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Western part of India was concentrated there. According to the contract, the Portuguese received a share in the revenues of the customs at Bandar Kong, which often brought them in conflict with Persian authorities who were reluctant to pay.\textsuperscript{34} The Portuguese seem to have enjoyed the same privileges concerning customs in Bahrain and in the nominally Ottoman town of Qatif.\textsuperscript{35}

The Portuguese trade was somewhat different from the trade of their European competitors. Most of their trade was done by natives from the areas they controlled in Western India. In Kong, there were Banyan, Indian Muslim and Arab traders who forwarded their merchandise either to the interior of Persia or to other ports on the Gulf. There were only a few real Portuguese involved, but the volume was large, for a long time much larger than Dutch or English trade. At some times, it also seems that Bandar Kong prospered more than Bandar Abbas because the local authorities were less unreliable than the courtiers who rented the offices of the customs in Bandar Abbas. After the fall of Muscat, the Portuguese interests were damaged by the everlasting war with the Omani Arabs and by their loss of large parts of their possessions in Malabar to the Dutch. Still, they were able for a long time to give sufficient protection to their shipping to let trade continue. The Portuguese could gain favours from the Persian authorities because they were willing to act against the Omani Arabs, something that the English or the Dutch were seldom willing to do. Portuguese-Persian military alliances never achieved very much because the fighting quality of the Portuguese ships was less than that of their Dutch and English competitors and they were only just able to stand against the Omanis. When they lost important strongholds in Eastern Africa to the Omanis, an essential part of the network of their trade was destroyed. Their intervention against Oman on behalf of Persia in 1719 became a failure, and they disappeared for some time. In 1729, the Portuguese tried to make profit out of the disintegration of Persia by occupying the island of Laraq and the Western part of Qishm, but they did not hold on to

\textsuperscript{34} Relação, pp. 17-18; ARA, VOC vol. 988, fol. 395.
\textsuperscript{35} ARA, VOC vol. 1144, fol. 908v.

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Muslims from Sind and the Mahraṭṭa area who wanted to gain a foothold there.\textsuperscript{36}

the English East India Company

It is rather difficult and dangerous to describe the activities of the English East India Company in the Gulf using the reports of its Dutch competitor as a source. No good, comprehensive history exists of the English East India Company and the earlier history of its activities in the Gulf have never been the subject of a monograph. Amin's book covers the later period quite well, but its scope is limited.\textsuperscript{37}

A further difficulty in the accurate appreciation of the English presence in the Gulf is the fact that the history of the English establishments on the Gulf does not very closely follow the general history of the English establishments in Asia. During the seventeenth century, English trade in the Gulf had rather good times, even while other English ventures in Asia did not prosper and the Company went bankrupt. For a long time, English presence in the Gulf was much more limited to a simple trade venture than the Dutch presence was. Gaining control of Western Java and the Spice Islands in the early seventeenth century gave the Dutch a permanent centralized powerbase and the ability to use violence for protecting economic interests. The English wanted to do the same, but they simply lacked the means, even in the Gulf, and English dreams to support their ambitions with military means remained idle for a long time.\textsuperscript{38}

The beginning of relations between the English and Persia was promising. While the Dutch were occupied elsewhere, the English were free to start trade with the coast of Persia in Jask in 1619. English naval help made it possible for the Persians to conquer Hormuz in

\textsuperscript{36} See p. 265.
\textsuperscript{37} A.A. Amin, British interests in the Persian Gulf (Leiden 1967).
\textsuperscript{38} An example of such ambitions, a plan for attacking Bandar Abbas is mentioned in Foster, English Factories (1655-1660), pp. 25, 227-228.
naval help made it possible for the Persians to conquer Hormuz in 1622, but their trade in Persia already declined soon afterwards. The situation became really bad for them after 1650, and they did not recover until about 1670. Most of their shipping was private, paying consular duties to the English East India Company establishments in the Gulf. Part of this shipping was not English, but was in reality shipping by Indian merchants on their own ships, covered by the English flag and sometimes under the command of an English captain. In the course of the eighteenth century, the sum of private English trade and English Company trade became larger than Dutch trade.

In the 1720’s, when English control over India increased, there were plans to extend this control into the Gulf, but the endeavours to obtain control over navigation in the Gulf between 1725 and 1729 were still rather weak, and not supported by higher English authorities who did not see much interest in the declining economy of the Gulf. Then, things in the Gulf became even worse and, like the Dutch, the English held to their interests in the Gulf more out of a vague hope that the once great profits would eventually return than out of real economic prospects. The great military power which the English were developing in India was hardly used in the Gulf, where up to their departure in 1766, the Dutch kept up a much larger military presence.

The increase of English power in Asia throughout the eighteenth century did not result in a growing English power in the Gulf. The decline of trade in the area caused by the blocking of international trade routes by the disintegration of Persia and of the Ottoman Empire, lessened the English impulses to take action in the Gulf. They were also reducing their presence to no more than two staff members in the whole Gulf.

39 EGD 5-1-1727); ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3420 and 3429v.
40 Amin, British interests, pp. 115-116.

the Dutch East India Company

The Dutch East India Company, officially called the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC (United East India Company) was a very large and complex organization. In order to understand its own role in the Gulf and to evaluate its role as a witness to events in the Gulf, it is necessary to pay some attention to its history, structure and the Company’s own conceptions of its place in the economy and politics of Asia.41

The VOC was the product of a merger, brought about by Dutch politicians in 1602, of a number of small trading ventures which had organized expeditions to Asia since 1595. The traces of this origin remained visible as long as the VOC existed. It was a loose federation of six working companies, called Kamers (Chambers) in each of the main trading areas of the Republic of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, itself a federation. Each of the Kamers had its own board of directors (Bewindhebbers) and shareholders. The six Kamers were established in Amsterdam, Middelburg (capital of the province of Zeeland), and in four lesser trading towns in the province of Holland: Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn and Enkhuizen. A committee of seventeen Bewindhebbers sent by the Kamers acted as the highest authority: the Heren Zevenent or ‘Gentlemen Seventeen’. This highest board of directors had only three sessions in a year: after the

arrival and twice before the departures of the great fleets of ships (because of nautical reasons, the movement of ships was bound to seasons).

Current affairs were dealt with by a skeleton bureau of the Gentlemen Seventeen in cooperation with one of the two principal Kamers of Amsterdam and Zealand which took turns in having the presidency. The Gentlemen Seventeen decided on the political instructions to be given to the Company's officials in Asia, on the merchandise to be ordered from Asia and on the money, manpower and material to be sent to Asia. The selling of the products from Asia, the equipment of the ships and the recruitment of staff, soldiers and sailors was done by the Kamers independently according to a distribution key agreed by the Gentlemen Seventeen.

In contrast to the federal structure in Europe we see a unitary structure in Asia. There, in Batavia (now Jakarta) the Governor General and his council, usually called the Hoge Regering in Batavia (Batavia High Government) had all authority. The Council was composed of the heads of the principal administrative departments, its most important member was the Director General, head of trade and finance. There also was a High Court of Justice. Under the High Government, there were seven main regional authorities in the Western part of the Indian Ocean, the Governors or Directors of Ceylon in Colombo, Coromandel, Malabar in Cochin, the Cape Colony in Capetown, Bengal, Persia (Bandar Abbas) and Surat. Each Governor or Director was assisted by a Political Council composed of the principal officials (Heads of military, commercial and financial departments). There was usually also a Court of Justice (Raad van Justitie) composed of a small committee formed out of the Political Council. There were a great number of other regional establishments directly subordinate to the High Government in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, China, Japan, Burma and Yemen of which the more important also had a governor or director and council and the less important usually a Head or one or two Residents. The regional authorities only took orders from the Batavia High Government directly: the Seventeen always acted in regional matters through the High Government, even if the principal regional authorities sent reports directly to the Seventeen as well as to Batavia.

The Governor General and also the regional governors and directors had to consult their councils in all important matters and in most cases it was the council which took the decisions and could even outvote their President: an important example of this for the Gulf was the refusal of the High Government to approve the plan of the Governor General Mossel to occupy Bahrain in 1756. Because of the long delay in communications with Holland, the High Government had great freedom of action, but the Seventeen insisted that the High Government informed them of all their actions down to the smallest detail.

The Dutch East India Company did not have very strong ties with the Dutch government. Its charter gave it full powers of sovereignty in Asia in its dealings with Asian powers, but it had to consult the government for its dealings with other European powers in Asia. It had its own flags and it struck its own coins. There was no appeal in Holland to the verdicts of the Batavia High Court of Justice. In the Netherlands, the Company had the full monopoly of all trade with the countries around the Indian Ocean. Being a semi-independent state in Asia, the Company’s machinery in Asia was also in another way not so closely connected to the Netherlands: it recruited a very large proportion of its personnel outside Holland. Only the Governor General and the Director General were always Dutchmen, in all other offices we find from time to time foreigners. Many of them came from Germany, the Baltic area, Scandinavia and Switzerland, but there were also many English, French and even some Italians, Russians and Greeks. Several of the Dutch Company’s Directors in the Gulf were Germans. This system permitted the Company to recruit its huge number of staff, sailors and soldiers without causing a notable drain on the restricted population of the small country where it was established.

The VOC always remained in its essential structure a trading company. All political and military structures in Asia were con-

42 ARA, VOC vol. 2848, fol. 1143-1149, 1183-1187.
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sidered by the directors in Holland as necessary, but often undesired, means to protect the flow of trade. The Directors in Holland rarely manifested any ideology of territorial colonialism: they only looked at the balance sheet. This caused a divergence of interest between the Directors in Holland and their subordinates in Asia. Most Governors General and many regional authorities had a more or less defined conception of the Company as a great political and military power in Asia, but even there, members of their councils adhered to the more mercantile views of the Directors in Holland. The double face of the VOC: trading venture and colonial government, is the cause of a major part of the complexity of its history in Asia. Both parts were closely linked: the colonial establishment gave the firm footing necessary for the protection of trade in very unsafe surroundings but the colonial establishments with their heavy military expenses could only be kept up with the profits of the trade establishments.

Until 1781, the VOC could not expect financial or military support for colonial ventures from the Dutch State Government in Europe. On the contrary, the Company had to pay heavy contributions for its trading privileges. The decrease of profits in trading caused a military weakness which explains the Company’s final failure to defend its Western colonial possessions against the English in 1781 and to maintain its strong position on the Indian subcontinent.

The strong position of the Dutch Company in Asia until halfway through the eighteenth century was established by the Governor General Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587-1629). Before Coen, the Company only controlled a few positions in the Spice Islands. In 1619, Coen founded a European city on Java in Jakarta, which he called Batavia. In nautical terms, this was a good location: near the narrows which separated the China Sea from the Indian Ocean, it controlled the turning point of trade in Asia. Chasing the English from the Spice Islands, vigorously defending his position on Java against the powerful local princes and using the revenue of the Spice Islands for expanding Batavia as a stronghold, Coen established a position which was too strong for any European competitor to attack.

Since then, the Dutch had a safe naval base from where they could attack the Portuguese strongholds at their ease while striving to get the navigation between the China Sea and the Indian ocean under their control. Firstly the establishing of a stronghold was followed by trading ventures all over Asia: establishment in Japan, Surat, on the Coromandel coast and in the Gulf in the 1620’s, the start of the conquest of the coastal region of Ceylon, of Malacca and occupation of Taiwan in the 1640’s. The only setback was the loss of Taiwan to the Chinese. In the 1660’s, coastal Ceylon was brought entirely under control, followed by the conquest of the Portuguese stronghold Cochin on the Southern point of India. The network of trading establishments had also been extended in the meantime.

On the whole, the Dutch Company encountered few serious problems until about 1720. After that time, the Company showed insufficient flexibility in adapting to economic changes in Asia where the downfall of Persia caused a breakdown of the traditional trade movement between the China Sea and the Gulf and where the decline of the Mughal Empire brought about great changes in India. Probably, the growth of plantations in the Caribbean area caused a crisis in the prices of tropical products in Europe to which the Dutch Company’s reaction was inadequate.

In Persia, the Company’s trade was based at first on the buying of silk for cash, or in exchange for spices or cotton tissues from India. Halfway through the seventeenth century the silk trade started to decline, while the Dutch sales of tropical products kept increasing. As a consequence, the Dutch started to export cash and bullion from Persia, at first clandestinely, because of interdictions by the Shah, but later openly. Sudden problems in Persia brought about an enormous loss of liquid assets in 1722 which could not be recovered. The Dutch presence in the Western part of the Indian Ocean suffered from its inability to react to the expansion of English influence in

43 Most revealing is the discussion about the desirability of the occupation of Bahrain in 1755-1756 in ARA, VOC vol. 2848, fol. 1143-1149, 1183-1187.

44 Van Dam, Beschryvinge, pp. 313-314, 321-326.
Asia and the establishment in Bombay of an English stronghold almost as valuable as the Dutch position in Batavia.

In this manner the much greater power of Britain had acquired a stronghold in Asia itself, and the military supremacy of the small Dutch Republic in Asia melted away, even if in certain areas, like the Gulf, Dutch military prominence maintained itself until the 1760's. But as the profits in the Western basin of the Indian Ocean declined, the Dutch had no interest in maintaining a strong presence there. After many years of losses, the Company finally decided to retire from the Gulf in 1765, leaving it to private Dutch enterprise, which in fact did show some activity in the Gulf.\textsuperscript{45}

The activities of the VOC in the Gulf were its most far-reaching operations. Because of this, the expenses of shipping were relatively high. The Gulf was rightly considered to be an unhealthy place and this also meant extra expenses and extra manpower to replace persons who had died. The profit margins on the sale of merchandise in the Gulf had to be very large to compensate for the expenses and to make the Dutch establishments in the area worthwhile. There was not sufficient support for certain missionaries who wanted an extension of the colonial activities into the Gulf: the majority view was that the Company was squandering too much money into colonial settlements and small trade offices and that no new ventures should be started, and certainly not in remote areas. In the Gulf, the Dutch East India Company was the only Dutch trading venture. During the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth centuries, Dutch private trade and navigation in the Gulf was rather rare, if not forbidden. The disadvantage of the Company's monopoly was a lack of flexibility. The advantage was that the Company's own ships were the only Dutch ships in the Gulf: easy to be recognized and controlled by the Dutch authorities and, because the Company's ships were well armed and could expect the full protection of the military power of the Company, they were not in danger of being attacked in the case of irregular naval warfare by local powers. The English Company, which as a trading venture was a much smaller body than the Dutch Company, always allowed free trade by English subjects and by people from English-controlled areas in Asia under the English flag against payment of a consular tax. This meant, as we will see later, many small and vulnerable ships sailed under the English flag, but were often manned by local people, thus creating a considerable danger of getting involved in local naval warfare.

The Dutch had chosen a less risky, in fact too safe a way of operating in the Gulf. Reserving the Gulf for the Company's trade meant a certain rigidity in trade relations and the private merchants under the English flag were able to keep up trade with the Gulf when in the second half of the eighteenth century the Company-owned Dutch shipping in the Gulf had become the source of big losses. When the Dutch Company was finally ready to give freedom to private Dutch enterprise in the Gulf it was too late to maintain a formal Dutch presence there. The endeavour to make the island of Kharg a safe place under the Dutch flag for international shipping, private or by chartered companies, did not yield sufficient profits to cover expenses.

The policy of the Company in the Gulf was always to live in peace with all local powers. This could become difficult when there was a war on because the basis of Dutch presence in the Gulf was a treaty with Persia which held some (luckily very vague) clauses about military assistance. Except for a few incidents, the Dutch had been reasonably successful in keeping out of conflicts with local powers. Much more troublesome were the relations with other Europeans. The Portuguese were enemies from the beginning until the 1670's. The relationship with them was for a long time just a matter of trying to hit them with as many ships and men as could be temporarily diverted from the normal trading activities of the Company. The English were the strongest competitors. Relations with them were difficult, even at times of close alliance in Europe. The Dutch State Government would not allow the Company to carry on its own policy regarding relations with its English competitor, because of the global repercussions this would have.

\textsuperscript{45} Floor, 'Dutch trade', p. 211 gives a list of Dutch private ships sailing to Muscat in the years 1777-1793. In this period, 28 private Dutch ships went from Indonesia to Muscat.
the Anglo-Dutch rivalry

As Dutch and English sources contain the most important information on the Gulf during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it should be noted that these sources reflect an often fierce competition between the two nations. Sometimes, the competition had a negative influence on the reliability of the sources. Facts and motives could be distorted.

Soon after the arrival of the Dutch in the Gulf it became clear that the English East India Company was unable to keep up competition with the Dutch. This situation began to change in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, when English trade recovered. Like the Dutch trade, English trade survived the decline of silk trade since the end of the seventeenth century rather well. Although as long as Dutch predominance in India lasted, the English had some difficulties in keeping up with the Dutch, later the greater flexibility of the English system of mainly private trade slowly led to English predominance. This should not obscure the fact that as a company, the English East India Company did not display much trade activity in the Gulf in the eighteenth century: up to the 1760’s the Dutch Company was the larger economic venture, as can be shown by the comparison in size of their establishments.

