

The Europeans and the United Arab Emirates in the 16th and 17th Centuries

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This paper deals with the specific topic of the Europeans and the UAE region in the 16th and 17th centuries, where none of areas of the Gulf regions, including the coast region of the U.A.E, were free from European influence and domination.

This paper explains the historical rooting for the cities of the coast of the UAE, their ports and the relationship of the Europeans with the region starting from the Portuguese and passing through England and Netherlands, who were driven by the need to achieve their interests in one way or another. In fact, the Arab population was more determined to defend their water and land with which they were associated, since it was their land and the resources of their livelihood. This study sheds light on land features that did not arise by chance, with its emirates; now known as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman and Umm Al Quwain that have had some deep roots in the past, evidenced by the presence of monuments and archaeological collections, which recorded the presence of these emirates at that time. Such deep-rooted history was clear during the subsequent historical times, and even during recent ages, though the name of the UAE came under other names. The areas involved in this research are what is known nowadays the Sahil Emirates (UAE nowadays), and the ports and cities built there, such as the ports of Khorefkan Dibba and Julphar, which enjoyed a reputation for business in the early decades of the 16th Century.

Keywords: *Arabian Gulf, Coast of the UAE, European powers, Ports.*

Introduction

The Arab Gulf is marked by its middle location; in the heart of the old Arab world. Such a location represents the link point between the three continents; Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is an internal sea that is close to the Fertile Crescent which forms the bridge connecting the Asian and African continents on one side and Europe on the other side. Therefore, it is considered natural output to allow travellers between such continents to avoid deserts and mountain barriers.

The Arab Gulf length from Al Basrah to the Oman coast is about 800 KMs, whilst its width; east Qatar peninsula, is around 228 KMs, and at the Strait of Hormuz 46 KMs. Its area is about a quarter million Sqms. The Arab gulf is located between 23-30 latitude and 48-56.50 longitude in an area that witnesses severe humidity and heat.

Given its extension in the old world heart, the Arab Gulf works to bring the land crossing that goes through Iraq and Syria, close to far-east countries. This marine bulge works to grant trade greater importance than that through the Red Sea. Therefore, the Indian trade with Europe followed such a route (Arab Gulf route) until the Trans-Cape of Good Hope route was discovered (Oliviah, 1988).

The regions that are highlighted in this paper are what is called coast emirates (known currently as UAE) ports and cities which are established thereon; i.e. Khorfakan, Dabba & Jilfar, that enjoyed a commercial reputation in the first decades of the 16th century as described by modern researchers (Geffrey, P.90), such as commercial centres like Dubai city. Also the countries that practiced commercial activity in the Arab Gulf used to have, as Admond says, private commercial centres. For instance, the Arabs had absolute sovereignty on the Arab Gulf trade, which remained until the 16th century. Thence such sovereignty was transferred to the Portuguese, the English and the Dutch. Seraf port obtained its famous reputation during Arab sovereignty, Hormoz port during Portuguese sovereignty until the 1st quarter of the 17th century, then Bander Abbas during the Dutch sovereignty as the centre of their trade. The latter remained until the last decades of the 17th century, after which the English people inherited such sovereignty (Admoof 1978).

The Gulf eastern coast commences from Jasik cape; at the Eastern Persian coast to Mascot on the eastern coast, the northern edges of both coasts meet Al Basra port in Iraq, where the route to the Mediterranean starts. Their southern edges are opened to the Indian Ocean and the Eastern African coasts. The foregoing works to bring the Gulf as a hub of international transportation routes (Slot, 1997).

Thus, we notice that the Arab Gulf enjoys an important strategic site, which grants its decent position as centre of trade and navigation activities throughout the eras. Further, it becomes a conflict field between various powers to possess and control its trade routes. Such conflict still exists today.

