



# *Liwa*

Journal of the National Archives

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Journal of the National Archives

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The Editor of the *Liwa* Journal (ISSN 1729-9039) invites the submission of original and unpublished scholarly articles in English and Arabic related to archaeology, history and heritage of the UAE and the Arabian Gulf region.

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# To Learn from Past Experiences: Collecting the UAE National Archives\*

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Dr. Abdulla M. El Reyes

**THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL** meeting of archivists was held in Brussels in June 1910. Nineteen countries participated to discuss key professional issues. The proceedings were eventually published and one of the most successful national archivists of the twentieth century, Arthur G. Doughty, built on the discussion to pen a statement asserting the fundamental value of the archival record: “Of all national assets, archives are the most precious. They are the gift of one generation to another and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilization” (Doughty: 5).<sup>1</sup> In his active role in both building the collections of what is now Library and Archives Canada and in encouraging the scholarly study of history, Doughty was clear on the archives’ role to help the process of nation building. To him and in his time, the great nation building projects of railways and canals, financial centers and economic policy had a cultural parallel as a new country sought to understand itself and the national experience in addressing the challenges of the future.

The first President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, was no less forthright in establishing, in 1968, the Center for Documentation and Research (CDR), “...to provide the Emiratis with the tools to preserve their history and learn from past experiences” (Al Nahyan, Mansour: online). It was Sheikh Zayed’s firm conviction that, “A nation without a past is a nation without a present or a future”.<sup>2</sup> The CDR was the UAE’s first active cultural institution, and deliberately so. Heritage is one of the most important elements of identity, contributing to social understanding and supporting the values and meaning informing economic progress. The mandate of the Center for Documentation and Research was expanded in 2008 to become the National Center for Documentation and Research and in March 2014, its evolving role was acknowledged by its new name as The National Archives of the United Arab Emirates. Throughout this evolution, the National Archives has maintained a guiding belief in heritage as an

\* This paper is reprinted, with permission, from *Museums and the Material World: Collecting the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. by Pamela Erskine-Loftus, Edinburgh: Hudson House (MuseumsEtc, Ltd; for further information, see [www.museumsetc.com](http://www.museumsetc.com)). With this issue of *Liwa*, we mark the 2014 transition from the United Arab Emirates National Center for Documentation and Research to the National Archives, of which Dr. El Reyes is Director-General.



The National Archives of the United Arab Emirates.

effective and efficient inspiration for the present and future, seeking the appropriate balance between authenticity and modernity.

Forty-five years after its founding the National Archives is recognized as a dynamic force in developing the national life and consciousness of this vibrant society. Its aim is to document society in all its complexity and diversity, recording the experience of generations, collecting its multimedia documentary heritage, preserving and animating it as the social memory or the true “gift of one generation to another”. Official records, the private papers of those who have contributed to the UAE, the recorded experiences of many, and the wealth of books and newspapers published in the UAE combine to present a portrait of the country. Library and archival resources, print and manuscript, maps and photos, oral and film, and the proliferating variety of digital media collectively form the documentary heritage of a society. The words written by those who have gone before, the stories passed down through families, and the images of faces and of a disappearing way of life, provide direct communication from the past to the present, helping us and future generations to understand our origins, the continuity of traditions and values, and our strengths in approaching the future.

Given this mandate and key social role, the collecting efforts of the National Archives are intended not solely to support research but also to create an enduring national resource with many values long into the future. Such a comprehensive, multimedia collection certainly is vital for both education and research at all levels but, like all national archives, it provides the legal foundation of a modern society. The archival record documents citizenship, the constitution, evolution of public policy, creative

expression, scholarship, environmental conditions, land, treaties, sovereignty, as well as borders and boundaries. This is indeed social memory. Documentary heritage is an essential national asset – it is often both unique and fragile, requiring careful preservation; an inescapable challenge made more daunting by the additional need to ensure that complex electronic records maintain their authenticity and integrity as evidence long into the future.

Documenting a modern progressive society requires a creative, flexible and above all inclusive collection development strategy.<sup>3</sup> This begins with an understanding of the complex history of the region, identifying those authorities, traders, navigators, governments and commercial interests which would have created documentation. From the rise of Islam until the 16th century, the sea-borne trade from India via the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea routes was chiefly in the hands of the Arabs. Closely linked to trade routes across the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea route to European markets, the pearl and sponge fisheries in the Gulf attracted traders from the East and the West. In the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to penetrate the Indian Ocean/Arabian Gulf. They in turn were followed by the Dutch and British East India companies as commercial rivals, complicated at times by the Anglo-French struggle over control of trade with India.

Britain's formal relationship with the sheikhdoms on the Gulf Coast began with the General Treaty of 1820 and was further cemented / reinforced through the 19th century by a series of 'Maritime Truces'. Following the conclusion of Perpetual Maritime Truce of 1853, the Gulf sheikhdoms came to be known as the 'Trucial States'. With the signing of the Exclusive Agreements with the Trucial Chiefs in 1892, Britain became the paramount power in the Gulf until their withdrawal from the area in 1971. With the 20th century discovery of oil in Iraq and elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula, the sheikhdoms assumed new commercial importance, leading to the first oil concession for Abu Dhabi in 1939. Serious production was delayed, with the oil exports beginning in 1962. In 1968, the British government announced its intention to terminate the treaties and through the initiative and leadership of the sheikhs, the Union Accord that year laid the basis for the establishment of the federation known as the United Arab Emirates on 2nd December 1971.

Given this complex history, the National Archives set out on its continuing effort to identify and copy treaties, maps, correspondence and commercial, naval and military records from all the relevant archives. The Ottoman Archives, key archives in Portugal, Holland, France and those of the United Kingdom have cooperated in the painstaking task of locating documents bearing on the history of the Gulf region and in copying them. The National Archives of the UK have proved to be essential sources, reflecting close historic ties. The mapping done by these nations shows how gradually the Gulf entered European consciousness. Diplomatic correspondence and treaties provide first-hand evidence of the evolving relationship as the strategic position of the Gulf affected the European empires. Shipping and trade records cast light on

growing economic ties. The personal papers of imperial officials and trade negotiators as well as travelers present external impressions of life in the sheikhdoms. And in the twentieth century, the photos and films of military units stationed around the Gulf show the landscape before the developments of the past fifty years. Supplementary documentation has also now been copied from official sources in Germany, India, Iran, Japan, Russia, Turkey, USA, and the Vatican, covering an impressive range of subjects relating to the area over a period of five centuries. And, in February 2014 a formal arrangement was made to extend this process to Italian archives. This evolving collection provides a convenient, unique and invaluable resource for the study of the history of the entire Gulf region. The continuing importance of this effort was eloquently demonstrated in April 2013 when HH Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs, took time while accompanying the UAE President on his official visit to the UK, to visit their National Archives. This has reinforced the close ties between the archives of the UK and UAE, and opens the possibility of further systematic digitization of records.

Like many other nations, the UAE has been searching for authentic records of its past amongst the records of the old imperial powers. Like other countries, the UAE has recovered and opened for careful research an immense body of documentation. And as elsewhere, researchers find that the records, impressive and revealing as they may be, require careful and critical analysis as virtually all were created by others. Local voices were not heard and the available images reflect the perspective of visitors. But by gathering this documentation, the National Archives has performed an essential service to all interested in the region and has created a solid foundation for documenting more recent aspects of society and events.

## **The Government Archives**

The vital archival role focuses on the identification and preservation of the official records of government. Archives are documents created in the course of day-to-day activity which are then kept in official custody as a record of that activity. Maintained in the context of their creation, these documents, in all media formats, constitute the unique evidence of official action, decision and transaction. Given the legal issues around the role of government, these documents need to retain their integrity and authenticity, provable in a legal setting as needed. In addition, as evidence they are also both fundamental and valid as the accepted basis for historical study in many disciplines. Archival methods have evolved in response to the need to preserve not just the document – not just their informational content – but also the context or administrative function which created the documents. Like archaeological artifacts, documents derive their validity and full meaning from their context and like these artifacts, any researcher or court needs to be informed of this context in order to understand the meaning and credence of the document. The central archival principles of preservation and description, respect des fonds and provenance, are



designed to maintain this context. A fonds includes all the records, in whatever medium, created in the course of day-to-day business by a major administrative entity. It may include levels of sous fonds mirroring the administrative functions and structure of the organization. This structure must be respected and retained in the long-term management of the fonds. The archives must also respect the provenance of the records or the way in which they were organized, maintained and retrieved in the office of origin. Together these principles ensure that the context of creation and the relationships across the various records series and their functional purpose are retained to inform those seeking to understand the context and meaning of the record. Various forms of finding aids and indices can be created to help provide intellectual access to the records, overcoming the limitations of the original organizational structures. Collection programs by universities which remove official or semi-official records, like presidential papers, from a nation for preservation in some distant library, destroy a key part of the context of meaning and leave gaping voids in the documentary heritage of a people. Through the visible and central role of the National Archives, this cannot happen in the UAE. Having the unique record of one's life's work accepted for preservation is a distinct honor.

The National Archives has taken a proactive approach in addressing its responsibilities for the long-term record of the UAE Government, the individual Emirates, publicly owned corporations, the judiciary, and local government entities. A key step in this occurred in 2008 with the promulgation of Federal law No. 7. This transformed the Center for Documentation and Research into a full national entity: the National Center for Documentation and Research (NCDR), defining its mandate as the official repository for the preservation of UAE government records. This remit, inherited by the National Archives, spans all forms of records in all federal and local government bodies. And it requires the institution to archive these in accordance with international standards, ensuring they are available in perpetuity for public purposes.

To fulfill this mandate, the National Archives has embarked on a process of detailed visits to every government department and agency, examining the physical condition of all records and their organization. From this the Archives prepare a professional assessment of both aspects. The Archives' staff have earned the credibility to recommend that improvements be made in storage facilities, seeking to eliminate fire hazards, and requiring controlled environments appropriate to the longevity of the records. They also advise on the classification systems used, seeking to standardize records classification across departments. A government-wide committee studies these reports and ensures that the recommendations are taken seriously. As departments no longer need frequent access to administrative records for current administrative purposes, arrangements are therefore made to transfer records to the National Archives. The records are appraised for their continuing value: whether for legal purposes, or enduring historical significance. This is undertaken by archival staff trained in information management and knowledgeable regarding the many uses to

which records may be put. Broadly speaking, in a modern administration, considering all the records created or received in a given day, only a small percentage are deemed of permanent value while the bulky routine records can be recycled as soon as their administrative and legal values expire. This is a delicate professional decision relying on expertise and informed by international precedents.

After five years of continuous effort, the National Archives has now organized and assessed 81% of the records of federal and local government entities in the UAE. In all, Archives officials have reviewed the records programs of 39 Government entities in Abu Dhabi, 22 archives in Dubai, 24 in Sharjah, thirteen in Ras Al Khaimah and ten in Fujairah. The Archives intends to send its missions of experts to sixteen archives in Ajman and Umm Al Quwain to organize them in the next stage. With this, the formal missions will have completed record assessments and reports for more than 167 Government entities in the UAE, and will strive to visit the remaining thirty-nine.

Internationally, the problems associated with the longevity of electronic records have engaged the archival profession, the academic community and industry as they seek durable solutions. Both hardware and software are available in many configurations and change at a speed only account executives appreciate. Backward compatibility for software is increasingly limited. New software applications bring together information from many sources for an instant, providing the basis for a decision, yet do not create a continuing document. And the hardware evolves from floppy discs of varying sizes to today's USB thumb drives through to tomorrow's next device. Computers of just a few decades ago are scrap, film cameras are disappearing, the Internet is expanding at an astronomical rate, and the specter of Big Data is now upon us. All of us in government and as individuals are challenged to find the drafts of that major report five years ago or locate old family photos and videos. Email accounts have been cleansed and items more than a few weeks old have gone away; Blackberry's PIN message service leaves no trace at all; and government and institutional websites change rapidly. The information highway which once looked so promising ahead of us is crumbling in our rear-view mirror.

The digital era is also bringing solutions as the costs of mass digital storage decrease, and semantic web search engines enable intelligent searches in immense repositories of unstructured data and records. New enterprise software, linking all functions within and across a government, help standardize terms and data to facilitate long-term retrieval. Yet, as noted above, the defining characteristic of an archival document is its integrity and authenticity as a record. It is not just loose data but has structure and substance to prove it is a record: a letter has certain form and attributes which clearly identify it as a letter, with date and signature, or an audit report has its own form for credibility, or a registration or case file or an affidavit. All documentary attributes need to be maintained along with the administrative context in which the document played a role.

The National Archives has been following closely the progress of the international archives and records management organizations through the International Standards Organization. All its work is based upon the existing suite of standards and is flexible enough to accommodate changes as these standards evolve with technology. The Archives is in the midst of implementing an Electronic Records Management (ERM) program across the government. Building upon recognized best practices, this enterprise document management system has embedded in it the accepted corporate records classification system linked to the approved records retention and disposal schedules for the various types and functions of records.<sup>4</sup> The e-records can be communicated directly to the National Archives where they are scanned to eliminate viruses and converted to a standardized e-format for long-term retention and retrieval.

For older records, the Archives has a sophisticated facility to digitize essential paper-based records, scanning them into the ERM program, linked to the more recent program records. This conversion process respects the requirement to maintain the value of the document and files as evidence. The great majority of government records hold no intrinsic value as artifacts but carry informational value, which digitization captures. Those series of documents considered to have high historical value will be kept in paper format with a digital research copy. With advanced search technology, this simplifies retrieval and eventual research use.

Working closely with the departments, the National Archives records management expertise and processes are demonstrating their importance across the government. The benefits are many. By drawing official attention to legacy records, sometimes stored in unsuitable conditions, the program rescues paper records from continuing deterioration. The careful consideration of the original purposes of the records and the appraisal of any continuing values ensure that informed professional decisions replace haphazard neglect in constructing the national memory. The disposal of unneeded files saves costs while the conversion of essential records to electronic formats makes retrieval of past decisions and precedents far more efficient than searching through boxes of unclassified records. The result is twofold: departments can now conveniently access their own organizational memory in dealing with the future, and researchers and the public alike can be assured that a comprehensive official record is being maintained in the best possible condition.

## **Private collections**

While official records are essential, they only document one aspect of a modern active society. Other perspectives are equally important. For example, The Qasr Al Hosn Documents, dating from 1923 and largely pertaining to the reign of Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al Nahyan (ruler of Abu Dhabi 1928-1966), comprise an important indigenous archive of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The National Archives has been fortunate in earning the trust of donors and collectors and is gradually developing a collection of papers and records from private sources. Gertrude Dyck, a Canadian

nurse who helped advance health care in the UAE in the 1950s, gave her letters and other papers for preservation as part of the national story. Similar collections from private organizations and individuals are kept in their original form and made available for research and exhibition as appropriate.

## **The Emirates Library**

The extensive collections of the Emirates Library provide a comprehensive research resource for scholarly and public reference. The primary objective has been clear: to acquire available published resources about the United Arab Emirates in any format, any language and produced anywhere in world. Recognizing the broader research context, the Library also collects materials on the Arabian Gulf region, the Arab world, Islamic civilization, and world history. Additionally, the Library participates in gift and exchange programs with other leading international institutions.

With 45 years of focused acquisitions, the Emirates Library has become a rich resource, with tens of thousands of books plus extensive periodical and newspaper print holdings. These include fine rare books and pamphlets and private collections like that of Sheikh Faleh bin Nasser Al-Thani, an avid collector, with 207 books on history and Arabic literature.

The library subscribes to electronic databases and also holds a distinctive collection of electronic theses, dissertations and e-books focused on the Arabian Gulf region. Its holdings encompass reference materials available in print, electronic and multimedia formats mainly in Arabic, English and French; however, materials in other languages such as German, Persian, Dutch, and Portuguese are included. There are plans to digitize its multilingual collection of rare books to allow researchers greater access while ensuring the preservation of the materials. This is a dynamic and growing collection, systematically acquired from publishers, authors and continual vigilance in the antiquarian market.

## **Maps and photographs**

A recent exhibition at the National Archives highlighted the cartographic history of the Arabian Gulf region. Collectively these portray the evolving understanding of the Arabian Peninsula and its place on world trade routes. Arab domination of Gulf trade during classical times indicates that the Arabs possessed advanced geographical and navigational knowledge of the Gulf. Arab writers, historians and geographers collected valuable geographical information during the Middle Ages. The first map of the Arabian Peninsula to be printed was for the 1477 edition of Claudius Ptolemy's Geography (originally written by the Alexandrian geographer and mathematician in the second century CE). The shape given to the Peninsula and the position of place names was to influence future maps of Arabia for several centuries. The earliest map showing Portuguese discoveries was a Portuguese world chart secretly

acquired by Italian Alberto Cantino in Lisbon in 1502 (and referred to as the Cantino planisphere). This map recorded the famous voyage of Vasco da Gama to India. The Archives has acquired an extensive and continually growing collection of regional maps, with printed atlases and now satellite imagery documenting the ways in which the UAE and the Peninsula have been visualized over the centuries.

A major collection of photographs is providing a strong visual record of people, landscape and events in the UAE over the past century. The photo archives section was established in 1974 aiming to preserve photos that are related to the history and development of the country. The collection consists of thousands of photographs in various formats and sizes. A large number of the archived photographs chronicle the late Sheikh Zayed's most important works and events. Among the oldest photos in the Archives is one taken by Rev. Samuel Zwemer in 1901 depicting the Qasr Al Hosn (today the oldest stone building in Abu Dhabi). Another taken by the German photographer Hermann Burkhardt in 1904 portrays Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa, famously known as Zayed the Great, sitting in his majlis at Qasr Al Hosn surrounded by sheikhs and countrymen. The collection continues to build with images from the Emirates News Agency (Wakalat Anba'a al-Emarat, founded in 1976), some of the country's oil companies, and a number of supportive individuals. Recently, an excellent series of aerial photos of the region around Abu Dhabi was obtained from the family of a British air force pilot stationed here between the wars. And other collections come to light in attics of former British officials who served in the emirates during the 1950s-1970s. In a strongly visual age, this photographic record assumes increased importance in visualizing almost forgotten sites and landscapes.