Even if they cooperated sometimes, the English disliked and despised the Dutch. In English documents, the Dutch often figure as boorish drunkards and their high-handed way of supporting trade by threats of military intervention was resented. The English over-estimated Dutch power and their willingness to use military power in the Gulf. A typical example of this are the events of 1759. The Dutch had already abandoned their establishment in Bandar Abbas for some time, while the English had retained a token presence there which came under pressure from greedy local authorities. At that moment some warships appeared. The English thought that the Dutch were returning but they were mistaken: it was the French coming to plunder them. In reality, the Dutch had no intentions of resuming activities in Bandar Abbas.

In practice, Dutch and English activities and viewpoints resembled each other up to a certain point. Their mutual dislike was mainly based on competition. Competition had in the 1620’s already brought about a serious conflict in Asia, in 1652 it caused a war which had rather serious consequences for the English presence in the Gulf. Two later wars, in 1665-1667 and in 1672-1674 were in fact new attempts to reach the decision the war of 1652 had not brought. In 1688, a Dutch army invaded Britain and ousted the Stuart king, who was replaced by the Dutch stadtholder William III. This did not bring a real personal union in the modern dynastic sense of the word: William III was not the head of state in the Netherlands even though the function of stadtholder had some monarchic attributes. The governments of both countries cooperated up to a certain point rather closely, but this was not the case with the East India Companies who under a semblance of formal friendliness kept up a fierce competition.

All the mutual dislike did not hinder the Dutch and English from joining forces in cases of emergency or mutual profit, as long as they were not at war. To a considerable extent they made use of each other’s shipping facilities for the transportation of letters and merchandise. Informal private contacts existed between the chiefs of the establishments of both nations, even if these were not encouraged by higher authorities.

In the eighteenth century the situation of uneasy cooperation mixed with distrust and dislike continued. Both nations were at peace for a very long time. In the meantime, the English took control of Surat, while the Dutch influence in the area slowly decreased until, in 1781, the English took revenge for the Dutch support of the American revolution by occupying most of the Dutch establishments in India. Most of these places were returned to the Dutch


47 See for instance the case mentioned in EGD of 29-11-1760.
in 1784, but this could not hide the fact that the end had come to the existence of the Dutch East India Company as an independent power on the Indian subcontinent and to most of its ventures in the Western part of the Indian Ocean.

In their policy in the Gulf, there were no great essential differences between the interests of both nations. Both were bound by some kind of alliance to Persia which gave them the trade privileges on which their economic interest in the Gulf was based. There were some small differences because both powers tended to support different groups, especially at the time of the fall of the Safavi dynasty in Persia, when the Dutch tended to remain closer to the Safavi interest while the English more readily recognized the Afghan conquerors of Persia. Later, the English more easily adapted to the rule of Nadir Shah in Persia. There were different nuances in the relations of both powers with Arab tribes where the Dutch usually just tried to keep friends with everyone (the cheapest way to protect their economic interests) while the English were more aggressive because of the Arab competition with the country trade in Indian-owned ships under the English flag.

the other European nations and the Gulf

From a global viewpoint, the activities of other European powers in the Gulf were of little importance. Still, at certain moments, these powers played a part, and they left some documents which are of direct importance to the historical knowledge of the area. As the presence of these powers was often unrelated to the mainstream of events, we will give some details on their activity in this chapter.

The Republic of Venice had since the 15th century, from time to time, diplomatic relations with Persia and permanent relations with the Ottoman Empire. These political relations had practically nothing to do with the Gulf area. On the other hand, individual

Venetian merchants were active on the route between Aleppo and Hormuz. The Venetian traveller Gasparo Balbi is one of the most important sources of our knowledge of the Gulf in the latter days of Portuguese Hormuz. Venetians played a very important part in the exportation of pearls. In 1644 it is recorded that an important portion of the trade of Bahrain was in the hands of Venetians and in the 1630's a Venetian resident in Bandar Abbas gave the Dutch the first expert information on the pearls of the Gulf. In 1765, Venetian merchants were still important in Basra.

As the Venetians active in the Gulf were individual private merchants, it is difficult to get a clear picture of their activities from official Venetian archives. Their activity was tied up with trade over land between Basra and Syria and with small Venetian shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean, a matter which also largely escapes official documentation. It is possible that a detailed research in the archives of the Venetian Embassy in Istanbul, especially in the files containing correspondence of the Embassy with the Venetian Consulate in Aleppo, may produce important data. In the eighteenth century there was some Venetian shipping in the Indian Ocean, but these ships apparently never entered the Gulf.

France was sometimes somewhat important secondary power in the Gulf. Basically, French activity there followed two lines. The first line was an attempt to imitate Dutch expansion in Asia, while the second was an extension of the protectorate claimed by the French King over Roman Catholics in the Ottoman Empire to the countries of the Gulf.

We can be brief about the second line. In the course of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, the Carmelite monastery which was established in Basra after the fall of Hormuz, came under protection of the French ambassador. Also in the seven-

1903).


50 Lorimer, Gazeteter, Historical part, vol. 1/2 p. 1239.

51 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 834, 895.
teenth century, French Capuchin monks established a monastery in Isfahan. From Basra, Carmelites spread to small establishments on the Gulf like Bandar Abbas and Kharg (during the short period this island was occupied by the Dutch). Portuguese Carmelites remained active in Persia itself (Bandar Kong and Isfahan) until the Afghan conquest of Isfahan.

Halfway through the seventeenth century, some French travellers went all over Asia with an open eye to look for possibilities of French expansion. People like the jeweler Jean Baptiste Tavernier and the priest Barthélemé Carré visited Persia and Basra. In their descriptions they often give valuable details and very critical observations of the Dutch and the English. Carré's accounts especially are of great importance because he is the first European to have come into close contact with Arab shaikdoms on the coast of Persia. The French geographer Sanson published fairly good maps and a geographical manual of the area.52

These accounts were closely studied in France. In 1664, a French East India Company was founded; one of its principal projects was trade with Persia. More than in Holland or in England, the French East India Company was a government venture. It was born out of the ambition of the Minister Colbert to make France a commercial power equal to Holland or England. The problem was that a firm economic basis was lacking for such an enterprise and the French Company remained an artificial structure. The first tentative step to get a foothold in Persia in 1666 was a failure.53 Later, in the course of wars with England and Holland, the French tried to do damage to their enemies by making beautiful promises to the government of Persia, such as the offer to conquer Muscat, if they would chase the enemies from Persia. This also failed. In the eighteenth century, the French were able to establish some trade between Basra and certain French colonial establishments. We have made no research into the background of this trade in sugar and coffee from French establishments such as Réunion. Sugar, coffee and possibly also French woollen cloth, which was much in demand in the Ottoman Empire, were marketed in Basra. Especially since the time of Nadir Shah, there was increasing French commercial activity in Basra. Sometimes, French ships even came to Bandar Abbas. The French consul in Basra c. 1740, Jean Otter (a Swede by birth) wrote a quite interesting book on the Gulf.54 The French finally made an important impact on the history of the Gulf in 1759, when they raided the English establishment in Bandar Abbas, which never recovered from this blow. This heralded the end of direct English presence in the Lower Gulf.

During the Franco-English wars of the 1780's and 1790's there were French attempts to make alliances with rulers like the Ottoman Sultan, the Shah of Persia, Hyder Ali of Mysore, his son Tipu Sultan or even the Imam of Oman, to damage the English position in India, or to open for the French overland access to India. The French colonial administration of the islands Mauritius and Réunion (at that time called Ille de France and Ille de Bourbon) repeatedly tried by friendly means or by force to make the Imam of Oman open his ports for French privateers. This usually met with little success, but it was perceived as a very real threat by the English. The English reacted by increasing political and military pressure in the Gulf which culminated in the early nineteenth century in their actions against the Arab tribes of the area of Ras al Khaima.55


53 ARA, VOC vol. 1255, fol. 855-870. Such attempts were repeated several times. In 1691, the French had an agent in Bandar Kong (ARA, VOC vol. 1476, fol. 486).


55 Al-Qasimi, Myth of piracy, pp. 27-28, 31; Risso, Oman and Muscat, pp. 64-66, 81-82; Bibliothèque Municipale, Caen, Papiers Decaen vol. 97, fol. 15-30. The French ambitions in the Gulf were in reality quite humble as is shown in the correspondence of the French Consul in Basra in ANP Correspondance Consulaire Basra vol. 1-2 and in the papers about the first attempts to
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There were three other European East India Companies which were active in the Arabian Sea: the companies of Denmark, Sweden and of the Austrian Netherlands (now Belgium). Denmark had already halfway through the seventeenth century attempted to establish diplomatic relations with Persia. Of the three small East India companies mentioned, the Danish company was the most important. Its focus of activity was in Southern India. Around the year 1640, a Dutchman named Pessart was carrying on a very considerable trade in the western part of India and even as far as the Gulf under the flag of the Danish East India Company. We find some references in Dutch documents that Danish ships came from the Danish establishments in India to the Gulf. Especially during the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a very lively trade between Oman and Southern India, and possibly, (but I have not investigated the Danish archives on this subject), there was also Omani shipping to Danish establishments there. Danish ships also went to Dutch Kharg and to Basra at that time. The East India Company of the Austrian Netherlands had not much to do with the Gulf. Most of its activities were concentrated in Bengal, where it had an establishment in Banquibazar. It also sent some ships to Yemen, and in its last days it did some trade between Bengal and the Gulf, but its ships were then flying English or French flags.

Unconnected with the Danish commercial ventures in Asia was the great scientific expedition to Arabia which set out in 1761 and of which one of the participants, Carsten Niebuhr, a German from Ostfriesland, wrote two deservedly famous books which belong to the most valuable historical sources on the Gulf at this time.


56 Mention of a ship of Pessart in the Gulf in Generale missiven, vol. 2, p. 36. In 1701 a Danish ship was attacked by Arab ships off Hormuz: ARA, VOC vol 1667, fol. 50-58 and Van Dam, Beschryvinge (vol. 83), pp.363-375.

57 Al-Qasimi, Myth of piracy, p. 19.

58 C. Niebuhr, Beschreibung von Arabien (Kopenhagen 1772) and Reisen in Arabien (Kopenhagen 1772).

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Sweden also displayed some activity in the area. Sweden is only rarely mentioned in connection with the Gulf. A Dutch privateer, Herman de Crooy, obtained Swedish letters of marque in 1664. Covered by the Swedish flag, he attacked Surati shipping off Mocha, but entering Goa harbour his ship was confiscated by the Portuguese authorities and used for warfare against the Arabs of Oman. In 1682, a Swedish envoy in Isfahan received trade privileges, but I found only one reference to a Swedish ship entering the Gulf.

Some mention should be made of Russian activities. Russia was an alternative route for silk from Persia to reach Western Europe. The English were involved in this alternative to the Gulf trade. The Russians displayed from time to time great activity in Iran, but this was usually purely political and concerned the delimitation of spheres of influence on the Northern border of Persia. One of the purposes of their diplomatic activity was to divert the trade of Persia through Russia instead of through the Gulf, as was proposed by a Russian Embassy in Isfahan. Some trade from Persia always passed through Russia to Europe. There are some interesting documents in the Venetian archives on this matter, containing comparisons in the cost of transportation of merchandise either along the route Astrakhan-Isfahan or along the route Isfahan-Rishahr-Basra-Alep. In the seventeenth century, Poland also had ambitions for trade with Persia by way of the Black Sea. Plans for this were connected

59 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, pp. 90, 102.

60 Abbot, Leant Company, pp. 146-147; Van Dam, Beschryvinge, p. 282; Dunlop, Bronnen, p. 191; ARA, Staten-Generaal no. 12569.67 and 12584.33 (documents on plans of a Dutch Company for trade through Russia with Persia in the early seventeenth century); Staten-Generaal vol. 3349 fol. 138v-139 (30-1-1703: plan in 1703 of the Armenian Pieter Aved to divert the trade between Holland and Syria through Persia and Russia instead of through the Mediterranean). An English trader along the landroad halfway through the eighteenth century published a most interesting account of his experiences: J. Hanway, A historical account of British trade over the Caspian Sea (London 1753).

61 Berchet, Persia, pp. 248-249.
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with contacts between the Armenian communities of Poland and Persia.62

Finally, some mention should be made of activities of Asian countries in the Gulf. These activities were limited because all shipping from the Gulf beyond the Southern point of the Indian subcontinent was effectively screened off by the Europeans. Only the Omanis seem to have penetrated farther East, sometimes even to Indonesia. All the Western coast of India had busy shipping links with the Gulf. For a long time, this was almost exclusively trade; there were seldom political initiatives from Indian states in the Gulf. The Mughal Empire entertained diplomatic relations with Persia at regular intervals. The Omani carried on an active policy and even made military expeditions to India, but we have no references to political activities from India in the Gulf before the end of the eighteenth century when Hyder Ali tried to open establishments in Muscat and Bandar Abbas on the same footing as European nations.63 By way of curiosity it should be mentioned that Siam sent on a few occasions embassies to Persia through Bandar Abbas.64

the personnel of the establishments of the Europeans on the Gulf

Since the fall of Hormuz in 1622, the Portuguese retained Muscat and a number of subordinate fortresses. According to a list of the situation in 1634, there was quite a lot of Portuguese personnel present. It should be considered that this is a strength purely on


64 Foster, English Factories (1668-1669), pp. 211, 213.

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paper, officers tended to leave vacancies unfilled so that they could take the pay for their private use. There was a small administrative staff in Muscat, together with a garrison of 400 soldiers, 12 ships each with 40 sailors, and supporting institutions such as a hospital, an armoury, etc. The subordinate fortresses between Dabai and Qarqat each had a garrison of at the most 40 Portuguese soldiers and 150 Lascars, but the average was 8 Portuguese and 20–30 Lascars. The whole establishment must have been a sheer disaster from a fiscal viewpoint: the income from Muscat amounted to 67,125,000 pardos, while the expenses were 120,952,000 pardos. Purely on the basis of these figures one should not conclude that Portuguese power in the Gulf was doomed: there still were possibilities of compensation for the losses in Oman by profits in Bandar Kong and Basra, where there were no military expenses.65

The English and Dutch establishments were not nearly as large as the Portuguese establishment in Muscat. Both had main offices in Bandar Abbas and smaller offices, usually one in Isfahan, often one in Basra, sometimes also in places like Lar, Kerman, Bushahr, Shiraz etc. The smaller offices usually consisted of two staff members who bore in Dutch establishments the title of Residents, an interpreter, some clerks and servants. The main office was a different matter. The Dutch establishment in Bandar Abbas was much larger than the English factory. The reason for this is that the Dutch Company had monopolized trade and went to great lengths to protect it, while the English allowed private traders who to some extent had to fend for themselves. The Dutch establishment usually consisted of 150 to 200 men. The main office of the VOC in Bandar Abbas until 1700 was a splendid affair in the centre of the town. It was built more or less like a caravansaray around a courtyard. In the building were the offices, workshops for craftsmen, sleeping quarters and warehouses for merchandise, provisions, arms and spare equipment for ships. The Company often had a small but well-armed ship on permanent station in the Gulf and also chartered small local craft for all kinds of services. With the deterioration of the situation in Persia in the

65 BNL FG 1783, fol 5v-10.
late seventeenth century, the Dutch decided that they needed a safer residence and built a more simple, but much larger and stronger residence constructed almost as a military barracks complex just outside the town on the sea near a safe anchorage for the ships. This building served about 1790 as the customs office of Bandar Abbas.66

The Dutch establishment was manned by a large number of people. The highest of them had the title of Director as long as the establishment prospered, but after 1725 the chief Dutch official carried the title of Head (Oppenhoofd) and later only Resident. Until c. 1750 there was a very large Dutch staff in Bandar Abbas. The expenses for the upkeep of such an establishment were monumental. The Director had the high rank of Opperkoopman. He was assisted by a political council composed of the heads of the main departments: the Lieutenant who commanded the soldiers, the Pakhuismeester who was the head of the stores of merchandise, the Dispensier or Paymaster who was also responsible for provisions, the Equipaggemeester who was responsible for the ships, the Treasurer, the Chief Accountant and the Fiscal who was responsible for legal affairs and police. The Fiscal, together with some other members constituted the Raad van Justitie, the court of law. There was a large number of clerical staff, a full complement of craftsmen, some land based sailors to assist shipping if necessary and, last but not least, a considerable body of soldiers.67 Usually half of the soldiers were Europeans and half of them mercenaries from the Indonesian island of Bali.68 It is remarkable that Balinese soldiers were used: Bali, an independent Sultanate allied to the Dutch, was the only part of Indonesia where Hindu religion prevailed instead of Islam. During the last years of Dutch rule, there are references to the use of black soldiers from Southern Africa instead of Balinese.69 There also were a number of personal servants of the staff, mostly natives from Indonesia, India and Afriča. Finally there were some Banyan and Armenian clerks and interpreters. The Banyan brokers of the Company, who had the formal status of independent merchants, lived in houses near the establishment. The VOC had a few more establishments in Persia. There was usually one in Isfahan, manned by two residents, some clerical staff and a few soldiers. Sometimes there was an establishment in Lar. In Kerman the Dutch bought wool. Usually the head of that agency was an Armenian, but for a short time a European resided in Kerman. In Shiraz the Company had a winemaker and in the mountains North from Bandar Abbas the Head of the establishment had a summer residence. The later establishment of Kharg island which existed from 1755 to 1766 was just a smaller version of the Bandar Abbas establishment, this time in a real fortress.70 Other offices in the Gulf like Basra, Muscat and later Bushahr only had Residents with some clerical staff. Some establishments were not permanent but only manned during the trading season like those of Basra and Muscat during the seventeenth century. Muscat had no great economic importance for the Dutch and Basra was, in the seventeenth century, mainly kept on for the dispatch of letters by the landroad, but later became important.71 The general Musterrrolls of the Company permit us to have a complete set of names of all European personnel in the Gulf after 1700. Many of them were not native Dutchmen. Even persons of the highest ranks could be foreigners.