Sources of the Gulf Study

The Arab Gulf regions, including the AKA UAE coastal region witnessed types of European influence and control in the 16th and 17th centuries. In fact, our Arab sources, due to relevant foreign sovereignty circumstances, did not bequeath us what may help us in understanding this region, so it is necessary to go through the European sources; Portuguese, English or Dutch. Alboquerque's comments, for instance, were published by his illegal son, Brazo Al Bokerk, (who carried the Al Fonso title after the death of his father), under the title, *Comments of Al Fonso De Al Boker*, and printed in Lisbon, via subsequent prints 1557, 1576. Such comments were adopted by the English print version carried out by Walter De Keri Berg. Such comments worked to extol Portuguese works and victories on the nations to whom they were exposed, even though such acts were characterised by infinite cruelty and harshness suffered by the A. Gulf inhabitants (3rd. Ras Al Khaimah historical researches 1990). In spite of the foregoing, such comments included beneficial subjects on this region, inhabitants and sources. Such subjects are located in a book named, *Barbarosa Courses Book*, issued in the Italian language for the first time in 1563, then in the English language in 1865, under the title *The Book of Durata Borbosa*. This is considered valuable research addressing the A. Gulf region in the first two decades of 16th century. Such research defines the names of some regions even though it contains more misrepresentation than was tackled in Alboquerque's comments, and moreover, referring to its sources and inhabitants (Al Hamadani 1987.)

In the second place comes the book of Jawad Bros, which was published by the A. Gulf documents commission, in the A. Gulf centre at Al Basrah University under the title *A. Gulf history in Portuguese documents*. We can say that this book contains beneficial information about UAE ports; i.e. Jalfar port, even though the extremism trend as to Portuguese; (Al Hamadni 1997). The Portuguese historian, Manwail De Varia Sosa, handled the political and military activities of the Portuguese in the 16th and 17th centuries. But as the Portuguese control was limited to the Arab coast only and not extended to the internal regions, our information is minor in the internal regions, as referred to by (Decardi 1970).

The English documentary sources published in the 17th Century, known as, *English Agencies Reports in India 1618-1669 in 13 volumes*, occupy special importance for this century. These worked to confirm much information, dates and incidents relating to the UAE coast, which is not comparable herein except to *Annals of the Carmelite Fathers in Persia in 16th and 17th Centuries*. As both groups represent reports served by company representatives in the Gulf or



Christian religious mission leaders in the region, who were aware of the political trends paths which the European powers represented, and dealt therewith to achieve the political, economical and religious interests thereof.

The Dutch documents and sources were not of great importance regarding the information we obtained on the Arab Gulf. However, the efforts by recent researchers; in particular, B.J. Slot, relied on the documents of the East Indian and Dutch company as material for many written works, most important of which was his book *Gulf Arabs 1602-1784*. He showed the importance of such documents, saying:

Unlike most of the authors who discussed Gulf history, we depended on the Dutch Archive as a key source instead of the British archive. This matter seems, for the first beginning, illogical, but we have to take into consideration that the Dutch East India company was the strongest European power in the region during the term which this research covers. Anyhow, the Dutch sources, in addition to their rich information, were not written in the Dutch language only, but include many references to the local Arab Affairs (Slot 1997).

Portuguese Influence

There is no doubt that the Portuguese aimed at achieving political, commercial and military domination in the east in general, and the Arab Gulf region in particular. In that trend, the Arab Ports on the eastern coast of the Gulf were subject to Portuguese attacks in the days of , when such policies were carried out. What was the Emirates fate at that time?

We know that Al Bokerk, since his entry to the Arab Gulf, targeted Arab ports, as he sought to deprive such ports of their commercial role, thus he burned all the moored ships in the ports. As expressed by De Cardi, the cities, fishers, cottages, nets and palm trees were also subject to fire and destruction (De Cardi 1970).

Pursuant to the Portuguese policy, Albuquerque started to attack Arab Gulf ports, starting from Oman ports and reaching Qaryat, which were already burnt. Qaryat was subject to bombing and they committed offensive massacres therein (Danvers, 1894). Albuquerque continued his hostile acts all over the coast, he attacked Muscat city, and issued orders to bomb and burn it as well; even though its ruler paid the imposed tax, which was allocated, for King Hormoz, to the Portuguese, in order to avoid the destruction of the city. The city was also subject to burning, plunder and the destruction of the moored ships (Al Salmi. P11, Welson P 66-67).

