Meanwhile, relations between the Dutch and the Persians continued to deteriorate. When the Dutch protests in Bandar Abbas and Isfahān became too loud, their representatives were put in prison and only freed after payment of a large sum of money. It is understandable that at that time the Dutch became really irritated. The Dutch director Constant wrote: 'words are without effect with these people and if we will not show our teeth to the Persians, we will never obtain our dues'. Constant suggested to the Batavia High Government 'to evacuate the establishments in Persia, to block Bandar Abbas with four or five ships, to confiscate Persian merchandise found on Gujarati ships by Dutch ships cruising in the Gulf as a compensation for the money extorted by the Persians or to try some action against Bahrain from which island the Shah drew yearly 25,000-30,000 tuman [a tuman was a Persian accounting unit equivalent to about forty Dutch guilders] in customs duties and pearls and also to undertake something at Bandar Kong'.

In this conflict between the Dutch and the Persians an Arabian alternative appeared. It is mentioned by the French traveller Tavernier who at that time stayed at the Dutch establishment in Bandar Abbas. Tavernier had his own views regarding the Dutch-Persian conflict. According to him, it was caused by a mistake made by the Dutch in their commercial negotiations with the Persian court. In

66 Van Dam, Beschryvinge, vol 2/3 pp. 294-295 ; Foster, English factories (1642-1645), pp. 170-171.
67 ARA.VOC vol. 1146, fol. 912v (Constant to Batavia High Government, 12-2-1644). See also ARA.VOC vol. 1152, fol. 86-87 (letter by Constant to the same, 11-2-1645). The Batavia High Government agreed with this project by its resolution of 1 August 1644: VOC vol. 667.

1636, a diplomatic delegation from the Duke of Holstein had arrived in Persia with great plans for trade. This delegation is mainly known to modern historians because of a book published by one of the delegates on Persia. The Duke of Holstein had attracted to his town of Friedrichstadt a number of Dutch religious exiles (of the persecuted Remonstrant branch of the Dutch Reformed church) in an endeavour to make Friedrichstadt a large emporium, in competition with Amsterdam. Tavernier mentioned that in their desire to prevent success of the Holstein delegation, the Dutch in Isfahān offered exceptionally high prices for the Persian silk. Once the Holstein plans had evaporated into thin air, the Dutch refused to pay these prices and this caused a conflict with the Persians. While the Dutch were at odds with the Persians, the Arab Emir of 'Vodena' or 'Moyesur' appeared on Qishm. He made a proposal to the Dutch to change the routing of the entire trade between Basra and the Indian Ocean. It would go by sea from Basra to Qatif (overland transport though the desert of Najd was considered unattractive) and from Qatif overland through the territory of the Emir of 'Masculat' to 'Vodena', a place where two rivers join. It is not fully clear which places are meant. Masculat may possibly be situated in Buraymi or Liwa. Tavernier, whose not always very accurate book is the source of this information about plans for trade in the Arabian peninsula, states that Vodena is not situated on the place where the maps have it, but nearer to Muscat. In a remark aside, he mentions that the Amir of Vodena later conquered Muscat and that in the final part of his book there would be some more information. Regrettably, such information is not to be found, so we are not certain whether this is
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

a mention of first diplomatic negotiations of the later Imam Sultan bin Sayf, who conquered Muscat in 1650. If Tavernier is right (which is not too certain, he never was in the area and was not very good at topography), Vodena would be somewhere in the area of Suwar, rather dangerously near the Portuguese naval station of Muscat. If the old maps are right, Vodena was a place near Ras al Khaima, possibly Dihan, and this fits better with other information given about the place by Tavernier. Anyhow, this was a plan to carry merchandise by caravans from Qatif along a road parallel to the coast through the areas of the Banu Yas and the Banu Khalid to some port outside Portuguese control.

We do not know what to make of this proposal. It might seem rather unrealistic, this long route through a particularly inhospitable desert. Such transport at the time was not completely unheard of: Salbanke had made the trip from Qatar to Lima in the Musandam peninsula on camel with a caravan in the early seventeenth century, so some kind of route seems to have existed at that time where in more recent times nothing of the kind existed.

There is another point to the proposal made by the Emir of Vodena: it once again shows that there was a search for trade routes outside Persian or Portuguese control. As far as the Persians were concerned, the Dutch authorities in Batavia and Bandar Abbas were ready for action, even if the Directors in Holland rarely contemplated steps which were dangerous for their balance-sheet. The desire of local Dutch authorities for military action against the Persians was also inspired by the success the Portuguese had in a similar case. The Portuguese had not received their share in the Bandar Kong revenues for 5 years, so they took ships with Persian cargo passing off Muscat and finally had sent 8 or 10 ships from

71 According to Tavernier, Vodena was a place where two 'rivers' (or maybe rather creeks) met, and that the place was also called Moyeur. Such a place can be seen on many old maps near Julfar. Some maps (the first map of the Gulf in Liefbaut's Atlas is one of the latest maps showing this situation) have instead of Vodena the name Dadena, which might be connected with the Daolin in Balbi, Viaggio (ed. Pinto), p. 121, which seems to be the modern Dihan in the Julfar area, indeed between two creeks.

OMANI ARABS, DUTCH AND ENGLISH DOMINATE THE SCENE

Muscat to Bandar Kong to claim the tribute due to them by the Persians. The Persian governor of Lar then paid the money. The Portuguese were also thinking about a project proposed to them by a Mandaean from Basra to occupy the island of Qays as a replacement for Hormuz, but this project was not executed.

In 1645, the negotiation of a truce with Portugal made it possible to divert Dutch warships from the squadron which had been blocking Goa to the Gulf. The Dutch policy was executed by a special mission of Commissioner Wollebrand Geelvyns de Jongh with Commodore Bloq as commander of the military forces. Geelvyns de Jongh tried to get a policy of diversification under way. He sent an expedition of two ships to Basra, this to the dismay of the English who saw the Dutch with exceptionally large quantities of merchandise arriving at Basra. By means of sending Dutch trade away from Bandar Abbas to Basra, Geelvyns de Jongh had his hands free for military action in the Lower Gulf. Geelvyns wrote in June 1645 from his ship off Larak:

We will keep here, according to the orders of the Lord Governor General and the Gentlemen Councillors of India for the blockade of the anchorage of Bandar Abbas and of the Gulf (until we get new orders which are to arrive next December or January) the small ships Reymershaur, Hoakenswerk, Pae and Zeemeewe. We have the intention to send the Hoakenswerk and the Zeemeewe towards the end of July to Bahrain to try pearl-diving, and to confiscate the fishing-boats which belong to subjects of the King of Persia. May God grant us that we achieve our purpose and we will inform Your Honour of the results... (ARA, VOC vol. 1152, p. 75.)

The plan for action against Bahrain shipping was scrapped because a conflict with Arab sailors was considered undesirable. As a consequence, the Dutch naval forces limited themselves to actions

72 ARA, VOC vol. 1146, fol. 915 and 935.
73 ANTT, DR vol. 55 no. 235 (fol. 294).
74 Instructions in ARA, VOC vol. 1146, fol. 823-824v.
75 The plan for blocking Bahrain was suggested by the director Constant: ARA, VOC vol. 1146, fol. 912v. Instruction for the blockade by the High Government in ARA, VOC, vol. 868 (9-8-1644), fol. 533. In the margin left of the paragraph about the blockade of Bahrain has been written 'geexcuseert', (not to be executed).
in the Lower Gulf. The presence of a large naval force gave them the occasion to move around freely. They concentrated on three goals: to explore the coasts of the Eastern part of the Gulf, especially of the Portuguese-dominated area of the Musandam peninsula, to occupy the fortress of Qishm and to block Bandar Abbas in order to force the Persians to accept Dutch demands.

The expeditions to the Musandam peninsula are of interest insofar as they give us the first detailed description of the area. In 1645, a small ship crossed the Strait of Hormuz and approached the Arab coast at Qidi in the Musandam peninsula near the present border between Oman and the United Arab Emirates. It established friendly contact with local tribesmen and explored the coast between Sha’am and Qidi. Another expedition followed a few weeks later with the small ship Zeemeeuw. This ship took a look at some islands like Farur and Tanb, and explored the Southern coast of the Gulf between Khasab and Daba. The Zeemeeuw called at Khasab, Kamzar and Daba. From the description we know that Portuguese authority and even a garrison with a Portuguese commander (Andries Sardagh in Dutch, Andrea Sardanha in Portuguese?) were still established in Daba. The Zeemeeuw’s Captain, Claes Speelman, made small drawings in his log; in this manner we owe to him one of the oldest, simple pictures of a place on the modern border of Oman and the United Arab Emirates: Daba.

The main event in this period was the Dutch action against Qishm. This action is exceptionally well documented. There are several Dutch reports on the operations and there is also an account in the memoirs of a German officer of the Dutch marines which was printed in Breslau (the actual Wroclaw in Poland) in 1668. After negotiations in Bandar Abbas had failed, the Dutch ships appeared off Qishm in 1645. But the attempt made next day to take the fortress failed: the Dutch saw that its walls were too strong to be attacked by the light guns of the small ships they had in the Gulf and the force of 250 soldiers was insufficient to take the fortress by assault.

Luckily for the Dutch, the Persians in Bandar Abbas, an ill-fortified town, seemed to have panicked when they observed the Dutch willingness to take strong action. They offered to let the Dutch return to Bandar Abbas and to continue to trade there freely until an agreement was reached with the Shah. Blocq, the commander of the Dutch squadron was to go to Isfahan to negotiate a final settlement. He died under way and Geleynssen de Jongh, who was still with the ships in Bandar Abbas, did not want to give the power to negotiate to one of the underlings who accompanied Blocq. It was decided in tentative talks with Persian authorities that the situation should remain as it was: provisional free trade for the Dutch, until a new Ambassador arrived from the Batavia High Government. In the meantime, the Persians started to pay the sums claimed by the Dutch. In fact, notwithstanding the poor results of their action against Qishm, the aggressive policy was a success: it seems that the Persians had been put under heavy pressure by the blockade. Dutch trade quickly returned to the old level: in the accounting year 1647/1648, profits in Persia reached the sum of f. 246,492 and in 1648/1649 even f. 326,290.

The Ambassador appointed by the Batavia High Government, Joannes Cunaeus, did not reach Isfahan until 1651. Until then, Dutch trade was conducted satisfactorily on a provisional basis. Cunaeus was able to reach a good agreement. The high authorities of the Lower Gulf. The most direct sources on this expeditions are the diary and reports by the Commodore Blocq, which can be found in ARA, VOC vols. 1152, 1153 and 1155. References also in reports by other Dutch officials in the same volumes and in Dagregister (1645-1646), pp. 260-261. The English view in Foster, English factories (1642-1645), pp. 255-257, 275, 277-278, 299, 308 and Saldanha, Persian Gulf Précis, vol. 1, p. xxii. 79 GENERALE MISSIOEN, vol. 2, pp. 340-341, 377. The English considered the Dutch action as effective, cf. Saldanha, Persian Gulf Précis, vol. 1, p. xxii.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

Dutch East India Company were dissatisfied with the way in which the matter was handled. Their reactions show the different ways in which they thought. The Batavia High Government devoted some pithy remarks to the way the operations were conducted. They considered that the operations had put the reputation of the Company as a strong power in danger. According to the High Government the attempt on Qishm should have been done well or not at all. They considered that to have tried it weakly and stopped at the first difficulty was the worst way to handle the matter. The Board of Directors in Holland, who were merchants and not so much interested in political prestige, had some harsh words for the Governor General. They considered that the Governor General should not have followed a warlike policy without explicit approval of the Directors in a matter which was not so urgent that Batavia could not have waited for approval from Holland. They made it clear that the Governor General was not allowed to start military operations against any of the great states in Asia unless he had permission from the Directors in Holland or if Dutch interests had been attacked first.  

81 Boxer, Ruy Fregre, pp. 192-193 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 250-251; Cordeiro, Dois Capitâes, pp. 53-54, 70-73. During the time of the war, Pietro della Valle was in Basra. His account of it is in Viaggi, vol. 3, pp. 378-379.

82 The report of Cunaeeus's mission has been published : A. Hota, Jornal der reis van den gezant der O.I. Compagnie Joan Cunaeeus naar Persî in 1651-1652 (Werken van het Historisch Genootschap, 3rd series vol. 26, Amsterdam 1908).

83 There is some doubt about the family-relations in this succession. The historiography up to now has assumed that Ali was a son of Afrasiyab: El, vol. 1, p. 236. Uzunçarşıli, Osmanî Tarihi vol. 4/1, p. 325 also mentions Ali as a son of Afrasiyab. The source probably is Pietro della Valle, Viaggi vol 3, 377. The Dutch Basra diary of September 1653, VOC vol. 3988, fol. 545-549, states that Ali was a brother of Afrasiyab and that he was put on the throne in Basra by Portuguese influence. The supposition that Ali was a brother and not a son of Afrasiyab fits better with the events of the quarrel within the family of 1652-1654, see below, p. 199-202. Ali is described as an old man in 1645, this also indicates that he was a brother rather than a son: ARA, Geleynsens von Jongh, 280e (Dutch Basra Diary).

the Afrasiyab of Basra and European interests in the Upper Gulf

At the time of the fall of Hormuz in 1622, the Afrasiyab principality of Basra also seemed doomed. With the conquest of Hormuz,  

80 The report of Cunaeeus's mission has been published : A. Hota, Jornal der reis van den gezant der O.I. Compagnie Joan Cunaeeus naar Persî in 1651-1652 (Werken van het Historisch Genootschap, 3rd series vol. 26, Amsterdam 1908).

OMANI ARABS, DUTCH AND ENGLISH DOMINATE THE SCENE

Pasha of Basra under pressure to recognize the Shah as his lord. Afrasiyab did not want to become a Persian Wali, and asked for support from the Portuguese. Ruy Freire was only too willing to be of assistance, and after the Persian failure to take the fortress of Dawraq, which belonged to Basra, the Persian attack was repelled in the marshes East of Basra. In 1625, the Persians attacked Dawraq again, with the support of the Arabs of Jaza’ir, but with no result.  

At this time, Afrasiyab died. The Portuguese, who were then very powerful in Basra, supported the succession of Afrasiyab’s brother, Ali, passing by the claims of Afrasiyab’s sons. Ali formally asked for recognition by the Sultan which he obtained. He was able to repel a new attack by Imam Quli Khan in 1629, in which he was helped by the Shaikh of the Banu Ka’b, Badr. Basra retained part of its shipping activity, because much of the trade from India now called at Muscat instead of Hormuz and proceeded to Basra under Portuguese protection. It is understandable that the Afrasiyab regime in Basra kept close ties with the Portuguese. Ali Pasha seems to have been a loyal ally of the Portuguese while keeping his options open. After the fall of Hormuz, Portuguese commercial interests concentrated in Basra. Portuguese merchants became very active there and Ruy Freire obtained permission to establish two Portuguese monasteries of Augustinian and Carmelite monks. There

81 Boxer, Ruy Fregre, pp. 192-193 = Ruy Freire, Comentarios, pp. 250-251; Cordeiro, Dois Capitães, pp. 53-54, 70-73. During the time of the war, Pietro della Valle was in Basra. His account of it is in Viaggi, vol. 3, pp. 378-379.