The establishments of the English Company resemble those of the Dutch Company though on a somewhat smaller scale. According to figures published by Amin, in 1751 the English establishment in Bandar Abbas had 11 men in the European staff while the Dutch had at that time about a hundred: 114 in 1740, and after 1756 in Kharg

66 About this building see p. 27 note 9
67 The lists of Dutch staff in Persia are in the General Musterrrolls of the Dutch establishments in Asia in ARA, VOC vol. 11334-11667. Oppenhoofd was the highest rank existing in the hierarchy of the East India Company outside Jakarta. The other executive ranks were in descending order Koopman, Onderkoopman, and Assistent.
68 ARA, VOC vol. 2091, fol. 4937: mention of Balinese soldiers in Dutch service.
69 Amin, British Interests, pp. 147-148, quoting EGD 3-5-1756.
70 A map of Kharg with the fortress of 'Musselsteyn' in A.W. Stiffe, 'Persian Gulf notes', Journal of the Royal Geographical Society 12 (1889), pp. 180-181. According to Stiffe, the fortress was completely ruined at that time, except one part which was used for the Persian garrison of the island.
71 Van Dam, Beschrijvinge, 324-325.
about 130 Europeans. The English like the Dutch had the structure of a 'President' with a Council of chief officials which later was reduced to two Residents with a small clerical staff.

the economy

There is no aspect of the history of the Gulf on which we have so many contemporary documents as on economic matters. There is also no aspect of the history of the Gulf of which so little is known. The many Portuguese, Dutch and English economic documents tend to cover only one side of the economy of the Gulf: external trade. This was only part of the economic system. Of the remainder we have only a few vague indications.

Next to nothing is known about the general state of the economy of the Gulf. It seems that the area was rather heavily overpopulated. Most of the coastal stretches offered little scope for agricultural production of any kind. The only way people could live off the land was by some nomadic cattle breeding.

There were some other ways to obtain an income and to be able to supplement the poor food of their own production or to buy textiles for clothing. These possible sources of income on land were connected with transportation of merchandise by caravans and the collecting and selling of products like gummi arabicum and other drugs. We have no indication of the importance of these extra sources of income. Transportation seems to have been lucrative: carrying fees were very high in the area, but we have no idea of frequencies and quantities carried. The principal caravans went inland from the main harbours of Bandar Abbas, Bandar Kong, Basra, Muscat and later Bushahr. There must have been some overland traffic on the Arabian peninsula parallel to the coast of the Gulf: in 1602 the Englishman Salbanke was able to travel overland from

Qatar to Muscat and apparently, Muscat’s trade with Qatar, Bahrain and Al Hasa mainly went overland in the 1670’s. Of much greater importance in terms of money were the products of the sea. There were three sources of income connected with the sea: income from transit trade, fishing and pearling. There were several ways in which the inhabitants of the coasts of the Gulf could obtain some income from transit trade. The rulers of states or semi-independent territories like Hormuz, Basra, Oman and their direct surrounding had their ‘tollhouses’ where passing merchandise was taxed, usually at about 5%. At one time, the state of Hormuz had found in this the main source of its wealth. Many of the wars in the Gulf had something to do with attempts of certain rulers to force shipping to pass by their harbours and to pay toll there, avoiding the harbours of their opponents.

Most tribal rulers were excluded from the game. Sometimes they were able to participate with profit like Shaikh Rashid of Basidu in the 1720’s, but he was an exception. This Shaikh Rashid was even familiar to the use of such relatively modern ways of payment as letters of exchange. Sometimes, the small tribes asked contribution from ships sailing through what they considered their waters. If such contributions were not given freely, they might be taken by force, and the victims complained about piracy. This indignation is slightly exaggerated: even in Europe the same practices still occasionally occurred. When they got the chance, some Arab sailors took to privateering. Many tribes which were allies of the Ya’ariba dynasty in Oman considered themselves at war with the Portuguese and their allies in India. Ships suspected as belonging to the Portuguese and their allies could rightfully be attacked by Arabs. Sometimes errors would be made: especially ships of local design

72 Amin, British interests, p. 155. The Dutch figures may be found in the muster rolls of Asia in ARA, VOC vol. 5168-5214.


75 Details on the career of Shaikh Rashid and the trading place he founded in Basidu can be found in chapter 7 of this book. A mention of his use of a letter of exchange in ARA, VOC vol. 2416, fol. 849.
belonging to English or Dutch subjects in India or Persia could be the victims of such errors, to which the English tended to react rather vehemently, the Dutch usually more phlegmatic.76

Some inhabitants of the area were able to acquire a larger portion of the wealth which annually passed through the Gulf by actively participating in importing and exporting, even if foreigners had a large share in the operations. On the subject of foreigners one should certainly not think in the first instance of Western Europeans, but of people from India, Armenians, and even some Jews and Greeks. In comparison with them, the Western Europeans had only a relatively small share in the trade which transited the Gulf.77

Another group of people which took some profit from the transit trade was the mass of small traders selling food, sometimes water and firewood, or working in the service of the foreign merchants as messengers, clerks, or sailors. In this way, several Arab nakhdas (captains) with their ships and crews were employed by the Dutch for transportation.78

Fishing was very important, not only because it could feed the inhabitants of villages on the desert coasts, but also because dried small fish could be used for feeding cattle, lessening the danger of starvation for humans and beasts. The Gulf was, and is, very rich in fish.

In terms of money, the pearl diving profits were very considerable, but during the period treated in this book, pearlimg does not seem to have offered much perspective except to a few rulers, shipowners and wholesale traders. Risks appear to have been great because often nothing was found and the expenses were consider-

Some occurrences of this kind are reported in the chapters 7-8 of this book.
Very typical cases are those referred to in the English Gombroon-diary 14-9-1756, 15-10-1756 and 4-12-1756 and in ARA, VOC vol. 2417, fol. 4098-4099.

The relative importance of the turnover of non-European merchants can be seen sometimes during wars, when they used European shipping for safety and lists of cargo sent by European ships are kept: e.g. in ARA, VOC vol. 1667, fol. 260-274).


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able. A Dutch observer at the end of the seventeenth century has a very negative view of it.79

The peoples of the coast of the Gulf were maritime nomads. Their life depended on their ships. Balbi gave in 1580 a detailed description of these ships and of the pearl diving.

These ships have a curved bottom and are from the bows to the stern without any deck, but they have a wide hold. The stern is somewhat higher than the bows, the rudder is bound with strong ropes to the stern and sticks into it so that the rudder can not be moved more than two fingers, but that is enough, because these rudder are scooped out in front and stretch far behind. The mate sits on a traverse beam and keeps in each of his hands the end of a rope which under the water is drawn through the rudder. He draws the rope with the hand he wants the ships to turn. The lower side of the rudder makes the stern turn. This is the way they handle their ships.
The mast is in the middle of the ship and the sail on it ends downward in a point. When the wind is blowing from behind, they only let down a small sail which they call Zambusa, and they use it instead of a fore-sail, turning it to the side from where the wind is coming. On the side they point to, they fix the sail drawing it with the downward point to the back of the ship. Next, they hoist from down out of the ship another small sail up to the top of the mast, and they flow a pennant from there. The rope, with which they hoist the sail (and which alsofixes all the other ropes to the mast), is tied to the bench of the mate. The backside of the ship is covered like a tent with mats and planks about 3 ells high. They adorn the backside of the ship with four flags, two on each side and a smaller in the middle. On the bows there are not more than two anchors to be able to anchor the ship in case of emergency. The sails are made of crude cloth, like canvas, and large or small as is needed. The inside of the ships is lined with the bark of date palm, but in such a manner that the lining is not touching the bottom or the sides of the ship. In this way, even when water penetrates between the bottom and the lining, it will not damage the cargo. Behind the ships, usually a small boat is tied, but in order that the small boat will not hinder the ship, they put a boy in it who has the order to hoist a sail on it as soon as a wind is blowing...

...When the season for the fishery starts, all these islanders send their best swimmers, who dive to the places where the oysters are most plentiful. On the beach there, they make an entire village of tents, or build some huts of

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The technique of pearl diving is described in Balbi, Viaggi, pp. 120-122 and in VOC vol. 2937, fol.33-40. In 1756, the head of the Dutch establishment on Kharg wanted to import diving bells from Europe for better results (Ivess, Travels, p. 215 and ARA, VOC vol. 334, letter of 24-9-1761.) The negative remarks in ARA, VOC vol. 1476, fol. 630-632.
straw. They do not stay any longer but for the duration of the pearling season. They take all they need and provisions with them and the fishing is open to everybody, because the King of Portugal takes a tax from this and also the monks of the Monastery of Saint Paul. During the pearling season there are three or four well-armed ships on sea nearby to protect the fishers from pirates, while these fishers are working everywhere with many vessels. In the morning the ships leave the temporary village and spread over the Gulf and hold at a place where they think they can find profit. They throw from each ship two or three ropes, on the end of which they have bound stones and sink them. So they fix the vessel on a place and the divers hang a bag on their side and close their noses against the water with the horns of goats and coat their ears with an oil which resists water. They climb down along the ropes and fill their bags as quickly as possible with oysters, then they shake the rope as a sign that the bag is full and that they want to come up. Then they are instantly drawn up in the ship. If this does not happen instantly, there is danger that the diver will drown, which has often happened. When one diver comes up, it is the turn of another to go down and so they keep on until the evening. If they are lucky and find a good place, they often get their ship completely full. In the evening they sail to their temporary village and those who have been fishing together throw their pearls in one heap on land. They leave them until the fishing has finished, then each goes to his own heap and opens the oysters, which is then easier because they have died, and they search for the pearls. This done, they throw them in copper sieves, separate the round ones from the oblong ones. The round ones are bought by the Portuguese. The second kind, which are not entirely round, are called Aia de Bengal, the third quality Aia di Camara and the smallest kind Aia di Cambata. After they have been sorted, the experts come and make an estimate of their value and then the buyers of all countries come and buy them all in a few days.

Life in the Gulf depended very much on exchanges with the outside world. Money was needed to buy food and spices, to buy clothing, to buy wood for ships. Basically, there were two ways in which money could come into the hands of the inhabitants; either from pearling or earned in connection with transit trade. Theoretically, there was a third way in which especially some heads of Arab tribes could acquire wealth: from presents given by the Persian or Ottoman government to obtain 'good behaviour'. Probably, this stream of money inward was neutralized by an outgoing stream of money: the money extorted by the Sultan or Shah's representatives from tribal chiefs or from traders.

It is quite easy to come to a wrong estimate of the place the Europeans held in the economy of the Gulf. The Portuguese did little trade for themselves, but they had the control over much of the trade of local merchants from the Gulf as well as from India who were obliged to pay taxes to the Portuguese. The part played by the English in the economy of the Gulf was more complex. There was a large body, the English East India Company, which carried out a limited amount of trade and received some income from permitting English subjects and inhabitants of parts of India controlled by them, to trade in the Gulf. In the course of the eighteenth century, the English tried to gain the same kind of control as the Portuguese had had during the sixteenth century. Dutch activities were for a long time strictly limited to the activities of their East India Company, a huge trading body and much less interested in getting income from sources like taxation in comparison with the English Company. At the time the free trade theory emerged around the 1750's, they suddenly took another course and established a safe harbour for everyone on Kharg, hoping that such a concentration of trade would grow there and that the Company's expenses could be covered by the spin-off of the increased local activity. This was a mistake.

It was participation in transit trade and shipping which created the capital which could serve as a power-base for some local inhabitants. Especially in the eighteenth century one sees the increasing importance of the Arabs as economic and political powers in the area. Apparently, most of the transit trade through the Gulf was conducted by people from India, with an increasing Arab participation, first from Jufar, from places between Jufar and Muscat and from Muscat itself, but finally also from many other places. On land, things were taken over either by Arab-Persian cooperation (in Farsistan) or by Arabs (in Oman) or by cooperation of Arabs (sometimes Christians), Jews, Armenians, Greeks in Basra. The Gulf had remained an important route for transit trade between the Ottoman Empire and the East even after the Europeans had opened their own route around the Cape of Good Hope. The route through the Gulf declined, first in the seventeenth century because of the breakdown of the Kingdom of Hormuz and still further during the eighteenth
century because of inland trouble and maritime insecurity. Part of the overland trade between the Mediterranean countries and Asia was diverted to the Red Sea already during the eighteenth century.

piracy: myth and reality

In the period treated by this book, piracy is mentioned less than in later years. Still, there are a lot of references to ‘pirates’ in all European sources although one nation might be more agitated about supposed acts of banditry at sea than others. In recent times, piracy has become a very bad word. In order to understand events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we should appreciate that the word piracy had a less pronounced moral meaning and that most of what was called piracy was not what we now understand. In a broad sense, every sailor of whatever nation was more or less a pirate in these times. It was considered perfectly normal for any subject of a nation at war to capture a boat owned by the enemy or by an ally of the enemy. Modern moralists and legalists talk in these cases about ‘corsairs’, ‘privateers’ or ‘freebooters’ and contrary to ordinary pirates, theirs is a gentlemanly profession. In reality it is very difficult to distinguish the gentlemanly pursuit of capturing enemy ships from simple robbery. In the case of the Gulf we have a very complicated situation in which the notions of war or peace were rather vague. But references to real piracy were comparatively rare in the Gulf: real pirates, usually Europeans, mostly operated in the Indian Ocean.

It is very doubtful whether the Arab tribesmen who are too readily denounced as pirates in some European documents really were so. We must consider that there was an almost continuous war on between Portugal and the Arabs of Oman. Because of this, it was perfectly legitimate for the Arabs to capture Portuguese ships. The Portuguese may talk about piracy, but this was just wartime propaganda. Dutch observers usually consider Arab attacks against Portuguese shipping as normal acts of war. Arab tribes were also often at war with Surat, Canara or Persia. The Arabs would then have the justification to attack ships of these nations. Less correct, but still not completely out of order would be to attack the allies and friends of the enemy or to attack neutral shipping on its way to enemy harbours.

There are however clear cases of European piracy. One particularly revolting case was recorded in the diary of the Dutch establishment in Surat. A ship of an English interloper sank off Muscat. Some of its crew came abroad of a grab belonging to an Arab merchant of Bandar Kong, Shaikh Abdul Haji. These Englishmen offered the crew of the Arab ship alcohol, and when these sailors were sufficiently drunk, they killed most of them, sparing two women, the nakhuda and the mate. They sailed to Onore, and off the coast they violated and murdered the women and threw the two survivors overboard. They sold the ship in Onore but they were caught and executed because the nakhuda and the mate had managed to swim to the coast and were able to prove their case in the local court.82

If we consider the mentions of piracy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we see that most actions called piracy by their victims, could still be considered somehow as legitimate naval warfare. The attacks by the Omanis on Arab ships calling at Bandar Kong where the Portuguese had a share in the customs revenues may be considered as legitimate, as might the Arab attacks on Surati ships flying the English flag when there was a war with Surat. Also Arab attacks on shipping to and from Persian harbours, when there was warfare, were not illegitimate. There has also been some capturing of ships owned by or in the service of the English or the Dutch. In the Gulf, the English seem to have been more often the victims of such attacks than the Dutch. This is understandable: the Dutch tended to use ships with heavier armament in case of danger and were less prone to protecting country trade by Indian ships with their flag. In most cases, such attacks did not cause serious incidents. The Arabs knew the force of possible European retaliation and most cases of attacks on Dutch or English shipping were administrative

82 The case is told in Barendse, Koningen, Compagnieën en Kapers, p. 217, quoting ARA, VOC 1398 1-2-1684,217; VOC 1396, 740.
errors where the ownership was not sufficiently clear. The Dutch usually obtained immediate restitution of ships and cargo, this was also often the case with the English.

That the sources use the word ‘pirates’ is simply a linguistic matter: at the time the difference between simple banditry and privateering was not always expressed in precise terms. In the reports, piracy is privateering of which the writer of the report either is (or risks becoming) the victim. The fact is that the situation in the Gulf was very stimulating for any kind of privateering. There was almost continually some kind of war on. It was very difficult to distinguish country trade in the service of the enemy from country trade covered by the flag of the English or the Dutch Company. For all practical purposes, the European-built ships of the English or Dutch East India Company very rarely had any problems with Arabs, they only attacked each other as was the case in 1653, when the Dutch captured some English ships in the Gulf.83

Thus, we have tried to avoid the use of the word ‘pirate’ even if this word has been used in the sources. We are aware that the writers of these sources had a different understanding of the word ‘piracy’ and we also are aware that sometimes with some stretching of moral and juridical rules, practically all captures of ships in the Gulf by Asians could be considered as legitimate privateering. There were practically no regular warships in the Gulf, so that any kind of local naval warfare was done by trading ships, and it is not realistic to moralize on the subject: up to the Napoleonic times the same situation existed in many places in Europe.