Albuquerque repeated such savage acts in Sahar and Khorfakan, which were the last station on the Omani coast. Albuquerque issued orders to bomb and destroy it. Moreover, he cut the

ears of captives who were caught by the Portuguese, the same as he did in Mascot (Wilson 1985). Such cruel acts practiced by Albuquerque affected Hurmoz seriously, despite the great defence preparations adopted by its king (Saied Eddin) but he found himself obliged to demand peace in 1507. Conciliation was reached, which included conditions relating to trade; i.e. exempting the Portuguese goods from any tax, preventing all domestic ships from navigation except via license from the Portuguese fleet (Saied. P.29). Thus such a treaty was the start to Portuguese domination over the A. Gulf trade, even though it was subject to many uprising attempts and the Othmani competition thereof in the middle of the 16th century.

Khorfakah city was referred to in many Portuguese sources as an important place, once the Portuguese reached it for the first time. Albuquerque prepared to attack the city. Its inhabitants came to know about the attack, thus they started to prepare themselves to defend it. They gathered themselves, some were riding horses, others riding camels and others were on their feet. The voices were loud from the city walls. Whereas the Khorfakan inhabitants did not send their delegate to negotiate with Al Bokerk, so the latter decided to attack them, and the inhabitants struggled hard to defend their city. We knew this from the writings issued by the Portuguese Jwa De Bros, who said:

Khorfakan became almost vacated from its inhabitants at the time when Al Fonso De Albuquerque arrived. Once the solders reached the land, the Arabs withdrew to the mountains. Al Fonso soldiers chased them under the lead of his brother son De Antonio with a hundred men. Such troops suffered much in attacking the Arabs, who risked their lives in defending their women and children. The campaign killed many of them and the defenders were fighting hard until they could run away, leaving 22 wounded persons, most of them were females and children. De Antonio captured them when he returned. They were in very bad condition, wounded, tired (A.G. history in Portuguese documents 1778).

The Portuguese started raiding the city, for three days they captured many inhabitants and they deformed them by cutting their noses and ears. Finally Albuquerque set fire to the city of Khorfakan, which destroyed all its buildings (de Faria Sousa, 1979).

After such massacres in Khorfakan, he described the city while leaving to Hermuz saying:

It is a wide city containing beautiful houses, inhabited by rich traders from Indian Kajarat. They raise horses, which are exported to India. The city suburbs contain houses built in solid stones, full of orange, fig, lemon, palm and vegetable farms. There are water springs used to irrigate agricultural plants and it is full of fishing boats located on the coast (Maylz 1986, Hawley, 1970, Albuquerque 1875).

Albuquerque caused exaggerated levels of damage to the Arab ports, in order to destroy their trade and stop its reconstruction. Cities like Khorfakan and Dibba, were known as flourishing cities before the Portuguese reached therein at the beginning of the 16th century, but were destroyed thereafter. These cities and others, as described by Heard, "could not avoid the Portuguese attacks from time to time, to confirm the Portuguese power and plant the idea that Arab Trade groups cannot be competitors of the Portuguese (Heard, 1982). We do not forget Julfar (Ras Al Khaimah), which is located between the sea and the inlet which was used as port or pearl. The town length is half a mile and its width is around a quarter of a mile. It contains castles, which protect it from land and sea attacks. Some such castles were armed with canons (Kelly 1979). It was difficult to moor large ships in Julfar port, so they were placed half a mile away from the port, while the small ships could come closer for 500M from the beach (Buckingham, 1981). This port was able to receive a hundred ships, each capacity at 300-400 tons (Al Qusimi, 1990). The ships were coming to Julfar port loaded with various commodities; from Basra and Bahrain, dates, horses. From Persia; gunpowder and cloths, from Muscat, sugar, cloths, dates. From India; rice, steel and threads (Kili 1979).

The prosperity of the ports located at the Gulf sides indicates its location importance, and the ports' importance as to commercial relationships between the east and Mediterranean countries.

One of the researchers noted this importance; "Should the Arab Gulf be closed, there would be no trade importance for the eastern Mediterranean basin in international trade" (Al Shami 1980). This great importance attracted the Portuguese to attack Gulf ports, destroying them in order to force those who used them to transfer to the Cape of Good Hope path for the purpose of international trade monopoly.