## **Oral history**

While the records created by other nations relating to the Arabian Gulf and official records are both extensive and essential, they relate only part of the story of a people. The memories of elders, leaders and older citizens cast light and bring to life the drier official files. Oral history and traditions, passed down from generation to generation are vital in documenting the national experience. These memories convey a way of life and of thinking that reminds us, and the future, of the perspectives and distilled wisdom of those who have gone before. There is an old African proverb that states, "When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground".

His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan recognized this in issuing law No. 7 in 2008, establishing an oral history program in the National Archives. The intent was modest: to supplement "already existing knowledge or filling gaps therein, or providing information that has never been recorded before" (Article 1, Oral History). With this challenge, the Archives began its oral history program in 2009, with advice for the first year from the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. In a few years, the oral history collection has grown to over 700 interviews with key individuals, recording the customs, traditions and culture of the UAE and its people.

Each interview follows a clear methodology, with prepared questions, obtaining the authorization of the informants, and a clear recording in both audio and video formats. Each interview is transcribed and proofread, and copies of both the recordings and the transcripts become part of the Archives' permanent collections. Interviewees receive a copy of the transcript as well for the information of their families. Gradually this has developed as a substantial research resource, one whose value can only increase as age takes its toll on such human libraries.

The National Archives has also been experimenting with other, less structured approaches to collecting oral history. It has an active presence at the many festivals and book fairs round the UAE, and oral history provides an informative and genial connection to a broad public. In 2013, for example, the oral history section participated in the Qasr Al Hosn Festival in Abu Dhabi with a team of staff and a purpose-built studio for recording interviews on site. Qasr Al Hosn is the former seat of the rulers of Abu Dhabi and the festival presented an excellent opportunity to gather reminiscences from those who witnessed the rise of the Union and other key events. It also proved an effective way to engage school children in hearing about their heritage.

The oral history program has demonstrated its importance in meeting one of UNESCO's cultural aims: that of preserving the intangible heritage of a people. The program has moved beyond stories to gather traditional poems, many of which survive only in oral form. Old songs and music are recorded whenever possible. And genealogies of families, clans and tribes reinforce a sense of belonging and a realization that current customs are deeply embedded in the shared culture of all Emiratis. The collection is now rich in regional voices and accents, permitting work to begin to build a lexicon of UAE dialects. The oral history collection is now an integral and expanding part of the national memory and, quite literally, represents and carries forward the voice of the people.

### **Bringing the collection to life**

The collections of the National Archives form the recorded memory of the UAE. These extensive collections contain the experience and reflections of generations and need to be conveniently available to Emiratis today and for generations yet to come. Preservation is one aspect of this and the Archives has secured one of the most modern and technologically sophisticated buildings for this purpose. But the collections, unique and valuable as they are, are not meant to repose quietly on secure shelves. To be "the gift of one generation to another", the current generation must be able to access, explore and learn about their heritage. They need to know themselves and this society they are inheriting as they move forward in the 21st century.

The National Archives describes, catalogues and indexes its various collections according to international standards. Catalogues and more detailed descriptions

of holdings are available online and in comfortable reading rooms, staffed by knowledgeable reference experts. These facilities are available to all who wish to visit. But this tends to be a passive role, waiting for researchers, many scholarly and some enthusiastically amateur, to approach. As in all aspects of its programs, the Archives have been decidedly progressive and proactive. This commitment has extended globally as the Archives made possible an initiative with UNESCO and the International Council on Archives to develop a sophisticated open source web-based software program embodying the accepted descriptive standards for use by archives everywhere. This is known as Access to Memory (ICA-AtoM). This has been beta tested in at least ten languages and adopted by more than two hundred institutions. It has been adapted to manage extensive national inter-institutional databases of archival holdings and for library purposes. It continues to evolve with active user dialogue and developer support. Version 2.0.1 was released in December 2013.

The National Archives' public outreach takes several integrated and complementary forms. It has long had an active publication program, producing a series of historical works and edited documents in volumes noted both for their scholarship and for their careful design. The journal *Liwa* is part of the Archives' efforts to both promote research and disseminate knowledge about the history of the UAE. This program has complemented an extensive exhibition program, exploring in-depth many aspects of UAE history. These exhibitions, at times integrating textual records, maps, photos, film and sound, assist the public, schools and universities alike to understand the variety and extent of the collections available to them. And the Archives have developed close working relationships with museums in the UAE. Documents, especially photographs and films, are available on loan to museums and historic sites, to make the collections as widely available as possible while respecting the preservation of fragile materials. High quality reproductions are featured in the mobile archival exhibits used in major public celebrations. The exhibitions serve the purpose of presenting the role and holdings of the Archives in the most dramatic way, attracting many distinguished visitors and classes to venture into the Archives. The visitor experience is enhanced by a special 3D movie explaining the archival process, from the changing ways in which documents are created through preservation techniques, and then to research showing how history lives outside the textbook. A visit therefore demystifies the archives, and its processes and encourages return visits and research.

Members of the archives staff have engaged school children in many ways, working collaboratively with the Ministry of Education. The staff participates in the development of curriculum and can draw upon their collections to illustrate and enliven class presentations – school trips are organized and welcomed. The books published by the Archives are required reading in university level courses on the region, and an annual Young Historians Competition has been established jointly, engaging many students in pursuing historical research.

The Archives' bilingual website has long been seen as a leader internationally for its

integration of film and text in a bilingual environment. Its extensive content and search engine have eased the work of many interested in learning more about the Arabian Gulf region. Now, this has been taken one step further in an innovative application, presenting the UAE Sheikhs' Chronicles as an app available through the Apple Store. The Chronicles cover the daily social, economic, media and public activities of the Sheikhs from 1969 to 2010. These are searchable by subject, date or source on iPhones and iPads, and include a feature on what happened on a specific day. The content is drawn from a variety of authentic sources in the collection and helps highlight the essential role of inspired individuals in shaping and leading modern society. This is the beginning of a web 3.0 interactive archive which will soon be extended with a redesigned website.

The latest interactive, mobile technology is helping ensure that the National Archives is indeed the national memory, growing systematically, using all relevant media to document society, appropriately made available to all who may want to draw on it. One hopes that the late President, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, whose initiative and foresight launched the Archives, would see in its educational, research and online programs the realization of his vision as each succeeding generation explores and learns from the nation's proud heritage. This is the purpose of an active archival collecting strategy.



## Notes

1. Sir Arthur G. Doughty, Dominion Archivist of Canada, 1904-1935. Written in 1916, published in *The Canadian Archives and its Activities* and engraved on his official statue, 1937.
2. This famous quotation recently inspired an award winning artwork, unveiled in Abu Dhabi, 2 December 2013. See: [www.uaeinteract.com/docs/artistic\\_tribute\\_to\\_Zayed %E2%80%99s\\_vision\\_unveiled/53995.html](http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/artistic_tribute_to_Zayed_%E2%80%99s_vision_unveiled/53995.html)
3. The National Archives' collecting strategy is a living, dynamic policy not interred in bureaucratic prose. The strategy is multifaceted, reflecting the various aspects of the institutional mandate. For government records, the usual archival appraisal criteria apply, identifying the 2% or 3% of current records which have long-term value while authorizing the disposal of the remainder after an appropriate time. Beyond this rigorous legal mandate, acquisitions are strategic, fulfilling the Archives' objective to use all media in documenting society; but by the nature of archival donations or sales, acquisitions are strategically opportunistic. The time when an individual, family or organization is willing to make available unique records depends on many personal factors. For the acquisition of collections in the private sector, efforts have been made to contact former British officials to secure any documentation they and their families may still hold. Elsewhere, important collections are purchased. For the oral history collections, key informants are systematically identified, but by also casting a wide net the recollections, perspectives, words and songs of a wide cross section of society are gathered for preservation. Guided by the vision of a national archives and active on many fronts, a unique and irreplaceable record is being built from many sources.
4. For such systems, see, for example Enterprise Content Management at [www.opentext.com](http://www.opentext.com)

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## **Websites**

Access to Memory (AtoM): [www.ica-atom.org/](http://www.ica-atom.org/)

International Council on Archives: [www.ica.org](http://www.ica.org)

International Standards Organization: [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)

The National Archive of the United Arab Emirates: <http://www.na.ae/ncdr/English/index.aspx>

## **Endnotes**

The National Archives' collecting strategy is a living, dynamic policy not interred in bureaucratic prose. The strategy is multifaceted, reflecting the various aspects of the institutional mandate. For government records, the usual archival appraisal criteria apply, identifying the 2 or 3 % of current records which have long-term value while authorizing the disposal of the remainder after an appropriate time. Beyond this rigorous legal mandate, acquisitions are strategic, fulfilling the Archives' objective to use all media in documenting society; but by the nature of archival donations or sales, acquisitions are strategically opportunistic. The time when an individual, family or organization is willing to make available unique records depends on many personal factors. For the acquisition of collections in the private sector, efforts have been made to contact former British officials to secure any documentation they and their families may still hold. Elsewhere, important collections are purchased. For the oral history collections, key informants are systematically identified, but by also casting a wide net the recollections, perspectives, words and songs of a wide cross section of society are gathered for preservation. Guided by the vision of a national archives and active on many fronts, a unique and irreplaceable record is being built from many sources.

# In a changing world, archives buildings are also changing...

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France Saïe-Belaïsch

This text was presented during the International Congress of Archives in Brisbane, Australia in 2012. It was updated for this publication but the general ideas are the same.

Archives preserve and make available the recorded memory of society. They have been described as ‘the gift of one generation to another’. They provide authoritative evidence of past actions and decisions and are vital for legal purposes as well as research and genealogical studies. They enable us to learn from past experience and help us to know ourselves and the society we have inherited. Archival documents today take many forms, from ancient manuscripts and modern paper files through to maps, oral recordings, photographs, films and broadcast recordings and the great variety of electronic records which dominate our social interaction and governments. All these records are fragile and often unique, carrying immense and replaceable cultural, legal and social value. Insurance cannot replace them. Instead, they require careful storage and security to enable us to use them and to be certain they will be available for future generations.

France has a long and distinguished tradition of buildings designed and built for the preservation of historic records. While conservation laboratories and skilled technicians can repair and restore the most delicate of records, such treatments are time consuming and need to be reserved for only the few documents that may be needed for exhibition. The most cost-effective means of conserving the extensive archival record of France is through the construction of facilities which ensure strict environmental controls appropriate to each of the various documentary forms. Constant temperature and humidity or at least very gradual changes with the seasons are essential. Older archives buildings need to be upgraded and adapted to the latest research on the long-term preservation of paper and film. With the varied climatic conditions within France and with the requirement to achieve the necessary environment while limiting energy use the architectural challenges are significant.

The examples in this paper illustrate how these challenges have been addressed in the various regions. Sustainable architectural solutions have been developed and integrated in creative designs worthy of the heritage of the country. Some have been designed and built as archives; in other cases, innovative approaches have given older buildings a new modern life.

Government archives reflect the administration which they serve. Each maintains the official record of the administrative body which creates the records, with larger archives in the *départementes* and smaller ones for the municipalities. Each combines a secure storage area with the controlled temperature and humidity levels, linked to a comfortable reading room for public use. Specialized facilities are cost effective as archives are amongst the few government buildings in which the value of the irreplaceable contents is infinitely greater than the value of the building itself.

Without giving a lesson on the history of the buildings of archives in France, I shall say simply that France has a relatively long tradition of construction or rehabilitation for its archives. One of the most remarkable of them is certainly the *Hôtel de Soubise* in Paris that the Emperor Bonaparte I personally allocated to the National Archives in 1808 (photo). He had the grand ambition of bringing all the historic records of Europe into one building close to the heart of Paris. This building has been the object of numerous extensions since then.

In the French *départementes*, some buildings were specifically built for archives at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They often looked like big libraries and it is not without a certain nostalgia that we look at their photos as they are not in use any more.



Paris – Hôtel de Soubise – French National Archives (photos France Saïe-Belaïsch)

*In a changing world, archives buildings are also changing...*



Paris – Hôtel de Soubise – French National Archives (photos France Saïe-Belaisch)



Formers archives building in two French départements : La Marne et le Puy-de-Dôme

Designed a few years later, some buildings of the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century are still in service as in the *département* of the *Lot-et-Garonne*. We can still admire their internal organisation and their architecture. (Photos).



Archives départementales of the Lot-et-Garonne (photos Philippe Henwood)

*In a changing world, archives buildings are also changing...*

But whatever is the charm of those buildings, with the use of wood and the heating and lighting requirements, the records were at risk. Environmental controls were minimal.

In the long tradition of archives building in France, archives towers built in the 1970s distinguish themselves from the architectural landscape. Most of them - still in use - are now being renovated. This model of very high buildings - “the tower of archives” - has since evolved towards lower buildings. But high or low, the construction of these buildings in which the archives storage vaults represent approximately 60 to 70 % of the space is always an architectural challenge. This is not solely a matter of controlling the environment, but archives storage requires particularly strong floors.

Traditionally, archives were seen and designed as forbidding places meant for scholars. More recently, archives directors have changed and now seek to engage schools and the public in actively exploring the sources of their history. This has meant that archives now include exhibition and teaching spaces along with welcoming reading rooms.

## **Rehabilitation of existing buildings**

This is an option often used - especially for the municipal archives. This option enables energy savings in several ways: first of all the energy intended for the demolition then for the use of new materials represents a significant saving. This is a strategy for sustainable development. Older buildings usually have a very good thermal inertia because the walls are very thick. Additionally those premises are generally readily available, so time and money is saved by using them. Moreover the older buildings are located in desirable areas in the city, reducing the costs of transport for the public and the staff. These buildings are frequently distinguished and a familiar, perhaps proud part of the community.

Three municipal archives projects stand out. These are witnesses or rather leaders of change: in Brive-la-Gaillarde, Tarbes, and Selestat.

The conversion of a 17<sup>th</sup> century convent in Brive-la-Gaillarde (photos) in the south of France was a major challenge. The building has many levels and the internal structure had few large spaces. The result, though, provides the city archives with an impressive and functional presence appropriate for the next century.

In Tarbes (photo), the conversion of this former 19<sup>th</sup> century military warehouse in the South of France was doubtless simpler because of its simple geometry. This building is half occupied by archives, with the other half used for maintaining the collections of the museum of the Hussars, the dashing light cavalry in the armies of Emperor Napoleon 1.



Archives of the city of Brive-la-Gaillarde - the facade and the meeting room  
(photos France Saïe-Belaïsch)



*In a changing world, archives buildings are also changing...*



Archives of the city of Tarbes (photo France Saïe-Belaïsch)



Archives of the city of Sélestat (photo Archives Municipales)

With the adoption of the European currency - the euro-, numerous branches of the Bank of France were closed. One of these, in Sélestat (photo) a small city in Alsace, successfully became a municipal archives. The hall of the bank is now a space for exhibitions and the storage area is situated in the basement. This type of building is well suited for use as an archives, with strength, security and an architectural presence in convenient locations.

Other rehabilitation projects have been highly varied too; involving two tobacco factories, two water tanks, one sorting office, one umbrella factory, some printing offices and two pharmaceutical warehouses. The common theme is that each of these projects renews buildings having a strong architectural or patrimonial quality which is an integral part of their community. Modern archives need to be visible and accessible for the public, offering services to all citizens and inviting school classes to make use of the record.

For smaller buildings, it is easier to respect the standards of the Archives of France especially regarding the separation of the public and the documents. That is why this choice of rehabilitation is more often made for municipal archives rather than for 'départementale' archives.

In rehabilitated premises, and with careful design, sharing facilities with other services is often viable, for municipal but also for departmental archives. Collocating with libraries is very frequent but it is not the only solution: the grouping with cultural services also takes place. Small museums or museum storage, specialized conservation laboratories, program offices for historic monuments or services of archaeology are often associated with the archives. In one instance, an archives is associated with a department of sports- a novel juxtaposition!

In recent years, we have found that some of our most distinguished architects have become interested in the challenges posed by the design of archives. For example, for a recent competition, no less than 120 architects presented their application and 5 were retained to present a project.

## **Construction of new buildings**

The following projects - recent or under construction - are presented as they provide examples of architectural solutions and innovative techniques for sustainable architecture.

*In a changing world, archives buildings are also changing...*



Archives départementales du Nord : the façade under construction (photos Conseil Général; Archives Départementales / Jean-Luc Thieffry) and behind the facade (photo France Saïe-Belaïsch)



Archives départementales du Nord  
(photos Conseil Général; Archives Départementales / Jean-Luc Thieffry)

# Friendship & Cooperation Treaty Between The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia And The Kingdom of Egypt May-November 1936

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Dr. Ashraf Saleh Mohamed Sayed

## Abstract

The subject of this research is the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty concluded by the Kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Egypt on May 7 and November 18, 1936. This treaty is a dividing line between a stage where relations between the two countries have been so strained to the extent of estrangement since 1926, and another stage when they were restored to normal and even better than normal thus reflecting the close ties binding the two countries and their peoples, and impact thereof on the Arab world. The research has been conducted in accordance with the analytical historical approach based on an exposition of historical realities and deductions made through explanation and interpretation.