Captures of Asian ships by Europeans were of a less justifiable kind. The activities of the European and American pirate communities established on Madagascar, the Comores and the Seychelles often had nothing to do with legitimate warfare.

83 Foster, English factories (1651-1654), pp.161, 163-165.

CHAPTER 3
THE DECLINE OF PORTUGUESE POWER IN THE GULF

first setbacks for the Portuguese

During the first years of the seventeenth century, Portuguese naval control in the area around the Indian Ocean suffered a number of serious setbacks. First there was the influx of European competitors into Asia: English and Dutch. The new Europeans did not only do damage to the economic base of the Portuguese presence by taking for themselves a part of the profits, but they also started military operations against the Portuguese establishments and ships which were equipped for warfare against Asians, not against Europeans. Also relations deteriorated between the Portuguese and the Asian peoples in whose territories the Portuguese held fortified towns and trade establishments.

The English and the Dutch often contributed to the Portuguese difficulties by intriguing with local rulers to oust the Portuguese. The Portuguese had not the means to pay much attention to the problems in the Gulf: most of their military power was involved in defending essential areas in the Eastern parts of Asia against the Dutch onslaught. The diminution of their trade because of the activities of foreign competitors also diminished their economic means to keep up a defence system.

This was happening while in the Gulf pressure rose from two sides. There was the expansion of Persia to the Northern coast of the Gulf and there was pressure from inland tribes of the Arabian peninsula to the Southern coast. Shah Abbas I of Persia left more or less a free hand to the almost independent Governor of Farsistan, Ala Werdhi Khan and later to his son Imam Quli Khan. These two were trying to break the Portuguese-Hormuzian monopoly of Gulf trade in order to get their own finger into the pie and to obtain as a result a large income from customs duties. The kingdom of Lar was
annexed to Persia in 1603, and from then on, the heartland of the kingdom of Hormuz was within the reach of the Persians.1

In the meantime, tribes were very much on the move in the Arabian peninsula and the Portuguese establishments on the Southern coast of the Gulf came under Arab pressure. The sources we have on the history of the Gulf are not of a kind to give us clear information on the real causes of the increasing pressures on the Portuguese from the Arab side. The phenomenon of unrest seems to be widespread over the entire peninsula: the Ottoman borders were as much under attack as the Portuguese establishments. This makes it conceivable that there was a deep undercurrent of economic or demographic character. Possibly some climatological change did upset the precarious ecological balance in the desert area, causing a diminishing food production and increase of nomadism which in its turn caused new pressures on the production by the sedentary population of the oases and again an increase of nomadism: the fatal chain reaction always present in the desert economy. However, there was increasing tribal pressure on the Basra region, on the Ottoman hold on Basra and on some remaining strongholds in the Arabian peninsula like Yemen and on the Portuguese hold on their strongholds.

The internal situation in Hormuz aggravated the crisis. The Portuguese administration was thoroughly corrupt and only part of the money destined for defence was used for this purpose.2

The first disaster befell the Portuguese at Bahrain in 1602. There was no garrison of real Portuguese soldiers in the fortress of this far outpost of the Kingdom of Hormuz, but this makes little difference. The important fact is that the most Western fortress of the Kingdom of Hormuz came under control of the Persian and Arab enemies of Portugal, and that Hormuz had lost control over the Western part of the pearl banks, not only a very considerable source of revenue, but also a means to keep influence with Arab tribes of the coastal area by having the possibility to decide who would be allowed to dive and who would not.

3 Gouvea, Relation, p. 39-41; cf. Faroughy, Ormuz, p. 92-93, who quotes Gouvea and a history of the Safavi by Murajim Yazdi, manuscript in the British Library Oriental no. 6263, which has a slightly different story mentioning that the man who organized the rebellion on Hormuz was the Wazir himself whose name was Khoja Mo‘īned Din (Khoja Ma‘īn al Din).

The Dutch letter in ARA, Vooqomagnin 159, doc. 43 (letter of Fernando Croiz in Goa). There also exists an English letter of 1609 which tells that Bahrain fell to the Persians some 6 years ago: Calendar of State Papers, (Colonial, East Indies, 1513-1616), document no. 446, p. 186. Short references can be found in Gulbenkian, Ambassade de Luis Pereira de Lacerda, p. 36 and in Boxer, Ruy Fregere, p. xxii, quoting Portuguese documents printed in Bulhão Pato, Documentos remettidos, vol. 1, p. 11, 13, 31-32.

4 Durnel, Bronnen, p. 687.

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economic means to build up a large naval force. A small Portuguese galley squadron was the only naval force in the Gulf.

No less dangerous for the Portuguese was the approach of European competitors. Already in 1609, there was some panic among the Portuguese in Hormuz because a large Dutch fleet had appeared in the Arabian Sea, but the Portuguese did not know that the Dutch had as yet no plans against Hormuz and limited their activities to attacks on Portuguese shipping in the area of Dhufar. 7 By 1618, the Dutch had acquired many fortresses in the Spice Islands, in Java, and even in Pulicat in India. There were fears that the Dutch would attack Malacca, the Portuguese stronghold separating East Asia from the Indian Ocean. 8 This was still rather far away from the Gulf, but danger was building up nearer at hand. Dutch ships had arrived in Aden, Mocha and Shihur in the Hadramaut. 9 This build-up of pressure and small territorial losses like that of Bahrain were relatively unimportant in comparison with a much more dangerous development: the threat that Hormuz would lose its position as practically the only link between Persia and the sea.

For several years, Imam Quli Khan had tried to get outlets for Persia in the Gulf inside his own province of Farsistan. There was one very good place for this. A valley of Southern Persia, through which runs the main caravan road from Isfahan to the coast, ends in a sandy beach in between the islands of Hormuz and Qishm. For a long time, this area had belonged to the Arabs of Hormuz, and they still had a small fortress there, which the Portuguese called Comorão. Most of the drinking water used in the arid island of Hormuz came from wells in this area. Since the Persians had occupied

7 Cordeiro, Dois Capitães, p. 147. This Portuguese panic may have been caused by the fact that the Dutch had made an alliance with enemies of the Portuguese in Malabar.

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Laristan, they had started to occupy small stretches of this territory, even in time of peace between Persia and Portugal. In 1602 they attacked Comorão for the first time. 10 The Portuguese were now confronted with the difficulty that while they were at peace with the Shah, the local authorities of Shiraz were attacking them. In 1607, forces of the Governor of Shiraz gained control of the essential sources of water and built two new fortresses near the old fortress of Comorão (Gamru in Persian). After some negotiations, the water sources were returned to the Portuguese, but the Persian fortresses remained in place and the Portuguese had lost exclusive control over the coastal area opposite Hormuz. 11

Finally, in 1615, Imam Quli Khan besieged the Portuguese fortress of Comorão with a considerable force and took it without meeting serious resistance. The Portuguese were too slow in reacting to this setback and hesitated to start a formal war with the Shah. 12 Their problem was that while formal peace existed with the Shah, this did not stop the Governor of Shiraz from attacking an area which the Persians considered to be theirs. The Portuguese establishments in Asia were too heavily pressed by Dutch attacks to be able to help the very small forces in Hormuz.

The Portuguese were allowed no rest. In the early years of the seventeenth century, certain contacts seem to have been established between small groups of coastal Arabs and Imam Quli Khan, otherwise the strong support by small local ships of the Persian attacks on the Portuguese can not be explained. 13 At the same time, a dangerous situation was building up in Oman. Hormuz controlled a number of coastal fortresses there, but the remainder of the country belonged to the Rulers of Oman of the Al Nabhan dynasty. Their state was a loose conglomerate of tribes which tended to disintegrate since 1565. The principal source about the history of Oman at that

10 Gouvea, Relation, p. 37.
11 Boxer, Rue Frére, p. xxii; Rue Frére, Comentários, p. 3; Gulbenkian, Ambas-
sade de Luis Pereira de Lacerda, p. 35.
12 Boxer, Rue Frére, p. xxii.
13 Boxer, Rue Frére, p. 181 = Rue Frére, Comentários, p. 238-239.
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The Omani chronicle of Shaikh Sirhan, an Ibadhi source which is rather biased against the remains of the Al Nabhan state, where Sunni influence seems to have been strong.\(^{14}\) Already during the end of the 16th century, there had been a Persian intervention against one of the Al Nabhan, probably from the area of Jask. The Persians attacked Suwar, but were repelled.\(^{15}\) During the following years internal troubles in Oman continued. The weakening of the Al Nabhan certainly was dangerous for the Portuguese because it could lead to all kinds of conflicts near the Hormuzan fortresses on the coast. There were serious troubles around Suwar in the years 1615-1616. The town was contested by several members of the Al Nabhan. There are some differences in the story of these conflicts between Portuguese and Omani sources.\(^{16}\) While the Portuguese mention a simple rebellion against the Portuguese-Hormuzan authority in the area, the Omani chronicle sees Suwar as an Omani town disputed between several Al Nabhan pretenders. In these disputes at a certain moment Hormuzan forces intervened.\(^{17}\)

While the Persians apparently had the support of certain Arab groups, other Arabs were opposed to the Persian drive for expansion to the coast of the Gulf. Ali Kamal, a tribal leader from Nakhilu who had some standing at the Persian court, left Persia with a few followers after a conflict which had led to the killing of several members of his family. He founded a village on the opposite coast of the Gulf, probably somewhere between Sharjah and Ras al Kaima. He offered himself as an ally to Hormuz, a curious turnabout, considering the old hostility between Nakhilu and Hormuz.\(^{18}\)

The vendetta between Ali Kamal and the Persians shows that although the Persian drive against the Portuguese may have had Arab support, there was nothing like a general Arab movement in support of the Persian actions against the Portuguese. The Persians seem to have taken their conflict with Ali Kamal very seriously; they landed a considerable body of troops on the Arabian peninsula and managed to drive away Ali Kamal with his small force. A Portuguese observer considered that Ali Kamal had made an error not to cooperate with an Arab tribal leader he calls Carthane, who dominated the interior. This Arab leader might be identified with the Hilali leaders Qatan bin Qatan or Nasir bin Qatan mentioned in an Omani source.\(^{19}\) The presence of Persian troops in the area offered the occasion to all who had grudges against Hormuz to declare themselves, and the consequence was a widespread uprising against Hormuz in the area between Julfar and Suwar.\(^{20}\) The whole episode of Ali Kamal is of great interest, so we give here the text of the principal source on it.

Persian forces crossed the Gulf and arrived at Zulpha [Julfar] on the coast of Arabia. All people in Hormuz feared with reason that they would plunder and burn this place like they had done during the war of Bandar.\(^{21}\) Although this was the only place which had remained to the poor king of Hormuz, who asked with much insistence that he would be given troops to defend it, this was impossible because there were few soldiers in Hormuz, and because there were only three small ships and one galley without rowers and without equipment: the other ships and soldiers had gone with the commander of the fleet to escort the ships of the governor and other officers of the King to Sind and Basra, and so it was certain that Zulpha would be plundered and burned. It was thought that all dangers which threatened Hormuz would now descend upon the poor Arabs who lived there. Some people were sad about this because they had their possessions and most of their merchandise there. But the small hope disappeared because 7 or 8 days later it was told that the Persian army had returned to the place where it was before, after having ruined and burnt a small village on a mile's distance from Zulpha, where 50 or 60 Arabs from Nakhilu had been killed, but that Zulpha had not been attacked. It is said that the reason for this expedition was that the king of Persia had a quarrel with a certain Arab from Nakhilu, which is situated on the

14 Ross, Annals, p. 35-44.
15 Ross, Annals, p.36.
16 The incidents with Suwar have been discussed extensively in Boxer, 'New light', p.32-33
18 Silva Figueres, Ambassade, p. 383. Trouble with in the area of Julfar in 1614-1615 is also mentioned in Bocarro, Decade XIII, p. 347.
19 Ross, Annals, pp. 48, 53-54.
21 Bandel is Band Ali near Comorão, the war alluded to is the war in c. 1608 about the fortresses and wells near Comorão.
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border of the kingdom of Lar, called Ali Cuman [Ali Kamal], because he had moved some years before to the coast of Arabia near Zulfa, in order to live there together with some others, and they built in that place some small simple houses in the ordinary manner of the people of Nakhu. The reason why this Arab left Nakhu, was that being a valiant man, who had done courageous deeds in war, he could not suffer the pride and the insolence of the Persians, and he lived in a continuous defiance of the Khan of Shiraz and of the King of Persia, who planned to capture him, because with these qualities he could have started an uprising with the people of his country who would have followed him with pleasure and would have obeyed his orders. This must have been the true reason of his departure because instantly he negotiated with the king of Hormuz and with the governor of the fortress of Hormuz and promised to serve the King of Spain to defend his kingdom against the Persians, if he would be assisted with some money to entice some people from Nakhu who would enter his service. But because the governors of Hormuz looked too much for their own interest to be interested in such things, they did nothing to keep this man who was courageous and who could keep in devotion a great number of Arabs, although he would have been content with little. In India and especially in Persia it is of utmost importance to have local allies against a so powerful lord as the shah of Persia, for whose government all Arabs have horror, but they neglect to win them by small gifts by which one could oblige them to keep themselves ready for all occasions, which occur quite often because of the vicinity of the Persians. The Nakhu man, although he kept guard and had observed the Persian army, which was told to sail directly to Hormuz, neglected to ask directly for help to the Arabs, his neighbours, whose emir or lord whom they obey is called by a particular name Carthame [Qatan], and it would not be easy to obtain it because he was poor, and had no means to pay these nomadic people who are selfish and mercenary. But in order to be sure that the enemy after having taken Hormuz would not attack him also, he fortified as well as he could the nearest port to the place where he had established and sank some ships charged with sand on the places where he thought that an invasion would be easiest, and he made some small fortifications for the defence. The Persians arrived one morning with 150 small ships loaded with more than 5000 men most with firearms and 200 horse. At a distance of 30 or 40 passes from the land, where the beach is rather flat, they dived in the water and the first horsemen went on horse in the boats and instantly attacked the Arabs on several places. The Nakhu man had 200 men, and 30 horse, who received with great courage a hail of shot and arrows which the enemy discharged on them, and although they could save themselves all by retiring from the coast, whence they had already retired their women and children some days before, they preferred to fight like they did for some time in their trenches, resisting the Persians with such a courage, that they did them as much damage as they received. But the number was unequal, and their captain was wounded by two bullets, so they retired with their ordinary speed, helped by their knowledge of the land. The

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Persians pursued them for some time and killed some on the retreat, so that with those who had been killed earlier, some 60 remained and 40 of the enemy. The Nakhu man did at this occasion all that could be expected of a valiant soldier and of a good captain not willing to leave his poor huts without facing and fighting the enemy, serving us as an example of what we should do in Hormuz, of which the commander had none of the good qualities which appeared so shining in the Arab.

Already for some years, Shah Abbas I had been trying to establish contacts in Europe. He wanted to open a road for exportation of Persian silk outside the area controlled by his enemy, the Ottoman Sultan. It was a source of great irritation to him that the Sultan received a considerable revenue from customs duties on Persian products going to the Mediterranean. The Shah tried to approach powers like England and Holland, promising great privileges if direct trade could be established. The English especially were interested in buying silk in Persia and they were looking for cheaper ways of doing trade with Persia than the expensive caravans. Their ambassador in Persia was offered the choice of several ports to build an establishment. Among these ports was Bahrain, but the English considered the risk of an establishment there too great with the exit of the Gulf dominated by the Portuguese.\(^\text{22}\) The only open outlet Persia had to the sea were the ports of Baluchistan, although they were ill-connected with the interior of Persia. In 1616 English ships arrived at the Baluchistan coast and landed at Jask. Direct relations between Persia and the English establishments in Asia were established.\(^\text{23}\)

Shah Abbas had also approached the Dutch, but at first the Dutch were too busy in the Eastern part of the Indian Ocean to show much interest in trade with Persia. Certain circles in Holland were anxious to acquire their own means of supply of Persian silk, and information had penetrated to the directors in Holland that there were large possibilities for trade in the Gulf, but the management of the Dutch

\(^{22}\) Calendar of State Papers (Colonial, East Indies, 1513-1616), documents no. 763 and 946 (p. 317 and 397).

