CHAPTER 6
THE WAR BETWEEN PERSIA AND OMAN

the first phase

From time to time, Persia had already shown some interest in expansion into Oman. As far as can be seen from the surviving documents, there had been no legal territorial claim on Omani territory by the Safavis, but for reasons of expediency they had considered occupying Muscat or the Jufar-area. Except for a very short period in 1618-1623, Persian troops had never been present in this area. This shortlived Persian presence had occurred at a time when the Portuguese were weak and the Persians apparently had the support of some Arab shipping. As the Persians themselves lacked the naval means to keep troops on the opposite side of the Gulf supplied with food and ammunition, the Persian military presence there could not last long. While Muscat was still in Portuguese hands, the Persians had several times discussed with the English and the Dutch some projects for conquering Muscat. In the early 1660’s, when Ya’aria-rule apparently was in some kind of crisis, again such plans were considered because of the danger of Muscat being taken by the Portuguese or the English.

The Dutch had not displayed much more than a polite interest in such plans, fearing that, as had happened in Hormuz, the Persians would have the Europeans do the work but keep the profits for themselves. Eventually, the Dutch had come to the conclusion that the Omanis might prove to be of some small use as allies against the Portuguese, even if a formal alliance was never reached. Moreover, the Dutch lacked real interest in hostile confrontation with the naval power of Oman in areas where they had no strong naval means.

1 Boxer, Ruy Freges, p. 181-182.
2 See before, pp. 172-175
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themselves. The economic development of Oman and the overseas trade of the Arabs of the area did not interfere with Dutch interests: it was of more damage to the Portuguese and English who were directly interested in the 'Moorish' shipping of the Western part of India.

Oman almost continually had conflicts with certain rulers in India, Muslim or Hindu as well as Portuguese. The trade of Oman with Cochin, the town in Malabar which the Dutch had conquered on the Portuguese, went without a hitch. This good economic relationship was probably the reason why it was difficult to get the Dutch into action against Oman.

In 1694, the Portuguese were under heavy pressure from uprisings against their establishments in Eastern Africa. The people of Pemba, an island near Zanzibar, asked for Omani support against the Portuguese. Boxer supposes that the desire to keep the Omanis busy so that they could not intervene in Africa was bringing the Portuguese to an alliance with Persia. This seems to be an inversion of cause and consequences. As we will see, Persia sought an alliance with the Portuguese after having been attacked by Oman.

In 1695, a large force of Omani ships arrived at Bandar Kong. The Arabs captured the ships which were at anchor and plundered the town. Several Portuguese ships were taken. The cause of this incident is that Oman wanted to make Muscat the pivot of local trade in the Gulf and to finish off Bandar Kong as a competitor and as the centre of trade for the Portuguese enemy. In view of the Portuguese policy of the previous years, the attack on Kong was not an unprovoked piece of aggression. However, Bandar Kong was very im-
portant for the economy of Persia and attacking Bandar Kong could be the first step in a general attack on the Portuguese-controlled trade route Basra-Bahrain-Kong-India, and in an Omani attempt to acquire control over trade in the Gulf. Under such circumstances, a war between Persia and Oman was to be expected. Omani intentions of the attack on Kong become clear from a letter of the Imam to the Shah. In this letter, the Imam stated that the attack was not directed against the Persians, but that the Omani only asked the same trade privileges in Persia as the Portuguese had been granted. The Shah did not reply to this letter.

In order to understand the reasons for the war, we should make a detailed analysis of this attack and of the reactions it provoked. The actions of Oman were especially directed against Portugal: much of the trade Oman wanted to get under her control was carried on under the Portuguese flag. For many years, Omani forces had attacked the coastal towns of neighbouring countries, apparently with the intention to force the people in the area to use Omani-controlled shipping for their trade and to use the port of Muscat as an entrepôt. The attack on Bandar Kong was a logical sequel to the Omani conquests in Eastern Africa. Oman's adversaries had been unable to take adequate countermeasures after the raid on Kong. Portugal had been the only power to contemplate counterattacks against Omani territory, but there had been no real action by the Portuguese. The Omanis avoided offending the Dutch and to a lesser extent the English, because the trade of these powers was largely outside the sphere of Omani interest and because their naval power could not be challenged without danger. The attack on Kong meant however a direct menace to the Persians. The Persians had

3 Boxer, Fort Jesus, p. 57-58.
4 Generale Missione, vol. 5, p. 810 (19-1-1697), 743 (2-11-1695), 772 (8-2-1696); VOC 1582, fol. 32-33; VOC 1571, fol. 92-95; Kroell, Louis XIV, p. 10. Saldanha, Persian Gulf Précis, p. xxx; Lockhart, Fall, p. 62-68 refers to only one Armenian ship as booty of the Omanis, with a cargo worth £ 198,000 (based on Bruce, Annals of the East India Company, p. 169).
5 Bathurst, 'Maritime Trade', p. 102-103, states that there was an increase of 'piracy' by Omani ships because the Imam had insufficient power over the shipping community. This is a too simple statement: the attacks on the shipping of competitors fits into a logical strategy and we find no direct reason to suppose uncontrolled piracy.
6 Gaudereau, Relation de la mort de Shah Soliman (Paris 1696), p. 70-71 and ARA, VOC 1571, fol. 96-97 are two independent sources mentioning this letter. Gaudereau's reference has been commented in Lockhart, Fall, 68 and Kroell, Louis XIV, p. 10.
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suffered some damage and they would become entirely dependent on the English and Dutch Companies for their foreign trade if the Portuguese trade would disappear. In that case, the revenue from customs duties of Southern Persia could be diminished. Unlike the trade of Bandar Abbas, the trade of Bandar Kong was for a large part in the hands of local interests (rich Persian and probably also Arab merchants). Oman’s action must have provoked pressure upon the Shah by prominent Persians to take revenge. English and Dutch interests were also somewhat involved in Kong; recently, both nations had experimented with trade there. No Persian measures were taken while the Shah was waiting for the Europeans. Some Portuguese ships were seen off Hormuz, but they took no action. According to the Dutch, the Portuguese limited themselves to a promise to the Persians that if the Shah would send an army to Muscat, the Viceroy would personally come with a fleet from Goa to support it. The Portuguese and the Persians reached a draft agreement on this matter, but this agreement had no practical effects.

It was to be expected that the other European powers represented in Persia would be asked for help. There was some vague understanding about an obligation for naval assistance to Persia by the English and Dutch Companies who enjoyed a privileged position in Persia. At first both refused: they claimed that they needed their forces because they were at war with France or for other such reasons. The Imam sent another letter to the Shah, now threatening to destroy Bandar Abbas if his conditions were not met. The only result was that an English ship which was loading in Bandar Abbas

remained there for a short time to protect the port. The Portuguese continued negotiations with the Persians. A Portuguese envoy was sent in 1696, but no preparations for military action were apparent in the summer of that year. Later, in December 1696, the Portuguese quarrelled again with the Persians about the payment of their share in the customs revenues of Bandar Kong. As a demonstration of their dissatisfaction with the Persian attitude they captured a ship from Sind near Qishn.

The Persians had the sympathy of France. Gaudereau, a French priest in Persia was advocating plans for a French conquest of Muscat. This would help the Persians and to put the Dutch enemy to shame, but France lacked the power for such adventures.

Then during the next winter, the Persians showed themselves very friendly to the Dutch and made many concessions. Ali Merdjm Khan was appointed as commander of an expedition against Muscat and he approached the Dutch for help. New and very advantageous privileges were offered to the Dutch representitives. The Dutch now showed more willingness, because trade with Persia was rapidly growing in importance and also because they were afraid that their Portuguese competitors would use concessions to the Persians to

12 The report of this mission is published in J. Aubin, L’ambassade de Gregorio Peretta Fidalgo à la cour du shah Soltan Hossein (Lisboa 1971), cf. Generale Missiven, vol. 5, p. 810, 860(19-1-1691: ‘not yet’); vol. 5, 810. ARA, VOC 1598 (part Persia) fol. 37: the Portuguese had sent an ambassador from Goa, but his mission was frustrated because just then news arrived in Persia about an Omân attack on Mombasa. Lockhart, Fall, p. 392, states that the support given by the Portuguese to the Persians, though small, so incensed the Omani that they attacked Mangalore in India and finally conquered Mombasa in 1698. This seems to be turning the matter upside down: the Portuguese, not the Persians were the priority for the Omanis. Aubin, Ambas- sade, p 25 mentions that the Portuguese force sent to help the Persians was very small and did not achieve anything.
13 ARA VOC vol. 1598 (part Persia) fol. 51.
14 Kroell, Louis XIV, p. 14-15. The French East India Company was more realistic and than Gaudereau and saw no possibilities.
obtain such privileges that they would take the best position in the Persian market. In June 1697, the Batavia High Government decided to reply in a positive sense to Persian requests for help. This help would consist of transportation of Persian troops, provisions and ammunition, but direct participation in any warfare by Dutch troops was explicitly forbidden, nor would Dutch ships be allowed to support Persian troops with their artillery at the landing. Five large ships were made ready in Batavia to sail for the Arabian Sea, but only one was firmly destined for Bandar Abbas. The others would only sail there if the Persians were ready, otherwise these four ships would be employed for trade in Surat. After this Dutch offer, the Shah told the Portuguese Ambassador that his help was, after all, not needed. The Dutch used the occasion of good relations with Persia to start building an entire new residence just outside Bandar Abbas. The work took many years, but when this new fortified building was ready, the Dutch had a strong and safe position in Bandar Abbas.

The last years of the seventeenth century were a period of great anarchy at sea. Not only were the Omanis making war on the shipping of their enemies, but there were also European pirates of the worst kind. These European pirates, with some buccaneers from America, had established themselves on small islands north of Madagascar and were hindering navigation in the Red Sea. Many of these pirates were refugees from religious persecutions in Western Europe: some Protestant French and Catholic English had been obliged to leave their country and to live as bandits. Four ships of Irish pirates (probably Catholics on the run) had first been acting some time as buccaneers in the Caribbean and then arrived at Qishm.

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17 De Bruyn, Reizen, view between p. 348 and 349. See p. 27 note 92 for plans of the building and for the manuscript of this view of Bandar Abbas with the new Dutch establishment, which took many years building.

but they soon left to try their luck on other coasts of Asia. The Dutch were earning large profits because of the threats posed by Omanis and others to the navigation between India and Persia. Many merchants from India put their goods on Dutch ships, which brought a considerable supplementary income to the Dutch company.

The great plans for a Persian attack on Oman with Dutch logistic support fell flat because in 1697 the Persians did not have any troops available for attacking Muscat. They were busy in warfare around Basra and the Shah, as the Dutch cynically remarked, 'was too busy with his wives'. The Dutch were delighted not to be obliged to help the Persians in an expensive and risky venture, which would almost certainly meet with the disapproval of the Directors in Holland. The Governor General in Batavia was able to write to his superiors in Amsterdam 'we have escaped the obligation of lending ships for the war'. This was a piece of good luck for the Omanis, a direct attack by an organized naval force could have had serious consequences for them. In 1697, the Omanis were finally ready to intervene in Africa. They had earlier been asked to support the uprising against the Portuguese in Pemba, which had started in 1694. They put Mombasa under siege and managed to occupy this important Portuguese place after a siege of 21 months. The fall of Mombasa was an important event in the gradual dissolution of the Portuguese territories in the Western part of the Indian Ocean.

In 1698, the Europeans wanted to keep their hands free for the protection of navigation and did not want to be tied up in wild operations in dangerous circumstances such as actions against Oman on behalf of the Shah. They feared for the safety of their ships while the abovementioned Irish pirates, who had retired to the islands off Eastern Africa, were active. The following year, the
Dutch did not believe any more in Persian actions against Oman. In that year, relations between the Dutch and Persia were deteriorating. The Persians, not without reason, accused the Dutch of building a fortress in Bandar Abbas. The accusation was not without grounds, because the new Dutch factory was a very strongly fortified building.23

The tension between the Persians and the Dutch did not last very long. Relations between Portugal and Persia grew tense again on the matter of the customs duties of Kong. The Persian authorities, altering course, approached the Dutch with promises of rich rewards if the Dutch would chase the Portuguese from Bandar Kong. They had chosen a bad moment: just at that time, relations between the Dutch and the Portuguese were excellent.24

For some years, there was almost no action in the conflict between Persia and Oman. The Omanis seem to have been satisfied with the results of their first attacks, and were making attacks on the shipping of Surat and on the coast of India instead. The Persians had some trouble in the Upper Gulf.25 Very little is known about the internal history of Oman in these years, so we do not know of any reason for the temporary standoff in hostilities. Neither is it clear why in 1702 the Persians suddenly wanted to start the war again. They looked for help to the Dutch East India Company. The war which broke out in that same year between Holland and France was sufficient reason for the Batavia High Government to decide not to grant any Persian requests for help against Muscat. In fact, the Dutch were getting slightly nervous about such requests, and were afraid that the Persians would take their ships by force to use them against the Omanis. Special secret instructions were finally sent about this matter by the Batavia High Government.26 Meeting with a Dutch

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22 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 43.
26 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 215 (1702); ARA, VOC vol. 1679, fol. 27 (request for two Dutch gunners by the Persians); the instructions in ARA, VOC vol.

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refusal, the Persians decided to ask the Portuguese, who indeed did send six ships. These ships did not take any action. Their crew were starving in the Gulf and many deserted.27

In 1704, a state of general warfare prevailed in the area. While an English-Dutch alliance was fighting the French, an armed conflict broke out between Surat and the Dutch. Dutch captains were instructed to capture all the Surati ships they could find, except those which were in the ports of friendly states like Persia or Oman.28 The Omanis were not very lucky that year in their own perennial warfare against the Portuguese and the Portuguese took many Omanis ships off Surat.29 There also was a sudden possibility of a conflict between the English and Oman. The Omanis had captured an English ship which was engaged in trade between Mocha and Surat. The Omanis alleged, according to a Dutch source that this was in revenge for a massacre of Omanis which had taken place in Surat in 1704. The English were furious and their Directors went as far as writing that only the war in Europe prevented them from attacking and destroying that ‘nest of pirates, the Muscat Arabs’.30 The Dutch avoided at all cost to get involved in a conflict with Oman. In 1705 Dutch ships received orders to prevent Omani ships from calling at Surat, or any Mughal ports, but without offending them. Trade continued, using sometimes enemy ships if this would seem safer or more advantageous. In this way, cargo belonging to an agent of the Imam of Oman in Surat was sent on an Arab ship belonging to a certain ‘Shaikh Abdul’, an inhabitant of Kong, the establishment of Oman’s traditional enemy Portugal.31 It appeared that in 1705 the

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719, Resolutions High Government 21-7-1704.
29 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 319.
30 Lockhart, Fall, p. 397-398, quoting Bruce, Annals, vol 3, p. 557, 572. Lockhart himself gets rather excited clamoung about ‘the first such attack on our shipping in the Gulf’. In fact, the ship was only temporarily detained, and this is an insignificant incident if one compares it with the large number of ships which were illegally captured in Europe by any belligerent party in the seventeenth century. The Dutch report in Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 456.
Omanis had recovered very well from their losses of 1704. They took revenge by an attack on the Portuguese city of Damao.32
Now, the Dutch themselves began to suffer from the war. Some Turkish sailors who had been employed by the Omanis against Damao, but who were later dismissed, had taken to piracy. These Turks took a small Dutch ship off Goa and killed its crew.33 In 1706, the Persians renewed their demands for assistance to the Dutch. They asked the Dutch to capture and destroy all Omani ships they found and to blockade Muscat. Such requests had little chance of being granted as the Dutch and the Omanis had a common interest. While the Dutch war with Surat continued, Oman had in 1706 also started hostilities with Surat.34 The Dutch gave military assistance to the Persians in one case only. This was in 1708 when they sent one of their ships to the island of Larak to chase away a band of pirates from India, subjects of the Mahratta dynasty of Angria, who had settled there.35
The policy of Oman was not as inconsistent as it might seem. The conflicts with Portugal, Persia and Surat had a common background: the desire in Oman to control trade between the Gulf and India. Oman was unable to destroy any of these great powers, but by first attacking ports and shipping of one and then of the others, the Omanis could try to divert trade in the desired direction. In 1707 the war between Oman and Surat ended so that the Omanis had their hands free again to wage war on the Persians.36

**Turmoil in the Upper Gulf**

In the previous chapter, we witnessed the conquest of Basra by the Muntafiq. The sudden display of power of the Muntafiq tribal federation may have seemed quite imposing, but its basis was not strong. The Ottoman Pasha in Baghdad cannot have liked the situation and he was able, by hindering the passage of merchants, to strangle Basra’s economy. This economy must have felt the negative consequences of the Omani attacks in the Lower Gulf since 1695. Events concerning Muscat had already caused a crisis several times in the trade of Basra. In the East, the powerful Mushasha dynasty governing Huwayza (who were Arabs, but formally integrated as provincial governors in the Persian government system) was not reconciled with the loss of part of its territory to the Muntafiq. In Basra itself, the business community was too well aware of the advantages of Ottoman rule and kept to its traditional pro-Ottoman stand.

