



## **THE WAVERING POWER**

### **The Portuguese hold on the Arabian coast of Oman**

**1622-1650**

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*To my wife...*

*...and to the brave men who gave their lives for the Portuguese flag in Muscat, 1650*

## **Acknowledgements**

My journey into this dissertation began with my long-lasting interest about the Portuguese presence in Hormuz and the existing fortress Afonso de Albuquerque built there in 1515. As I started reading about it, I realized how complex and dramatic this part of the Portuguese Empire's history was. Throughout this learning period, that shed some light into Portuguese activities in the Gulf during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, one detail caught my eye. The Portuguese had ruled Muscat and some of Oman's most important port cities as their base of operations in the region, for almost 30 years. Today, this part of Portuguese history is hardly recognizable by the general public. Yet, in Muscat, the two Portuguese forts, with almost 500 years of history, are among the top tourist attractions of the city, and along the Arabian coast of the Gulf there are many more elements whose origins can be traced back to the Portuguese. At some point in my readings, it became clear to me that this was the history I would like to study and write about. The Portuguese presence in Oman in the seventeenth century became my objective.

I'm not an historian, I'm a proud geographer. It was not an easy task for me to write this work. It took many hours of reading, thinking and writing. History has always been my life-long passion, but one thing is to read about it, another very different thing is to study and write an academic essay. These difficulties I have shared with just one person, my wife. She witnessed all the phases of the project, which means that she was there when I had my fears and questions, when I became stubborn and absent, and, above all, when I felt amazed and enthusiastic about what I was working on. For months she lived surrounded by battles, sieges, documents and decisions. The mysterious world of Portuguese-Omani relations in the distant seventeenth century was ever present. For her listening during the entire process, for her reading and advice of this document, and for her overall support I cannot thank her enough.

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In the end, this document is the product of a great personal adventure. An adventure inspired by the amazing history of a small country that, one day, had vast ambitions and even greater illusions. The history of the Portuguese overseas expansionist movement that began in the fifteenth century certainly emphasizes the country's distinctive characteristics. Hopefully, some of the Portuguese Empire's virtues and flaws, and ultimately, aspects of the Portuguese people's character, can be recognised throughout this narrative.

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#### Abstract

Portuguese presence in the Gulf of Oman developed, in general, since the early sixteenth century. However, the Arab shores were constantly side-lined in favour of Hormuz, the centre of Portuguese operations in the region. That changed in 1622, when the island was lost to an Anglo-Persian force. That moment, the Portuguese chose Muscat as a regional base and, as such, the Omani world became fundamental for the consolidation and enhancement of the Portuguese position as a leading power. Yet, the rule of the Omani shores proved to be difficult and hazardous. The *Estado da India's* decline in resources, increasing European competition and the rise of a new united Arab entity exacerbated those difficulties and, in a few decades, Portuguese control was reduced to Muscat itself. This study addresses some of the pivotal characteristics and events related to the Portuguese presence in the Arabian coast of Oman, from the loss of Hormuz to the fall of Muscat in 1650. Therefore, military operations, commercial undertakings, financial difficulties, political decisions, religious features and tense relations are at the centre of the narrative. This way, it would be possible to understand how the *Estado da India* elite in Goa and the Portuguese officials in Oman acted throughout this period. Portuguese-Omani interactions started well before 1622 and continued well beyond 1650, but the three decades addressed in this dissertation can be seen as their climax.

**Keywords:** Portugal, Estado da India, Gulf, Oman, Muscat, Ibadism, Commerce, War

## THE WAVERING POWER

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#### Resumo

A presença Portuguesa no Golfo de Omã desenvolveu-se, de forma geral, desde o início do séc. XVI. Contudo, a margem Árabe foi constantemente descurada em favor de Ormuz, o centro das operações Portuguesas na região. Tal mudou em 1622, quando a ilha foi perdida para uma força Anglo-Persa. Naquele momento os Portugueses escolheram Mascate como base regional e, dessa forma, o mundo Omanita tornou-se fundamental para a consolidação e desenvolvimento da posição Portuguesa como potência dominante. No entanto, a governação da costa Omanita provou ser difícil e perigosa. O declínio dos recursos do Estado da Índia, a crescente competição de países Europeus e a criação de uma entidade Árabe unida exacerbou essas dificuldades e, em poucas décadas, o controlo Português estava reduzido apenas a Mascate. Este estudo foca algumas das características e eventos chave da presença Portuguesa na costa Árabe de Omã, desde a perda de Ormuz até à queda de Mascate em 1650. Desta forma, operações militares, desígnios comerciais, dificuldades financeiras, decisões políticas, características religiosas e relações tensas estão no centro da narrativa. Assim, será possível perceber como a elite do Estado da Índia em Goa e os oficiais Portugueses em Omã agiram durante este período. As interações entre Portugueses e Omanitas iniciaram-se bastante antes de 1622 e continuaram muito para lá de 1650, mas as três décadas examinadas neste documento podem ser vistas como o seu auge.

**Palavras-chave:** Portugal, Estado da Índia, Golfo, Omã, Mascate, Ibadismo, Comércio, Guerra

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will analyse the Portuguese presence in the Omani coast between 1622 and 1650. These two dates symbolize vital moments of Portuguese presence in the Middle East in the seventeenth century. The former date signals the loss of Hormuz, one of the richest Portuguese ports in the entire Indian ocean, to an Anglo-Persian force, and the ensuing transfer of the command centre of Portuguese operations in the Persian Gulf to Muscat, in the south. The later represents the decisive Portuguese defeat in the Gulf<sup>1</sup> and loss of Muscat to an Omani army, an outcome that will ultimately lead to the extinction of Portuguese rule in the Arabian shores, although their navy would continue to play a role in the affairs of the region until the 1700's.