\(^{23}\) Steensgaard, Asian trade revolution, p. 327; Boxer, Ruy Fregre, p. xxi-xxii.
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East India Company in Asia did not have sufficient means to try them.24

Portuguese countermeasures: the mission of Ruy Freire

Seen in the framework of international relations, the political situation in the Gulf was somewhat anomalous. The position in world affairs at that time was that the King of Spain and Portugal was involved in a kind of holy war with the Ottoman Empire, and with Islamic Morocco. He was also at war with the Dutch who had rebelled against the King of Spain who by inheritance was also 'Lord of the Netherlands'. These wars were not connected although shortly after 1610 some tentative steps were taken to get a formal alliance afoot against the King of Spain. England was not directly involved because it was not formally at war with any party. The position of the Shah in this situation was ambiguous. The Shah considered the Ottoman Sultan as his principal enemy, and an alliance with the Portuguese would be logical. In fact, there was a series of negotiations between the King of Spain and Portugal and the Shah, but these negotiations were difficult because the Portuguese, assuming the right of monopoly of all trade in Asia, were angered by the Persian permission to the English to establish themselves in Jask. The representatives of the King of Spain and Portugal could not obtain firm promises of restitution of Bahrain and of the fortress of Comorão, maybe because of the feeble hold by Shah Abbas I on Imam Quli Khan, the governor of Farsistan, maybe because of Persian claims of some kind of sovereignty and the financial advantages the Persians expected from pearling in the area of Bahrain.

At first, both the Portuguese and the Persians seem to have continued their endeavours to reach a negotiated settlement, but their efforts failed. Mutual distrust and the cultural differences made negotiations between the two powers difficult.25 When negoti-26

iations failed, a naval force under command of Ruy Freire de Andrade was sent from Lisbon in 1619 to regain the initiative for the Portuguese in the Gulf by chasing the English away and putting some pressure on the Persians. One of the main points of the Portuguese project for regaining control of the Gulf was to build a new and very strong fortress on Qishm island. Qishm had food and water and was less dependent on outside support than was Hormuz. Of course, this was dangerous. The Shah of Hormuz had some claims on Qishm, but the powerful Khan of Farsistan would certainly resent the building of a fortress there and the Shah would suffer loss of income if the Portuguese cut off the trade of the English in Persia.

On June the 20th, 1620, after a voyage of 15 months, Freire arrived off Hormuz. He was received with due ceremony, and the troops, who had received no pay for a long time, were paid by the Portuguese Governor with assistance from the financial resources of a charitable brotherhood connected with the Chapter of the Catholic church of Hormuz. The Shah of Hormuz also visited the fleet.26

After these formalities, Freire went off in a hurry with a naval force to Jask in order to impede the English from buying Persian silk there. The Portuguese establishments in Gwadar and Sind were warned to keep their ships out of the way and send them to the safe port of Muscat because English ships were expected. On Christmas day 1620, the ships of the second English expedition to Jask arrived in the area and the Portuguese engaged in battle. After almost two weeks of manoeuvring without much action, there was a short battle, but fighting was terminated by a storm. The English, although they were badly mauled in battle, were able to make use of the storm to disengage and quickly loaded the silk which was awaiting them in Jask.27 The failure of this Portuguese attempt to

25 The negotiations between the Persians and the Portuguese are extensively discussed in Storegaard, Asian trade revolution, p. 211-323.
26 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, p. 14-18; Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 76-79.
27 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, p. 18-20 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 81-82. In the same book the English accounts of the affair are printed: 250-254 the account by Richard Swan and 254-5 by Monnox (a mention in a Dutch source is Coen, Bescheiden, vol. 3 p. 212).
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block English shipping is an indication that the Portuguese ships were less seaworthy in bad weather than the English or Dutch ships were. In battle there was at the time not much difference between the Portuguese and the Northern peoples, but when there was bad weather, the Dutch and the English ships, built for the gales of the Northern Atlantic, were clearly at an advantage.

After this failure, Freire started formal negotiations with the King of Hormuz about the building of a fortress at Qishm as the Portuguese king had ordered him. The negotiations are described in detail in the Comentarios, a rather biased, but extremely well-documented and detailed apology of Ruy Freire’s actions in the Gulf, and they present an interesting impression of the way territorial claims were considered in those years. The Captain of the castle of Hormuz was the first to give his opinion on the project. Even while he recognized the advantages of having a fortress which unlike Hormuz, could support itself with food and water, the commander did not agree with the project of fortifying Qishm because this would lead to an end of the peace with Persia and the Portuguese would have another war on their hands. But the Shah of Hormuz was of another opinion. He considered that all the coasts of Persia were legally his possession and that Qishm even presented a special case because the Persians had earlier sold this island (which did not even belong to them) to the Portuguese for a large amount of money. In the view of the Shah of Hormuz there could be no legal obstacle to the Portuguese fortification of Qishm and he offered money and soldiers of his own for this project.28

Finally, a force of 2000 Portuguese and 1000 Muslim soldiers from Hormuz were dispatched in 3 ships and 30 small vessels to Qishm on May 7th, 1621.29 The island of Qishm was at that time garrisoned by a strong force of Persians, who were entrenched on the beaches, but the combined invasion force of Portuguese and Hormuzians managed to dislodge them. They built a fortress around prefabricated wooden frames which they brought from Hormuz. It was situated near some wells: in this way the loss of the wells on the mainland was compensated. The wooden core was quickly surrounded by heavy walls. Now Hormuz had a new and sure source of provisions nearby.30

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the siege of Qishm and operations in Sir

Imam Quli Khan’s reaction came without delay. While the Portuguese were still at work, a Persian force under Abdullah Khan, nephew of Imam Quli Khan, approached. However, the Persian commander, seeing the progress the Portuguese had made with their work, did not dare to attack this fortress which was moreover protected by a considerable naval power. Instead the Persians settled themselves in a fortified camp near the Portuguese fortress. Persian troops continued to pour in from the mainland. The Portuguese were able to get from a spy the information that the Khan of Shiraz, Imam Quli Khan, was said to have 25000 soldiers ready in Lar which he would send to Abdullah Khan.31

Within the Portuguese camp, matters did not go well. Manoel de Azevedo, one of the most prominent Portuguese officers, had once been Ruy Freire’s superior officer and resented now being under his command. Finally, Azevedo left Qishm with the troops under his command, thus weakening the defences of Qishm at a crucial moment.32 It must be remarked that for all his energetic ways, Ruy Freire may have not been such a good commander as history (influenced by the Comentarios) has described him. Not only do we perceive indications of cruelty towards suspected adversaries which seems to have been more pronounced than usual in his time, but he also seems to have been very impetuous in his plans and was not a man who cooperated well with his colleagues. We should consider that the mentality of the Portuguese noblemen especially their arrogance and individualism, was not really suited to the mainten-

28 Boxer, Ruy Freire, p. 34 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 93.
29 Boxer, Ruy Freire, p. 32-35 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 93-94.
30 Boxer, Ruy Freire, p. 35-38 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 95-97.
31 Boxer, Ruy Freire, p. 44-45 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 104.
ance of an ‘empire’ consisting of small outposts with limited military means. On the other hand, the bourgeois from the cities of North-Western Europe may have been considered adventurers and individualists in their own cultural surroundings, but in comparison with the Portuguese they were less proud, less inclined to expect blind obedience and more inclined to expect and respect intelligent initiative from their staff. They also tended to be a shade less arrogant and cruel towards the local population.

Expecting a Persian counter-attack, Ruy Freire continued with his work on the fortification of Qishm. He sent a considerable force of small ships to hinder the passage of the Persian force to the island. The remainder of the Portuguese naval squadron at Qishm, some larger and 16 small ships, was sent to plunder the town of Bandar Kong. With this force went a unit of Hormuzian Arabs under command of Ali Kamal. Bandar Kong was not fortified, and the large Persian garrison was unable to defend the town, so that the Portuguese and Hormuzian forces could retire with a rich booty.33

Once the construction of the fortress of Qishm was finished, the Portuguese started to recover the losses which had been recently suffered by the kingdom of Hormuz. In 1619, the Persian attack on Ali Kamal in the area of Sir had stimulated a widespread uprising of Arab elements in the area between Jurfar and Suha against the authority of Hormuz and the Portuguese.34 Ruy Freire sent two trankeys under Felipe Alfonseca and Gaspar Pereira Páes to investigate the situation. The Portuguese ships entered the inlet of Khasab where they discovered two ships. They attacked the ships and after overpowering them, with much loss of life on the side of their adversaries, they found out that on board were two Shaikhs of Rams, who were on their way to offer their friendship and presents to the Shah. One of the ships carried a number of horses. The Portuguese beheaded all the Arabs they took prisoner with the exception of the two Shaikhs who were brought before Ruy Freire in Qishm. Once arrived in Qishm, the Shaikhs were taken aside by ‘Miragonadim’.

commander of the Arab contingent in the troops at Qishm, who warned them that their lives were in the hands of Ruy Freire. Next Ruy Freire asked them about the present situation on the Southern coast and agreed to set them free for the huge ransom of 120,000 patacas, which, if anything, might prove that the towns of the Sir area had at that time considerable quantities of cash and so presumably carried on important trading.35

The consequence of the capture of the Shaikhs of Rams seems to have been that all the area of Sir remained more or less loyal to Hormuz with the exception still of Jurfar, where there was a Persian garrison, probably as a consequence of the Persian attack on Ali Kamal. The Portuguese considered that this town would not be too difficult to retake ‘because it had no king’: apparently the Portuguese aristocrats considered it easier to gain a victory over a group of citizens of a town than over a local ruler, possibly also because a Persian official could command less authority and support than a local ruler.

In 1621, three small ships under the command of Hieronimo Tavares and troops under Ali Kamal were sent from Laft, specially equipped with some heavy guns, apparently because guns might be needed to reduce a strong fortress. Tavares sent ‘Cogenedim’, the Governor of Jurfar, who was a near kinsman of the Shah of Hormuz, an ultimatum to surrender the fortress and its Persian garrison.36 He received a negative reply: his adversaries said they had enough powder and shot to defend themselves. Ali Kamal and Tavares decided to land and to entrench themselves in a large mosque which stood on a sandy plain not far from the fortress. They subsequently plundered the suburbs, burning and killing at random. They built

34 Silva Figueras, Ambascade, p. 383-385.
platforms for the artillery and soon the fortress was reduced to a state of ruin. The quick success of this bombardment seems to indicate that the fortress was not very strongly built. 'Cogenedim' surrendered on condition that the Persian troops would not be harmed, that the local population would receive a general amnesty from the Shah of Hormuz and that the Commander 'Cogenedim' would deliver himself up to the mercy of Ruy Freire. The Persians in Julfar did not want to accept those conditions, but within the town they were in a minority and the local population were willing to submit.

Thus, the fortress surrendered and Ali Kamal was left there as Governor with a force of 200 soldiers. 'Cogenedim' and 600 Persians were carried off to Qishm to Ruy Freire. Ruy Freire acted with diplomacy. In the name of the uncle of 'Cogenedim', the Shah of Hormuz, he pardoned him. He set the Persian garrison free, after which the Persians offered to go over to the Portuguese service. This was accepted and 'Cogenedim' received command of this new body of troops. They participated in a raid against the Persian town of 'Bramy' (Khor Ibrahim), opposite Hormuz. Four Nakhilu ships were captured.37

But while this was going on, Persian troops under Abdullah Khan were massing together. In June 1621, the Persian commander arrived in front of the fortress of Qishm. A long siege started, with several heavy attacks by the Persian forces against the fortress and Portuguese counterattacks. The Portuguese certainly were not completely blocked because they sent a naval force to the small town of Kuhistaq on the Persian coast opposite Larba and plundered it.38 After some time, the Portuguese naval force, which was at anchor in a creek near Laft, made another sortie, this time against the fortified Persian harbour of Saramiño (it is difficult to identify this place), where many of the Persian supplies were handled. The Portuguese conquered the fortress and razed it to the ground.39

Next, Ruy Freire ordered his naval forces to destroy Jask, as this would not only harm the Persians but would also mean an end to English trade with Persia. Indeed, the attack on Jask succeeded and the Portuguese and Hormuzian forces plundered the town dreadfully, not sparing the English factory. Meanwhile the Persians captured a small ship from Hormuz off Bandar Kong and killed its crew. In retaliation, a Portuguese force under Ali Kamal was sent to plunder this town. They conquered the fortress and the Hormuzians in the Portuguese force took terrible revenge by plundering and killing many Persian soldiers.40 Early autumn was the time when each year the monsoon carried the English ships to Jask. The Portuguese kept a strict lookout, Ruy Freire left Qishm and joined a strong fleet which was to cruise off the coast.

At this time, discord became again manifest among the Portuguese. Freire received a letter from the Viceroy in Goa disapproving of his actions in Qishm and deploiring the break with Persia. He ordered Freire to give up Qishm. This letter was discussed in a council at Hormuz. The Shah of Hormuz was of the opinion that Qishm should be kept (of course: he claimed sovereignty over the island), but that the fleet off Jask should be withdrawn in order to protect Hormuz and Qishm against Persian attacks. Ruy Freire wanted the fleet to remain at Jask, but the Shah of Hormuz had also great authority with the Portuguese and action was taken according to his advice. While the English might be expected to arrive any moment, the Portuguese navy attacked the Persian fortress at Laft and destroyed it, while the army made a sortie from Qishm fortress.41

The situation had grown quite dangerous for the Portuguese. Ruy Freire had been able to pacify the coast of Oman and to build a fortress at Qishm, but this was only by direct military confrontation with Persian forces and after twice attacking the English. Even if

there was no formal war between Portugal and England, the English must have been considered to be free to attack in their turn the Portuguese in the area. The English had already concluded a defensive alliance with the Dutch, a combined naval force of both nations was to cruise off the Eastern coast of Africa to protect mutual interests. The Dutch were also planning to follow the English in opening trade with Persia through Jask. In fact, the English had asked for Dutch assistance in the operations in the Gulf planned for that year, but they did not reach agreement with the Dutch when the latter claimed in exchange the right to appoint the vice-admiral of the fleet. Instead, the Dutch fleet under a rather iritated Admiral Dedel, sailed for operations against the Portuguese on the Eastern coast of Africa.\textsuperscript{42}

Along with the same monsoon as that with which the English were expected came a Portuguese relief fleet under the command of Simão da Mello. The news arrived then that nine English ships, several of them very large, were sailing towards Hormuz. On the advice of the Shah of Hormuz, the Portuguese planned to fall upon the English with all their naval forces, both with the large ships which Ruy Freire had with him and with the small ships assembled in the creek near Laft. While Hormuz prepared itself for a possible English attack, Francesco de Souza, commander of the naval force, died. There was no successor available with his reputation and experience. Until a final decision by the Vice-roy of Portuguese India arrived, Simão da Mello, former commander of Mombasa took the command.\textsuperscript{43}

Shortly afterwards, while the attacks by the Persian besiegers on Qishm continued, and the Portuguese spirit of resistance began to crumble, the nine large English ships, escorted by hundreds of Persian small boats, appeared off Qishm. Ruy Freire got on board of the fleet in order to attack the English, but it seems that the commanders of both Qishm and Hormuz fortresses lost their heads in panic. The English landed at Qishm and started to bring heavy artillery into position in a modern scientific way. One of the first victims of the fight was the man who was in charge of the positioning of artillery, the famous Polar traveller William Baffin. Very quickly, the English artillery did terrible damage to the fortress. On the second day of the siege, the Portuguese made a sortie but from the third day on, English artillery pounded the fortress in such a manner that it was obvious that it could hold out no longer and negotiations were started for surrender.\textsuperscript{44}

Meanwhile, the naval squadron stationed at the Khor of Laft made an attack on the English navy, but its commander was killed and the attack repelled. Upon this the squadron fell back on Hormuz. The morale of the Portuguese in Hormuz was low. The commander, Simão da Mello, was inclined to inertia, and an open conflict broke out between the very active Shah and the commander. The Shah got his way in the Council and it was decided that a force of ships would be dispatched to Qishm. But just at that time, the fortress of Qishm was surrendered to the English on condition that the troops in the fortress would be evacuated by the English. In reality, the English only partially executed this agreement: they evacuated the Portuguese but disarmed the native soldiers and left them in the fortress to be massacred by the Persians.\textsuperscript{45}

The siege of Hormuz

On Hormuz, the news of the fall of Qishm and the captivity of its garrison, together with its commander Ruy Freire, caused great distress. They also received the news of the agreement the Persians had reached with the English Factor in Jask about the reward the English would receive if they chased the Portuguese from the Gulf. Soon they were to see the English ships approaching; and on the 20th

\textsuperscript{42} Dunlop, Bromen, p. 13-16 (letters about the dispute with the English by the Dutch director in Surat of 1622-1623); Coen's beschiden, vol. 1, p. 757-758; Macleod, Zeevaart, vol. 2, p. 76-77.

\textsuperscript{43} Boxer, Ruy Freire, p. 77-91 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 147-150.

\textsuperscript{44} Boxer, Ruy Freire, p. 96-99 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 156-158; Cordeiro, Dois Capitães, p. 36-39.

\textsuperscript{45} Boxer, Ruy Freire, p. 104-110 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 165-169.
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or the 21st of February 1622, English ships landed troops on the island of Hormuz without encountering much resistance. In the turmoil which followed, English and Persian troops entered the town of Hormuz and plundered and destroyed at will, while the Portuguese and the Shah retired into the Portuguese fortress. This fortress was very strong and could not easily be brought down by artillery as the fortress of Qishm had been, because it was very well built of hard stone.

