mainland for the impending invasion of Bahrain.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study", *History and Anthropology* 17 (2006), 193-194.

¹⁵ Muhammad Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal* [The Necklace of Pearls in the History of Awal], (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 1996 [c.1924]), 122-123; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 292-293.

Once all the preparations were made, Shaikh Abdullah commenced his campaign against Bahrain, landing close to Manama. When news of this reached Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, who at the time resided at Muharraq, he was understandably alarmed. He mustered all the troops at his disposal and sent a message for his brother, Shaikh Ali, to call upon and assemble fighting men from Riffa.¹⁶ Shaikh Muhammad, of course, was unaware of Shaikh Ali's designs and set off with the rest of his brothers, cousins and troops to meet the forces of Shaikh Abdullah. He camped near Souq el-Khamis in western Manama and waited for reinforcements he had ordered Shaikh Ali to bring from Riffa so that he could meet the forces of his grand uncle. The reinforcements never arrived. They were withheld by Shaikh Ali. By the time that Shaikh Muhammad must realized they were not coming (and presumably the reason they were not coming), it was too late. Shaikh Abdullah's troops had already reached the battlefield, and Shaikh Muhammad was forced to fight an unequal battle.¹⁷ The battle was fierce and well fought, but ended in a disastrous defeat for Shaikh Muhammad. His troops were routed and one of his brothers, Shaikh Duaij, was killed, as well as one of the grandsons of Shaikh Abdullah, Shaikh Muhammad bin Mubarak.¹⁸ Shaikh Muhammad tried to retreat to Manama, but was prevented from doing so by a contingent under the command of his brother, Shaikh Ali, who tried to capture him.¹⁹ Nonetheless, Shaikh Muhammad managed to escape with a band of followers to the Arabian mainland. From there he proceeded to Riyadh to seek help from the new Saudi Emir, Abdullah bin Thunayaan.²⁰

¹⁶ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 293-294; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 123.

¹⁷ Ibid; Ibid.

¹⁸ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 393; local sources state that two of Shaikh Muhammad's brothers were killed; for more information see al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 294 and al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 123.

¹⁹ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 294.

²⁰ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 395. The new Saudi Emir's full genealogy is Abdullah bin Thunayyan bin Ibrahim bin Thunayyan bin Saud.

Meanwhile, the situation in Bahrain became very turbulent. Shaikh Abdullah allowed his Bedouin army to plunder every town in their path.²¹ Why the Shaikh allowed such things to happen is unclear. One possible reason is that the army, mostly undisciplined mercenary Bedouins, was hard to control, though they took such extreme measures that Shaikh Abdullah cannot even have tried to stop them looting. Possibly he was angry with the people of Bahrain because they had supported his grand nephew, but he seems to have allowed his anger to cloud his judgment. Perhaps the old Shaikh did not understand the real reason why many people in Bahrain supported his grand nephew—probably the malicious conduct of his sons, their retainers and followers—and so wanted to punish the people of Manama and others for doing so. It is quite plausible that he wanted to instil fear in their hearts so they would never take the side of any future pretender. Whatever the reason for it, his policy only served to increase the alienation of the people of Bahrain, and even of those in Qatar. Shaikh Abdullah had unwittingly given his adversary, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, a great opportunity (which was taken, as we shall see) to recruit large numbers of followers and sympathisers in any future campaign against him. As for Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa, his grand uncle not only failed to fulfil his promise of sharing the rulership, but also severely maltreated him. Shaikh Ali, who must have regretted his conspiracy against his brother, attempted reconciliation so that they could attempt to regain their political power which was compromised by the battle of Souq el-Khamis.²²

²¹ Ibid, 393-394.

²² Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 295-297; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 123-124.

5. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa's Exile and Return

Defeated at al-Nasfah, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa fled to the Arabian mainland and took refuge at Riyadh with the new Saudi Emir, Abdullah bin Thunayyan.²³ The Emir gave Shaikh Muhammad a warm welcome, granted him asylum but declined to help him by supplying him with troops, saying that he had only just secured his political position and needed time to consolidate his power internally before engaging in any external conflict.²⁴ Letters from his brother, Shaikh Ali, soon started reaching him. Shaikh Ali expressed his deep regret at what had happened and told his brother that he was secretly rallying people to their cause. He would seek aid from their old foe, Isa bin Tarif al-bin Ali, who also happened to be Shaikh Ali's maternal uncle, as well as from Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma, the son of the arch-nemesis of their family, and from other tribal allies in Qatar. According to local historians, such as al-Khairi and al-Tajir, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa was very surprised,²⁵ but seems to have quickly overcome any hard feelings, as he apparently resolved to seize the opportunity offered to him. He responded positively, telling Shaikh Ali that he would leave Najd for Qatar at once in order to gather allies and supporters, and that Shaikh Ali should covertly do the same.²⁶

That conciliatory, yet pragmatic, action taken by Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa reveals that Shaikh Abdullah was facing a difficult foe. In a message, Shaikh Abdullah warned the Saudi Emir against intervening in his conflict with his grand

²³ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoabee Tribe of Arabs", 393; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 295-296. See also letter from Native Agent in Bahrain, Mirza Muhammad Ali, to Asst. PRPG, Lt. Col. H.W. Robertson, 20 October 1842, 191, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 55 (1383), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

²⁴ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 297; Khalifa Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya Fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabiya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluuum, 1986 [c.1922]), 108.

²⁵ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 124; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 296-297.

²⁶ Ibid; Ibid. See also letter from Native Agent in Bahrain, Haji Jassim, to Asst. PRPG, 20 October 1842, 257, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 55 (1383), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

nephew. He advised him to observe strict neutrality, and even used threatening language to make his point clear.²⁷ In his account, al-Khairi goes so far as to claim that Shaikh Abdullah openly threatened to resort to open warfare. He made it clear that he would wage a military campaign to annex Saudi Qatif and Saihat if the Emir did not banish Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa from his lands.²⁸ That clearly shows that Shaikh Abdullah saw Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa as a very serious threat to his rulership, and may have overreacted to it. He did not give the same kind of attention to Shaikh Ali, who, rather strangely, continued to reside in Bahrain.²⁹ Shaikh Abdullah's aggressive approach risked reopening a dangerous front with the Saudis as he spent considerable attention and energy to prevent an alliance between Shaikh Muhammad and Emir Abdullah bin Thunayyan. His close attention distracted him so that he failed to notice, or respond to, the covert coalition being built by his grand nephews, Shaikhs Muhammad and Ali.

The plan of the two brothers was twofold. First, Shaikh Ali entered into correspondence with his maternal uncle, Shaikh Isa bin Tarif al-bin Ali, chief of the powerful and numerous al-bin Ali tribe and their allies. He also communicated with Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma, who mustered a force of no fewer than three or four hundred men.³⁰ Second, their cousin Shaikh Abdul-Rahman bin Abdul-Latif Al Khalifa rallied support on their behalf from their tribal allies in Qatar.³¹ The two brothers built a formidable coalition, taking advantage of the fragile and unstable tribal/political structure of the Arabian Gulf at the time. They easily managed to recruit people who had been enemies to their families just a few years previously.

²⁷ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 869, Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 396-397.

²⁸ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 296.

²⁹ Ibid, 298.

³⁰ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 868.

³¹ His full genealogy is Shaikh Abdul-Rahman bin Abdul-Latif bin Abdullah bin Khalifa (brother of Ahmad al-Fatih) bin Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir.

This capriciousness made any Gulf ruler wary of shifting political allegiances as they could easily jeopardise his rulership. The ruler always needed to be alert to such developments so that he could extinguish any potential danger. However, as we shall see, Shaikh Abdullah failed in that task and lost his rulership.

In late 1842, the British Resident at Bushire, Captain Hennell, received a visit from Isa bin Tarif and Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma. The two men sought his permission to join the cause of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, and to ally with him against Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad. The Resident did not hesitate to give his blessing for hostilities against Shaikh Abdullah to commence, as long as the Restrictive Line remained inviolate. The promptness of the sanction made by Captain Hennell seems to have been a response to what the British perceived as unsatisfactory behaviour by Shaikh Abdullah in his handling of the Egyptian Crisis of 1839. These tense relations must have been exacerbated by the incident at the house of the British native agent when Shaikh Abdullah sacked Manama following his victory at the battle of Souq el-Khamis in 1842.³²

In November 1842, the British Resident despatched his assistant, Lieutenant Kemball, to Bahrain in order to warn Shaikh Abdullah that British permission had been granted to his foes to attack him. The news appears to have taken the Shaikh

³² J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 868; for a detailed account of the incident, see Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 393-394; James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178-180; Also see letter from Asst. PRPG to Bombay Government, 22 September 1842, enclosing letter from Native Agent to Asst. PRPG, 8 September 1842, 203-206; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to Asst. PRPG, 18 September 1842, 217-218; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Bombay Government, 1 October 1842, 215-216; Letter from Bombay Government to Asst. PRPG, 27 October 1842, 211-212; Letter from Bombay Government to Asst. PRPG, 17 November 1842, 219; Letter from Bombay Government to Government of India, 17 November 1842, 219-220 in *Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary*, vol. 55 (1383), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India. It would be fair to say here that the agent himself carries at least part of the blame as he gave, for a fee, asylum in his house to some people whom the Shaikh was seeking. The agent's action was not part of his prerogative and it cannot be said that he did it for humanitarian reasons because he sought financial gain by his action.

completely by surprise. He protested to Lieutenant Kemball that news of that coalition and of the British sanction had come too late, since the majority of his men and vessels were away on trading voyages. The Shaikh requested that the British delay giving their permission until the safe return of his men and vessels, as otherwise he would be in an unbalanced and unfair situation vis-à-vis his foes.³³ The Shaikh also warned that if the British failed to delay the commencement of hostilities, he would be forced to ally himself with the Saudi Emir, subjecting his territories to Wahhabi influence. The Shaikh must have perceived that such a move would be counterproductive to British interests in the Gulf. He also offered to allow Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma access to Dammam in order to remove the produce of his estates and property. That offer came with the condition that he did not bring any large vessels, which could have been used for hostile actions, near Dammam's harbour so as not to threaten the Shaikh's domains. Shaikh Abdullah made this proposal because Bishr claimed that his reason for wanting to join the coalition against the Shaikh was that he was forbidden access to his estates near Dammam. Captain Kemball took careful note of the Shaikh's remarks and duly reported them to the Resident in Bushire, but the British took no action to delay the commencement of hostilities.³⁴

It is uncertain whether Shaikh Abdullah actually needed his vessels and dependants to return from their trading voyages to face this new coalition. He could have used that plea as a ploy to buy the time to cool his confrontation with the Saudis and assemble his troops to face the new threat. He might have been telling the truth,

³³ See letters exchanged between Shaikh Abdullah and the Asst. PRPG after the Shaikh was overthrown from power: Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to Asst. PRPG, Lt. A.B. Kemball, 29 May 1843, 255-256; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, 23 June 1843, 257-258' in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 70 (1491), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

³⁴ Ibid, p 868-869; Lt. A.B Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 395-396; see also J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), 380-381.

however, since the autumn and winter months were conducive to trade with East Africa, Aden and Malabar. It is also possible, though uncertain, that the British authorities chose to notify the Shaikh at that time to put him at a disadvantage against his adversaries. This may have been in retaliation for his handling of the Egyptian crisis of 1839, which the British viewed in a poor light.³⁵ Shaikh Abdullah attempted to break the coalition forming against him by trying to appease Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma, but to no avail. That ploy seems to have been commonly used by Arabian Gulf rulers at the time. Such rulers must have realized that with their limited material resources they needed to fragment their enemies in order to defeat them. Shaikh Abdullah was unable to do that.

6. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa Retakes Bahrain: Takeover of Qatar and the Battles of al-Hunaynia and al-Saya

Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa bade farewell to Emir Abdullah bin Thunayyan, travelling to Hasa and thence to Qatar in order to rally his supporters, arriving in early 1843.³⁶ He was greeted by Shaikh Abdul-Rahman bin Abdul-Latif Al Khalifa, a staunch supporter of Shaikh Muhammad's cause. Both shaikhs gathered supporters in Qatar. Simultaneously, Isa bin Tarif, Bishr bin Rahma al-Jalahma and their allies reached Qatar, as organised by Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa.³⁷ As well as these chiefs and

³⁵ See also J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 868. After that crisis, the Secret Committee of Directors of the East India Company discussed the possibility of replacing Shaikh Abdullah with another Shaikh more positively disposed to British interests. The Government of India also took the decision not to restrain or hold back Sayyid Said of Oman if he attempted a new conquest of Bahrain.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 869. See also Letter from Asst. PRPG, Lt. Col H.W. Robertson to Bombay Government, 27 January 1843, enclosing four letters from Native Agent in Bahrain, Haji Jassim, to Asst. PRPG, 2 January 1843, 6 January 1843, 17 January 1843, 21 January 1843, 224-227, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 70 (1491), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

³⁷ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 298.

their followers, the al-bu Kawara tribe under their chief, Muhammad bin Sa'ad, the al-Nuaim under their chief, Jabr bin Nasser, and several other tribal allies joined forces with Shaikh Muhammad.³⁸ This large, diverse coalition of the Qatari population set about the takeover of Qatar. They seized the fort of Murair near Zubarah. Shaikh Abdullah sent a contingent to prevent the seizure, but it arrived too late and retreated without attempting to recover it.³⁹ With that episode, Shaikh Muhammad successfully took over Qatar and placed it firmly under his control.⁴⁰ He then started to assemble a fleet to carry his troops to Bahrain. Shaikh Muhammad sent an army under the command of his cousin, Shaikh Abdul-Rahman and Shaikh Jabr bin Nasir, chief of the al-Nuaim tribe. According to local accounts, Shaikh Muhammad had so many troops at his disposal that he and his allies did not have enough ships to transport all of them to attack Bahrain at the same time. Shaikh Muhammad ordered the fleet to transport nearly half the men under the command of his cousin, Shaikh Abdul-Rahman, to Bahrain. The fleet would then come back to the Qatari coast to transport him and the rest of his troops to Bahrain.⁴¹ These accounts indicate not only that Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa had gathered a large support base, but also that Shaikh Abdullah and his sons had alienated many tribal allies in Qatar. This must have created a power vacuum that Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and his supporters successfully used to their advantage.

³⁸ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 124; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 109.

³⁹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs" 397; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 869. See also letter from Native Agent in Bahrain to Asst. PRPG, 14 February 1843, 232, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 70 (1491), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁴⁰ Letter from Native Agent in Bahrain to Asst. PRPG, 14 February 1843, 235; Letter from Native Agent in Bahrain to Asst. PRPG, 5 March 1843, 239; Letter from Native Agent in Bahrain to Asst. PRPG, 10 March 1843, 241, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 70 (1491), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁴¹ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 125; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 109.

Shaikh Abdul-Rahman landed with his forces at al-Jisaira, on the southeastern coast of Bahrain, with the intention of capturing the town of Riffa. Before his arrival, he sent a messenger to Shaikh Ali, who resided at Riffa, to gather his supporters to meet and join the invading force. Once the two allies and their respective forces had combined, they proceeded to take Riffa by surprise.⁴² Shaikh Abdullah, however, appears to have detected that move. He sent an army led by his son, Shaikh Nasser, to meet the invaders and stop them before they could takeover Riffa.⁴³ The two armies met near the wells of al-Hunaynia, south of Riffa. A short but fierce battle ended in a few hours, with Shaikh Ali Abdul-Rahman and his allies victorious. Shaikh Nasser bin Abdullah retreated to Manama. Among the notable casualties who were slain in that battle was Shaikh Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Salman Al Khalifa.⁴⁴

The allies then proceeded to take Manama. The people there, as we saw earlier, had suffered from the plunder by the Bedouin soldiers of Shaikh Abdullah's troops in his retake of Bahrain. That would have naturally made them feel bitter to Shaikh Abdullah and his allies, so they took the side of his adversaries, the army led by Shaikhs Ali and Abdul-Rahman, enabling Shaikh Ali to capture Manama with relative ease.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa landed with the rest of his forces near Manama. There he was joined by the forces under the command of his brother, Shaikh Ali. From there, the joint forces of the two Shaikhs crossed over from Manama and attacked Muaharraq, the last remaining town in Bahrain under the control of Shaikh Abdullah. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and his allies were

⁴² Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 298-299.

⁴³ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 398; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 869. See also letter from Native in Bahrain to Asst. PRPG, 18 March 1843, 245, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 70 (1491), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁴⁴ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 124-125; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 109; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 299-300.