## Prologue

Egyptian-Saudi relations are as old as history<sup>1</sup>, as the Red Sea has been a trade route for between Egypt and Hejaz<sup>2</sup> as well as a route for Arabian tribes migrating from the Arabian Peninsula to Egypt<sup>3</sup> carrying with them Arab and Islamic culture together with the Prophet Mohammad's Mission (Islam). Egyptians were always yearning to visit the Holy Lands and were keen on maintaining the best relations with them.

However, Egyptian-Saudi relations, like all international relations, have fluctuated. During the conflict between King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud (1292-1372H:1876-1953) and Sharif Hussein (1270-1350H : 1854-1931) in the early 1920s, Egypt remained neutral though favoring Ibn Saud, which was the same attitude maintained by Britain so much so that some tended to think that Britain was the actual architect of Egyptian policy during that time. However, Britain and Egypt had their own respective reasons for adopting the same attitude<sup>4</sup>. One of the reasons why Egypt opted to remain neutral *vis-a-vis* that conflict was the fact that Sharif Hussein had declared an Arab Revolution against the Ottoman State while most Egyptian nationalists believed that it was in the best interests of the Islamic nation to unite under the Ottoman State in order to be able to confront Western imperialism. In this respect, Hafez Wahba (1306-1386H: 1889-1967), an advisor to Ibn Saud, said: "A large segment of

the Muslims of India and Egypt did not appreciate Sharif Hussein's rise against the Turks"<sup>5</sup>. Another reason was the medical mission Egypt wanted to send in 1923 along with the annual *Mahmal* (new cloth covers, manufactured and donated by Egypt and ceremonially sent on camelback to Hejaz) but was rejected by Sharif Hussein thinking it had political purposes<sup>6</sup>. Retaliating, the Egyptian government recalled the Pilgrimage mission and the *Mahmal* returned to Egypt without completing the pilgrimage rituals. In the following year, and in spite of an agreement between the two parties regulating the *Mahmal* and accompanying medical mission, Sharif Hussein ill-treated the Egyptian mission and even insulted King Fuad (1284-1354H: 1868-1936) by removing his name from the *Kiswah* (covers). Moreover, Egyptian pilgrims were ill-treated. In 1924, Sharif Hussein declared himself Caliph of all Muslims upon the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, thus infuriating King Fuad who was aspiring to hold that position.

Under such circumstances, Ibn Saud seized the opportunity to improve ties with Egypt. He sent a cable to King Fuad congratulating him on the inauguration of the first Egyptian parliament in 1924<sup>7</sup>. Prince Faisal also quoted Ibn Saud as saying that he wished to convene the Islamic Caliphate Conference in Cairo,<sup>8</sup> and that the position of Caliph was offered to King Fuad<sup>9</sup>. Recognizing the traditional ties between Egypt and Hejaz, and Egypt's leadership position from the cultural and municipal points of view<sup>10</sup>, Ibn Saud intended to lure Egyptian public opinion as a prelude to annexing Hejaz to Mecca. This task was facilitated by Sheikh Mohamed Rashid Ridha (1282-1354H: 1865-1935), owner of *Al-Manar* magazine who was present in Egypt at that time and was defending the *Salafiya* Movement (*Al-Tawheed* advocacy) and Ibn Saud's reform policy<sup>11</sup>.

Early in 1925, Ibn Saud dispatched an Egyptian physician named Dr. Abdul Hadi Khalil to convey greetings to the King of Egypt and ask His Majesty to give a considerate look to Hejaz and its suffering and send to its people a portion of the proceeds of the Two Shrines' *wakfs* (endowments). However, the envoy returned carrying best wishes only<sup>12</sup>.

On the other hand, King Fuad ordered the confiscation of an arms shipment at the Port of Suez sent by Belgium to Sharif Ali Bin Hussein who was King of Hejaz at that time. King Fuad did not heed Sharif Ali's appeal for assistance against Ibn Saud. In September 1925, King Fuad dispatched a delegation headed by Sheikh Mohamed Mustafa Al-Maraghi, Chief of the Supreme *Sharia* Religious Court and including Abdul Wahhab Talaat, First Secretary at the Royal Court, to help negotiate conciliation between the King of Hejaz and the Sultan of Najd. However, Ibn Saud rejected the mediation so that nothing would impede the conquest of Hejaz which was about to be fulfilled<sup>13</sup>. The delegation returned to Egypt affirming that the situation was in favor of Ibn Saud. When Ibn Saud ultimately entered Hejaz, Egypt responded to his request of remitting proceeds of the *wakfs* of the Two Holy Shrines in order to help relieve sufferers and assist people of Medina<sup>14</sup>. On January 8, 1926

Ibn Saud was declared King of Hejaz and Sultan of Najd and associated territories, having succeeded in annexing Hejaz to Mecca<sup>15</sup>.

Based on the statement above, it may be said that relations between Egypt and Ibn Saud were excellent since the latter had begun contacting Egypt until 1926. What, then, were the reasons that led to the deterioration of relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia to the extent of political rupture?

### **First: Reasons for the deterioration of Egyptian-Saudi relations before 1936:**

Egyptian-Saudi Relations were excellent before Ibn Saud annexed Hejaz and declared himself King thereof in 1926. However, they soon after started to deteriorate, reaching the point of severing diplomatic ties between the two countries. This was due to several reasons but the most direct one was the *Mahmal* incident in 1926 and refusal by the Egyptian Pilgrimage Emir, head of the official pilgrimage mission, as he was called at that time, to distribute alms from the proceeds of the Two Holy Shrines *Wakf*, to the poor of Hejaz. The other reasons include: Egypt withholding recognition of Ibn Saud's status as King of Hejaz; rivalry between Ibn Saud and King Fuad regarding the position of Caliph; the Hejaz Nationality Law of 1926; dispute over the Egyptian *Tekkiya* (house of the poor); and the dispute over the isles of Tiran and Sanafir, and fisheries.

#### **• Al-Mahmal Incident (1926):**

From the time of Queen Shajar Al Durr<sup>16</sup> (d. 655H: 1257) during the Ayyubid Dynasty, Egypt used to send to Hejaz a Mahmal (a set of richly decorated curtains carried by the Mahmal, a camel procession, and intended to drape the Ka'ba), together with proceeds of the Holy Shrines' wakfs<sup>17</sup>. Al Mahmal was accompanied by bugles and other musical instruments to help organize the soldiers' march on one hand, and to entertain them and accompanying pilgrims, on the other. The Mahmal, as such, continued during the Mamluk and Ottoman eras.

In 1925, Egypt did not dispatch the Mahmal due to the state of war between Ibn Saud and the Hashemite's over Hejaz. Following Ibn Saud's success to annex Hejaz in 1344H: 1926, Egypt wished to restore the Mahmal tradition. Before departure, however, news spread that the Ibn Saud government intended to disarm the Mahmal upon its arrival at Jeddah. However, the Hejaz Agency in Cairo denied such reports<sup>18</sup>.

No doubt, the new regime in Hejaz imposed certain adjustments, including towards the Mahmal tradition. The new Saudi regime did not tolerate a Mahmal escorted by an armed force to protect it throughout its long journey to Hejaz; it regarded it an encroachment upon the country's legitimate sovereignty. Moreover, some of Najd's fundamentalists objected to the use of music and certain pilgrim customs such as

smoking. It was their view that music distracts attention and lessens the devotion for which pilgrims have come to this Holy Land. They also saw tobacco as an evil that must be uprooted<sup>19</sup>.

The Mahmal ultimately travelled to Hejaz and it was reported that King Abdulaziz and his sons welcomed it in Jeddah. While en route to Mecca, the people of Najd (Al Ikhwan) heard the music played by the band accompanying the Mahmal and rushed to stop it. Clashes occurred between the two sides resulting in casualties, mostly Najdis. However, King Ibn Saud himself rushed to the scene, and without his intervention, the situation might have escalated further<sup>20</sup>.

Eventually, Ibn Saud sent a message to the Emir of the Egyptian Pilgrimage protesting against the Egyptian force's conduct and the use of fire arms. Hafez Wahba states that he spent more than a week shuttling between King Abdulaziz and the Emir of the Egyptian Pilgrimage in order to avoid a new rebellion. The Ikhwan, he added, were intolerant and were filling the Holy Shrine and Mecca roads. They were infuriated by the Mahmal and its people. Whenever they heard the bugle sound they said it was 'Satan calling' and they were maddened to see the Mahmal entering the Holy Shrine as usual. They wondered how the government could allow entry of idols into the Shrine<sup>21</sup>.

Thus Hafez Wahba asked the Emir of the Egyptian Pilgrimage to order the force to refrain from sounding the bugle and also to order the Mahmal out of the Holy Shrine. However, two close aides of King Abdulaziz sought to persuade the King to keep the Mahmal within the Holy Shrine. Eventually, it was agreed that the two parties withdraw the notes previously exchanged with regard to the incident and replace them with soft-worded letters, thus settling the question<sup>22</sup>.

- **Refusal by the Emir of the Egyptian Pilgrimage to distribute charity and proceeds of the Two Shrines' Wakfs:**

No sooner had this crisis been solved than another emerged in connection with the distribution of charity and proceeds from the Two Shrines' wakfs. Discussions between Hafez Wahba and the Emir of the Egyptian Pilgrimage regarding the issue did not lead anywhere. The Emir insisted that lists of beneficiaries must be changed and Hafez Wahba flatly rejected the suggestion. Thus, the Egyptian Mahmal returned without distributing any charity or the proceeds of the Two Shrines' wakfs to the poor of Hejaz. This led to increased tension between the two countries.

- **Egypt's withholding recognition of Ibn Saud as King of Hejaz:**

Though Ibn Saud had declared that the government of Hejaz considered the Mahmal incident as a local issue that would not affect relations and friendship between the two sisterly countries, Egyptian public opinion and the Egyptian government were offended. The Egyptian press launched a fierce campaign against the Wahhabis. Al



Ahram editorial said that Bolshevism and Wahhabism were a great danger to mankind<sup>23</sup>. Al Siyasa went as far as to describe Wahhabis as ‘fierce animals preying on whoever is not Wahhabi’<sup>24</sup>. However, the Egyptian government saw the issue as political rather than religious and this led to further deterioration in the relations between the two countries, and even between the two monarchs as King Fuad maintained his refusal to recognize Ibn Saud as King of Hejaz. It was an opportunity for the Egyptian King to express his real feelings towards Ibn Saud who was already recognized as King of Hejaz by most countries of the world, including Britain which was dominating Egypt<sup>25</sup>. Ibn Saud, meanwhile, was keen on securing such recognition because of Egypt’s prestige in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Thus, the Hejazi Consulate in Egypt did not represent the official authority in Hejaz<sup>26</sup>.

Though the Egyptian government halted the dispatch of official pilgrimage missions from 1926, it did not prevent Egyptians from performing the pilgrimage at their own risk. The Egyptian Cabinet stated ‘Egyptian pilgrims may be exposed to certain dangers and therefore their travelling to Hejaz shall be at their own risk.’ Replying to a question at the House of Deputies on why the government would not prevent Egyptians from travelling to Hejaz to perform the pilgrimage while it perceives the dangers and is responsible for avoiding them, the Prime Minister Abdul Khaliq Tharwat Pasha (1873-1928) said that the government’s attitude was dictated by religious considerations: the government could not secure a fatwa (ruling) blocking the pilgrimage and thus would not bear the repercussions of preventing Muslims from performing a religious command<sup>27</sup>.

The decision to block the Mahmal and withhold the Holy Shines’ funds had reduced the usual number of Egyptian pilgrims on the one hand, and deprived the people of Hejaz from a substantial financial resource, on the other. As their conditions worsened, they formed a society in Mecca to claim the Two Shrines’ wakfs proceeds in order to alleviate suffering of the poor of Hejaz<sup>28</sup>.

- **The Caliphate Issue:**

The abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate (27 Rajab1342H: March 3, 1924) had prompted certain Arab leaders to aspire for that prestigious religious position by virtue of its being the spiritual leadership of all Muslims. Among those leaders were Sharif Hussein, whose chances had diminished following his departure from Mecca. Some believed that the Ruler of Hejaz had better chances.

When Sharif Hussein declared himself Caliph of the Muslims in 1924, King Fuad and King Abdulaziz were united in their rejection of Sharif Hussein’s declaration. They therefore called for debating the issue of the Caliphate at a conference truly representing the Islamic peoples. Rashid Rida<sup>29</sup> observed that “this attitude was one of the reasons why King Fuad began to be inclined towards Ibn Saud in his conflict with Sharif Hussein. In his bid to annex Hejaz, Ibn Saud sought to win Egyptian

public opinion and backed a proposal for convening the conference in Cairo. He also offered the position of Caliph to King Fuad. The annexation of Hejaz being imminent now, Ibn Saud began to call for convening a conference in Mecca to debate the future status of Hejaz<sup>30</sup>. He sent letters signed by him to Egypt and other Islamic countries<sup>31</sup> explaining his plans and pledges to the Islamic world. These included the following:

1. Hejaz is for Hejazis, from the point of view of governance, but for the Islamic world, considering Muslims' rights in the Holy Lands;

Conduct a referendum for selecting a Ruler for Hejaz under the supervision of Islamic world representatives<sup>32</sup>.

Having annexed Hejaz, Ibn Saud declared himself King thereby infuriating King Fuad who considered that move as breach of Ibn Saud's pledge to the Islamic world. The situation became even worse when Ibn Saud, thinking that the Caliphate Conference which was held in Cairo in May 1926 was conceived in order to nominate King Fuad as Caliph, declined to send a representative<sup>33</sup>. He also convened the Islamic conference he had himself called for in the same year that he convened the Cairo Conference<sup>34</sup>, thus confirming King Fuad's doubts that Ibn Saud had sought to subvert the Cairo conference.

- **The Hejazi Nationality law:**

Another reason for the strained relations between the two countries was the Saudi nationality law issued by the Saudi government in November 1926. Article One of that law stipulated that 'whoever is born in Hejaz shall be deemed Hejazi, and whoever stays in Hejaz for three consecutive years shall earn the Hejazi nationality'<sup>35</sup>. The law was communicated to the Consuls of foreign countries in Jeddah, including the Consul of Egypt. However, the Egyptian government protested against it and demanded amendment thereof on account of alleged violation of international laws. The Saudi government replied that the Egyptian government had no right to protest as the law was an internal Saudi affair and pertains to Saudi sovereignty. It also explained that the presence of various Islamic communities in the cities of Hejaz had inspired the promulgation of the law. The Egyptian government's opposition to the law was based on fears that its promulgation would tempt Egyptians born in Hejaz or residing therein to earn Hejazi nationality. A proof supporting this claim was Hafez Wahba himself who had earned the Hejazi nationality.

Some believe that the promulgation of that law was at the heart of the Egyptian government's refusal to recognize the government of Hejaz<sup>36</sup> a situation that had prevailed until it was resolved by virtue of the 1936 treaty.

- **Dispute over the Egyptian Tekkiya:**

There were also differences over the Egyptian Tekkiya in Hejaz<sup>37</sup>. Hejazi authorities made several attempts to seize that tekkiya in order to expand the Two Holy Shrines. Among such differences were the levying of taxes on tools, drugs, clothes and the ordinance relating to the Egyptian Tekkiya. The Egyptian Consulate in Jeddah had complained of the unprecedented treatment the Tekkiya was receiving and that such taxes would cost the Egyptian Ministry of Wakfs some LE 5,000. The Consulate also indicated that the decree was issued while the King was away. Replying to a note by the Consulate at Riyadh, the Head of the Supreme Court said that the Hejazi government was free to levy custom duties or exempt thereof.

Distribution of charity assigned to 'servants of the Holy Shrine' through the Egyptian Tekkiya was also a controversial issue as the Saudi government had preferred that such funds be remitted and eventually distributed by it<sup>38</sup>.

- **Dispute over the isles of Tiran and Sanafir, and fisheries:**

Another issue contributing to the deterioration of relations between the two countries was differences over the borders between them at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba. Two isles, Tiran and Sanafir<sup>39</sup> standing at the entrance of the Gulf were under Hejaz and eventually under King Abdulaziz by virtue of his new capacity. However, Egypt did not recognize that status. The government of Hejaz asked the government of Egypt to halt fishing in Hejazi territorial waters, and to reconsider the treaty marking the borders between the two countries. Attempts were made to settle those differences but they all failed until the 1936 Treaty was finally concluded<sup>40</sup>.

## **Second: Attempts at Rapprochement:**

The two sides had exerted efforts to resolve their differences and normalize relations. However, there were also counter moves to thwart such efforts. On the Saudi side, King Abdulaziz himself was so keen on resolving differences in the hope of wrenching Egyptian recognition that would help him foster his position in the Islamic world, and also to benefit from Egyptian expertise in fulfilling his ambitions regarding the modernization of his kingdom. His adviser, Hafez Wahba (who was of Egyptian origin) had wide contacts with Egyptian politicians, and together with Sheikh Fauzan Al-Sabiq, Saudi envoy to Egypt, exerted extraordinary efforts to resolve differences between the two countries.

On the Egyptian side, the Al Wafd party was seeking rapprochement during its tenure. It was the majority party and the only bloc capable of confronting the wishes of King Fuad<sup>41</sup>. There were also efforts made by some Ulama (religious scholars), and Hassan Al-Ashmouni, Egyptian Charge D'affaires in Jeddah, Amin Tawfiq, the Egyptian Consul, and Mohamed Talaat Harb (1867-1941), a prominent Egyptian economist, who have all contributed to efforts aimed at resolving differences between the two countries.