A long siege began.46 The strategy employed by the besiegers was the use of mines. First they made a long tunnel reaching a point under the bastion of Santiago, but after a mine was blown up there, the Portuguese were still able to repair the damages. However, in addition, the English had blocked the fortress effectively from the sea and dominated the island in such a way that the small Portuguese naval force which was still at Hormuz could not be used and had to be scuttled in order not to fall into the hands of the enemy.47 Negotiations were started. The Persians told the Portuguese they could keep Hormuz if they would accept Persian sovereignty as the Shahs of Hormuz had done before the conquest by Albuquerque, and if they would pay half the revenues of the customs in Hormuz and Muscat to the Shah. The Persians were ready to leave the island of Qishm to the Portuguese against payment of 500,000 patacas, but they claimed the possession of Jular. Deciding that the Persian conditions were impossible to accept, the Portuguese applied all their efforts to defence.48

A few days later, a second mine blew up, and this time the bastion of Santiago fell. The fall of the fortress of Hormuz could now only

be a matter of time, even if, because of the slow progress of the siege (two months had passed), the possibility existed that Portuguese reinforcements could soon use the new shipping season to reach Hormuz. A small ship had brought letters from the Viceroy in Goa reporting that he had not been able to send help before because out of fourteen which had left Lisbon only two ships had arrived in Asia. Now a great number of small ships was sent to Hormuz, but this fleet was dispersed by storm, and the ship of Dom Manoel de Sousa was the only one to arrive at Hormuz. The ship returned to Goa with the son of the King of Hormuz and with a great treasure and messages to the Viceroy. But when this ship arrived in Goa, the shipping season was over and no more help could be sent to Hormuz. The son of the King of Hormuz who had been brought to Goa was later to become ruler of the remains of the Hormuzian Kingdom on the Arabian coast.49

The lack of food and water in Hormuz was working in favour of the besiegers. The state of health of the garrison was bad. Meanwhile, three great assaults had been made during the last days of April 1622. Finally, the Khan of Shiraz offered the Portuguese new conditions for surrender: he now only offered to spare the lives of the Portuguese soldiers if they surrendered. Again, the Portuguese refused. When the English offered to negotiate, the Portuguese were ready to do so. The following conditions were agreed upon: the Shah, Princes and Wazir could leave with their retinue, the priests with all ornaments, the Portuguese should be embarked, the Governor could take his possessions and slaves, the soldiers could leave with their weapons and all other inhabitants who would like to leave could do so.50

So the Khan of Shiraz and the English commanders entered the fortress and they were presented with the keys. The Shah then appeared and he was courteously greeted by Imam Quli Khan. But later, the Portuguese were driven very roughly out to the ships which were to carry them to Muscat. The Shah of Hormuz and his


47 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, p. 116-139 and 258; Ruy Freire, Comentários, p. 177-198.

48 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, p. 148-152, 266-271; Ruy Freire, Comentários, p. 207-212.


50 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, p. 165-170, 283-293; Ruy Freire, Comentários, p. 224-227.
Arabs, Ottomans and Persians in the Upper Gulf.

The events in the coastal area of the Upper Gulf ran more or less parallel with those of the Lower Gulf. Here also the pressure of Persian expansion was present, but less effectively than in the Lower Gulf because of the simple fact that Persia stood alone here: neither England, nor Holland were willing to jeopardize their friendly relations with the Ottoman Sultan in this area by supporting Shah Abbas.

Clear information on the political divisions in the Upper Gulf around the year 1600 is scarce. The area of Basra was governed for the Ottoman Sultan by a Pasha surrounded by a Janissary oligarchy, a situation somewhat comparable to the political system in places like Algiers and Tunis. The Governor of the province of Al Hasa seems to have been nominally subordinate to the Pasha of Basra, but in practice he kept himself independent. In 1609, it is mentioned that Qatif was ruled by a Turk, but that this dignitary was in a state of rebellion against the Sultan. 52 Ottoman rule over Basra was far from secure: lines of communications with the centre of power of the Ottoman Empire were long and fragile. The Ottoman government of Basra entertained good relations with Hormuz and the Portuguese: the trade which went from there through the Gulf was Basra’s main source of prosperity.

51 Boxer, Ray Frey, p. 170-173; 295-297; Ruy Freire, Comentarios, p. 228-231.

THE DECLINE OF PORTUGUESE POWER IN THE GULF

North-East from Basra, the Huwayza area was dominated by the Mushasha dynasty, which originated from the Arabian peninsula. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the rulers Sayyid Mubarak and his son Sayyid Nasir were cooperating with the Shah of Persia. The Mushasha could extend their dominions to the area of the Lower Karun when the Afshars, a Turkish tribe, quarreled with the Banu Ka’b who had settled in their area at the end of the sixteenth century. The Mushasha occupied the town of Dawraq (this Dawraq can hardly have been the fortress near Basra, which was under the control of the Pasha of Basra, but must have been Fallahiya). Sayyid Mubarak was so powerful in his area that on old maps his country is shown as ‘the country of Barachan’ (Barachan stands for Mubarak Khan). On Portuguese maps his name is often recorded as ‘Bombarea’. A Portuguese source mentions that he has two ministers belonging to the Mandean sect. 53 An anti-Persian faction took over in Huwayza when in 1617 Sayyid Nasir died by poisoning. A period of trouble followed and, according to Caskel, in 1621 troops of Imam Quli Khan occupied the disputed area. 54 The ruling family became reunited because of this threat and the new head of the family, Sayyid Mansur cooperated with the Pashas of Basra against the Persians. 55

There are no sources on the attitude taken by the Arab tribes in the coastal area East from there. There were two rather important places in that area: Rig and Bushahr. They seem to have been used from time to time as bases from which to launch attacks on Hormuzian shipping.

53 Caskel, ‘Die Wall’s’, p. 418. Perry, ‘Banu Ka’b’, p. 133, has an interesting detail: the Ka’b were settled in the area of the Afshars (friends of Persia) by Afrasijab (the nominally Ottoman Pasha of Basra c. 1620) to counteract Persian influence. The maps in Slot, Orígenes, pp. 28-29, 64. See also Bragança Pereira, Arquivo, tom. 4 (História administrativa) vol. 2 (1600-1699) pt. 1 (Bocarro’s Livro das Plantas), p. 93-94.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

It is apparent that Basra must have prospered in the early years of the seventeenth century. This can not be concluded from direct sources and firm data on Basra’s share in Gulf trade are scarce. An indication is furnished by Salbanke, who stated that in 1609, every month several ships from Hormuz arrived in Basra. Another indication is the considerable amount of products from India sold in Aleppo, a trade which for some time had grown to such an extent that the overland trade with India by way of the Gulf and Iraq seemed to be overtaking Portuguese trade around the Cape of Good Hope. In this trade through Aleppo the competitors of Portugal: Venetians, English, Dutch and French, were prominent. But for some of them, this participation in trade through the Gulf was only a temporary game. A Venetian consul in Aleppo recorded a remark by a big Dutch merchant who told him that the Dutch were now very active in Aleppo but that this was only temporary: they would leave as soon as their direct trade with Asia around the Cape could get under way.

The economic prosperity of Basra did not coincide with political stability. The Ottomans seem to have had difficulties with the surrounding tribes, who when dissatisfied, attacked shipping with much damage. The position of the Ottoman Governor in Basra must have been very difficult. It occurred at some moment between 1610 and 1620 that a certain newly appointed Pasha was reluctant to reside in this isolated spot. Of course, this Pasha had had to pay the Sultan a considerable sum for his office. He covered his losses by selling the office to a local personality, a certain Afrasiyab, under condition that this person would remain loyal to the Sultan. Such proceedings were in themselves not unusual in lower offices in the Ottoman Empire, but it would not be expected in the case of such an elevated person as a Pasha and this former Pasha was executed.

56 Salbanke in Purchas, Pilgrimes, lib iii, p. 237.
57 Berchet, Siria, p. 103. About the trade of the Dutch in Aleppo see the remarks in Braudel, La Méditerranée, p. 500-501, and Wätjen, Die Holländer in Mittelmeergebiet, p. 146.
58 Slot, Archipelagic turbatus, vol. 1, p. 261 gives details on this custom with lower officials in another distant province of the Ottoman Empire.

THE DECLINE OF PORTUGUESE POWER IN THE GULF

The Ottomans spent little effort in the solving of the problem in Basra: they just left the buyer to himself. On the origins of Afrasiyab, sources contradict each other. Although some sources describe him as a local Ottoman customs official, it would be preferable to follow the opinion expressed in the letters of the Carmelite monks of Basra who repeatedly mention his family as Arabs.

With Afrasiyab starts a period in which Basra again became a de facto independent principality. For Basra, this had the advantage that it gained room to manoeuvre in the looming conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. But Basra was in danger. The expansion of Persia towards the Gulf and towards Bagdad might cut off its trade from two sides. The only possible help had to come from the Portuguese.

59 Longrigg, Four centuries, p. 99-101. A contemporary account is Pietro della Valle, Viaggi, vol. 3, p. 376, who states that Afrasiyab did not buy out the original Ottoman Pasha but chased him away. Two sources quoted by Longrigg are posterior to the events and should be considered more critically. These are the local Arab chronicle: Zadu’l Mustafar iva lahnatu’l muqimi wa’l lahidir (Bagdad, 1922, there is an abstract in Mignons, History of Modern Iraq, p. 269-266) and the French travellers account by Tavernier: Les six voyages, vol. 1, p. 244. A good summary of the European knowledge on this matter in Dapper, Naukeurige Beschryving, part Babylonia, p. 145-146.
CHAPTER 4
OMANI ARABS, DUTCH AND ENGLISH DOMINATE THE SCENE

The English and the Dutch

It has already become clear in the previous chapter how the English, having arrived from Surat in Jask in 1619, had given the Shah of Persia the possibility of an outlet for his trade free from Portuguese control. The Dutch were not unaware of the possible advantages of trade with Persia, but they had for some time been concentrating their forces to build up their strongholds on Java and on the Spice Islands. There had been pressure from the Directors in Holland, who usually were more interested in profits than in military ventures, to try trade with Persia. For some reason or other, this was several times delayed, and the Dutch ships which had been earmarked for some time to be sent to Persia, were only sent on their way after the English and the Persians had taken Hormuz.1

After the fall of Hormuz, some difficulties arose between the English and the Persians about the execution of their agreement. The Persians were unwilling to let other Europeans fortify themselves in the crucial fortress, and were most reluctant to pay for the English assistance. The English in turn felt cheated and were afraid that the Portuguese might return to revenge themselves.2 As the English power in Asia was not very strong, this was a grim prospect. The English had ambiguous feelings about the arrival of the Dutch and about Dutch plans to increase their naval presence on the Western coast of India in order to neutralize Portuguese Goa. In the view of

1 Corn, Bescheiden, vol. 1, pp. 757-758; Dunlop, Bronnen, p. 16 (Instructions to the Dutch envoy Visnich sent to Persia from Surat); Macleod, Zeemacht, vol. 1, pp. 408, 433.
the English, the Dutch certainly were their competitors, but despite this fact they might be willing in the short term to cooperate with them in order to overcome the Portuguese threat.

The Persians were very happy with the coming of the Dutch, who might offer more protection against the danger of a Portuguese counter-attack. In their dealings with the Dutch, the Persian government used the same procedures as in their negotiations with the English: large promises which were only in part realized. This way of acting put a heavy mortgage on the foreign relations of Persia. The Persians at first made grand promises, but these were reduced considerably when they had formalized into privileges given in writing by the Shah, and these charters were often badly or not applied at all. The English were entitled to half of the revenue of the customs of Bandar Abbas, but at best they received only a small portion of that. The Shah had granted freedom of customs duties to the Dutch, but the Persians showed great imagination in diminishing the real value of this concession. As a result, both the English and the Dutch were from the beginning reluctant to grant the military help they were asked for to achieve the conquest of Oman or Basra.

Shah Abbas seems to have had grand plans for his entering into relations with the European powers. He wanted formal alliances against his Ottoman enemy. For this, he tried to get into contact with foreign governments, but this was difficult, especially in the case of the Dutch, who wanted to restrict contacts with powers in Asia to the lower level of their East India Company. There were three reasons why the Dutch avoided direct contacts with Persia at a normal diplomatic level. The first was a rather vulgar one: they wanted to avoid the expenses which would be incurred in receiving envoys of oriental princes who expected a splendid reception. The second was that the Dutch government was well aware of the intentions of the Shah and did not want to offend the Ottoman Empire, an important partner in trade and a possible ally against the Hapsburg monarchies, by entering into direct relations with Persia. The third was that, according to the charter of the East India Company, Persia belonged to the part of the world where the state had delegated its competence to the East India Company. By dealing with Persia only through the Company, all these problems could be avoided. The Persian Government was slightly offended by this low-level approach. Finally, by some devious means, and having some help from Hubert Visnich, the Company’s representative in Isfahan, the Persians managed to arrange for an envoy of the Shah to go to The Hague. This was a certain Musa Beg. He was accompanied by the court-painter of the Shah, the Dutchman Jan van Hasselt. This mission did not have the expected result because the Dutch government was unwilling to make any move against the Ottomans. The crux of the matter was that both the English and the Dutch had come to the Gulf for trade. They were not interested in the geopolitical ambitions of the Shah and they wanted to avoid military expenses which they regarded as being unnecessary.

The Persians did not allow their English or Dutch allies to settle in the strategically situated town of Hormuz. Instead, these Europeans were allowed to open establishments near the fortress of Comorão on the mainland, in a new town which was named Bandar Abbas after the Shah. A Persian Governor with the rank of Sultan

4 Foster, English factories, (1622-1623), pp. xii, xx, 181, 186-187; Dunlop, Bronnen, pp. 142, 158.
6 Data on Dutch trade are published in Dunlop, Bronnen, pp. 65-119. The policy is defined in Meilink, ‘First relations’, pp. 34-44.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

(Sultan in Persia was not a monarch but a governor of a district) took residence there. At first, Bandar Abbas did not attract much shipping, but prospects would be good if the English and the Dutch would be able to assert their naval superiority over the Portuguese. The Persians did not have much of a navy, although Pietro della Valle mentions in 1622-1623 a ‘Persian’ navy under the command of Shaikh Muhammad Suhari. This commander apparently was an Omani Arab, and it is not probable that his men were of very different origin.

Portuguese attempts to consolidate their power on the Southern coast of the Gulf.

After the Persian-English conquest of Hormuz, the situation in the Lower Gulf remained tense. It was expected that the Portuguese would send a huge force to regain the Gulf. The Portuguese needed some time to get this force together, but in the meantime, they could start to recover some of their losses on the Arabian peninsula.

Several years before the fall of Hormuz, at the time of the attack on Ali Kamal, the Persians had sent over to the area of Musandam and Suhar some troops who had established liaison with Arab leaders who were hostile to the Portuguese. As these Persians had a Suhari admiral, this would not have been difficult for them. Some information on Persian activities in the Musandam area is given by Pietro della Valle, who was staying at that time with the Sultan of Bandar Abbas. He met there a boy from Daba, Sayyid Mu‘adh, son of Sayyid Khamis, the ruler of Daba. Della Valle understood that the people of Daba, although originally Hormuzian subjects, had changed loyalty when they perceived the weakness of the Portuguese. Juffar was also under Persian control. Della Valle wanted to make a trip to Daba, but the Sultan did not agree, because Della Valle was known as a friend of the English and could easily fall victim to Arabs looking for revenge for atrocities committed by the English during the siege of Qishm and Hormuz.

At first, the Portuguese in Oman seem to have been unable to oppose the growth of Persian influence. Ruy Freire managed to escape from the English captivity in which he had been held since the capture of Qishm, but could not do much. He came to Muscat to meet the fleet which had been sent as relief to Hormuz during the siege, but which had not appeared in time because it had been scattered by a storm. Meanwhile, the English ships carrying the survivors of Hormuz arrived in Muscat, where there were already many refugees who had come over earlier. There were not enough Portuguese forces in Muscat to make an attempt to recover the lost fortress of Hormuz, so Ruy Freire returned to Goa. There inquiries were made into the causes of the loss of Qishm and Hormuz, but nothing was done to recover the lost territories. In 1823, the situation changed. The Viceroy of Portuguese India, Albuquerque, who had been opposed to Freire’s aggressive policy in the Gulf, had been replaced by the more energetic Vidalgueira who appointed Freire as General of the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz.

At the end of April 1623, Freire sailed with a few ships to Muscat. Upon the news of the arrival of the Portuguese reinforcements, the Persian forces on the Arabian coast and their allies retired to the fortresses of Suhar, Khor Fakan, Daba, Lima, Khasab, Rams and Juffar. Freire landed troops at Suhar, occupied the bazaar and found a good place to position his guns. He then started to bomb the fortress which was in the hands of a certain Shaikh ‘Naqi’. The fortress could not sustain artillery-fire, probably it was a construction of mud bricks and coral stone. Soon the Persians had to surrender. The fortress was repaired and Freire concluded a peace with the ruler of the region, Mahmud ‘Manafere’ (maybe Manafere stands in the Portuguese text for bin Hafiz, one of the Al Nabhan dynasty.