⁴⁵ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 399; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 870.

victorious. They forced Shaikh Abdullah to take refuge at the fort of Abu Maher while his sons took refuge at the fort of Arad. Local historians, such as al-Nabhani and al-Tajir, call this battle of April 1843⁴⁶ the battle of al-Saya. Among the Bahrain notables who died in this battle was Shaikh Yousif bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa.⁴⁷ He fought on the side of Shaikh Muhammad, dying from his injuries a few days after the battle.⁴⁸ Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad fought bravely, but the tide of the battle turned against him, and he was soon forced to surrender. The old Shaikh was allowed to take his belongings and leave for Dammam, which was governed by his eldest son, Mubarak. It was the only place that still acknowledged his authority. Shaikh Abdullah's sons, who had also surrendered, were permitted to remain in Bahrain.⁴⁹ After the battle, Shaikhs Muhammad and Ali were reconciled and Shaikh Muhammad re-declared himself ruler of Bahrain and its dependencies, and duly made Shaikh Ali his deputy.⁵⁰ A new era had begun in the modern history of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa family. See Figure 11.⁵¹

It is puzzling that Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, a capable military commander who had defeated formidable foes such as Sultan Said of Oman, Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma, Ibrahim bin Ufaisan and the Saudi rulers of Najd, was defeated so quickly. One possible factor could have been the military prowess of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, but this could not have been the sole, or even prime, reason. Most probably, there were several different factors at work. First, it cannot be overlooked that by

⁴⁶ Ibid, 399; Ibid, 870.

⁴⁷ His complete genealogy is Shaikh Yousif bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim (brother of Ahmad al-Fatih) bin Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir.

⁴⁸ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 125; Al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 110.

⁴⁹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 399; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 870, see also Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 301-302.

⁵⁰ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 302.

⁵¹ This map was drawn based on the accounts of al-Nabhani, al-Khairi and al-Tajir in addition to various traditional oral accounts.



Figure 11: Shaikh Muhammad Bin Khalifa Captures Bahrain 1843

1842-1843 Shaikh Abdullah had become a very old man. That would naturally have affected his ability and performance. Second, the sons of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, far from being supportive, were sources of annoyance and trouble for him. They and their followers persisted in acts of aggression against traders, especially foreigners. Understandably, that placed their father in an uncomfortable and embarrassing situation with foreign powers, especially with the British. They also shattered the image of their father's authority by instigating and participating in an open rebellion against him in Qatar. Their actions brought about unnecessary conflicts between their father and Isa bin Tarif, chief of the al-bin Ali tribe. Later, after their reconciliation with their father and return to Bahrain, they once again started to defy their father's authority. Their conduct must have spread discomfort and insecurity throughout the islands. That, coupled with the old age of their father, which forced him to reside for extended periods at Khor Hassan in Qatar, would have alienated the people of Bahrain and the prospect of one of Shaikh Abdullah's sons ruling Bahrain after the Shaikh's death may even have frightened them. The sons of Shaikh Abdullah probably even alienated the rest of the Al Khalifa family. As we have seen, other Al Khalifa Shaikhs, and members of different branches of the Al Khalifa family, fought on the side of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. The sons of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad had unwittingly provided the perfect environment for Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa to gain supporters, followers and sympathisers for his cause.

A third factor in Shaikh Abdullah's defeat may have been the British authorities in the Gulf. They must have viewed Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad disapprovingly after his handling of the Egyptian crisis in 1839. This may have been why they promptly granted permission for Isa bin Tarif and Bishr al-Jalahma to join Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. It may also explain why they did not notify Shaikh

Abdullah about his adversaries' intentions until too late, and why they chose to notify him at a time when many of his vessels and followers were probably absent on trading voyages.

A fourth factor was probably Shaikh Abdullah's overreaction when he retook Bahrain from Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and subjected Manama to the uncontrolled plunder of his Bedouin mercenaries. That moment of blind anger would have alienated even more people.

All these factors undoubtedly greatly facilitated the task of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa in usurping the rulership from his grand uncle.

7. Reign of Shaikh Muhammad, Exile of Shaikh Abdullah and attempts to recapture Bahrain 1843-1847

By April 1843, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa had effectively secured control of Bahrain and Qatar. Only Dammam remained in the hands of his grand uncle. Shaikh Abdullah remained quiet for a short while, and neither party bothered the other, both probably catching their breath after their intensive showdown. They were probably busy assessing their respective political positions as well as consolidating their power bases and forces. However, change started in June 1843, as Shaikh Abdullah started a campaign of naval raids, harassing the naval trade and maritime traffic of Bahrain.⁵² The old Shaikh probably chose early summer to start these hostile operations because it was the beginning of the pearling season in Bahrain and in the Gulf region in general. This would have given maximum annoyance to the new ruler, whose domains' economy depended heavily on pearling. At the same time, Shaikh

⁵² Ibid.

Muhammad would not have had a large number of fighting men at his disposal to resist Shaikh Abdullah, and would look incapable of protecting the livelihoods of his subjects. That would naturally have shaken the political image of Shaikh Muhammad and weakened his position as a new ruler.

Shaikh Muhammad must have realized the dangers of his grand uncle's schemes and promptly responded to them. He dispatched several vessels to blockade the port of Dammam, bottling up the old Shaikh's vessels and preventing imports and exports.⁵³ These hostilities caught the attention of Faisal bin Turki Al Saud, the new Emir of Najd, who had just overthrown Emir Abdullah bin Faisal and re-established himself as the new Saudi ruler and Emir of Najd.⁵⁴ The new Emir probably wanted to play one Al Khalifa Shaikh off the other. He could hardly fail to gain, as both Shaikhs solicited his aid and alliance.⁵⁵ Shaikh Abdullah most probably wanted him as a strong ally to help him regain his authority over Bahrain and its dependencies. Shaikh Muhammad must have realized his great uncle's intentions and sought alliance with Faisal simply to deprive Shaikh Abdullah of it. Lucrative though this play-off would have been for him, the new Emir was not in a position to take full advantage as he had not yet consolidated his power at home. His role in the conflict between the two Shaikhs was therefore not very active.⁵⁶ After much deliberation and several rounds of negotiations with both parties, Emir Faisal decided to side with Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. It was the brother of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, Shaikh Rashid, who headed the negotiations with Emir Faisal and secured the Emir's favourable position towards his brother. The Emir's decision could have been influenced by the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lt A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of Wahabee Tribe of Arabs", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 454.

⁵⁵ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "*Historical Sketch of the Uttooabee Tribe of Arabs*", 400.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

experience his father had had in his disputes and confrontations with Shaikh Abdullah. Therefore it is quite plausible that the Emir bore a personal grudge against Shaikh Abdullah.⁵⁷ Or they may have also been other reasons behind Emir Faisal's decision. First, he probably viewed Shaikh Muhammad as the stronger of the two parties, and the better choice for an alliance. Second, Shaikh Abdullah and his sons occupied Dammam, on the Arabian mainland very near Saihat and Qatif. Faisal quite possibly viewed these lands as his rightful ancestral domains and reasoned that the expulsion of Shaikh Abdullah and his allies from Dammam was a vital step towards reasserting his authority in that region. This, as we shall see, is exactly what happened.

As the conflict between the two parties deepened, a local Gulf ruler, Shaikh Jabir bin Abdullah Al Sabah of Kuwait, an old ally and kinsman of the Al Khalifa family, tried to mediate a peace settlement between the two belligerents, having, in August 1843, sought and received the permission of the British authorities in the Gulf to intervene. The British advised Shaikh Jabir to confine his efforts to peaceful mediation between the two parties, and to avoid from engaging in any hostile action against Shaikh Muhammad. Shaikh Jabir agreed to this, and proceeded to Bahrain accompanied by eight large vessels.⁵⁸ Once there, he entered into lengthy deliberations with Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and managed to convince him to

⁵⁷ Ibid. See also letter from Lt. J.J. Draper, Commander of sloop of war Coote to Lt A.B. Kemball, Asst. PRPG, 1 October 1843, enclosing report compiled from intelligence received by native agent in Bahrain, Haji Jassim, 23 September 1843 to 1 October 1843, 490-492, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 67 (1488), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁵⁸ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 401; See also J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 872. See also letter from Lt. J.J. Draper to J.P. Portes, SNO PG, 4 September 1843, 463-466; Letter from Asst. PRPG, Lt. Col A.B. Kemball, to Lt. J.J. Draper, 14 September 1843, 469-471; Letter from Native Agent in Bahrain to Lt. J.J. Draper, 23 September 1843, 490-492; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Bombay Government, 3 October 1843, 436; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Bombay Government, 18 October 1843, 485-487, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 67 (1488), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

invite his grand uncle to Bahrain. Shaikh Abdullah refused to play any part in that initiative when he realized it would not restore him to his previous power. He also refused an offer made by Shaikh Jabir to come and live with him in Kuwait until the tensions between him and his grand nephew had subsided. Without having achieved any of his objectives, Shaikh Jabir returned to Kuwait.⁵⁹ Shaikh Abdullah left for Bushire.⁶⁰

After this well-intentioned but unsuccessful Kuwaiti initiative, Shaikh Abdullah, whose attempt to regain his authority had cost him the alliances of both the Emir of Najd and the Shaikh of Kuwait, searched for other allies. He tried approaching the Shaikhs of the Trucial states for support, namely Sultan bin Saqr al-Qasimi of Sharjah and Maktoom bin Buti of Dubai.⁶¹ Learning of Shaikh Abdullah's schemes, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and his allies wasted no time in looking for their own allies. Isa bin Tarif, now the ally of Shaikh Muhammad, entered into communication with Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhboot Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi and Shaikh Abdullah bin Rashid Al Mualla of Umm al-Quwain. He invited them to meet him on the island of Qais⁶² and managed to secure their alliance through valuable presents.⁶³

These developments naturally alarmed the British authorities, who must have feared for maritime safety in the Gulf as these hostile coalitions formed. They decided to intervene, discouraging the shaikhs of the Trucial Coast from joining any of the warring parties in Bahrain. They also informed Shaikh Abdullah that they disliked the

⁵⁹ Letter from Native Agent in Bahrain to Lt. J.J. Draper, 23 September 1843; Letter from Lt. J.J. Draper to Asst. PRPG, 5 October 1843, 493, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 67 (1488), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁰ Ibid, *ibid* 872-873.

⁶¹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 402.

⁶² Known in British sources as *Kenn*, see *ibid*, but known to Gulf Arabs as *Qais*.

⁶³ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 402.

prospect of the shaikhs and tribes of the Trucial Coast being dragged into the conflict with his grand nephew, since it would endanger maritime safety in the Gulf. They did, however, offer to mediate between grand uncle and grand nephew, although they made it clear that they would not be able to guarantee the restoration of his quondam position and power.⁶⁴ The British motives are not fully clear. Possibly fear for the safety of maritime traffic and trade in the Gulf region was their only reason for stopping the shaikhs of Trucial Oman from joining the cause of Shaikh Abdullah, but it is also possible that the British despised Shaikh Abdullah because of his handling of the Egyptian Crisis of 1839 and might have wanted to punish him for his actions.

Once Shaikh Abdullah understood that allies were not to be found on the Arabian littoral of the Gulf, he sought the aid of a much larger power, namely Persia. He communicated with Shaikh Salman, nephew of the Shaikh of Bushire, by visiting that port in 1843 and sending a message to Tehran. He returned to Dammam to await a reply.⁶⁵ According to Lorimer, the purpose of his intrigues was to alarm the British authorities, possibly pressuring them to take a more favourable disposition towards him.⁶⁶ Shaikh Abdullah visited Bushire again in December 1843, to meet the British Resident. The Resident offered to have a meeting on one of his warships, but the

⁶⁴ Ibid. See also Letter from Shaikh Maktoum bin Butti, Ruler of Dubai, to Asst. PRPG, 27 July 1843, 480; Letter from Shaikh Sultan bin Saqr, Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, to Asst. PRPG, 30 July 1843, 449; Letter from Shaikh Saqr bin Sultan, Ruler of Sharjah to Asst. PRPG, 28 September 1843, 451; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Shaikh Saqr bin Sultan, 28 September 1843, 451-452; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah, 28 September 1843, 443-444; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to Asst. PRPG, 29 September 1843, 445-446; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah, 29 September 1843; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to Asst. PRPG, 30 September 1843, 447-448, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 67 (1488), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁵ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 873; Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 402-403. Letter from Asst. PRPG to Bombay Government, 435-436. See also letter from Shaikh Salman of Bushire to Shaikh Abdullah, No Date, 439 for English translation and 441-442 for Arabic original; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Colonel J. Shiel, British Charge d'Affairs at the Persian Court, 3 October 1843, 453-455; Letter from Asst. PRPG to Bombay Government, 16 November 1843, 457-458, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, Vol. 67 (1488), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India. See also letter from PRPG, Captain S. Hennell, to British Charge d'Affairs at the Persian Court, 23 December 1843, 79-80, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 65 (1598), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Shaikh declined, and suggested instead that they meet on shore. According to Kemball, Shaikh Abdullah insisted on a shore meeting because his real intention was to hold a secret meeting with Shaikh Salman, not an overt one with the British.⁶⁷ The old Shaikh may have feared that the British would try to sabotage any alliance with the Persians, thus foiling his plans to regain authority in Bahrain and Qatar.

8. The Siege and Loss of Dammam in 1844

A new development on the Arabian littoral pushed Shaikh Abdullah even further towards throwing himself into the arms of Persia.⁶⁸ In early 1844, a Najdi army under the command of Emir Faisal bin Turki arrived and laid siege to Dammam, the only place still under the authority of Shaikh Abdullah.⁶⁹ The Saudi siege was aggravated by a naval blockade administered by Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and his forces. When news of this reached Shaikh Abdullah, he was in Bushire trying to solicit aid and support from the Persians or the British. The Shaikh of Kuwait tried to smuggle in provisions for the sons of Shaikh Abdullah and their besieged men, but both of his boats were intercepted by the vessels of Shaikh Muhammad before they reached Khor Balbul, where the provisions were to have been landed for onward carriage by camel. Shaikh Muhammad agreed, on the advice and recommendation of the British

⁶⁷ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 403. See also Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to PRPG, Captain S. Hennell, 26 December 1843, 81-82; Letter from PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah, 27 December 1843, 83; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to PRPG, Captain S. Hennell, 29 December 1843, 87-89; Letter from PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah, 30 December 1843, 91 in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 65 (1598), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁸ Shaikh Abdullah was offered a reception of honour when he landed in Bushire by the authorities of the town. Allegedly he was offered military assistance by the Persian Government in exchange for being a vassal of Persia and paying a large annual tribute to the Persian government and for giving up one his sons as a hostage to ensure that he kept his side of the bargain. For more details see Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 19 January 1844, 101-102, enclosing letter from PRPG to British Charge d'Affairs at the Persian Court, 10 January 1844, 103-104, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 65 (1598), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁶⁹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 404; Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 16 February 1844, 45-45A, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 65 (1598), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India. See also al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 304.

authorities in the Gulf, to return the boats and cargo belonging to the Shaikh of Kuwait. But only under the condition that Shaikh Jabir abstain from intervening in the conflict with his grand uncle.⁷⁰ Upon learning of the very precarious situation of his sons and followers in Dammam, Shaikh Abdullah left Bushire in an attempt to relieve them. Once the Shaikh was in the neighbourhood of Bahraini waters, he tried to send another boat to supply provisions to the besieged people in Dammam.⁷¹

That relief attempts were being made in this way sheds light on the Shaikh Abdullah's situation and strategy at the time. His forces in Dammam were likely surrounded by overwhelmingly large land and naval forces, and severely outnumbered. The apparent plan of the besieged was to stand their ground and remain in the secure fortifications of Dammam until the enemy forces, especially those of Faisal bin Turki who were a long way from their homeland, became so restive that Shaikh Abdullah would have been able to push them to a compromise. The defenders must have realized that direct engagement with a numerically superior enemy would have led to disastrous consequences. This episode also reveals that Shaikh Abdullah's followers, and his naval force, were shrinking. He could not even attempt to break the naval blockade. Shaikh Abdullah's smuggling attempt failed, as his boat was intercepted. Four *buteels*⁷² were dispatched to catch the Shaikh himself, but he managed to outmanoeuvre them and escaped to Kuwait. In the meantime, his sons and

⁷⁰ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 404-405. Also see letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 27 February 1844, 49, enclosing letter from Shaikh Sabah bin Jabir, son of the Ruler, to PRPG, 19 February 1844, 50-50A; Letter from PRPG to Shaikh Sabah bin Jabir, 22 February 1844, 51-51A; Letter from PRPG to Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, 22 February 1844, 52-52A, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 66 (1599), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 406.

⁷² A type of local midsize war vessel, used by Gulf Arabs in the nineteenth century known for its speed and maneuverability and was often used for scouting. It was also used, as other types of local dhows, for mercantile and commercial purposes in times of peace.

their men were forced to surrender, stipulating as conditions the sanctity of their lives and the liberty to carry away their personal property and belongings.⁷³

9. Shaikh Abdullah Relocates to Naband

Some of the sons of Shaikh Abdullah, including Nasser, returned to Bahrain after the loss of Dammam, while others preferred to stay with their father, who relocated to Naband on the Persian littoral.⁷⁴ Shaikh Mubarak bin Abdullah, on the other hand, left for Qatar with his ally Shafi, chief of the Bani Hajir tribe. From there he went to Bahrain to meet his cousin, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, in order to reach a compromise that would finally put an end to the family feud. Shaikh Muhammad agreed to end the conflict with his grand uncle and cousins, welcoming them to Bahrain as long they accepted that sole political authority in Bahrain and its dependencies would be his unchallenged prerogative.⁷⁵ Historical sources do not give us an account of Shaikh Abdullah's reply, but judging from his later actions, he must have refused the offer.