Thus, it could be said that there had been two main fronts attempting to ease tension and normalize relations between the two countries: one, Saudi, represented in King Abdulaziz, Hafez Wahba and Fauzan Al Sabiq; and the other, Egyptian, represented by Al Wafd<sup>42</sup>, Talaat Harb, Hassan Al-Ashmouni, Amin Tawfiq and some Ulama. In addition, there were popular forces that sought to normalize Egyptian-Hejazi relations, such as Egyptian participation in endeavors to terminate the Saudi-Yemeni war, and the role played by the press and popular tourism between the two countries.

### **Third: Negotiations and Conclusion of the May 7-November 18, 1936 Treaty:**

- **Negotiations and the Conclusion of the May 7, 1936 Treaty:**

On April 7, 1936, Egyptian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ali Maher (1811-1960) sent a cable to the Saudi Foreign Minister inviting him on behalf of the Egyptian government to delegate a representative of the Saudi government in order to negotiate outstanding issues. The following is the text of the cable (translated into English):

“As it is one of the most cherished wishes of the government of His Majesty to foster Egypt’s relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the basis of cordiality and friendship, and to settle all outstanding issues in the best interests of the two countries, I have the honor of inviting Your Highness to dispatch at the nearest opportunity a delegate to negotiate with us and sign whatever agreement we may reach.”

The next day, a reply was cabled welcoming the Egyptian initiative. Fuad Hamza Bey, Undersecretary for the Saudi Foreign Ministry, was thus delegated to negotiate with the Egyptian government. The following is the text of the reply (translated into English):

”I received with great pleasure and gratitude your kind cable expressing the Egyptian government’s desire to foster relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the basis of cordiality and friendship, and to resolve outstanding issues between the two countries in the best interests of both. Accordingly, you have kindly invited my government to dispatch a delegate to Egypt to consider with your honor such issues and to sign any resulting agreement. In response, I have the pleasure of expressing to your honor the delight of the government of His Majesty vis-à-vis this blessed step in the best interests of our two countries and the long-standing ties and interests based on a glorious set of traditions and a common past, religion, language and region. The government of His Majesty appreciates the noble spirit that has dictated this kind initiative and is pleased to act reciprocally. We accept the invitation with full gratitude and we have selected HE Fuad Hamza Bey, Undersecretary for the Foreign Ministry, to undertake this mission. He will be travelling from Jeddah on Monday, April 13 and will arrive in Suez on Wednesday, April 15. I pray God Almighty to help us succeed in maintaining our common interests and our nations’ happiness and prosperity”<sup>43</sup>.

Now, the question is: Why did the Egyptian Government take the initiative for

resolving outstanding issues and normalizing relations between the two countries, taking into consideration that it did not respond to any attempt previously made by the Saudi government in this connection?

During the political rupture between Egypt and Saudi Arabia (1926-1936) contacts between them were maintained in nearly all religious (except the Mahmal and charity), social, educational and economic fields. Pilgrimage convoys continued to pour into Saudi Arabia every year, even during the years of the world economic crisis. Though some of the newspapers loyal to King Fuad published insults to the Saudi people and their Ruler, passion and cordiality remained unchanged and were further strengthened by a visit to Egypt by Prince Saud, one that helped obviate whatever doubts Egyptians might have entertained towards the Saudis.

In addition, economic aid continued to be dispatched by Egypt to Saudi Arabia during the various crises the Saudis had encountered. Egyptians generously donated to help relieve the Saudis. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia extensively sought Egyptian expertise such as teachers and physicians and many Saudi students came to Egypt to receive education at all stages of education with the approval of the Egyptian government. Cordial ties between the Egyptian and Saudi peoples were further demonstrated by Egyptian popular participation in efforts exerted to halt the Saudi-Yemeni war, and the warm welcome given by the Saudi King, government and people to Mohamed Talaat Harb Pasha during a visit he paid to their country.

Thus, plenty of evidence confirms continuity of cordial relations between the Egyptian and Saudi peoples, and suggests that the disputed issues could have been easily resolved had it not been for the intransigence of the ruler of Egypt, King Fuad, while Britain had opted to simply watch. Therefore, it could be said that the differences were between two kings rather than between two peoples, i.e. personal differences which had come to an end with the demise of King Fuad<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, it should be noted that King Fuad's stance had changed in the last two years of his life and 'there were no more any reasons for dispute and estrangement and there was room for brotherhood and cordiality only'<sup>45</sup>.

King Fuad gave up his previous stance rejecting recognition of the Saudi government and any bid to solve outstanding problems between the two countries. Having realized that the Caliphate issue (which was the root of all the evil) was no longer feasible as the Hejaz was indispensable and its ruler had already established himself well there; and seeing that King Abdulaziz did not declare himself Caliph, and that the Islamic world was not oriented to designate any of its rulers as Caliph, and in view of domestic and external considerations, King Fuad changed his mind. In the meantime, he had fallen sick since 1934 and <sup>46</sup> probably thought he was going to die soon and thus felt he had to do some good to please Almighty God, his people and his government and so agreed to embark on negotiations. Only eight days following commencement of negotiations, King Fuad died.

As to Britain's passive attitude with regard to tense relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, it could be said that Britain would have never hesitated to remove causes of tension and mediate between the two Arab countries if this had been in her own interests. However, normalization was not in the best interests of Britain. The British agents in both countries could have indeed had the upper word if their government had instructed them to intervene. However, Britain later backed Egyptian Prime Minister, Ali Maher and pressed King Fuad into starting negotiations. This shift was caused by the fact that by 1935, Britain was preparing to negotiate a treaty with Egypt<sup>47</sup> and therefore interfered to put an end to the tension between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, the international situation was not in favor of Britain; Italy was turning to the side of Germany, Britain's deadliest enemy, and attacked Ethiopia. There were also Mussolini's efforts to come closer to Saudi Arabia and Yemen. All this made Britain seek speedy settlement of problems between its own allies, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It also supported Ali Maher's steps to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that Ali Maher was distressed by the severing of relations between two peoples having such close ties. He therefore wanted to take advantage of his being the head of the new 'transition' government to sign a treaty,<sup>48</sup> calling on the Saudi government to start negotiating in order to conclude a friendship treaty between the two countries.

The year 1935 may be labeled as the popular prelude for negotiations. The Egyptian and Saudi press began to exchange campaigns for resolving differences between the two countries. Saudi newspapers paid tribute to the role played by Talaat Harb to bridge the gap between the two sides. An article in *Al Ahram* said: "How could a Muslim imagine that political relations between the leading country of the Islamic world and the country hosting the sacred shrines are severed and for trivial reasons? If properly treated, such problems can be easily solved. It is truly unfortunate that successive governments have, over the last ten years, failed to solve those problems and hence recognize the government of His Majesty King Ibn Saud"<sup>49</sup>.

Negotiations between the two sides started on Monday, April 20, 1936/1355H. The Egyptian side was represented by Prime Minister Ali Maher, the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar, Mustafa Al-Maraghi (1881-1954) and Abdul Hamid Badawi, Chief of State Judiciary. The Saudi side was represented by Fuad Hamza, Undersecretary for the Foreign Ministry, and Fauzan Al-Sabiq, Saudi envoy to Egypt. Negotiations continued through May 7, 1936 but were then suspended.

Talks over religious issues took more time, and Ali Maher, therefore, suggested to Fuad Hamza that those should be deferred to a supplementary round to be held in November the same year,<sup>50</sup> on account of King Fuad's death, noting that at that time he had the power to sign the treaty. The two sides thus agreed to sign the treaty while deferring religious issues (Al Mahmal, Kiswa, charity and nationality) to a supplementary round of negotiations. It looked as if Ali Maher had wanted his short-

lived transition government to make a mark in history; one to be forever remembered by the Egyptian people.

On May 7, 1936 (Safar 16, 1355H) the Egyptian-Saudi Treaty was signed at the court of the Egyptian Cabinet. Reporting the event, Al Ahram said: "The Treaty was signed at 11 pm yesterday (May 7). After 16 days and 14 hours and 15 minutes, As far as could be remembered, it was the first time in history that a treaty was signed by two kingdoms during the transfer of constitutional powers in one of them from its deceased King (Fuad) to his Cabinet. During the period from the King's demise to the convening of parliament, all the King's constitutional powers were vested in the Cabinet whose head, yesterday, signed the Egyptian-Saudi Treaty." According to Al-Ahram, it was on that night that the Cabinet ceased to exercise such powers as Parliament convenes the next day. Thus, the Treaty was the last major action taken by the short-lived 'Maher' Cabinet.

The Treaty, thus, has been dictated by a prior desire to establish relations between the two countries on the basis of friendship, sincerity and upholding mutual interests. It was decided to release the text of the Treaty on Saturday in Cairo and Mecca simultaneously. It consisted of seven articles filling nearly a page and a half<sup>51</sup>. Article One stipulated that "the Egyptian government recognizes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a totally free and independent sovereign state." In fact, the issue of Egypt's recognition of Saudi Arabia was King Abdulaziz's primary concern. While Russia, Britain, France and other major powers had immediately recognized him as soon as he declared himself King of Hejaz in 1926, Egypt did not<sup>52</sup>. King Abdulaziz was embittered because, since Egypt was enjoying great prestige in the Islamic world, its recognition of the new regime in Hejaz would be a great victory for him.

In 1928, some members of the Egyptian House of Deputies had raised the issue of recognition of Saudi Arabia. They wondered why Egypt refused to recognize the government of Hejaz while major European powers hastened to do so. Replying, the Prime Minister confirmed the religious ties binding the two governments and that the government was examining outstanding issues between the two countries. He added "We hope that in the near future we shall reach a solution that maintains excellent relations between the two peoples and their cherished wish to restore cordiality and understanding"<sup>53</sup>.

In 1930, Abdulrahman Azzam made a speech in the House of Deputies defending Ibn Saud and asked the government to explain reasons for withholding recognition of the government of Hejaz. However, the Foreign Minister refused to make any statement regarding outstanding issues between the two countries asserting that such issues should not be debated publicly<sup>54</sup>.

The issue of recognition continued to be raised time and again at Parliamentary lobbies and in the press until the Treaty was signed and Egypt eventually recognized the Ibn Saud government. Article Two of the Treaty stipulated that permanent peace

and sincere friendship shall prevail among the two kingdoms and their subjects, and that each party shall do its best to maintain excellent relations with the other, seeking by all means to prohibit the use of its territories as a base of illegal acts disturbing peace and tranquility<sup>55</sup>.

Article Three stipulated the establishment of diplomatic and consular representation. The issue of consular representation had been a subject of difference between the two countries. In 1925, the Egyptian government established a consulate in Jeddah in the reign of Sharif Ali bin Hussein. It was headed by an officer, and then by a civilian, following the Hejaz-Najd war in 1926. It was recognized by the Hashemite government and later by the Ibn Saud government and was given all the powers granted to other consulates. On the other side, the Ibn Saud government had established, in 1926, an agency in Cairo and this was known as the 'Hejaz Agency' and was headed by Sheikh Fauzan Al Sabiq. It replaced the Hashemite Agency but was not recognized by the Egyptian government as part of its stance withholding recognition of the Ibn Saud government. The Egyptian government did not give the Hejaz Agency the same treatment given to other consulates, and its head did not enjoy the same privileges enjoyed by his counterparts<sup>56</sup>.

Article Four dealt with pilgrimage facilities and the observance of other Islamic rites by Egyptian Muslims. It also dealt with ways and means of securing the lives and property of the pilgrims during the pilgrimage season. Article Five endorsed the Saudi government's approval of Egypt voluntary undertaking of the reconstruction and maintenance of the Two Holy Shrines, including paving the roads used by pilgrims, providing lighting for the two shrines and their surroundings, and providing drinking water and other facilities in the best interests of pilgrims and their health.

Article Six stipulated that the two parties shall—after the signing of this Treaty and at their earliest convenience, enter into cordial negotiations to resolve outstanding issues between them, conclude customs, postal, navigation and other such agreements of common benefit to both of them. Article Seven stipulated that the Treaty has been drafted in two original copies in Arabic and shall be ratified as early as possible. It shall be effective only from the date of the exchange of instruments of ratification in Cairo. On May 8, 1936, the two parties ratified the Treaty and its text was simultaneously published in both countries.

### **Supplementary Negotiations and Conclusion of the November 18, 1936 Treaty:**

The Egyptian and Saudi parties agreed to defer religious issues to a supplementary round of negotiations to be held in November 1936. The reasons for deferring were:

Egypt was experiencing difficult political circumstances at that time as official authorities were busy with proceedings relating to the transition of constitutional powers to King Farouk and the accompanying issue of Regency;<sup>57</sup>



2. Political leaders were busy negotiating a friendship treaty with Britain;
3. Brevity of the time available for negotiations with the Saudi side as Prime Minister Ali Maher was in a hurry to conclude a treaty while he was still enjoying constitutional powers to do so and such powers were to cease on May 8 (when Parliament would convene);
4. Pressure exerted by public opinion and external circumstances for reaching a speedy understanding; Egypt was thus concerned with King Abdulaziz and deferred other matters for debate at a time to be fixed later;
5. Differences between the two sides were considered insignificant, rather, they were but personal differences and would eventually be resolved following the demise of King Fuad.

In November 1936, the Wafd government, which succeeded that of Ali Maher, saw it fit to resume negotiations with the Saudi government. The new round was led by Mustafa Al-Nahas Pasha (1876-1956)<sup>58</sup> and focused on four issues: Al Mahmal, Al-Ka'aba Kiswa, charity distribution and nationality.

Negotiations started with a preparatory meeting between Mustafa Al Nahhas, Abdul Hamid Badawi, Chief of Government Judiciary and Chief Royal Adviser, and Sheikh Mohamed Al-Banna, Director of the Religious Affairs Department, at Al Nahhas office. They discussed the issue of the Two Shrines Wakfs from the Shari'a and Legal points of view, as a prelude to debating it with Fuad Hamza, Undersecretary for the Saudi Foreign Ministry at a meeting in the Cabinet court. Talks were held in a cordial atmosphere as described by statements made by Hamza after the meeting. He told Kawkab Al-Sharq reporter: "Negotiations dealt with outstanding issues between Egypt and the Hejaz in general". He also told an Al-Balagh reporter: "The prevailing spirit augers well but there will be another meeting. I am utterly optimistic and deeply impressed by the Egyptian government's kindness, sympathy, cordiality and friendship."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Hamza told an Al-Mokattam reporter: "Throughout the meeting I did not feel I was facing an alien negotiator, but a statesman whose gestures told of his sincerity and truthfulness as well as his dedication to Islam and the Arabs." Hamza also said, "After all I have heard today I feel optimistic regarding an imminent and satisfactory settlement of outstanding issues; one that shall be acceptable and pleasing to Muslims. I believe the matter will be finalized in a few days"<sup>60</sup>.

In this connection, Al Ahram said editorially: The negotiations have dealt with two important issues: the Two Shrines wakfs and the dispatching of the Egyptian Mahmal to Hejazi territories. The Saudi government's point of view, as stated in the first session, was that Egypt should pay it the wakf funds due since 1926 and until 1936 on the ground that such funds are the exclusive right of the Two Holy Shrines and therefore could not be disposed of, or spent on any other charity aspects. However, the Egyptian government indicated that the said funds have already been spent on

other charitable aspects and therefore suggested that payment should begin from the date of settling outstanding issues and not retroactively and that conditions should be restored to pre-1936 terms.

The Egyptian government also wished restoration of Al Mahmal and its traditional role so that the procession would travel to Hejaz as before. However, the Saudi government had a different view <sup>61</sup>. Negotiations were thus halted and were to be resumed at a later meeting. Hamza was to consult his government on the issues debated. Several meetings were later held and it was during the one held on November 15 that a provisional agreement was reached on outstanding issues. On this, Al-Mokattam said:”

As regards the charity issue, it was decided that the Government would ask the Shari’a Court to issue a decree annulling the one it had issued in 1925, permitting spending of charity funds originally donated for people of the Two Shrines on other charity aspects. This would allow remittance of the charity funds of this year as usual. However, funds of the previous ten years were still being debated but the Saudi side was claiming them on the ground that they belong to residents of the Two Shrines and should not be spent on others. As to the method of distribution thereof, the Egyptian side suggested that they should be distributed through a joint authority. However, the Saudi side vehemently rejected that suggestion and thus it was decided to maintain the status quo.

As to the Kiswa, it was agreed that Egypt should continue to dispatch it as usual, i.e. to be carried to Hejaz with Al Mahmal and placed on the walls of the Ka’aba. With regard to the Mahmal, the Egyptian side suggested that the tradition be maintained as usual but the Saudis objected to the entry of Egyptian military forces into Hejaz. They argued that now that there are no security risks there was no reason for sending troops with Al Mahmal. The Saudi view was provisionally endorsed and the Saudi side pledged that the Saudi government would welcome the Emir of Haj and his entourage as usual. However, the Saudis opposed the entry of the Mahmal into Mecca and the newspaper commented on this question saying: “This issue remains unsolved and we hope to see it appropriately settled”<sup>62</sup>.

Another meeting was the one held at the Saudi Agency between Fuad Hamza and Fauzan Al-Sabiq on one hand, and Abdul Hamid Badawi on the other, on Tuesday November 17, 1932 during which the final framework for solving all outstanding problems was agreed upon. It was also agreed that text of the final agreement should be drafted. This was submitted on the evening of the same day at the Senate to the Prime Minister who reviewed it, and briefed the Ministers on it as a prelude to signing thereof at the Cabinet Court the next day (November 18, 1936).

On the morning of the next day, Fuad Hamza and Fauzan Al-Sabiq met with the Prime Minister in the presence of Wassef Ghali Pasha, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, and Abdul Hamid Badawi, Chief Adviser. The agreement was signed during that

meeting. It was in the form of three memos drafted in two original copies which were signed and exchanged by Mustafa Al-Nahhas on behalf of the Kingdom of Egypt and Fuad Hamza on behalf of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A fourth memo was issued by Fuad Hamza alone. The two sides exchanged compliments and agreed to simultaneously publish the text of the memos on Friday, November 20, 1936 in Egypt<sup>63</sup>.