Such uprisings carried out by the region inhabitants were not due to political reasons only, but for economical reasons as well. The Portuguese in Hurmoz imposed high taxes on the region's inhabitants which were increased in time, once the Portuguese domination was reinforced. Taxes were collected in the name of King Humoz, who used to have influence on the Western coast of the A.Gulf; De Brose said, "the Arab peninsula collections were coming either from Arab ports or from inside the country. The employee in charge in such regions was called (Al Jazeel) and its office was called (Al Jazalah)".

Qalhat city was the most important work centre located at the Arab peninsula coast, where 192,000 Ashrafi were collected. The amount was distributed as follows: 11,000 from Qalhat city, 4,000 from Muscat, 1,500 from Sahar, 1,500 from Khorfakan, 500 from Dabba. Whilst, Jalfar, another region in the Arab peninsula, and its suburbs were paying 7500 Ashrafi, without need to impose fees on some pearl hunter boats who were working in such areas. Such hunters were paying fees imposed on them at Hurmoz city; @ 1,500 Ashrafi. The

collected amounts from the whole Arab Peninsula were totalled at 82,200 Ashrafi, excluding those collected from Qateef city & Bahran island, that were rebelling against Hurmoz. In fact such collections were considered huge income at that time (Shekhali & Hamadani 2014).

Thus the Portuguese obtained huge benefits from the Arabian coast ports, including UAE coastal cities. It is no wonder, then, that the Portuguese sources describe the Al Jbour princes, in the Bahrain region, who did not pay imposed taxes on them, to be rebellious. This was one of the causes that led to Prince Meqrin Bin Zamil's murder, in 1521 (Barhisa, P.77, Nonobi Silfa, 1986).

The following incidents indicate that the Portuguese showed great interest in Julfar. As Brose wrote, it was this region including other areas, but in fact it was the most important property of Hurmoz on the other side of the Gulf (Slot 1997). Such interest is witnessed from their acts therein, represented by installing castles and military forts in the town. Also they established Customs house therein (De Cardo, p.291).

Moreover, Julfar was mentioned in the report set out by jewels trader from Venice; Fasparo Balbi (Slot, 1997).

Europeans and UAE Coast in the 17th Century ***Weakness of Portuguese Influence in the Region***

Portuguese influence continued in the UAE coast at the beginning of 17th Century as it had in the 17th century, with considerable difference in the nature of such influence, which was subject to many variables. Such weakness was ascribed to unifying the Portuguese and Spanish throne (1580-1640). Further, Spain's concern was directed towards their influence in regions in the new world rather than Portuguese-occupied regions in the east. The Portuguese influence was subject to severe blows after being dispelled from Hurmoz in 1622, and their attempts to replace such influence by establishing a foothold in the eastern coast of A. Gulf by further occupying UAE coast regions. The Arab State was established in Oman in 1624, which held the responsibility to dispel the Portuguese from Arab coastal regions. Such new developments offered another image to the European powers' relationship with the Emirates coast.

The Portuguese stand at the A. Gulf eastern coast was shocked in the A. Gulf western coast, even after their failure in Hurmoz in 1622. The reason behind such failure was attributed to not being interested as to problems in A. Gulf, and devoting most of their power to defending the basic regions in the eastern parts of Asia against the Dutch attacks. Due to their trade decreasing trend, their economical capabilities were decreased to maintain their defensive system, the Persian (Safawyeen) influence extension towards the north coast of the A. Gulf,

and the pressure of internal tribes in the Arabian peninsula. The foregoing generated weakness as to Portuguese domination in their castles (Slot, 1997).

In 1619-1620, a joint Arabian Persian squad succeeded to dispel the Portuguese from the occupied garrison near Julfar and another garrison called Dola (it may be Dibba). These two garrisons used to supply Hurmoz with water and supplies. Hurmoz suffered major difficulty in receiving its supplies (Loremer 1985).

After the Portuguese lost Hurmoz in 1622, they moved their base in the A. Gulf and Oman Gulf to Muscat, where they appointed a governor in Muscat named Re Frayer De Andardi, who enjoyed a very bad reputation due to his acts and scandals in the A. Gulf during a term extended from 1620-1632. Via this Portuguese leader's acts, the Portuguese tightened their grip on the A. Coast from Sour, in the south up to Jilfar (Ras Al Khaimah), in the north. They practiced arbitrary procedures towards the Arabian tribes and forced them to pay high taxes (Barthurst, 1967).