From Naband, Shaikh Abdullah embarked on a campaign of harassing the shipping of Bahrain.⁷⁶ This was a shrewd strategy, as the Shaikh apparently realized that Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and his allies could easily attack him at Dammam, to the west of the 1820 restrictive line in an area where the British authorities would allow the Gulf Arabs to engage in warfare. Shaikh Abdullah had

⁷³ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Historical Sketch of the Uttooabee Tribe of Arabs", 406. See also letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 23 April 1844, 155-156, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 67 (1600), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 406-407. Letter from Asst. PRPG to Bombay Government,, 16 November 1843, 457-458.

⁷⁵ Mai Al Khalifa, *Abdullah bin Ahmad: Muharib Lam Yahdaa [Abdullah bin Ahmad: a Restless Warrior]* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 2002), 163.

⁷⁶ Lt H.F Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttooabee Tribe of Arabs", in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence, Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, no. xxiv, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 408.

few potential recruits on that side of the Gulf, anyway, as many leaders there, such as Faisal bin Turki, Isa bin Tarif and Bishr bin Rahma, harboured grudges against him. At the same time, the British authorities in the Gulf discouraged the Trucial Coast Shaikhs of Sharjah and Dubai from joining him, apparently to punish Shaikh Abdullah for his dealings with the Egyptians. Nonetheless, although the Shaikh could not solicit aid from the Persian Government, he realized that Persia might help him in another way. The old Shaikh must have reasoned that if he ran his campaign from a port on the Persian littoral, he would be within the restrictive line, although he intended to make naval raids west of, and therefore outside, the restrictive line, thus achieving several objectives.⁷⁷ First, he could harass the trade of Bahrain and its dependencies, denting his grand nephew's economy and weakening his power. Second, the booty from his raids would enable him to recruit, by financial seduction, a large number of mercenaries from among the tribal chiefs and allies of Qatar and the littoral opposite Bahrain. Third, by making his base on the Persian littoral, he secured himself from any possible retribution by Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, who would have been unable to cross the restrictive line and wage war against his grand uncle in the restrictive zone. Fourth, Shaikh Abdullah would exert pressure on the relations between the British and the Persian authorities. A British attack against the Shaikh on the Persian coast would have led to a crisis between the British and Persia. The old Shaikh would have made the "legitimate" excuse that he only raided Bahraini

⁷⁷ Shaikh Abdullah first started his scheme of raids by attacking and seizing a Bahraini Buteel near the port of Asseelo on the Persian littoral. When Shaikh Muhammad complained about this to the PRPG the latter warned Shaikh Abdullah of the consequences of waging such raids west of the restrictive line and the Shaikh agreed to return the vessels with the goods that it carried. It must have been after this incident that the old Shaikh changed his strategy and started conducting raids east of the restrictive line. For more details see letter from from PRPG to Bombay Government, 30 December 1843, 210-211, enclosing letter from Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa to PRPG, 5 December 1843, 212, and letter from PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah, 22 December 1844, 214-215; Letter from Bombay Government to PRPG, 16 March 1844, 216; Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 8 August 1844, 218-219; Letter from Bombay Government to PRPG, 8 October 1844, 220, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 65 (1598), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

shipping in areas outside the restrictive zone, a permissible action according to the 1820 treaty between Great Britain and the Arab shaikhs and rulers around the Gulf.

Once settled at Naband, Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad started a campaign of naval raids in Bahraini waters, no doubt to the great annoyance of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. During one of Shaikh Abdullah's raids near Bahrain, while he was still close to the islands, Shaikh Muhammad sent him a delegation of leading notables from Bahrain. The delegation's message invited Shaikh Abdullah to return and settle in Bahrain, but the old man said that he would accept only if the fort of Abu Mahir in Muharraq were restored to his authority. He made other conditions too, but it seems they were too demanding,⁷⁸ so the reconciliation attempt ended in failure.

On his way back from that raid, Shaikh Abdullah seized two vessels near the shoal of Fasht el-Debil, southeast of Bahrain, sparking a complaint from Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa to the British Resident in Bushire. He demanded that the British either restrain Shaikh Abdullah or allow Shaikh Muhammad to chase him inside the restrictive zone.⁷⁹ The second option most certainly did not appeal to the British authorities, as it would have jeopardised their long-term strategy to create a safe maritime zone for trade and shipping in the Gulf region. They therefore had to try to restrain Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad in the same way that they had restrained his old enemy Isa bin Tarif, though in this case the circumstances were quite different. Isa bin Tarif's base was on the island of Qais, detached from the Persian mainland and easy for British cruisers to reach and restrain him at any time they needed to do so.⁸⁰ The same did not apply to Shaikh Abdullah, located at a port that was difficult to access, being wide open to the prevailing winds in an area where sailing was both

⁷⁸ Lt H.F Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 408-409.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 409.

⁸⁰ For more details see *ibid*.

difficult and dangerous. Naband was also on the Persian mainland, where a British attack on Shaikh Abdullah's vessels would have constituted a direct act of aggression on Persian soil.⁸¹ That could have sparked a diplomatic row between Britain and Persia, something that the British were anxious to avoid. They tried a different tactic to contain Shaikh Abdullah.

The British Resident entered into correspondence with the Governor of Naband, Ahmad bin Saif, trying to pressurise him into restraining the hostile activities of Shaikh Abdullah against Bahrain and its dependencies. Ahmad bin Saif responded positively, even sending a confidential envoy to Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa to convey his apologies for the behaviour of Shaikh Abdullah. He also promised to restrain Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad to the utmost of his power.⁸² He failed to do so, as Shaikh Abdullah interfered in the internal politics of Naband by allying himself with the tribe of Bani Malij, who had a feud with Governor Ahmad bin Saif.⁸³ That enabled Shaikh Abdullah to contain the Governor of Naband—the opposite effect to the one intended by the British.

Shaikh Abdullah attacked Bahrain and its dependencies once again, seizing another two vessels. Incensed, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa sent his brother, Shaikh Ali, to the British Resident in Bushire to complain. Shaikh Ali reiterated his brother's demand that the British should either restrain his grand uncle or allow Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa to retaliate against him, even within the restrictive zone.⁸⁴ The British authorities considered the proposal seriously. It was quite possible that they would have allowed Shaikh Muhammad to retaliate militarily, but before

⁸¹ For more details see *ibid.*

⁸² Lt. H.F. Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 410.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

they had reached a decision, strict orders arrived from the British Government. The Resident was to use force if necessary to prohibit Shaikh Abdullah from stirring up any more trouble for Bahrain and its trade as long as he remained on Persian soil. The British and Persian governments had been in communication, and the British were now at liberty to exercise that option. The Resident immediately dispatched a warship to Naband to inform Shaikh Abdullah that he was under restraint by the British Government as long as he continued to live in Persia.⁸⁵ Shaikh Abdullah's movements and intrigues were now effectively restrained by the British Resident in Bushire, despite the "legal loophole" in the 1820 agreement and the diplomatic row that his actions and machinations had caused. Naband had lost its geographical advantage for the old Shaikh, so he needed to devise another strategy to continue his feud with his grand nephew.

10. Shaikh Abdullah Leaves Naband

By October 1845, Shaikh Abdullah informed the British Resident at Bushire that he intended to leave Naband and travel to Qatif on the Arabian littoral of the Gulf. He had seen an opportunity to help him in his struggle with his grand nephew. He had received a letter from Abdullah bin Said, the Saudi Governor of Qatif, in which the Governor invited the Shaikh to join him as an ally against Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. On the surface, the Saudi Governor maintained apparent amity towards Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, but was secretly preparing to attack him and specifically invited Shaikh Abdullah to join him for this purpose.⁸⁶ Shaikh Abdullah

⁸⁵ Ibid, J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 877.

⁸⁶ Lt. H.F. Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 412. See also letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 26 August 1845, 266-270, enclosing letter from Shaikh Abdullah to PRPG, 6 August 1845, 272, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 1 (1631), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

sailed with his men to meet Abdullah bin Said, but the schemes of the Saudi Governor had been discovered before they arrived, and the Bahraini navy, under Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa, was already blockading Qatif. As a result, Shaikh Abdullah landed in the area of Ras Tanura, about 12 miles north of Qatif. He sent a messenger to his son, Shaikh Mubarak, and to Abdullah bin Said, informing them of his position and giving directions for his plan. The old Shaikh intended to make a surprise attack on the blockading Bahraini fleet, enticing it to pursue him. Once the blockade was lifted by his father's manoeuvre, Shaikh Mubarak bin Abdullah and Abdullah bin Said were to launch a surprise attack on Bahrain, wresting it from the hands of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.⁸⁷

Shaikh Abdullah's messenger was unable to deliver his messages, as he was intercepted by the Awamir tribe, allies of Shaikh Muhammad and his brother. The Awamir immediately carried the letters to Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa, and the designs of Shaikh Abdullah were revealed. Preparations were immediately made in Bahrain to defend the islands from surprise attacks, and many more vessels were sent to support Shaikh Ali off Qatif. As Shaikh Abdullah approached Qatif, apparently unaware that his messages had gone astray, he was overwhelmed by the large, well-prepared naval force that attacked him as soon as he arrived.⁸⁸ The old Shaikh retreated rapidly. He was now in some difficulty, since his schemes with the Saudi Governor had failed, but it was useless to return to Naband even if that were possible—neither the British Resident at Bushire nor Abdullah bin Saif would have welcomed him. Shaikh Abdullah apparently decided to go and settle, at least for a while, somewhere safe

⁸⁷ Ibid. 413.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 413-414. See also letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 1 September 1845, 282-284, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 1 (1631), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

from his grand nephew's retribution and away from the British Resident and his authority.⁸⁹

The old Shaikh set sail for Kuwait, where he was warmly welcomed by the ruler, Shaikh Jabir bin Abdullah Al Sabah. When the British Resident heard Shaikh Abdullah had settled in Kuwait, he seems to have taken alarm at the mischief that he might have been plotting. He wrote to the ruler of Kuwait, expressing the hope that he would help preserve maritime peace by restraining Shaikh Abdullah, during his stay in Kuwait, from engaging in hostilities against the trade of Bahrain and its dependencies.⁹⁰ The British Resident was not disappointed, as Shaikh Abdullah did not engage in any hostilities against his grand nephew, but maintained a calm and peaceful style of life in Kuwait. He probably only monitored, quietly and from a distance, the raging conflict between his grand nephew and the Saudi Governor of Qatif.

In June 1846, during Shaikh Abdullah's stay in Kuwait, the Persian Government approached him with a new political offer in the form of an invitation from the Governor of the Province of Fars to return to Bushire. The Shaikh would be entertained and maintained by the Shah of Persia until an opportunity arose for action to reinstall him as the Ruler of Bahrain and its dependencies.⁹¹ The sudden Persian enthusiasm for the cause of Shaikh Abdullah seemed suspicious, given that they had

⁸⁹ For more details on the siege of Qatif see Letter from Captain S. Hennell Resident in the Gulf to the Government of Bombay on 20 October 1846 enclosing letters from the native agent in Bahrain on 27 September and 11 October 1846 in IOR: R/15/1/108, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain: Primary Documents 1820-1960*, vol. I 1820-1868 (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 569-575.

⁹⁰ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 877. See also letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 20 October 1845, 290-293, enclosing letter from PRPG to Shaikh Jabir of Kuwait, 7 October 1845, 296-297; Letter from PRPG to Shaikh Abdullah, 7 October 1845, 298; Letter from Shaikh Jabir to PRPG, 13 October 1845, 300-301; Letter from Shaikh Abdullah to PRPG, 15 October 1845, 302; Letter from PRPG to Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, 20 October 1845, 304-306, in *Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary*, vol. 1 (1631), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁹¹ Lt. H.F. Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 414-415.

previously declined to help him. The reason is debatable. Possibly it was a ploy to use Shaikh Abdullah as a pawn, to influence Bahrain and the Arabian littoral in general, or maybe Persia wanted to prick the growing British naval influence in the Gulf region. Shaikh Abdullah also seemed to have suspected their motives. As Disbrowe states, the Shaikh probably realized their duplicity as well as their unwillingness and inability to assist him in his endeavours.⁹² However suspicious he was, he probably did not want to close the channels of communication between him and Persia, as they would be vital if the Shaikh desired to retain his influence on the local politics of the Gulf politics at the time. He declined politely, saying that his current circumstances did not allow him to accept the Shah's offer at that time.⁹³

Three months later, Shaikh Abdullah decided to leave Kuwait, probably because of the restraints and restrictions placed on his political and naval moves during his residence there. He moved to the island of Tarut, near Dammam.⁹⁴ Shaikh Abdullah's sudden re-emergence in the area alarmed all the political players in the region and prompted Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa to reinstate his blockade of Qatif.⁹⁵ It also led to clashes on the Arabian mainland between Shaikh Muhammad and the Saudi Governor, Abdullah bin Said. Strangely enough, Shaikh Abdullah took no part in these hostilities and practised strict neutrality.⁹⁶ Why he did so seems inexplicable. If he really left Kuwait due to political restrictions, it seems strange that he engaged in no hostilities once he had left. Did he leave Kuwait because he felt unwelcome there, or perhaps because he wanted to be somewhere where he was not subject to political restrictions, and where he would remain quiet, though able to act

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid. See also Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 11 August 1846, 169-172, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 75 (1843), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁹⁴ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 877.

⁹⁵ Letter from PRPG to Bombay Government, 15 September 1846, 184-186, in Bombay Political & Secret Department Diary, vol. 75 (1843), Maharashtra State Archive, Mumbai, India.

⁹⁶ Lt. H.F. Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 415.

quickly once an opportunity presented itself? There is no verifiable evidence that he had been unwelcome, so the second explanation seems more likely.

It was not until 1847 that Shaikh Abdullah was involved in another political struggle with his grand nephew. That year, his brother-in-law and erstwhile enemy, Isa bin Tarif, led an open and dangerous rebellion in Qatar against Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. It was to be the last battle to which Shaikh Abdullah contributed forces against his grand nephew, though he did not participate personally. The next section explains the relationship between Isa bin Tarif and Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa during the period between the defeat of Shaikh Abdullah in 1843 and the tumultuous events of 1847 that culminated in the battle of Umm Suwayya. The section also examines the role of Shaikh Abdullah and his sons in that land battle, as well as the battle's consequences for both Shaikh Muhammad and Shaikh Abdullah.

11. Relations between Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and Isa bin Tarif, 1843-1847

The alliance between the two men started when Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa was struggling to overthrow his grand uncle and seize his political power. According to al-Khairi, Shaikh Muhammad started consolidating his position as the new ruler once he had defeated Shaikh Abdullah and ousted him from Bahrain. He rewarded Isa bin Tarif, chief of the al-bin Ali tribe, with the island of Sitrah in Bahrain as a fief and reward for his services and help.⁹⁷ Shortly thereafter, however, Isa bin Tarif apparently requested his nephew, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa, to ask Shaikh Muhammad to appoint him as Governor of Qatar, which at that time was still under Al Khalifa rule. Shaikh Muhammad took alarm at that ambition and told his brother he did not

⁹⁷ Al-Khairi *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 302.

trust Isa bin Tarif. Shaikh Ali kept on giving assurances and guarantees to his brother about the future conduct of his maternal uncle, but Shaikh Muhammad refused to grant the request, probably hoping that Shaikh Ali would give up and forget about the matter. Shaikh Ali persisted, however, until Shaikh Muhammad reluctantly agreed and appointed Isa bin Tarif as Governor of Qatar. According to al-Khairi, Shaikh Muhammad only agreed to prevent a new family conflict arising between him and his brother.⁹⁸

In October 1843, Isa bin Tarif and his dependents left the island of Qais and established themselves in Bida'a (Doha), Qatar.⁹⁹ According to al-Khairi, Isa bin Tarif remained quietly in his post for several years before he began to make trouble. Al-Tajir, on the other hand, claims that Isa bin Tarif had always harboured malicious, though well-concealed, intentions against Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and the Al Khalifa family in general.¹⁰⁰ Al-Tajir seems quite credible, as Lorimer agrees with him, stating that no sooner had Isa bin Tarif settled in Qatar than he started conspiring against Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. He communicated with Sayyid Thuwaini bin Said, the regent of Masqat and the son of Sayyid Said, Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar. Isa bin Tarif suggested to Sayyid Thuwaini that he should make use of the dissensions and conflicts within the Al Khalifa family to make a bid for the conquest of Bahrain, offering his services to help the Omanis do so.¹⁰¹ He probably wanted the Omanis to make him their vassal governor over Bahrain and its dependencies; after a few years, once his position was established and secure, he would have probably revolted against them.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 302-303.