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83 Perry, 'Banu Ka’b', p. 133.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

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The history of the Upper Gulf was during the second quarter of the seventeenth century considerably less eventful than the history of the Lower Gulf. Its economic situation must have suffered from the policy of Persia to cut off the transit trade from Persia through Iraq to Syria. The fall of Hormuz must have meant that part of Basra’s trade was diverted to other routes. The Persian Government, apparently wishing to avoid any profits coming to the area controlled by the Ottomans, also did nothing to stimulate the traffic of the Upper Gulf, but favoured places on the Lower Gulf. As a consequence there is scant information about places like Rishahr near Bushahr and Bandar Rig. At first, there was some Portuguese trade in Rishahr.86 Later, the Governors of these places were trying to attract some navigation by approaching Europeans in Basra.87 The English seem to have done some trade with Qatif at that time, maybe they also had received suggestions like the Dutch had from Arab Emirs from the peninsula.88

Ali Pasha’s position in Basra was not a very easy one and the situation grew ever more difficult for him. He protested repeatedly to the Dutch and the English in Bandar Abbas and Surat about the damage they did to the shipping of his place.89 Imam Quli Khan continued his endeavours to conquer Basra. In 1627, he sent out an expedition to conquer Basra and Huwayza where the Arab ruler seems to have ended his obedience to the Shah as soon as the Persian forces had retired. The Khan could not obtain any support from the Dutch or English for this plan: the friendship of the Sultan was a matter of policy of both the English and the Dutch government, and the East India Companies would never be permitted to counteract state policy in such an important matter just for the favour of the Shah.90 The Persians had some help from Arab tribesmen who blocked the roads between Basra and Syria, but Basra was able to resist all Persian attacks. The Persians claimed in 1629 to have conquered the town, but this was not true.91 The Portuguese also were in contact with the other Ottoman governor on the Gulf, the Pasha in Qatif, who like his colleague in Basra was fearing the expansionism of Imam Quli Khan. In 1627, they assisted the Pasha of Qatif in a war against Bahrain.92

Ruy Freire’s reconciliation with Persia and the opening of Bandar Kong for Portuguese shipping left Ali Pasha alone to face the Persians. His position became very delicate: he had to avoid a confrontation with the Shah while not too much offending his formal overlord the Sultan. In case of war between the Ottomans and Persia his was an unenviable position. Since the Ottoman conquest of Baghdad in 1638, the power of the Sultan had come nearer to him. It appears that he changed his policy and kept relations with Persia on a more friendly basis, probably in the hope of obtaining help from the Shah if Ottoman pressure for obedience to the Sultan increased.93

87 ARA, Geleynsen de Jongh-papers no. 280e (Dutch Basra-diary of 1647-1648), cf. letters of Dawud Khan, governor of Rishahr to the Dutch director in Bandar Abbas ibid. no. 100; Foster, English Factories(1642-1645), p. 283.
88 Foster, English Factories (1642-1645), pp. 100, 147.
89 Foster, English factories (1624-1629), pp. xxxi, 324, 326.
90 Foster, English factories(1624-1629), pp. x, 43; Dunlop, Bronnen, p. 214.
92 Pissurlicarac, Assentos, vol. 3, pp. 174-176. Cordeiro, Dois Capitães, p. 54. Boxer, ‘Anglo-Portuguese rivalry’, pp. 110 and 116 erroneously mentions the Shaikh of Qatif in this context, but at that time the town of Qatif still was under the rule of an Ottoman Pasha.
93 Generale Missiven, vol.2, p. 36 mentions the sending of a small Dutch ship to Basra on behalf of the Shah to get from there a Persian rebel who had fled.
Ali seems to have been rather a superstitious character. Because of the predictions of his astrologer, he did not live in town, but in a tent in the desert. He paid both the Shah and the Sultan an annual tribute of ten horses.\textsuperscript{94}

Not all developments were negative to Ali. The tensions in the relations between Persia and the English and the Dutch brought both European powers to attempts of trade in Basra. The English were the first to penetrate in the Upper Gulf. In 1640 they went to Basra and started to do trade there with reasonable profit. At first, they were received by Ali Pasha in a most friendly way and prospects for trade were good. But once started, they discovered that the duties to be paid were very heavy, that the caravans which brought the cash with which the merchandise was bought from the Europeans did not come so very regularly, and that the capacity of this market was limited.\textsuperscript{95} The English took the view that the Portuguese would soon be finished in Basra: they expected the arrival of the Dutch and two such arrogant cocks (the Dutch and the Portuguese) could not live next to each other.\textsuperscript{96}

Indeed, the Dutch had observed the English initiative in Basra, and had already decided to follow their example when they had the opportunity. Their shipping potential was very much limited for some time by their warfare against Goa and soon they heard that English profits were not so large, so they took their time.\textsuperscript{97} When

they started, in 1645, they followed a rather heavy-handed policy. They sent 2 small well-armed ships with a rich cargo (large ships could not penetrate to Basra) in the hope of being able to make a show of force and to flush their competitors from the market.\textsuperscript{98} This scheme failed. The expedition started inauspiciously. The pilot of the Dutch ship had hired on Kharg was unable to find the Bamišhir and the Dutch ships were led astray to the coast of Kuwait (at that time an area without any sign of human habitation).\textsuperscript{99} A strange by-pro-duct of this and other expeditions into the Gulf organized by Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jongh was the giving of Dutch names by the exploration teams to several islands in the Gulf. Most of these names did not stick, a few survived on later Dutch maps:\textsuperscript{100}

Henlijn = Schelvis (after a Dutch ship)
Nabī Tuḥb = Delfshaven
Nabi Frur = Zeemeeuw (after another Dutch ship)
Abū Musa = Rijnsburg (another Dutch ship)
Sirri = Rijnsburg (another Dutch ship)
Hindurabi = Hoom (a Dutch city where one of the Chambers of the East India Company was established)
Sītūr = Wolf (another Dutch ship)
Shaikh Saib = Rotterdam (a Dutch city where one of the Chambers of the East India Company was established)

\textsuperscript{94} De la Boulaye de Couz, \textit{Voyage}, p. 291.
\textsuperscript{95} Foster, \textit{English factories (1637-1641)}, pp. xxiv, 33, 42, 193, 201, 204, 210-211, 245-247; Dutch report on the start of English trade in Basra: VOC vol. 1146, fol.818.
\textsuperscript{96} This charming and accurate allegory in a letter from the English mission in Basra, published in Foster, \textit{English Factories (1637-1641)}, p. 252: ‘because two arrogant dunghill-spirits one residence can not contenay’.
\textsuperscript{97} ARA, VOC vol. 935, p. 935 (letter Batavia to Bandar Abbas, 24-5-1644: too dangerous to send any ships now to Basra because of naval activities of the Portuguese who captured 4 native ships from India near Muscat. Same letter p. 990: English trade is of little consequence).
\textsuperscript{98} ARA, VOC vol. 1152, part Basra I; ARA, papers Geleynssen de Jongh, nos. 280 a-d, 281e, 291c, 292, 297a-c.
\textsuperscript{99} The nautical details on the expedition of the Dutch ships are very well known because several logbooks have survived: ARA, Geleynssen de Jongh-papers, nos. 280 a-d, as well as the chart made by the second Dutch expedition, which apparently shows the path followed by the first expedition in its search for the route to Basra (Landesbibliothek, Karlsruhe, manuscripts of the Dutch official Artus Gijels no. 478). The pilot from Kharg brought the Dutch ships to the entry of the Shatt al Arab which was closed by shallows. Because of a navigational error the ships went South and not finding a practicable entry, arrived near Bubiyan or the Northern corner of the Bay of Kuwait.
\textsuperscript{100} A list is given in Hotz, ‘Roobacker’, p. 38, we have corrected in a few places with the help of the diaries in ARA, Geleynssen de Jongh papers 280a and 280c and the contemporary nautical charts in Badische Landesbibliothek, Karlsruhe, Artus Gijels papers 478 and British Library, London, Miss. Add. 34184.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

Kharg = Delft (a Dutch city where one of the Chambers of the East India Company was established)
Khargu = Enkhuizen (a Dutch city where one of the Chambers of the East India Company was established)
Quban = Amsterdam (a Dutch city where one of the Chambers of the East India Company was established)
Khidr = Middelburg (a Dutch city where one of the Chambers of the East India Company was established, this name and that of Amsterdam-island survive on later maps but are then sometimes given to small islands in the Shatt al-Arab).

On arrival in Basra, things did not go according to expectations. As he had done with the English, the Pasha received them at first in a most friendly manner and made several vague promises. But finally he again claimed the full amount of customs-duties while the Dutch had been expecting the same privileges as in Persia. Trade was slow in Basra, and had already been so for some time, because of a conflict between the Pasha and the tribes upstream. Finally, on leaving Basra, one of the Dutch ships caught fire and so the financial result of the expedition was negative. Next year a new expedition was sent, but because of conflicts between the Pasha and the Ottoman Governor of Baghdad, trade was slow and the Pasha, seeing that the Dutch were not prepared to pay large sums in customs duties, was less friendly. A special problem for trade was the way customs duties were levied in Basra: the Dutch would have to pay customs duties for all merchandise they brought in, and for the unsold merchandise pay customs duties again to get them out. The reason for this rule was that the Shahbandar (head of the port and the customs-office) was interested in buying up the merchandise himself for a low price and used the threat of double customs duties to force the Dutch to accept his prices. Quite another effect of the first Dutch expeditions is that the diaries kept by their leaders offer for the first time a detailed view of the situation in Basra, and of the trade-movement of the town. Of some interest is the reference to the arrival of a ship from Julfar carrying sugar: apparently that part of the coast of the Arabian peninsula already had its own long-distance shipping.103

Apparently, trade was busy in Basra, but the local government put heavy charges, not only on the Europeans (which would be understandable and which would have had some economic and political justification), but also on the local merchants. Of course, the Pasha needed money to keep the tribes of the area, the Pasha of Baghdad and the Sultan in Istanbul satisfied, but it remained questionable how far local taxation could go before awaking opposition which would be as dangerous as a conflict with the tribes or with the Sultan.104 The Pasha of Basra had not only to deal with the Sultan and the tribes, but also with Persia. The threat from Persia had diminished because Persia was weakened under Shah Safi, but the Shah was not without influence with the tribes of the area and Ali had also to keep friends with the Shah. Ali Pasha of Basra, an old man, manoeuvred cleverly, veering left and right, but his was a dangerous game.

OMANI ARABS, DUTCH AND ENGLISH DOMINATE THE SCENE

the end of Portuguese Oman

The main result of the first 50 years of the seventeenth century was not the rather marginal presence of the English and the Dutch. The economic importance of the trade of the English and Dutch seems to have remained rather small. Of more importance was the trade by local merchants and merchants from India which was carried on under some kind of Portuguese control from Bandar Kong, Muscat and Basra.105 Even after the taking of Bahrain and

101 ARA, VOC vol. 1057, Basra part 2, fol. 337: inventory of the goods salvaged from the fire of the Schelvis.
102 Diary of this second expedition in ARA, Geleynsen de Jongh-papers no. 280e. Other papers on the expedition in ARA, VOC 1152, Basra part 2.
103 ARA, Geleynsen de Jongh-papers no. 280e, diary on the date 9-12-1646.
104 ARA, Geleynsen de Jongh-papers no. 280e, diary on the dates 7 July and 15 August 1646.
105 Some impression of the importance of the 'native' or 'Moorish' trade in comparison with Dutch and English trade is given in the lists of the cargo of 'Moorish' ships and in the remark in ARA, VOC vol. 1185, fol. 371-377 to be compared with Dutch statistics ibid fol. 365-370.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

Hormuz, Persia had not become a real power in the Gulf. More important than this was the emergence of the new Arab state of Oman, which had been established near, and partly on the ruins of the Kingdom of Hormuz. This state, based on the region of Nazwa extended its territory with the possessions of Hormuz in the area of Sir.

The new Oman was a conglomorate of many heterogeneous Arab elements, but shortly before 1650 these elements became reasonably unified. Oman put Muscat under such heavy pressure that the Portuguese had difficulty in defending it. Suwar was taken by the Omanis in 1643.106

The Portuguese possession of Muscat was the only thing which kept Oman from becoming the most prominent regional power on the Gulf. Already in 1647 or 1648, Arabs in the service of the Portuguese had tried to take Muscat by surprise. They failed, although Arab warriors had entered the city.107 Pressure was building up. Negotiations between the Portuguese and the Omanis were started, the negotiations had as theme the recognition of Portuguese rule over Muscat in exchange for the surrendering of the small fortresses between Daba and Muscat to the Omanis. Except Muscat, only Khasab, where Shaikh Malik was a friend of the Portuguese, would remain in Portuguese hands.108 An agreement was reached between Portuguese envoys and two Oman plenipotentiaries, one of whom, ‘Sefo ben Aly ben Salim el-Casmi’ apparently was an al Qasimi (Sayf bin Ali bin Salih), a member of the Qawasim, a family who played later a very important part in the history of the Gulf as Rulers of Julfar.109 It seems that this agreement was never executed.

106 Danvers, Report, p. 121.
107 Danvers, Report, p. 121. Some Arabs entered the Augustinian monastery and killed some monks of which event there exists a tableau of tiles in the Graça monastery in Lisbon, a photograph of it in Gulbenkian, Ambassade en Perse de Luis Pereira de Lacerda, between pp. 67 and 69.
109 Pissurzelncar, Assentos, vol. 3, pp. 507-508: text of the armistice agreement of 15-12-1648, the sheikh ‘Sefo’ may be the sheikh of ‘Siar’ [Sir] referred to ibid, p. 504.