The Portuguese employed minor diplomacy to protect their trade centres, in Julfar in particular, which enjoyed great strategic importance in dominating the Gulf. Mostly they sought strength which they used towards the people of Hurmoz, Persians and Arabs. In 1623, the Persians occupied Khorfakan from the Portuguese, but this did not last long, as they were dismissed from this town by Ed Re Frayber Andardi, even though the latter was dismissed, after a short time by Emam Naser Ben Mershed (Hawley, 1970). Due to the strong Persian garrison existence in Dibba, R. F. Andardi continued marching thereto, and he placed Portuguese garrisons therein, consisting of fifty soldiers. Moreover, he continued collecting taxes and fees therefrom. The Portuguese stand in Dibba was not stabled in a good manner, due to the squads of Eman Naser Ben Mershed to free up the Arabian coasts from the Portuguese. Therefore, others, in the region had to reorganise themselves; (Slot, 1997).

In 1625, after being defeated near Bander Abbas by the Dutch and English ships, the Portuguese leader and his remaining ships resorted to the Arab Coast; maybe Khwiar Bay near Julfar (Ras Al Khaimah). He established a temporary base there, Khasib; nearby Masandam cape was used as a Portuguese base at that time; (Heard 1982, Slot.1997). Thus their struggle with the Arabian troops, along the Omar and Emirates coasts was not easy. The next step of the Arabian troops, after their victory nearby Sahar and Muscat, was represented by attacking Julfar, where there was a Persian castle, and another one for the Portuguese in Dibba, protected by two Portuguese ships. Arabian troops put under the leadership of Ali Bin Ahmad, marched to Julfar, where Naser Eddin Bin Ajami was. The Arabian troops stormed the city, surrounded the castle (Al Seer Castle) and occupied it. Other troops, led by Khamees Ben Makhzoom, marched towards Dibba, where there was a Portuguese castle and liberated it. This took place in 1633 (Khalfan. 1983, Ben Zraiq. 1347).

It is worth mentioning herein that the Arabian tribes in the region, where UAE was formed, played a great role in confronting the Portuguese domination. Bani Yas had a big role in dispelling the Portuguese from the castle in Julfar in 1631. Al Qawasim had also a similar role in liberating Oman and other Arab coasts at the middle of the 17th century. Slot refers to Qasimiah's personality who is (Saif Bin Ali Bin Salih Al Qasimi), who had such role (Slot. 1997).

It worth noting that the Portuguese, while planning to extend their influence on the Arabian coasts, were searching for domestic allies. Once they had hopes of cooperating with the Saint Yohann Christians, AKA Sabaah Mandanien (Tafernah. 1944), who resided in the south part of Iraq Al Ahwaz. The Portuguese Carmil mission, in Asfahan, set out a plan to convince thousands of them to immigrate to the Portuguese regions in the Arab Gulf. Muscat and Dibba were the main nominated regions for their settlement (Boxer, in 4th. episode of centres and bodies who care of Arab Gulf studies and Arabian peninsula held in Abu Dabi, 1979, slot. 1997).

Indeed some of those were transferred to Dibba, where the Portuguese had castles. However, when they reached the location they discovered that they could not settle in the area surrounding Dibba, as it was controlled by the Arabs rather than the Portuguese. Some of them returned to Basrah, while some were moved to India. A Portuguese Priest who visited Muscat in December 1633, described the Portuguese as suffering from Arabs attacks against the Portuguese existence saying,

All the Arabian coast was in war state with Portuguese, as the Arabs dominated actually, the bigger part of the region, Dibba in particular, and surrounding regions. (A Chronicle of the Cqrmelities in Persia 1939... and).