⁹⁹ Lt. A.B. Kemball, "Chronological Table of Events: The Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein), From the Year 1716 to 1844", in *Records of Bahrain: Primary Documents 1820-1960*, vol. I 1820-1868 (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]) 17.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 303-304; Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 126.

¹⁰¹ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 873.

When Sayyid Thuwaini received Isa bin Tarif's proposal, he forwarded it to his father in Zanzibar. The Sultan contacted the British authorities for their advice, and they urged him to reject the offer for two main reasons. First, the Sultan had based himself in Zanzibar, so far from the political scene in the Gulf that he would have difficulty waging a military campaign in person—the British viewed his son, Sayyid Thuwaini, as incapable of handling such an enterprise alone. Second, such an invasion could have led to a regional crisis in the Gulf as, if Isa bin Tarif could solicit the aid of the Omanis, then Shaikh Muhammad could solicit that of the Saudis, who could easily have launched a counterattack by land invasion. That would have weakened the Omanis, slackening the pressure on Shaikh Muhammad and allowing him to confront Isa bin Tarif and his allies with relative ease. At the same time, the Iranians might have used the situation as an opportunity to espouse the cause of Shaikh Abdullah, and the Shaikhs of Sharjah and Dubai might have protested at the British ban, imposed earlier, on their joining the conflict.¹⁰² The prospect of a regional war in the Gulf must have looked very grim for the British in the Gulf, who wanted nothing more than peace to ensure the safety of maritime trade; a regional war would certainly be counterproductive.

Local historians such as al-Khairi and al-Tajir do not mention Isa bin Tarif's early conspiracy, merely documenting Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa's suspicions of him from a very early stage. Lorimer's account of the conspiracy, however, sheds light on an important aspect of the conflict between Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad and his grand nephew. Isa bin Tarif, whose malicious, secret ambitions had existed from a very early stage, probably espoused Shaikh Abdullah's cause in 1847 as part of a longer-term plan to further those ambitions. He apparently desired to dethrone the Al

¹⁰² Ibid, 873-874.

Khalifa family from Bahrain and their other dependencies, and to crown himself as a new ruler, founder of a new dynasty. This reveals the fragility of the political position of any Arab Gulf ruler at the time. The Al Khalifa had enjoyed political hegemony in Bahrain and Qatar for nearly eighty years, yet one of their closest allies, related by marriage, sought to overthrow the dynasty.

12. Last Days: Battle of Umm Suwayya 1847 and Death of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad 1849

According to local historians such as al-Nabhani and al-Tajir, by 1847 (1264 AH) Isa bin Tarif had secretly organised a network of tribal supporters in Qatar with the intention of revolting against Shaikh Muhammad. He also sent for the sons of Shaikh Abdullah, based near al-Hasa, to participate in the revolt. Shaikh Mubarak bin Abdullah led a contingent of the Bani Hajir tribe to join Isa bin Tarif.¹⁰³ Shaikh Abdullah, who must have seen this as a lucrative opportunity, was willing to put aside his past conflicts with Ibn Tarif. Not only did he send his son Shaikh Mubarak, but he also crossed to the Persian mainland to recruit soldiers and obtain reinforcements.¹⁰⁴ This sudden and unexpected alliance between his governor and his grand uncle put Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa in a precarious position.

It is surprising that Shaikh Abdullah should have been willing to ally himself with such a treacherous man as Isa bin Tarif, but he had suffered long years of exile and may now have been desperate to make progress. Their alliance was probably a “marriage of convenience” that would have dissolved once their common enemy was vanquished. Lorimer’s account gives us a good indication of the gravity of Shaikh

¹⁰³ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La’al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 126; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 878.

Muhammad's situation, stating that the British Indian Government had sent confidential orders to the British authorities in the Gulf that any invasion of Bahrain by Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad, Isa bin Tarif and their allies should be prevented by the British naval force in the region. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa was deliberately kept in the dark about these orders because the British did not want him to rely on their aid—they would act directly only as a last resort, if Shaikh Muhammad could not beat his enemies alone.¹⁰⁵

Shaikh Abdullah and Isa bin Tarif had clearly placed Shaikh Muhammad in a very perilous situation. In fact, according to al-Khairi and al-Tajir, Isa bin Tarif's forces numbered about 7,000. As al-Khairi puts it, "... Isa did not have a shadow of doubt that Bahrain was at his mercy",¹⁰⁶ although Shaikh Muhammad, who had had his suspicions about Ibn Tarif all along, was not unnerved.¹⁰⁷

The rebels in Qatar exchanged communications with Shaikh Muhammad. Isa bin Tarif and his allies demanded that Shaikh Muhammad restore the estates and property belonging to Shaikh Abdullah and his family.¹⁰⁸ As al-Khairi points out, this manoeuvre was probably only a ploy to further their selfish interests; they had no real interest in the welfare of Shaikh Abdullah.¹⁰⁹ Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, however, decided to crush this rebellion in Qatar before Shaikh Abdullah could return from the Persian mainland, and before the rebels could pose a significant naval threat to Bahrain. Accordingly, Shaikh Muhammad led an army into Qatar, and apparently decided to have a showdown on land. The allied rebels probably did not expect this move by Shaikh Muhammad, believing that their large numbers would deter him from

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 126; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 306.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 878; Al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 306.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

waging war on land. Shaikh Muhammad's timing also ensured that the battle would take place before his enemies' strength was augmented by the arrival of Shaikh Abdullah from Persia. The armies engaged near the town of Fuwairat in northern Qatar. Shaikh Muhammad inflicted a crushing defeat on the forces of the allied rebels and Isa bin Tarif was among those slain in the battle.¹¹⁰ See Figure 12.¹¹¹

Local historians call the battle "Umm Suwayya" after a spring of water located near the battlefield. According to Hennell, Isa bin Tarif lost no fewer than eighty men there, ten of them prominent men from Ibn Tarif's own tribe.¹¹² Lorimer says: "This disaster was the death blow of Shaikh Abdullah's hopes."¹¹³ After his victory, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa proceeded to al-Bida'a (Doha) and appointed his nephew, Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad, governor of eastern Qatar.¹¹⁴ Before his return to Bahrain, Shaikh Muhammad also banished from Qatar some of the tribes that had been the main instigators and encouragers of the rebellion led by Isa bin Tarif, such as the al-Suwaidi tribe.¹¹⁵ The battle had two major outcomes. First, it was the last

¹¹⁰ J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, p 878; Lt. H.F. Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 416; local historians such as al-Khairi, al-Nabhani and al-Tajir give a more detailed description of the battle. According to their accounts, Shaikh Muhammad defeated Isa bin Tarif by recognising and using two things. The first was Ibn Tarif's vanity, and the second was that Shaikh Muhammad noticed that, despite Isa's army being numerically superior, a large portion of it was made up of mercenary Bedouins who were only after booty and loot. He probably realized that if Isa bin Tarif was killed, many of them would just flee, leading to confusion and anxiety in the rest of the troops. That would have given Shaikh Muhammad good leverage over them. As stated earlier, Shaikh Muhammad must have decided to capitalise on the alleged vanity of Isa bin Tarif, and challenged him to a duel. Ibn Tarif took the bait, accepted the challenge and was killed. According to al-Khairi, he probably wanted to have the honour of killing Shaikh Muhammad to use as a pretext for claiming the rulership of Bahrain. For more details, see al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 311-312; al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 127-128; al-Nabhani, *Attuhfah Annabhaniya*, 113.

¹¹¹ This map was drawn based on the accounts of al-Khairi, al-Nabhani and al-Tajir in addition to various traditional oral accounts.

¹¹² Letter from Asistant Resident in the Gulf, Lt. A. B. Kemball on 1 December 1847 to the Government of Bombay enclosing letters from the native agnet in Bahrain on 9, 19 and 21 November 1847, IOR: R/15/1/111, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain: Primary Documents 1820-1960*, vol. I 1820-1868 (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985[1856]), 576-582.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ His complete genealogy is Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Salman bin Ahmad al-Fatih bin Muhammad Al Khailfa. His mother was a sister of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.

¹¹⁵ Al-Tajir, *Aqd al-La'al Fi Tarikh Awal*, 128; al-Khairi, *Qalaid il Nahrain*, 314 & 340.

serious threat that Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad presented to Shaikh Muhammad bin



Figure 12: Battle of Umm Suwayya 1847

Khalifa before the former's death in 1849. Second, Shaikh Muhammad managed to defuse a major threat to the Al Khalifa dynasty by defeating Isa bin Tarif, chief of the powerful al-bin Ali tribe. With that victory, Shaikh Muhammad consolidated his power and position as ruler of Bahrain, Qatar and dependencies. The alliance between Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad and Isa bin Tarif, as stated earlier, was probably only a 'marriage of convenience'. In all likelihood, each ally tried to use the other as a ladder to achieve his ambition in the highly risky game of politics and war.

After the devastating blow to his efforts and hopes in Qatar, there were only two minor events before Shaikh Abdullah's death in 1849. First, he was approached by the Persian Consul General in Baghdad, Abdul Jabbar Khan, who expressed the Persian government's interest in espousing his cause. Ironically, the Consul also wrote letters to Bahrain expressing Persia's support for Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.¹¹⁶ The Persian object of this double-dealing might have been to deceive Shaikh Muhammad, but they might have intended to use both Shaikhs as pawns in a larger political scheme. However, the British Resident apparently caught wind of what was going on. He must have seen the growing Persian influence in Bahrain as counterproductive to British interests in the Gulf. He therefore exerted pressure on the Persian Consul to cease communications with both Al Khalifa Shaikhs. The Consul eventually acceded to the British demands.¹¹⁷ Shaikh Abdullah then searched for a new ally, and found no one but his old foe, Sayyid Said of Oman and Zanzibar. The Shaikh set off to visit the Sultan in Zanzibar at the time, in the hopes of forging an alliance with him. On his way, Shaikh Abdullah stopped at Masqat in Oman, where

¹¹⁶ Lt. H.F. Disbrowe, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs", 418-419; J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 878-879.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

he breathed his last and died, apparently from old age.¹¹⁸ His death concluded a major period in the modern history of Bahrain, the Al Khalifa family, and the Gulf region.

13. Conclusion

Much can be deduced from the analysis of this period of Shaikh Abdullah's life. We have seen a detailed and thorough account of the internal and external political factors that affected the sustainability of the rulership in the nineteenth century Arabian Gulf. Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad's inability to succeed in balancing those factors ultimately resulted in his political downfall and the loss of his shaikhdom.

What led to the political downfall of such a strong and powerful leader as Shaikh Abdullah? The primary reason seems to have been his inability or unwillingness to control his sons. Their insolence and their conduct and attitude towards the people living in their dominions, such as the merchants and the tribal leaders/men, and even towards their own family, certainly helped to bring about the demise of their father's political position. The unruly conduct of Shaikh Abdullah's sons seems to have isolated them and their father from many of their tribal supporters, not to mention other members of the Al Khalifa family—Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa had no difficulty in rallying support from other family members. Many of them must have shared his fears and concerns for what might have happened after Shaikh Abdullah's death and the accession of one of his sons. Shaikh Muhammad was able to recruit members of the family who were not from the Ahmad al-Fatih branch, including Shaikhs Abdul-Rahman bin Abdul-Latif and Yousif bin Muhammad. Shaikh Abdullah, on the other hand, had only the support of his sons and grandsons. It

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

is noteworthy that, even when trying to regain his political position in Bahrain, Shaikh Abdullah could rally no supporters from within the Al Khalifa family.

As well as family members, Shaikh Muhammad succeeded in recruiting not only tribal allies with previous grievances against Shaikh Abdullah, such as al-Jalahma and the al-bin Ali tribe, but also other tribes such as the al-bu Kawara and al-Nuaim. Shaikh Abdullah had become increasingly isolated because of his apparent inability to restrain the abusive conduct of his sons, so could only recruit mercenary Bedouin troops, whose unruliness and tendency to loot must have isolated him even further from the populace in Bahrain and Qatar. All of that facilitated Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa's overthrow of his grand uncle and his enthronement as ruler of Bahrain and its dependencies.

When Shaikh Abdullah was ousted from Bahrain, he attempted more than once to reclaim his lost political authority but always failed. His loss of power coincided with the ascendancy of a new Saudi Emir, Faisal bin Turki Al Saud, who probably held a grudge against Shaikh Abdullah because of the latter's past conflict with Faisal's father, Emir Turki bin Abdullah, and because Shaikh Abdullah had occupied Dammam, part of Emir Faisal's ancestral heritage, after his exile. All this might well have inclined Emir Faisal towards Shaikh Muhammad and against Shaikh Abdullah, as a step towards regaining his lands. Shaikh Abdullah had been deprived of the assistance of a very powerful potential ally, who chose instead to join his adversary.

Another major reason for Shaikh Abdullah's failure, this time external, was the attitude of the British, who probably viewed Shaikh Abdullah in such a poor light after his dealings with the Egyptians in 1839 that they were willing to support any

move against him by a cooperating pretender. It is true that they did not give any known direct military or financial support to Shaikh Muhammad, but they did provide substantial indirect political support. They prohibited the Arab tribal chiefs on the Trucial Coast from espousing the cause of Shaikh Abdullah, or from meddling in the internal politics of the Al Khalifa family. They also discouraged the Shaikh of Kuwait from giving military support to Shaikh Abdullah, restricting his activities to peaceful mediation between the warring factions of the Al Khalifa family. By doing so, they deprived Shaikh Abdullah of the services and assistance of other tribal allies on the Arabian littoral of the Gulf. They also scotched his attempts to ally himself with the Persians, using political pressure and influence. They also pressured the Persians into allowing them to restrain Shaikh Abdullah from raiding Bahrain's maritime traffic from his base at Naband on the Persian littoral.

Shaikh Abdullah, already hobbled by age, failed alliance attempts and the threatened intervention of the British, faced a formidable foe with apparent military prowess. Coincidence and luck were also on Shaikh Muhammad's side, as they helped him foil Shaikh Abdullah's attempt to take advantage, with his sons, of his alliance with the Saudi Governor of Qatif, Abdullah bin Said, to take back Bahrain. The allies' communications were intercepted by allies of Shaikh Muhammad, so the crucial element of surprise was lost and Shaikh Abdullah was defeated. Shaikh Abdullah and his sons did manage, however, to strike a dangerous and crafty alliance with Isa bin Tarif, but Shaikh Muhammad proved to be a prudent military commander. He crushed the dangerous uprising of 1847 before it got beyond control, and this had grave consequences for his rulership and political position of Shaikh Abdullah. Shaikh Muhammad confirmed, yet again, that he was the undisputed chief in both Bahrain and Qatar. His victory probably made any possible attempts by some

of his allies to flaunt their previous support for him in claiming rulership as a favour. That would have been especially true with the defeat and death of the most prominent among them, Isa bin Tarif. Shaikh Muhammad's victory also severely weakened Shaikh Abdullah's political position and ability to recruit supporters in Bahrain, Qatar and other parts of Eastern Arabia. Knowledge of that weakness is probably what prompted Shaikh Abdullah to solicit the aid and alliance of his old foe, Sayyid Said bin Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar.

All the reasons cited above contributed to the political downfall of Shaikh Abdullah and to the failure of his numerous attempts to regain control of his position as ruler of Bahrain and its dependencies. For an observer trying to understand the history of Bahrain and the surrounding region in the first half of the nineteenth century, Shaikh Abdullah stands out as an important figure. Analysis of his political career informs understanding of the history of the region. His role was pivotal in many of the major political events and intrigues, as well as in the military standoffs between the local rulers of his day. He helped to shape the geopolitical structure that we see in the Gulf region today. Yet Shaikh Abdullah also presents himself as a historical paradox. As a leader, he defeated all his external enemies, but he was brought to ruin from within his own household. Whatever his mistakes, faults and miscalculations, it would be essential for historians to understand the important political role that he played starting his father's death in 1795 and which lasted until his own death in 1849. His mark on the political history of his country, and of the region in his day, deserves our proper attention and consideration.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

What new light does this study shed on the history of Arab Gulf politics and rulers in the first half of the nineteenth century in general, and the political role played by the Al Khalifa family and Shaikh Abdullah in particular? It reveals that the Gulf rulers employed a set of strategies to defend themselves and their dominions. Skilful use of these strategies was vital for the survival of a ruler, his family and his shaikhdom in the era that preceded British protection and hegemony. Rulers generally had a choice of three basic mechanisms/tactics to be used against external threats.

The first was for a ruler to enter into direct military confrontation with his foe and defeat him in battle. If successful, it put an immediate end to the threat. The possibility and consequences of defeat had to be considered, however. Two other tactics could be employed if a ruler was not confident of winning a war. The most common of these was entering into a protector-protégé relationship (a process known as *dakhala*), where the ruler placed himself and his shaikhdom under the protection of a more powerful ruler—including his attacker—by paying him a sum of money, a form of annual “protection tax”.¹ Although largely effective in securing a domain, this strategy had its disadvantages—chief among them was that a protector frequently meddled in the internal affairs of his protégé. To lessen the hold or influence of a protector, a ruler could seek the support of a new protector.