In 1697, Farajallah, the Wali of Huwayza, attacked and defeated the Muntafiq forces. Perceiving the weakness of the Muntafiq, the notables of Basra appealed to the Ottomans. Hasan Pasha was appointed by the Porte as Governor of Basra. He marched to the South and was able to occupy Qurna, where Euphrates and Tigris join, but he was stopped there. This Ottoman dignitary then agreed with Farajallah, nominally a Persian dignitary, that the latter would try to occupy Basra. In 1697, Farajallah captured the town, and passed formal possession of Basra to the Shah. The latter did not want to provoke a conflict with the Ottomans at that stage and sent the keys of the town to the Ottoman Sultan. This apparently was not much more than a formal gesture. Basra was governed by a Persian Governor, although this Governor was for the time being the Arab Wali of Huwayza. Farajallah was only a subject of the Shah in name. Dutch reports of 1699 mention that the Persians were afraid to attack Muscat in that year because they feared that Farajallah might attack them from the rear.37

In fact, Persian authority in the area was no better established than Ottoman authority. The real power in the area was held by Arab tribal leaders whose ever-shifting alliances and conflicts made it

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31 *Generale Missiven*, vol. 6, p. 376-377 (1705), 454; ARA, VOC vol. 1714, fol. 131.
32 *Generale Missiven*, vol. 6, p. 377.
33 *Generale Missiven*, vol. 6, p. 373, 410.
34 *Generale Missiven*, vol. 6, p. 458 (30-11-1706).
35 *Generale Missiven*, vol. 6, p. 507 (expedition of the ship Eugenia, 30-11-1707).
36 *Generale Missiven*, vol. 6, p. 521.
37 Longrigg, *Four centuries*, p. 121; Lockhart, *Fall*, p. 52-54; Caskel, ‘Wali’s’, p. 428; *Generale Missiven*, vol. 6, p. 42, 60; *Chronicle*, vol. 1, p. 497.
impossible for both great empires to get a firm hold on the situation. There was a sudden upsurge of tribal warfare, apparently caused by tribal migrations under the pressure of a series of great floods. Persian authority quickly crumbled away when the government in Isfahan got into conflict with the Wali of Huwayza. Farajallah first called the Ottomans for help, then, after he had been replaced by the Shah as Khan of Basra by Dawud Khan, he reconciled himself with Mani, the Muntafiq-leader. In this manner a new powerful Arab alliance threatened to conquer Basra and to dominate the head of the Gulf. Upheavals in the world of Arab tribes seem to have had a much wider spread than just to the Upper Gulf. In 1700, the Ottoman Sultan ordered all Pashas of districts bordering the desert to make war on the tribes after tribesmen had attacked a caravan of pilgrims to Mecca.

The Persians were too weak to be able to settle the situation and the contingents of tribes from the Gulf, which were recruited by the Persian authorities for service near Basra, achieved little. The Ottomans were in better shape. The Shah, for reasons which were not clear to contemporary observers, suddenly decided to restore Basra to the Ottoman Sultan in 1700. The disastrous war of Turkey with Austria and Venice had ended with the treaty of Karlovci in 1699, and the Turks were free to settle matters elsewhere. An Ottoman Pasha of Basra was appointed, Ali Pasha, and a strong army was sent under the command of the Pasha of Baghdad, Daltaban Mustafa Pasha. Farajallah was defeated and surrendered, Mani reconciled himself with the Ottomans and Dawud Khan left Basra. In 1701, Ali Pasha entered the town. Ali Pasha seems to have tried to restore Basra to its former prosperity, he invited the Dutch to resume trade. Ottoman power was restored, but the situation was not yet completely stable. Basra trade did not prosper and in 1704, the town was ravaged by an epidemic which caused 8000 dead. Later, there was some hope for the better, when in 1705 Ali Pasha, a tyrant according to the Dutch, was replaced by Khali. These hopes proved false. Khalil upon his arrival started a quarrel with the new Muntafiq leader Mughamis, son of Mani. The Ottomans tried to replace him with a puppet shaikh, but failed. In 1706, there was a new uprising of the majority of the Muntafiq under Mughamis. Basra was plundered by the Arab and the Dutch suffered heavy material losses. An Ottoman army was unable to break this rebellion, although Basra remained in Ottoman hands.

To bring matters under control, Hasan Pasha of Baghdad took the government of Basra in his own hands, ruling it by a deputy (mitsellim). Basra remained in Ottoman hands, but the town seemed unable to recover its former prosperity for some time. The trade crisis, which occurred in the Gulf because of the war between Persia and Oman, may have been responsible for this. The Dutch evacuated their establishment in Basra in 1706 because trade was slack and taxation heavy. They did not return for a long time. The English experimented in 1715–1716, but suffered heavy losses. They also refrained from repeating the experiment. For the duration of the war, European presence in Basra was limited to the Carmelite Chronicle, p. 428). Longrigg, Four centuries, p. 121–122 has a different story: Ali Merdim Khan was replaced by Ibrahim Khan and in 1700 Mani tried to recapture Basra but Ibrahim chased the Muntafiq away. Ibrahim was then replaced by Dawud Khan who died during a new Ottoman attack on Basra.

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38 There is some difference of opinion on the name of Farajallah’s successor as governor of Basra. The Carmelite chronicle calls him Dawud Khan (Gollancz, Chronicle, p. 420, while Lockhart, Fail, p. 54, seems to skip a period and has Ali Merdim Khan as Farajallah’s immediate successor.


40 ARA, VOC vol. 1630, fol. 1873, 1888–188v.

41 We have followed here the account of the Carmelite Chronicle (Gollancz, Chronicle, p. 428). Longrigg, Four centuries, p. 121–122 has a different story: Ali Merdim Khan was replaced by Ibrahim Khan and in 1700 Mani tried to recapture Basra but Ibrahim chased the Muntafiq away. Ibrahim was then replaced by Dawud Khan who died during a new Ottoman attack on Basra.
monastery, and the chronicle kept by the monks became the only European source on events in the area.

The history of the Upper Gulf countries outside the Basra area remains almost unknown. There are very few sources available. The troubles in Basra may have caused some diversion of the normal trade movement to other places. Kazima, the Northern port of the Banu Khalid with access to the caravan routes to Aleppo, appeared more clearly on maps printed since 1720, an indication that this place had grown in importance in the years before. On the other hand, expansion of the Banu Khalid and their allies on their other wing was blocked by the Huwala. The Utub, a considerable tribe of sailors under the protection of the Banu Khalid were chased from the pearl banks in the Qatar and Bahrain area by the Huwala, and migrated to the area of Basra. This event suggests a considerable change in the situation around Bahrain. In the 1670’s the pearl bank had been conquered by Upper Gulf tribes, but now the Huwala of the Lower Gulf had regained the upper hand and for the years to come the area was dominated by the Huwala. The war between Oman and Persia also caused movements among the Arabs of Huwayza who turned against the Persians. Farajallah’s son Sayyid Abdallah was involved in border conflicts with the Turks. He sent support for Persian operations against Oman. In 1718, the Turks occupied his territory. The Turks appointed his brother, Sayyid Muhammad as Governor, while Sayyid Abdallah eventually took office in the army of Shah Sultan Hossein of Persia.

There also may have been some diversion of trade from Basra to the Arab ports on the Northern coast of the Gulf which had in peace-time access to caravan routes by way of Baghdad to Aleppo. A later Dutch source remarks that in the past, Bandar Rig had been a busy port under its ruler Mir Hamad. This later source may refer to the period of troubles in Basra around the year 1700, because the only early contacts of the Dutch with Bandar Rig had been in 1705, when a Dutch ship was sent there to experiment with trade. Of the port of Bushahr, we have no other information at that time but that its inhabitants apparently were on the side of the Persians against the O曼is. Arab tribes of the surrounding area had taken the Omani side, and they received punishment from the Persians in 1716 for doing so.

The second phase of the war between Persia and Oman

During its first phase, the war between Oman and Persia was not very significant. It had not been more than a reflection of Omani warfare against Portugal in which Persia had become hurt, after which followed some futile attempts by the Persians to take revenge. The main Omani effort against the Portuguese had not been in the Gulf but in Eastern Africa, where the OMANIS now held the important town of Mombasa. From Mombasa, the OMANIS soon extended their domination to Kilwa, Pemba and Zanzibar. After that, the war between Oman and Surat had caused a diversion. Once the OMANIS had concluded peace with Surat, they pursued their attacks against Persia and Portugal with more vigour.

In 1707, Omani ships made a show of power off Bandar Abbas and captured ships owned by Persian subjects wherever they could. A Persian ambassador was sent to Batavia to ask for Dutch help, but this mission was delayed because the poor man lacked money for the long journey. The next year, the OMANIS made an

47 Slot, Origins, p. 43-55.
50 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 378; Kniphofsen-report fol. 7v-8r= Floor, Description, p. 173).
51 ARA, VOC vol. 1897, fol. 202 about a punitive expedition against the Arab population of Dashistain because it had shown sympathy towards the OMANIS.
52 Risso, Oman and Muscat, p. 120.
53 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 522 (5-1-1708).
54 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 507, 522, 567. The Ambassador only arrived in
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attempt on Goa, but that proved too ambitious and it failed. During preparations for this attack, the Omanis nearly got into conflict with the Dutch. A Dutch ship arrived in Muscat while the Omani navy was there at anchor ready for the attack. It was held in the harbour for some time in order to keep the preparations for war secret. The Dutch protested, and the Omanis replied by being very friendly to other Dutch ships so that the danger of conflict blew over.55

The Persians also sent an Ambassador to Bombay to ask for English help against Oman, without any effect. The Ambassador, Mirza Nasir, preferred not to return after his failure and became a merchant.56 The example of these two Persian ambassadors shows that Safavi diplomacy had become a farce. In Isfahan, the conflict with Oman was also discussed by the Persians with the French Ambassador Michel. The representative of Louis XIV made a wild suggestion. If the Persians would be willing to chase the Dutch and the English from Persia, the mighty French nation would entirely fill the gap in Persian trade caused by this measure. As a reward, the French would also conquer Muscat for the Persian crown. It was bad luck for the Persians that the French did not have the power in Asia to do anything except some privateering. The Persians were wise enough not to enter seriously into the French proposals.57

In 1709, after a peace of barely two years, war broke out again between Surat and Oman, which during its first year brought no success to the Omani fleet. The next year however, the Omanis took several Surati ships in the Red Sea and kept several others blocked in the port of Aden.58 Logically, the Omanis tried not to have too many conflicts simultaneously and tried to negotiate peace with Persia. An Omani Ambassador was sent to Isfahan. He offered the retirement of Omani ships and of the irregular Arab auxiliaries from the Gulf if Persia gave the Omanis access to Persian ports and paid them half of the customs revenues of Korg as had been paid before to the Portuguese. But negotiations were slow. The Ambassador remained seven months in Isfahan before he was sent to the Governor of Kuh-Galu, who got orders to send one of his people to Muscat to bring the Imam a Persian reply.59 Meanwhile, Oman continued its war with Surat with much energy in the Red Sea, sending a large fleet there which took several ships of the Surati traders near Mocha.60 There was also an incident with an English ship.61

In 1711, a new Omani expedition in the Red Sea met with less effect because the Governor of Aden warned Surati ships to leave in time.62 It seems that at that time the Persians, after much pressure, obtained a promise from the English to help them against Muscat, by carrying Persian troops to Oman, but nothing came of it.63

In the same year 1711, the Imam Sayf bin Sultan I died. His son and successor Sultan bin Sayf II continued his father’s policy.64 The conflict between Oman and Persia remained limited to the diplomatic front for the time being. There are no mentions of Omani attacks even if the circumstances seem to have been favourable because in 1712 the Persians were quarrelling with the Portuguese. The Vicerey in Goa was angry with the Persians because they were very slow in paying out the Portuguese share of the revenues of the customs of Bandar Korg. He sent some ships who captured two

Batavia after a new crisis in 1715 and failed to make any impression on the High Government. He seems to have been more interested in borrowing money for private purposes. The negotiations are recorded in ARA, VOC vol. 731, Resolutions of the Batavia High Government, 29-3, 4-4, 20-4, 14-6, 18-6 and 16-7-1715.

55 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 567.
56 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 567, 625.

58 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 506.
60 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 705, 726.
61 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 793.
62 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 792.
63 Generale Missiven, vol. 6, p. 794 (30-11-1711).
64 Badger, History, p. 93: Ross, Annals, p. 56; Lockhart, Fall, p. 68.
vessels belonging to Persian subjects near the anchorage of Bandar Kong’s competitor, Bandar Abbas and carried them to Bandar Kong. As a result, the Persians turned to the Dutch for help against the Portuguese and proposed that they should continue by attacking Muscat. The moment was ill-chosen: the Dutch were rather friendly with Portugal at the time and had several reasons to be irritated with the government of Shah Sultan Hossein. The Persians had no choice but to reconcile the Portuguese by paying their dues.  

The international situation in the area was getting incredibly complicated. Oman was at war with Persia but concentrated most of her energy on warfare with the state of Canara in India, while concluding peace with Surat. The Portuguese were also involved in warfare with Canara and as a consequence not interested for the moment in warfare with Oman. After the Portuguese, the English had become disgusted with the Persians; they blocked Bandar Abbas and had temporarily diverted their trade to Muscat. The relations between the Persians and the Dutch had become bad after the Persians had persuaded a foolish Dutch representative in Isfahan to ignore all his instructions and to lend a very large sum of money to the Shah who should be considered completely unworthy of credit. When the superior Dutch authorities reacted by punishing this representative, the Persians interfered in the internal affairs of the Company with a heavy hand. This lost the Persians all remaining goodwill from the Dutch Director in Bandar Abbas and the Batavia High Government.  