OMANI ARABS, DUTCH AND ENGLISH DOMINATE THE SCENE

The Portuguese were able to hold on to Khasab. There was even a plan to establish a Carmelite monastery there.110 In 1649, just after the death of Imam Nasir bin Murshid, his successor Sultan bin Sayf started a regular siege. In the first days of the siege he was able to take some key positions by surprise and this weakened the Portuguese defence to such an extent that they could not keep up much longer. A Dutch report of 1650 mentions that a ship had arrived bringing the news that the town had fallen and that the Portuguese held on to only one fortress, although from there they were offering surrender.111 This is confirmed in somewhat more detailed reports in the Carmelite archives in Rome by a Carmelite who was in Muscat at that time. No help from the other Portuguese establishments came and the last fortress of Muscat fell.112 In this way, the Portuguese rule of places in the Gulf ended, although the next years some efforts were made by the Portuguese to regain a foothold on the Arabian peninsula. They could only stay on as merchants in Kong in the same way the English and the Dutch were in Bandar Abbas. The Persian endeavours to acquire control over the Southern bank of the Gulf had failed as well. Thanks to the English intervention of 1622 and the Anglo-Dutch intervention of 1625, Persia had obtained a free outlet to the sea and control of the coastal islands of Qishm, Laraka and Hormuz. But Persia was showing the first signs of economical, military and political decline. The two remaining European powers

110 Chronicle, vol. 2, p. 1117 about the Carmelite plans in ‘Casab’. The editor makes a mistake in supposing that Casab in Portuguese stands for Al Hasa, there can be no doubt that it is Khasab.
111 ARA, VOC vol. 1185, fol. 680v-681: report from the Dutch Director in Bandar Abbas to the Dutch director in Surat, cf. English mention of the conquest of Muscat in Foster, English Factories (1651-1654), pp. 73, 79.
112 The main source on the fall of Muscat into the hands of the Arabs are the letters of the Carmelite in the Carmelite archives in Rome; 241k and 242a, of which parts are quoted in Chronicle, vol. 1, pp. 358-359 and vol. 2, p. 961. There is a rather vague mention in the Oman chronicle: Badger, History, pp. 79-87 and Ross, Annals, p. 55. An interesting account is given by a later English traveller: A. Hamilton, A new account of the East Indies, pp. 43-44, who had in 1727 his story from an old Portuguese turned Muslim.
in the Gulf had arrived at the conclusion that close cooperation with the Shah held no advantages to them. Both powers had some interest in the economic well-being of Persia because this would help trade, but they distrusted the regime. The English power was in a state of decay all over Asia. The Dutch were stronger, but had even less interest in the well-being of Persia. The actions of the Dutch East India Company in the 1640’s show the fundamental dilemma of European presence in the Gulf. Local European representatives seemed to tend towards taking a hard line, they seemed to be wanting to imitate the Portuguese policy of customs houses to obtain a share of the income of all Persian trade, and they were sometimes willing to participate in Persian military plans. But the more commercially-minded directors of the Companies in London and Amsterdam were mentally not ready for such colonial policy. They just wanted profit, and did not care very much for show of force for its own sake: the expensive imperial glory of the romantic nineteenth century has not enough appeal for the mercantile pragmatists of the seventeenth century.

The Arabs of the Northern bank of the Gulf were absent from the accounts of 1650. There is hardly a mention of them in European or Omani sources. It can be assumed that they continued to participate in the warfare against the Portuguese. 113 Certainly, many of them lost their lives at Hormuz or Qishm; possibly, many took to their boats and emigrated to the Southern bank. Others would have adapted themselves to Persian rule. These Arab inhabitants made the harbour of Kong a very serious competitor for Bandar Abbas. Because of the emergence of Kong as an important port, the shipping of Bandar Abbas declined into a sideshow; it became the concession-port for the Europeans, while Kong carried on the traditional trade of the Gulf and, more than Bandar Abbas, took the place of Hormuz. So Hormuz finally was replaced by several ports on the lower Gulf: Bandar Abbas, Bandar Kong, Muscat and, to a lesser extent, Julfar.

The essential progress achieved in this period was that since the fall of the Portuguese strongholds, shipping in the Gulf was free.

113 *Chronicle*, vol. 2, pp. 1116-1117.
CHAPTER 5
ARABIAN EXPANSION

the consolidation of Oman

With the Arab conquest of Muscat, a new era in the history of the Gulf begins. From then on, Portuguese domination of the shipping along the coast of the Arabian peninsula was over and Arab traders were able freely to roam about the Gulf under their own flag. The time was rather favourable to the Arabs: the Portuguese were out of breath, relations between the Dutch and the English were somewhat tense and Persian power did not represent much.\(^1\) The Dutch were still looking for replacements for the declining profits in Persia. Some initiative was taken in Basra, where Dutch and English looked at each other with jealousy.\(^2\) However, the Dutch seem to have planned to fill in the empty space left by the Portuguese in a peaceful manner. Already in 1650, on receiving the news of the fall of Muscat, the Batavia High Government had decided to send instructions to Bandar Abbas that the Director there should take a look at the possibilities of trade in that town.\(^3\)

On March 6th 1651, the Director of the Dutch establishment in Bandar Abbas instructed the Koopman Elias Boudaen to visit Muscat while returning from Basra to Surat. Boudaen’s report did not contain any good news for those who hoped that the Dutch could find in Muscat a port as important as that of Bandar Abbas. Its trade had probably suffered from the long wars the Portuguese had been forced to engage in to preserve their influence in Asia, and the tribes from the desert, who had finally conquered the town, were not really

1. *Generale Missiven* vol. 2, p. 403 about the bad state of Portuguese power.
3. *Generale Missiven*, vol 2, p. 417. The Dutch Director in Bandar Abbas had reported the news of the fall of Muscat on 1-1-1650 to Surat, from where the news was sent to Batavia, cf. VOC vol. 1185, Persia fol. 680v-681.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

interested in repairing the damages of the war. It would take some time before a merchant population would settle again. Maybe, Boudaen’s view was too negative; the Banyan traders who informed him of the possibilities of trade in Muscat may have lied a little in order to deter European competitors. But probably, Boudaen was right in considering that the conditions of trade in Muscat were not good enough for the Company, which, with its enormous expenses of ships and European sailors, depended on quick turnover against cash. English observations confirm Boudaen’s view. One English report of 1653 states that Muscat had declined so much that the Imam was thinking of restoring the town to the Portuguese. Boudaen expressed some fear in his report that the ships taken from the Portuguese by the Arabs might be used against European shipping, he cites in this context an attack on an English ship. This fear seems not to have been justified by later events. Of course, the Arabs continued general warfare against Portuguese shipping, but neither the English nor the Dutch shipping had any significant problems with the new Arab sea-power.

Boudaen’s report is on the whole a rather interesting document and this is why we will give here below the text of his account: the first description of Muscat written after the Arab conquest.

...the town is surrounded by high and steep mountains, on which there is no vegetation, even no grass. It is a very strong place, and according to many impregnable, because of the situation of its three fortresses, which are built on high rocks which are out of range for artillery from other places, and they have only a very narrow road of access. On this there are some places where masonry allows only one or two men to come up abreast, in such a way that Muscat can only be taken by starvation. The fortresses are full of fine bronze artillery on both sides: as well on the seaside as on the side of the town. The Arabs, according to their custom, allow the town to decline completely. I believe one can not find even 10 houses in it without rents in the walls, the houses have fallen like heaps of rubble upon the other. They have repaired the fortresses in their own way up to now, but I believe that they will allow them to degrade also because they do not want to make expenses.

As soon as we arrived and had got a guide, we went on land. We were instantly brought by some Banyans to the house of the governor, to whom, after the ordinary compliments, I explained the purpose of our travel. He seemed to be satisfied with our arrival and declared himself to be entirely at our service, saying that we were very welcome, that the town was open to us and to all other traders, and that we could do trade as we liked it, and leave again without paying any customs duties (which had not been claimed from anybody since the conquest of the town). He wanted also to offer us a house to our choice, in case we would return for trade. We thanked him most sincerely. Next, I asked the principal Banyans of this place (who were present as interpreters) what quantity of merchandise could annually be traded in this place. Upon this they (who certainly would not underestimate the matter) told: as much rice, pepper, black sugar, coarse and round tissues together for 20-25000 guilders, from which clearly can be seen that this will be no place for the Company, because with such a small amount of coarse merchandise the expenses can in no way be compensated. But in order to leave the matter not completely untried, we had some parcels of samples brought on land, just to show. For some parcels and pieces they offered such low prices, that we sent them again to the ships and this amount of goods of a value of l. 737.17 we would not be able to sell in four month’s time for cash, which sufficiently shows that this is not a trading place. Moors and others who arrive here with simple vessels bring rice, black sugar, and a bit of pepper, which is exchanged for dates and sometimes sold for cash, in which case they will have to wait for payment for a time of several months. This these people do because they have little expenses on crew. The inhabitants of Muscat are presently most Arabs (with some black converted Portuguese), who have come to live there from the mountain and the desert. They sail as privateers with the ships and frigates they took from the Portuguese, and catch everything they can get, which can be seen from what they dared to do with the English ship Livarth [Levort] coming from Kung which first at night and then by day was gunned by them. (ARA, VOC vol. 1188, fol. 544v-546v, report by Boudaen of November 1651).

It so happened that the Dutch were very well received in Muscat. A possible reason for this reception might be some fear on the part of the Arabs that the Portuguese might return to take their revenge. The Dutch would be the most probable ally against the Portuguese. The Portuguese did indeed take some action but without result while the Omanis captured off Yemen a Portuguese coffee-ship.

5 The black Portuguese mentioned are Christians from India living in Oman who had become Muslims in Oman after the Arab conquest of Oman.
6 At that time, the Dutch had plans to attack the Portuguese establishments of Diu and Damao: VOC vol. 1185, fol.743.
7 ARA, VOC vol. 1195, fol. 782v.

Portuguese documents tell us about a small force sent from Goa immediately upon receipt of the news of the fall of Muscat. According to Portuguese sources, this force would have penetrated the Gulf up to Qatif and Bahrain, retaken Khasab, which was proposed as a replacement for Muscat or Hormuz, and negotiated at Kong with the Persians of Lar about the cession of Hormuz or Larag. The Portuguese occupation of Khasab did not last very long. It seems that the Shaikh of Khasab invited the Portuguese to build a strong fortification in his town after the Omani Arabs conquered Muscat. Work was started, but then Arab troops appeared before the fortress was ready. According to the cynical account of a Carmelite monk, the soldiers, who were building the fortress, behaved in the way normal for soldiers and fled as quick as they could from the half-ready fortress. These negotiations had no results and after the Portuguese had left Kong, Arab ships came there and took away some Portuguese merchant ships. We have no full confirmation of this in Dutch sources. There is only a reference to the presence of Portuguese merchant ships in Bandar Kong which were captured by the Arabs, who killed the Portuguese crews. Later, according to the Dutch, an Arab squadron of five frigates and two small ships captured a Portuguese merchant vessel off Jask. The Portuguese, who realized that these events were very damaging to their reputation, then decided to send a large fleet into the Gulf. In March 1652, a strong Portuguese fleet arrived. Muscat was attacked, but in vain. The Dutch reported that there were rumours that the Portuguese had suffered serious losses. Another setback for the Portuguese was the loss in a storm of a convoy of merchant ships on its way from Malabar to the North. Moreover, Sivapanai, ruler of a large part of Canara, made use of the weak position of the Portuguese to conquer several of their fortresses on the coast of Canara. While attempting to regain these places, the Portuguese had no resources to spare to resume their offensive in the Gulf.  

In 1653, wild rumours circulated in the Gulf. A ship from Bandar Kong brought to Basra the news that the Dutch had allied themselves with the Omanis and on behalf of the Imam were collecting the customary tax on shipping in the Gulf which in earlier times had been claimed by the Portuguese government of Muscat. Although this was not true, the rumour gives an indication as to how the merchant community in the Gulf saw Omani ambitions to occupy the position the Portuguese formerly had and the possible European support these ambitions could have.

Dutch and English ventures in the Gulf, 1650-1660

While the Portuguese were occupied elsewhere, the Dutch were in singularly good shape. In Europe they had become involved in an armed conflict with the English which remained there without a decisive result. In the Gulf, in 1653, the Dutch captured three English ships and one Portuguese ship. At that time, when Gulf trade was its only source of profit, this terrible loss put the English East India Company out of business for some years.

The international situation opened new perspectives for the Dutch. It seems that in Western Europe the demand for pearls had

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10 *Generale Missiven*, vol 2, pp. 638-639 (24-12-1652).


12 ARA, VOC vol. 3988, fol 540 (Dutch Basra diary 7-10-1653).

increased considerably, so much that the Directors of the Dutch East India Company forgot their earlier experiences with the trade in pearls from the Gulf and gave orders once again to make an attempt to enter trade in Gulf pearls. The order was duly passed on to the Director in Bandar Abbas who replied that there were no good prospects for this in Bandar Abbas but that while the Portuguese were out of action and the English kept away, an expedition might be tried to Julfar and Bahrain to see if something could be bought directly from the producers. Nothing came of this and the next year, there was some new trouble with the English. The Directors in the Netherlands did continue to order pearls from the Gulf, but very little activity was shown in this matter by their representatives in Bandar Abbas.

The mention of Julfar as a centre of trade in the Dutch plans does not stand on its own. The French traveller Thevenot, who visited the coast in 1663, noted that Julfar was a place with a stone fortress, which was visited by several merchant ships from India.

The Basra venture, started again by Boudaen in 1651, did not have a long life. Trade declined there because of internal trouble. In 1655 Basra-trade was considered a failure and the decision to terminate the venture was left to the director in Surat. On the whole, Dutch trade in Bandar Abbas did continue to prosper even after the first boom of the reopening of Dutch trade in 1652 had ended. The old complaints about the greed of Persian officials continued. The Dutch did not suffer very much from the behaviour of the Shahtbandar before 1655, but in this year Muhammad Quli Beg, an old acquaintance of the Dutch became Shahtbandar. He was greedier than his predecessor and many foreign Muslim-owned ships began to use the port of Bandar Kong instead of Bandar Abbas, because the Khan of Lar showed a more moderate behaviour than the local government of Bandar Abbas.

For the Dutch business still went rather well, even if there were temporary setbacks like in 1656, when, because of the enormous volume of Surat shipping, Dutch trade was slow. At the same time, the trade of the English Company had reached almost zero, although the private trade of their officials was booming. In the accounting year 1657/1658, the Dutch offices in the Gulf had made a profit of over half a million guilders, only Japan (with slightly over a million) made a larger profit. The importance of Gulf trade for the Company becomes even clearer when we consider that the total net profit of the trade of the Dutch offices in Asia was just one million guilders. New ventures were started: it was discovered that Kerman wool could be of interest as a raw material for the Dutch cloth industry and for almost a century Kerman wool would be one of the most important commodities in Dutch trade in the Gulf. The Dutch had less success with a new establishment they opened in Sind: this was closed after only two years because of lack of trading activity in this place. The Persians approached the Dutch in 1657 with a plan for a combined English, Dutch and Persian operation against Muscat, but met with little enthusiasm.