Between those two key dates, in roughly three decades, Portuguese had to make Muscat and its surrounding strongholds what they had never done before, a priority. A priority in governing the territory, improving its defences and developing its trade. Despite the Portuguese presence in Oman can be traced for over a hundred years, during the Portuguese golden rule of Hormuz and dominance over the seas, the Arabian shores of the Gulf were side-lined and secondary in importance to its more famous neighbouring island.

This dissertation proposes to examine individual actions as well as general state policies of the Portuguese regarding their possessions in the region, the relationships created between Portuguese officials and the local Arab leaders, and the role the Omani part of the Portuguese Empire played in Gulf history of the seventeenth century. It was a time and place with abundant activity by regional and global powers. Besides the Portuguese and local Omani tribes, it's possible to identify the Ottomans and the Persians as regional powerful entities on one side, and the English and Dutch as European competitors with their private trading companies, on the other.

Portuguese rule of Oman, as the Empire's regional centre of power, in the mid-seventeenth century, is a lesser-known part of the Portuguese Empire's history. This essay intends to bring some light into it.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the Gulf of Oman is commonly referred as an independent geographical entity of the Persian Gulf, for the sake of narrative it'll commonly address them both as simply, the Gulf.

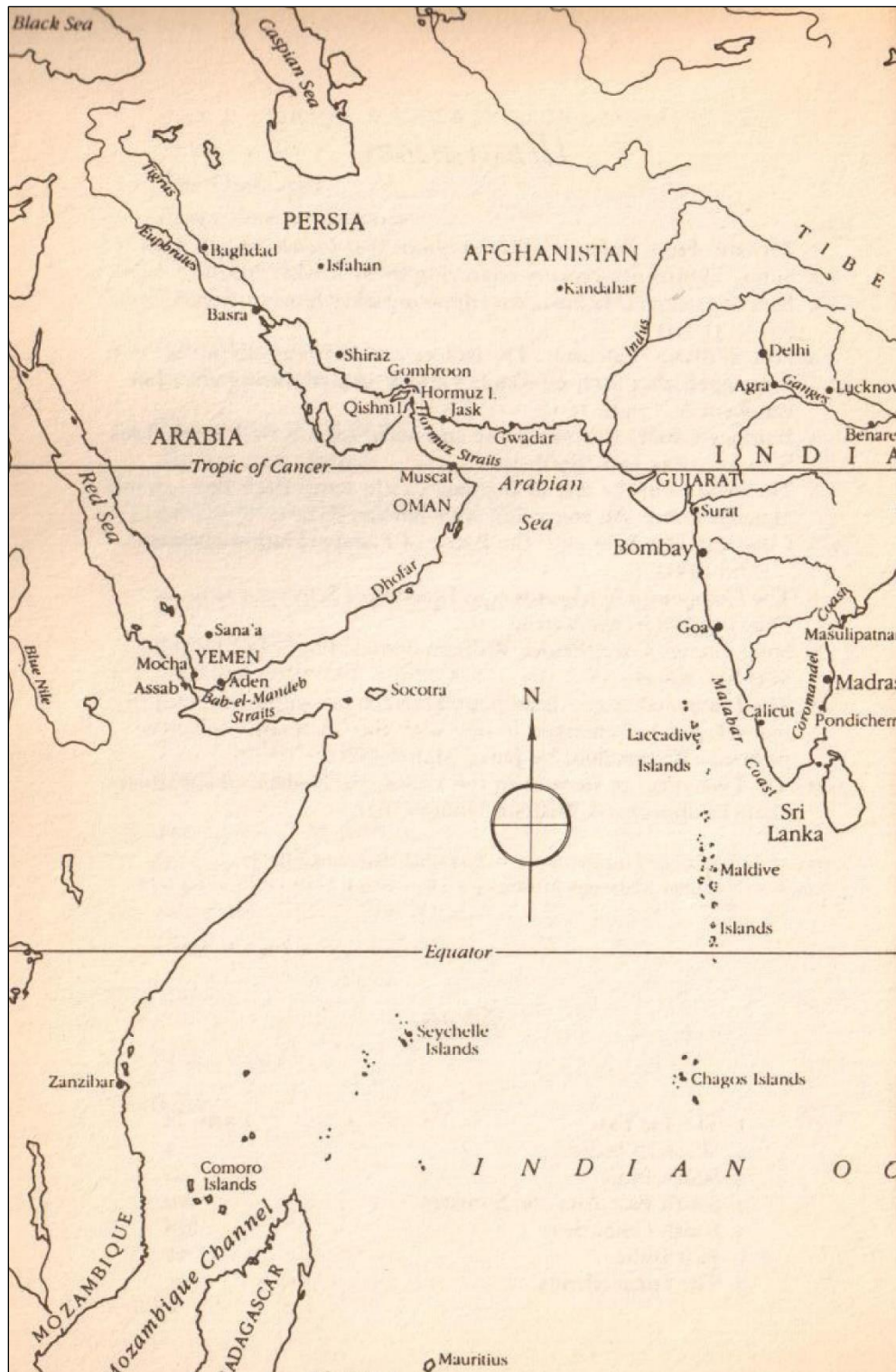


Figure 1 - The Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century

Source: KEAY, John; *The Honourable Company – A History of the English East India Company*, Harper Collins, 1993

## 1.1 General historical context

In the summer of 1507, a mysterious naval fleet of six ships and nearly 500 men sailed into the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, in the northwest part of the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean<sup>2</sup>. The never seen before expedition was about to change the course of history for the coastal villages and towns of both Arabian and Persian coastlines. They were Portuguese sailors and soldiers under the command of Afonso de Albuquerque, and their immediate actions would trigger more than 200 years of continuous tension, trade, conflict, alliances, rebellion and warfare in the region, between Portugal and various local and regional powers.