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65 Generale Missiën, vol. 6, 905 (13-1-1713); ARA, VOC vol. 1829, fol. 59-60.  
66 Generale Missiën, vol. 7, p. 29, 32.  
67 Generale Missiën, vol. 7, p. 54.  
68 Generale Missiën, vol. 7, p. 35-37, 121-122. The Head of the Dutch office in Isfahan apparently suffered from persecution mania. He thought that the Director in Bandar Abbas was trying to poison him. He sought the protection of the Persian authorities and gave them secret information which put the Company in serious trouble.

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69 ARA, VOC vol. 1812, fol. 166 (attack on Qishm); Generale Missiën, vol. 7, p. 118-119 (26-11-1714); Hamilton, New Account, p. 74-75 gives an account of the strength of the Omani navy in this period: 1 ship of 74 guns, 2 of 60 guns, 1 of 50 and 18 small ships of 12-32 guns.  
The Dutch remained unwilling to help the Persians. The French Carmelite monks in Isfahan were suggesting to the French government that a French attack on Muscat might bring big profits to France, but France had no means in the area. The Persians lacked means for naval warfare in the Gulf and were occupied by internal troubles: one of their most trusted generals had started a rebellion and the situation in Northern Persia was growing dangerous. The Safavi regime was disintegrating, the Shah was incompetent, his ministers corrupt, the finances of the empire were in disorder, and the taxation system destructive for their own economy. But in October 1715, the Persians were obliged to look more seriously at the situation in the Gulf. During this month strong Omani forces twice tried to overrun Bahrain. The attacks were repelled with heavy losses to the Omanis (Dutch documents mention a loss of 1000 men). This meant that the war had taken a very dangerous new turn for the Persians: the loss of the considerable income from the pearl banks of Bahrain would be a heavy blow to the already weak financial position of Persia. A special force was designated for war against the Omanis of which Safi Quli Khan was appointed the commander. The Omanis apparently needed some time to get their forces in sufficient shape after their first failures, but in 1717 they started again. In February, they tried to overrun Hormuz. They plundered the island and killed the Governor, but failed to take the fortress. In the late summer of 1717 they attacked Bahrain again, and now took that fortress after a siege of about a month. There is an unconfirmed report that the Omani had not only used their own ships but also English ships which had been temporarily diverted from the line Surat-Bandar Abbas.

After taking Bahrain, the Omani forces straight away overpowered the fortresses of Qishm and Larag. They now had a firm foothold on the approaches of the principal ports of Southern Persia and closed the area for all navigation, except English and Dutch. Their next objective was Hormuz. Omani forces landed on the island and entered the town where they freed an important Persian rebel against the Shah who was held prisoner there. But the Persian garrison in the fortress of Hormuz did not surrender and a long siege started. Hormuz did not have its own supply of water nor was the fortress in particularly good repair and also it lacked stores. It was expected that it would not be able to hold out. The Persians tried to obtain Dutch help against the Omanis at Hormuz but to no avail. The only concession of the Dutch to the Persians was that they wrote letters to the Omani commanders at Hormuz and Qishm warning them not to damage the trade of Bandar Abbas. These commanders had sometimes approached the Dutch with messages of friendship and invitations for trade with Muscat. The Dutch saw no profit in trade with Oman, but also no more profit in helping the Persians.

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73 Lockhart, Fall, p. 95-102.
74 Generale Missiven, vol. 7, p. 253 (30-11-1716); ARA, VOC vol. 1886, fol. 95, 137-138, 169. Important details also in the letterbook of the Portuguese colony of Diu in BNL, FG 10668, fol. 92-99.
75 Ovington, Travels, p. 245 estimates the revenue of the Shah out of the Bahrain pearls at 500,000 ducats, not counting 100,000 'which are supposed to be diverted'.
76 VOC 1886, fol. 155 (Safi Quli Khan approached the Dutch for help); Generale Missiven, vol. 7, p. 253 (30-11-1716).
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By far the most interesting contact between the Dutch and the Omani forces on Hormuz took place in February 1718. The ship Haringtuyjn was on its way from Batavia to Bandar Abbas. Entering the Gulf, she was short of fresh food. Some sailors decided to take a sloop and to go fishing near Larac, or to buy something there. They were unaware that there was a war on. The sloop was stopped by an Omani watch-ship who suspected them to be Portuguese and the sailors were brought to the Omani camp on Hormuz. There they met an Omani officer, who had been in Batavia as a slave of a Portuguese captain. He cleared up the misunderstanding, and before leaving, the Dutch visited the commanders of the Omani army on Hormuz:

About 8 o'clock, we were brought to him [the Omani general] by this Captain and some other officers, passing a row of a thousand soldiers armed and saluting with their guns. We went to a dilapidated building and we found there seated on a beautiful carpet two gentlemen with swords and shields who seemed to us to be stately persons. They asked us to sit down with them on the carpet and asked us of which nation we were. I replied that we were from Holland and servants of the Company. He also asked where we came from. I replied 'from Batavia' and that we were destined to Bandar Abbas. Next he asked us how we were treated on the island of Larac and I replied 'very well' and that we owed them gratitude and that I would report accordingly to my captain. Then he asked me why we had come to Larac. I replied 'to buy sheep' and that we did not know of their war with the Persians. Next he asked whether our ship had any gunpowder. I replied 'as much as is necessary for the defence of the ship'. Then he asked whether we had textiles on board. I replied that I did not know because I had not seen the papers of the ship, because this was not my job. Then he asked me not to report badly to my Captain [meant is not the Captain of the ship but the Director of the Dutch Establishments in the Gulf] and he gave me a letter to the Captain. Then he gave us permission to leave. We stood up and thanked him for the civil way in which he had treated us. Under the sound of trumpets we left along the line of soldiers to the hut of the captain. There we were invited to eat rice with 'tammer' [dates] and almond-cake. After the meal we asked to leave and we were brought to our sloop by the captain and a body of 25 soldiers, who boarded one of their vessels which conveyed us through the line of ships which blocked the island. When we had passed the line, they saluted us, on

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which we replied with three times Hussa [a kind of Dutch salute involving the throwing up of hats]. (ARA, VOC vol. 1913, fol. 442-443)

The translation into Dutch of the letter given to the sailors and written by the commanders ‘Nasser ben Abdallah ben Ahmet Hansie’ and ‘Shaikh Rhamha ben Mhatel ben Rhamha ben Mhamet Hoeli’ has survived:

After compliments.

This will serve to assure Your Honours that I am your friend. That the sloop of your ship with three men was held in Larac (which is under the obedience of our Imam) by my people happened out of ignorance because they did not know whether they were Dutch, English, French, Portuguese or Danes. The men on the island informed me and sent them to me. As soon as I found out that they were Dutchmen, I sent them freely back to you as is my duty. Our Imam has ordered me to respect the Great Dutch Company in all matters, which order I have to obey completely, so if you will order me something, I will reply with pleasure.

May your glory increase. (ARA, VOC vol. 1913, fol. 437-438)

An interesting aspect of the contacts between the Dutch and the Omani commanders is that it gives us some idea of the state of the Omani forces. One of the commanders was Shaikh Rahma bin Matar Al Hula or rather Al Qasimi. He belonged to a family which is already mentioned in the course of the war with the Portuguese in 1648. Shortly after 1718, Rahma himself was mentioned as Amir of Julfar and he finally became the founder of an independent principality there. Shaikh Rahma tried later again to acquire Hormuz. His presence may indicate that the war in the Gulf was mainly an affair of the Western part of Oman. There is a Huwala dimension to it: Shaikh Rahma is called Al Hula (singular of Huwala) and also the Huwala tribes in the Bandar Kong area were supporting the Omani. 83

Meanwhile, the Persians had been concentrating an army of 8000 men to recapture Bahrain under Lutf Ali Khan. The news of the departure of this very large force obliged the Omani commanders at Hormuz to lift the siege of the fortress and to leave quickly for


83 The documents on the Haringtuyn in ARA, VOC vol. 1913, fol. 437-443. Rahma is called Al Hula ibid. on fol. 437 and in the Omani chronicles: Badger, History, 111; Ross, Annals, p. 63-64.
Bahrain to help there. As a result, the Persians were able to get reinforcements to Hormuz and to repair the fortress. The main goal of the Persian counterattack was not reached. The Persians suffered a bloody defeat off Bahrain where they lost three-quarters of their forces. Still, Hormuz was again firmly in their hands and the Omanis made no new attempts to take it.84

The Persians were not very clever in their diplomacy. The Safavi regime needed some good news. They claimed to have won a great victory in Bahrain and this, together with the lessening of the pressure by rebels on the Northern border, was reason for great joy. They now approached the Dutch director Oets in Bandar Abbas to ask him to assist the Persians by chasing the Omanis from Larat and Qishm; the Dutch would receive enormous privileges as a reward.85 Oets was not impressed. He discreetly pointed out that the Persians who had so magnificently beaten the Omanis at Bahrain, should be able to chase the Omanis from Qishm without problems. This was a rather cynical attitude because at that moment Oets already knew of the Persian defeat at Bahrain.86

Still, no other solution remained for the Persians but to turn again to the Dutch for help. The moment was not bad. Some time before the Dutch had sent a very high-powered ambassador, Jan Josua Ketelaar, to Isfahan to negotiate an end to the chill in relations which had existed since the events with the Dutch representative in Isfahan of 1713. Ketelaar was a very clever and experienced negotiator. He was well versed in Oriental languages (he was the author of the first Hindustani grammar), and he had already earned a justified reputation in difficult negotiations in Yemen and Delhi. Ketelaar arrived in Isfahan in May 1717 and stayed for more than a year. The Shah and his chief minister Fath Ali Khan put Ketelaar under heavy pressure to give help against Oman, especially after the Omanis had conquered Bahrain. Ketelaar refused, telling the Jamool al-dawla that he had no power to divert ships from their ordinary missions (and that the captains of Dutch ships knew he was not allowed to issue such orders to them) and that the Dutch ships, designed for trade between deep water ports, were not equipped for warfare, and could not be used in the shallow waters off the Arab coast.87 There was not much truth in what Ketelaar said, but the Persians would probably not know that. The Persians now threatened that they would call the Portuguese for help and that they would grant them all the privileges they had promised the Dutch. Ketelaar was not impressed and told the Persians that they could do as they liked because this was not his affair. The Persians now opened negotiations with Father Antonio Desterro, a Portuguese Catholic priest established in Isfahan who also acted as Portuguese envoy to the Persian court. Father Antonio suggested that the Persians should send an Ambassador to Goa. The Persians were not satisfied with this (how could they send an Ambassador to Goa when the seaways were controlled by Oman) and tried again to convince Ketelaar. Ketelaar replied that he had no powers and that the Governor General in Batavia was the only Dutch authority to be able to order Dutch ships to intervene in warfare. He suggested that the Shah send a formal request to Jakarta with the ships which were ready for departure in Bandar Kong. The Persians were not happy yet, but they grudgingly consented in making formal treaties with the Dutch on the old points of dispute, if the Dutch would give free passage to their Ambassador to the Viceroy in Goa. This concession was made and Ketelaar got as a reward the fermans he wanted. Having completed his mission, Ketelaar left Isfahan.88

84 ARA, VOC vol. 1928, fol. 31, 32, 179, 186; Generale Missiven, vol. 7, p. 407 (the building of the new Dutch establishment in Bandar Abbas was delayed because all masons were recruited by the Persians for repairs to the fortress of Hormuz). Lockhart, Fall, p. 115-116 is vague in his account of the events.
87 ARA, VOC vol. 1913, fol. 497-499; Lockhart, Fall, p. 402-404; Generale Missiven, vol. 7, p. 377 (6-12-1718). The many papers of Ketelaar’s embassy and his diary can be found in VOC vol. 1913. There is also a book on the mission by a German military officer in the Dutch service: J.G. Worms, Ost-Indien und Persische Reisen (Dresden 1737). The manuscript of the Hindustani grammar in ARA, Sypesteyn-papers supplement 2.
88 ARA, VOC vol. 1913, fol. 131. The original treaty was kept in the Archives.
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There had also been negotiations between the Persians and the French. The French consul in Shiraz, Padéry, although formally under the orders of the Consul General in Persia, Gardane, had been negotiating with the Persians about a common action against Oman, against the will of his superior. Padéry had some powerful friends in France, but the real significance of this unauthorized approach is very little and Gardane’s negative judgment about the plan was right. Nothing came of it.89

The Dutch were not yet free from all problems. On the road from Isfahan to Bandar Abbas, Keteelaar died on May 12th, 1718.90 The Persians now tried to compel the lower ranking Dutch authorities in Bandar Abbas to make concessions. They told the Dutch that the Omanis had the idea that the Dutch ships which were to arrive from Batavia were destined for war against them and that the Omanis would certainly attack the Dutch. They also tried to keep Dutch ships from departing from Bandar Abbas, which only earned the Dutch reaction that if the ships could not leave, the letter of the Shah could not be carried to the Governor General and possible Dutch assistance would come later still.91

No other solution remained for the Persians but to wait for the Portuguese. Indeed, a Portuguese fleet arrived at the end of 1718 in Bandar Kong. The Portuguese came with a squadron of four large and well-armed square-rigged ships of European construction, a formidable fighting power. Its effectiveness was probably hampered somewhat because it was not manned with skilled and disciplined European soldiers and sailors, but mostly by people from India and Africa. Before taking any action, the Portuguese first

of the Governor General, but I could not find it in Jakarta although it figures in inventories.

89 Kroell, Louis XIV, p. 67-69.
90 ARA, VOC vol. 1913, fol. 260; Lockhart, Fall, 404; Worms, Reise, p. 304-305. The monument erected on Keteelaar’s grave was still there in 1821 (it can be seen on a picture of Bandar Abbas in an article by A.W. Stiffe in Geographical Journal, vol. 16, p. 212).
91 ARA, VOC vol. 1928, fol. 167-168 and VOC vol. 10435 (letter from Bandar Abbas 1-12-1718).