For some time, English influence in the Gulf had been in full decline. The English East India Company had gone bankrupt and private trading was working at a reduced scale. A new English Company had been founded, but its agents did not reach the Gulf before 1659. Meanwhile, relations between the Dutch and the local Persian authorities were deteriorating again. Twice, in 1658 and in 1659, the T'irimad al Dawla, the Persian Prime Minister, appointed a nephew of his as Shahtbandar of Bandar Abbas. Both appointees were greedy people. At the same time, a conflict arose between the Shahtbandar and the English because the Shahtbandar again started refusing to pay the English their share of the customs revenues. The

14 ARA, VOC vol. 1283, fol. 702 (Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 21-3-1654); Generale Missiven, vol. 2, p. 765.
19 Foster, English Factories (1655-1660), p. 131.
English agent threatened with a naval blockade, but this made no impression. From then on, the English began showing more activity and seemed to be planning to make their first real colonial venture in the area. In 1659, apparently as a reaction to the Persian overtures of 1657, they sent a representative, Rainsford, to Muscat in order to open a factory there. He was to propose to the Arabs a common action against Bandar Abbas. Rainsford had the luck to find the Imam in Muscat (the Ruler usually resided in Nazwa). Rainsford was a military man, and he planned an English military establishment in Muscat. The proposal was that the garrison of Muscat would consist of an equal number of Omani and English soldiers; the English would receive the old Portuguese government building. There was some uncertainty about the way in which the customs revenues would be divided between the Imam and the English. While the negotiations were still going on, Rainsford died and the mission remained without results.\(^{22}\) In the case of this mission we notice the same difference of opinion between Directors in Europe and the representatives in Asia as we have already observed in the case of the Dutch. The mission was organized by the representatives of the East India Company in Surat, without previously informing their Directors in London. In fact, the Directors in London did not like this adventure at all and reproached their representatives in Surat for having acted outside the boundaries of the powers given to them.

The Dutch were not very active at that time. They were very much involved in several wars, in which they had varying success. They were able to acquire the main Portuguese fortress of Southern India and to gain definitive control over Ceylon, but they lost their important colony of Taiwan to the Chinese.

The relative lethargy shown by Oman in its exterior policy did not last a long time. After the apparent recession shortly after the fall of Muscat, there was a considerable expansion about 1660, when Oman started a vigorous offensive against its enemies. In 1661, the Batavia High Government was informed by the Director in Bandar Abbas that the Omanis had started to build a considerable navy and in the next year, this navy came into action. Several Portuguese places on the Western coast of India were attacked and pillaged. The most important place which was plundered by the Omanis was Bombay.\(^{23}\) The Omanis had a conflict with Shivaji, the Ruler of a growing territory just south of Goa, and this meant that merchants from places belonging to him such as Baraslore, Mangalore and Baticalao had to pay huge customs duties (17.5%). The Omanis had also done much damage to the shipping of Portuguese Damao.\(^{24}\)

Muscat attracted the attention of the Dutch again. The Shahbandar of Bandar Abbas proposed to the Dutch that they would offer to transport Persian troops to Muscat; after its conquest they would then receive important privileges for their trade in Persia. There was a special reason for the Shahbandar’s proposal: Bandar Abbas had lost shipping because of a considerable movement of small local shipping between Muscat and the smaller Persian ports like Rig where there was no Persian customs office (125-150 ships annually).\(^{25}\) This diminished the Shahbandar’s own income. The Dutch Director Van Wijck did not trust such proposals because he knew too well that the central government usually did not consider itself bound by the promises of local officials. To avoid being duped, he posed conditions which were so heavy that the Persians did not renew their demand.\(^{26}\) Batavia was not interested in the Persian

\(^{22}\) VOC vol. 1289, fol. 898v; VOC vol. 1242, fol. 1091v; Generale Missiven vol.3, pp. 274-276, Foster, England Factories (1655-1660), p. 230. Risso, Oman and Muscat, p. 13 notes, quoting Bathurst’s unpublished Oxford thesis The Yarubi dynasty of Oman of 1667 (not seen) that Rainsford’s mission failed because of Dutch influence in Oman. There is no trace of Dutch interference in the Dutch archives, and Bathurst remark should be considered an example of the often occurring exaggeration of Dutch activities in English sources.

\(^{23}\) ARA, VOC vol. 1240, fol. 412.

\(^{24}\) ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 490; VOC vol. 1259, fol. 1303.

\(^{25}\) ARA, VOC vol. 1242, fol. 1091. This importance of Rig in that time is confirmed in Thevenot, Suite du Voyage, pp. 297-299.

\(^{26}\) Floor, ‘First relations’, p. 290, is of the opinion that Van Wijck had provoked this Persian request, but in view of Van Wijck’s reaction to it, this does not
plan, but the Directors in Amsterdam, wanting to steal a march on the English, were more positive. Van Wijck maintained his pro-Omani attitude. He did not believe that the Portuguese would be able to defeat ‘the courageous Arabs’. He saw several other possible courses of action. After the Dutch conquest of Cochim and other places in Malabar in 1660, the Dutch East India Company had in a rather distant way become an important trading partner of Oman: Muscat was the focus of much of the trade, direct and transit, from Malabar. The local representatives of the Dutch East India Company were looking for some way in which to get a larger share in this trade.

This was why the Dutch Director Hendrik van Wijck wrote a letter from Bandar Abbas to the Imam of Oman in 1665 proposing some kind of cooperation against the Portuguese and also to establish a Company residence in Muscat. The reply came shortly afterwards, and because this is one of the oldest documents from an independent Arab sovereign from the Gulf which has come to us, we give its complete text:

In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate.
This writ comes from Sultan Imam of the Muslims, the son of Seif, son of Matoba, son of Aboe ’I Arab, son of Sultan, whom God may grant glory and victory, to the Lord Hendrik van Wijck.
Your letter, which because of its dignity we do esteem like a jewel, has come to us. It is full of understanding and of graceful expressions and adorned with noble, polite, courteous and friendly expressions and of such a luster that we have been illuminated by it like the earth is by the moon, and of such a power that it would bring joy even to the saddest heart, because it comes from our most loved lord, the very gracious, merciful and benevolent, powerful, hony-

Based on the text and the footnotes:
27 Batavia only wanted to take action if there would be a formal request by the Shah himself: Resolutions High Government, 4-4-1665, cf. ARA, VOC vol. 988, fol. 395 (High Government to Bandar Abbas, 2-9-1664 reporting the opinion in Holland).
29 ARA, VOC vol. 1234, fol. 520 (4-4-1665).
conquer. Because of this policy, most Banyan traders had left Muscat and had started business in Bandar Kong or Bandar Abbas. However, the High Government was not against a limited experiment and they empowered the Director to send someone to Muscat.

This modest plan was made at a time when the Dutch were reconsidering the possibility of extending their activities in the Gulf beyond Bandar Abbas. They had seen how important the ‘country trade’ by ships from India was and they were looking for ways to get a share in it for themselves. Again, given the good market for pearls in Europe, missions to Bandar Kong and Bahrain were considered. Julfar was not mentioned this time. The missions to Kong met with little success, only small amounts of pearls of the right quality for the European market could be found. The Director in Bandar Abbas had also sent a Banyan in the service of the Dutch Company to Bahrain, but this mission only led to losses.

The Dutch did not follow up this course of action: they dominated the pearl banks off Ceylon and did not need to buy Gulf pearls very much. It was planned to send an European to Bahrain as soon as there was occasion, but somehow this occasion never materialized. In the case of Muscat, further action was taken. In fact, the following year, a small ship, the Meerkat, was sent from Bandar Abbas to the coast of Oman in order to explore the coast, to make a good chart and to see what possibilities there were for trade.

30 ARA, VOC vol. 889, fol. 515 (High Government to Bandar Abbas, 13-9-1665); ARA VOC vol. 990, fol. 605 (id. 13-9-1665). In January, 1665 the High Government had suggested to the directors in Holland that it might be good to have an agent in Muscat: Generale Missien, vol. 3, p. 459.
33 ARA, VOC vol. 1252, pp. 716-720.
34 There is a report by the head of this mission, Vogel, in ARA, VOC vol. 1259, pp. 3366-3377, published in Floor, ‘First contacts’, pp. 298-307. The chart of the Musandam area on fig. 2 in Floor’s article is not based on this expedition but on the earlier expeditions by the ship Zeemeeuw in 1645, of which the logbooks are in ARA, Geleysn en de Jongh papers, nos. 280 and 280a. The chart on fig. 3 in Floor’s article is indeed based on Vogel’s expedition, the original is in ARA, VEL 222.
there were two small villages with some date palms. It is a beautiful bay but there were only a few goats on the dry land and there was no possibility of trade. South of the bay of Lima there is a bay with a very small village called 'Lima Cadima' [Old Lima]. From there they anchored off 'Dibba' [Daba]:

Dibba (where we could not enter because of the wind and adverse stream) is a place, according to the interpreter who was sent with us where there were about 300 houses of date branches... At the time of the Portuguese there had been 4 fortresses of which the largest is still standing. This place is situated in a valley where there is a multitude of date palms under which there are wells where one can get fresh water. On the Northern side there is a river of fresh water where the fishermen live... (ARA, VOC vol. 1259, p. 3371.)

From there, they went on to Lebdia (Bidiya):

Lebdia is a place which has about 200 houses all built from branches of date palms. It is standing on the beach on a latitude of 25 degrees 5 minutes. It has behind the houses a beautiful valley, where there are a great many date palms and some fig trees and there are several wells, one of them on a pistol shot's distance from the beach where there is very good and fresh water to be got. In this valley grow some melons, watermelons and onions but not in great number. Behind this valley there is nothing but rocky mountains, so there is little trade possible. One may get some provisions there: cows, goats, chickens, melons, watermelons and onions, but not abundantly. This place has no bay but an open anchorage 10-12 fathoms deep about a quarter mile from the coast... (ARA, VOC vol. 1259, pp.3371-3372.)

From there, the Merkhat arrived at Khor Fakan:

'Gorocam' is a place on a small bay which has about 200 small houses all built from date branches, near the beach. It had on the Northern side a triangular Portuguese fortress, of which the desolate ruin can still be seen. On the Southern coast of the bay in a corner there is another fortress on a hill but there is no garrison nor artillery on it, and it is also in ruins. This place has a beautiful valley with a multitude of date palms and some figtrees and there also grow melons, watermelons and myrrh. Under the trees there are several wells which are used for irrigation. It is good and fresh water but some farther away than the wells at 'Lebdia'. On the Southern end of the valley between the mountains there are some orange and lemon trees. The countryside around and beyond the valley is rocky mountainland. The people live off the products of the valley and there is no possibility of trade. The provisions one may get here are the fruits mentioned above and some small cows, goats and chickens but not abundantly... Here ends the sandy beach which started at the cape of 'Dibba' and South of 'Gorocam' there is only rocky mountain up to Kalba... 36

The report of the expedition also mentions several places beyond Kalba, but gives no details on them. 37 Finally, it gives a description of Muscat, the only considerable town on the coast:

'Mascatta' is a town within stone walls, with some guns on it pointed to the bay. The place is about as large as Bandar Abbas and its houses are built almost in the same way. It has a large population of several kinds of people from India who come to trade here. It is situated on the latitude of 23 degrees 18 minutes. The town is situated on the slope of a mountain and it has three fortresses near the seaside: on the Eastern side of the town on a mountain the fortress 'Mogobalavan' which can only be reached by a stairway hewn in the mountain. On the Western side of the town there is the fortress called 'Mascatta' which has down on the foot of the mountain a bastion which by a stone stairway gives access to the fortress. To the North at a musket's shot distance from the fort 'Mascatta' there are on and below the mountain two bastions, one called St. Anthony, and on the mountain stand eight to nine watch houses. Beyond the town there is nothing but rocky mountain. But there is much trade here, done by Moors, Banyans and people from Malabar which have much traffic with their ships. They carry here all kinds of cotton cloth, and also pepper, coffee, cinnamon, ginger, berberis, rice, sandalwood, iron and untreated hides... One can get here all kinds of provisions for ships but everything is very expensive except fish which is caught in abundance and is sold at a reasonable price... (ARA, VOC vol. 1259, pp. 3375-3376.)

The report does not show much optimism about the possibilities for Dutch trade of the Arab coast except in Muscat. Muscat might be tried and action was planned for 1670: a not inconsiderable delay. The motives for this plan were the usual Dutch motives for extension of activities outside Bandar Abbas: unsatisfactory development in trade with Persia and friction with the Persian government. 38 The Imam of Oman had shown himself most friendly to the Dutch in an incident concerning the confiscation by the Omanis of a ship from India carrying an Ambassador of Siam (a friend of the Dutch) to the Shah.

37 'Nabhr' [Nabhar], 'Ammock' [Amq], 'Seer' [Sehar], 'Soeek' [Suwaiq], 'Suadi islands' [Suwadi islands], 'Soobey' [Subay], Bocca [Barqua], 'Sieb' [Sib]: ARA, VOC vol. 1259, pp. 3373-3375 (= Floor, 'First contacts', pp. 304-306).
38 ARA, VOC vol. 894, fol. 678 (Batavia High Government to Bandar Abbas, 17-10-1670). The profit figures show indeed a lower result for the year 1669/1670, cf Klerk de Reus, Geschichtlicher Ueberblick, appendix 9.
While the development of Dutch trade-relations with Oman was being postponed, several conflicts were brewing in the Gulf. In 1667, it seemed that a war between Persia and Surat would become inevitable. Surati traders had been since the Anglo-Persian conquest of Hormuz very active in trade in the Gulf. It seems that they, and not the Europeans, handled the largest share in the foreign trade of the Gulf. At that time, Surat was a virtually independent province of the Mughal Empire. Surat had never been politically involved in the Gulf, and it is not clear to us why a war was imminent with Persia. The only reason one might imagine is hostile behaviour of Persian authorities against Surati traders. Luckily, war was avoided by the timely death of Shah Abbas II of Persia. The new Shah, Sulayman, was a more peaceful character.

The Portuguese also had a grudge against the Persians who were once again slow in paying the Portuguese share in the customs of Bandar Kong. In 1668, a Portuguese naval squadron committed terrible cruelties against the Arab inhabitants of Bandar Kong and molested the Shatbandar of that town. The Portuguese squadron had been expected to try to recapture the town of Muscat, but no serious action was taken against Oman. In 1669 a new Portuguese fleet appeared which then defeated the Omani navy, but achieved nothing else. The next year the Portuguese repeated their empty demonstrations. The English also had plans for action. Having acquired in Bombay a firm base in the area, they felt strong enough to take the initiative: orders were given that as soon as the Bombay fortress was ready, an English force would attack Bandar Abbas in order to put some muscle behind English claims for payment by Persia of the arrears of the English share in the customs there.