It had been nearly 10 years since Vasco da Gama had arrived to the shores of Calicut, in May 1498, achieving the long-lasting dream of finding the sea route from Europe to India. Since that day Portuguese officials had worked tirelessly to establish a permanent presence in the Indian Ocean and beyond, specially to get hands on the spice trade that was of special interest for the Portuguese crown. In fact, despite all the interest in the riches of pepper or cinnamon, other ambitions were in play. Dreams of conquest and glory, together with the eternal intrinsic crusading rhetoric helped to draw the main lines of Portuguese immediate actions in Asia. What would go down in history as the Portuguese Empire had strongholds in many different places, from Brazil to Sri Lanka, Angola to Macau, Morocco to India, but at the beginning of the sixteenth century some of the most coveted targets for conquest were located in and around the Arabian Peninsula. This was of the utmost importance to make secure the access to the Indian shores.

Albuquerque's actions in the Gulf were not an isolated attack by the Kingdom of Portugal to a forgotten region of the Middle East or an individual adventure by some privateer. On the contrary, they were part of a plan. More specifically, a royal plan. King Manuel I (r. 1495-1521), the Portuguese monarch that had ascended to the throne in 1495, was a deeply religious man whose vision for the Portuguese expansion in the East encompassed the complete asphyxiation of Muslim trade and the ultimate destruction of Mameluke Egypt<sup>3</sup>, thus paving the way for the

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<sup>2</sup> José Manuel Garcia, *O Terrível*, pg. 112-136.

<sup>3</sup> João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *História da Expansão*, pg. 105.

reconquest of Jerusalem for the Christian faith. As part of his grand design, King Manuel's fleets would be extremely active in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf<sup>4</sup> during the first years of the sixteenth century. His instructions for Afonso de Albuquerque were precise and clear: coupled with the strengthening of commercial relations in the Malabar Coast he should do whatever he could to disrupt and weaken Muslim commerce, especially in the Arabian shores<sup>5</sup>.