Asked by Al-Ahram reporter about his impressions regarding the agreement, Fuad Hamza said: "This result was expected due to the iron-clad relations between the two sisterly countries and mutual love between the two peoples. I thank God Almighty who has led us to this great success which has cleared all the clouds from the skies of the two friendly nations"<sup>64</sup>.

The agreement, thus, consisted of seven memos, three of which were dual, i.e. a note and endorsement thereof. The last one was issued by the representative of the Saudi government alone. The memos dealt with five issues, the first being Al Mahmal, in which it was agreed that the Mahmal shall be dispatched but without an accompanying armed escort, provided that it shall be received by the Saudi Government in Hejaz and would remain there until the end of the pilgrimage season when it would return home with the rest of Egyptian pilgrims. It was also stipulated that the Mahmal was to be dispatched this year (1936) and instructions were issued to the Ministry of the Interior to take the necessary measures in this connection.

The second issue was the Kiswa and it was stipulated that it shall continue to be manufactured in Egypt and not in Mecca as the Saudi side requested, provided it shall contain inscriptions stating that it was manufactured in Egypt and dedicated to the honorable Ka'aba in the reign of King Abdul Aziz Al Saud.

The third issue was the Two Shrines' wakfs and it was agreed that the Egyptian government will ask the Supreme Shari'a Court to issue a ruling for handing over charities to the Saudi government as per the custom that had previously prevailed. However, the issue of charity arrears since Egypt began to withhold them from Hejaz as per a ruling by the Shari'a Court in 1926 was deferred for subsequent consideration.

Nationality was the fourth issue and it was decided that Hejazis who had acquired Egyptian nationality, and Egyptians who acquired Saudi (Hejazi) nationality should choose the nationality they prefer within six months from the date of concluding the agreement, without prejudice to the right of everyone to stay or settle down in either country until the promulgation of the national law in the country of his/her choice.

The fifth and last issue was but a pledge by the Saudi government not to impose custom duties or any other taxes on pilgrims without first informing the Egyptian government.

An annex to the agreement was issued concerning Al Mahmal reception proceedings and the distribution of charity in Hejaz. The annex set forth details of a military

and official reception of the Mahmal upon its arrival at Jeddah Port. It also provided that the Pilgrimage Emir would first enter Mecca and read out King Farouk's letter offering the Kiswa as a gift, and would then go back to accompany the Kiswa as it enters the Holy Shrine. The Kiswa was to be officially received at the entrance of the Holy Shrine and speeches would be made by representatives of the two countries. The Pilgrimage Emir would then take permission from the King of Saudi Arabia to return to Egypt carrying a written reply to the King of Egypt. Finally, the Pilgrimage Emir would submit a statement to the Undersecretary for the Saudi Foreign Ministry indicating the sum earmarked for distribution to the poor, this being part of the surplus of investing wakfs of the Two Holy Shrines<sup>65</sup>.

The second and third memos relating to the Kiswa were amended through two other memos on August 1, 1941 as Egypt had wanted to change the text of the statement inscribed on the Kiswa which read: "This Kiswa was manufactured by order from His Majesty the King of Egypt and was dedicated to the Holy Ka'aba in the reign of His Majesty King Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia", a tradition that has been maintained since the conclusion of the 1936 Treaty, to another text that read as follows: This Kiswa has been manufactured by **Al-Mutawakkil** 'Alā Allāh Farouk I, King of Egypt, and was dedicated to the Holy Ka'aba in the reign of the Custodian of the Two Shrines, King Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia." King Farouk earnestly wished to have his name inscribed on the covers of Al-Ka'aba without any majestic titles to demonstrate not only humility but also veneration of the House of Allah. Meanwhile, the Egyptian government agreed to contribute to the reconstruction of the Two Holy Shrines at its own expense, provided it would inform the Saudi government in advance of any plans in this concern.

The government policy statement read out at the ceremony marking the inauguration of the Egyptian Parliament on November 21, 1936, paid tribute to the final agreement between the Egyptian and Saudi governments. The statement said, "We refer with gratification to the successful negotiations between our government and the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which have settled outstanding questions, thus cementing our ties with that sisterly country. As a result of such settlement, the Mahmal ceremony shall be resumed, God willing, in the next season and the honorable Kiswa shall be dispatched to the House of Allah. Other traditions previously observed shall also be resumed, including the distribution of charity and the surplus of investing wakfs of Two Holy Shrines at the holy lands, spending such sums on the poor of Hejaz, reconstruction of the Two Holy Shrines and repair of facilities thereof<sup>66</sup>. There was considerable popular and world reaction to the 1936 Egyptian-Saudi Treaty. It also impacted the course of later events.

#### **Fourth: Treaty Outcomes:**

- **Political Outcomes:**

By virtue of the Treaty, Egypt recognized Saudi Arabia as an independent and sovereign state, and thus political relations between the two countries were normalized, and diplomatic and consular representation were exchanged. An Egyptian Commission was established in Jeddah in 1937 and was headed by Minister Plenipotentiary Abdulrahman Azzam, while in the previous year (1936) a Saudi Commission was established in Egypt under Sheikh Fauzan Al-Sabiq. Diplomatic representation was upgraded to the level of Minister Plenipotentiary in 1938<sup>67</sup>.

As a result of the treaty and the normalization of relations, the two countries sought to further strengthen their ties and this was evident from the two countries' attitude towards current Arab issues, including partial Arab unity schemes, such as the Fertile Crescent and Greater Syria; the establishment of the Arab League, the Palestine issue, and the Egyptian national question. The Treaty was thus a notable step towards Arab rapprochement in general and the liquidation of older differences<sup>68</sup>.

Egyptian and Saudi attitudes towards the Fertile Crescent scheme, set forth by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Said, and the Greater Syria scheme proposed by the Emir Abdulla of Transjordan since 1942, were identical. Both schemes called for a union of Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Palestine, in addition to Iraq. The Egyptian and Saudi sides rejected the two schemes which imposed 'a union formed by one Arab entity on another'.

When talks on the establishment of the Arab League started, the Egyptian side sought to convince King Abdulaziz that the scheme was genuine and would not be used as an instrument for the realization of the proposed Hashemite schemes. The League, the Egyptians argued, would comprise independent and sovereign member states. The Saudi delegate eventually signed the Alexandria Protocol. He had withheld signing until he had consulted King Abdulaziz.

Ties were further strengthened when King Farouk paid a surprise visit to Saudi Arabia in 1945; what came to be known as the Radwa Meeting<sup>69</sup>. The visit lasted more than a week. King Saud had received the Egyptian King at a city wholly made of tents set up on an extensive plain between Sharm Yanbo' and Jebel Radwa<sup>70</sup>. The purpose of the visit was to further strengthen ties between the two countries and to convince King Abdulaziz to sign the Charter of the Arab League. Upon King Farouk's return home, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry issued a statement which said, "The visit was a personal one and was not designed to examine certain issues. However, it was greater than any state visit aimed at solving certain problems because it had reinforced agreements so far reached and has opened the road for fresh ones. It has settled certain matters, cemented the bonds and created friendship and above all has made the unity of the Arabs a solid matter"<sup>71</sup>.

- **Economic Outcomes**

As a result of the Treaty, the Egyptian government has implemented most of the projects proposed by Talaat Harb. The Saudi government had asked Talaat Harb to nominate an Egyptian road engineer to inspect the Mecca-Jeddah-Medina roads and to suggest the best measures that could be taken to ensure comfortable movement of pilgrims on such road. Talaat Harb communicated the matter to the Egyptian Minister of Transport and the Minister provided him with a list of capable Egyptian engineers to choose from. Meanwhile, the Egyptian Consulate in Jeddah requested the nomination of twenty educated youth to join companies operating in Hejaz.

In this regard, Al-Ahram stated: "Misr Bank is directing considerable attention to the Arab countries. HE Talaat Harb Pasha has visited Hejaz to examine its economic and municipal conditions and he has sent delegates who have undertaken several research works there. The outcomes of such research works were submitted to His Majesty King Abdulaziz and government officials, as well as to His Majesty the King of Egypt. His Majesty King Abdulaziz has sent Harb a letter admiring this effectual action and the valuable data which is now under examination by the bodies concerned"<sup>72</sup>.

Al Ittihad commented editorially on Talaat Harb's efforts saying, "HE Talaat Harb is credited for having contributed the greater share in planning such projects and Harb has already begun execution thereof." The same paper published a report sent by one of the engineers about "general conditions in the Hejaz from the administrative and technical points of view." The report dealt with the water supply problem, the establishment of industrial schools, the embroidering and silk industry development and the establishment of a mechanical workshop in Mecca. It also dealt with projects for water distribution in towns, the electrification of Mecca and the building of a road between Jeddah and Mecca as well as a railway road between the two cities, the establishment of a spinning and weaving factory, a meat processing plant in Mena and a date palm processing plant. It also proposed a project for repairing Al-Mashaar Al-Haram and other restoration projects"<sup>73</sup>.

In October 1939, and as per Article Five of the Egyptian-Saudi Treaty stipulating that Egypt shall voluntarily undertake restoration of the Two Holy Shrines and repair of facilities related thereto, contacts were made between the two countries so that the Egyptian government may undertake a project for paving the road between Jeddah and Arafat and also to pave dangerous parts of the Medina-Mecca road as well as water and electricity supply projects for Mecca. An agreement in this connection was signed by the two sides on October 5, 1939.

On May 31, 1941, a trade agreement was concluded by the two countries to enhance trade relations between them. It provided for the export-import of certain goods between the two countries and for a reciprocal most favored nation clause with regard to crops and products exported by either country for consumption in the other, or for re-export to other countries. The agreement also stipulated that Egypt would organize

an exhibition for its products in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government provided the space required for that exhibition and welcomed Egyptian trade missions, especially during the pilgrimage season.

- **Social Outcomes:**

The treaty cemented the already close ties between the Egyptian and Saudi peoples. It was characterized by friendship, cordiality and brotherhood between two peoples bound by the ties of religion, language, history and blood. It has been proved that Arabian tribes have always existed in Egypt as they emigrated from Arabia via the Red Sea and Sinai.

- **Religious Outcomes:**

With the signing of the Treaty, Egyptian authorities began to implement its articles. First, measures were taken for the Mahmal to travel to Hejaz in the 1937 season. Egyptian newspapers published details regarding the cost of the Kiswa which had amounted to about LE 8,000 in 1925, the last year in which the Mahmal was dispatched before the tradition was halted. This is in addition to the cost of the soldiers who escorted the Mahmal throughout its journey to Hejaz. The newspapers also published a copy of the letter sent by the Ministry of the Interior to the Royal Court to endorse the assignment of King Farouk's special calligrapher to write down the statements to be inscribed on the Kiswa as per the Treaty. Those words were to be embroidered using gold and silver threads on the special silk material manufactured for the Kiswa. The newspapers further published a copy of the letter sent by the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Agriculture to provide the camels that would carry the Kiswa to the honorable Ka'aba or to purchase two fit camels to be trained in time for the mission<sup>74</sup>.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health decided to dispatch a medical mission to the Hejaz as per the traditions that have been previously observed in order to look after the pilgrims, Egyptians and otherwise. The Pilgrimage Mission for that year was headed by Mahmoud Bassiuni, Speaker of the Senate. The Ministry of War suggested to the Ministry of the Interior the erection of a grand marquee at Salaheddin Square, adjacent to the Citadel, to ceremonially launch the Mahmal on February 12, 1937. The Cabinet also issued a decree forming a special committee to supervise reconstruction and restoration projects at the Two Holy Shrines and the distribution of charity to the poor of Hejaz.<sup>75</sup> The Mahmal of that year was dispatched as per the provisions of the treaty.

- **Scientific and Cultural Outcomes:**

The Treaty also resulted in dispatching a group of Egyptian teachers for Saudi schools as per a request by the Saudi Education Directorate. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia

dispatched a mission comprising students to continue their education at Egyptian schools and at Al-Azhar.

Within the context of scientific, cultural and religious cooperation between the two countries, the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar, Sheikh Mustafa Al-Maraghi, received from King Abdulaziz a collection of valuable Arabic and Islamic books and the Grand Sheikh ordered them placed in the library of Al Azhar<sup>76</sup>.

Commenting editorially on such developments Saut Al-Hejaz said, "Egypt is the closest Arab country to Saudi Arabia due to the bonds of Arabism, locality, language and religion." The paper described Egypt as 'dearer to the hearts of Saudis in view of what it offers to their children, the best of science and business'<sup>77</sup>. Um Al-Qoura said editorially that "Saudi Arabia appreciates Egypt's care of Saudi students"<sup>78</sup>.

• **Administrative Outcomes:**

Among the other outcomes of the Treaty were Saudi attempts to duplicate many of Egypt's administrative systems. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry received a message from the Egyptian Consul in Jeddah stating that a member of the Saudi Shura (Consultative) Council said that the Council intended to amend a set of laws and regulations and that in this connection it was interested in reviewing the systems defining departmental jurisdiction at the Egyptian Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry diverted that request to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Minister ordered that the necessary measures be taken in this connection<sup>79</sup>.

Meanwhile the Saudi government asked the Municipality Department in Egypt to dispatch an engineer to supervise repair of the Mecca-Medina road and the Egyptian government immediately responded to this request.

Since then, Egypt became the principal source of expertise sought by Saudi Arabia for the building of a new state.

In short, a new era had been ushered in for the two countries. Relations between them were dominated by solidarity and brotherhood following the signing of the 1936 Treaty. All outstanding issues were cordially settled and the era of tension and estrangement was over. The capabilities of the two peoples combined to ensure progress and development. Bridges of cooperation were thus built in the best interests of the two brotherly peoples.

Hence, one better understands the importance attached to the 1936 Treaty which was seen as a dividing line in the relations between the two countries.



## **Epilogue:**

Based on the above review of the Egyptian-Saudi 1936 Treaty, the following remarks may be made:

- Differences between the Kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Egypt were but differences between their two Kings, Abdulaziz and Fuad, respectively. The main reason for such personal differences was King Fuad's ambition to become Caliph. He was under the impression that what King Abdulaziz was doing to tighten his hold and spread his influence in the region was but a prelude to declare himself Caliph, especially after he had gained full control of Hejaz and thus the Two Holy Shrines were now under his jurisdiction. However, King Abdulaziz did not intend to declare himself Caliph; he declared himself King of Hejaz as per the wishes of the people of Hejaz. He did not send a delegation to the Caliphate Conference in Cairo because he believed that it was designed to support King Fuad's claims for the Caliphate and, such claims, if realized, would constitute an infringement on King Abdulaziz's sovereignty over the Two Holy Shrines which were within his sphere of influence. Moreover, King Abdulaziz had convened an Islamic Conference in Mecca to probe ways and means of ensuring the comfort of the pilgrims. Because he wanted to safeguard his country against any foreign intervention, he opposed the military force escorting the Mahmal as it amounted to encroachment upon his country's sovereignty. Noting that in the reign of his predecessor, some Hejazis had relinquished their nationality, he issued the nationality law. Thus, King Abdulaziz's measures to tighten his hold over his territories were misinterpreted by King Fuad who insisted on withholding recognition of Abdulaziz as King of Hejaz.
- Several attempts were made to remove causes of tension between the two countries and to achieve rapprochement. Most of these initiatives came from the Saudi side. King Abdulaziz was deeply embittered as King Fuad snubbed him, did not respond to his initiatives and refused to recognize him. However, attempts made by popular forces were greatly effective in bridging the wide gap between the two countries. Saudis were deeply impressed by the successful endeavors made by an Egyptian popular delegation that managed to put an end to the Saudi-Yemeni war and the conclusion of a treaty between the two warring countries. They felt the next step should be the normalization of relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.
- Mohamed Talaat Harb had played a significant role in bridging the gap between the two countries as a prelude to the conclusion of a treaty between them. His visit to Saudi Arabia three months before conclusion of the Treaty was very effective. In addition, he is credited with having implemented several vital projects in Saudi Arabia and concluded two agreements, one relating to municipal projects in the Hejaz and the other connected with the promotion of economic relations between the two countries.

- Egyptians continued to pour into the Hejaz for the Pilgrimage, in spite of the fact that their government had let them down, declaring it was no longer responsible for their safety and comfort. This was a factor to be reckoned with in the popular drive to normalize relations between the two countries.
- On the other hand, there had been attempts at thwarting endeavors aimed at removing tension between the two countries.
- Shortly before his death, King Fuad completely changed his attitude towards Saudi Arabia and King Abdulaziz. This remarkable change was due to excessive popular pressure on the one hand, and a corresponding change in Britain's attitude as a friendship treaty with Egypt was being negotiated. In the meantime, the state of the world had affected the international balance of power, with Italy seeking to bring Saudi Arabia and Yemen closer to each other.
- The time available for negotiating the May 7, 1936 Egyptian-Saudi Treaty was so short (17 days only) as Prime Minister Ali Maher was in a hurry to get it concluded during the ten days deadline stipulated by the Egyptian constitution for the Cabinet to exercise the King's powers. That was why religious issues were deferred to a supplementary round of negotiations that was held in November.
- The Treaty as a whole was a victory to the Saudi side: Egypt recognized the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a sovereign and independent state and the name of King Abdulaziz was thus inscribed on the Kiswa. Meanwhile, Al Mahmal was denied its military escort and proceeds of the 'Two Shrines' wakfs were restored. The Treaty was thus in line with the Saudi policy of concluding agreements with neighboring countries.
- One of the significant outcomes of the Treaty was the establishment of cooperation between the two countries to help resolve Arab problems. The two countries were united against proposed partial Arab unity schemes. They were also united in promoting the creation of the Arab League and supporting the Palestine cause. The Treaty also opened the door for a vast exchange of visits and this was greatly effective in further strengthening ties between the two countries. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia supported Egypt's national cause and urged both Britain and the United States to settle that question.