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wanted some matters settled: formal privileges as promised and payment of the arrears of the revenues due to them and reimbursement of the cost of sending this fleet. The Persians were not quick to fulfill their promises. As a result, the Portuguese fleet waited in Bandar Kong for Persian concessions. The Omanis did not wait until the Portuguese were ready to attack them, but started to provoke them into action. An Omani fleet made derisive demonstrations in sight of the Portuguese ships and the Portuguese pride could not stomach this. In January 1719, the Portuguese came out of Bandar Kong. The Omanis retired to the shallow waters off Julfar where in an area of their choosing the Omanis offered battle. The Portuguese claimed to have obtained a victory, but the truth was that losses were fairly evenly divided. At the end of the day, the Portuguese ships retired to Bandar Kong while the Omani ships entered the port of Julfar. The next day, a new battle was fought. This also was not really decisive, but at the end of the day the Portuguese retired to Kong again while the Omanis went to Qishm. These final movements show the real result: the Portuguese force had been unable to defeat the Omanis or even wrest Bahrain or the control over the waters around Qishm from them. Next, the Portuguese retired to Goa and left the Persians with their problems.92 The Persian army passed its time in trying to subdue ‘rebellions’ of the Arabs of the Persian coast and of Huwayza, without achieving anything substantial.93

92 ARA, VOC vol. 1964, fol. 114-115; VOC vol. 1947 (Persia part 2.), fol. 49-52, 69; Maman-Clairac, Histoire, pp. 131-133 also considers the Portuguese to be the losers of the battle; Generale Missioun, vol. 7, p. 506; Lorimer, Gazetteer, historical part p. 70 (who considers a Portuguese victory); Evora, Biblioteca publica cod. CXVI-1-38, p. 311-324. There exists a printed Portuguese poem on their ‘victory’: Euentus Lusitanarum classis que ad Persiam profecta est by Franciscus Gyraldes (s.l.d.n.t.). The author was a participant in the battle, cf. Relaciones, p. 352-353. The French sources on the events are cited in Kroell, Louis XIV, p. 65-66, who rightly judges that Lockhart, Fall, p. 116 and 146, is wrong in attributing the failure of this Persian-Portuguese alliance to the offers of French assistance against Muscat by the unofficial French consul in Shiraz, Padéry.
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The war was now at a stalemate. The Persians were unable to do anything against the Omanis. The Omanis took no new action. Their Imam Sultan bin Sayf had died in April or May 1719, and this untimely death was followed by a long period of instability. Sultan bin Sayf had only left a son of twelve, Sayf bin Sultan, and there was a difference of opinion in leading circles in Oman whether this small boy could be Imam. This would anyhow clash with the views of Ibadhi Islam prevailing in Oman. For a short time, Sayf bin Sultan was Imam, but then a palace-revolution put another member of the Ya’ariba family, Muhanna bin Sultan, in his place. In 1720, Muhanna started peace negotiations with Persia. At first, these negotiations went well. The Persian commander in the war against Oman, Lutf Ali Khan, was well aware that no other solution remained to him but to make peace. A provisional treaty was reached already in 1720. According to this, the Omanis would give up all their conquests but would receive a place on Qishm to repair their ships, and a tribute of 4,000 tuman or 127,500 guilders in exchange for Bahrain. The Persians would forbid the Portuguese to trade in Bandar Kong on the condition that the Omanis would defend Persia against a Portuguese attack. Qishm and Larq were instantly returned to the Persians. But Muhanna bin Sultan was not popular with many Omani leaders, and after a short civil war, another member of the family, Ya’arib bin Abu ’l Arab was put in his place as regent. Ya’arib was less satisfied with the treaty with Persia and refused to give up Bahrain until a more advantageous treaty was concluded.

Lutf Ali Khan then gave orders that the Omani ambassadors, who were in Kong negotiating with him, were to be put in prison (end of 1720). Finally in 1721, Persians and Omanis agreed that Bahrain would be returned to Persia on payment of 6,000 tuman, almost a quarter of a million guilders, considerably more than earlier stipulated. The sum was paid at the end of 1722, and Bahrain was returned. According to a later source, the restitution of the island was reached by the intervention of an Arab Shaikh, Muhammad bin Majid.

It seems that the Omani possession of Bahrain had not been without problems. Hamilton, an English traveler who visited Oman soon afterwards, writes that after the Omani conquest ‘the honest pearl-fishers deserted it whilst the Arabs kept possession, who finding that their new establishment could not defray the charges of keeping without the pearl-fishers ...’

Peace was restored although confidence in the safety of shipping was not great. As late as May 1722, the Shah issued an order that French merchant ships should be protected by Persian soldiers against ‘Muscat pirates’.

It is difficult to make an estimate of the influence of this intermittent war on the historical evolution of the countries of the Gulf. Its events were in themselves not so very important. Certainly, the weakness of Persian power in the coastal area became very clear, but it remains doubtful whether this weakness was a consequence of the war or whether the war was simply a consequence of this weakness. Carré’s travel in the 1670’s shows that Persian authority in the Dutch archives of such an attack.

96 ARA, VOC vol. 1983, fol. 115; VOC vol. 1967, fol. 732-732v; Generale Missiven, vol. 7, p. 573 (30-1-1723). An indication of the more aggressive policy of the new Omani government might be an attack on a Dutch ship in 1721, mentioned in Risso, Oman and Muscat, p. 14, but we found no mention in

97 ARA, VOC vol. 10435, letter of 1-8-1721: 6000 tuman or 255,000 guilders; VOC vol. 1983, fol. 150; Generale Missiven, vol. 7, p. 630-631 (30-11-1723). The French Consul Padery, quoted in Kroeck, Louis XIV, p. 51 mentions 9,000-10,000 tumans, while the French Consul-General Cardane has the more realistic amount of 160,000 écus.
98 Niebuhr, Beschreibung, p. 330. Floor, ‘Bahrain project’, p. 147, seems to have overlooked the report in ARA, VOC vol. 1983, fol. 150 about the peaceful restitution of Bahrain and incorrectly supposes that Shaikh Jabara of Tahiri conquered it for the Persians, although the document he quotes (VOC vol.1999 should be 2009 - p. 47) has no word about Jabara, who is mentioned for the first time in 1728.
100 Schinkoroiit, Regesten, p. 427.
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Huwala area did not amount to much. The two chief diseases of the Persian Empire were the constant border-wars in the North (Caucasus and Afghanistan) and the inability of the rulers to get their finances in order without destroying the economic vitality of the country. The failure of the Safavi dynasty to safeguard the Northern border and to keep their finances in order was a greater disaster than the relatively small problems in the Gulf area. It seems rather that the poor performance of Persia in the Gulf was caused by its general weakness.

The Arabs had become quite a power in the area, but they were very much divided among themselves. The first indications of a set pattern are already appearing. Oman became divided into a Western and an Eastern tribal conglomerate, a division which later would materialize in the rise of two political units: the Emirates of the West around Rahma bin Matar in Sir and the Imamate in the East centred on Nazwa. The Huwala of Persia's coast were less and less willing to accept Persian authority, and were in conflict with the Utub, the maritime section of the Al Hasa Arabs, about the pearl bank. The Shiite peasants and traders of Bahrain and of the Qatif-area were without military power and had to submit to the more warlike groups surrounding them. The Arabs of the marshy area at the head of the Gulf were being a menace to the Ottoman authority and made use of the conflicts between the Ottomans and the Shah as a lever to acquire more power. The war had accentuated these developments to a great extent. The history of the Gulf was more and more becoming a complicated texture of conflicts and alliances between the Arab tribes.

The Europeans were to become losers in this development. They do not appear to have been very much aware of the dangers. Profits in Dutch trade had not suffered very much from the war. We do not have the figures of English trade, but it also seems to have continued with good profits. The Europeans depended chiefly on the economic vitality of Persia and were not really aware that Persia was on the brink of a general collapse. The attitude of the Dutch is typical: by building their new establishment in Bandar Abbas as a fortress they were showing expectations that they would need to defend their stocks and people against local disturbances, but they still expected large profits. At sea, there were no serious problems for the Europeans. There usually was a small Dutch ship on station, which was used for transportation between Basra and Bandar Abbas, and since 1716, the English had equipped two local vessels for naval patrols. The level of the expenses for this as well as for the Ketelaar mission shows that the Dutch and the English were expecting that trade would go on. This was an error.

The disappearance of the Portuguese from Kong was seen as a manifestation of Portuguese weakness, but it may have been as well an indication that the trade of merchants from India with the Gulf was declining. For the traders from India, the decline of Basra in local troubles must have been another great setback. Soon, this decline of the trade of merchants from India would manifest itself far away. In the Mediterranean, the decline of Dutch trade with the Ottoman empire would finally cease in the 1730's because spices and textiles from India were brought to the Ottoman ports of the Mediterranean by Dutch ships instead of by caravans from Basra. In this way the Gulf lost part of its economic function which must have caused more impoverishment and instability: a vicious circle.

102 Istanbul, Bashbananik Arshivi, Mühlime defteri 111 p. 113; facsimile in Aba Hussein, ‘study’, p. 102, cd Slot, Origins, pp. 70-72.
103 Klerk de Reus, Historische Ueberblick, appendix 9.
104 Lockhart, Fall, 398 for the English ship. The Dutch ship figures in the annual lists of the naval force in Asia annexed to the report by the Governor General to the Gentlemen Seventeen in the Overgekomen Brieven in the archives of the VOC.
CHAPTER 7
THE AFGHAN CRISIS AND THE ARAB TRIBES

the position of the Arab tribal leaders in South-Eastern Persia and Sir

During the years following the peace treaty between Oman and Persia complex political events generated an entirely new power structure in the Lower Gulf area. Persian power was at an even lower level than it had been before the war. Theoretically, the Dutch and English or even the Portuguese would have been able to fill some of the gaps but they did not do so. For this there was a very good reason. The political disintegration of Persia had also economic effects: the importance of the Gulf trade of the European nations diminished to a point near extinction, and, consequently, seeing that the Gulf had no economic importance any more, the highest European authorities declined to enter in adventures proposed by their representatives of the Gulf. The Turks had no influence at all in this area and Oman was weakened by civil war.

It was into this gap that Arab tribes who lived on the Northern coast of the Gulf started to expand their influence. At the same time, the area of Julfar, the North-Western province of Oman, started to act as an independent power. There were probably already tribal connections between the Julfar area and the tribes of the Northern coast. The Ruler of Julfar, Rahma bin Matar, was several times involved in affairs on the Northern side of the Gulf. The actions of the Arab tribes also had a strong influence on the future of Bahrain.

For the first time, European sources repeatedly mention the names of several of the most prominent Arab Shaikhs in the area. Before turning to the chronological sequence of events we must try to describe briefly their position in the unbalanced power structure of the Gulf. Basically there were four Arab elements in the history of the Lower Gulf at that time. The four Arab Shaikhs we encounter
in the documents could manifest themselves in different ways. Of course, they were chiefs of larger or smaller tribes and one of the very real foundations of their power was that they had a number of armed men at their command. Some of them were able to build up even larger multi-tribal structures, in this manner they could acquire considerable armies. In many cases, such structures were rather ephemeral and only the Shaikh of Jufar was able to found a more durable perennial multi-tribal ‘state’. The same tribal chiefs may be described in European sources as big merchants and that is right: as head of their tribes and often as entrepreneurs in pearl diving, they had ships and revenues which enabled them to take part in the economical life on the Gulf. The considerable wealth the Shaikhs could acquire enabled them to find yet another way of increasing their wealth and power. They could buy from the Persian authorities highly lucrative offices like Chief of Customs (Shahbandar). This was however a risky investment, the instability of Persia meant that a Shaikh never knew for how long he would be able to keep his office as Shahbandar.

The most successful of the Shaikhs mentioned in this period was Rahma bin Matar al Qasimi, the Amir of Jufar. Some sources refer to him as connected with the Huwala but it is not clear with what branch of the Huwala. He could be considered as the quintessential Huwala leader: Sunni, showing Arab solidarity against Persian and English encroachments and powerful on both coasts of the Gulf. Some early Dutch sources refer to him as one of the wealthiest merchants of the Gulf. From the early beginnings it is clear that Rahma commanded not just one tribe, but a whole federation. Rahma Rahma had been one of the commanders of the Omani forces besieging Hormuz in 1718 and as such he had been in touch with the Dutch. He also participated in the Omani civil war, where he figured as the most powerful tribal leader in the North-Western area. The core of his military force seems to have consisted of Shihuh tribesmen and he even had some artillery. The civil war in Oman brought Rahma virtual independence: from this period on, Jufar was practically an independent state. The fact that he was based in Julfar on the Southern bank of the Gulf usually protected the Shaikh of the Qawasim against the cupidity of Persian officials which often caused considerable damage to other shaikhs who were established more within the reach of Persian power. There are indications that his town Julfar already had its own long-distance trade independent of the Persian or central Omani economies.

The other Arab Shaikhs lacked the advantage of distance from Persian power, they had no stable base. The most powerful of them was Shaikh Rashid of Basidu on the Western extremity of Qishm. It is not clear to which tribe this Shaikh belonged. Lorimer cites him as a Qasimi, but there seems to be no real proof in English sources of this, although a Dutch source mentions rather close links with Rahma bin Matar. Rashid’s town, Basidu on Qishm, was inhabited by merchants from Julfar, from Bandar Kong (in the area of the Marazik, one of the Huwala tribes which later was closely connected to the Qawasim) and from Muscat. There is no indication that he

1 This Shaikh Rahma has already been mentioned in the previous chapter as one of the commanders of the Omani force which attacked Hormuz. The first reference to the al Qasimi is much earlier, in 1648, when one of its members was among the Omani negotiators of the truce with Portugal of 1648 (see before, p. 160). Rahma is referred to in the Omani chronicles as one of the principal leaders of the Ghofiri faction (Badger, History p. 111 and Ross, Annals, p. 63-64 where he commands an army of people whose speech was ‘like the chirping of birds’, which probably indicates Shihuh tribesmen). His connection with the al Haram is indicated in the Kniphauser report fol. 11v-12 (Floor, ‘Description’ pp. 169) and in EGD 9-9-1761.

2 See p. 158.

3 Lorimer, Gazetteer, Historical part, vol I/1a, p. 96, tells that the Shaikh of Ras al Khaima(Jufar) established himself in Basidu. From Lorimer, this story found its way into the EI (article ‘Kawasim’ by G. Rentz in vol. 4, pp. 777-778). No reference in English documents confirms this. It rather seems that Lorimer took Rashid of Basidu for Rashid bin Matar, Rahma’s successor in Ras al Khaima since 1760. References to Rahma as a close ally of Rashid in ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3424v-3426 (Dutch Cammon diary 22 V 1727 and 30 V 1727). Rashid’s widow fled to Ras al Khaima after the death of her husband: EGD 10-7-1736).
belonged to the Banu Ma'in of Laft on Qishm, the tribe of the later very prominent Abdul Shaikh which followed a completely different political course. Rashid is first referred to, already as an important person, in a Portuguese source of 1716. An unproven possibility is that he belonged to the Marazik whose area was just opposite Basidu on the mainland around Bandar Kong; Rashid was a prominent inhabitant of Bandar Kong before 1720. While Bandar Kong went into a rapid decline after 1722, Basidu took over its economic function. Shaikh Rashid several times tried to extend his power by acquiring the office of Shahbandar of the Persian harbours. For some time, it seemed as if Basidu might become a second Hormuz, especially because Shaikh Rashid followed a liberal economic policy as long as he was able to do so.

Another powerful Arab chief was Shaikh Jabara of Tahiri on the Southern coast of Persia. This Jabara seems to have acquired his wealth and power mainly by being an important man in the retinue of high Afghan dignitaries, but later he was one of the first personalities of the area to rejoin the Safavi side. His Nasur tribe was one of the most numerous sections of the Huwala. Sometimes, he operated together with Shaikh Rashid of Basidu, whose widow he finally married. Like Shaikh Rashid he was interested in acquiring Persian dignities.

4 ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3424v-3425 (Dutch Camron diary, May 1727) and VOC vol. 2016 (Persia part 1) fol. 109.
5 The Banu Ma'in (who were not Huwala) are first referred to in the Kiippershausen report, which calls them a section of the Huwala called Banu Temim, which may indicate an origin from the interior of Arabia (=Floor, 'Description' p. 177). Niebuhr, Beschreibung, p. 329, calls them Ben Amin.
8 Lockhart, Nadir Shah, pp. 6, 79, 108 is not too accurate on the facts, cf ARA, VOC vol. 2152 fol. 7709 (Dutch Camron diary 30-10-1729) and EGD 19-6-1737.

The Afghan Crisis and the Arab Tribes

In later stages, two other branches of the Huwala, the Al Ali of Sharak and Qays and the Ubaydli of Nakhlu also played an important part in events on the Gulf. They were sailors and for some of the time more or less followed the lead of Shaikh Rashid of Basidu.

The tribal leaders and Huwala groups mentioned above followed more or less the same line until halfway through the 1730's when the increasing grip of Persian power caused a division amongst them. In the remainder of this chapter we will see how they responded to the chaotic situation which was caused by the disintegration of Persia in 1722.