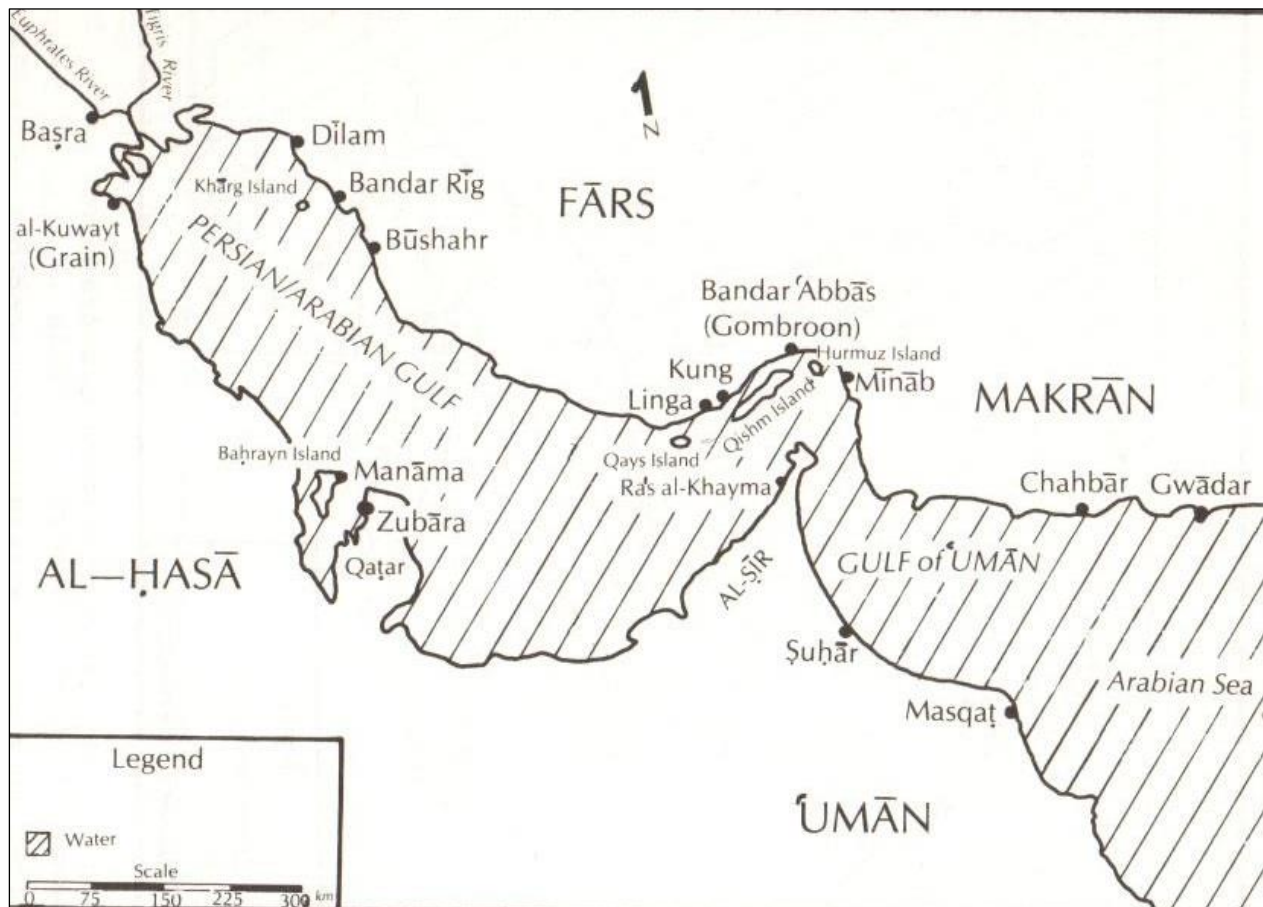


Figure 2 - The Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman

Source: RISSO, Patricia; *Oman & Muscat – An Early Modern History*, Croom Helm, 1986

<sup>4</sup> C. R. Boxer, *O Império Marítimo Português*, pg. 61-62.

<sup>5</sup> José Manuel Garcia, *O Terrível*, pg. 107-111.

As a faithful servant of his King, Albuquerque planned his actions carefully. He had one ultimate objective for his campaign, the conquest of Hormuz<sup>6</sup>. Hormuz was, at the time, one of the most important entrepôts of the Indian Ocean, its privileged geographical position allowing the filtering of trading routes between east and west. In fact, through its harbour one could find transactions of cotton, butter, sugar, iron, rice or spices heading west and, on the opposite easterly direction, dried fruits, carpets, different types of silk, gold and silver coins, weapons, salt, different types of pearls and, in particular, horses<sup>7</sup>. The sea routes that evolved through the Gulf, in and out of Hormuz, were vital for the commercial prosperity of several communities.

After leaving the recent conquered island of Socotra<sup>8</sup>, at the mouth of the Red Sea, Albuquerque started his assault on the Gulf by overrunning the Omani shores. His lightning war on coastal Muslim communities made him sack several major ports and towns in less than two months. Qalhat, Quriyat, Muscat, Sohar and Khor Fakkan readily submitted, and the violence unleashed by the Portuguese was such that, amid reports of native's noses and ears being sent to Hormuz as a warning of their impending fate, the Commander earned the historically infamous nickname of "*The Terrible*"<sup>9</sup>. Next, as planned, Albuquerque subjugated Hormuz in a few weeks and forced its ruler to pay tribute to the King of Portugal<sup>10</sup>. Despite the quick success and full battle victories in 1507, dissent among his captains would prevent him from completely conquering the island<sup>11</sup>. That would only be achieved eight years later, when Albuquerque, now Governor of the *Estado da India*<sup>12</sup>, returned to Hormuz. That year, 1515, marks the complete submission of the Hormuzian Kingdom as a protectorate of Portugal, and the start of the construction of a fortress, symbol of the new era of Portuguese rule<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Hormuz was, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, in turmoil. Members of the local royal family were struggling for control between themselves and the governor of Lar, in mainland Persia, was trying to take advantage of the situation. When the Portuguese arrived, a Persian official had been *de facto* ruling the island for 20 months, as a semi-independent Kingdom that owed its allegiance to the Safavid Persian Empire, whose capital was the city of Tabriz. Nevertheless, profound tensions between Persian officials and the local elite were common.

<sup>7</sup> Dejanirah Couto, 'Hormuz under the Portuguese Protectorate', pg. 43-44.

<sup>8</sup> The Portuguese didn't conquer the whole island.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Crowley, *Conquerors*, pg. 196-198.

<sup>10</sup> José Manuel Garcia, *O Terrível*, pg. 147-165.

<sup>11</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Ormuz – 1507-1622*, pg. 37-38.

<sup>12</sup> *Estado da India* was the institutional name of the Portuguese Empire east of the Cape of Good Hope.

<sup>13</sup> The fortress, finished in 1516 and baptized as "*Nossa Senhora da Conceição*" still stands today in the northern tip of Hormuz Island.

For more than a century after 1515, Hormuz represented one of the most important Portuguese strongholds in the Indian Ocean and also one of the most profitable, accounting for about 1/5 of the entire *Estado da India* revenue in 1620<sup>14</sup>. As for Muscat and the other towns in the Arab shores of the Gulf, they were to be kept quiet and secure in a way that was to enhance the development of the *crown jewel* island of Portuguese supremacy in the region. Alongside Goa and Malacca, Hormuz represented one of the pillars on which Portuguese power rested, and the Gulf became one of the two most vital waterways strategically controlled by the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the other being the Strait of Malacca<sup>15</sup>. These were the foundations for more than a century of Portuguese dominance in the Indian Ocean, regarding both local Powers and European competitors. In fact, around 1570, Portuguese officials, merchants, missionaries or just small colonies of people, were present on pretty much every shoreline of the African and Asian continents. There are reports of activities in Japan, China, Southeast Asia, Persia, East Africa and in the Ottoman Empire<sup>16</sup>. The tiny Kingdom of Portugal, with a population of roughly one million people, was now a world superpower. Stretching its influence for thousands of miles, the Portuguese embarked in an endeavour aimed to control trade in an entire ocean. However, the gigantic extent of the Empire in Asia, together with a chronic lack of manpower and resources, was to be one of its shortcomings.