## Endnotes

1. See Husam Mohamed Abdulmo'eti, *Al-Elaqat Al-Mesriya Al-HiJaziya Fil Qarn Al-Thamenashar*, Cairo, Egyptian General Book Authority, 1999 pp. 17-74
2. The Red Sea was the main outlet for the eastern trade and the only route to Hejaz since the Fatimide Era. See El-Sayed Abdulaziz Salem, *Al-Bahr Alahmar Fil Tarikh Al-Islami*, Alexandria, Moassasat Shabab AlJami'a, 1993, pp. 21-29.
3. See Nahla Anis Mohamed Mustafa, *Al Hijrat Al-Arabiya Ila Misr Waatharoha fi allahja Al-Masriya Wa Athar Zalek fil Mojtama: Kan Historical journal*, Cairo, XIX, March 2013, pp. 48-62
4. Among the reasons that led Britain to adopt a pro-Ibn Saud attitude rejection by Sherif Hussein of the Anglo-Hejazi Treaty which took three years to negotiate and his rejection of British intervention in Hejaz and Palestine. See Amin Al-Rihani, *Tarikh Majd Al-Hadith wa molhaqatoh*, Second edition, Beirut, 1954, pp. 397-308
5. Hafez Wahba, *Jazirat Al-Arab fi Al-Qarn Al-Eshreen*, second edition, Cairo. 1946, p250
6. On the basis that such a mission may report poor conditions and subsequently block the pilgrimage season. See Ameen Rihani, *Tarikh Majd*, pp. 397-398
7. Sami Mahran, *Hekayat Barlamaniya, (1866-1952)*, Cairo, Egyptian General Book Authority, 1999, p.58
8. Ra'fat Al-Sheikh, *Derasat Fi Al-Tarikh Al-Hadeeth Wal Moasser*, Zagazig, Maktabat Al-Dirasat Al-Tarikhia wal Elaqt Al-Dawliya,1983, p.112
9. Hafez Wahba, *Khamsoun Aaman Fi Jazirat Al-Arab*, second edition, Cairo,1860, p.131
10. Hafez Wahba, *Jazirat Al-Arab fi Al-Qarn Al-Eshreen*, , p. 256
11. What is meant here is what happened when the first Saudi state seized Hejaz and its attitude towards what were regarded as 'non-Islamic' customs, the demolition of domes, and removal of precious stones from covers of the Prophet's Tomb. See Ra'afat Al-Sheikh, *Al-Tarikh Al-Hadeeth*, p. 112
12. Ameen Fares Rihani, *Arabian Peak and Desert: Travels in Al-Yaman*, London, Constable and Co. Ltd, 1930, p.228
13. Abdulla Mohamed Arabawi, *Mawqif Misr Min Dam Bin Saud Lil Hejaz: 1924-1926*, Symposium on Egyptian-Saudi Relations in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Zagazig University in collaboration with the Islamic Universities Association, Sha'ban 1407/April 1987, Vol. I, p.13
14. Ra'afat Al-Sheikh, *Al-Tarikh Al-Hadeeth*, p. 113
15. Ismail Ahmad Baghi; Mahmloud Shaker, *Tarikh Al-Alam Al-Islami Al-Hadeeth and Al-Moa'sser (987-1400 H: 1492-1980)*, Riyadh, Darul Marrikh, 1955, Vol. I, Al Janah Al-Asyawi, p.77
16. See Qassem Abdu Qassem; Ali El-Sayed Ali, *Al-Ayyabioun Wa Al-Mamalik: Al-Tarikh Al-Siyassi Wa Al-Askari*, Giza, Ain Albohouth wa Al-Dirasat, 1855, pp.128-132
17. Mohazmed Hassanein Haikal, *Muzakkirat Fi Al-Siyassa Al-Masriya*, 1951, Cairo, Maktabet Al-Nahda, Vol. I, p. 401
18. Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi Wa Al-Ijtima'ei Lil Mamlaka Al-Arabiya Al-Saudiya (1902-1932)*, Cairo, Girls' College, Ain-Shams University, 1985, p.172 (Ph. D thesis)

19. Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi*, p. 173
20. Hafez Wahba, *Khamsoun Aaman Fi Jazirat Al-Arab*, p.132
21. Op. cit. p.145
22. Sayed Ahmad Mohamed, *Al-Mamlaka Al-Arabiya Al-Saudiya wa Seyasatoha Al-Kharijiya, (1924-1953)*, Cairo, Girls' College, Ain Shams University, 1975, p.271 (Ph.D. thesis)
23. *Bolsheviks* is the name that was given to supporters of Lenin, founder of the Communist Party in Russia. It is a word of Russian origin and refers to *majority*.
24. Sayed Ahmad Mohamed, *Al-Mamlaka Al-Arabiya Al-Saudiya wa Seyasatoha Al-Kharijiya, (1924-1953)*, p.272
25. H. St. John Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, London: Erbest Benn Ltd. 1955, p.299
26. Madiha Ahmad Darwish, *Al-Elaqat Al-Masriya Al-Saudiya (1924-1936)*, supervised by El-Sayed Rajab Harraz, Giza, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University (unpublished Ph.D. thesis)
27. Sayed Ahmad Mohamed, *Al-Mamlaka Al-Arabiya Al-Saudiya wa Seyasatoha Al-Kharijiya*, p. 274.
28. Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi*, p. 174. *Some argue that Hejaz was a poor country living on Haj, especially the Egyptian Caravan. See Nabeeh Bayyoumi, Tatawor Fikrat Al-Qawmiya Al-Arabiya Fi Masr, the Egyptian General Book Authority, 1975, p. 116*
29. Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi*, p. 127
30. Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.318
31. Ibn Saud's call for convening that conference was responded to only by a faction of Indian Muslims and the Caliphate Association there. It was their view that Hejaz should be governed by an authority representing Islamic peoples in the whole world. The people of Najd were worried that such a view might prevail and therefore hastened to declare Ibn Saud as their king. See Ameen Rihani, *History of Najd*, p. 427
32. Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi*, p. 128.
33. Fakhreddin Al-Ahmadi Al-Zawahri, *Al-Azhar Wa Al-Siyassa: Min Muzakkirat Sheikh Al-Zawahri (Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar)*, I'timad Printing House, 1364H:1945, p.215
34. - The Conference was held in Mecca in 1926. Ibn Saud insisted that it should not deal with political issues, particularly determination of the status of Hejaz. However, the conference failed as did that of Cairo.
35. Madiha Ahmad Darwish, *Al-Elaqat Al-Masriya Al-Saudiya (1924-1936)*, p.346, Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi*, p. 176.
36. Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi*, p. 176.
37. Among the tasks of the Egyptian *Tekkiya* were treatment of the sick, feeding the needy. It was haunted by destitute bedouins, Hejazis and Najdis as well as by the poor in general. See Madiha Darwish *Al-Elaqat Al-Masriya Al-Saudiya (1924-1936)*, p.353.
38. Madiha Darwish *Al-Elaqat Al-Masriya Al-Saudiya (1924-1936)*, pp.351-352, Nazik Zaki, *Al-Takween Al-Siyassi*, p. 177.
39. Tiran Island is located at the base of the Gulf of Aqaba in the direction of Ras Mohamed; Sanafir lies to the east of Tiran. The two islands dominated the Gulf's entrance. They

- were often deserted and were only used as a base for fishing. However, as interest in the Gulf of Aqaba heightened, they gained particular importance as they dominate its entrance. Madiha Darwish *Al-Elaqat Al-Masriya Al-Saudiya (1924-1936)*, p.177.
40. See Hamed Sultan, *Moshkelat Khalij Al-Aqaba*, Giza, Arab Research & Studies Institute, Cairo University, 1967, p.16; Helmi Abdulkarim Alzoghbi, *Al-Istratigiya Al-Sohuniya fil Madi, Al-Hader wal Mostaqbal*, Shoun Arabiya journal, published by the General Secretariat of the Arab League, Tunis,, No,47, September 1986, pp.194-203
  41. On the role of Al-Wafd Party in Egyptian political life, see Mohamed Faheem Amin, *Al-Wafd Wa Dawroho Al-Tarikhhi Fi Al-Haraka Al-Wataninya Wal Ommaliya Wal Igtimaiya*, Cairo Darul Fikr Al-Arabi, 1992, pp. 43-237
  42. Ra'fat Al-Sheikh, *Tarikh Al-Arab Al-Mo'asser*, Giza Ayn Al-Dirasat Wal Bohouth, 1996, p.180
  43. *Al-Ahram* newspaper, April 9, 1936, No. 18436
  44. Nabih Bayyoumi, *Al-Qawmiya Al-Arabiya*, pp. 121-122
  45. Hafez Wahba, *Khamsoun Aman*, p.146
  46. Madiha Darwish, *Addawla Al-Saudiya*, p.440
  47. That Treaty was but new fetters binding Egyptians. See Mohamed Abdulrahman Hussein, *Nedal Sha'b Misr (1798-1056)*, Alexandria, Monsh'at Al-Ma'aref, 1970, pp.119-128
  48. According to the constitution, the Cabinet exercises all the King's powers. See Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, *Muzakkirat*, Vol. I, p. 408
  49. *Al-Ahram* newspaper, April 12, 1936, No. 18439
  50. Ayda El-Sayed, *Elaqat Misr Bi Dowal Al-Mashreq Al-Arabi (1936-1952)*, supervised by Salah Al-Aqqad, Cairo, Girls' College, Ain Shams University, 1985, p.198 ( Ph.D. thesis)
  51. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya min Mo'ahadat 1836 bayn Misr wa Al-Saudiya*, Symposium on Egyptian-Saudi Relations in the first half of the 2th Century, Sharqiya, Zagazig University, in collaboration with the Islamic Universities Association, Sh'ban 1407 H: April 1087, Vol. II pp. 20-21
  52. Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, p.299
  53. Nabih Bayyoumi, *Al-Qawmiya Al-Arabiya*, p.129
  54. Ayda El-Sayed, *Elaqat Misr Bi Dowal Al-Mashreq Al-Arabi (1936-1952)*, p. 198
  55. *Al-Waqaei Al-Masriya*, May 11, 1936, No. 16
  56. Madiha Darwish *Al-Dawla Al-Saudiya*, pp.361-362
  57. Following the resignation of Nassim Pasha's government, Ali Maher's transition Cabinet took over until parliamentary elections took place (for both the House of Deputies and the Senate and those were scheduled for May 5, 1936). Four days before that date, King Fuad died and all his constitutional powers went to the Cabinet for ten days ending on May 8 when the two Houses of Parliament would be sworn in and meet on the next day (May 9) when the Regency Envelope was to be opened and the Regents took the constitutional oath. Thereupon, the Cabinet resigned and the majority government took over. This what exactly had happened as Ali Maher resigned on May 10 and Mustafa Al Nahhas and his majority *Wafd* Cabinet were sworn in. Mohamed Hassanein Haikal, *Muzakkirat* Vol. I, pp. 406-407

58. On the Cabinets headed by Nustafa Al-Nahhas, See Mahmoud Metwalli, *Mustafa Al-Nahhas Za'im Al-Umma*, Cairo, General Information Authority 2008 (*Rowwad Al-Haraka Al-Watania* series: 9) pp.43-54
59. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.27
60. *Al-Moqattam* newspaper, 4/11/1936, No.14621
61. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, pp. 26, 27
62. *Al-Moqattam* newspaper, 16/11/1936, No.14633
63. *Al-Moqattam* newspaper, 18/11/1936, No.14635
64. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.33
65. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.35
66. Madiha Darwish *Al-Dawla Al-Saudiya*, p.453
67. Sayed Ahmad Mohamed, *Al-Mamlaka Al-Arabiya Al-Saudiya*, p.282
68. Nabih Bayyoumi, *Al-Qawqmiya Al-Arabiya*, p.123
69. Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, pp. 338-339
70. Farouk Othman Abaz, *Zeyaret Al-Malek Saud Ibn Abdulaziz Li Misr wa Atharoha fi Da'im Al-Elaqat Al-Saudiya Al-Masriya* (Rajab 15, 1373 H: March 2, 1954, Saudi Addarah magazine accessed on 16/10/2013 on the link: [www.darah.info](http://www.darah.info))
71. Ayda El-Sayed, *Elaqat Misr Bi Dowal Al-Mashreq Al-Arabi (1936-1952)*, p.213
72. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.38
73. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.44
74. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.42
75. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.43
76. Ibrahim Abdulla, *Mawqef Al-Sahafa Al-Masriya*, p.47
77. Sayed Ahmad Mohamed, *Al-Mamlaka Al-Arabiya Al-Saudiya*, p.282
78. Madiha Darwish *Al-Dawla Al-Saudiya*, p.456
79. Madiha Darwish *Al-Dawla Al-Saudiya*, p. 456

# Here Passed the Caravans

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Khaled Saleh

On an extremely hot noon, and as the wind blows on Mleiha, it would be impossible to imagine that this region had once embraced several aspects of civilization long before modern technologies enabled man to overcome excessive heat through air conditioning, and to quench his thirst by desalinating water.

In this article, we shall attempt to dissipate the mirage and pinpoint the region's historical facts so that a relative picture may be drawn of life as it was lived some two thousand years ago. The region had been a busy hub haunted by caravans and its fertile oasis had attracted merchants.

We will also try to reconstruct life at that time on the basis of archeological finds and comparing such finds and conclusions drawn therefrom with counterparts discovered at contemporary oases and villages. It is sincerely hoped that such static objects shall tell so much of the people who had made them.

## **Echo of the Mattock:**

While oil has brought immeasurable wealth to countries of the Arabian Gulf and has lifted their peoples up from destitute to prosperity, it has incidentally benefited the culture and history of those countries. Some of the oil explorers of the 1930s had had interests other than the *Black Gold*. They were also looking for certain things no less precious than gold of all colors and—for conscious and advanced peoples—even more precious: artefacts and monuments that tell of peoples' history, preserve memories of nations and trace their true identities. Mattocks had thus stricken the land of the Emirates and other Gulf countries and so the glare of a deeply rooted past began to dazzle the eyes and engage the brains. Abu Dhabi had had the honor of leading that race.

## **Umm An Nar Lights up the Road:**

Bahrain has been the first Gulf entity to amaze the world as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Durand's archeological finds revealing an ancient civilization<sup>1</sup>. However, the British archeologist's endeavors had paved the way for archeological excavations in sisterly Abu Dhabi. In 1959, a Danish excavation team previously engaged in Bahrain





It unearthed Umm An Nar's circular necropolises which go back to more than 4,000 years, thus confirming the importance of the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula which stands in the middle between civilizations dating back to thousands of years: those of the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, Delmon and Yemen which had had cultural, social, political and economic impact due to close human and geographical interaction between them.

Excavation missions continued to come to the Emirates one after another; the most important being the Iraqi mission which was the first to function after the rise of the Union (United Arab Emirates/UAE). It was an outcome of a cultural agreement between the UAE and the Republic of Iraq. Signed in 1971, that agreement had stipulated the dispatch of Iraqi excavation missions to the UAE<sup>3</sup>.

### Name and meaning

There is no historical source that indicates the origin of the name of *Mleiha* (also *Imleiha* in the local dialect of its people and the people of Sharjah in general). However, the word in Arabic means *good looking, pleasant or pleasing*<sup>4</sup>.



Archaeological sites in the Central and Eastern regions of the Emirate of Sharjah  
Map showing the Mleiha Site and the more important sites where the local mission worked

### **Cardinal Points:**

Late in 1972, excavation works started in Sharjah thus revealing a rich history buried in the sands. The excavation campaign was encouraged by the Ruler of the Emirate, Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohamed Al-Qassimi, himself a man captivated by history and particularly conscious of his nation's contribution to human civilization. HH invited the Iraqi excavation mission to visit Sharjah, and examine Mleiha. The mission was headed by the late Tariq Mazloun and Monir Taha who were supervised by the late Mohamed Ali Mustafa. Sheikh Dr. Sultan urged the mission to concentrate on Mleiha where invaluable artefacts had already been unearthed. Those included inscriptions dating back to the pre-Islamic era<sup>5</sup>. The mission immediately conducted surveys at various parts of the Emirate starting on January 20, 1973. The surveys included four sites in Mleiha and continued until April 28, 1973<sup>6</sup>. In the first site, the mission unearthed clay fragments with red lines dating back to the period between the fourth and second centuries BC. Also discovered were the pillars of a mud brick building consisting of a number of chambers.

At a nearby farm, human remains were found in a square tomb, together with some artefacts dating back to the same time. However, the site was exposed to looting and damage a long time ago. In the third site, another square tomb was unearthed, but like the other one it was exposed to looting and damage. Among the artefacts found in that site were amphora handles with ancient Greek writings, a matter which led members of the mission to believe that the tomb belonged to a Greek who had lived there more than 2,200 years ago<sup>7</sup>. However, they gave up that impression when subsequent excavation works had proved that whereas the handles were those of an amphora used to carry goods from one place to another, they do not necessarily indicate the presence of a Greek community in Mleiha<sup>8</sup>. In the fourth site, parts of a big house, labelled *The Palace*, were found. It was built of mud bricks and its internal walls were coated with gypsum<sup>9</sup>, a sign of its wealthy owner.