¹ James Onley, “The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century,” *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 42-60; James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, “Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study”, *History and Anthropology* 17 (2006), 200-201.

The final choice for a ruler who wished to avoid both war and a protector-protégé relationship was to play his foes off against each other. When a ruler was forced to contend with a powerful regional power, he would usually ally himself with another ruler, who acted as an auxiliary force. Such an alliance would usually stop an approaching foe in his tracks. A good example of this was Shaikh Abdullah's action against the Persian encroachment of 1836. When Shaikh Abdullah became aware of Persia's designs against him and of the possibility of a Persian-Omani alliance, he sought the alliance and protection of the Saudis. One apparent aim was to discourage the Omanis from allying with the Persians, and he succeeded, as the Persians were deterred from proceeding with their aggressive designs against Bahrain and its dependencies.

Playing foes off against each other, though usually effective, rarely led to long-term security; the agreements resulting from such tactics were short-term marriages of convenience, dissolved as soon as they were no longer needed. The quick termination of these alliances is explained by the limited economic resources available to the Gulf rulers at the time.² Lack of resources probably generated envy between neighbours, who would try to take whatever they could. The same lack made rulers unwilling to share wealth, in the form of a tribute; with anyone else, so that once the need for protection was over they would usually try to shake off the yoke of the protector.

Another major aspect of this study is the political life and legacy of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. During his long political life, 54 years, from 1795 to 1849, Shaikh Abdullah exhibited many of the characteristics of an ideal Arab ruler of

² James Onley, "The Politics of Protection: The Arabian Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century", *Liwa: Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research* 1 (2009), 27-28.

his day, at least in his ability to face external threats. The Shaikh's qualities as an able ruler were evident during his time as junior co-ruler with his brother Shaikh Salman, his senior co-rulership with his nephew Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman and then with his grand nephew Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. The Shaikh used all three of the tactics/mechanisms described above with exemplary efficiency. He protected Bahrain and its dependencies from falling prey to foreign occupation and preserved the rulership of the Al Khalifa family. Shaikh Abdullah succeeded in protecting the domains of his family from the Omanis, the Saudis, Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma, Isa bin Tarif al-bin Ali, the Egyptians and the Persians.

Nonetheless, prior to Shaikh Abdullah's reign with his brother Shaikh Salman, their father and grandfather used such tactics successfully. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir first placed himself under the protection of the al-Musallam family who were the vassal rulers of Qatar for the Bani Khalid tribe. Notwithstanding, when Shaikh Muhammad felt that his financial and military power grew vis-à-vis the al-Musallam, and that their protectors, the Bani Khalid, were weakened from internal feuding, he rebelled against their authority, and used direct military confrontation to overthrow them. His son Shaikh Ahmad al-Fatih found no alternative to using direct military confrontation to thwart the attack of Shaikh Nasr al-Mathkoor's army on Zubarahh in 1782. Shaikh Ahmad later used such a method to launch a conquest against Bahrain and add it to his family's domains.

Shaikh Abdullah and his family used direct military confrontation effectively against many foes, including the Saudis, whom they defeated in several battles. Among his successes in using such a tactic were the ousting of the Saudis from Qatar and Bahrain in 1810, the decisive naval victory over the Saudis and their ally Rahma bin Jabir in 1811 and his campaign of war and raids in Eastern Arabia in the 1830s.

Direct military confrontation was successful against the Omanis too. Shaikh Abdullah and his family defeated the Omanis and their ally, Rahma bin Jabir, at the battle of Maqta'a in 1816. His victory over the Sultan of Oman in the battle of Gazgaz in 1828, combined with a naval raid on Masqat, convinced the Sultan that he should seek an agreement of perpetual peace with Shaikh Abdullah. The agreement was successful and there has been no armed conflict between Bahrain and Oman since 1829.

Local rulers sometimes needed to use direct military confrontation against the threats of political rivals. Shaikh Abdullah and his family were threatened by contenders among the Bani Utbah tribal confederation like the famous warlord Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma, finally defeated and slain in 1826. Rahma, who apparently wanted to settle an old family feud with the Al Khalifa family, tried to achieve his objective by allying with different foes of the Al Khalifa, like the Saudis of Najd and the Al Said of Oman. When the geopolitical circumstances changed and Rahma could find no allies among the major regional powers that would allow him to attack the Al Khalifa domains in Bahrain and Qatar directly, he resorted to maritime raids. Such raids were intended not just to provide financial gain but also to weaken the economic, and thus the political, position of Shaikh Abdullah and his family. To counter this threat, Shaikh Abdullah formed an alliance with the Bani Khalid, who were angered by Rahma's land raids. Rahma had not expected this coalition, which besieged him by land and sea—a campaign that ended with the defeat and death of Rahma. Isa bin Tarif, chief of the al-bin Ali tribe, was another political rival. He tried, with the help of some of Shaikh Abdullah's sons, to stage a revolt in Qatar in 1835. He, too, was defeated and was forced to leave Qatar with his followers.

Other threats were countered either by entering into protector-protégé relations or by playing one power off against another. Shaikh Abdullah, along with Shaikh

Salman and their family, willingly submitted to Sayyid Ahmad bin Said of Oman in 1801, placing themselves under his protection. They relinquished their authority over Bahrain in order to maintain control over Zubarah and their other dependencies in Qatar and to retain their agricultural estates in Bahrain. Nevertheless, eight years later, Shaikh Abdullah and his family placed themselves under the protection of the Saudis and allied with them to throw the Omanis out of Bahrain. This was not an unqualified success, as the Al Khalifa, although free from the Omanis, fell victim to the Saudis, who took over Bahrain and Qatar, taking Shaikhs Abdullah and Salman, and their cousin Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa, as hostages to the Saudi capital of Diriyah. To deal with this reversal, the Al Khalifa family, under the leadership of Shaikh Abdullah's nephew, Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil, put themselves back under Omani protection. With Omani help, Shaikh Abdul Rahman managed to oust the Saudis from both Bahrain and Qatar. His victory probably prompted Shaikh Abdullah, with his brother and cousin, to negotiate terms for their release by the Saudi ruler. Succeeding, they returned safely to their domains.

Shaikh Abdullah was also successful in playing off one power against another during his reign as senior co-ruler. He saw that the Persians were intent on trying to bring him under their yoke in 1836, and that the Persian Prince of Shiraz was likely to call upon his in-law, Sayyid Said of Oman, to aid him with his naval power against Bahrain. That must have prompted the Shaikh to end his ongoing conflict with the Saudi Emir at the time, Faisal bin Turki Al Saud, and seal an alliance with him instead. The Shaikh placed himself under Saudi protection for a mere 2,000 MT Dollars a year and obligated himself to provide military assistance if needed by the Saudi Emir. In return, the Saudis would supply Shaikh Abdullah with military assistance if Persia attacked him. The Shaikh did, however, insist that he would aid

the Saudis militarily against any enemy except Sayyid Said of Oman. That would have sent an indirect message to Sayyid Said that, as Shaikh Abdullah had denied himself a Saudi-Bahrain alliance against Oman alone, but not one against a Persia-Oman alliance, it would not be in Sayyid Said's best interests to form such an alliance. If that was indeed the case, the Shaikh's strategy worked brilliantly.

The Shaikh Abdullah also played off one power against the other during the Egyptian crisis of 1839, when there was a strong possibility of an Egyptian invasion of his domains in Bahrain and Qatar. At the time, the Shaikh was under pressure from the British Resident in the Gulf not to enter into any agreements with the Egyptians, though the Resident refused the Shaikh guaranteed British protection against an Egyptian invasion. The Shaikh's only hope of success was to play off the two powers against one another. He sought Persian protection while at the same time demanding that the British should protect him if they did not want him to become a protégé of the Egyptians; he was also secretly making deals with the Egyptian commander, Khorshid Pasha. Almost certainly, the Shaikh's pleas for British and Persian protection were no more than tools to manipulate the Pasha and make him believe that one or the other would protect him if the Egyptian offer to their potential protégé was unconvincing. If that was indeed his intention, he succeeded. Khorshid Pasha agreed that Shaikh Abdullah and his domains in Bahrain, Qatar and Damman should enjoy Egyptian protection for a small annual tribute of 2,000 MT Dollars. The Shaikh also succeeded in inducing the Pasha to agree that there was no need for an Egyptian *Wakil* to reside in Bahrain.

The Shaikh's political manoeuvres saved Bahrain and its dependencies from a possible devastating Egyptian invasion for a trivial price. It was Shaikh Abdullah's ability to play off the major regional powers (Egypt, Britain and Persia) against each

other that led to the settlement with Khorshid Pasha, though his success caused some undesired consequences later. The Egyptian departure from Eastern Arabia in 1841 left Shaikh Abdullah without any solid protection from a major power. The British resented him too, so he could not call on British help when he could have benefited from it a few years later.

Any Arabian Gulf ruler at the time had to be alert to several factors if he was to maintain his authority and rulership.³ These factors were both external and internal, but it is the internal ones affecting Shaikh Abdullah that were the cause of his downfall. By neglecting them, he lost his authority and power when his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, led a rebellion against him. It is quite possible that the Shaikh would have been able to solicit some foreign aid in that struggle if any of the powers had felt that he had substantial support from the populace of Bahrain or from his family. The old Shaikh had neither.

How did Shaikh Abdullah lose all support within Bahrain? It seems quite a paradox that a leader who was able to thwart various external threats to his power and authority was defeated so easily by an internal mutiny, against which he seemed unable to recruit any support from his subjects or his own family. To try to explain that, we need to look at the internal factors affecting a ruler's authority in the early nineteenth century Gulf. The political power of any Shaikh depended on the support of three main groups in society. First was his extended family, whose support and approval of his rule was vital. Second was the support of his tribal allies, as they provided the bulk of his military force. Third was the support of the merchant community, who had a much larger political influence in the pre oil economy of the

³ For a detailed examination of such factors please see Onley and Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf", 193-204.

Gulf than they have today. The local economy at the time depended on them, and if a group of wealthy merchants decided to immigrate to a better port, they could affect the local economy badly, as the ruler and shaikhdom would not only lose financially, they would also lose status in the eyes of other merchants in the Gulf region.⁴

By the end of his reign, Shaikh Abdullah seems to have lost the support of all these groups and the loss led directly to his political ruin. As we have seen, the behaviour and attitude of his sons sowed the seeds of his downfall, starting after the death of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman in 1834, when they became aggressive and rebellious against their father's authority. Their actions culminated in the 1835 Qatar rebellion, in which they allied with Isa bin Tarif, chief of the al-bin Ali tribe and maternal uncle to three of them. The rebels' aim was to dethrone Shaikh Abdullah, but the old Shaikh managed to crush them with the help of his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. Reconciliation followed, but the episode should have been an early warning sign to Shaikh Abdullah, alerting him to his sons' actions and their possible (and in fact actual) undesired consequences. Shaikh Abdullah's sons soon returned to their insolent behaviour. They started harassing merchants in Bahrain and compounded their depredations by offending and abusing the British Native Agent in Bahrain, bringing unwanted trouble with the British. The Shaikh's old age seems to have decreased his ability and vigour as a ruler, making him delegate more of his authority to his sons and grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.

That delegation of authority was the start of more trouble. The sons of Shaikh Abdullah started to abuse their authority, spreading chaos and resentment among the populace of Bahrain. The atmosphere, as the sons continued their misdemeanours, led

⁴ For more on the above mentioned points please see Onley and Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf", 189-206.

to frequent clashes between them and Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. Such a tense socio-political environment also resulted in a slowdown in the local economy, as many merchants started to see Bahrain as an unsuitable place to conduct business and trade. The insolence of Shaikh Abdullah's sons seems to have affected not only the general populace of Bahrain but also its merchants, tribal leaders, and most importantly many of the Al Khalifa Shaikhs.

Shaikh Abdullah was now losing all three props of his authority: family, tribal allies and mercantile community. The deprivation had started because of the actions of his sons and his inability or unwillingness to restrain or control them. Shaikh Muhammad must have seen this as an opportunity to unite the Al Khalifa family under his command and to project himself as a potential, probably the most eligible, candidate to succeed his grand uncle. As has been seen, a civil war ensued, Shaikh Muhammad overthrew his grand uncle and assumed the rulership of Bahrain and its Qatar dependencies in 1843. All Shaikh Abdullah's efforts to restore his position failed, and he died at Masqat in 1849. There were three reasons for his continued failures. First, he had no internal support within the Al Khalifa family or from other tribal leaders in Bahrain. Second, there was no external support from any local power, as the British, apparently resentful of his 1839 dealings with the Egyptians, actively sought to deny any such support. There was one power, the Saudis, whom the British might not have been able to influence against the Shaikh, but the Emir of Najd, Faisal bin Turki Al Saud, chose to side with Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa instead. Third, Shaikh Muhammad managed to crush the only serious threat to his rulership of Bahrain in 1847 when Isa bin Tarif, chief of the al-bin Ali tribe and governor of Bida'a (Doha) in Qatar, had defected to Shaikh Abdullah. Isa bin Tarif assembled a large army and the British at the time believed that he had a very good chance of

defeating Shaikh Muhammad. Nevertheless, Shaikh Muhammad still managed to defeat his troops and slay him at the battle of Umm Suwayya in Qatar. That was Shaikh Abdullah's last attempt to regain his domains; he died in 1849 in Masqat, still searching for an ally, as he awaited a reply to his request of alliance with his old foe, Sayyid Said bin Sultan.

Shaikh Abdullah's life, a prime example of an Arabian Gulf ruler's career in the first half of the nineteenth century, presents itself as a political paradox. This thesis shows that from an international point of view, he was a very competent and capable ruler, able to counter all external threats to his shaikhdom by using the three strategies with meticulous efficiency, always choosing the best strategy for the circumstances. He knew when to go to war, when and with whom to ally, when and from whom to seek protection, and (except possibly in one case) when to play one foe against another. The exception was during the Egyptian crisis of 1839, when he managed to protect himself from the wrath of the Egyptians but at the expense of bringing British resentment upon himself. Even that might not have been a mistake, as he did not have sufficient guarantees of protection from the British. That flaw aside (and perhaps an accusation of negligence could be made in his dealing with the Saudis in 1809-1810), the Shaikh was very successful in managing Bahrain's external affairs.

Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad's major flaw as a political leader was his weakness in domestic affairs, particularly family affairs. He may have been unlucky in that most of his numerous sons were aggressive rogues, but he could have exercised more effort to try to restrict their excesses, it might be argued. Those excessive and abusive actions and conduct built anger and resentment among the populace of Bahrain and its dependencies, not just among the masses but also among the merchants, tribal leaders and allies of the Al Khalifa, and even members of the Al

Khalifa family itself. Fear of the political and economic future of Bahrain if the sons had succeeded the father would have generated a suitable political climate for the overthrow of Shaikh Abdullah. Nobody had any confidence in the Shaikh's sons or could trust them with their future and interests. In such an environment, the most suitable candidate to replace Shaikh Abdullah was his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. As we have seen, Shaikh Muhammad did indeed rebel against his grand uncle and found ample support among his family, the tribes and the populace of Bahrain and Qatar in general, while Shaikh Abdullah, no doubt surprised that his erstwhile tribal allies favoured Shaikh Muhammad, was forced to depend mostly on Bedouin mercenaries from the Arabian mainland.

Could Shaikh Abdullah have saved himself from political downfall had he nominated another member of his family as his successor? That successor would have been a member of the family with the confidence of the family, the people and the Al Khalifa's allies. If he had found and nominated such a successor, he might well have remained in power until the end of his life, though his sons would certainly have objected. If they had, the Shaikh would have had to fight and possibly kill his own sons, and that thought must have made him unwilling to appoint a successor, preferring to risk the loss of his shaikhdom for the sake of maintaining his house intact rather than to retain power and lose his sons. His heart, not his head, cost Shaikh Abdullah his position as Ruler.