As the sixteenth century drew to an end, problems began to surge. In the last years of the century English and Dutch acts of piracy started to pressure the Cape Route and shipping suffered enormous losses due to assaults or risky nautical decisions some captains took in order to escape enemy fleets in the south Atlantic<sup>17</sup>. Records show a dramatic reduction in the number of ships that arrived in Lisbon from India, from 42 in the decade of 1581-1590 to only 28 in the decade of 1601-1610<sup>18</sup>. As for the causes, it is known that between 1601 and 1650 more than 20% of the

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<sup>14</sup> João Luís Fernandes Ferreira, *Entre Duas Margens*, pg. 25.

<sup>15</sup> The third essential access point whose control was necessary for closing down the Indian Ocean trade to non-Portuguese sanctioned merchants was the Red Sea. However, Afonso de Albuquerque failed his attempt to seize the city of Aden in 1513 and, despite some prospects until the 1530's, interest faded with time. A detailed explanation about the geo-strategic importance of these chokepoints can be found on Nicola Meli's paper, 'The importance of Hormuz', pg. 107-120.

<sup>16</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *O Império Asiático Português*, pg. 149.

<sup>17</sup> João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *História da Expansão*, pg. 173.

<sup>18</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *O Império Asiático Português*, pg. 201.

disasters in the *Carreira da Índia* were due to enemy action, a significant increase from the 8.5% of the previous half a century. The periods between 1587-1597 and 1606-1608 were especially dramatic concerning enemy attacks on Portuguese ships in this route<sup>19</sup>. Thus, at the beginning of the seventeenth century the Portuguese were recognizing their dominance over the Indian Ocean was in immediate danger.

Northern European powers, through their private trading companies<sup>20</sup>, were getting more and more daring and, as such, attacks and losses were becoming more frequent. The Dutch first arrived in the Indian Ocean in 1596 with the fleet of Cornelis de Houtman<sup>21</sup>, and it would soon become commonplace for Dutch ships to attack Portuguese vessels in the region. There were reports of various fleets, in the years 1604, 1607 and 1608, going from The Netherlands to the East Indies<sup>22</sup> passing through Mozambique and Goa in order to attack the *Estado da Índia's* vessels. Adding insult to injury the Dutch, in the first decade of the century, also laid siege to several Portuguese strongholds, having being able to capture Ambon and Tidore, both in Indonesia, in 1605<sup>23</sup>. As for the English, their damaging presence in the Atlantic was felt from the 1580s<sup>24</sup> and the first English ship, captained by James Lancaster, crossed the Indian Ocean in 1592. English actions on the Arabian Seas began in the beginning of the seventeenth century when, in 1608, their first ship arrived in Surat<sup>25</sup>. From that point forward, their influence over the northwest part of the Indian Ocean grew steadily, especially with the Moghul Empire<sup>26</sup>. In 1613 the first English ship sailed into the Gulf<sup>27</sup>.

The actions of these two powers, both in the early stages of empire building, would cause tremendous pressure on Portuguese resources, to the extent that several cracks began to unfold

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<sup>19</sup> Paulo Guinote; Eduardo Frutuoso & António Lopes, *Naufrações e Outras Perdas*, pg. 112-123.

<sup>20</sup> Contrary to Portuguese policy of direct royal control over operations, Dutch and English expeditions to the Indian Ocean, although supported by the state, had a heavy private participation and control. This policy was supported through the creation of Companies from which individuals could acquire stocks.

<sup>21</sup> Francisco Bethencourt & Kirti Chaudhuri, *História da Expansão Portuguesa Vol. II*, pg. 87.

<sup>22</sup> The term East Indies, when associated with the Dutch, represent, in general, the archipelago islands of what is today Indonesia.

<sup>23</sup> André Murteira, 'The English and Dutch', pg. 3-4.

<sup>24</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Mohammed Hameed Salman, *Aspects of Portuguese Rule*, pg. 213.

<sup>26</sup> The Moghul Empire was a Muslim state that existed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century in south Asia. At its greatest extent it controlled much of the Indian sub-continent.

<sup>27</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 103.



in the Empire. Several losses would emerge from those cracks and the existing resources were insufficient to cope with them. The first major blow was to be Hormuz, in 1622, an event that changed the century old *status quo* of the region decisively.

The object of this work starts with the specific events leading to the 1622 debacle and the ensuing transfer of the regional power structures to Muscat. From there, three decades of Portuguese direct control over the Arabian coast of Oman unfold.

Beginning with the stabilization of a dire situation and the vigorous counter-attack of Portuguese forces, to the enhancement of Muscat as capital of the Portuguese presence in the Gulf, several aspects will be addressed. The understanding of Portuguese government in the Arabian shores and the relationship between the various outposts, as well as focal points of decision-making and commerce, are to be central to the analysis of this period. On the other hand, religious and governing aspects of the Omani world, and their relevant leaders, are examined, as well as the interactions the Portuguese had with the local authorities. It will be important to examine what alliances were forged, which enmities were fostered, and to what end.

It would all come to an end in 1650, when Omani forces ousted the Portuguese from Muscat without, contrary to the loss of Hormuz, any foreign help. It'll be interesting to understand how a global Empire lost its last major Gulf stronghold this way.

## 1.2 Organization of the essay

As said before, the main focus of the analysis is the in-depth knowledge of a roughly 30 years period of Portuguese presence on the Omani coast, right before its loss to the local Arab dynasty in 1650. In order to travel throughout this period and understand the events that took place in the region it is necessary to address several key aspects of a diverse nature. The chronology of events and its implications range extensively, from geographic to military, social to administrative.