Events during the time of the power vacuum, 1722-1727

Events in the Gulf area were connected to events happening in Persia, and were influenced by Afghan incursions and the downfall of the Safavi dynasty in 1722, but only to a certain extent. Bandar Abbas was very far from Isfahan, and the road which connected the two places went through areas in which control by the central government of Persia had always been weak. As a consequence, events in Bandar Abbas developed rather differently. In this book more attention will be paid to events in the Gulf area and events in central Persia will be passed over very summarily.

Just after the end of the long war between Persia and Oman, the situation on the Northern border of Persia had become explosive. The Shah dismissed his Chief Minister Fath Ali Khan and the Commander of the army Lutf Ali Khan, a nephew of this Minister. This led to many rebellions and late in 1721, the Afghan leader Mahmud of Qandahar marched to the South, defeating all Persian troops he found on his way. In March 1722, the Persian army was virtually annihilated and Isfahan came under siege. One of the Safavi princes, Tahmasp, managed to escape from Isfahan, but the
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Shah remained in the besieged town and had to surrender his capital and empire to Mahmud in October 1722. The Afghans were able to occupy a large portion of Persia, but pockets of resistance remained around several Safavi pretenders of whom Tahmasp was later to become the most important. As loyalty to the Safavi was widespread in Eastern Farsistan, this area was the theatre of many battles between Safavi adherents of different kinds and the Afghans. This had consequences for the situation in the Lower Gulf.

Oman was not in a position to take advantage of the Persian troubles. It had its own crisis. The Imam Ya'arib bin Abu'l Arab was opposed by people who considered that the boy Sayf bin Sultan II was the legitimate Imam. An uncle of Sayf bin Sultan, Abu'l Arab bin Nasir, became the leader of this faction, which got hold of Rastak and Muscat. Ya'arib was unable to contain the rebellion, gave up the Imamate and retired to Yabrin. This led to a split in Oman because the Regent Abu'l Arab almost at once got into conflict with Muhammad bin Nasir, leader of the Ghafiri faction, who won the support of the former Imam Ya'arib bin Abu'l Arab and of the tribes of the Northwest, (the Banu Yas and the Banu Kitab) and also of Shaikh Rahma bin Matar, the Amir of Julfar. From this moment on, the division of Oman in two tribal factions, which was already apparent at earlier times, became more clear, and sources start to mention these factions by the names of Ghafiri and Hinawi (the Banu Hina are recorded already before as having been instrumental in the downfall of the Imam Ya'arib bin Abu'l Arab). The Omani chronicles tell a rather simplistic story about the origin of this conflict. Probably, there was a deeper background. We observe that the centre of gravity of Ghafiri power was in the North-Western part. In the first half of the seventeenth century, there had been consistent opposition in this area against the Ya'arib Imamate. There are some indications that the Ghafiri faction, which has a strong Sunni component, was a leading element in the warfare against Persia: Rahma bin Matar had been at Hormuz, while an Imam opposed against the

Hinawi, like Ya'arib bin Abu'l Arab had acted more strongly against the Persians than the Imams supported by the Hinawi. The Ghafiri area had already been developing its own external commercial relations separately from Muscat. In 1701 there was already some trouble about trade between Julfar and Canara on the Western coast of India. Later, coastal towns or villages like Ras al Khaima and Sharjah would become the places where exchanges took place between commercial shipping and the tribes of the desert.

In short, not only politically, but also economically, there were two distinct areas in Oman. These areas were not clearly defined, Oman was a patchwork of Hinawi and Ghafiri tribes. The stronghold of the Ghafiri area was at that time the Western part from the Dhahira to the coast of Sir. It was connected with the Huwala group on the Northern coast of the Gulf, many of whom were Hanbali or Shafi'i Sunnis as were several tribes in the Western part of Oman. It should be remarked that the Ghafiri-Hinawi dispute as it was in the Omani civil wars of the first half of the eighteenth century seems to have been rather different from that in later times: it seems to be more clearly a geographical and religious conflict than it was in later years, while also certain tribes changed allegiance. An example of such a change are the Banu Yas who supported the Ghafiri in the eighteenth century, but in modern times they were considered a Hinawi tribe.

The division in Oman was clearly beginning to be dangerous for the very existence of the only large Arab state on the Gulf. After a typhoon destroyed Muscat in August 1723, the adventurous French consul in Shiraz, Padéry, received the offer from an Arab Shaikh that he would deliver the town of Muscat to him within two weeks if the French would send two ships to help him. Wild suggestions, surely, but manifestations of a serious crisis.

Events in Bandar Abbas followed a rather sinuous path, only loosely connected with events in central Persia. At the end of the rule

10 Badger, History, pp. 102-106.
11 Badger, History, p. 105.
12 ARA, VOC vol. 1667, fol. 418-419.
13 Kniphausen report fol. 11v (=Floor, 'Description', p. 177).
14 Kroell, Louis XIV, p. 75 note 234.
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of Shah Sultan Hossein, Nur Allah Khan, the Beglerbeg (Governor of a large district) of Farsistan had been replaced by an Arab, Sayyid Abdallah Khan, former Wall of Arabistan. He was a member of the powerful Mushasha family of Arabistan and he played a rather sinister part in the events around the siege of Isfahan by the Afghans. Mirza Sayyid Ali, another member of the same clan, became Shakhbandar of the seaports. Mirza Abul Qasim had been appointed at the same time as Governor (Ja-nishin) of Bandar Abbas. The Afghans were too busy in other areas to be able to extend their influence in the area of the Garmisirat (the ‘Hot Lands’ of Eastern Farsistan) and so the Safavid officials were able to retain their influence for some time.15

The economy of Farsistan must have suffered heavily. This is indicated by the evolution of the Dutch trade figures (English figures are not known). After the normal year 1721/1722 with a profit of 649,538 guilders, Dutch profits fell quickly and were under 100,000 guilders in 1724/1725.16

Bandar Abbas was also in a difficult situation because the danger of Baluchi incursions continued. Mirza Sayyid Ali was formally recognized from afar by the Afghan Shah as Shakhbandar and later also as Ja-nishin of Bandar Abbas, probably in the hope that Sayyid Ali would recognize Afghan rule without seeing Afghan armies. On the other hand, Shah Mahmud had refused to maintain Sayyid Abdallah Khan who from the beginning had gone over to his side, presumably because he did not trust traitors very much.17

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THE AFGHAN CRISIS AND THE ARAB TRIBES

Mirza Sayyid Ali seems to have been inclined to obey the new rulers, but on his arrival in Bandar Abbas, he found out that the local garrison refused to recognize Mahmud Shah and the commanders of the Hormuz garrison tried to persuade him to go over to the Safavi side. It was not clear at the time what the Shahbandar thought, he retired to Bandar Kong, out of reach of the Bandar Abbas military. There he seems to have kept up some kind of relations with the Afghans, but for a long time he had little authority.18 The fact that the strategic position of Bandar Abbas was very weak and that on Hormuz there was still a strong garrison which kept to the Safavi side, made it rather difficult for the Afghans to extend their influence in Bandar Abbas as long as their army could not pass Shiraz and Lar which were still in the hands of their adversaries. At first, it seemed that the Afghans would come quickly. In the summer of 1723, Afghan forces attacked Shiraz, and the remaining Safavid officials in Bandar Abbas panicked. They asked the Dutch to help them to defend Bandar Abbas and Hormuz, but the Dutch did not have a high opinion of the value of the Safavid forces and refused to get involved. The Afghan advance slowed down in the autumn of 1723 and the Safavi forces took a little courage.

In the late autumn of 1723 a sudden conflict flared up between the English and the Safavid authorities of Bandar Abbas. One Englishman was killed and there was an exchange of artillery fire between the citadel and the English. An English ship which approached land to support the English factory was destroyed. The fights between the English and the forces of Mirza Sayyid Ali and the Ja-nishin Abul Qasim lasted eleven days during November, while the Persian soldiers plundered indiscriminately in the town. Finally the Dutch mediated in the conflict, which ended with the English having to pay a fine of 4,000 tuman or 160,000 guilders.19

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15 The best source for the events are the annual letters by the head of the Dutch establishment in Bandar Abbas to the Batavia High Government: ARA, VOC vol. 1983, fol. 8-166 (1722); VOC vol. 1999 fol. 7-78 (1723); VOC vol. 2016, (Persia part 1), fol. 4-35, (part Persia 2), fol. 5-45 (1723-1724); VOC vol. 2055, (Persia part 1), 41-104 (1725), (part Persia 2), fol. 5-46 (1726); VOC vol. 2079, fol. 3-26 (1727). Cf. Lockart, Fall, pp. 133-136, 138-140, 144-146, 148-149, 155-156. On Mirza Sayyid Ali cf. Aubin, ‘Sunnites’, p. 164, the information given by Aubin on the background of this dignitary does not fit with the information in the Dutch reports.
16 Kerk de Reus, Geschichtlicher Ueberblick, Appendix IX.
17 ARA, VOC vol. 2016 (Persia part 1), fol. 4-5.
18 ARA, VOC vol. 2016 (Persia part 1) fol. 105.
19 ARA, VOC vol. 2016 (part Persia 1), fol. 102-104. There is no English diary covering this period but details might be found in the reports from Bombay to London which I did not consult.
The Afghan government now tried to persuade other local powers to recognize their authority. Mahmud Shah then appointed Shaikh Rashid of Basidu as his Shahbandar in January 1724. Rashid wrote the Dutch to notify them of his appointment, but the head of the Dutch establishment declined to get involved in any struggle for power and refused to discuss political matters with Rashid. Rashid, well aware of the Safavi power in Bandar Abbas, did not press for recognition of his authority, and remained rather discreet.20

Finally, in the course of 1724, the town of Lar accepted Afghan rule and Khusrev Beg, an old Safavi official, was appointed Shahbandar of Bandar Abbas by Mahmud Shah. Khusrev Beg had a good reputation with the Dutch and they hoped that Mahmud would be able to maintain his position because under the rule of Khusrev there might be some chance of stability for Bandar Abbas. But the Safavi Ja-nishin arrested Khusrev before he arrived in the town and brought him as a prisoner to Hormuz. Nevertheless, the Safavi control over the area was not very strong. The Safavi authorities in Bandar Abbas were afraid that one day the Afghans might appear and they prepared to leave quickly if the necessity arose.21

It is hardly surprising that Basidu prospered in all these troubles: Basidu was on an island and could not easily be reached while Shaikh Rashid took no clear sides and received every trader. The Dutch entered into friendly relationship with Basidu, where the local shipping concentrated more and more.22 Nervous local authorities tried to move the Dutch to take over the responsibility for Bandar Abbas and Hormuz, but the Dutch did not want to cooperate in the defence of Bandar Abbas with the Safavi military whom they despised for their cowardice. They were somewhat interested in offers for the takeover of Hormuz, and the head of the Dutch establishment was seriously considering making use of the Persian suggestions by transferring the Dutch establishment to Hormuz; he asked the Batavia High Government for permission to do so if the situation got worse.23

Meanwhile, the Afghans did not make much progress in gaining control over Farsistan. They lost Lar again to adherents of the Safavi pretender Shah Tahmasp under Amir Mir Ali. Safavi commanders made contact with Bandar Abbas and in June 1725, Shaikh Rashid, who after his brief flirtation with the Afghans now pretended that he was an adherent of the Safavi, from whom he acquired the temporary administration of the office of Shahbandar, unexpectedly occupied the fortress of Hormuz and hoisted the Persian flag there. Rashid’s representative in Hormuz, Shaikh Ali, occupied the citadel of Hormuz and there also the Safavi flag was hoisted. Rashid remained in power in Bandar Abbas for a considerable time until the new Shahbandar Murtada Quli Beg arrived.24

In April 1726, a palace revolution brought the Afghan chief Ashraf on the throne of Persia instead of Mahmud, who had been unable to clear away the last Safavi opposition. The new Shah went about matters in a more energetic manner, also helped by the fact that the Safavi faction had finally broken up. In Lar, a certain Ahmad, a descendant of the Safavi by the female line, had established himself as Shah, but his reign did not last long. In the autumn Safavi control over Southern Persia collapsed again. New Afghan armies overran the Safavi opposition in Lar. This put Bandar Abbas again in an isolated position, and the local administration became panic and looked for protection from the Europeans.25

By the end of 1726, there were more changes of Safavi officials in Bandar Abbas. Muhammad Salih Beg became Na’ib (deputy-governor) instead of Murtada Quli Beg who became commander of Hormuz.26 Trade had practically come to a standstill in Bandar Abbas, but Basidu was still thriving. The English Company espe-

20 ARA, VOC vol. 2016 (Persia part 2), fol. 76-77.
22 ARA, VOC vol.2016 (Persia part 1), fol. 110; (Persia part 2), fol. 150 (the latter about Basidu as a refuge for Dutch brokers persecuted by Mirza Sayyid Ali).
24 ARA, VOC vol. 2034, fol. 50-51, 260-266.
25 Lockhart, Fall, 192-211, 274-281; ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3364v (Dutch Camron diary 10-9-1726) about repercussions in Bandar Abbas.
26 ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3398v (Dutch Camron Diary 8-11-1726).
cially encountered serious difficulties. The increasing English expansion in the area of Surat caused the first serious clashes between them and the Arabs of the Gulf, competitors of the merchants of India in the trade of the Gulf. By assuming power in that area, the English became involved in an intricate pattern of alliances and hostilities which caused them many difficulties. The cause of the first problems was Muscat. Oman lived in perennial conflict with certain parts of Western India and the English became involved in this conflict. Another source of trouble was that the English had still not given up their claim to half of the Bandar Abbas customs. Finally and worse still, the English were trying to get native shipping in the North-Western part of the Indian Ocean under their control, claiming that no native ships from India could come into the Gulf without an English passport.  

Trouble started in the winter of 1726 when an Omani ship, the Rahmani of Shaikh Mahmud ‘bin Jessan’, arrived in the Gulf. In Bandar Abbas it tried to capture a Surati ship under the English flag. The English President asked the Na’ib to order the Omani ship to leave Bandar Abbas. Next, the Rahmani sailed to Basidu. From there, a false report arrived that the Rahmani had captured an English ship. The English now lived in a constant fear because of the many Arab trankeys which were cruising off Qismh. They decided to make a show of force when the Captain of their ship Providence sent them a report of ill-treatment at Basidu. Arab sailors in the port there clearly showed their dislike and Rashid was unwilling to make amends for this. The English took this as a provocation. In the Gombroon diary, their Resident noted:

We have taken this notice of the affair as it seems to us a further confirmation of the necessity to break off trading thither and hindering others as much as possible, for he (Rashid) does not want inclination but only power to be a robber since he plainly protects and encourages those that are such to abuse and plunder even those if are trading with him and at his port.

In January 1727 the English grab(a grab or gurab was a medium size ship built in the Gulf or in India) of Captain Benson took an Arab ship and a grab, which were declared legitimate prize by the English Resident and sold at Bandar Abbas to show the Omanis that the English meant business. The English notified the Imam of this step and sternly warned him.  