In 1670, the Dutch finally took decisive steps to open relations with Oman. Omar, the Wali of Muscat, had contributed to this increase in Dutch interest. A Dutch private trader on an expedition to Mocha had decided to try Muscat and received a most friendly reception from the Wali. He made good profit in Oman. The private trader sent a second expedition in 1671. The Dutchmen saw an English ship in the harbour of Muscat, but no competition was to be feared from the English: the Omanis disliked the English because of the Portuguese marriage of King Charles II. The Wali was very friendly again as were the Wakil (financial representative of the Imam) of Muscat, Shaikh Abdallah (or Abdul) Sulayman and his deputy Hajji Khalil. Hajji Khalil was the son of a Turk and a Bahraini mother who had come to Muscat from Basra; he was later suspected by the Dutch of being an Ottoman spy. The Wakil even offered the Dutch some Omani soldiers for the war against the Portuguese, which could not be accepted because there was peace between the Dutch and the Portuguese at the time. The Imam manifested his desire to send an ambassador to Batavia, but the private traders did not reply to this because they knew that the Batavia High Government did not like foreign observers in Batavia.

After a renewed Omani show of friendship, setting free a ship carrying a Dutch passport they had captured because it belonged to enemies of the Omanis from India, the High Government ordered Van Goens, the Dutch Governor of Ceylon to negotiate a military alliance with Oman. 

39 ARA, VOC vol. 1266, fol. 941.
41 Foster, English Factories (1668-1669), pp. 30-31.
42 Report of this trade-expedition in ARA VOC vol. 1279, fol. 462-468. Barendse, Koningen, Compagnieën en Kaapers, p. 59 and notes on p. 261 seems to confuse this expedition of 1670 with the expedition of the Merkat of 1666.
43 ARA, VOC 1288, fol. 435v, 438.
44 Floor, 'Description of Mascat', p. 4, cf. VOC vol. 1284, fol. 224v-2248.
45 Floor, 'Description of Mascat', pp. 6-7; ARA, VOC vol. 1279, fol. 958-959 (Governor General to Governor of Ceylon, 19-11-1671); ARA, VOC vol. 895 (Governor General to Director in Bandar Abbas, 1-9 and 19-11-1671) fol. 636, 907; Generale Missiven, vol. 3, p. 520.
the Dutch mission and its observations on the state of Oman in 1672

Van Goens instantly sent one of his men, Padbrugge, in the company of one of the participants of the first private expedition, Harcksz. Padbrugge had instructions that he should limit himself for the present to obtaining a trade agreement; but with the understanding that if war with the Portuguese would break out again, he would have the power to conclude a military alliance with the Imam. Concerning the details of his mission, Padbrugge was to refer to the Director in Bandar Abbas. The ship carrying Padbrugge to Bandar Abbas made an unscheduled visit to Muscat, where Padbrugge conducted some preliminary negotiations with the Wakiil Shaikh Abdallah. He received a invitation from both the ‘old Imam’ and the ‘young Imam’ to visit Nazwa. According to Floor, this occurrence of two Imams was because of an illness of Imam Sultan bin Sayf bin Malik, so that his son Abu’l Arab for some time conducted part of the affairs. Padbrugge could do nothing definite during this visit because he had first to consult the responsible Dutch authorities in Bandar Abbas.\textsuperscript{46}

Upon Padbrugge’s arrival in Bandar Abbas, the Dutch political Council there confirmed the plan to send a mission to Muscat. The instructions drawn up by the political council for this mission contain revealing considerations about the motives of Dutch policy.\textsuperscript{47} A rather large deputation was sent: with Padbrugge went George Wilmson, who had some unspecified experience with Arabs, spoke Persian and was to be the head of the Dutch establishment in Muscat, Harcksz., the secretary of the council in Bandar Abbas, and another, who was to learn negotiating with Arabs. The council expected that the Imam would not be very interested in a trade agreement with the Dutch (he only wanted support against the Portuguese, while the council also had its doubts about trade with Muscat: it would only reduce the importance of Bandar Abbas and this would only be interesting in case of a serious rupture between the Dutch and Persia). They went on with the project because a rupture with Persia was always possible. Such simple economic considerations imply important facts: apparently a very considerable part of Bandar Abbas’s imports from the East was re-exported to the Arabian peninsula, otherwise Muscat could not damage Bandar Abbas.

Padbrugge was instructed to conclude the best possible trade agreement, on the same footing as the trade agreement the Dutch had with Persia (freedom of customs duties in exchange for some kind of compensation). On the military side, the mission was to be discreet. A thorough investigation should be made of the military capabilities of Oman and of the possible value of Oman as an ally against the Portuguese. If the Imam insisted on sending an Ambassador to Batavia, this was to be accepted under condition that this Ambassador would travel on a Dutch ship. This was an important concession and indicates the importance attached at that time to relations with Oman. The mission left Bandar Abbas on June 6th, 1672. It took five days to arrive in Muscat.

Padbrugge and Wilmson started their mission with negotiations with the Wakiil of Muscat, who was the Head of the Customs and the deputy of the Imam in economic affairs, while the Wali of Muscat was the military and civil authority in the town. According to his instructions, Wilmson explained to the Wakiil the purpose of his mission. The Wakiil replied, as he had done the year before, that he was ready to join his forces with the Dutch for the destruction of the Portuguese. Wilmson replied that this would be difficult just now because the Dutch had concluded peace with the Portuguese, but that, when this peace was broken, the Company would be ready again to cooperate with Oman, and that the Director in Bandar Abbas had been empowered by the Batavia High Government to negotiate with Oman about this matter.\textsuperscript{48} But in reality there was little chance of a rapid change of attitude by the Dutch towards

\textsuperscript{46} Floor, ‘Description of Masqat’, pp. 8, 56 note 43 cf. ARA, VOC vol. 1288, fol. 430-431.

\textsuperscript{47} Resolutions of the political council in Bandar Abbas in ARA, VOC vol. 1279, fol. 958v-959, Instructions to the mission ibid. fol.1029-1030.

\textsuperscript{48} ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 476v.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

Portugal: the Dutch were on the brink of a war with France and England and they did not want to complicate their position in Asia any more by starting a new war with Portugal. In a meeting with the Imam the Dutch could offer nothing more. The Omani, who had hoped very much for assistance against the Portuguese (who seem to have been preparing either a counter-offensive against Oman or a naval demonstration in the Gulf to force the Persians to pay the customs duties of Khor), understandably became very cool towards the Dutch envoy.49 Later, after the failure of an Omani attack on Portuguese establishments in India, which was followed by a formal declaration of war by the Portuguese, the Omanis became more friendly to the Dutch again, but this was only temporary.50

Padbrugge, a high official, who had been sent only to conduct the negotiations, then returned to Bandar Abbas and left Wilmson to head the Dutch establishment. The Imam gave him a friendly letter to his superiors, but this was only a formality: in reality, both parties were disappointed. Wilmson’s stay in Oman was not very agreeable. He tried to obtain the trade agreement which was desired by the Dutch council in Bandar Abbas, but was given evasive replies. Trade did not go well and Wilmson had many disputes with the local authorities about customs duties. In 1674, he left Oman, leaving his deputy, Ritsert, as head of the Dutch establishment.

Having arrived at this point in our account, it is time that we should pay some closer attention to the internal affairs of Oman, the oldest structured Arab state on the Gulf. Thanks to reports written by Wilmson and Padbrugge, we may supplement the rather dry historical data of the Omani chronicles with some first-hand accounts of how a large tribal state did function.51

The tone of Wilmson’s report is not positive: he had to give arguments to his superiors why he gave up so quickly and why he did not bring back a good profit. It is understandable that he tried to put the fault on somebody else’s account. Although his report shows considerable irritation about the treatment he received, it still is a most valuable source for our knowledge of the situation in Oman during the rule of the Imam Sultan bin Sayf. It is interesting to compare it with Padbrugge’s report on his mission. Padbrugge shows a certain kind of appreciation of the Arab way of life. His better feelings are shown in remarks such as ‘they may seem rough from the outside but they are polished inside’ and in a sympathetic remark about a society in which personal qualities are more important than birth. His portrait in words of the Imam Sultan bin Sayf is highly valuable, because it is the oldest detailed portrait of an Arab ruler of the area.

In their way of dressing, all seem equal and with the description of His Highness the old Imam, one might as well describe a common soldier, a camel driver, or a peasant. When we were received in audience, His Highness the Imam had on a turban of fine cotton fabric with behind a pendant slip of about three quarters of an ell. This turban was rather unusual because he wore a cap of gold thread underneath it while the others wear a simple cotton one. He had his sword beside him, but usually he carries it in a bandoleer on his left shoulder. His Highness’s coat was not much different from that of ordinary people. It was made of a light quality of woolen cloth striped lengthwise with white stripes of a hand’s width. It hung like a mantle around his shoulders or rather like a ship’s master’s coat without sleeves. Below it he wore three more coats and some shirts of fine cotton, one with wide sleeves which fell like the coat to the ankles. He was girded with a belt in which he wore a dagger which was crosswise stitched with gold thread. The shoes were yellow in the Persian fashion. The Imam is of average stature, rather brown skinned. The pupils of his eyes draw to the middle, so he squints. Many Arabs do this and we presume that this is caused by the extraordinary and exceptional heat. The man also has a good facade and a real aquiline nose, which is typically Arab, because we saw many of that kind... (ARA VOC vol. 1288, fol. 441v-442.)

Padbrugge’s remarks on Omani social and political customs are no less interesting:

Their way of dealing, both among themselves as well as with strangers, is very polite, amiable, generous and obliging. They are candid in their manners to such an extent that it should be called a vice. Nothing can be decided without it being instantly brought to public knowledge. This is also caused because everybody may attend the general council... (ARA VOC vol. 1288, fol. 441v-442.)

49 ARA, VOC vol. 1304 fol. 477.
Unlike the Omani sources, the Dutch reports do not enter into the details of the tribal divisions in Oman, but give a very clear view on the political, economic and social situation. At this time, Oman seems to have been in some trouble. A Portuguese attack on Oman seemed to be imminent now that the Portuguese had improved their relationship with the Dutch and the English and could use their military means elsewhere. Shortly before Wilmson’s arrival in Muscat, the Portuguese had already made a naval demonstration in front of the town. But Oman’s troubles were not restricted to unsatisfactory developments in the conflict with the Portuguese: Wilmson’s report also reflects rather serious internal tensions. Wilmson’s view of the situation seems to be under strong influence by the opposition against the ‘old Imam’ Sultan bin Sayf. Close reading of the report reveals that this opposition consisted of part of the tribal leaders and of the merchant community, adherents of the ‘young Imam’ Abu’l Arab, who had been relegated again to the background, in fact banished, after his father’s recovery from illness. In his report there are some clear echoes of complaints by oppressed tribal leaders and by merchants suffering from heavy taxation. Here, we will give first the text of the most essential element, and then try to give a historical analysis of this account.

The principality of Oman has been governed for a long time by Imams elected out of the heads of the principal families. They were sometimes succeeded by their descendants, but at a certain moment, when they were not satisfied with the rule of a certain Imam, some families came together and killed the Imam with most of his family, of which almost nobody survived. Then, the country was for a long time without ruler and there were more than seventy chiefs who each ruled over their family and their city or village. The strong were robbing and plundering the weaker until finally some families proposed as their Imam Rashid [it should be Nasir] bin Murshid, a person who was always present in the mosque at Nazwa and was considered to be a man of great holiness and sincerity. After he had been confirmed as Imam, and had the principal place of the country in his power, he governed and protected the part of the country which was under his control in a peaceful and exceptionally good manner. People from many other regions came to him, and his authority was for ever increasing. He got taste for extending his authority and so he wrote a manifest in which he described his way of government and how

he protected his people. This he sent throughout the country, inviting all to come under his rule. As a result, many clans came under his authority. So he became strong enough to force the remaining leaders into submission and to extend his authority over almost the whole country so that nobody remained but the Portuguese and their allies -who possessed the seacoast- to resist him. From time to time he made war against them but then he got ill and felt that he would die and having no male heirs he knew no better but to leave the government to the actual Imam (Sultan bin Sayf) who had served him for a time as governor and as general, and who had shown from time to time many virtues and good government. A few hours before his death in presence of the clergy and some prominet he confirmed him as the Ruler. But the new Imam like his predecessor had not an easy start because many clans were not satisfied with his election and did not like his stern character and went to war against him. But he brought them all to submission, some with guile, others with presents and the remainder with violence. Some of the chiefs were arrested as troublemakers and put into prison, sometimes they were secretly killed or publicly executed. In this way, the interior was pacified. Then he found the Portuguese in his way. They occupied the principal seaports of the country and intrigued with the opposition. The Imam, understanding that he would have no peace as long as the Portuguese held any fortress in the country, concentrated all his forces to chase them and at the right moment he overpowered first the small coastal places, of which he found some even without garrison, and then he attacked Muscat. This town was at that moment without provisions because of the advice of a Banyan. He fell upon it and took it without much trouble.

The Imam as supreme ruler, although elected, now starts to be more like a sovereign because he has all fortified places in his power. He covers everything with a veil of holiness and that it is to the wellbeing of the country, but there are many who are disgusted with his greed and his avarice. But nobody dares to oppose him, because they are without power and without leaders. The majority of the people obeys more because of compulsion than because of love because he has his foot on their necks. A rebellion would break out the moment there would be the right leader with some means and power. All officials in the country are subordinate to the Imam. Each town or region is governed by a Wali and next to him there is a Qadi or religious judge. The duty of the former is to administrate justice in the name of the Imam, to collect the taxes and to pay the military with it and to bring the reminder to the Bayt al Mal or treasury, of which the Imam alone has the authority. The Imam uses this in such a honest manner that, except the sums he takes from it in the interest of the country and a certain sum that all agree he can take (so little that they do not dare to name the sum because it would seem a lie), he does not take a penny for himself. The Qadi has to control that all justice goes according to their laws without respect of persons or connivance... (ARA, VOC vol. 1304, 484v.)
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

The matter that attracts most of our attention in this text is the hint of an interior tension and the difference in the ways of keeping the state together by the two Imams. Nasir bin Murshid seems to have been something of a constitutional monarch: he brought his state together by presenting a proposal in writing regarding the conditions of his rulership. In fact, the Oman he founded was not yet much more than a federation of tribes who might have been aware of belonging to a group of some kind, but who were still not prepared to give up their independence unconditionally. Then, like it later happened at several occasions in Oman, there came a difficulty over the succession to the Imamate. Nasir bin Murshid had sons, but as his successor, he appointed his military commander Sultan bin Sayf. This succession of the best conforms completely with the prescriptions of Ibadhism, and stands in strong contrast with the family interest shown by later Imams.