The first pivotal aspect to be addressed, in chapter two, is the geography of the Gulf, more specifically the geographical aspects that had a significant impact on Portuguese rule in the region since the early sixteenth century. In this analysis some of the notorious characteristics of Hormuz and Muscat will have centre-stage, as well as the dimensional relationships that were developed between the several relevant states operating in the Gulf. The main purpose of this chapter is to create for the reader an image of the *world* where the narrative will take place.

The central event of the fall of Hormuz marks the beginning of the narrative, in the third chapter. Regarding this, it's interesting to address the general events leading to the 1622 siege and ensuing Portuguese defeat, with special emphasis on the role played by Safavid Persia and the English East India Company, as well as Portuguese officials. Because of the scope of this work it's also important to analyse the events related to the south shores of the Gulf, before and during the siege, and whether those events are of military nature or political matters that somehow influenced the outcome.

With its famous stronghold lost, the Portuguese retreated to Muscat. In the next chapter it will be possible to understand how this withdrawal was made, what the situation was in the city and the surrounding Portuguese possessions in Oman, as well as the Portuguese immediate counter-attack. Among the several Portuguese characters brought to us by the contemporary sources of the time one emerges, the singular figure of Rui Freire de Andrade. The actions of the Portuguese Commander, who was fundamental to the stabilization of the situation, would brand him as the major Portuguese official in the region for almost 15 years.

The following chapter deals with more internal aspects of Portuguese rule on the Omani coast. Apart from the efforts that had the objective of stabilizing the military situation, the *Estado da India* had to put in place policies regarding the development of Muscat as a trading centre as well as a general reorganization of Portuguese operations. The politics of the region and the financial situation assume a significant dimension, as well as trade routes the Portuguese were now trying to develop. There were positive results. However, as will be seen, dissention between officials, whether civil or military, was not uncommon and internal conflicts helped to undermine the fragile Portuguese foothold on the Arabian Peninsula.

While the *Estado da India* tried to consolidate its positions along the Gulf southeast shoreline, inland a new force was beginning to emerge in the Omani Arab world. Chapter six approaches the rise of Nasir bin Murshid as the new ruler who united several Omani tribes that in the past had constantly made war on one another. It was a significant event for the local Arab community of the seventeenth century, for it centralized power and allowed different and wider ambitions to come into play for the Omanis. Simultaneously, along with the new dynasty, the impact of Ibadism in the local Arab population and elite will be analysed. It's very particular characteristics within the Muslim world would help shape society and have an important impact in the future of the region.

The next chapter will focus deeply on the pressure that was amounting on Portuguese Oman. The conflicting relations with the other European powers and the relationship developed between the Portuguese and the Omani Yarubi dynasty will be fundamental to understanding the events. In particular, the actions and reactions around the increasing Omani operations targeting the Portuguese positions in the region. As shall be seen, not all Omanis were aligned with their unified leadership and the Portuguese were, many times, drawn to the inner political problems of their local tribal society. As the seventeenth century nears its half term, small skirmishes and bigger military engagements would become more common, which lead to a new alignment of forces and the forging of renewed alliances and animosities.

Chapter eight will closely analyse the events leading to the fall of Muscat. In 1650, contrary to the preceding losses of Hormuz or Malacca, in which the English and the Dutch had both played a central role, it was a local force that confronted and expelled the Portuguese. It's important to understand why and how. There will be a special focus on the military aspects of the campaign, the interactions between the Omanis and the Portuguese during the operations, as well as the efforts made by Portuguese officials to avoid their eminent fate.

This major battle at Muscat was a turning point in the history of the Portuguese Empire in the Gulf. The event would ultimately represent much more than the simple loss of a stronghold. It would be the symbolic end of an era. Nevertheless, Portuguese presence in the region was not over. The ninth chapter of the narrative will address subsequent events that emanated from the Portuguese-Omani relations and the Fall of Muscat in 1650. The truth is, the event that could be

seen, at first light, as the end of hostilities was, in fact, the beginning of a larger war. The *Estado da India* would continue to act in the Gulf, harassing its enemies, in order to bring commercial advantages, but the times were very different.

The final remarks mark the end of the dissertation.

### 1.3 Material and sources

The materials used for this dissertation were, mainly, from three different sources: collections of contemporary documents, books and articles. However, despite the consultation of a few hundred different works, the primary sources referring to the events dealt with in this research are not as many as might be expected. Even so, during the research for relevant information, sometimes the problem was not so much the lack of sources as the diversity of them. It would be beneficial to have access to more Arab or Persian sources dealing with the events of this period, but it's a difficult quest. Works of this nature, at least in some language other than Arabic or Farsi, are extremely rare and in most cases, when found, are not in their primary form. About the consulted works for the subject of study, it's unfair to distinguish the most important sources of information. There were many sources that brought some light on the subject, or at the very least, added more interesting questions to the ones that were already present. However, some are unquestionably worth mentioning when dealing with the various aspects of the Portuguese presence in the coast of Oman between 1622 and 1650.

During the research and writing process of this work, one of the most enriching experiences was the reading and analysis of contemporary documents. In this regard, two collections stand out. The first consists in 3 of the 5 volumes of the "*Assentos do Conselho de Estado*", that contain an amazing variety of information, from discussions to nominations, military decisions and financial statements, of the *Estado da India*'s councils held at Goa, from 1618 to 1658. These invaluable documents allow a deep insight into the state of affairs of the Empire's capital, its limitations and policies at crucial times. The other collection is the "*Portugal in the Sea of Oman – Religion and Politics*", a newly edited collection of 17 volumes with documents that

deal directly with the Portuguese presence or interaction in Oman. In the course of the research more than 50 documents from the collection, dating from between 1612 and 1734, were analysed. Additionally, António Bocarro's work "*Livro das plantas de todas as fortalezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental*", dated from 1635, presents a detailed description of many of the Portuguese strongholds in the East, including those in the Gulf, with special emphasis on the beautiful handmade drawings of the towns and forts held by the Portuguese. Also dated from the seventeenth century, Paulo Craesbeeck's "*Commentarios do grande capitam Ruy Freyre de Andrada*" is also fundamental, narrating the life of the Portuguese Commander and, hence, pivotal events such as the fall of Hormuz and the Portuguese counter-attacks from Oman in its aftermath.