One might ask whether all this violence was really necessary. The Dutch, while keeping a lower profile, had much less trouble with the Arabs. A few times, Arab ships covered by the Dutch flag had been taken by ships belonging to Arab Shaikhs, but some letter of expostulation to the Shaikh, sometimes accompanied by a relatively small present had always had good effect. The Dutch had more military power in the area than the English, having a garrison in Bandar Abbas, and they also had the heavily armed ships of their Company, but their use of naval force was limited to the protection of their own trade. The English had trouble because they carried on a policy of mare clausum as the Portuguese had done before them. The head of the Dutch establishment wrote in his letter to the High Government a lot of criticism about the English attitude. Rather illustrative of this is a remark by the Dutch head Pieter ‘t Lam who stated that the English tried to dominate the Gulf as a consequence of their conquest of Hormuz in 1622; the only remedy would be a Dutch occupation of Hormuz. Of course, the Dutch did not accept the English pretensions about the rule of the sea and they remarked about Rashid that he had manoeuvred rather cleverly by balancing between the Afghans and the Safavis and that Basidu had become a rich place because of the good treatment he gave to traders. With ill-hidden amusement they referred to rumours in Bandar Abbas that Rashid had brought his treasure to safety in Julfar and had

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27 EGD 5-1-1727; ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3405-3405v, 3420 and 3429v (Dutch Gommon diary 26-7, 27-7 and 6-6-1727); ARA, VOC vol. 2138, fol. 101. This policy was stopped the following year after orders from higher authorities: Generale Missiun, vol. 8, p. 213.

28 EGD November 1726-January 1727; ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3405 (Dutch Gommon diary 24-12-1726). There was already a dispute between Shaikh Rashid and the English because the latter claimed half of the customs revenues which should be paid (but probably were not) in Basidu: EGD 2-12-1726, as well as half of the revenues obtained by Rashid as Shahbandar of Bandar Abbas.

29 ARA, VOC vol. 2105, fol. 157 (remark by Pieter ‘t Lam).
called upon the Omanis to damage English shipping. They interpreted the cruising of English ships off Qishm as an attempt to fend off possible assistance to Rashid from the other side.30

The conflict between the English and the Arabs damaged English trade. In the spring of 1727, English ships did not dare enter the Gulf. Ships of the English Company started to cruise off Qishm to observe Arab movements. In Laft the English ships discovered a Portuguese ship and some Arab vessels. A ship from India sailing to Basidu was intercepted by them. Its Nakhuda was treated to a severe lesson 'to make these people sensible that the English are masters of these seas and that they are fully resolved to continue so by always keeping a proper force for that purpose in the Gulph.31

The victims of this policy took an acquiescent attitude, although at first Shaikh Rashid received an offer of 300 soldiers from Shaikh Rahma of Julfar if he wished to resist the English.32 Shaikh Rashid, seeing that trade in Basidu was suffering from the English boycott, sent a conciliatory letter to the English resident in Bandar Abbas. The English did not reply to this move of Rashid: they had already decided to stop all shipping from Basidu. Instead, they sent him a very menacing letter demanding instant payment of the sums claimed by the English out of the revenue collected by Rashid when he had acted as Shahbandar of Bandar Abbas. They reproached Rashid for having retired to Basidu and receiving the enemies of the Shah there, thus causing damage to the port of Bandar Abbas and to the cooperation which had existed between the Persians and the English since the time of Shah Abbas. Rashid, expecting shortly the arrival of merchant ships in Basidu, saw no other solution but to pay the English a first installment of 1050 tuman. The English did not intend to leave Basidu alone. They sent a ship to have a look at Basidu. The English investigating team saw that the port of Basidu was reasonably busy. There were several ships from India. One ship belonging to Rashid himself had just arrived with a cargo from Malabar. There was also a ship belonging to a merchant in Basidu named Severan, while a ship belonging to another local merchant called Madajee was expected soon. The expedition had rather acrimonious dealings with Rashid.33

During the summer of 1727, Afghan pressure on the Safavis of Southern Persia increased. The Safavi usurper Sayyid Ahmad, who had ruled Laristan for some time, reconciled himself with the Afghans and became Governor of Laristan under the name Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Shaikh Rashid travelled to Bandar Kang in July to buy peace from the Afghan Shahbandar Sayyid Ali. The Shahbandar extorted an enormous sum of money from Rashid. The English continued to put pressure on the shipping of Basidu. In June 1727, they intercepted a ship off its coast, owned by Arabs from Asalu, which had no English passport: apparently, the English now claimed full control over shipping, even of the local population, in the old Portuguese manner. The English were also angry with the Al Haram of Asalu because of the bad treatment given there to an English ship. In reply, the English wanted to burn Asalu and to stage a naval demonstration off Bushahr, but this plan was not put into action.34

In September of the same year 1727, Afghan forces approached Bandar Abbas. The commander of the Afghan forces, Zabardast Khan, entered Minab and the Shahbandar appointed by the Afghans, Sayyid Ali Khan, finally entered Bandar Abbas, but Qishm and Hormuz remained in the hands of the Safavi authorities.35

30 ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3405, 3424v-3425, cf. EGD 22-3-1727/.
31 EGD April 1727/, especially April 24th from which the quotation is taken.
32 ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3425v-3426.
33 EGD 26-4-1727 / 30-5-1727/ and the Dutch diary of 26-4 - 17.6.1727 in VOC vol. 2088 fol. 3420-3427 (the end of the matter is not referred to in the English diary because there is a gap in it). The text of a very arrogant letter by the English agent to Rashid in the EGD inserted under the date of 22-5-1727/. On the events see also ARA, VOC vol. 2105, (Persia) fol. 101.
34 EGD 27-6, 28-6 and 30-6-1727/.
35 VOC vol. 2105, Persia fol. 10-11,17-20; VOC vol. 2088, fol 3464, cf. some data on Sayyid Ahmad in Lockhart, Fall, pp. 300-301.
the Afghan intermezzo in Bandar Abbas.

The new administration did not like the situation it found in Bandar Abbas. Of course, the Dutch were as supporters of the Safavi not in the favour of the new authorities. As a consequence the rather outsize sepulchral monuments of the Dutch dignitaries Ketelaar and Oets just outside Bandar Abbas were damaged, native ships in the service of the Dutch were captured and the native staff employed by the Dutch were obliged by force to pay taxes. The English tried to reach an agreement with the Shahbandar Sayyid Ali Khan for cooperation in the destruction of Basidu, but there was no time, because Sayyid Ali Khan had fallen into disgrace with Sayyid Ahmad Khan and was carried as a prisoner to Lar. However, soon afterwards, the English were able to make an agreement with Sayyid Ahmad Khan for a combined operation against Basidu.36

Rashid of Basidu still tried to save himself by getting into favour with the Afghan general Zabardast Khan, but to no avail. Zabardast kept him as a hostage until he paid a very considerable sum and Basidu was plundered. The Dutch stopped trading gold there, and the economic situation in the area became worse than ever.37

In February 1728, while Sayyid Ali Khan was re-instated as Shahbandar, Rashid was finally released by the Afghans against payment of 2,500 tuman in cash and the same sum in written promises. Meanwhile, the situation in Bandar Abbas remained unstable, while Basidu regained its former prosperity. The English had a quarrel with Sayyid Ali Khan and threatened to leave Bandar Abbas for Basidu.38 Zabardast Khan had appointed the Baluchi Shaikh of Makran, Balal as governor of Bandar Abbas, which caused great fear there.39

This period also saw the last Portuguese intervention in the Gulf. The Portuguese had been able to profit from troubles in Oman. In 1728, the Omanis lost Mombasa to the Portuguese.40 The same year, a Portuguese naval force appeared off Qishm. The Portuguese, having heard of the chaotic situation in Lower Persia, seemed to have thought that this was an occasion for them to regain a foothold in the Gulf. It seems that in this operation in the Gulf, they cooperated with people from Sind.41 They occupied the customs house in Basidu and plundered the possessions of Rashid. The latter was unwilling to suffer new losses without making any resistance and called his Al Ali allies from Sharak to attack the Portuguese. The Portuguese had a considerable force of 500 Europeans and a number of people from India. They alleged that their plan was to chase the English from Qishm and to establish a residence there, and also to occupy Laqaq and Hormuz. They had seized the Shahbandar, Sayyid Ali Khan, whom they carried off to Goa announcing that they would be returning the following spring.

This Portuguese show of power did not last long. In 1729 the Portuguese had already been chased away from Mombasa and a Portuguese fleet in 1730 was not able to retain that place.42 They had no chance for any more action in the Gulf. Shaikh Rashid could return to Basidu, where he remained in trouble with the English, who repeated their claim that ships from Basidu should carry English passes.43

The situation in the Lower Gulf had changed dramatically at that time. Certain Persian dignitaries, like the Governors of the fortresses of Qishm and Hormuz did not know what to do in the struggle between Safavis and Afghans and with the threatening appearance

36 Lockhart, Fall, p. 404; VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3467v, 3471v, 3474v, 3480, 3493 (Dutch Cammon diary 9-10-1727, 29-10-1727, 5-11-1727, 20-11-1727, 12-12-1727).
38 ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3525v, 3534v (Dutch Cammon diary 20-2-1728, 29-2-1728); VOC vol. 2114, fol. 3455-3456 (Dutch Cammon diary 3 IV 1728).
39 ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3544 (Dutch Cammon diary 23-3-1728).
40 Boxer, Fort Jesus, pp. 75-86.
41 The principal Portuguese document on this is the journal of the travel in 1728 from National Library, Lisbon, PC 485, fol. 9-13v, cf. Relações, p. 394 and BPE arm. V-VI no. 6-8: documents on the expedition of colonel Cien-fuegos. The Dutch references in ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3476v-3519v.
42 Boxer, Fort Jesus, pp. 79-82.
43 EGD 2-12-1728)
of the Portuguese. They finally found a solution by offering their fortresses to the Dutch or to the English for safe keeping. Some officials had already been offering Hormuz to the Dutch for some time saying 'Why should you stay in this dangerous place: in Hormuz you can be kings'. So the Dutch were offered Hormuz while the English were offered Qishm. The English took over Qishm quite easily and discreetly. The hoisting of the Dutch flag on Hormuz caused much more scandal. The Dutch political council in Bandar Abbas knew very well that the Batavia High Government did not approve of plans for taking Hormuz, but the Head of the Dutch establishment, Pieter 't Lam, seized an offer by the commanders of the Hormuz garrison with both hands because he saw in the acquisition of Hormuz a way of obliging the Persians to pay off the enormous debts of 1,700,000 guilders the Safavi had accumulated. Negotiations did not proceed as well as had been expected. The first result was that in October 1728, the garrison of Hormuz agreed to fly the Dutch flag, but the garrison firmly refused to allow Dutch troops into the fortress. The Dutch had not been the only ones interested in taking control of Hormuz. Shaikh Rahma of Jufar also had a representative on the island who tried to persuade the garrison to recognize Rahma as lord of Hormuz, but the Dutch had won the race and Rahma's representative was sufficiently elegant in spirit to come to congratulate the Dutch deputation.

This reappearance of Shaikh Rahma bin Matar, a principal leader of the Ghafari-faction, in Hormuz gives us occasion to pay attention to events on the Southern coast of the Gulf. There, the Ghafari Imam Muhammad bin Nasir was fairly successful in expanding his authority. He had taken Suah with a large army, and with the help of a considerable force of tribesmen from the West: Banu Yas, Banu Kitab and Banu Na'im. Soon afterwards, trouble arose between the Imam and these tribes (the Omani chronicle tells a very picturesque story about this) and they left his army. In another confrontation between Ghafari and Hinawi forces, Muhammad bin Nasir was killed; the Hinawi Imam Sayf bin Sultan escaped from his keepers and, now being of age, finally became Imam on his own without a Regent in the Spring of 1728. This did not mean that the Ghafari faction was annihilated: they had only lost a leader and their army had not suffered much. The Ghafari tribes dispersed, but remained a considerable force. It soon became clear that Sayf bin Sultan was unable to extend his influence into the Ghafari area. On the contrary, his own territory fell piece by piece into the hands of the new Ghafari leader Abu'l Arab bin Himyar, who had started in the Dhahir area, the main Ghafari bastion, but soon extended his activity to the heartland of Oman.

It is very difficult to get the right impression of what happened next in the region of Bandar Abbas. There are some differences between the Dutch and the English Gombroon diaries, not just in their interpretation of the events, but even sometimes in the names of dignitaries involved. The consequences of hoisting the Dutch flag on Hormuz were serious. Until then, the Afghans had left Bandar Abbas more or less alone, but now they decided, possibly at the instigation of the English (as the Dutch supposed) that they should do something about the situation there. Ashraf appointed Sayyid Abdallah Khan as Governor of Garmsirat (the coastal area) and sent Barud Khan, who had already been appointed as governor of Bandar Abbas instead of Muhammad Salih Beg, to his town to arrest the leaders of the Dutch and to send them to Isfahan. At least this is the English view.
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The English, wanting to show their sympathy to the Afghans, carried Afghan troops to Qishm and Larak in order to occupy these islands. Meanwhile, the Afghans and the Dutch were involved in a strange kind of play. The Dutch wrote to Zabardast that they had only taken Hormuz into temporary keeping because the English were planning to establish themselves on the islands and sent proofs of these plans. Zabardast Khan wrote an answer to the Dutch congratulating them that they had not left Hormuz to be taken by the English. The Dutch diary describes matters in a way which is not like the English description at all. It is almost impossible to judge the events in their right value: the Dutch may have been inclined to colour their account fearing criticism from Batavia, while the English were not fully informed of the Dutch motives.

On December 17th 1728, a representative of Barud Khan arrived at the Dutch residence with a very polite letter in which Barud Khan announced his arrival in Bandar Abbas the next day. When conforming to custom, the Dutch Head with his two deputies rode out to greet the Khan, they were summarily arrested. The three arrested were the Head Pieter 't Lam (who just had received the news that his request to be replaced was granted and that the Basra Resident De Cleen would succeed him), the Koopman Molengraaff and Michielse who had been preparing to go to Basra as Resident. Sayyid Abdallah Khan then arrived in Bandar Abbas and maltreated the Dutch prisoners. One of them, Michielse, died in prison. The Khan then asked a ransom while saying that he had orders to send the prisoners to Isfahan. He also asked the English for assistance in the recovery of Hormuz. But the Dutch were quicker. They used their small force of European and Balinese soldiers to attack Abdallah Khan's house and tried to liberate the prisoners. When, after having rammed the doors, the Dutch entered the courtyard of the house, Abdallah Khan, who had been sitting there smoking a hookah, fled with his aides. The two Dutchmen burst out of the door of their prison, followed by their guards who wounded them with pistol shots. Pieter 't Lam was seriously wounded and had to be carried. Molengraaff was able to walk, supported by two grenadiers. Outside the house, there was an exchange of fire, where Molengraaff and his two helpers were killed. With a few more soldiers killed, the Dutch managed to return to their fortress, the Persians suffered heavy losses against the well-disciplined Dutch force. The Dutch residence was brought into a state of defence, but Pieter 't Lam died after four days of his wounds leaving a young widow whom he had married only a few weeks before.

Sayyid Abdallah Khan asked the English for help. According to the English diary this was refused, but the Dutch diary tells that the English gave the Persians gunpowder. The Dutch were in a difficult position. They were lucky to have their large new fortified residence, but there was an epidemic raging and many Dutch were ill and died. The old Portuguese citadel of Bandar Abbas dominated part of the Dutch residence and artillery fire from there, however inexpertly executed, caused damage. The remaining members of the Dutch Political Council courageously defended the compound. The Dutch were able to bring a heavy gun from their ships into the residence and started firing it. This caused the Persians to make some concessions. They offered peace and the restoration of their old privileges. Finally an agreement was reached by the mediation of the Nasir Shah and Shaikh Jabara of Tahiri, 'Dispenser' (pay-master) of Barud Khan, and Shaikh Ali, the right hand of Jabara and of Shaikh Rashid.