The passage of the report by Wilmson quoted above suggests that instead of starting fresh negotiations to bring the tribal leaders together under his rule, the new Imam tried force because he had many enemies among the tribal leaders and he might not have been able to assert his authority by negotiation. He was able to get the tribes in line by killing or imprisoning several of his enemies. Now, Sultan bin Sayf had to continue in the way he had started. In order to enforce his authority he established a strong bureaucratic organization supported by military power, excluding the tribal leaders from the administration of the country. There was a large army, one informant stated that the Imam had 15,000 men, but garrisons in the fortresses were even smaller than they had been in Portuguese times. Wilmson does not mention any sequel to the troubles (referred to in the Omani chronicles) which Nasir bin Murshid had had with the tribes in the North-Western part of Oman in the 1640’s. These troubles seemed to anticipate the later troubles between the Hinawi and Ghafiri factions, but there is no mention of such troubles during the rule of Sultan bin Sayf. Bathurst rightly sees the origin of the tensions rising during the rule of Sultan bin Sayf I as related with the gap between dynastic policy and Ibadhi orthodoxy. The Ibadhi see the Imam as chiefly a religious leader, while the Imam himself tries to increase political power. Wilmson reports that the territory of Oman stretched up to a point some days travel to the West of Jufar (which must indicate a point somewhere in the area of Abu Dhabi). From this it seems that the Western area, where under Nasir bin Murshid the opposition of the Qatan had been there, was now in the hands of the Imam.

The exclusion of tribal leaders from the government of the country was not without danger. Stability now entirely depended on the way the Imam was able to pay the military in order to be sure of its loyalty. During the rule of Sultan bin Sayf, this was not too difficult because there was, as we shall see, a considerable economic expansion, and furthermore Sultan bin Sayf’s conquests enabled him to pay. In order to be sure of the key strongholds, he had appointed his sons as governors of the main cities of Bahla and Rastaq. There was a danger in this: he was creating the possibility of war between his sons after his death.

Muscat was still rather separate from the rest of Oman. It was governed by a Wali and a Wakil, the latter administered the income from trade. Trade at that time was carried on by Banyans and Muslims from India, not by the local people. Already in 1675 there was a conflict between the Imam and his eldest son (Abu’l Arab, Governor of Rastaq) because the Imam did not want to grant his son the smallest influence over foreign trade. The son was angry about the protection his father gave to the Wakil Abdullah who oppressed the foreign merchants. It is interesting to see in the Omani chronicles that the description of the rule of Abu’l Arab, when he became Imam, is full of praise for this Imam’s behaviour towards the merchants.

53 Floor, ‘Description of Masqat’, p. 27.
55 ARA VOC vol. 1304, fol. 483v, 484 (=Floor, ‘Description of Masqat’, pp. 32, 34).
56 ARA VOC vol. 1304, fol. 483v-483v (=Floor, ‘Description of Masqat’, p. 31); cf. Ross, Annals, pp. 55-56 and ARA, VOC vol. 1499, fol. 899v.
57 ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 489v-490 (=Floor, ‘Description of Masqat’, p. 45) of Ross, Annals, p. 55.
Oman depended for wheat on Persia and for rice on the coast of Canara in India. Sugar was planted around Nazwa and in several other places, and it was, with dates, the only product of the land. All sugarcane was concentrated in Nazwa where, under the eye of the Imam, the only refineries were. Three quarters of both refineries belonged to the Imam, and a local merchant had a quarter share in each refinery. Most of the sugar was sold in Persia, some was exported to Bahrain, Al Hasa, Basra and Mocha.  

The port of Muscat had really become a pivot in the trade along the Western coast of the Indian ocean. Importations from India, Yemen and Eastern Africa were concentrated there and then sent on to Al Hasa, Bahrain, Qatar and Basra. The export of sugar and large quantities of dates did not keep the trade-balance of Oman from being negative, but this was compensated out of the revenue from the carrying trade. The aggressive policy of Oman against Portugal and states in India can be understood from the considerable need for money the Imam had for paying his troops and the bureaucracy needed to keep his state together. At this time, Muscat seems to have been the only important trading town in the area, with the possible exception of Jufar. There is not much mention of Jufar, but a few Dutch documents indicate that it was a trading centre of some importance already in Ya'ariba times.

Success in war was crucial for Oman's stability. During Sultan bin Sayf's rule, Oman was fortunate in this although there clearly were some problems in military matters. Wilimson's description makes it clear that the Imam was only just able to keep up his military strength: troops and sailors were not very well paid and the enthusiasm among the population for service in the army or the navy was small. Wilimson gives a detailed description of Omani military action in the time of his presence in Muscat. As a reply to the Portuguese naval demonstration off Oman in 1674, the Omani government had pressed the crew of merchant vessels into military service, but no action took place. Wilimson presumed that the lack of Omani initiative was caused by the lack of sailors and soldiers. He described the naval power of Oman as consisting of fifteen or sixteen units: three or four rather large square rigged ships, two small square rigged ships and nine or ten small vessels. The total armament of all these ships was 90-95 guns, most of light calibre, which is not at all considerable. The Omanis had no permanent crew for these ships but took on people from fishing boats, hamals and all kinds of people whenever there was need. Sailors and soldiers were hired for 9-12 larins (a piece of silver currency of a value of 0.6 Dutch guilder, originally coined in Lar) a month. But at the time, the Omanis had great difficulty in engaging people. While the Omanis had almost 20 ships, the Portuguese had only five, but the Omani had just lost three ships to the Portuguese on their last expedition to Mozambique. Later, the Omanis had made an expedition against Cutch on the coast of India, according to Wilimson no more than a marauding raid. Training and discipline were the weakest sides of Omani military power. Their warriors were unable to handle artillery, for this they depended on black slaves of the Portuguese who had been captured by the Omanis. These black slaves were not much good as gunners. It was Wilimson's considered opinion that in case of a war between the Portuguese and the Dutch, the Omanis as allies would be more of a liability than a help. The Omanis tried to get Dutch carpenters and blacksmithe into their service, but hearing how much the Company paid such craftsmen, they did not pursue their endeavours. They wanted to buy from the Dutch a large number of Ceylonese guns, but were told that few were produced now, instead they were offered a few beautifully inlaid Ceylonese guns as a present.

58 ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 489v-489v (=Floor, 'Description of Masqat', p. 44).
60 ARA, Geleynsen de Jongh-papers no. 280e (Basra-diary 9-12-1646); VOC vol. 1666, pp. 418-419; VOC vol. 1283, fol. 406 states that Jufar had used a force of no less than 25 trankeys to attack Bandar Kung.
61 ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 475v-476. Examples of this kind of ceremonial guns can be seen in the Historical Department of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.
Next, the Omanis wanted to borrow some ships from the Dutch for an expedition but this was refused because the Dutch republic was at that time at war with England and France. Wilmson was present in Muscat when an expedition against India set out. The Imam used sailors from Sind (the Portuguese as well as the Omanis never used inhabitants of Sind as soldiers, but very often they used them as sailors). The naval squadron had about 1700-1800 men on board. It set out in order to plunder the Portuguese villages in the Bassin area. As the Portuguese had before them, the Omanis used many Baluchi soldiers. These Baluchis had come over to Oman because they had suffered much violence at the hands of the Persians.

During what Wilmson calls the Persian war (a war between Oman and Persia of which we have not much further information but which seems to have taken place about 1670), the Dutch had seen whole families coming with small boats from the coast of Baluchistan to Oman. The Baluchis were considered to be good soldiers and sailors and were employed by the Omanis in expeditions to Hindustan, Mocha and Africa for monthly wages of 18-20 lariats. Wilmson’s reference to Omani expeditions to Eastern Africa lends support to Risso’s supposition that Omani migration to the area of Mombasa and Pate started in the late seventeenth century.

Wilmson did not agree with the opinion expressed by one of the members of the Dutch staff in Bandar Abbas that the Omanis would be ready to give one of the fortresses of Muscat to the Dutch: it had cost the Omanis so much to take them that they would never give them away. Furthermore, enemies of the Dutch in India had depicted the Dutch to their Omani trade partners as the worst possible oppressors.

63 ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 482v.
64 ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 482v.
65 Risso, Muscat and Oman, pp. 119-120.
66 ARA, VOC vol. 1304, fol. 476.
to both parties and the decisions which had to be reached in order to deal efficiently with them.

Already in 1675 the Batavia High Government decided to close the Dutch residence in Muscat. It should be noticed that this was a decision taken by the Batavia High Government, but the Directors in Holland still had expectations about the trade with Oman because they counted on profits from the export of rice to Arabia. The Directors in Holland knew that the Portuguese had had in old times a contract with the Na’ik of Canara to export rice from there to Muscat and Basra. But the Dutch authorities in Asia had different interests and possibly were also aware that this kind of bulk shipping of cheap goods was not the Company’s strong point. They pointed out that Oman sold underpriced sugar from its new plantations in Persia. In this way, the Omanis clashed with the immediate interests of the Batavia upper ten.

Although they were on their own, the Omanis still fought a successful war against the Portuguese. In 1676, Diu was plundered by the Omanis. Dutch representatives reported great famines by drought in the Arabian peninsula in 1677: demographic pressures caused by deprivation may have stimulated the Omani expansion. The Omanis managed to occupy Pate in the Mogadishu-area, and the Portuguese were unable to regain it. In this way, the Omanis obtained a firm settlement on the Eastern coast of Africa from where they could get food and slaves.

68 Generale Missioen, vol. 4, p. 92.
69 Dagregister (1676), p. 146; Generale Missioen, vol. 4, p. 122. It had earlier been plundered in 1669 (ibid. vol. 3, p. 701. The next year, the Omanis plundered the countryside of Portuguese possessions in India: ibid vol. 4, p. 212. The peace between the Portuguese and Oman, reported in 1673 (Generale Missioen, vol. 3, p. 891) seems not to have lasted for long.
71 Generale Missioen, vol. 4, p. 400.

the Arabs on the Northern coast of the Lower Gulf

Some important information on the Arabs of the Northern coast of the Lower Gulf is given by the French priest Carré, a contemporary of Wilimson and Padbrugge, who had been sent by the Minister Colbert to have a look at the area where the Dutch and English East India Companies were active in connection with French plans for trade with Asia. On two occasions, Carré visited the most important places between Bandar Rig and Bandar Abbas. He gives many details of Arab tribes and their way of life, although he does not mention the individual tribes by name. This is not a fundamental problem, there is no reason to assume that the tribal chart of the area was essentially different from that presented by later observers like Kniphausen and Niebuhr.

The Arab tribes described by Carré were only nominally subjects of the Shah of Persia. Carré tells a curious story about Nakhlul, one of the principal towns in the area. At some unspecified moment, the inhabitants of that place got rid of their Persian Governor and demolished the fortress; probably this happened at some time after the death of Imam Quli Khan. It seems from Carré’s accounts that since 1622, the pattern of alliances of the Arab tribes of the area had changed somewhat. According to Carré, the principal Arab ally of the Portuguese against Oman was Nakhlul. Although sections of the population of Nakhlul had already taken the side of the Portuguese (in the case of Ali Kamal in the early seventeenth century), the general attitude of that area had been one of hostility to Hormuz and the Portuguese.

The main concern of the Huwala tribes at that time was that other Arabs, all from the Upper Gulf, apparently the Bana Ka’b from the area below Basra and the Arabs from Bandar Rig and Bushahr, had chased them from the pearl banks. As pearl diving was the main

72 About Carré see Dictionnaire de biographie française, vol. 7, col. 1224-1225. About his manuscripts and his published book see above.
source of income of these tribes, they were in serious trouble. In 1674, the heads of the Huwala tribes from Nakhilu, Asaluh, Sharak and Kangun were called together in Bushahr by the Khan of Shiraz, who wanted to mediate in their disputes with the Upper Gulf Arabs: that year 400 vessels from the Lower Gulf had plundered Rig. The results are unknown, possibly it was a failure because it was only after 1700 that Upper Gulf tribes in their turn were complaining that they had been chased from the pearl banks by the Huwala. 

**Events on the Upper Gulf and the end of the Afrasiyab dynasty**

A high degree of instability existed around the Upper Gulf since 1650. This might very well have had economic causes. As most of Basra's trade came via Muscat, there must have been considerable problems in the early 1650s: the fall of Muscat dealt a blow to the economic structure into which the trade movement of Basra had been integrated. Now, with the Portuguese far away, the Pasha of Basra had to reconsider his position. Luckily for the Pasha, the Ottoman Sultan was too busy with his war with the Republic of Venice over Crete and was unable to put much energy into Iraqi problems.

Approximately at the same time as the Portuguese loss of Muscat, old Ali Pasha of Basra died. Ali's son Husayn (some sources call him Hasan) succeeded him. This was to the displeasure of Fethiya and other sons of the old Pasha Afrasiyab, who had already been kept from the succession on their father's death. Our sources are rather contradictory about Husayn Pasha. Longrigg describes him as a harsh ruler to his own subjects, but liberal to foreign merchants, apparently following sources who compared this Pasha with his immediate successors. The diaries of the Dutch expeditions to Basra of 1651-1654 have a worse opinion which seems to reflect the opinions of local merchants who had reason to resent the capriciousness of the Pasha and the heavy taxes he had imposed upon them.

Apparently, Afrasiyab's successors were not very popular with the local population. They may possibly have been of local origin, but they ruled Basra as if they were foreigners. Apparently they governed the town and lived off its income together with a small Janissary camarilla as semi-independent rulers in the same way as other Janissary leaders as the Day of Algiers and the Bey of Tunis did in their principalities. Husayn Pasha had great ambitions. He wanted to dominate the Gulf and had conceived plans for the conquest of Al Hasa and Oman.

Husayn Pasha's relations with his Northern neighbour, Murtada, the Ottoman Pasha of Baghdad, were rather bad. Husayn was occupying border fortresses upstream, such as Qurna, the place where the Euphrates joins with the Tigris. The Pasha of Baghdad took his revenge by supporting the opposition in Basra. This opposition had materialized early on during Husayn Pasha's reign around Fethiya and another son of Afrasiyab. Fethiya apparently made himself the leader of the existing popular opposition against Husayn. There had been some unrest, and Husayn had reacted violently. Fethiya fled with his younger brother from Basra to

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76 See below p. 230.

77 This pasha is called Hasan in the Carmelite Chronicle (Gollancz, Chronicle, p. 322), in all Dutch documents, and in English documents (Foster, English factories (1668-1669), p. 42, but Husayn in Hammer, Geschichte, vol. 6, p. 186 and in Longrigg, Four centuries, pp. 111-117. We should prefer Husayn, because there are some copies of documents in Ottoman writing in the Dutch archives in which his seal is copied which clearly bears the legend

78 Longrigg, Four centuries, p. 112 (this opinion apparently comes from the contemporary French traveller Tavenier), cf Carré, Travels, vol. 1, p. 90.

79 ARA, VOC vol. 1179 (Basra-part), fol. 843-882; VOC vol. 1188 (Basra-part), fol. 461-481, (Surat-part), fol. 524-537; VOC vol. 1208 (Basra-part), fol 238-282; VOC vol. 1388, fol. 312-323, 524-528 and 534-544.