Regarding the books, these were the most relevant. Beginning with a general overview of the Portuguese presence in the region, "*Portugal, The Persian Gulf and Safavid Persia*" and "*Revisiting Hormuz*", are two books that compile a variety of articles from various authors. Both are indispensable works. For a comprehensive overview on the importance of Hormuz, Muscat and Kong, three of the main ports of the Gulf, Willem Floor's "*The Persian Gulf: A Political and Economic History of Five Port Cities 1500-1730*" must have centre-stage due to the detailed information from various sources, and in-depth insights on social, economic, political and military aspects of life on coastal areas of the Gulf for this period. The pivotal loss of Hormuz is explained in detail in Luciano Cordeiro's work, "*Batalhas da Índia – Como se Perdeu Ormuz. Processo Inédito do Séc. XVII*". In his book, the nineteenth century author allows the reader to have a very interesting understanding about the events that occurred during the sieges at Qeshm and Hormuz, as well as the state of affairs of the Portuguese "entourage" when they left for Muscat. Also, important, dealing with the same period, but a more personalized account, José Gervásio Leite's "*Rui Freire de Andrada*", consists in a biographical work that narrates the life of the great Portuguese Commander who spent the last years of his life living and fighting in the Gulf. As previously said, Arab or Persian sources are not abundant, but Salil Bin Razik's work, "*History of the Imams and Seyyids of Oman*", and Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan's "*The Annals of Oman*" are essential to understanding the history and dynamics of Omani society, specifically the tribal nature of many conflicts. Although rarely mentioning the Portuguese directly, they contain

extensive information about many events that occurred after the rise of the Yarubi dynasty and the conflicts with the Europeans on the coast. Another different but invaluable approach to the political and military events on the Persian Gulf is given by Colonel S. B. Miles in his *“The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf”*. For a detailed explanation about Ibadism and Oman in the Early Modern Age, Patricia Risso’s *“Oman & Muscat – An Early Modern History”* is a must-read due to very particular knowledge of the Omani world, although the book’s main period is slightly different than the one studied in this essay.

Complementary to the previous mentioned works, many papers were instrumental in understanding specific events during the period of study. Not wanting to take the risk of being exhaustive or, on the contrary, forgetting any important work, it’s important to reference some authors like Alexandra Pelúcia, Dejanirah Couto, Eric Staples, Ghoncheh Tazmini, J. E. Peterson, João Teles e Cunha, Pius Malekandathil, Rudi Matthee and Rui Manuel Loureiro, whose papers were, in one way or another, absolutely vital to plunging into seventeenth century world of the Gulf.

The sum of all available and consulted works did allow a comprehensive analysis of the period, although more Arab and Persian contemporary sources in English would be a significant addition to the narrative.

## 2. GEOGRAPHY, RESOURCES AND STATES

First of all, it's important to address the generic world of this essay and to understand its main characteristics. Thus, the second chapter focuses on the geography of the Gulf and the major political entities present in it; a general overview of Hormuz, its characteristics, resources and political situation; a more important detailed information about Muscat, its distinctive geographical features, urban settlement, resources and seventeenth century politics; and an outline about some important locations of the Gulf region, which are of special interest for this narrative.

### 2.1 The Sea and the Empires

The Persian Gulf, with its Omani appendix, represents one of the most important commercial routes of the Middle East, if not the single most important waterway<sup>28</sup>. From the mouth of the Shatt al Arab River, south of Basra, to the Ràs al Hadd, the most easterly point of the Gulf of Oman and the *gate* to the Indian Ocean, any ship has to navigate for about 1.500 km. To put its importance into perspective, any sailor willing to reach the Indian Ocean from the Suez would have to negotiate twice that distance, which ultimately means double the amount of time. In its narrowest point, at the Straits of Hormuz, the Gulf is only 48 km wide and that distance is made even shorter for navigation purposes due to the shallow waters and reefs<sup>29</sup>. As such, navigation on the Gulf was not as smooth as one can imagine on an enclosed sea, and was also not done at any time. Afonso de Albuquerque, when writing to his King about his future mission in the Gulf, in December of 1513, relates that "*great things take their time, and in these parts there's a certain time for navigation*"<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> Nicola Melis, 'The importance of Hormuz', pg. 112.

<sup>30</sup> In the Portuguese original "...mas acêrca de Ormuz e de Baharem tudo se fará com ajuda de Nosso Senhor a seu tempo, porque as cousas grandes gastam sempre muito tempo, e mais nestas partes em que há um certo tempo de navegação." in Afonso de Albuquerque, Cartas para el-Rei D. Manuel I, pg. 148.

Along the shores of this 432.000 sq. km body of water, several communities evolved and prospered for hundreds of years, many of them depending on its resources for their daily sustenance. Many but not all. In truth we can perceive that while small tribes and coastal communities did rely on the Gulf for their nourishment and power; such examples can be found in the reliance on fishing has the basic livelihood along its shores<sup>31</sup>, bigger states with broader ambitions neglected its geo-strategic importance for much time, namely the Ottoman and Persian Empires. As an example, during their long struggle for the control of the Middle East, these two heavyweights fought mostly inland, even though the sea had marked, during much time, a frontier between their territories<sup>32</sup>. For them, the Gulf was rarely a theatre of operations.