Appendices

Appendix I

Chronology of Key Dates

Date	Remark
c. Mid 1600s	Ancestors of the Al Khalifa and al-Sabah and other Utubi families from the Jumaila tribe leave their ancestral home in al-Haddar, Najd. Bani Utbah or the Utub tribal confederation is formed in eastern Arabia between them and the al-bin Ali from the Bani Sulaim tribe.
1701	The Utub wage an unsuccessful Naval conquest on Bahrain but are repelled by the Huwala Arabs.
c.1716	The Utub establish themselves on Kuwait under the suzerainty of the Bani Khalid tribe. They gradually become independent from Bani Khalid under the rulership of the al-Sabah dynasty.
c.1766	Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir relocates from Kuwait to Zubarahh. Builds Sabha (Murair) Fort and gradually defeats al-Musallam, Bani Khalid vassals in Qatar, and assumes the Shaikhdom of that Peninsula.
c.1778	Shaikh Muhammad dies, his son Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad rules.
1782	Shaikh Khalifa leaves for pilgrimage. His brother Shaikh Ahmad is his deputy and faced invasion from the Al Mathkoor family of Bahrain and Bushire. Shaikh Ahmad defeats them at battle of Zubarahh. Shaikh Khalifa dies in pilgrimage and Shaikh Ahmad becomes Ruler in his place.
1783	Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad wages a successful conquest against Bahrain and includes it in his domains
1795	Shaikh Ahmad dies and is succeeded by his son, Shaikh Salman.
1798	Shaikh Salman relocates his seat of government from Zubarahh to Bahrain so as to be in a better position against the emerging Saudi threat.
1801	Bahrain faces Omani Invasion by Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad. Shaikh Salman submits on certain terms and conditions and relocates to Zubarahh
1809-1810	Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah manage to oust Omanis from Bahrain by Saudi help but then captured and held as captives in Riyadh along with their cousin Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa. Their nephew, Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil, manages to obtain help from Sayyid Said of Oman. Through scheming with his cousin, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman, he succeeds in capturing Zubarahh and Bahrain from the Saudis and imprisoning their garrisons. His success secured the release of the imprisoned Al Khalifa Shaikhs in Diriyah.
1811	Battle of Akhakhira
1816	Battle of Maqta'a
1820	Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah sign General Treaty of 1820 with the British Government. The stated aim of the treaty was to restrict piracy and assure maritime peace.

Date	Remark
1822	Shiraz agreement is signed between Captain William Bruce, PRPG, and the Prince of Shiraz. The agreement acknowledges British recognition of Persian sovereignty over Bahrain. The agreement sparks British anger and is not recognised by Bruce's superiors as the latter signed it without their prior consultation and approval and he is removed from his post.
1825	Shaikh Salman dies.
1826	Rahma al-Jalahma is slain in a naval battle of the coast of Dammam.
1828	Battle of Gazgaz
1833-1834	Saudi-Bahrain war
1834	Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman dies.
1835	Sons of Shaikh Abdullah along with the maternal uncle of three of them, Isa bin Tarif al-bin Ali, start a rebellion in Qatar. The rebellion fails as it is crushed by the forces of Shaikh Abdullah led by Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.
1836	Prince of Shiraz tries to intimidate Shaikh Abdullah into acknowledging Persian hegemony over Bahrain. Shaikh Abdullah responds by stopping his conflicts with the Saudis and acknowledging their suzerainty in exchange for their military assistance if he is faced by a Persian invasion.
1839	Egyptian Crisis of 1839. Egyptian forces of Muhammad Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt, under the command of Khorshid Pasha installs his protégé Khalid bin Saud as new Saudi Emir in Najd. They proceed to Eastern Arabia and attempt to subdue Bahrain. Shaikh Abdullah naturally alarmed and seeks British advice. The PGPR first tells the Shaikh that it is the latter who will be best able to solve his own problem. Nevertheless, the British later ask Shaikh Abdullah to not place himself under Egyptian protection but are unwilling to afford him guaranteed protection on their part. This prompts the Shaikh to ignore their wishes and negotiate with the Egyptians and places himself under their protection. The British are angered by his decision.
1842-1843	Civil War in Bahrain which ends with Shaikh Abdullah losing his throne and Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa becoming the new Ruler.
1844	Siege of Dammam
1847	Battle of Umm Suwayya
1849	Shaikh Abdullah dies in Muscat.

Appendix II

List of Battles

DATE	LOCATION	NAME	COMBATANTS	RESULTS & IMPLICATONS
c.1766	Sumaisma, Qatar	Battle of Sumaisma	Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir vs. al-Musallam	Shaikh Muhammad victorious and consolidated his political power over Qatar.
1770s	Ruwais, Qatar	Battle of Ruwais	Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir vs. al-Jalahma	Shaikh Muhammad victorious and the challenge of the al-Jalahma to his authority in Qatar.
15 November 1782	Zubarahh, Qatar	Battle of Zubarahh	Shaikh Ahmad al-Fatih, Utub, and people of Zubarahh vs. Shaikh NasrAl Mathkooor army	Shaikh Ahmad victorious and invasion of Al Mathkooor to Zubarahh is repelled. Shaikh Nasr leaves Bahrain to Persia to seek assistance of Persian government to wage a counteroffensive on the Utub.
March-May 1783	Bahrain	Conquest of Bahrain	Forces of the Utub vs. Garrison of Al Mathkooor	Utub victorious and Bahrain comes under the possession of Shaikh Ahmad.
September-October 1801	Bahrain	Omani Invasion of Bahrain	Shaikh Salman vs. Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad	Shaikh Salman surrenders Bahrain to Sayyid Ahmad on the condition that the Utub property and fishing rights in remain intact. Utub relocate to Zubarahh. Shaikh Muhammad, brother of Shaikh Salman was taken hostage by the Omanis.

DATE	LOCATION	NAME	COMBATANTS	RESULTS & IMPLICATONS
1809-1810	Bahrain	Joint Saudi-Utub invasion of Bahrain	Saudis, Utub vs. Omanis	Omanis ousted from Bahrain. Saudis refuse to surrender Bahrain to the Al Khalifa according to their prior agreement.
1810	Zubarahh Qatar	Saudi Invasion of Zubarahh	Saudis vs. Utub	Shaikhs Salman, Abdullah and their cousin Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa taken as hostages in Diriyah. Zubarahh comes under Saudi rule.
1810	Zubarah, Qatar	Shaikh Abdul Rahman's invasion of Zubarahh	Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman vs. Saudi Garrison under command of Ibn Touq	Zubarahh liberated from the Saudis. Saudi garrison taken as hostages.
1810	Bahrain	Shaikh Abdul Rahman's invasion of Zubarahh	Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil vs. Saudi Garrison under command of Ibn Ufaisan	Bahrain liberated from the Saudis. Saudi garrison taken as hostages.
c.1811	Huwaila, Qatar	First Battle of Huwaila	Ibn Ufaisan, Rahma al-Jalahma vs. Utub	Utub victorious. Saudis repelled.
1811	Akhakkira shoal, Bahrain	Battle of Akhakkira	Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad vs. fleet of Rahma al-Jalahma and Ibn Ufaisan	Shaikh Abdullah victorious. Saudi fleet destroyed.
1816	Sitrah, Bahrain	Battle of Maqta'a	Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah vs. Sayyid Said and Rahma al-Jalahma	Shaikhs of Bahrain victorious.

DATE	LOCATION	NAME	COMBATANTS	RESULTS & IMPLICATONS
1826	Dammam, Saudi Arabia	Showdown with Rahma al-Jalahma	Utub and Bani Khalid vs. Rahma al-Jalahma	Rahma slain.
1828	Juffair, Bahrain	Battle of Gazgaz	Shaikhs Abdullah and Khalifa vs. Sayyid Said of Oman	Shaikhs of Bahrain victorious.
1833-1834	Qatif, Saudi Arabia	Qatif War	Utub vs. Saudis	Surrender of Qatif to Shaikh Abdullah
1835	Huwaila, Qatar	Second Battle of Huwaila	Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, his brother Shaikh Ali vs. Isa bin Tarif al-bin Ali and renegade sons of Shaikh Abdullah	Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa victorious. Isa bin Tarif and al-bin Ali tribe expelled from Qatar. Doha destroyed.
1842-1843	Bahrain and Qatar	Bahrain Civil War	Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa vs. Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad	Shaikh Muhammad victorious. Shaikh Abdullah relocates to Dammam
1844	Dammam	Siege of Dammam	Bahrain-Saudi coalition vs. Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad	Shaikh Abdullah loses Dammam and relocates to Persian coast. He later relocates to Kuwait and then to Tarut Island opposite Qatif.
1847	Umm Suwayya, Qatar	Battle of Umm Suwayya	Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa vs. Isa bin Tarif and sons of Shaikh Abdullah	Shaikh Muhammad victorious. Appoints new governor in Doha.

Appendix III

List of Key People

Name	Relation	Significance to the story
Al Fadhil, Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid	Grandson of Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil bin Khalifa al-Kabir. Nephew of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah. His mother was Shaikha Amna bint Ahmad al-Fatih.	Managed with Omani help and the assistance of his cousin, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman to Defeat the Saudis and oust them from Qatar and Bahrain. He took many of them as hostages and through such leverage managed to secure the release of the imprisoned three Al Khalifa Shaikhs in Najd.
Al Fadhil, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa	Son of Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil bin Khalifa al-Kabir	Governor in Bahrain in the winter months during 1783-1795, when Shaikh Ahmad al-Fatih resided in Zubarahh.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad	Son of Shaikh Ahmad al-Fatih	Third Ruler of Bahrain and Fifth in Zubarahh, 1795-1843. His reign witnessed many violent battles and showdowns to protect his family domains. Those included challenges with the Omanis in the battles of Maqta'a and Gazgaz 1816 and 1828. With the Saudis in the battle of Akhakkira in 1811, and the Bahrain Saudi war 1833-1834 and Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma. He also had to face Persian encroachments, Internal rebellions in Qatar and in his family in addition to facing an Egyptian threat in 1839. He was overthrown by his grand nephew, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa in 1843. He tried to regain his throne several times but with no avail and died in Masqat in 1849.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa	Son of the second Ruler of Zubarahh. First Cousin of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah	Was imprisoned with his cousins Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah in Diriyah, the Saudi capital in Najd by Imam Saud.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Abdul-Latif	Great grandson of Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad, the second Ruler in Zubarahh	Played an important role in organizing the rebellion of 1843 in Qatar and succeeded in making several tribes switch their allegiance to Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. He led along with Shaikh Muhammad bin Ahmad the first part of the troops that left from Qatar to Bahrain and managed to takeover Riffa during the battle of al-Hunainya.

Name	Relation	Significance to the story
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Ahmad al-Fatih bin Muhammad	Son of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir.	Third Ruler in Zubarahh. Succeeded his brother Shaikh Khalifa. Defeated the forces of Shaikh Nasr Al Mathkoor in the Battle of Zubarahh. Waged a successful conquest of Bahrain at 1783 and added Bahrain to his domains.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman	Son of Shaikh Salman bin Ahmad	Was the right hand of his brother Khalifa. Played an important role in the command of the battle of Maqta'a in 1816. Helped in negotiating a peace between the Al Khalifa and Sayyid Said of Oman. Commander of the navy during the final showdown with Rahma al-Jalahma in 1826 and was personally responsible for the final assault in which Rahma was slain. He died in 1827. With his death the peace between the Al Khalifa and Sayyid Said ended. That in turn resulted in the battle of Maqta'a in 1828.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa	Son of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman the Junior co-Ruler of Bahrain 1825-1834.	He assisted his brother, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, in overthrowing their uncle Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad in 1843. Later Governor of Manama, 1843-68, and Fifth Ruler of Bahrain, 1868-69.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Khalifa bin Fadhil bin Khalifa al-Kabir	Brother of Shaikh Muhammad.	Founder of the Al Fadhil family in Bahrain. Some of his descendants would play a key role in supporting the Al Khalifa dynasty.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad	Son of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir.	Second Ruler in Zubarahh. His reign witnessed a rise in the importance of Zubarah as a political, commercial, and cultural center.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman	Son of Shaikh Salman bin Ahmad	Helped his cousin, Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid Al Fadhil in ousting the Saudis from Qatar and Bahrain in 1810. Later became the Junior co-Ruler with his uncle, Shaikh Abdullah who was the Senior co-Ruler. Was an important commander in the battles of Maqta'a in 1816 and Gazgaz in 1828 and the 1833-1834 war with the Saudis. He died in 1834.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Muhammad bin Ahmad	Son of Shaikh Ahmad bin Salman and nephew of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman	He assisted his cousin Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa in his rebellion. He led the first troops with Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Abdul-Latif and was killed in the battle of al-Hunainya.

Name	Relation	Significance to the story
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa	Son of Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman the Junior co-Ruler of Bahrain 1825-1834; grand nephew of Shaikh Abdullah.	The Fourth Ruler in Bahrain and the Sixth in Zubarahh 1843-1868. He tried to succeed his father in his position being his eldest son. Nevertheless he was not given the same authority by his granduncle, Shaikh Abdullah. However in 1835 the Sons of Shaikh Abdullah started a rebellion in Qatar with the aid of the maternal uncle of three of them, Isa bin Tarif al-bin Ali. Shaikh Abdullah relied on Shaikh Muhammad to put down that rebellion. Shaikh Muhammad led his troops against the rebels in the 1835 battle of Huwaila and managed to defeat them. That achievement elevated his position in the family. Nonetheless his conflicts and tensions with the sons of Shaikh Abdullah continued to intensify until he managed to lead a revolt against Shaikh Abdullah in 1842. His revolt was initially successful but he was ultimately defeated and had to flee to Najd and seek asylum in Riyadh. Notwithstanding he managed to weave another rebellion in 1843 with the help of his brother Shaikh Ali and his cousins Shaikhs Abdullah bin Abdul-Latif and Muhammad bin Ahmad. His second attempt was successful and he first managed to take over Qatar and then Bahrain in the same year and banished Shaikh Abdullah and his sons. Conflict continued between him and his grand uncle's family between 1843 and 1846. In 1847, Isa bin Tarif, who became his ally and Shaikh Muhammad rewarded him by making him the governor of Qatar, conspired with Shaikh Abdullah and his sons against Shaikh Muhammad and led a rebellion against the latter. That rebellion came to a showdown in Umm Suwayya in Qatar where Shaikh Muhammad and his forces defeated the forces of Isa bin Tarif, who was slain, and the sons of Shaikh Abdullah.

Name	Relation	Significance to the story
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Kabir	Founder and agnatic ancestor of all the Al Khalifa rulers in Qatar and Bahrain.	Founder of the Al Khalifa dynasty's who established their rule in Zubarahh, Qatar.
Al Khalifa, Shaikh Salman bin Ahmad	Son of Shaikh Ahmad al-Fatih	Second Ruler in Bahrain and Fourth in Zubarahh. His reign witnessed many violent battles and showdowns to protect his family domains. Those included challenges with the Omanis, Saudis and Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma
Al Mathkoor, Shaikh Nasr	Ruler of Bushire and Bahrain and vassal to Persia	Attacked Zubarahh at 1782 but he was defeated and failed to capture it. Tried to solicit Persian aid against the Utub to avenge himself. However, the Utub launched a campaign against Bahrain in 1783 and succeeded in capturing and ousted garrison of Shaikh Nasr
Al Sabah, Shaikh Jabir	Ruler of Kuwait	He tried to reconcile Shaikh Abdullah and Shaikh Muhammad but to no avail.
Al Said, Sayyid Said bin Sultan	Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar	Assisted Shaikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid in ousting the Saudis. Nonetheless, he was later in conflict with the Al Khalifa which resulted in the battles of Maqta'a in 1816 and Gazgaz in 1828.
Al Said, Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmad	Ruler of Oman and Zanzibar	Led a successful Omani invasion against Bahrain in 1801 and included the islands into his domains. Was killed by the Qawasim in 1804.
Al Saud, Emir Abdullah bin Thunayyan	Third agnatic cousin of Emir Khalid bin Saud	He overthrew the rule of Emir Khalid bin Saud. He gave asylum to Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa when the latter was defeated by Shaikh Abdullah and had to flee Bahrain. He was overthrown by Emir Faisal bin Turki in 1843.