Baghdad and thanks to money he received from the opposition in Basra, he was able to travel to Istanbul. In 1653, he returned with the blessing of the Sultan, and some troops. Apparently, Huseyn hesitated to offend the Sultan. In September 1653, he made peace with Fethiye. Both entered Basra, but it seems that nobody believed in Huseyn's sincerity. Shortly afterwards, Huseyn had Fethiye arrested and planned to exile him to India. Later he was even planning to kill him. This was avoided by the intervention of Huseyn's mother, who then helped Fethiye to escape again to Baghdad.83

There, Fethiye received new military help from the Pasha Murtada, while there were also disturbances among the local population of Basra. Arab tribes in the area had joined the opposition and were plundering the land outside the city. Huseyn Pasha seems to have had reason to distrust everybody, he even locked the commander of his own troops, Mustafa Bey, in the old fortress. The Pasha and his adherents looked for help to Persia and hoped that the Turks would not have sufficient means to attack them because they were very much occupied with a rather difficult war with Venice over the Greek islands in which the Turks suffered a series of naval defeats. Suddenly, in September 1654, the Pasha's position collapsed. He had first wanted to kill his own mother because in the previous year she had interceded with him in favour of the relatives who had now called in the Turks. But the old lady very cleverly escaped, and Huseyn Pasha went next to the fortress to get his revenge on the imprisoned army commander Muhammad Beg. The governor of the fortress protected his prisoner, and there was a fight which the Pasha lost. Huseyn Pasha now fled from the town with only a few servants, and his two relatives hurried to Basra from Baghdad together with the Pasha of Baghdad.84

82 Hammer, Geschichte, vol 5, p. 634; ARA, VOC vol. 3998 (Dutch Basra diary 9-9-1653); Thevenot, Suite du Voyage, pp. 314-315. According to Thavenot, Fethiye's younger brother asked to be appointed as Pasha of Qatif, but it is not known whether he succeeded.

83 Hammer, Geschichte, vol. 5, p. 634; The best source for these events is the Dutch Basra-diary in ARA, VOC vol. 1209, fol. 254-259, which gives a detailed account of the events in Basra of September 1654.

In the meantime, Basra was being attacked by Arabs, but the Janissary garrison of Huseyn Pasha held the pontoon bridge. On the 27th September 1654, the troops from Baghdad arrived and started to plunder the town in a most cruel manner. Murtada Pasha appointed Ahmad Pasha as Governor of Basra. The Pasha of Baghdad himself raped the wives of several Afrasiyab prominet.84

All this did not contribute to the popularity of the new government. Murtada Pasha's position was not strong because he had to cope with rebellions in the area of Baghdad, and it seems that there existed plans in Istanbul to replace him. Meanwhile Huseyn's forces apparently were still in control of some fortresses on the road between Basra and Baghdad. Huseyn himself had been able to gather some support from the Arabs in the marshes and his pressure on Basra was increasing. Finally, on October 3rd, Murtada had the two members of the Afrasiyab clan, who had called him to Basra, murdered. Later, most of the members of the Afrasiyab family were executed. This was too much for the local population, rebellion broke out in the border fortresses of the Basra district and Arab tribesmen appeared near the town. Shortly afterwards, Murtada fled almost destitute from Basra and arrived in Baghdad. He was replaced as Governor of Baghdad and became Governor of Aleppo, where he distinguished himself by terrible misbehaviour. It was finally his refusal to join the Ottoman forces in the bloody war against Venice on Crete which brought him the silken cord of his execution by order of the Sultan.85

Huseyn returned as semi-independent ruler of Basra.86 The Dutch had at first thought of retreating from Basra, as the English had already done, but continued to trade there with a considerable profit.87 For some time, Huseyn seems to have improved his ways and there were no more complaints about him. The Ottomans had

84 ARA, VOC vol. 1209, fol. 259-262; Thavenot, Suite du Voyage, p. 315.
86 Hammer, Geschichte, vol. 6, p. 100.
shown that they were worse than Husayn, and Ottoman military power had been severely hit by the Venetians. For a short time, it even seemed that they would completely disappear from the scene in the Gulf. They lost their foothold in Al Hasa, although it is not clear how. According to some sources, the Banu Khalid tribe threw off the already rather symbolic remains of direct Ottoman rule over Al Hasa in 1662. The contemporary traveller Thevenot has some additional details and a slightly different date: Qatif was in 1664 conquered by an Arab Shaikh, who was in alliance with Husayn Pasha of Basra. The Pasha of Basra seems to have claimed the overlordship of Qatif as his share from the profits of the expedition. The former Pasha of Qatif fled to Istanbul, but the Shaikh did not want to recognize the Pasha of Basra as his lord. Possibly, both versions of the story can be combined by assuming that Qatif was conquered by an alliance of Afrasiyab and Banu Khalid.

The Ottoman punitive expedition against Basra of 1664-1665 may have been the consequence of the complaints of the former Pasha of Qatif in Istanbul. Husayn Pasha could maintain himself by buying the Ottomans off. This was only a short respite. Soon there were new chances for the Ottomans. The war in Crete was slowly turning in their favour. In 1668, the newly appointed governor of Baghdad, Muhammad Pasha, was ordered to regain Basra and Al Hasa. Muhammad Pasha concentrated a huge force of troops from Syria, Diyarbakir and Northern Iraq and with the support of a great number of tribes of the Northern desert he proceeded to the South. At Qurna, they encountered Husayn’s forces which were joined with the remnants of the forces of a former rebel in Erzurum, Abaza. But the Turks found it difficult to take Qurna and started to negotiate. An agreement was reached: Husayn would retire to Mecca, and his son Afrasiyab would become Pasha of Basra against payment of a huge sum of money (800,000 pieces of silver and a yearly sum of 20,000 arsli or silver lion dollars). Nothing came of this settlement: The Ottoman army retired to Baghdad and Husayn returned to Basra, where in his absence the local population had taken over, under the direction of a Christian merchant from India. Husayn was able to suppress this rebellion in a most ruthless way. He extorted the money he had promised to the Ottomans from the population and sent his nephew Yahya to Edirne to pay the Sultan. But in Edirne, there was also a deportation from the people of Basra who complained about the Pasha. Yahya then betrayed his uncle. To the Sultan, he offered to pay the same sums as Husayn if he would receive the government. This was given to him and the newly appointed Pasha of Baghdad, Firari Mustafa, was ordered to send an army against Basra. Husayn fled to Persia and Yahya became the last Afrasiyab Governor of Basra. He could enter the town after buying the loyalty of the Janissary garrison with large sums of money.

A Defterdar (financial inspector) was sent by the Sultan, a certain Rahma Qasimzade, to make a list of the income of Basra. Qurna was occupied by the Ottomans with a large force of Janissaries to keep the road open in future. But Yahya did not tolerate the Defterdar and Rahma had to run for his life. When the Sultan, who was in Brusa, heard of this, he appointed his nurse’s husband, Mustafa Aga as Governor of Basra. Yahya seemed to have lost control of Basra once again. After first retaking Basra, Yahya marched to Qurna were he was defeated. He fled to the Persian border where he collected an army of Arab tribesmen. After having regained strength, he marched against Basra, where his troops committed the most atrocious acts of violence. Finally, Firari Mustafa, with a large new Ottoman

89 Thevenot, Suite du Voyage, pp. 317-318, who mentions that Qatif was in his time and important port of transit where merchandise from India and Muscat was forwarded to Central Arabia.
army and with the support of the Banu Lam, was able to conquer Basra and to chase Yahya to Persia. The Turks killed many opposing Arab tribesmen. Mustafa Aga soon lost his position as governor which was given to Firari Mustafa who had been replaced as Pasha of Baghdad, and from this time the regular Ottoman rule of Basra begins.\(^{94}\)

The Ottoman administration proved to be worse than its predecessor. This apparently is the reason for favourable appraisals of Husayn’s rule over Basra: the Afrasiyab ruler was seen in a good light in comparison with his immediate successors. The problem with the first Ottoman governors seems to have been that they wanted at least as much money as their predecessors, and also claimed contributions from the surrounding tribes. This ended in serious conflicts with the tribes and fresh interruptions in trade occurred. Carré saw Basra much in decline in 1672, but Dutch reports show a certain hope for improvement.\(^{95}\) Firari Mustafa’s successors since 1672 seem to have created a better situation. Basra recovered, and we see a considerable increase in Dutch trade. The Dutch who, according to Carré, kept their establishment only for the forwarding of post by the land road, so important in the time of naval wars with the English and the French, started to make sufficient profits to maintain Basra for commercial reasons.\(^{96}\)

Our knowledge of the other places of the Upper Gulf remains rather vague. Carré mentions a considerable activity in places like Bandar Rig and Bushahr.\(^{97}\) Apparently, this had something to do with the decline of Basra, but the activity seems to have continued.

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94 Chronicle, vol. 2, pp. 1156-1157; Hammer, Geschichte, vol. 6, p. 188; Longrigg, Four centuries, pp. 118-119; Gollancz, Chronicle, p. 332; Foster, English factories (1668-1669), 213. The Dutch documents contain only very summary references to events in Basra at that time: the letters forwarded by the Carmelites of Basra to Holland hardly contain any local news.

95 Carré, Travel, vol. 1, p. 90; ARA, VOC vol. 1288, fol. 956-957.

96 Carré, Travel, vol. 1, p. 90; the increasing importance of Dutch trade in Basra is shown successively in Generale Missiven, vol. 4, pp. 124, 260, 364, 479, 743, 827.

enable her to expand her interests in Asia again. France also began under Louis XIV to be interested in Asia. The Portuguese were, after the loss of Malabar and Ceylon, a power of secondary importance in Asia. Their remaining possessions in India slowly came under the patronage of neighbouring local rulers. In the Gulf, they remained active: they still had ambitions about recovering Muscat or even Hormuz and, from time to time, Portuguese fleets penetrated deeply into the Gulf. In 1673, a Portuguese fleet was in Bahrain again and the Portuguese were negotiating with the Persians about the Persian tribute for Qishm. 103

In the long term, the recovery of the large European powers, France and England, would have adverse effects on the position of the Netherlands, a very small country. For the time being, the Dutch were so strongly established in Asia that their power could not be challenged by other Europeans. No power even dreamed of attacking the main Dutch positions. But for the future, prospects were less favourable to the Dutch.

The presence of other European powers in the Gulf area was less conspicuous than the Dutch presence. The French were a second rank power in Asia and when they sent spectacular but empty-handed embassies to Isfahan or to Delhi to offer an alliance against the Dutch, the Governments in these places did not take them seriously, seeing the busy traffic of Dutch ships and the almost complete absence of French naval power. 104 The English were slowly regaining some kind of footing, but after the crisis of their civil war, they were for a long time too weak to show themselves very much, especially at times when they were at war with the Dutch. Sometimes they tried to intervene. In 1659, during a period of peace with the Dutch, they suddenly wanted to recover their lost interests in Persia. They put the Persian government under heavy pressure to pay the arrears of the customs income of Bandar Abbas to them. When the Persians did not react in a satisfactory way, the English planned a blockade of Bandar Abbas in the same way as the Dutch had done in 1644-1645. 105 Later, at the time they acquired Bombay, they made a new plan for a direct military attack on Bandar Abbas. 106 Nothing came of these plans, simply because the means were insufficient.

Probably the most important event for the future history of the Gulf in those years had taken place in London in 1662, when King Charles II married a Portuguese Princess and received as a wedding present the island of Bombay. With this island, the English acquired a firm possession in the economically and politically important North-Western part of India, where they could establish a counterpart to the Dutch metropolis of Batavia on Java. 107 The Dutch had for a long time tried to get their own footing in this area attacking the Portuguese in Goa and Diu, but they had failed. Now, the English power could become firmly established in the Western part of the Indian Ocean. In the years to come, the Dutch would concentrate on the domination of the Eastern areas, while English interest would be concentrated in the West. In the long run, this would have consequences for the Gulf, although for many years to come, Dutch power, while not expanding in India, would remain predominant in the Gulf.

Around 1670, the Dutch in the Gulf began to fear that an alliance between the English and the Portuguese might become very dangerous to them: either the English might help the Portuguese to regain positions lost to the Dutch or both might establish new possessions. The Dutch were not the only ones to show some anxiety. For the Omanis too this was a dangerous situation. They were at war with the Portuguese and the increasing vigour shown by the Portuguese was a menace to them. It can be no surprise that just at that time the Dutch and the Omanis tried to establish relations.

103 ARA, VOC vol. 1285, fol. 407.
104 ARA, VOC vol. 1258, fol. 855-878: Dutch diary concerning the presence of French ambassadors in Isfahan.
105 Foster, English factories (1655-1660), pp. 25, 227-228.
106 Foster, English factories (1668-1669), pp. 30-31.
conflicts between Persia and the European powers after 1680

At the end of the 1670's, things started to go wrong for the Dutch and the English in the Gulf. Years of bad government slowly undermined the Persian economy. The inhabitants of Bandar Abbas and Minab sent deputations to the court to complain about the Shahbandar and Sultan of Bandar Abbas, but the T'Imad al dawla was not interested in economic affairs. The situation becomes clear from the profits of the country trade of the Dutch Company in Asia in 1678/1679. Persia had for a long time been the first or second source of profit there, now the share of Persia had become less: it was still as much as 300,000 guilders annually, but Coromandel, Surat and Japan each produced double Persia's profits. The High Government did however reject the idea of closing down this outpost because of fear that the English or the French might gain a firm footing there and this would damage the interests of the Company in Asia.

In April 1681, the situation had deteriorated so far that the profits in Persia were no longer sufficient to cover the obligatory purchase of the Shah's silk. There were incidents between the T'Imad al dawla and the Dutch, and the High Government decided that the silk contract should be terminated. The French and English also encountered problems in Persia. Like the Dutch, they had conflicts with the Shahbandar of Bandar Abbas who claimed exaggerated customs duties. The Persians tried to placate the Portuguese, who had also suffered, but by then had started to confiscate Muslim ships on route from India to Bandar Kong.

In 1683, upon receipt of news about continuing offensive behaviour of Persian authorities against the Dutch representatives, the High Government decided to take action. Probably, seeing that the Portuguese had obtained results by violent action, they hoped for the same. The Director Casembroot, who had travelled to Batavia to explain the situation, was sent back with the rank of Commissioner, some extra ships and 240 soldiers. Casembroot's instructions were that force should only be used in extreme circumstances. Sailing to Bandar Abbas, the Dutch squadron captured a number of non-European ships, temporarily holding them and their cargo. Arriving at Bandar Abbas with five ships, Casembroot sent a letter of protest from the High Government to Isfahan. He got no reply, but the Persians started to fortify the strongholds of Hormuz, Laranq and Qishm. Seeing that his blockade of Bandar Abbas led to no reaction in Isfahan, Casembroot decided to use force. His squadron anchored off Qishm, troops were disembarked and attacked the fortress. Casembroot was luckier than Bloq had been with his attack on Qishm in 1645 and the Persian garrison instantly surrendered.