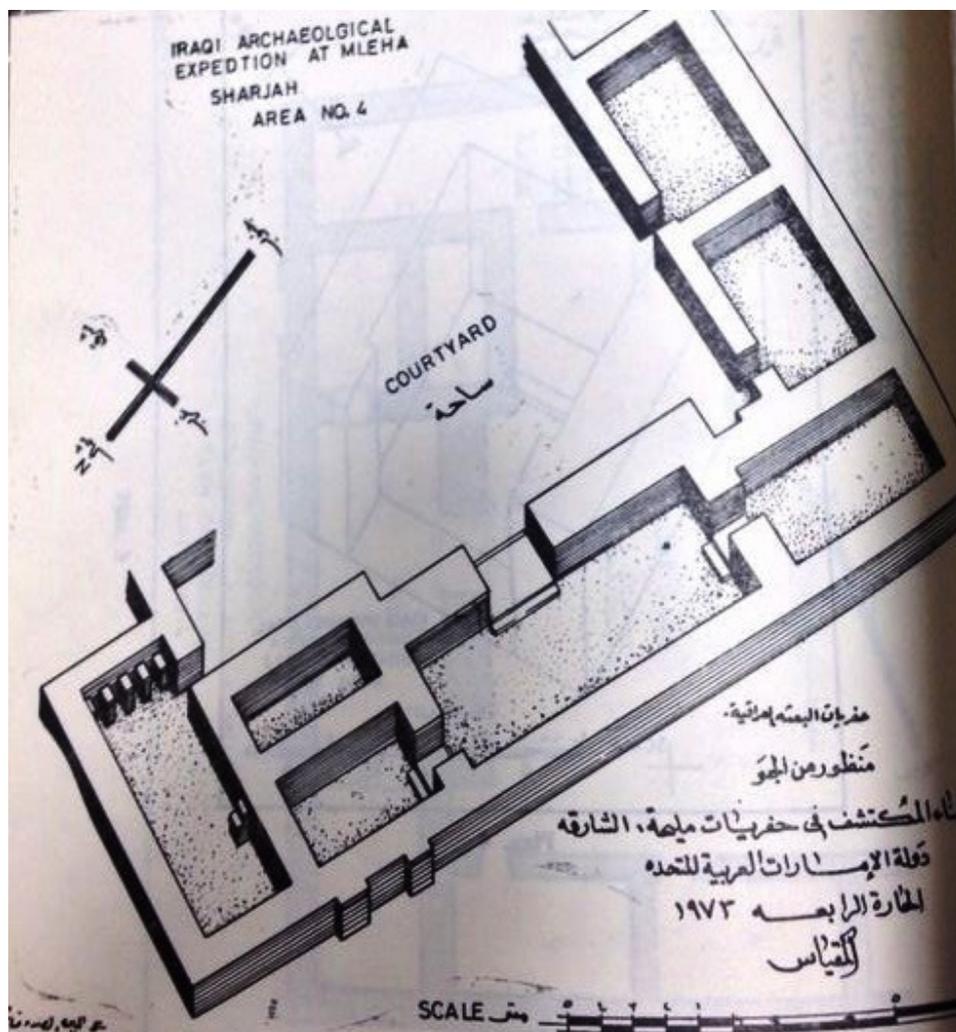
The late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan had visited the Mleiha site in March 1973 during his tour of the Central Region of Sharjah. He inspected the archaeological finds and was briefed on the archaeologists' initial impressions regarding the site. With his instinctive vision, HH suggested that that site must have been of great agricultural and commercial importance. This was historically proved later. HH also stressed that such archeological finds must be introduced to citizens and examined by scholars and those concerned with the Emirates' civilization so that all may be aware of the history and civilization of this country; for 'the state that has no past shall have no future'<sup>10</sup>.

As Sharjah had no museum at that time, the unearthed artefacts were handed over to the central National Museum at Al-Ain which embraced earlier archeological finds from all the Emirates<sup>11</sup>.

An examination of the early photos of the Mleiha treasure would reveal signs of

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demographic stability several centuries BC. Those signs also indicate contacts with adjacent regions, spreading as far as the Mediterranean basin, as suggested by the building of *The Palace* referred to earlier. Here a question poses itself: Why Mleiha?



Plan published by Somer magazine in 1974 showing side of the Palace discovered.

## **Daughter of the Mountain:**

Mleiha lies at a fertile plain in the Central Region of the Emirate of Sharjah, 50 km to the east of Sharjah city and to the south of Al Dhaid. It owes its existence to the mountain as geologists believe it is part of the gravel plain consisting of deposits carried away by waters falling from Al-Hajar Mountains over lengthy periods. As Mleiha is confined by a range of smaller mountains separating the gravel plain from the desert, the water coming from Al-Hajar Mountains in the east collide with the smaller mountains as they slide westward and are thus forced to run parallel to them to a distance allowing them to penetrate the ground, thus feeding subterranean water reservoirs. Meanwhile, the mud and sludge they carry are deposited in the plain thus rendering it more fertile. The plain's fertility is renewable as streams continue to flow through it and the small mountains protect it from desertification when westerly wind blows. The plain has thus become cultivable since ancient times with plenty of farms depending on underground water. Centuries-old wells have been discovered and these had functioned as alternative sources of water when rainfall was scarce. There are indications as to the huge amounts of water held by the Mleiha gravel plain during rainy periods<sup>12</sup>.

## **From the Stone Age:**

Mleiha is often referred to as a thriving commercial hub dating back from the first millennium BC to the beginnings of the first millennium AD. However, this should not obscure evidences of much earlier human settlements in the region found by archaeologists<sup>13</sup>. Among the most significant artefacts of the Stone Age unearthed in Mleiha were stone implements made of stone obtained from neighboring Faya Mountain and carved by skillful hands many thousands of years ago. These instruments were sharp enough to help feed empty stomachs on whatever preys that were available, far and near.

In a palm grove, a circular cemetery of the Umm An Nar type was discovered by a local excavation mission dispatched by the Sharjah Antiquities Department in 1998. It was used for collective burial in the third millennium BC. The mission unearthed bone remains and a quantity of local and imported pottery, stone decorated jars, bronze knives, arrow heads and ornaments. With its diameter of 13.85 meter, this is the second largest cemetery after that found in Sheml, Ras Al-Khaimah. It was built of stones of various sizes and its front was coated with regular lime stones. It has a northern entrance leading to eight burial chambers whose floors were covered with flat lime stone<sup>14</sup>.

## **Mleiha: Attraction factors and reasons for prosperity**

### **1. Water, the Origin of Life:**

Geographical and geological factors forming the land of the Emirates have affected the geographical distribution of archaeological sites<sup>15</sup> as man had traced sources of

living in order to determine the location of his existence and settlement.

Before the introduction of sea water desalination, demographic settlement in the Arabian Gulf was concentrated in and around water sources. Had it not been for pearl diving and some commercial interaction, there would have never been human settlements along the coast. This is due to the excessive heat in summer and dearth of water sources. Therefore, people settled in scattered villages around the streams descending therefrom. These watered people, animals and plants as rain waters have since time immemorial been deposited there and with each rainfall subterranean water reservoirs were continually filled and refilled<sup>16</sup>.

After the domestication of camels by the end of the second millennium BC, and with the availability of water, Mleiha became an important stop-over for caravans and eventually paved the way for the prosperity of the Arabian Peninsula in the latter part of the first millennium with the rise of the incense and myrrh trade which came from Yemen. Probably, Mleiha had become a market where caravans would exhibit their respective goods to the merchants coming from neighboring areas.

Mleiha's proximity to Al-Hajar Mountains secured adequate quantities of rainwater and this sometimes led to the formation of nearby pools since ancient times<sup>17</sup>. Surveys made by the local mission confirmed that the last filling of such pools was contemporary with Mleiha's prosperity era<sup>18</sup> and made available plenty of underground water. They also helped cultivate palm trees, grains and fruits and the raising of camels and cattle. It is also probable that fish from the coast had come to Mleiha where they were sold or bartered. Thus, Mleiha inhabitants, as well as passing caravans, had plenty of provisions and re-provisions<sup>19</sup>.

The presence of so many wells of significant width testifies to the density of Mleiha's population. It is quite possible that in the Hellenistic Era as well as in subsequent and earlier eras, underground water was available at a much lower depth than it is today<sup>20</sup>.

## **2. En Route:**

Accessibility is the primary factor that renders a certain spot of land a commercial hub. Another factor is its location among other areas so that it becomes intermediary. Such were aspects available to Mleiha; it lies at an area open to desert from the south and southwest extending to the Rub' Al-Khali (Empty Quarter) and this helped trade caravans to reach it without having to surmount barriers such as the mountains lying to the east of Mleiha.

Moreover, it lies on the Al-Jaw Plain which leads to the interior of Oman through which caravans could reach Mleiha. It is also located near valleys and passes that penetrate Al-Hajar Mountains from the east thus linking it to the villages scattered along the Mountains foot and beyond on the Batinah coast. Additionally, the Mleiha Mountains lying on the west are low and look like hills and these have exits leading to the Arabian Gulf on the west<sup>21</sup>.



View of archeological excavations in Mleiha (Source: Sharjah Antiquities Museum)

### **3. Between Two Seas:**

Mleiha lies between two coasts; it is only 60 km from the Arabian Gulf westward and the same distance from the Sea of Oman eastward. It took a traveler from Mleiha three to six days to reach either coast on foot, and two to four days on camel or horseback<sup>22</sup>.

Among the ports that witnessed Mleiha's prosperity at different times were Ed-Dur harbor on the Arabian Gulf (close to today's Um Al-Quwain), and Deba harbor on the Gulf of Oman<sup>23</sup>. It was likely through those harbors that goods carried by the caravans coming from Yemen were exported to Mleiha and from there to the eastern coast of the Arabian Gulf with Persia as their destination. The journey back to Yemen also passed through Mleiha. Thus, Mleiha had been an appropriate stopover for trade caravans between the two countries as it was closer to both than harbors of eastern Arabia. Trade passage through Mleiha was much easier for two reasons: the land route between the kingdoms of Yemen and Mleiha was much shorter than that between them and Al-Jahraa in Eastern Arabia; the second was proximity of the two harbors to the eastern coast of the Arabian Gulf<sup>24</sup>.

Thus, Mleiha possessed attractive factors due to its geographical location and resources. As archeological excavations confirmed, it was part of the incense route

and a stopover for caravans to rest and re-supply. It was also an intermediary between the civilizations of Yemen and Persia and a market for neighboring Omani territories.

What are the available evidences? And what is the actual value of the incense and myrrh trade that made Mleiha a major stopover for caravans?

### **Impact of the Incense Trade on Arabia:**

Students of the history of the Arabian Peninsula from the start of human existence to the discovery of oil will not fail to realize that it consisted of an inhabited southern section and a northern Bedouin one;<sup>25</sup> no kingdom had risen in pre-Islamic eras except in Yemen.

Yemeni kingdoms most likely began to emerge since the second millennium BC. Those kingdoms included Ma'in in Al-Joaf and Hadhramaut which at its zenith included Dhofar in the east, and Bijan in the west and entities in-between; Qutban in and around Bijan and Sheba, the most famous kingdom which for some time included almost all of Yemen. In the south, there were the Kingdom of Usan and the Kingdom of Hemayr which had inherited all those kingdoms at a later stage<sup>26</sup>. The rise of those kingdoms coincided with the domestication of camels by the end of the second millennium BC<sup>27</sup> somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, probably Hadhramaut<sup>28</sup>. The domestication of camels brought about a revolution in land transport due to the camels' exceptional capabilities, especially in desert navigation. It helped establish land routes for the incense and myrrh trade<sup>29</sup>. Such goods were the main source of those kingdoms' fortunes in the first millennium BC and the early centuries AD. It was on the camel's back that the glory of those kingdoms was established. The wealth also extended to the stations where the caravans used to stop over for rest and re-supply across Arabia from south to north and from the east along the coasts of the Arabian Gulf.

Oriental perfumes blended with oil, myrrh and spices were used in embalming as well as in sterilization and the treatment of diseases. The smoke of burning *Oud* (incense sticks) used to fill the atmosphere during wedding ceremonies and burial rituals as well as other religious occasions as per Old World customs. Therefore, incense sticks and their country of origin, *i.e.* southern Arabia, were held as sacred<sup>30</sup>. The stopovers were thus converted into commercial centers and markets frequented by caravans for rest and resupply. Merchants of the caravans used to sell some of the goods they carried at the stopovers in order to satisfy the needs of the local people and those who came to them for one reason or another, bedouins and urban people alike.

Among such stopover stations were Najran and Fao in the south, and Hajr and Jahraa (presumably today's Thaj)<sup>31</sup> in eastern Arabia. Their peoples became wealthy and could afford to purchase the most precious goods from markets of the world. This is testified by such archeological finds as the golden masks that date back to that era. Arabia became renowned, *Happy Arabia (Felix)* as the Greeks fondly called it, especially



Burner alabaster imported from Yemen  
(found at a tomb in Mleiha)

the kingdoms of Yemen, noting their people's wealth as evidenced by the palaces and magnificent temples they had erected, the rich clothes and ornaments they wore, and world goods that were available to them. Thus, incense and myrrh were the Arab's *first oil* whose revenue was used to import goods beyond imagination.

The Greek historian Strabo (64 BC-19 AD) states that Sheban and Garhai (probably Al-Gerrah) were the richest tribes as they had a significant share of the perfume trade. They used gold and silver instruments and objects including beds tripods, basins and drinking vessels, not to mention their magnificent houses whose doors, walls and roofs were richly colored and plated with ivory, gold, silver and precious stones<sup>32</sup>.

The Roman historian Pliny regrets describing Arabia as 'happy' saying it did not deserve that epithet; it was only

the 'Lower Gods' that had granted it that status, he argued, adding that it was 'so extravagant even in its death rituals and this was the reason for its *apparent happiness*.' 'Extravagance', he said, 'was manifested in burning large quantities of incense as part of the death rituals while incense was originally meant to serve the gods.' Pliny relates a story reflecting the extravagance of the Roman Emperor Nero during the funeral of his wife Poppaea Sabina when 'he burnt incense equal to the entire annual production in Arabia'<sup>33</sup>.

The Holy Quran mentions great wealth, and warns of the effects of the luxury of Sheba (a kingdom in Yemen) and how its people had not recognized God Almighty's blessings:

"And We set between them and the towns which We had blessed, towns easy to be seen, and We made the stage between them easy (saying): Travel in them safely both by night and day." Sheba:18

Interpreting this Quranic verse, Ibn Kathir refers to the great wealth and prosperous living the people of Sheba had enjoyed so much so that travelers had no need to carry provisions as they were travelling through closely connected villages with plenty





An alabaster jar imported from Yemen and found at a tomb in Mleiha

of fruitful trees. They would stop over in any of those villages and collect whatever they needed for the next round of their journey. The majority of interpreters are at one that the villages referred to in the verse are those of Syria because travelers and merchants used to travel safely from Yemen to Syria passing through connected villages by day and at night<sup>34</sup>. This implies that the entire Arabian Peninsula was wealthy and prosperous and had plenty of 'connected villages', these probably being commercial stopovers used by caravans for rest and resupply as we have stated earlier.

### **Arabia Peninsula Attracts Alexander the Great:**

Alexander the Great, who invaded the Arab Orient as he emerged from Greece, had sought to destroy the last strongholds of his enemies, the Persians, and to pursue their fleeing Emperor. He had achieved his objective when in 330 BC he seized their state and devastated its capital, Persepolis. Alexander then advanced eastward, annexing vast areas of Asia to his empire. In spite of all his victories, Arabia was always haunting Alexander the Great. In 325 BC he dispatched one of his commanders, Narcho's, at the head of a naval force consisting of 100-150 ships to explore the nature of the Arabian Gulf and its coasts from the Indus Delta to that of the Euphrates. Having successfully undertaken his mission, Narcho's was given a hero's reception by Alexander the Great at Babel and a large banquet was given in his honor. This simply shows that Alexander the Great was deeply interested in the Arabian Peninsula<sup>35</sup>.

It is quite possible that Alexander's interest in Arabia was generated by the intelligence he received that the Arabs of Yemen, having deciphered monsoon wind and directions thereof<sup>36</sup>, were now dominating the incense and spice trade, goods that they used to import from their countries of origin in India and East Asia and re-export to Mesopotamia and Egypt and from Egypt to Europe making the best use of the unique geographical location of Arabia between India and Europe. According to historical sources, Alexander came to know that acacia, myrrh and cinnamon were also grown in Arabia<sup>37</sup>.

Alexander the Great, thus began to prepare for invading Arabia by land and sea. However, he died in 323 BC before he could realize his dream. He had left behind an empire extending from the Chinese borders in the east to Greece in the west. It comprised an extraordinary blend of peoples and cultures. His commanders

shared that empire among themselves so that the Seljuks took over the western and central parts (including Iraq and Syria), while the Ptolemies ruled Egypt and part of Palestine<sup>38</sup>.

### **The Hellenistic Civilization... East and West merge:**

It was in the reign of Alexander the Great that a new civilization had emerged. It was a blend of the Western Greek civilization and the ancient civilizations of the Orient. An inevitable blend of cultures had emerged over the decades in the regions conquered by Alexander the Great in the Orient, thus forming what historians and researchers call the *Hellenistic Civilization*. This had lasted from the fourth century BC to the time of the Roman invasion of the Arab Orient in the first century BC.

At that time, the Arabian Peninsula was part of an expanding world trade network where the new Hellenistic kingdoms in the Arab Orient and Greece received the caravans carrying incense, spices, myrrh and other precious goods from Yemen. On their journey back, the caravans carried all sorts of goods from the Hellenistic world. Thus, there had been an active exchange of goods and with them cultural elements. Yemen also sought to recruit architects and builders to help add a Hellenistic touch to its temples and palaces<sup>39</sup>.