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11 Boxer, Ruy Freire, pp. 181-182 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 238-239.
who had already been active in that area for several years). From Suhar, Ruy Freire proceeded to Khor Fakan. The Captain of the fortress there was a kinsman of Ali Kamal and he received the Portuguese as old friends. Freire told the people of Khor Fakan not to be disloyal to the King of Hormuz any more, and to defend themselves well in future against the Persians. A Portuguese customs office was opened in Khor Fakan. Ruy Freire urged the inhabitants to recognize the new king of Hormuz as their overlord and this they did. They also swore fidelity to Portugal.

From there, Freire wanted to go on to Daba, where there was a strong Persian garrison. He was informed that the Arabs of the region, on the news that he had arrived in Khor Fakan, had taken revenge on the Persians for their tyrannical conduct and had put them all to the sword. Freire left a small Portuguese garrison of 50 men in Daba and charged the local Shaikh to collect the customs due to the Shah of Hormuz. It is not clear whether this Shaikh was still Sayyid Khamis, but the position of the Portuguese in Daba was not very stable: again in 1627 a Portuguese force had to be sent to recapture the area of Daba.

Operations had then to be suspended because navigation was impossible in winter, but in the spring of 1624, Freire continued to reorganize the possessions of Hormuz on the Southern coast of the Gulf. Customs offices were erected in places called ‘Borca’ (Barqa), ‘Soadi’ (Suwadi), ‘Soar’ (Suwar), ‘Alua’ (Wudam Alwa), ‘Amego’ (Amq) and ‘Ceyfin’ (Husayfin), all places on the coast of Oman. By way of Khor Fakan and Daba, Freire arrived at Lima. This fortress was still in Persian hands, it was difficult to attack with artillery, but it was stormed and everybody inside the fortress was killed. From Lima, Freire went to the extremity of the Musandam peninsula to Camusa (Kamzar), where he was received with great enthusiasm because the inhabitants were of a tribe said to be most loyal to the Portuguese. This remark probably refers to the Shihuh-tribe. The Portuguese were indeed able to maintain their authority in this area until the very end of their presence in Oman without difficulty.

The Portuguese ships, continuing on their way, then entered the deep fjord-like bay of Khasab. They found the town and fortress of Khasab deserted. Ruy Freire wanted to fortify this place because it was situated just opposite Hormuz and could be used to control shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and to harass the opposite coast. The natives were called to return with promises of safety and a fortress was built with a garrison of 20 Portuguese and 100 African soldiers. Here also a customs house was established.

When Freire was ready to leave Khasab, trankeys arrived from Rams. On board were the same Shaikhs as had been taken prisoner earlier by the Portuguese and were now offering their submission again. This was accepted and the taxes which had formerly been due to be paid by Rams to Hormuz were reduced. Finally, Freire left for Julfar. This town was considered not to be firm in its allegiance to the Portuguese party because of strife between interior factions. Its Governor, ‘Colimdim’, a nephew of the King of Hormuz, asked for a Portuguese garrison. Freire left 50 Portuguese soldiers in Julfar and constructed a customs house. With these operations, the entire Southern part of the Kingdom of Hormuz was again under control and the Portuguese had a base from which to launch attacks to the North.

In this way, the Portuguese regained control over the coast of the Arabian peninsula and a foothold at the Strait of Hormuz. As a kind of symbol, the nephew of the late Shah of Hormuz, Muhammad resided in Muscat as their a pensioner as late as 1640. It is doubtful whether the way in which Ruy Freire proceeded really promoted

12 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, pp. 182-186 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 240-244. The conquest of Suhar also in Cordeiro, Dois Capitães, pp. 53-70; the arrival of Ruy Freire in Khor Fakan ibid. p. 64.
13 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, p. 187 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 244-245.
14 Cordeiro, Dois Capitães, p. 102.
15 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, pp. 188-190 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 246-247.
16 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, pp. 189-190 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 247-248.
17 Boxer, Ruy Freyre, pp. 190-191 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 248-249.
18 Pissurienca, Assentos, vol. 1 part 2, p. 119. ANTT DR 33 fol. 51: Muhammad gives Daba to the Portuguese. Muhammad’s presence in Muscat is still recorded in De la Boulaye de Gouz, Voyages, p. 126.
Portuguese interests. His cruelty made enemies. Many years later, the inhabitants of the island Qays remembered the atrocities committed by him. The establishment of a whole series of tiny, weak fortresses (some sources call them ‘dovecotes’) with small garrisons in relatively unimportant places absorbed means which might have been used elsewhere to more effect. The Portuguese tried in 1629 to take advantage of religious troubles in Lower Iraq to improve their position in the Musandam area. Part of the Mandaeans (Subba) population of Lower Iraq and Huwayza stood under the pressure of Arab nomads and was looking for a safer place to live. The Portuguese offered them the area of Daba, and carried a number of Mandaeans to Muscat. It then became clear to the Mandaeans that the Portuguese had the fortress of Daba, but that the surrounding agricultural land belonged to the Arabs, so that they could not find a living there. Most Mandaeans returned shortly after 1630 to Basra. Still, it was apparent that a counter-offensive by the Portuguese was under way.

the second battle for Hormuz.

Matters started looking better for the Portuguese. Laraq may still have been in their hands. They were getting trade moving again between Basra and Muscat instead of Hormuz. On the other side of the Gulf, the English were rather disappointed about the inter-


20 Dovecotes (‘pombais’) are mentioned in ANTT, DR 19b, delibration of the council in Muscat of 21-9-1633. The burden of the expenses of the Portuguese establishments on the Arabian peninsula in comparison with the income can be seen in BNL, FG no. 17023, fol. 5v-10 (description of the situation in 1634).


22 This situation of Laraq is mentioned by the Persian ambassador in Holland, quoted in Dunlop, *Bromen*, pp. 694.

23 Dunlop, *Bromen*, pp. 59 and 197.


29 Dunlop, *Bromen*, pp. 142, 148-149, 158-159.

30 Dunlop *Bromen*, p. 175; a somewhat different account in the English sour-
tions between the English and the Dutch led to the Batavia High Government sending a naval squadron to the Gulf. Its commander, Willem Janssen, was to keep an eye on the Portuguese and to try to explore the situation of the Portuguese fortresses of Muscat.31

**the continuity of Portuguese trade**

A Dutch report on the trade of the Gulf of 1626 states that trade from India with the Gulf was not only carried on by Dutch and English ships to Bandar Abbas, but also by Portuguese frigates and different kinds of vessels from Arabia and India which visited Muscat, Basra, Bandar Kong, Nakhilu and Jask.32

Under the protection of the Portuguese, trade is being done by people from Cochin, Goa, Dabal, Chaul, Bassim, Damoo, Cambaya, Diu, Sind, Muscat, Hormuz, Rams, Bandar Kong, Basra and further along the coast of Arabia up to Morcha by frigates and small vessels. All traders from these places pay custom in the Portuguese fortresses, and pay extra for convoy, and the Portuguese probably are able to pay all expenses of their equipment for war out of this income... (ARA VOC vol. 1106, fol. 37v.)

The name of Nakhilu is especially remarkable here. This Arab port on the Northern coast of the Gulf is also mentioned in other sources. It seemed to be more or less the centre of Arab activity in the Gulf; we would also refer to the attacks already mentioned on Portuguese or Hormuzian ships by tribesmen of Nakhilu in Portuguese times.33 A slightly different view on traditional shipping in the Gulf is given by a French traveller who stated that the Portuguese in Muscat claimed tribute from all shipping in the Gulf, except from Dutch and English ships because they could not use force against heavily armed ships.34

ces: Calendar of State papers (1625-1629), p. 208 and Foster, English factories (1624-1629), p. 140.

31 Dunlop, Bronnen, pp. 786-787.
32 Dunlop Bronnen, p. 197.
33 Relações, es p. 237; Balbi, Viaggi, p. 222.
34 De la Boullaye le Gouz, Voyages, p. 131.

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**OMANI ARABS, DUTCH AND ENGLISH DOMINATE THE SCENE**

In the following years, the Portuguese continued their activities on the coast of the Arabian peninsula. In 1627 they recovered Daba and in 1628 they were cooperating with the Pasha of Al Hasa in Qatif and with the Pasha of Basra in a plundering raid on Qatar and in plans to recapture Bahrain. Little is known of these events. A considerable naval force was sent to reconquer Bahrain. It is not clear what this force exactly achieved although Portuguese sources mention heroic behaviour of its officers. Since these operations the Portuguese enjoyed special privileges in Qatif. The close relationship between Portugal and Qatif must have given effective control over the area of Bahrain to the Portuguese: the isolated fortress of Bahrain with a few Persian soldiers can hardly have dominated the seas. A somewhat later source mentions that the Portuguese enjoyed special privileges in Bahrain.35 Some information on Bahrain is given in Bocarro’s Livro das Plantas. The Portuguese have a Factory there, the island had two fortresses with strong garrisons sent by Imam Quli Khan and the pearl fisheries produce a revenue of 80,000 patulas for the Shah. The Portuguese receive half of the customs revenues of Qatif.36

Meanwhile, the Persians were not sure what to do. They saw that the Portuguese were away from Hormuz but not definitively defeated. In the winter of 1629-1630 the Portuguese sent a large force to Qishm and plundered the island.37 The Persians then took a clever course of action. Imam Quli Khan started a policy of reconciliation with Ruy Freire. The great advantage of such a policy would be that the Persians would not depend any more on one European party, but could trade directly through the Portuguese or through the English and Dutch, just as they liked. The negotiations between the two former enemies were not easy. A Dutch report gives some details:

The Captain of Muscat, Ruy Freire, has last January promised to the Khan of Shiraz, Imam Quli Khan, the sum of 5,000 tuman or 200,000 guilders under

36 Bragança Pereira, Arquivo, tom. 4 (Historia administrativa) vol. 2 (1600-1699) pt. 1, pp. 94-96.
37 Dunlop, Bronnen, pp. 757-758.
condition that the Dutch and the English will be excluded from the trade with Persia. He had special orders to obtain restitution of Hormuz, but his first proposal was refused promptly and he did not even make the second proposal. His envoy offered a present worth 40,000 Dutch guilders in pearls, which was accepted but compensated by a counterpresent of equal value. Last year, Ruy Freire had obliged the local merchant frigates on the anchorage of Garmon to pay 40,000 larins (or 24,000 Dutch guilders) contribution. The Khan now claimed restitution of this sum and the negotiations could not proceed as long as this money was not paid... (ARA VOC vol. 1106, fol 41.)

Finally, a very peculiar agreement was reached with Ruy Freire. Of this agreement we have a Dutch translation. The first condition was that Freire would not allow Portuguese ships to go to the Upper Gulf (Basra and Qatif) unless they had passed by Bandar Kong and paid duties there to the Persian authorities. The Portuguese would receive half of the customs duties from there. If merchants from Bandar Kong wanted to send ships to the Upper Gulf, the Portuguese were allowed to take a share of 50% in their cargo. Persian subjects were not to take any action against the Portuguese possessions on the Musandam peninsula ('the region of Roeykort now called Hassebeh' or Khassab). In other documents, it is also mentioned that the Persians would pay the Portuguese a tribute for the island of Qishm; this is confirmed by later documents. Another reference to increasing Portuguese activities concerns the construction of a new fortress in Julfar, from which to control shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

In fact, Portuguese trade seems to have been quite considerable at that time. Kong was a thriving town, and pearl trade soon concentrated there. The importance of Portuguese trade is shown in the list of profits the Dutch had of a Portuguese ship, sailing from Muscat to Goa that they captured in the Gulf of Oman:

62.5 tuman ransom for the freedom of 26 Portuguese prisoners
60 tuman sale value of the ship [a tuman was approximately 40 Dutch guilders]
13 tuman on captured Arab horses
69 tuman in Moorish ducats [gold coins]
15.25 tuman golden Portuguese coins
0.5 tuman in other coinage
a quantity of parcels of pearls, amounting c. 1500 carats in total
9010 pound incense valued at 930 [probably guilders]
4013 pound sweet wood valued at 345 guilders
2 packets carpets valued at 591 guilders
598 man Patta dry dates sold at 2.625 mahmudi one man [one man = 60 Dutch pounds]
598 man Patta pack dates sold at 2 mahmudi one man
130 man Patta almonds sold at 6 mahmudi one man
190 man Patta raisins sold at 3 mahmudi one man
golden jewelry of a weight of 11 ounces
silver jewelry of a weight of 12 ounces (ARA VOC vol. 1117, fol 47.)

Thevenot, who visited the Gulf in the 1650's, has a most interesting description about how the Portuguese exercised their authority over much of the Arab ports of the Gulf after the fall of Hormuz. Each year, some Portuguese warship came to the island of Tand, and were there joined by boats from Bahrain, Qatif, Kong, Qishm and other places, which brought the tribute which was in some cases quite considerable: half of the customs duties for Qatif and 16000 abbassis for Bahrain. The Portuguese representative in Basra received a daily payment from the Pasha of that place.

Dutch trade was expanding and in 1627, the Dutch seem to have seen some possibilities in Basra: the Dutch squadron sent to the Gulf in that year received orders to explore the area, but nothing came of it. The Dutch Consul in Aleppo, De Croy, advocated that the Dutch would agree with the Shah that they, instead of the Portuguese, might occupy Hormuz. In that case, the Dutch would be able to block the Portuguese from the Gulf. If the Ottoman Sultan would reconquer Baghdad, the Company might open an establishment there and take their share in the overland trade. But the Directors in Holland

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38 Dunlop, Bronnen, pp. 683-686.
39 ARA, VOC vol. 1146, fol. 915-915v.
40 Ruy Freire, Commentaries, pp. 312-313. The strategic possibilities of Julfar for hindering navigation in the Gulf were considered by the English in a report of 1631: Calendar of State Papers, Colonial, East Indies vol. 1, doc. no. 159, p. 131.
42 Thevenot, Suite du Voyage, p. 354.
43 Dunlop, Bronnen, p. 786.
did not like adventures. Their Resident in Persia was explicitly instructed that he might occupy Hormuz if the Persians agreed (it was at the moment that a Dutch 'fleet of defence' was sent to cooperate with the English in avoiding a Portuguese reconquest of Hormuz) but that he might not interfere in the policy of the Gulf:

If His Majesty [the Shah] would charge us with the protection of the coasts, this protection would not extend to all coasts of the Gulf but only to Bandar Abbas and Hormuz... You will not use any of our men against any present or future enemy of the Shah of Persia but only against those who are also our enemies. Because of this we expressly forbid you to use your soldiers and ships against the Sultan of Constantinople, nor to his subjects, nor to any other people which is under his protection like the Arabs and the people on the other side of the Gulf along the coast of Arabia. You will not interfere in the war between the Sultan and the Shah of Persia around Basra and in other regions on the Gulf, although it seems that the Portuguese may have made an alliance with Basra... This is the wish of Their High and Mighty [the States General] and we order you with urgency to obey their command or we will punish you in the most rigorous way on your life and goods. (Document published in Dunlop, Brown, pp. 158-159.)

events in Oman: the Ya’ariba dynasty

While the best accounts of the events up to then had to be found in European sources, there is an Omani source which gives us many details on the events in the area from 1628 to 1650: the Omani chronicle, of which two versions exist. The problem with the Omani chronicle is that it is very vague in its chronology. Often, we depend on outside sources to enable us to put a date to an event, but as outside sources do not enter into details on the interior situation

44 E.C. Ross, Annals of Oman (London 1986). This is a translation of the Kashf al Ghumnah, maybe by Shaikh Sirhan bin 'Umar, written in 1728. On this chronicle there are several details in W. Phillips, Oman, a history (London 1967), pp.19-20. The text of this chronicle has, sometimes almost literally, been incorporated in Humayd bin Salih bin Muhammad bin Ruzayy's Al-fath al-mubin fi srat as-sadat al-lūl Sal'din of 1858/1276 which has been translated into English: G.P. Badger, History of the Imams and Seyyids of Oman (London, Works of the Hakluyt Society 1st series vol. 44, 1871).

of Oman, the Omani chronicles contain exclusive information. The vagueness of the Omani chronicles on dates is not really a lack of accuracy: from the few references to events which can be compared with outside sources, it seems that the chronological framework of events in the Omani chronicles is rather accurate.

While Ruy Freire was consolidating Portuguese control from Muscat over the coastal region up to Jufar in 1624, momentous events were taking place in the interior of Oman. In Rastaq, the Ya’ariba leader Nasir bin Murshid was elected Imam by a number of apparently Ibadih prominent of the area in 1624. In a short time, this new Imam was able to bring large parts of Oman like the regions of Ibra and Nazwa under his control. With the help of the people of Sir, Nasir bin Murshid could gain control of the Dhaihara-area between Sir and the Batina coast. Many tribal leaders of this area, especially the Hilali Qata bin Qata and Nasir bin Qata, with their adherents of the tribes of Buraymi. According to the Omani chronicle, a few Arab chiefs who had lost their position because of the advance of the Imam had joined the Portuguese. These chiefs are not mentioned by name, the author of the chronicle is probably referring to tribal chiefs in the area between Daba and Suhar.