A full account of the events in the Dutch diary between 18 December 1728 and 8 January 1729 (ARA, VOC vol. 2114 fol. 3565v-3595v). Correspondence between the hostages and the remaining Dutch in the establishment in Bandar Abbas (often very emotional short letters written in pencil like the letters by Pieter 't Lam to his young wife) and other papers in VOC vol. 2138, fol. 225-238. Full report by the Acting Head Heevoeman in VOC vol. 2138, fol. 7-78. The English view in EGD 29-12-1728.

ARA, VOC vol. 2114, fol. 260v-2611, EGD 10-1-1729 and 29-1-1729. A detailed day to day description of the fight in the Dutch diary from 10-1-1729 to 19-1-1729. The start of the negotiations ibid 14-1 to 23-1-1729: ARA, VOC vol. 2088, fol. 3601v-3614. Jabara had, in cooperation with the merchants of
During the negotiations, the Dutch took no risks: they refused to visit the government building, unless a Persian hostage was given and they were allowed to keep armed soldiers with them even inside the building. The agreement concluded on January 23rd did not include any change of position on Hormuz. The Safavi garrison there continued to fly the Dutch flag notwithstanding English pressure to surrender to the Afghans. The Dutch paid 1100 tumans, but refused the Persian offer of freedom of customs or an equal share in the customs revenues as the English had in exchange for helping the Afghans to get Hormuz into their hands.

Shaikh Jabara received a nice reward from Shah Ashraf for his good offices in the negotiations with the Dutch. He was formally admitted within the ranks of Persian dignitaries, becoming Governor of Bahrain and receiving the title Bara Khan. Possibly, this was an easy way for the Afghans to have their authority recognized on Bahrain without being obliged to send an invasion force there themselves. The Shaikh of one of the most powerful Huwala tribes, the Nasir, certainly would have the naval forces to overpower the Al Haram of Asalu, who had possessed the island for several years. Shaikh ‘Sanct’ of the al Haram is recorded as an adherent of Shah Tahmasp and this may have been another reason for the gift to Jabara. Some authors presume that Jabara acquired Bahrain earlier and in another manner, but this opinion is based on a wrong understanding of sources.

Bandar Abbas, put pressure on Sayyid Abdallah Khan, asking him to make peace with the Dutch, otherwise the trade of Bandar Abbas would be ruined. EGD 31-12-1728).

52 EGD 10-1-1729.

53 Text of the agreement in ARA, VOC vol. 2138, fol. 238-244, diary notices in VOC vol. 2114, fol. 3613v-3614; EGD of the end of January gives the English view. The English Cymbroon diary (23-1-1729) mentions that the Dutch flag on Hormuz had been replaced with the English, which is contrary to the account in the Dutch documents.


55 Lockhart, Nadir Shah, p. 6 is not based on any source, while the survey of

In May, while the Dutch flag was still flying over Hormuz, the garrison of Qishm rebelled against the Afghans who had tried to take eight girls from the island. English help was not forthcoming and the Dutch also refused Barud Khan any help, but they offered mediation. The negotiations failed because Barud Khan did not keep his word. Barud also had difficulties elsewhere. He had to pay a large sum to Shaikh Balal of Makran in order to keep peace with this Baluchi leader. In August, the Dutch and English tried to reach a peace for Qishm, but things developed in a different way. Envoy from Qishm, carrying letters to the Europeans fell into the hands of Shaikh Shabuna, an Arab of unknown affiliations, but very friendly to the Afghans, who resided on the Eastern part of Qishm. Shabuna asked the Qishm people to surrender to him, but when they surrendered, Shabuna had a large number of them executed and their heads were sent to Bandar Abbas to be displayed there.

The Afghan domination of Qishm remained uncertain. Rumours were circulating of Afghan defeats in the interior of Persia. Soon, the Wakiil of Muscat, Abdallah bin Mas‘ud appeared on Qishm and plundered the town. It is not completely clear how this strange wave of expansion fits into the events of the Omani civil war. The Wakiil asked to buy arms from the Dutch which was refused. It is no wonder that in this situation, the Hormuzians tried to strengthen their almost forgotten ties with the Dutch. In September 1729 they asked the Dutch again to establish their residence on Hormuz instead of in Bandar Abbas. But the Dutch refused to take such dangerous steps. Soon the Hormuzians surrendered to the Afghans and lowered the Dutch flag.

56 ARA, VOC vol. 2152, fol. 7661-7663v, 7664v-7670.

57 ARA, VOC vol. 2152, fol. 7699-7700v. Reference to the Omani force on Qishm in VOC vol. 2152, fol. 7710-7711v.
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Some uncertainty existed in Bandar Abbas about possible actions of the Dutch authorities in Batavia in retaliation for the events of the winter of 1728-1729. In earlier years, the Dutch had reacted quite violently to offenses. In fact, the news of the death of Pieter 't Lam only reached the Batavia High Government in August 1729. No reaction came. The Batavia High Government considered the affair a consequence of bad behaviour by Pieter 't Lam who had disobeyed their strict orders to keep away from Hormuz and did not plan to take any action. Strangely enough, the Directors in Holland, although usually opposed to all military adventures, had more sympathy for 't Lam, but they were too far away to be able to instruct Batavia in time.58

Meanwhile, the English continued to act as policemen, hunting 'pirates'. There are several references to this in their Gomboon diary of the summer of 1729. The Ottoman authorities in Basra asked that an English ship would be sent to chase so-called pirates or rather adversaries from the area of Bahrain. In fact, an English ship visited all the ports of the Gulf and chased away Shaikh Khalfan and some 'pyrate trankeys'.59

Time was now running out for the Afghans. In September, they were still claiming victories against the forces of Shah Tahmusp and asked the Dutch for ammunition which was to be delivered to a reliable Arab Shaikh, Saved, son of Rahma of Jufar.60 The victories soon turned into defeats. In the late autumn of 1729, Shah Tahmasp's general, Tahmusp Quli Khan, chased the Afghans from Isfahan. Cut off from their homeland, many of the Afghans retired in the direction of Shiraz, Lar and Bandar Abbas. By the end of 1729, a representative of Tahmusp Quli Khan, Amir Mir Ali had arrived in Minab and was proceeding to Bandar Abbas.

58 ARA, VOC vol 744, Resolutions Batavia High Government 6-7-1728; ARA, VOC vol. 327 letter of the Gentlemen XVII of 15-9-1730; 'Something more could have been done to give assistance to 't Lam on his repeated requests...in that case Barud Khan and his rabble could not have acted...'.
59 EGD 31-7 and 29-8-1729j.
60 ARA, VOC vol. 2152, fol. 7707-7707v.

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Now, events in Bandar Abbas took a freakish course: while Afghan power all over Persia was crumbling, it was recovering in Bandar Abbas. When Amir Mir Ali arrived on November 29th in Bandar Abbas, there was some fighting with the Afghans. Amir Mir Ali obtained the support of one of the commanders of the garrison of Hormuz, Kalb Ali Beg, who had been ferried over to Bandar Abbas with his troops on an English ship. The Dutch did not even offer transportation, they only offered some strategic advice: to keep the Persian troops together as an organized body and not to let them straggle through the town. However, a disciplined fighting force was not in the Safavi tradition and Amir Mir Ali fled.61

Already on the 23rd of November Afghan forces had arrived from Muscat in support of Barud Khan who had not much trouble in chasing Amir Mir Ali back to Minab in early December. From Minab, Amir Mir Ali wrote on behalf of Tahmusp to the Dutch and the English asking them to help him to dispel the Afghans, but not much help was forthcoming. The English only wrote a letter in support of Tahmusp Quli Khan's order to the tribal chiefs of the coastal area to stop the Afghans before they reached the sea.62

In February, a letter came from Tahmusp Quli Khan ordering the Dutch to take Barud Khan prisoner and to deliver him to Amir Mir Ali. The Dutch laconically replied that Amir Mir Ali had fled from Bandar Abbas some time ago. In a new letter, Tahmusp Quli Khan informed the Dutch that the English had told him that the Dutch had not helped in the takeover of Bandar Abbas but that they had instead helped the Afghans, however, he, the Khan, wrote that he did not believe this and now asked the Dutch for help. By that time the Afghans had understood that their position was hopeless, even if they had been able to force Amir Mir Ali to retire. They started negotiations with the English and the Dutch with the intention of leaving the town in the hands of the Europeans while they themselves retired. The Arab Shaikh Muhammad bin Majid was appointed as governor by the Afghans, but the Shaikh refused the

61 EGD 5-12 to 16-12-1729j; ARA, VOC vol. 2152, fol.7719-7727.
62 EGD 5 XII-16-12-1729, 11-2-1-1730j; ARA, VOC vol. 2152, fol. 7616-7717v.
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dubious honour. The Dutch were quicker to react and took the Safavi fortress of Bandar Abbas over with a force of European and Balinese soldiers. The Dutch commander was afraid that the unused old Portuguese fortress, which was situated above this Safavi fortress and could cover it with its guns, might fall into the hands of outlaws, and ordered it to be dismantled. The Dutch duly notified Tahmasp Quli Khan of their takeover 'in the name of the legitimate ruler'.

Meanwhile the English agent, Horne, had been appointed by Shah Tahmasp as temporary Governor and Shahbandar of Bandar Abbas. So, Horne took over from the Dutch who had administrated the town. Of course, the English authority was limited by the fact that the Dutch held the fortress. Finally, a representative of Shah Tahmasp's general Tahmasp Quli Khan, Kalb Ali Khan, arrived and took over the town and the fortress.

With this, the Afghan intermezzo in Bandar Abbas was over, but there remained some pockets of resistance in the area. An Arab shaikh, Ahmad Madanni, dominated the area around Sharak from his fortress of Marbagh and received Afghan refugees there. He did not recognize Tahmasp's authority. Some Afghan leaders had fled to the area dominated by the coastal Arab tribes, but they had no luck there: many Arabs had reasons to dislike the Afghans and several were killed. Others managed to escape to the other side of the Gulf, to Julfar, where they were not well treated by Shaikh Rahma bin Matar.

In this way, the Afghans had ceased to be a power in the area of Bandar Abbas, but Shaikh Ahmad Madanni remained unchallenged for some time. He was even able to occupy Lar. This was only one of the many troubles suffered by the restored Safavi regime in

Bandar Abbas. The Persian hold on Bandar Abbas was uneasy, but it would last for the time being.

the Safavi restoration, 1730-1736

Contemporary and later historians often are impressed by the record of Tahmasp Quli Khan or Nadir Shah as this Persian Napoleon later called himself after he had pushed the Safavi aside and had in 1736 taken the crown himself. A closer scrutiny shows a less glorious image. Tahmasp Quli Khan or Nadir Shah's only significant victories were the defeat of the Afghans and the conquest of a large part of the Mughal empire. Neither the Afghans nor the Mughal Empire really represented a major military force in the world at that time. Nadir Shah's actions against Turkey were less spectacular although Turkey was then a very weak power. Nadir Shah's record as ruler of Persia was bad. His appointees were acting in a contradictory and haphazard fashion. The new regime was, notwithstanding the forthcoming rich booty from India, as bankrupt as the Safavi regime had been. Extortionate taxation to keep the military machinery moving and very bad logistic support for this machinery led to rebellions of whole regions and mutinies in the armed forces. In fact, Nadir's rule knew more rebellions than any of the previous two centuries. Worse still was the ambition, apparently partly inspired by courtiers from Southern Persia, to acquire a navy and to obtain control over the coastal areas of the Gulf. Only powers with healthy economies are able to bear the expense of naval power, which in those times cost much more to maintain than a land based army. Expensive ships and artillery had to be bought, and great expertise was needed to handle the large fighting ships of the 18th century. Persia had not sufficient ready money to buy expensive ships or to hire European experts so the Persian authorities were obliged to squeeze the necessary money and supplies out of the Southern area where prosperity was already declining.

It became clear very soon after their takeover in Bandar Abbas that the Safavi control over the area was not yet undisputed. Already in 1730, the area of Bandar Abbas was under heavy pressure from
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Afghan adherents. Two Arab leaders remained loyal to the Afghans while from afar Muscat gave them some support. The principal Arab leader supporting the Afghans was Shaikh Ahmad Madanii, lord of Marbagh, a place in the large valley behind the coastal mountain range which connects Nakhlul with Sharar. Marbagh is separated by mountainous country and salt marshes from the road between Bandar Kong and Lar: an excellent base for guerilla warfare. The other Arab supporting the Afghans was Shabuna, the leader of a marine tribe based on the Eastern part of Qishm. Afghan elements concentrated in the area controlled by Ahmad and started to put pressure on Lar while Shabuna was active around Qishm.

Two other important Arab leaders finally took the side of Shah Tahmasp. The most powerful of them, Rashid of Basidu, showed some hesitation. He had no particular reason to love either party so he kept a low profile for more than a year. Rashid seems to have been very afraid that the Safavi adherents would punish him, but at first he had no trouble. There remained a sword hanging over his head because he had never reached an agreement with the central authorities concerning the settlement of the accounts of his administration of the office of Shahbandar. Every new local government seems to have been toying from time to time with the idea of calling on Rashid to pay enormous sums because they claimed that he had not paid the Government the customs duties he had collected. On the other hand, Rashid claimed that the Persian authorities still owed him large sums. Dutch observers give no clear indication which of the two claims was true. Still, the matter of the unsettled accounts was repeatedly causing trouble for Rashid. One such case was when the Dutch, with the return of the Safavis, saw the chance of claiming the payment of the enormous debts of the Persian government to them. But the Shahbandar refused to pay because he had no money as long as Rashid would not pay him. He asked the Dutch to employ their ships to collect the money from Rashid at

67 ARA, VOC vol. 2254, fol. 82, 131, 145-146.
68 ARA, VOC vol. 2254, fol. 13, 23, 27-29; EGD 1-7-1730]; Lockhart, Nadir Shah, p. 65.

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Basidu. The Dutch seem at first to have thought of acting in this matter, but soon they began to distrust the Persians and limited their action to writing a letter to Rashid. Finally, in February 1732, Rashid submitted formally and most humbly to the Safavi. After this, Rashid seems to have returned to his earlier policy. We see new complaints in the English diary that native ships without English passes called at Basidu, a sure sign that trade had resumed as before.

It was rather foolish of the Dutch to expect that they would ever be able to recover from the new authorities a sizeable part of the money they had lent to Shah Sultan Hossein. The financial situation of Persia remained very weak. Even the trusty garrison of Hormuz was threatening to start a mutiny if it did not receive the arrears of its pay over many years. During the rule of Tahmasp and later of Nadir Shah, the area of Bandar Abbas was subjected to upheaval after upheaval because of the inability of the Persians to pay and feed their military.