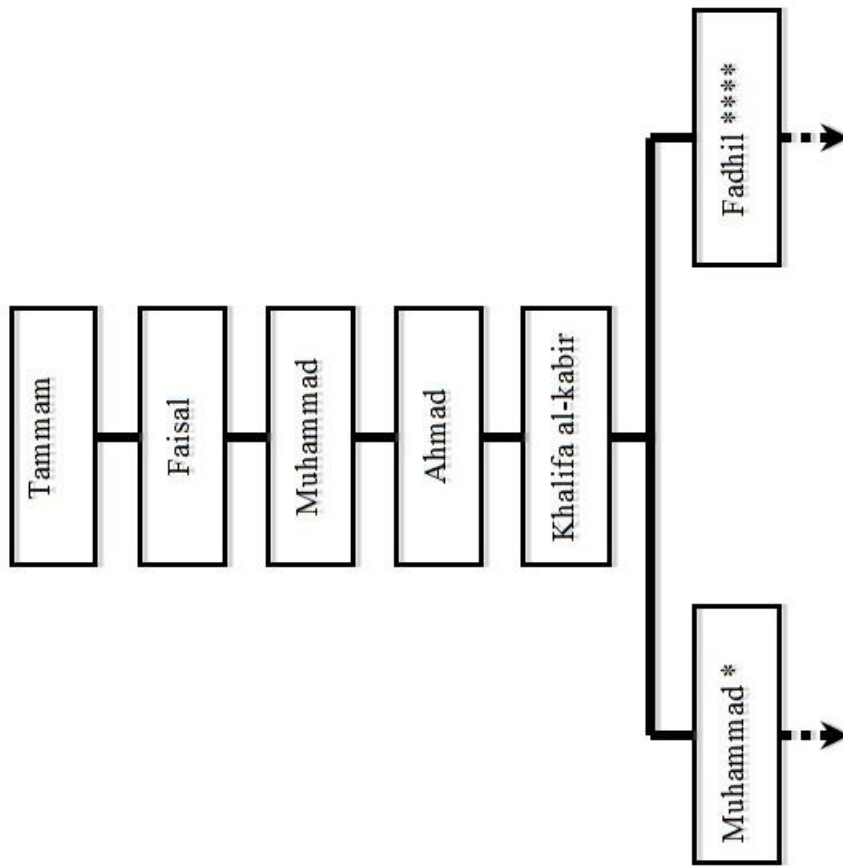
Name	Relation	Significance to the story
Al Saud, Emir Faisal bin Turki	Son of Emir Turki bin Abdullah	He stopped the War with the Al Khalifa in 1834 and returned to Riyadh to avenge the death of his father by Mashari bin Abdul Rahman. He succeeded in his endeavor and became the new Saudi Emir. He was overthrown by the Egyptian forces of Muhammad Ali under the command of Khorshid Pasha and Emir Khalid bin Saud in 1838 and was taken as a prisoner in Egypt. He managed to escape Egypt in 1842/1843 and succeeded in overthrowing Emir Abdullah bin Thunayyan in 1843. He took the side of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa in his conflict with Shaikh Abdullah and conducted a siege of Dammam in 1844 which resulted in Shaikh Abdullah losing the aforementioned place on the Arabian littoral. Thus, Shaikh Abdullah was forced to relocate to the Persian littoral. His second rule as Emir lasted from 1843 till his death in 1865.
Al Saud, Emir Khalid bin Saud	Son of Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud	He was taken as a captive by the Egyptians in 1818. Muhammad Ali Pasha sought to make him his vassal in Najd and sent him with an Egyptian army under the command of Khorshid Pasha to overthrow the rule of Emir Faisal bin Turki. Their mission was successful. Faisal was taken as a prisoner and Khalid was placed as the new Emir of Najd. Notwithstanding, Muhammad Ali needed to withdraw the Egyptian garrison in 1840 and Khalid was left alone to face challenging pretenders within his family. He was overthrown by Abdullah bin Thunayyan Al Saud in 1841.
Al Saud, Emir Turki bin Abdullah bin Muhammad	Founder of the Second Saudi State. Second agnatic cousin to Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud	He managed to escape being captured by the troops of Muhammad Ali Pasha when they captured Diriyah in 1818. In 1823 he led a revolt which expelled the Egyptian forces from Najd, re-establishing the Saudi dynasty and becoming the first Emir of the Second Saudi State. He was assassinated by his nephew Mashari bin Abdul Rahman in 1834. He was succeeded by his son Faisal.

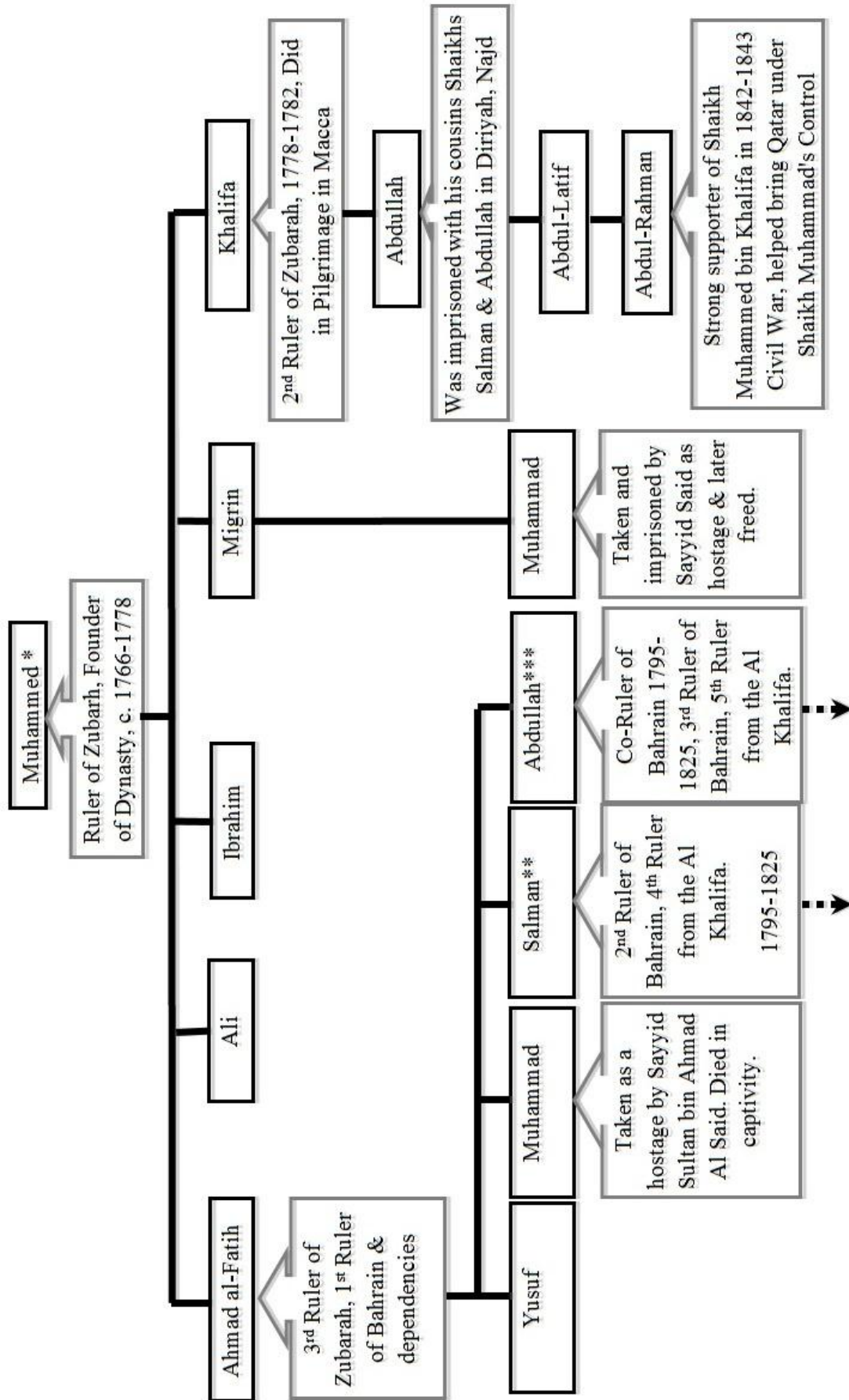
Name	Relation	Significance to the story
Al Saud, Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz bin Muhammad	Wahhabi Imam and Ruler of the First Saudi state which comprised in his time Najd, Hejaz and Eastern Arabia	Helped the Al Khalifa oust the Omanis from Bahrain in 1809/1810. Nevertheless, he overtook Bahrain and Qatar via his commanders Ibn Ufaisan and Ibn Touq. He imprisoned the Senior Al Khalifa Shaikhs, namely Shaikh Salman bin and Ahmad and his brother Shaikh Abdullah in addition to Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al Khalifa.
al-bin Ali, Isa bin Tarif	Shaikh of the al-bin Ali tribe. Maternal Uncle of Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa and Shaikhs Muhammad, Ahmad and Ali, sons of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad	He led along with the sons of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad a rebellion in Qatar in 1835 but was defeated and exiled with his tribe. In 1843 he took the side of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa, under the instigation of the latter's brother Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa, against Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad. He became governor of Qatar for Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa in 1844. In 1847 he conspired with Shaikh Abdullah and his sons and led a rebellion in Qatar in 1847 which resulted in the battle of Umm Suwayya. He was defeated and killed in it.
al-Jalahma, Bishr bin Rahma	Son of Rahma bin Jabir	He was among the important allies of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa in his takeover of Bahrain.
al-Jalahma, Rahma bin Jabir	Warlord and arch foe of the Al Khalifa	He tried to topple the Al Khalifa several times and allied with the Saudis and the Omanis against them. He was killed in a Naval battle against them in 1826.
Hennell, Lt. Col Samuel	Political Resident in the Persian Gulf 1838-1852	His conflict with Shaikh Abdullah in 1839 over the latter's handling of the Egyptian crisis of 1839 made him unsympathetic to the old Shaikh when he had to face the threat of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. Hennell allowed Isa bin Tarif and Bishr bin Rahma to join the cause of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa. Hennell also tried to sabotage any alliance that Shaikh Abdullah tried to obtain from assistance from the Persians or the Shaikhs of the crucial coast in his attempt to regain his rulership from Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.

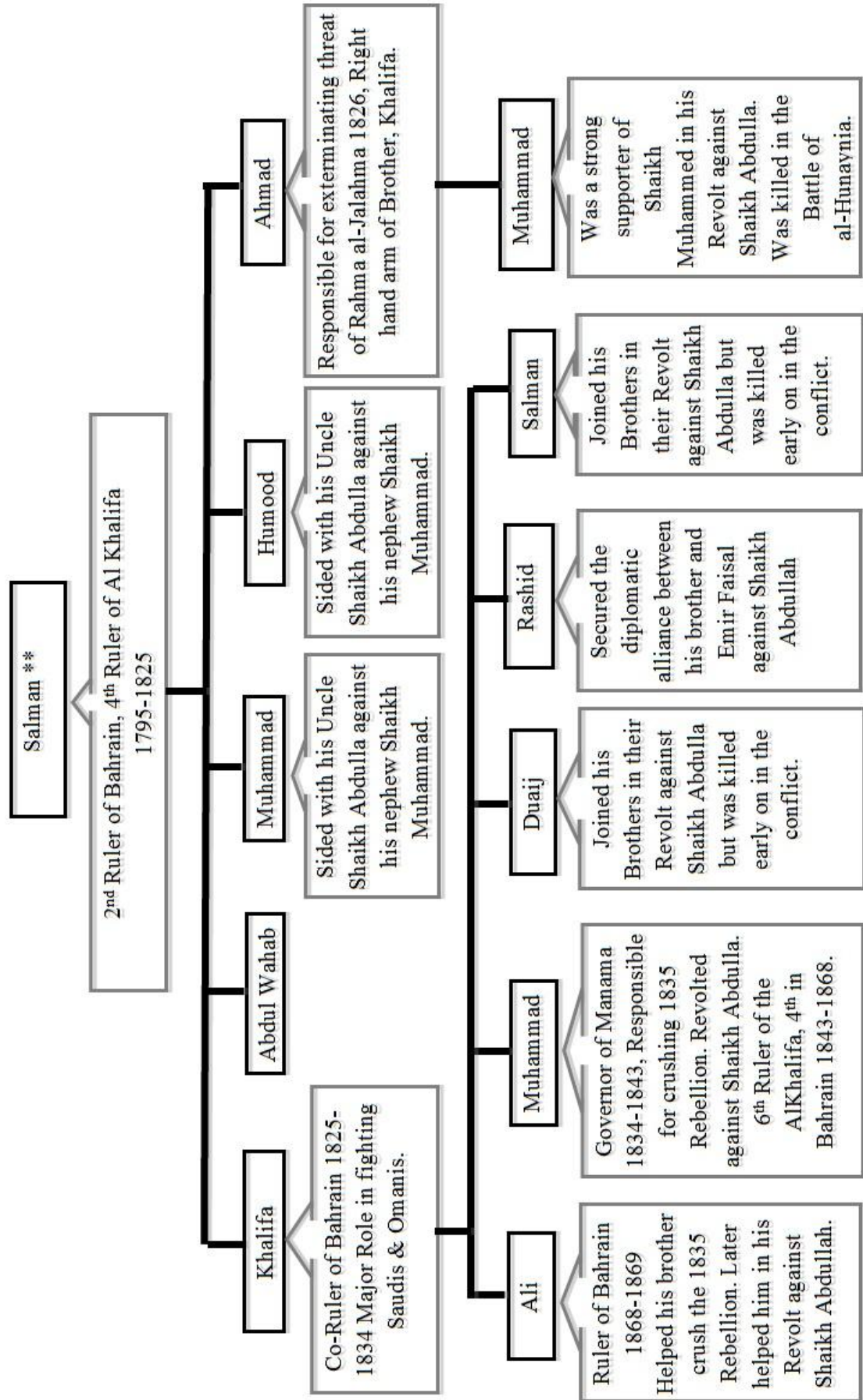
Name	Relation	Significance to the story
Khorshid Pasha	Egyptian General of Muhammad Ali's army in Arabia	He established Emir Khalid bin Saud as the Egyptian vassal in Najd. He then proceeded to Hasa and added it to the Saudi domains and tried to takeover Bahrain and Qatar. That last action caused the Egyptian crisis of 1839. Shaikh Abdullah managed to avert his threat by negotiating a treaty where the Shaikh subjected himself to Egyptian protection in return for paying a small tribute. However that treaty angered the British and made them unsympathetic to the cause of Shaikh Abdullah when he was faced by the revolt of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa.
Kier, Major General W. Grant	British Official	He was the signatory on the British side of the 1820 Treaty.
Stannus, Lt.-Col. E.G.	Political Resident in the Persian Gulf 1823-1827	He tried to broker a peace between Shaikh Abdullah and Rahman bin Jabir. His Efforts culminated in both men signing a treaty of reconciliation in 1824. Nonetheless, the short peace between them was short lived and hostilities soon returned.