It was of primary economic importance to the Imam to acquire control over the exterior trade of his territory which still remained in the hand of the Portuguese. It is not so very clear when operations against the Portuguese started. This was probably not much before 1632 as it appears from European sources that the Portuguese were in undisputed control of their fortresses up to then. This first attack by the Omanis on the Portuguese stronghold on the coast is only very summarily mentioned in Western sources. The Omani chronicle gives a very detailed account of the events. According to this chronicle, the Omani forces under Shaikh Mas‘ud bin Ramadan, defeated the Portuguese in battle and entered the city of Muscat

45 The year is given in Bathurst, 'Maritime Trade', p. 95, apparently from Omani manuscripts in the British Library
46 Ross, Annals, pp. 46-51; Badger, History, pp. 57-62.
47 Badger, History, p. 63; Ross, Annals, p. 50.
where they destroyed several important buildings. That Muscat was besieged is confirmed by Dutch and Portuguese sources, but we have no confirmation that the attack met with as much success as the Omani chronicle suggests. It is significant that the Omani chronicle mentions no consequences of this expedition; this means that it was not much more than a large plundering raid. 48

This clearly was not the case with another expedition which was sent out in the same year, under Ali bin Ahmad, to the coast of Sir. At that time Julfar, the capital city of this area was, according to the Omani chronicle, held by ‘the Persian Nasiruddin, with a force of Persians’ while another fortress in Julfar was manned by Portuguese troops. Probably, this so-called ‘Persian’ was in reality a man from Hormuz, a cooperation of Persia and Portugal in Julfar at that time is highly improbable. We also know from Ruy Freire’s Comentarios that there were Hormuzian Governors in Julfar. The Omani chronicle tells that the Hormuzians defended themselves with much energy, but that the town was taken by storm. Next, the Omani army was joined by fresh forces and conquered the Portuguese fortress on the seashore of Julfar (probably the new fortress, constructed in 1631). 49

Shortly before the two Omani attacks on the Portuguese strongholds, the Governor of Farsistan, Imam Quli Khan had proposed to the Dutch an expedition against Muscat. It seems the director in Surat had some doubts about the true intentions of Imam Quli Khan, and he referred to the recently reached agreement between the Khan and the Portuguese. Maybe the Khan had heard of the weakness of the Portuguese and was planning to change his policy. The Dutch authorities were not impressed and gave Jan Carstensz (who was to go as commander of a naval squadron against the Portuguese to the Gulf and Eastern Africa), strict orders to refuse the Persians any help and to advise Imam Quli Khan to use the English ships which were to come especially for this purpose against Muscat. In the end the English took no action against Muscat. 50

The Arab attacks in Oman and Sir are somewhat more summarily recorded in two Dutch documents. The ships of Carstensz’s squadron called (after visiting Socotra and taking a Portuguese ship with rich cargo in the Gulf of Oman) at Bandar Abbas and heard there that the Arabs had put Muscat under siege and had taken Julfar by storm, with much loss of life to the Portuguese and their allies. We will give here a literal translation of the account in Carstensz’s journal on the news he received from the Southern side of the Gulf:

According to reports by several people there are on the Arab coast the following pearls banks:
Nicolou [=Nakbilu]
Assoulou [=Asala]
Rigedalm [=Bandar Rig and Bandar Daylam]
Ryga Bandaar [=either a double mention of Bandar Rig or Rishahr], these all under the shah of Persia
Baren [=Bahrain]
Catyff [=Qatif]
Lassa [=Al Hasa]; the latter two under the domination of the Turks
Jofar under the king of Spain [=Julfar, the King of Spain was also king of Portugal], who had in that important place for many years a fortress with the necessary artillery and garrison. As we have been informed there came sure tidings to the Sultan of Bandar Abbas that the Arabs, who had besieged it for some time, had beaten the Portuguese who were there and had conquered the fortress with the loss of 30 or 40 lives and the remainder of the Portuguese had fled to Muscat. 51

Next, the Dutch ships went on to East Africa where they attacked Mombasa. 52 In 1633, the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies

48 Ross, Annals, p. 51; Badger, History, p. 66; ARA, VOC vol. 857 fol. 897: mention of the siege of Muscat in a Dutch document.
49 Ross, Annals, pp. 51-52; Badger, History, p. 66; Hansman, Julfar, pp. 10-11. The Portuguese account in ANTT, DR vol. 190 (1633-1635), deliberation of the council in Muscat of 21-9-1633. In this document there are critical remarks on the usefulness of the ‘dovecotes’ (small fortresses) established by Ruy Freire between Julfar and Muscat. Bathurst, ‘Maritime Trade’, p. 97-98, believes the ‘Persian’ of the Omani chronicle to be a real Persian and comes to a wrong appreciation of Persian policy.

51 Sultan was in Persia a provincial governor, not a chief of state.
52 Journal by Carstensz of his expedition in ARA, VOC vol. 1113, fol.214-229v. The journal also contains a most interesting description of Socotra and
wrote to the Director of the Company's establishment in Bandar Abbas about the situation in the area. He remarked that the fleet, which had been sent out in 1632 to the Western shores of the Indian Ocean in order to attack Portuguese interests there, could have done more useful work than of the attacks it made on Mozambique. The Commander of this fleet, Carstenz, met with the severe disapproval from his master: instead of a wild goose chase in Eastern Africa, Carstenz would have done better to make contact with the Arab forces who were fighting the Portuguese and find out if they need help of some kind. The reproach was not justified, because the High Government had expressly forbidden any participation of Carstenz's squadron in Anglo-Persian ventures against the Portuguese.  

In their letter, the Governor General and Council do not seem to know what action to take. First, they ordered the Director to send an envoy to the other side of the Gulf to find out whether the Arabs would like an alliance against the Portuguese or whether they would like or needed some help. On the other hand, the High Government concluded the letter saying that it would be useful if the Director would find out from the Persians what their opinion was about possible Dutch assistance to the Arabs:

From the diary kept by the Commodore Jan Carstenz, we have seen that the Arabs had besieged Muscat against the Portuguese during the Eastern monsoon of 1633 and that they had taken the place of Jolfar and killed many soldiers there. But Carstenz, who was there with four well-armed ships, did not even try to hear whether he could give these Arabs some assistance notes on the pearl trade. One of the participants published an account of the voyage, this contains some interesting remarks on the Gulf area, but no mention of the events in Jolfar (Hendrik Hagen, 'Verhael van de reys gedaen in de meeste delen van Oost-Indiën', printed in L.Commelin, Begin ende voortgang van de Oostindische Compagnie (Amsterdam 1646), vol. 2.).

53 ARA, VOC vol. 857, fol. 397 (letter by the Batavia High Government to the Director in Persia) with the remarks about Carstenz's actions. Carstenz's instructions, which were published in Dunlop, Bronnen, pp. 399-408, forbade Carstenz to participate in any military alliance between Imam Quli Khan and the English (vague plans for an Anglo-Persian alliance against the Portuguese in Muscat were coming up from time to time).

OMANI ARABS, DUTCH AND ENGLISH DOMINATE THE SCENE against Muscat. This we consider a gross and careless neglect of duty. And because we must cause damage to the enemy as much as make profit, we consider it necessary to order you that you will inform yourself over there what power the Arabs have and if they would want our help to take Muscat and what forces would be needed for this purpose and what they could offer us in return. (ARA, VOC vol. 857, fol. 397.)

We can imagine that the Persians, who had an eye on Muscat themselves, would not like the Dutch to assist the Arabs in its conquest. The order by High Government to the Director in Bandar Abbas to send an envoy to the other side was not really executed. The Director there took the matter up with the Sultan of Bandar Abbas, but it seems that this man was connected in some way with the Portuguese government, while other Persians were in favour of planning the conquest of Muscat. A spy was sent by the Sultan of Bandar Abbas who also reported to the Dutch. This report persuaded the Dutch that it was better to abstain. We will however remark that the Governor General Carpentier was the first European to express the wish for cooperation with the Arabs in the area. 54

In the meantime, the hostilities between the Portuguese and the Arabs continued. According to the Omani chronicle, a first attack was made on Suwar, where an Arab fortress was built next to the Portuguese fortress of that place. Attacks on Matrah and Muscat had no lasting success, while forces which tried to proceed to Suwar to attack the last Portuguese possessions on the Batina coast and in the Musandam peninsula, were finally brought to a halt before Suwar. On the whole, the Portuguese were able to maintain themselves quite well in the area between Muscat and Cape Musandam, but they lost Qaryat and Sur. 55 The Portuguese defeats inspired the Dutch to make new plans for the conquest of Muscat.

54 Report on the actions taken in ARA, VOC vol. 1117, fol. 781-781v. At that time, the Sultan of Bandar Abbas was apparently negotiating with the Portuguese about the settlement of a conflict which had came up between the Portuguese and the Persians and which had led to some Persian interest in the conquest of Muscat: ibid. fol. 788.

55 Ross, Annals, pp. 52-53; Badger, History, pp. 67-69; Bathurst, 'Maritime Trade', p. 98. Noronha de Linhares, Diario, p. 177, refers to peace negotiations between the Omanis and the Portuguese.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

In 1635, on the order of the High Government in Batavia, the Dutch in Bandar Abbas made proposals to the Persians for common operations against the Portuguese in Muscat. It seems that a French adventurer, Amand, had been recruiting troops for the Shah in Holland. The Persians took some time to reply to the Dutch proposals, and when their reply came, the Dutch had already dispersed their naval force: nothing came of it.56 Finally, the Directors in the Netherlands intervened with the remark that the Persians only wanted Dutch help out of fear for the Portuguese: the Directors in Holland were opposed to any interference in the wars of others. Anyhow, the Persians also did not show much enthusiasm: for them Muscat was too far now.57

For some time, there were no new Omani successes. It seems that there was an internal crisis in Oman. Nasir bin Qatan, who had earlier been one of the principal leaders of the opposition against Nasir bin Murshid, had retired far to the East to Al Hasa.58 From there he proceeded Westward into the Jafura area and attacked Buraymi. This attack was repelled, and then Nasir and his followers joined the Portuguese at Sur and blocked the land routes between Jufar and the Gulf of Oman.59 Later, one of the followers of Nasir bin Qatan, Muhammad bin Uthman, or bin Hamid, went down from Dhahira to Sir and committed depredations there. The Omani Governor of the area called him to order. Muhammad was taken prisoner and died shortly afterwards. The forces of the Imam Nasir bin Murshid again took the initiative, but for some time, the forces of the Imam achieved little in their struggle against Nasir bin Qatan himself who continued to make incursions into Oman.60 In the context of the fighting between Nasir bin Qatan and the forces of the Imam, the Omani chronicle published by Ross makes the earliest direct mention of the Banu Yas tribe.61 It is impossible to establish the exact chronology of the events mentioned by the Omani chronicle as following the battle at Surah of 1633: they may be any date between 1633 and the death of Imam Nasir bin Murshid in 1648.

Dutch military intervention in the Gulf

It became more and more clear that close cooperation between the Persians and either the English or the Dutch had become impossible. Both the Europeans and the Persians apparently were dissatisfied with the results of their cooperation. The Persians had admitted the English and the Dutch to trade in their country because they hoped for military help. Initially, this help had been given in the expectation of getting a share of the booty, but the Persians had kept all for themselves. Expansive Persian promises of freedom of customs duties had only partially been kept. Things had still continued quite well as long as Imam Quli Khan lived. This dignitary had been able to keep all parties reasonably satisfied and he seems also to have been able to cooperate if necessary with the Arab tribes of the coastal area: they had helped him against the Portuguese in Bahrain, Qishm and Hormuz. But when Shah Abbas died and was succeeded by the weak Shah Safi, the latter, fearing the great power of Imam Quli Khan as Khan of Shiraz, had him executed.62 The new administration had another policy in its relations with the European powers. Bargaining about the conditions of trade became very hard. Negotiations which had been carried on for some time between the Persians and the Portuguese about the restitution of Hormuz had no results, while the Portuguese were very angry because the Persians

56 The proposal of Dutch help for the Persians apparently was a personal project of the Governor General: the Directors in Holland did not like it: ARA, VOC vol. 1121, fol. 1651v-1662; papers on the activities of Amand in ARA, States General no. 12563.16.
57 Dunlop, Bronner, pp. 548, 558-559, 569, 615.
58 This Nasir bin Qatan probably is the 'Carchane', the Arab chief in the desert, referred to in Silva Figueroa's account as possible ally of Portugal: Silva Figueroa, Ambassade, p. 384.
59 Ross, Annals, p. 53; Badger, History, pp. 69-70.
60 Ross, Annals, p. 54; Badger, History, pp. 72-73.
61 Ross, Annals, pp. 53-54.
62 A contemporary printed account of Imam Quli Khan's death is Hagenaer, Verhael, pp. 45-47.
had stopped the payment of tribute for Qishm to them. Relations between the Persians and the Dutch and the English became difficult because of hard bargaining in trade matters. The English trade was of little value at that time, but the Dutch trade was very considerable and each year they had to pay all kinds of special duties and give expensive presents.

For the Europeans, a solution would have been to grow less dependent on the notoriously greedy Persian officials in Bandar Abbas by finding places for European trade elsewhere in the Gulf. For the Dutch there was not much chance in doing so. They needed their naval means desperately in a great war with Portugal and could not spare the small heavily-armed ships needed for the shallow waters of the Gulf, although they did look around for other places in the Gulf for their trade. This desire for an alternative for Bandar Abbas such as Basra is outlined in a letter of 1641:

Basra is a place, situated in Arabia, which is under Ottoman domination, in the Upper Gulf. It is very dangerous to navigate there because of the multitude of shallows and cliffs, the bottom of the sea is very rough and a sounding lead can not be trusted. On the distance of a cannon’s shot from the land it may seem 50-60 fathom deep and then suddenly rocks and shallows will appear, it can only be approached with the help of experienced pilots which can be found in Bandar Kong, but they are expensive. All Portuguese and other merchant ships usually carry two pilots, and do not dare to navigate without them. Even then, yearly a few ships are lost. The Portuguese from Goa, Diu, Dabul and Muscat usually go in May and June there to bring their merchandise, usually Surati cotton cloth, like kolars, barams, ardas, chuddar and all kinds of spices and return at the end of August or September, just before our ships appear in the Gulf. They first sail to Muscat, and from there each to its place of origin. They bring from Basra much money in cash, also pearls and dates. They usually pass to the South of Larak and Qishm, under the protection of six to ten frigates of war from Muscat, then they go along the coast of Arabia to Muscat without approaching Cape Jask. After having paid taxes in Muscat they go to Goa, Dabul, Damao and other places on the sea, before our ships arrive in the Gulf, so that when our ships are there, there are few Portuguese to be seen, only a few ships navigating between Bandar Kong and Muscat, which do not go to Basra. They also pass very near to the Arabian coast. These Portuguese vessels or frigates, if they could be captured behind Qishm or out of sight of the land, would be a good prize, but if they are captured in sight of Bandar Kong, there is the risk that they would have to be set free again because the Shah is having half of the customs of Bandar Kong and the Portuguese the other half, so that the Persians will not allow us to take part of their profit. It would be good if we had here one small ship like the Zandevoort and a good small rowing vessel to cruise in September and October and in May and June between Jask, Muscat and Qishm. Off season, the rowing vessel can be kept here on land and the ship can find a good bay as a sheltering place for the winter on the Arabian coast, like the one the Commodore Westerwold recently used... (ARA, VOC vol. 1035, fol. 664-665.)

The English managed in 1640 to start a commercial operation in Basra. They were reasonably, but not very successful in this: there was room for other Europeans in the trade of the Gulf while the Dutch navy kept the Portuguese locked up in Goa. The Dutch also tried to have a look at other places of the Gulf. In 1643, Overschie, the Dutch Director inCambon, sent a representative, Hubertus Costerus with a large sum in cash, first to Bandar Kong to investigate pearl trade there, and next to Bahrain, to try to sell the same kind of merchandise as the Dutch sold in Persia and to take a close look at all aspects of pearl trading. He was to use local shipping because of the lack of small Dutch warships. This had its dangers: off Bahrain, the ship which Costerus had chartered from the Sultan of Bandar Kong, was held up by an Arab privateer from ‘Hassonwou’ (which is according to a document in the Carmelite archives Nakhilu), under suspicion that it was a Portuguese ship. The Carmelite document states that the inhabitants of Nakhilu were in the habit to kill all Portuguese they could capture. Costerus could clear up this misunderstanding and he was set free, but the mission to Bahrain did not prosper. The merchandise the Dutch had brought with them could be sold for a good price even if the capacity of the market was small, but buying pearls for a good price proved to be difficult. The way pearl trade was done in Bahrain offered no profit to the Dutch: Arabs, Christians and Jews from Aleppo and Venice were too clever for them.

63 ARA, VOC vol. 1146, fol. 15.
64 Van Dam, Beschryvinge, vol 3/3 p. 294; Foster English factories (1637-1641) p. 306.
65 On this first Dutch expedition for the pearl trade in Bahrain see Floor, ‘Pearlfishing’, 210-211. Instructions for this mission to Costerus and a com-