Stranger than Rashid’s hesitating change of allegiance is the change in the attitude of the second important Shaikh, Jabara of Tahiri. Just before Ashraf’s defeat, Jabara had been appointed Khan of Bahrain, but he did not follow his former boss Barud Khan when this Afghan left Bandar Abbas. Instead, he took the side of Tahmasp and very soon, in May 1730, he was confirmed in his position as Governor of Bahrain by the Safavi. This seems a very lenient attitude of the Safavi to one of the chief Afghan henchmen but we should consider that the new Safavi administration was in urgent need of military support in the area where Ahmad Madanii and Shabuna were operating. Also, there was probably no way the Persians could conquer Bahrain at that moment and it seemed better to leave Jabara holding it in their name. Jabara’s friendship with the English who

70 ARA, VOC vol. 2254, fol. 1036-1037.
71 EGD 23-6-1733j.
72 ARA, VOC vol. 2254, fol. 146-150 (diary 16-11-1730).
were very close to the new Safavi officials may also have helped him.73

Until the early summer of 1732, war between the local Safavi commanders and Ahmad Madanni continued. In 1731 a new governor of Kerman was appointed who was to attack Ahmad Madanni. His name was Muhammad Taqi, a favourite of Tahmasp Quli Khan. This corrupt and inept courtier became a very important person in the history of the Lower Gulf in the coming years. Finally, on reports of the approach of larger Persian forces, Ahmad Madanni submitted and promised to deliver the Afghans who were with him to Shiraz and to pay a considerable indemnity. In exchange, Ahmad retained his powerful position near the crucial road between Lar and the coast. This was a very marginal victory for the Persians: Ahmad remained in position and could again become dangerous.74

In fact, events soon showed how unstable the Safavi position still was. Tahmasp Quli Khan had in 1732 deposed his master, Shah Tahmasp, and had put an infant, Abbas III, on the throne. Persia was now under full control of a Sunni general, although the country was still nominally ruled by the Shiite Safavi. In 1733, Tahmasp Quli Khan had to face the first large rebellion in the South East. Muhammad Khan Baluchi, Governor of Kuh-Galu, joined the Afghan side, while Shaikh Ahmad had not yet fulfilled the conditions of peace and surrendered the Afghans who hid in Marbagh. For a short time, it seemed that the Persian rule in the South would collapse again. But Tahmasp Quli Khan showed his military qualities in appearing, as quick as lightning, with his army in Muhammad Khan’s area and defeating him. Muhammad Khan fled to Marbagh where he was received by Shaikh Ahmad. Tahmasp Quli Khan despatched one of his commanders, Tahmasp Khan Yalayir, to put an end to Shaikh Ahmad’s power. This time, all ended in a full scale victory: early in 1734 Ahmad Madanni’s fortress was taken. Ahmad was a prisoner.

73 ARA, VOC vol. 2254, fol. 51; EGD January-February 1729.
74 The Dutch diary over the years 1730-1732 is full of mentions of Ahmad’s actions (VOC vol. 2254 fol. 203, 242, 968v, 985, 1001,1003, 1045, 1059-1063). The reference to Muhammad Taqi in ARA, VOC vol. 2254, fol. 987.

His son fled to Julfar. Muhammad Khan drew back to the area of Lingsa with a mixed band of Afghans and Arabs.75

The Persian authorities fell over each other in their zeal to mop up the last disloyal elements and managed to create a lot of confusion. The Dutch and the English were asked by the Persians to assist them in cutting off the retreat of the enemy, in cooperation with Rashid and Jabara.76 Operations were to be coordinated by Latif Khan a man, who had just been appointed by Tahmasp Quli Khan with the title of Derya Begi (Lord of the Sea or Admiral) to supervise a completely new venture: he was to make Persia a naval power by putting together a fleet. Latif Khan had lived for some time in Istanbul and was considered the second most powerful man in Persia after Tahmasp Quli Khan and Mirza Taqi, Tahmasp Quli Khan’s closest friend.77 The primary goal of the expensive naval venture was to break the Ottoman hold on Basra and so to bring the transit trade through the Gulf under Persian control.78

The Persian operations to cut off the retreat of the last Afghans and their supporters to the Arab side of the Gulf did not succeed: the fugitives were able to escape a combined force of Dutch, English and followers of Shaikh Rashid. It seems that a large part of the Baluchi, Afghan and Arab fugitives was finally employed in Oman by the Imam Sayf bin Sultan to contain the increasing Ghafiri opposition against his rule.79

The arrival of fresh soldiers for the Imam did not change the situation there very much because the new army of the Imam was completely routed by his Ghafiri adversary Abu’l Arab bin Hirmyar. Almost the only important tribal leader in Oman who remained true
to Sayf bin Sultan was Ahmad bin Sa'id the Wali of Suwar. At a certain
time, Ahmad too fell out with the Imam, but this conflict was solved
after some time. Oman was virtually cut in two parts.80

Rashid of Basidu was accused of having been the cause of the
escape of the Afghans and their adherents. He is alleged to have
shown his order from Latif Khan to some Arab friends, who had
then warned the fugitives. On Rashid’s side this may have been mere
imprudence, not treason. He himself suffered from it, because his
town Basidu was plundered by the Afghans. Latif, who seems to
have been a declared enemy of Rashid’s asked the Europeans to
arrest Rashid. The English arrested Rashid while the Dutch captured
his ship and gave it (luckily for them as later became clear) against
a written receipt to Latif.81 Rashid still had some friends. The Dutch
received an angry letter from Tahmasp Quli Khan asking why they
had arrested Rashid instead of doing useful work. They indignantly
replied that they had acted on written requests by Persian author-
ities. This was true, they had no reasons for a conflict with Shaikh
Rashid who was helpful in recovering local ships chartered by the
Dutch storekeeper which had been captured by tribesmen from
Sharak.82 The English, who had developed suddenly quite friendly
relations with Rashid, tried to shield him from the local Persians.83

Luckily for Rashid, Mirza Taqi, former Governor of Shiraz and
the closest aide of Tahmasp Quli Khan, who had just become Begler-
beg of Farsistan with the name of Taqi Khan, intervened. Probably
this dignitary was in urgent need of money. At first it was reported
that Jabara and Rashid were together fined the gigantic sum of
10,000 tuman (almost half a million guilders), but it later transpired
that in reality Taqi had offered both Arab gentlemen the opportunity
of renting from him the revenues of the Shabbandarate for 30 months
against down payment of this sum (the Shabbandar Muhammad

Salih Beg had fallen in disgrace). Rashid freely traveled to Basidu to
collect the money (which shows that he had liquid means available
of about the same size as the European East India Companies had
available in the Gulf!). Meanwhile Tahmasp Quli Khan cancelled the
offer of the office of Shabbandar by Muhammad Taqi to Rashid and
Jabar, appointing Mirza Isma’il. Rashid was now out of direct
danger and back in Basidu.84

The coasts of Persia were now under control of Tahmasp Quli
Khan’s officers. In 1736, the child Shah Abbas III died, and Tahmasp
Quli Khan now took the crown for himself, assuming the name of
Nadir Shah. This move was only grudgingly recognized by the
Europeans. Immediately after the operations against the Afghan
fugitives, Latif Khan approached the Dutch and the English in
Bandar Abbas to ask them to sell him ships for the Persian navy. It
was not very good timing. The English were rather disenchanted
with the Persians and were considering plans of leaving Bandar
Abbas and capturing some Arab ships to compensate their losses.85
The Dutch refused to sell with the explanation that they were willing
to protect the Persian ports, but not to engage in operations against
states bound to the Dutch by treaties like the Ottoman Empire, the
Mughal Empire or Oman.86 The English also refused, but there was
also English private shipping in the area and much to the disgust of
the President of the English establishment in Bandar Abbas, Latif
was able to buy three of these ships.87 In order to buy a fourth
European style, square-rigged ship, the Persians turned to Shaikh
Rashid asking him to sell them his Tawakkl. Rashid was not unwilling
but did not trust the Persians very much. Finally the sale and
payment were arranged by the Dutch acting as brokers. An interesting
aspect of this deal was the use of letters of exchange, the first

80 Badger, History, p. 138.
81 ARA, VOC vol. 2356, fol. 118-134; EGD April-May 1734f.
82 ARA, VOC vol. 2416 fol. 709.
83 EGD June-July 1734f; ARA, VOC vol. 2323, fol. 204; VOC vol. 2356, fol.
115-126.
84 ARA, VOC vol. 2323, fol. 207; VOC vol. 2356, fol. 35, 131-134; VOC vol. 2357,
fol. 237-238, 243.
85 EGD 3-5-1736f.
86 The mention of Oman in this context is not fully justified, the Dutch had no
treaty with Oman, there had been no more than an exchange of friendly
letters in the 1660’s and 1670’s.
87 EGD 6-7-1736f; ARA, VOC vol. 2357, fol. 454-465.
mention of the use of modern methods of payment by the Arab tribes in the Gulf. Numerous Arab tribesmen were hired with their ships. Latif also had a European naval adviser, the English Captain Cook, and now the Persian navy represented the most powerful fighting unit in the Gulf.

A naval base was established in Bushahr, a place situated in an area more loyal to the Persian Government than the Garmsirat, and the Persians also tried to attract the establishment of European Companies there. The new navy was never used for its original purpose of warfare against the Turks. The Persian regime continued to act on sudden impulses and never adopted a consistent strategy. The first diversion of naval means was caused by the sheer stupidity and greed of the local government in Bandar Abbas: the Shahbandar Mirza Isma'il and the Governor (Sultan) Amir Mir Ali. Shaikh Rashid was the unwilling cause of this incident. Suddenly, in the late spring of 1736, he died. The authorities in Bandar Abbas now saw the chance to settle their accounts and to enrich themselves. They sent a small force to arrest Rashid’s widow and to capture his considerable treasure. As the English Gombroon diary puts it:

They [the Persians] are likewise to try to get what they can from the Shaikh’s wife, but as she is a woman of great spirit and craft, it is said that she is already provided against their designs having called the Arabs from Julfar and other places to her assistance and that Basidore [Basidu] is now so full of them and a great number of rankeys about the island being resolved to carry the woman off if any force be attempted against her, so that if the Persians do not move cautiously, they may raise a flame which will bring a great trouble at Basidore and in these parts (EGD 10-7-1736).

When Persian emissaries arrived at Basidu, they indeed found a great number of Arab tribesmen ready to fight. They did not move cautiously and the incident ended in a general Arab rebellion on the Southern coast, while Rashid’s widow and her son Asskur took refuge with Shaikh Rahma bin Matar in Julfar. Before being able to use the Persian navy for the long-planned operation against Basra, Latif suddenly had to use his forces to contain this uprising. Arab ships plundered the coasts and one ship even attacked a native vessel in Dutch service. This ship was returned after a reasonably polite exchange of letters with the Shaikh of the Al Ali, Rahma bin Faysal.

As usual, the Persians turned first to the Europeans for help. The large European ships were ill-equipped for chasing the small Arab vessels, but the Europeans were willing to send a few ships to make a show of force around Qishm. For this purpose Persian soldiers were embarked on the Dutch ship Ritthem. An excursion was made to Qishm, where some groups of Arab vessels fled away. Finally, the Ritthem was able to capture two small vessels. Before giving them over to the Persians, the Dutch political council in Bandar Abbas interrogated the Arab sailors and upon their declaration that they were pearl fishers from Julfar, they set them free: apparently Julfar Arabs had a good reputation with the Dutch.

The events with Rashid’s widow caused trouble for Shaikh Jabara. He had married this widow and rented the customs of Basidu, and Latif Khan, suspecting that he had obtained the money of the widow (indelicately saying that nobody would marry an old woman except for her money), put pressure on him.

It must be admitted that Admiral Latif Khan now started to show that he had some good qualities. He managed to subdue the Arabs without using direct violence. In later history it is clear that Latif

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88 ARA, VOC vol. 2416, fol. 849.
89 References to Cook as Master of Equipment of the Shah’s navy in ARA, VOC vol. 2417, fol. 3595 and vol. 2448, fol. 79-83. Cook had been the captain of an English private ship which already in 1734 did errands for the Persian authorities in Bahrain: ARA, VOC vol. 2356, fol. 107.
90 ARA, VOC vol. 2357, fol. 449: the Persians offer the Dutch an establishment in Bushahr.
91 ARA, VOC vol. 2416, fol. 331-333; EGD 10-7-1736.
92 ARA, VOC vol. 2416, fol. 1389-1392; VOC vol. 2417 fol. 1445-1450; EGD 10-7, 12-7, 23-7 and 28-7-1736.
93 ARA, VOC vol. 2416, fol. 709, 814-815; VOC vol. 2417, fol. 4015-4016.
94 Generale Missiven, vol. 9, p. 826; ARA, VOC vol. 2416, fol. 1445-1450: resolutions of the political council in Bandar Abbas and instructions for the Ritthem; ibid fol. 1480-1484: report of the officers of the Ritthem with remarks about the ship from Julfar.
95 EGD 29-6-1737.
It must be admitted that Admiral Latif Khan now started to show that he had some good qualities. He managed to subdue the Arabs without using direct violence. In later history it is clear that Latif Khan was trusted by many Arab tribesmen. Two Arab Shaikhs with their tribes entered his service: the prominent Shaikh Abdul Shaikh of the Banu Ma'ain from Lafi on Qishm and the Shaikh Rahma bin Shahin of the Ubaydli of Nakhlilu.

The Persians rounded off their pacification of the coastal area by planning an action against Bahrain. For this operation Latif asked the support of the Dutch, but this was refused after much discussion in the Political Council. Later, the Dutch were accused by the Persians of having informed the Arabs of the secret plans for the operation against Bahrain, but I found no confirmation for these accusations. The English were also asked for help, they also refused, but there is no mention of accusations against them. The conquest of Bahrain was accomplished without much fighting. This contributed greatly to the prestige of Latif Khan with Tahasup Quli Khan. The motive for this expedition is not clear. Mirza Mahadi, a slightly inaccurate source, describes it as a punitive expedition. According to him, Jabara had heard of the plans and had fled to Mecca. Jabara's deputy did not put up much resistance. The current Dutch correspondence of that time contains a mention which makes it less probable that the expedition was directed against

Persian conquest of Bahrain. Jabara's loyalty to the Persians did not last. A year later, in 1738, it is reported that he joined a general movement of Arab tribes against the Persians after a defeat of the Persian navy against the Omanis. It is difficult to understand what really happened. A mere hypothesis, which does however fit the events better, would be that during the Arab insurrection after Rashid's death, tribesmen from the Northern coast (for instance the Al Haram, who had been dispossessed by Jabara in 1730) had taken over the island.

Next, the Persian government, lacking any sense of priorities but always responding to accidental, seemingly favourable occasions, became involved in a new adventure in the Gulf area. The situation in Oman offered an opportunity. The Imam Sayf bin Sultan found himself in a desperate situation. Over the years, opposition had been building up and finally Muscat, the main stronghold and the source of the Imam's trade revenues from Africa and elsewhere had fallen into the hands of his enemies. First, the Imam had been able to get some support from Baluchi refugees who had left Persia after the failure of their rebellion in 1734, but now the only way out for the Imam was to ask the Shah for help. The Persians now had ships and an active intervention in the Northwestern part of Oman would offer them the occasion to put an end to all support to the troublesome Arabs of the Northern banks of the Gulf by their brethren in Julfar and surrounding areas. The next Persian operations in the Gulf would finally not be directed against Oman and not Basra. The Shah started a disastrous war in Oman with an ill-disciplined army and an unskilled navy, being ill-equipped for warfare in the desert and on badly charted coasts full of inlets where enemies could hide. Over the next ten years this war would absorb most of the resources of Farsistan and would lead to the final political and economic collapse of a formerly rich province.

96 The sources concerning the Persian navy in 1742 contain a great many mentions to the Ubaydli and Banu Ma'in as crew on the Persian navy: see below p. 304-307. Abdul Shaikh was at a much earlier date connected with the Portuguese and a prominent inhabitant of Bandar Kong, cf. Auber, Ambassade de Gregorio Pereira Fidalgo, p. 23, 96, 121.

97 ARA, VOC vol. 2416, fol. 308-309, 937, 1034, 1053; VOC vol. 2417, fol. 3039.

98 EGD 3-5-1736, 17-5-1736f.

99 ARA, VOC vol. 2448 fol. 822.


101 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 884-885 and VOC vol. 2510, fol. 1097.

102 Badger, History, pp. xxvi, 130-132.