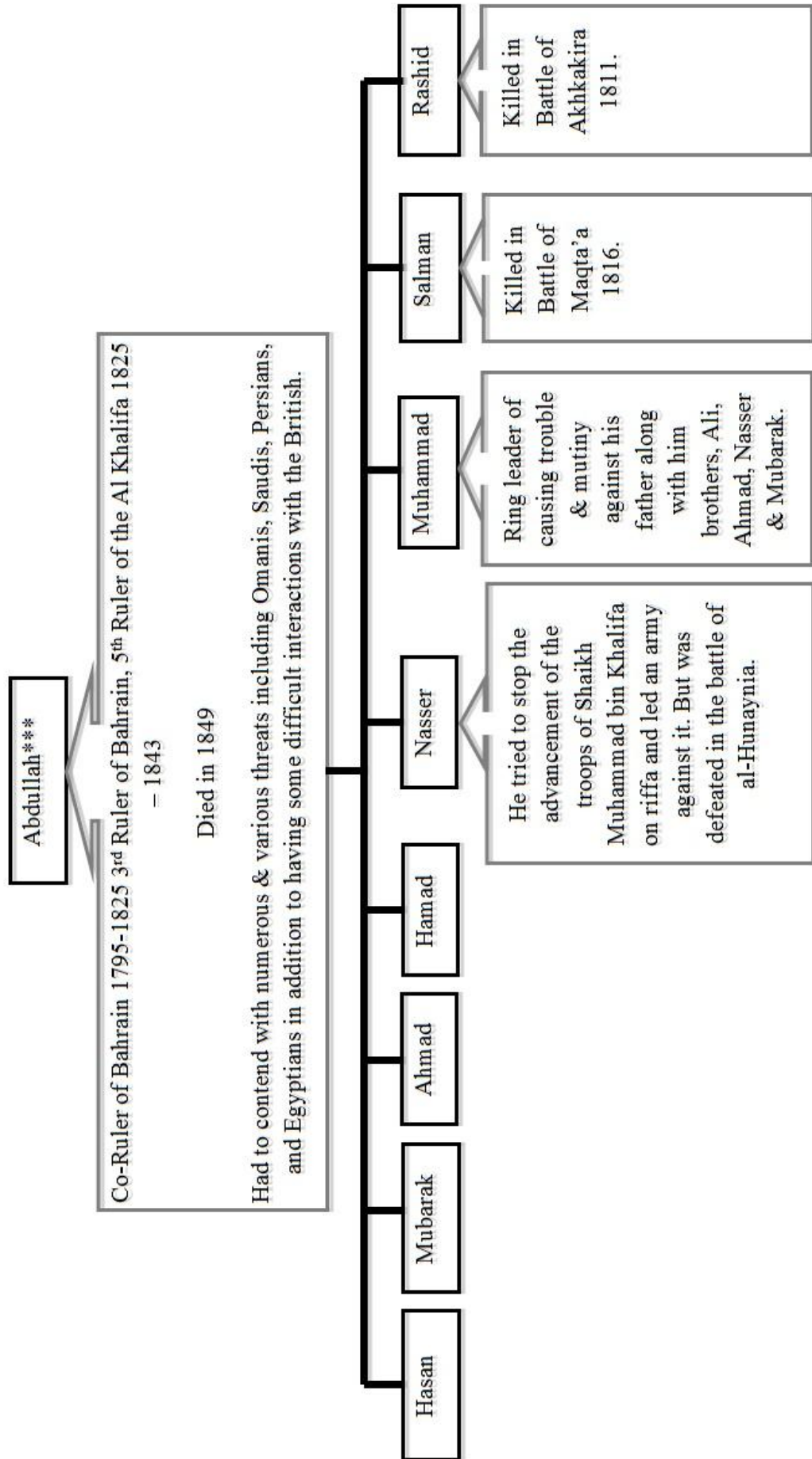
Appendix IV

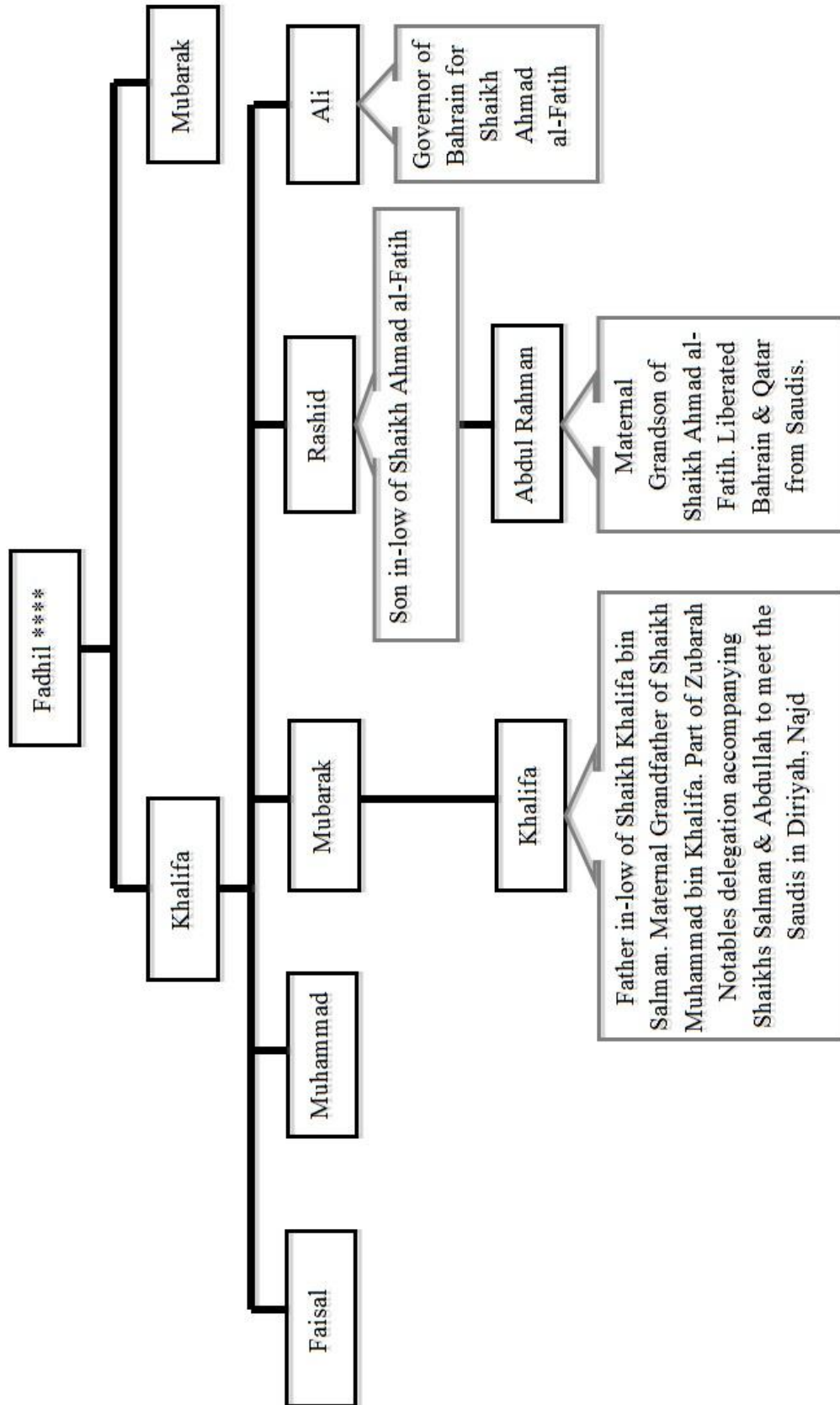
A Family Tree of the Al Khalifa











Appendix V

List of Treaties

Treaty Name	Parties	Treaty Key Features
Friendship Treaty 1816	Bahrain/British India	To Guarantee safe access for Bahraini ships to the ports of British India under the condition of reciprocal treatment for British ships visiting Bahrain. Placement of Native agent in Bahrain. Never ratified by Britain.
General Treaty 1820	Bahrain/British India	Along with other Arab Shaikhs of the trucional coats the Shaikhs of Bahrain agreed to abstain from any naval warfare and depredation east of the Restrictive Line. Such an abstinence would have made it safe for British shipping to pass unmolested in the Gulf.
Friendship Treaty 1824	Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad Al Khalifa/Rahma bin Jabir al-Jalahma	The agreement was engineered by Lt.-Col. E.G. Stannus with the aim of bringing peace between Shaikh Abdullah and Rahma. Nonetheless that peace lasted for only a short time and hostilities resumed between both belligerents.
Friendship Treaty 1829	Bahrain/Oman	The agreement brought peace between Bahrain and Oman after a long conflict. Oman recognized the independence of Bahrain and its Shaikhs and vowed not to demand any future annual tributes. Both parties also agreed to not intervene in the internal affairs of the other and to aid each other if they faced an external threat.

Treaty Name	Parties	Treaty Key Features
Treaty with Saudis 1836	Shaikh Abdullah/Emir Faisal bin Turki of Najd	Shaikh Abdullah to cease his warfare against the Saudi Emir and to pay him a small annual tribute. In return the Saudi Emir would assist Shaikh Abdullah with troops if the latter faces an invasion from the Persians.
Egyptian Treaty 1839	Shaikh Abdullah/Khorshid Pasha	Shaikh Abdullah agreed to enter himself and his domains of Bahrain, Qatar, and Dammam under Egyptian Protection in exchange for a small annual tribute and not having an Egyptian agent reside in Bahrain.

Bibliography

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

A. British Government Records, 1801-47

1. Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai, India:

Bombay Government, Political and Secret Department proceedings (“diaries”):

Diary 113: 1801.

Diary 115: 1801.

Diary 432: 1816.

Diary 483: 1820.

Diary 20: 1822.

Diary 26: 1825.

Diary 47: 1830.

Diary 78: 1837.

Diary 64: 1839.

Diary 67: 1839.

Diary 55: 1842.

Diary 67: 1843.

Diary 70: 1843.

Diary 65: 1844.

Diary 66: 1844.

Diary 67: 1844.

Diary 1: 1845.

Diary 75: 1846.

2. India Office Records, British Library, London:

Board of Control of the Affairs of India, Political and Secret Department, London;

L/P&S/5/375.

L/P&S/5/376.

L/P&S/6/177.

Bombay Government proceedings:

P/385/47.

P/386/3.

P/386/17.

Gulf Residency records:

R/15/1/42.

R/15/1/48.

R/15/1/108.

R/15/1/111.

R/15/1/740.

3. Arab World Documentary Unit, University of Exeter:

Bombay Diaries: Diary 119/16-18.

B. Other Primary Sources

Abahussain, Ali. "Dirasah Fi Tarikh al-Utub" [A Study of the History of the Utub], *Al-Watheeka* 1 (July 1982), 25-42: Letter of Ali Pasha Governor of Basra to Ottoman Sultan, Ottoman document: Journal 713, Hukim 2518, 1113 AH (1701 AD), Mission Booklet 111.

Al-Bahrani, Yusuf. *Lu'alu'at al-Bahrayn Fi al-Ijazat Wa Tarajum Rejal al Hadith* [The Pearl of Bahrain in Licences and the Biographies of Men of the Hadith].

(Bahrain: Fakhrabi Bookshop, 2008 [c.1768]).

Al-Khairi, Nasser. *Qalaid il Nahrain Fi Tarikh al-Bahrayn* [The Necklaces of Pearl in the History of Bahrain]. Ed. Abdul Rahman al-Shugair (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 2003 [c.1924]).

Al-Nabhani, Khalifa. *Attuhfah Annabhaniya Fi Tarikh Al Jazira Al Arabya* [The Nabhani Masterpiece in the History of the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: Dar Ehyaa al-uluum, 1986 [c.1922]).

Al-Rasheed, Abdulaziz. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt* [The History of Kuwait] (Beirut: Dar al-hayat. 1978 [c.1926]).

Al-Tabatebai, Abdul Jalil Letter to Ni'mat Allah Abood, January 3, 1812 (19 Dhul Hijja 1226 AH). Quoted in *Lughat al-Arab Magazine*, Part 10 of year 6, October 1928, 740-741.

Al-Tajir, Muhammad. *Iqd al-la'al fi tarikh Awal* [The Necklace of Pearls in the History of Awal] (Bahrain: al-Ayam Publishing Establishment, 1994 [c.1925]).

Ibn Bishr, Uthman bin Abd Allah. *Unwan al-Majd Fi Tarikh Najd* [The Title of Glory in the History of Najd], Vol I (Riyadh: Matabi al-Qasim, 1965 [c.1854]).

Ibn Ruzayq, Humayd bin Muhammad. *Al-Fateh al-Mubin Fi Sirat al-Sadah al-Busai'diyn* [The Clear Conquest in the Story of the Busai'di Sayyids] (Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, 1977 [c.1857]).

Disbrowe, Lieutenant Herbert F., "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs" in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 407-425.

Hennell, Lieutenant Samuel. "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein)" in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960*, Vol I: 1820-1860, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 30-40.

_____, "Historical Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Government of Muska" in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 187-203.

_____, "The Proceedings of Rahma bin Jabir, 1809-1826, Sketch of the Proceedings of Rahmah bin Jaubir Chief of Khor Hassan" in *Records of Qatar, Primary Documents 1820-1960*, Vol I: 1820-1853, Ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1991), 128-133.

Kemball, Lieutenant Arnold Burrows, "Chronological Table of Events with the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein), From the Year 1716 to 1844" in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series Ed. R. Hughes Thomas, (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 140-152.

_____, "Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein)" in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 382-407.

_____, "Historical Sketch of Wahabee Tribe of Arabs" in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series, Ed. R. Hughes Thomas, (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 440-455.

- _____, “Memoranda on the Resources, Localities and Relations of the Tribes Inhabiting the Arabian Shores of the Persian Gulf”, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-1868* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 100.
- Lorimer, John George. *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Vol. I: *Historical*, Part II (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915; repr. Demand Reprints, 1983).
- Seton, Captain David. (1995) “Diary, Bahrain, November 23, 1801”, in *The Journals of David Seton 1800-1809*, Ed. Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Saldanha, Jerome Antony (ed.), *Précis of Correspondence Regarding the Affairs of the Persian Gulf, 1801-1853* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1906; reprinted Archive Editions, 1986).
- Taylor, Captain Robert. “Extracts from Brief Notes Containing Historical and Other Information Connected with the Province of Oman; Muskat and the Adjoining Country; the Islands of Bahrein, Ormus, Kishm, and Karrack; And Other Ports and Places in the Persian Gulf”, reprinted in *Records of Bahrain, Primary Documents 1820-1960, Vol I 1820-1868* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1993), 90.
- Von Kniphausen, Tido and Van Der Hulst, Jan. as quoted and reprinted in Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf: The Rise of the Gulf Arabs, The Politics of Trade on the Persian Littoral 1747-1792*, Chapter 2: “A Description of the Persian Gulf in 1756” [c.1756], (Washington DC: Magi Publishers, 2007), 23-38.
- Warden, Francis. “Historical Sketch of the Uttoobee Tribe of Arabs (Bahrein)” in *Selections of the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series. Ed. R.H. Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 361-372.

_____. "Historical Sketch of the Wahabee Tribe of Arabs; From the Year 1795 to the Year 1818" in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series. Ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 427-436.

_____. 'Sketch of the Proceedings (From 1809 to 1818) of Rahmah bin Jaubir Chief of Khor Hassan', in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, No. XXIV, new series (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856; reprinted Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), 521-524.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. Arabic

Abahussain, Ali and Al Khalifa, Abdullah. *al-Baḥrayn 'Abra al-Tarikh al-Juz'a al-Thani* [Bahrain Through the Ages], Vol II (Bahrain: The Historical Documents Centre, 2008).

Abahussain, Ali. "The History of Bahrain During Two Centuries", in *Al Watheekah*, Issue 54 (July, 2008), 180-211.

Abu Hakima, Ahmad. *History of Eastern Arabia* (London: Probsthain, 1988).

Abu Hakima, Ahmad. *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith* [Modern History of Kuwait] (Kuwait: Manshūrāt Dhāt al-Salāsīl, 1984).

Al-Hadi, Bashar. *Al Fadhil al-Utub Wa Dawruhum al-Siyassi wal Ijtima'ei fi al-Khaleej al-Arabi A'ala Madaa Thalathat Quroon 1700-2000* [Al Fadhil al-Utub and their Political and Social Role in the Arabian Gulf 1700-2000], (Bahrain: Anonymous Publisher, 2009).

- Al Khalifa, Mai. *Abdullah bin Ahmad: Muharib Lam Yahdaa* [Abdullah bin Ahmad: A Restless Warrior] (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 2002).
- Al Khalifa, Mai. *Muhammad bin Khalifa al-Ustoorah wal Tarikh al-Muwazi* [Muhamad bin Khalifa the Legend and the Corresponding History] (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1996).
- Al Khalifa, Hamad. *Al-Dhue'a Al-Awal* [First Light] (Bahrain: Government Press of Ministry of Information, 1986).
- Al Khalifa, Hamad. *First Light: Modern Bahrain and its Heritage* (London; New York: Kegan Paul International, 1994).
- Al Thani, Muhammad bin Ahmad. *Lamahat Min Tarikh Qatar* [Glimpses from the History of Qatar]. Ed. Nasser bin Ali Al Thani (UAE: Ministry of Economy, Office of Intellectual classifications, 2006 [c.1953]).
- Al-Wardi, Ali. *Dirasa Fi Tabeat al-Mujtama'a al-Iraqi* [A Study in the Nature of Iraqi Society] (London: al-Warrak Publishing, 2007 [1965]).
- Chamieh, Gebran. *Al Saud Madhihim wa Mustaqbaluhum* [Al Saud Their Past, Their Future] (London: Riad el-Rayyas & Associates Ltd, 1986).
- Ghazal, Muna. *Tarikh al-Utub; Al Khalifa Fi Al Bahrayn, 1700-1970* [The History of the Utub: The Al Khalifa in Bahrain, 1700-1970] (Bahrain: al-Mitb'ah al-Sharqiyah, 1991).
- Tahbub, Fa'iq. *Tarikh al-Bahrayn al-Siyasi, 1783-1870* [The Political History of Bahrain, 1783-1870] (Kuwait: Manshurat Dhat al-Salasil, 1983).

B. English

Anscombe, Frederick F. *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Belgrave, Sir Charles. *The Pirate Coast* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1966).

Fattah, Hala. *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745-1900*, (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1997).

Floor, Willem. *The Persian Gulf: The Rise of the Gulf Arabs: The Politics of Trade on the Persian Littoral 1747-1792* (Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 2007).

Fuccaro, Nelida. *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Haarmann, Ulrich W. "Two 18th-century Sources on Kuwait: Murtada b. Ali b. Alwan and Carsten Niebuhr" in *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity*, ed. Ben J. Slot (London: Arabian Publishing Ltd, 2003), 30-48.

Kelly, J.B. *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Lienhardt, Peter. *The Shaikhdoms of Eastern Arabia*, ed. Ahmed Al-Shahi (London: Palgrave, 2001).

Onley, James. "The Infrastructure of Informal Empire: A Study of Britain's Native Agency in Bahrain c.1816-1900." DPhil thesis (University of Oxford, 2001).

_____. "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century", *New Arabian Studies* 6 (2004), 30–92.

_____. *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

_____. “Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection”, *Occasional Paper 4* (Doha: Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2009), 1–44.

_____. “The Politics of Protection: The Gulf Rulers and the Pax Britannica in the Nineteenth Century”, *Liwa: Journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research 1* (2009), 25–46.

_____ and Sulayman, Khalaf, “Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study”, *History and Anthropology 17* (2006), 189–208.

Ricks, Tomas M. “Slaves and Slave Traders in the Persian Gulf, 18th and 19th Centuries: An Assesment” in *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Gervase Clarence-Smith (London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1989).

Slot, Ben J. “Kuwait the Growth of a Historic Identity” in *Kuwait: The Growth of a Historic Identity*, ed. Ben J. Slot (London: Arabian Publishing Ltd, 2003) 5-29.

Slot, Ben J. *The Arabs of the Gulf, 1602-1742*, trans. Ayda Khouri, ed. Muhammad Mursi Abdullah (Abu Dhabi: Cultural Foundation, 1993).

Slot, Ben J. *The Origins of Kuwait* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).