English and Dutch in the Emirates coast in the 17th Century

Neither the English nor the Dutch had considerable activities in the Emirates coast, save after the Portuguese influence came to an end. Further, such activities were characterised by trade trends rather than political ones. In the 17th century, the English paid their major concern towards the eastern coast of the Arabian Gulf, compared to the western coast. This is ascribed to the high benefits they gained from their trade with the Persian country or Al Basrah. Besides, the Portuguese were dominating the Emirates coast. However, the Portuguese were feeling jealous of the English ships, which arrived in the Arab Gulf in the first decades of 17th century. Therefore, they tried to prevent the English ships and all other foreign ships from practicing navigation in the region, except via their permission. The foregoing was practiced to maintain the Portuguese domination on trade. On the other hand, The English East India company, centred in Sorat, objected to this, as the company managers were determined to

grab dominance of the Arab Gulf from the Portuguese, once the chance came; (Welson, 1985). The Persians tried investing in such a wish, and communicated with the English and Dutch to expand their influence towards the Arabian Coast, but the latter, as Slot says,

They did not approve the Persian game; although they wished to destroy the Portuguese-Hurmoz trade monopoly. They did not try to replace the Portuguese military domination, or bring their interference further beyond their trade ambitions (Slot 1997).

The strategic importance of Julfar; being a navigation base in the Gulf, was considered by the English in 1631 (Slot 1997), until the English and Portuguese concluded a treaty in 1635, which blocked such orientation (Draker 1980). The Dutch showed great interest as to the Arabian coast compared to that of English, due to the international superiority which they achieved in the Gulf regions and ports. On the other hand, the Dutch, the same as the English, established their existence, firstly, in the eastern coast, Bandar Abbas port in particular.

The Dutch gained high profits through their existence in the Bandar Abbas port. Such profits were subject to danger, as the Safawi Persians were changing their stands in a quick manner. In 1631, as after dispelling the Portuguese from the Julfar port in same year, Portuguese – Persian cooperation was achieved to enhance their influence on the Emirates coast. Lastly both parties were dispelled from the region, in particular from Julfar and Dibba in 1633; (Slot, 1985).

The Portuguese - Persian convergence was established on account of Dutch commercial interests, thus they started searching for other ways, rather than Persia, to gain money. The pearl trade was one of available alternatives.

In a report issued from the Dutch governor in Batifia addressed to the Chairs of the East Indian Dutch company, on 11/11/1645, reference was made to the pearl trade, in Arab Gulf in common, and Julfar in particular; stating,

It is decided that our representatives wish to expand their trade, but they have to send two traders who are clever and own expertise, prior to the pearling season in Bahrain or Julfar, where pearling is performed. They should issue their order to remain therein until the end of the pearling season, to oversight, in person, the pearls trade therein; (ARA(General State Archives) & Tadmori 19880

In fact the Dutch did not achieve great success in the pearl trade, even though they succeeded in establishing a trade relationship with Julfar (Ras Al Khaimah). This was achieved due to the Dutch ignorance of such trade from one side and they were not welcomed by the region inhabitants therein, as it was in Bahrain (Al Rabeie', 1989). It also is ascribed to the struggle



between them and the Portuguese in the Selan region, whereas the Dutch occupied pearl fishing areas, and disregarded their concern as to Arab Gulf pearls (Aba Hassan, 1987).

The modern studies performed by Slot explained that the Dutch communications with the Emirates coast were not completely stopped, even their failure to allocate their important position in pearl trade therein. The Dutch missions in 1644-1645 and in 1666 contributed to the region's discovery located between Ras Al Khamimah and Muscat, including Khasb regions and Dibba. It offered simple drawings on the last region located at the modern borders between Oman and UAE (Slot, 1997).

The Dutch mission set out a detailed description of the Southern Arab Gulf coasts and ports in 1666. Khassab bay was the first place they entered and their ships were docked in Dibba, Kalba and Khorfakan. It also presented descriptions for such sites and the navigational nature therein, also the types of houses built in the region (Slot, 1997).

Conclusion

This paper explains the historical rooting of Emirates coastal cities and ports, the European relationship to the region, starting with the Portuguese, English and Dutch. Such powers were seeking trade interests, which they tried to achieve in a variety of ways, but the Arab inhabitants were dying in defending their waters and lands, which they were connected to their living source.

Through the sources and references that tackled the relevant period, we are aware of the fact that the Gulf Arabs became a political and naval power and they had an important role in transit trade. The ports of the southern coast of A. Gulf played an important role in the Indian Ocean Trade. Most of the transit trade businesses across the Gulf at that time were managed by groups from India, with continuous participation from the Arabs; firstly in Julfar (Ras Al Khaimah), then in locations between Julfar and Muscat.



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