### **Mleiha Asserts its Presence on the Incense Route:**

From the outcome of 40 years of excavation at Mleiha, and in view of its natural factors of attraction and resources, it could be argued that it had been, together with its sisterly areas Gerrah, Najran, Mareb, Tamannou and Shabwa, active in the incense trade and accompanying goods as stated above. Thanks to its distinguished geographical location on the edge of the northern Arab desert and at the same distance from the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, Mleiha had contributed to shaping the new cultural reality that had embraced the regions referred to above. It had thus benefited from the extensive exchange between the Mediterranean basin, Arabia and the Iranian coast. This has been confirmed by archeological finds<sup>40</sup>. Mleiha was thus positioned on the route of that important trade and had its share of it; it had been its major station at southeastern Arabia. The following is a review of the conclusions drawn from examination of the said archeological finds.

### **First: Evidences of trade exchange and ties with Yemen and other countries:**

The first to attract the attention of Iraqi archaeologists were remains of an amphora with Greek writings<sup>41</sup>. This was the earliest evidence of Sharjah's connection with the European Mediterranean coasts; some Greek harbors and isles 2000 years ago. It is known that the Greeks and the Romans had then been in contact with Arabia as it was located on the route to India and China and as it produced or held goods much



Mleiha's Relations in the Incense Age

in demand in Europe<sup>42</sup>. This indicates that the amphora was part of the caravans moving along the incense route and some of them reached Mleiha to satisfy buyers' needs there. The same is true of the Roman glass vessels.

Meanwhile, contacts with Yemen are confirmed by the alabaster jars imported therefrom and were found in Mleiha, together with fragments of metallic pots with writings and inscriptions like those on similar pots found in sites in Yemen. At the Sharjah Antiquities Museum are displayed Hadhramaut coins of the *tetra drachma* category which were unearthed at Mleiha. An owl is inscribed on those coins, reminiscent of Athens coins<sup>43</sup>. Also found were clay jars imported from Bahrain, Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia.

## Second: Evidences of cultural unity between Mleiha and sisterly regions in Arabia

### 1. Written texts:

Texts were recorded on different materials: clay, stone, and metal plates<sup>44</sup>. The inscriptions on such materials raise more questions than the ones they answer regarding this commercial oasis. They include names of gods and persons without

indicating the nature of the political system and the prevailing economic conditions. Archeological finds have confirmed that people of Mleiha had used writing much more than the earlier residents of Sharjah did. Archeologists have unearthed inscriptions in the southern *Almosnad* style of writing (script handwriting) and others in Aramaic. This is in addition to inscriptions found on certain objects buried with their owners. However, most inscriptions have a religious character, particularly those unearthed in Yemen <sup>45</sup> and some other regions in Arabia. This suggests that writing was a monopoly at that time and was devoted to such purposes alone.



Tomb stone with inscriptions by Almosnad writing

### **Handwritten Texts (*Almosnad*):**

Among the archeological finds are several clay and metal pots bearing southern *Almosnad* writings. *Almosnad* was the language of southern Arabia and had originated in Yemen and was common in Oman. Many of the Arabs of Central and Eastern Arabia as well as Arabs from some of the northern parts had borrowed that language. Perhaps, the most important *Almosnad* text was that found by a Mleiha Bedouin; it is an inscription on a tombstone. The Bedouin had dedicated it to the late Sheikh Khalid, then Ruler of Sharjah. The present Ruler, HH Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohamed Al-Qassimi, ordered the tombstone shifted to the British Museum so that

it may be deciphered<sup>46</sup>. He also asked a French archaeological mission excavating in Sharjah to examine it. The tombstone was kept at the Emiri Diwan (court) in Sharjah until the 1990s when it was dedicated by HH to the Sharjah Antiquities Museum when it was inaugurated.

The tombstone is made of limestone on which four lines were inscribed in *Almosnad*:  
*This is the tomb of Obaida Bin Aos, erected upon orders from Ghadana Bint Shamtaktbi Bint Eshq Aos*<sup>47</sup>.

The same inscription was interpreted slightly differently by Mr. Issa Abbas, Excavation Controller at the Sharjah Antiquities Department, as follows:

*Tomb and tombstone of Aos Zi Bint Ghadant Bint Tishmataktabi in the year Esh and Four.*

All in all, the text refers to a man, while *Teshment* refers to a certain god known in northern Arabia. According to the Hemyari Calendar, the date mentioned corresponds to 180 BC<sup>48</sup>.

- **Sporadic inscriptions in Almosnad script:**

These include inscriptions found on a pot in Mleiha referring to a certain god in pre-Islamic times and was the arch god for Mo'ain in Yemen<sup>49</sup>.

The local archaeological mission also unearthed in 1991 a piece of limestone with an inscription similar to those found on some coins unearthed in Mleiha and Ed-Dur. Inscribed on the reverse, the anchor is at the side of a person sitting on a throne. Some have linked this to certain Seljuk symbols, whereas Dr. Hamad Bin Sarai suggests that the anchor symbolizes the harbor of Ed-Dur<sup>50</sup>.

In Madha, Oman, a similar inscription was unearthed and another in Iraq in what was once the ancient Arab Hodr kingdom. It was suggested that it symbolizes builders, while Mr. Issa suggests that it is closer to a letter from *Almosnad* abbreviating the name of Hamn, a god embodying a trait of the sun<sup>51</sup>.

In Mleiha, too, a fragment of a bronze pot was unearthed on which a six-letter *Almosnad* word was written and were interpreted as meaning 'man of the sun', probably the name of the owner of the tomb in which it was found<sup>52</sup>.

- **Aramaic texts:**

Aramaic writing had prevailed in Syria and Iraq. Some Aramaic inscriptions on clay and vessels were unearthed in Mleiha, and the longest of these was on a metal plate found at a tomb. Was it an amulet? The inscription on this bronze plate, which is on display at the Sharjah Antiquities Museum, might be a funeral text. It was translated into Arabic as follows:

*This tomb and domed hall*

*Have been built in Moki*

*By Wahab Allat*

*May the person who loots it be cursed by Kahl and Manat*

*The memorial is for his sons*

*Their offset's share is to be determined*

*Through agreement between the living*

*There is no document transferring it to strangers, especially women<sup>53</sup> and their children and uncle.*

Apparently, *Moki* is the ancient name of Mleiha at the era of its prosperity. It is close to the name occurring in Persian sources (*Maka* and *Mashia*), produced by Strabo as *Makai*<sup>54</sup>. Could it actually be Mleiha?

The Arabic names occurring in the text were common in the pre-Islamic era. *Wahab Allat*, means gift of *Allat*; and *Allat* was a well-known Arab idol. *Kahl* was the god worshipped by the people of the village of Al Fao which was called *Zat Kahl*<sup>55</sup>. *Manat* is also the name of a famous pre-Islamic idol. Those idols were worshipped by other Arab tribes and were mentioned in the Quran as follows:

*Have ye thought upon Al-Lat and Al-Uzza;*

*And Manat, the third, the other:*

*Are yours the male and His the female?* Al-Najm: 19-21

It is clear from this Aramaic text that the owner of the tomb invokes the help of the gods he worships to protect his tomb from looting. Thus, the metal plate is but an amulet, common among those people<sup>56</sup>. The use of Aramaic in Mleiha has been dated back to the first century AD.

- **Significance of written texts:**

Use by Mleiha inhabitants of *Almosnad* writing confirms that they were ethnic Arabs and were connected with the emigration of Arab tribes in the region<sup>57</sup>. The abundance of *Almosnad* writings in Mleiha also suggests that it was deeply affected by the prosperous civilization of Yemen about the same time when Mleiha was thriving. This is probably due to the fact that the origins of Mleiha inhabitants go back to tribes that had emigrated from Yemen in eras dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>58</sup>. They had formed a majority there and thus writing in *Almosnad* had prevailed, for that was what they perfectly knew and understood.

A second probability is that the inhabitants of Mleiha were tribal people who had emigrated with the objective of establishing a commercial station to host caravans



A bronze plate with Aramaic writing

coming to ensure their rest and resupply as well as to divert a portion of their goods to neighboring people. Thus the station would also serve as a market as has been the case in other parts of Arabia<sup>59</sup>.

The presence of Aramaic writing possibly suggests objects imported from places using that sort of writing as in northern Arabia and Syria. Some may argue that the Aramaic amulet unearthed in Mleiha suggests that the owner of the tomb where it was found knew well that sort of writing as did the one who wrote it for him. The answer to this objection is that it was quite natural to find such foreign *things* at such a commercial hub as Mleiha which was connected with other cultures in Iraq, Syria and northern Arabia where Aramaic was used. It was also natural that foreigners would come to Mleiha for trade purposes and it was quite possible that some of them had settled down there.

Moreover, some may argue that certain words and terms occurring in those texts suggest that they are of northern and not southern origin and are not to be found in the writings of ancient Yemen. However, the same answer applies: Mleiha had been a commercial center well-connected with counterparts. It is quite possible that some northern Arabs had come to it and settled there and hence a new form of writing had been introduced and this was but a version of *Almosnad* with certain northern traits imposed by the demographic composition in the site and the presence of communities of merchants and tribesmen of northern origins who must have carried to Mleiha their respective cultures and languages. Similar examples exist in contemporary Qarya (today's Fao) some 700 southwest of

Riyadh<sup>60</sup>. The similarities between Mleiha and Fao convince me that the former had been in close connection with the prosperous kingdom of Kenda whose capital was Qarya; a connection far beyond commercial and cultural ties. What would have prevented the rise of demographic interaction and political relations of one sort or another?

Similarities between the two sites could be stated as follows:

1. Presence of what looks like an administrative headquarters in both sites;
2. Both sides had minted their respective coins;
3. Presence of tombs with funeral towers;
4. *Mosnad* writing prevailed with some northern influence;
5. Strong ties with the kingdoms of Yemen;
6. Presence of houses of different sizes and the method of building thereof which testify to the class differences among inhabitants of both sites;
7. The two sites exist in places with abundant water and on the caravan route;
8. Both sides had similar economic resources such as :
  - fertile cultivable land
  - appropriate grazing land for cattle, sheep, and goats, considering that the climate then was more rainy than at present. This is evidenced by the discovery of the remnants of a lagoon in Mleiha whose last filling coincided with the site's prosperity. The proof in Qarya is represented in the presence of wild animal bones and those animals must have fed on abundant herbs. There is also the discovery of a huge quantity of cattle, sheep and goat bones in the site which testifies to the presence of regular grazing and a green blanket during the era of prosperity<sup>61</sup>.
  - Trade

However, Mleiha had outclassed Qarya by one vital aspect: its location between two coasts with nearly equal distance. Moreover, they are easily accessible. The route to the eastern coast on the Gulf of Oman passes through a mountain range forcing it to wind. However, travelers would always find a way to the Arabian Sea.

- **Texts written in Greek:**

Fragments and handles of Greek pots with Greek writings were unearthed at Mleiha. These constitute evidence that the people of Mleiha knew Greek. They also indicate that such writings were made by the original owners of those pots which later passed to Mleiha people. This almost the same as when someone buys an electronic apparatus from Japan with Japanese writing on it and



brings it home. Does this in any way suggest that this man was well-versed in Greek simply because a few Greek words were inscribed on clay fragments? Moreover, such fragments cannot be proof that a Greek community had existed in Mleiha<sup>62</sup>.

Among the texts found in Mleiha in the 1970s was one on the handle of an amphora, which is displayed at the Sharjah Antiquities Museum. The text refers to the maker of that amphora and the date of making (which was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC). This handle is the first ever discovered evidence of the existence of contacts between what is now the United Arab Emirates and Greek cities before the Christian era.

In 1986, a French excavation mission functioning in Mleiha unearthed a set of fragments including handles of Greek pots manufactured in Rhodes Island, with inscriptions and Greek seals that suggest they were made between 236-176 BC and that they refer to the wine trade in the region<sup>63</sup>.



Handle of an amphora with Greek writing unearthed by a French mission.

## 2. Necropolises and Tombs:

Mleiha notables were buried in square tombs with solid funeral memorial towers with no doors. These were built of mud brick and were a little less than 4 meters high. The top parts of these tombs were decorated all round. Some of those tombs consist of a single underground chamber topped by the funeral tower. Others consisted of two chambers. Differences between those tombs in size, shape and height could be interpreted as indication of rank, status or wealth as the deceased's precious objects were buried with him. The addition of a second chamber was probably meant to provide space for more such objects that could not be housed in the main burial



Mouth of a bronze pot in the shape of a bull's head found at a tomb in Mleiha

chamber. Thus a deceased buried in a two-chamber tomb must have been wealthier than the one buried in a single-chamber tomb. However, both were losers as the rising towers above the tombs attracted thieves once the tombs were no longer protected. This is why archeologists could not find many artefacts in the tombs with towers; they have detected clear signs of digging and looting. What was left consisted of glassy clay fragments and what were presumably arrow heads<sup>64</sup>.

The link between those tombs and what was found in other regions of Arabia was the presence of similar towered tombs such as those found in Fao, southwest of Riyadh<sup>65</sup>. However, those are higher than Mleiha tombs. Moreover, the decorations found on Mleiha tombs are similar to those found in houses of Madaen Saleh in northwestern Arabia as well as the Anbat villages in Jordan<sup>66</sup>.

- **Burial customs and rituals:**

Among the strange burial customs exercised by the people of Mleiha at that era (and were a novelty compared with earlier eras) was the burying of horses and camels, in addition to precious objects, with their deceased owners. What was the history of such a custom?

- **Horse and Camel Cemetery in Mleiha:**

The local archaeological mission headed by Dr. Sabah Jasim has discovered in 1994 a cemetery comprised of a number of camels and horses buried beside their owners<sup>67</sup>. Two explanations have been offered: the first is that those animals had been sacrificially offered to the gods worshipped by their owners, seeking

gratification thereof; the second is that this practice was but continuation of one based on the ancient belief of resurrection and therefore it was necessary to bury the deceased belongings with him so that he would use them in his new life. Advocates of the second explanation base their argument on two considerations:

The first is that ownership of horses and camels along the ages constituted a major value for the Arabs; horses in particular being a sign of wealth as they needed special care afforded by the wealthy alone. Thus, burying such animals with their owners was in line with burying other precious artefacts, for 'all must be there with the deceased in the other life' as they believed.

The second consideration is that the custom of burying horses and camels with the deceased was exercised by many Arab tribes in other regions of Arabia. Some pre-Islamic Arabs used to urge their sons to bury their pack animals with them so that they may mount them upon resurrection. Sometimes, the deceased camel was placed beside his tomb and tied head down and then left to die. This they called *Al-Baliyya* and it occurred in pre-Islamic poetry, an indication that the custom had prevailed among them<sup>68</sup>.

It is particularly interesting to note that camels were buried in a kneeling position with their necks stretched back to the middle of their backs. This is the same way used in slaughtering camels to this day in the United Arab Emirates. One question remains: were camels buried alive or dead? Was the slaughter undertaken inside the tomb or outside it?<sup>69</sup>

The desire for resurrection on camelback, not on foot, reveals excessive Arab pride and vanity. It also speaks of the value of camels for the Arabs; they chose to be resurrected on camelback<sup>70</sup>.

It seems that camels were buried together with certain distinguished gifts. In one tomb, it was discovered that with the camels were buried glassy water bottles and knives, and probably other gifts which were looted<sup>71</sup>. Archaeologists have also noted that the bones of buried camels were much thicker than those of today's camels. From the research conducted by Dr. Hans-Peter Uerpmann of the University of Tübingen, Germany, it was established that these camels were a hybrid of the single hump camel of Arabia and the two-humped camel that had prevailed in Central Asia and named *Bakht*, now extinct in Arabia. The tomb dated back to the first three centuries AD<sup>72</sup>.

It is deemed appropriate here to assert that other tombs where camels had been buried together with humans have been found at Ed-Dur Site and Jebel Al-Amleih as well as in Qatar and Oman<sup>73</sup>. Similar tombs were unearthed in Hadhramaut but these are older and date back to the period between the sixth century BC and the first century AD<sup>74</sup>. Particularly attracting was a tomb in which were found the skeletons of a horse and a camel by the side of the tomb of their owner. The horse's rein was decorated with golden plates.

- **The Decorated Horse:**

Who could have sacrificed all that gold and let it be buried in the sand? It is that unidentified man from Mleiha whose golden-rein horse was found buried side by side with him? What was his social status that enabled him to acquire such a quantity of gold some 1800 years ago? What is it that drove him to bury all that gold in the sand? It must have been a strong belief that made relatives of that man sacrifice both his horse and camel and bury them by his side. And the horse's rein was decorated with gold plates of two sizes: two bigger ones with 14cm diameter and eight smaller ones with 5.5cm diameter. It appears that these plates were connected to each other by a belt that must have decayed over time<sup>75</sup>.



The precious horse rein that dazzled its discoverers

It must have been the hope for a life after death that had led those people to bury with the deceased their most precious belongings, including the horse and its golden rein. The deceased had probably been a wealthy seafaring merchant who had amassed such tremendous wealth that enabled him to decorate his horse with gold. Or he might have been a ruler, or a descendant of a wealthy family that had accrued those treasures, including the golden rein. Was it more important to take one's most valuable possessions to the grave than to leave them for their heirs? Or did the deceased take with him a little portion of the fortune and leave the bulk for his heirs and loved ones who had voluntarily let the golden rein go to the grave with their deceased? What had driven the heirs to let all that gold go to the dust in full respect of the deceased's will and belief, even when he was but a helpless corpse in their hands?

These are questions addressed to those who had once inhabited Mleiha but are now no more.

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