The same day, news came to Bandar Abbas that the Shah had decided to let the Sultan of Bandar Abbas negotiate with the Dutch. This Sultan, Murtada Quli Khan was considered by the Dutch to be their friend. But now the Dutch had taken possession of Qishm, Murtada declared that he could not negotiate before receiving fresh instructions from the Shah. The Batavia High Government and Casembroot had taken some risk in embarking on its more violent course of action. They could be almost sure that the Directors in Holland with their merchant mentality would not approve of military initiatives in the Gulf. But reproaches and contrary orders from Holland to Batavia had to travel a long distance and could not be expected soon. Worse was the stalemate in which the Dutch forces in the Gulf found themselves. The naval force was supposed to be no more than a warning signal: the presence on board of only 250 marine soldiers made it clear that the Dutch were not planning a war against the Persians, but would limit themselves to some ges-

109 Klerk de Reus, Geschichtlicher Ueberblick, appendix 9.

112 The numerous Dutch documents: diaries, letters, minutes of deliberations, are to be found in ARA, VOC vols. 1398 and 1430, and some references in Generale Missiven, vol. 4, pp. 741-742.

113 Generale Missiven, vol. 4, pp. 741-742; ARA, VOC vol. 1406, fol. 1205v, 1280-1291. The conquest is also mentioned in Kaempfer, Amoenitates, p. 763.
tures in the area of Bandar Abbas. Of course, the Dutch force might inflict very serious damage there upon the interests of the Shah: they might block the trade of Bandar Abbas. But this danger had its limitations: the Dutch were able to block all Muslim and Portuguese shipping, but it was another matter to forbid the English to enter: this would mean starting a war with England, and the Governor General was not authorized to engage the Netherlands in war with England in such circumstances.\footnote{ARA, VOC vol. 698 and 700: Resolutions of the Batavia High Government 7-9 1683 and 19-9-1685; Van Reede’s report, chapter 1.}

Blockades of the Gulf by the Dutch like this Qishm operation, lacked full effect because it was impossible to stop the English breaking the blockade by offering their ships to Muslim traders to carry their wares to and from Bandar Abbas.\footnote{Generale Missiven, vol. 5, p. 557.} It would however be wrong to take too pessimistic a view of the Dutch position. With 250 European soldiers, unaccustomed to the climate of the Gulf, they still managed to do as they liked in the principal port of Persia. The position of the Persians was also not strong: open war with the Dutch could cause serious damage to the income of the Shah: the English were still a rather weak power and their shipping had not the capacity to compensate the Dutch blockade. The Governor General had given orders that unless the Shah made concessions, the Dutch force was to keep Qishm occupied and would boycott Bandar Abbas and sell their wares in Basra.\footnote{ARA, VOC vol. 700: Resolutions of the Batavia High Government, 19-9-1685.}

But the Persians started to show willingness to negotiate. A first step was taken by the restitution by the Dutch of Qishm fortress and all arrested ships in exchange for the promise by the Persians that the Dutch could trade freely in Bandar Abbas against payment of customs duties to be agreed in the coming negotiations. The merchandise belonging to Persian merchants would not be released by the Dutch before the sums and goods extorted from the Dutch were returned.\footnote{Generale Missiven, vol. 4, p. 742.}

As usual, when relations with the Persians were bad, the Dutch looked about for other trade partners in the Gulf. While there was no progress in the negotiations with the Persians, the Shah had forbidden the Persian merchants to buy goods from the Dutch. The latter retorted by sending a ship destined to Bandar Abbas on to Basra. There was increasing activity in Basra, where customs duties had just been reduced. Basra seems to have been at that time the principal centre for pearl trading, and the High Government was considering the possibility of buying pearls there.\footnote{Generale Missiven, vol. 4, p. 822; vol. 5, p. 143.} This was an especially interesting development because of the deterioration of Persian coinage which made it necessary to look for other easily convertible valuables to obtain payment for Dutch exports to the Gulf.\footnote{Generale Missiven, vol. 5, p. 486.}

In August 1685, the Commissioner Casembroot died. The negotiations came to a standstill because of the difficult question of the obligatory purchase of silk. The Dutch refused to buy Persian silk any more, and offered instead to pay an annual lump sum of 2,000 tuman instead of customs duties (85,000 guilders, 10% of the estimated value of import and exports). The acting director van den Heuvel did not reach an agreement with the Shah until 1687.\footnote{Generale Missiven, vol. 5, pp. 89, 143.} The High Government in Batavia was not satisfied with this agreement, and recalled van den Heuvel, but this new fermant obtained in 1687 would be the basis of the relationship between the Persians and the Dutch for a long time.\footnote{The text of the treaty is published in Corpus, vol. 3 no. cdxxvii.}

From figures produced in Gamron at the end of 1688, it seems that the forceful Dutch policy had led to good results: annual sales of Dutch products in the Gulf had reached the sum of 983,261 guilders while from Basra no less than 281,866 guilders was received, partly paid in pearls. Relations with the Persians were growing less tense because they had run into conflict with the English who, in turn having become dissatisfied with the conditions
of trade in Persia, had attacked the anchorage of Bandar Kong and had taken away some ships from there. This caused considerable commotion among the Persians who had interests in the ships in Bandar Kong and the Sultan of Bandar Abbas was ordered by the Shah to be friendly to the Dutch.\textsuperscript{122}

During the next few years, Dutch trade in the Gulf developed satisfactorily. Relations between the Dutch and the Government in Isfahan improved, and the Gulf was once again an important area for the profits of the Dutch trade in Asia.\textsuperscript{123} In the meantime, indications of economic changes occur in the Dutch documents. For the modern observer, these are indications of an impending crisis in Persia. Complaints about bad behaviour of local Persian dignitaries became more common. An sign of impending economic crisis was the continuing interest of the Europeans in the pearl trade. The lack of bullion in the Gulf caused the Dutch to look for other valuables, like pearls to use as means of payment. The balance of trade of Persia with the Dutch East India Company had been passive for years. Silk, the principal article exported by Persia, was less in demand and its production was declining. As a result, bullion and pearls were moving out of the Gulf to Batavia. No less significant was a shift in the shipping movements. In 1687, out of five English ships arriving in the Gulf, three were not destined for Bandar Abbas but for Bandar Kong. Both phenomena seem to indicate an increase of trade outside Bandar Abbas. Both the Dutch and the English had observed that Bandar Kong had been taking a large part of the trade away from Bandar Abbas. Most ‘Moorish’ trade was done there, in preference to Bandar Abbas, apparently because the Khan of Lar usually did not try so frenetically to squeeze the merchants to the utmost, as several Shahbandars and Sultans of Bandar Abbas had been doing during recent years. Another reason might have been that Bandar Kong was an important marketplace for pearls. Neither the English nor the Dutch had much confidence in the stability of the situation in Bandar Abbas and both were on the look out for alternatives.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{122} Generale Missiven, vol. 5, pp. 246-247.

\textsuperscript{123} Klerk de Reus, Geschichtlicher Ueberblick, appendix 9.

The English and the Dutch were looking for other possibilities to lessen their dependence on Bandar Abbas. The English had been quite successful in Basra in the 1680’s. The Dutch East India Company opened a small establishment in Bandar Kong, apparently to take advantage of the native trade movements of the Gulf and increased its activities in Basra. There seems to have been an upsurge in demand for pearls.\textsuperscript{125} But again this Dutch endeavour to diversify their activities in the Gulf did not meet with much success. At first, things seemed to go well. Basra trade prospered and the first results in Bandar Kong gave hope. But the Dutch had underestimated the power of the Portuguese. Rightfully, the Portuguese claimed to have a contract with the Persians about sharing the customs revenues of Bandar Kong: the Dutch activities did damage to the Portuguese interests on two fronts. By taking over part of the trade between India and Kong the Dutch reduced the shipping under the Portuguese flag; by their claim of exemption of customs duties they damaged the interests of the Portuguese as well as those of the Persian customs official. The Portuguese found a clever way to get the Dutch out: they incited the Persian local authorities to take down the flag of the Dutch Company from its establishment in Kong by force. Formally, the Dutch never had asked the right to have their flag flying there. This became a difficult question for the Dutch Director in Bandar Abbas. He could not accept an affront and angrily retired the Dutch representative from Bandar Kong.\textsuperscript{126}

Just before these events, the Dutch started another initiative. A jeweller from Amsterdam, Jacobus Hoogcamer, had been sent by the directors in Holland to Asia, especially to investigate the pearl trade and to organize Dutch trade in the most advantageous way. The main source of pearls for the Dutch Company remained the banks

\textsuperscript{124} Generale Missiven, vol. 5, pp. 89, 246-247; Foster, English factories (1670-1677), p. 203.

\textsuperscript{125} From 1684, the Directors in Holland showed a sudden interest in Gulf pearls: cf. resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII of 25-10-1686 and 5 November 1687 (orders of pearls of 40,000 and 100,000 guilders). It may have something to do with fluctuations of prices and supply on the international market.

\textsuperscript{126} Generale Missiven, vol. 5, p. 558 (11-12-1692).
of Ceylon and the South-Eastern point of India; these banks were completely under the Dutch authority and produced the kind of pearls which were best for the European market. Hoogcamer was also sent to the Gulf and resided for some time in Kong. From there he went on to Bahrain to study the pearl trade at its source. He even hired a ship and some divers and went himself to the Bahrain bank to look for pearls. His report on this venture is not optimistic. We give here a translation of the main conclusion in his report which speaks for itself:127

Concerning the pearl diving, I cannot advise you to take part in this because I found out that there is very little profit in it. From 10 vessels there is hardly one which is able to make good its expenses, but this diving is done by people who have not learned to do, nor are able to do, anything else. They continue it each year hoping for profit, and I found out that they are not to be trusted. Even when one watches them constantly, they are always able, when they fish something of value, to hide it for themselves.

In this way, the latest endeavour by the Dutch East India Company to expand its interest to the Arab economy of the Gulf was a failure.

The good profits in Basra did not last long. A devastating epidemic of bubonic plague broke out in 1690.128 The economic havoc it wrought probably was the cause of an attack by Arab tribes, according to Longrigg the Muntafiq and the Jaza’ir. They were beaten off, but the Pasha was killed in battle. The town still held out for one year but in 1694 it was surrendered to the Muntafiq Shaikh Mani bin Mughamis. Mani defeated an Ottoman relief army, made his peace with the Sultan and for some time was Ruler of Basra.129

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**new Portuguese initiatives**

The years since 1680 were marked by quiet on the Omani side of the Gulf. The Imam Sultan bin Sayf had died in 1680, and his elder son Abu’l Arab was a quieter ruler, who was less inclined to warfare. The new Imam seems not to have liked the atmosphere in the traditional capital of Nazwa and moved his residence to Yabrin. The fortress there with its inscriptions and wallpaintings, which are unique in the area, still bears witness to his taste and style.130 At the end of 1689, the Imam and the Wakil Shaikh ‘Abdul’ (Abdallah Sulayman) were promoting an agreement with the Portuguese. The Imam came to an agreement with a Portuguese Envoy, Gonçalo Simões. The terms were rather favourable to the Portuguese: they would be allowed to open a factory in Muscat, the Imam would pay a salary to the head of the factory, and if the Portuguese wished, they would be allowed to build a fortress in Khasab. The only important concessions made by the Portuguese to the Omanis was that Omani ships would be allowed to visit Portuguese ports in India and that the Portuguese would pay normal customs duties in Muscat.131

The terms of the treaties were such that opposition must have been provoked and the quiet times were over. Dynastic strife was looming. The opposition was headed by the Imam Abu’l Arab’s brother, Sayf bin Sultan. In fact, the treaty with Portugal was so short-lived that the competitors of the Portuguese did not even hear of it. Sayf bin Sultan staged a coup and occupied the fortresses of Muscat and Yabrin. To show the Portuguese clearly that peace was over, Arab privateers attacked the harbour of Bandar Kong. Trade in Muscat again came to a standstill, which caused the Dutch to give up new efforts to set up trade in Muscat, which they had started shortly before.132

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127 ARA, VOC vol. 1476, fol. 630-632.
129 Longrigg, *Four centuries*, p. 120 seems not to be very accurate in comparison with contemporary Dutch records, cf. ARA, VOC vol. 1520, fol. 183v; VOC vol. 1582, fol. 168-169; SG no. 6919 (report of the Dutch Ambassador in Istanbul 13 August 1693 and of the consul in Aleppo 9 October 1693; *Generale Missione*, vol. 5, pp. 558, 703-704, 772.
130 Ross, *Annals*, pp. 55-56. The wallpaintings, though suffering from too emphatic restoration, show some Omani ships, one a show of the normal type of local shipping in the Gulf, the other a bagalal, a three-masted square-rigged ship inspired by the European type of construction, cf. Oman, *a seafaring nation*, p. 66.
THE ARABS OF THE GULF

Since 1690, the Portuguese increased their activity in the Gulf. A possible reason for this was that England, Holland and France were occupied in a war, and wars tend to divert shipping to neutral flags. In 1690, the Portuguese tried to reach an agreement with the Government of Basra, but results were not satisfactory. The next year, the Portuguese tried to secure communications with Bandar Kang and Basra by sending a naval expedition into the Gulf. The Portuguese establishment in Basra made no profits. This was not surprising, considering the course events had taken there after the plague, but Portuguese influence in Basra still remained strong. There was still an agreement in force as late as 1701 by which the Portuguese received a considerable sum of money from Basra as payment for granting convoy to the yearly ‘Monsoon fleet’ of merchant ships between Basra and India. There was some discussion among the Portuguese which course of action should be taken. There was one project to occupy Hormuz and to put so much pressure on the Imam that he would declare himself a vassal of the King of Portugal; others advocated an alliance with the Persians against Oman and to improve Portuguese trade with Persia. An expedition was sent against Hormuz in 1695, but it never reached there.

As we will see in the next chapter, a new era of violence would soon start. Apparently, the Portuguese wanted to regain a firm foothold in the Gulf. At the time, the dominant trend in Omani policy was opposed to this. In the past years, conflicts between Oman and the Portuguese had been fought in the Arabian Sea. The future scene of conflict would be in Gulf. Persia, with its interest in Portuguese trade in the Gulf, would be directly involved.

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132 Ross, Annals, p. 56. The date can be determined as somewhere in 1690 (from a comparison of the reference to the events in the Omani annals with a Dutch report in ARA, VOC vol. 1499, fol. 899v and VOC vol. 1520, fol. 183v. The treaty of the Portuguese is to be dated shortly before February 1690). Dutch ships had visited Muscat in 1682, as is shown by a view of Oman made in that year by Dutch sailors, a copy of which is now kept in the Leiden University Library, VI-14-7.


134 Relações, p. 329, quoting BNL, Pombal manuscripts no. 490, fol. 251-254.