The Ottomans had recently conquered Egypt and the Holy Land when the Portuguese arrived in the Gulf, and in 1534 they expanded further east and occupied Baghdad. Ottoman expansion seemed, at one point, unstoppable with Basra and Qatif falling in 1546 and 1550<sup>33</sup>. The Indian Ocean began to be an attractive area of further expansion and plans were made for an attack on the Portuguese capital of Goa in the beginning of the seventeenth century<sup>34</sup>. From their recent Middle East possessions, they made some attempts to disrupt the Portuguese rule on the south shores of the Gulf but without much success. On July 1552, 30 Ottoman vessels carrying about 1.600 troops landed at Muscat and sacked the city. This expedition was led by the famous Ottoman Admiral and cartographer Piri Reis<sup>35</sup> who tried to lay siege to Hormuz just a few weeks after entering Muscat. However, this resulted in failure and he had no choice but to retreat to Egypt with some booty. Later, on 1559, the Ottomans besieged Bahrain but were forced to retreat after having lost nearly 90% of their forces to disease. It was to be the turning point of Ottoman intervention in Gulf affairs. The expeditions of the 1550's against Portuguese power in the region can be seen as more of a fainthearted attempt to drive out the Europeans than the result of a coherent policy devised by the Sultan for the domination of the Gulf. As it turned out, the local Arab elites were suspicious of the Ottomans and didn't rise up against their European overlords

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<sup>31</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Jorge Flores, 'Solving Rubik's Cube', pg. 191-215.

<sup>33</sup> D. T. Potts, *In the Land of the Emirates*, pg. 162.

<sup>34</sup> Giancarlo Casale, 'The Ottoman 'Discovery'', pg. 87-104.

<sup>35</sup> Piri Reis was the author, in 1513, of a world map that shows a large portion of the New World. The map is currently in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul.



has it might be expected<sup>36</sup>. Afterwards, the Ottoman Empire never challenged the shallow waters of the Gulf again.

Contrary to the Ottomans, who only controlled Basra and Qatif, the Persians had many dominions along the Gulf's shores. However, these were commonly maintained by indirect control. When Albuquerque landed at Hormuz the small Kingdom had a significant degree of autonomy regarding its senior neighbour<sup>37</sup> and until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the interest of the Safavid dynasty regarding the Gulf was secondary<sup>38</sup>. There are some factors that help explain the lack of commitment to the affairs of the Gulf as it seems a bit inconsistent that such an important commercial route, that immediately caught the eye of the Portuguese, had been neglected for so much time by the sitting power of the region. The fact remains that Persia was, predominantly, a land-based power. Just as the English were not known for their land army expertise until Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, so the Persians were not a sea favourable nation and only build a navy well into the eighteenth century<sup>39</sup>. When the Portuguese occupied Hormuz and made it their base, the Persians had no other choice but to submit. The Europeans were too strong at sea and there were more urgent problems to deal with along their land borders. The rivalry with the Ottomans and the constant clashes were features the Portuguese used to their advantage and, at times, there were signs a certain level of cooperation existed between the Portuguese and the Safavids against the Ottomans. It can be justly said the Persian fear of Ottoman aggression and the inexistence of a Persian navy helped to maintain the *status quo* as constructed by Albuquerque, throughout the sixteenth century<sup>40</sup>.

The year of 1622 stands out as an important moment regarding the relations between the Ottomans and the Persians, with significant impact in the Gulf. Between 1603 and 1639 only eight years of peace existed between the two empires, in two periods. In the second of those periods, from 1618 to 1623, the annual tribute the Persians paid the Ottomans was reduced, marking a general Persian recovery in the war with its neighbour<sup>41</sup>. Seizing the moment, the Persian

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<sup>36</sup> Mohammed Hameed Salman, *Aspects of Portuguese Rule*, pg. 187-201.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammed Hameed Salman, *Aspects of Portuguese Rule*, pg. 62.

<sup>38</sup> Rudi Matthee, 'The Portuguese Presence', pg. 5.

<sup>39</sup> The Portuguese lost Bahrain to the Persians in 1602 but the event didn't led to a massive Persian naval build-up.

<sup>40</sup> Ghoncheh Tazmini, 'The Persian–Portuguese Encounter', pg. 10-11.

<sup>41</sup> Halil Kürsad Aslan, 'Ottoman–Persian Treaties', pg. 3.

leadership displayed an energetic commitment to extend its power to the Gulf, with Hormuz as the objective.

## 2.2 The Jewel Island

If the Gulf was, for many years prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, left to the devices of small local communities, that didn't diminish its strategic importance, one spot in particular stood out from the rest. The importance of Hormuz, heard of by the Portuguese through reports from Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta or Pêro da Covilhã and directly accessed when they reached the Indian Ocean at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was certainly not due to its natural resources or to being ruled by a powerful state or empire, but to its location<sup>42</sup>. Although other ports had been preeminent in the past, at the beginning of the 1500's Hormuz was the jewel to grab. One can easily understand the importance of controlling an island that, from its southern shores to the first small islets of the Arabian coast is no more than 60 km. As the Straits of Hormuz embody a chokepoint of maritime exchanges in the region, Hormuz is its gatekeeper.

The island has about 40 sq. km and is mainly flat. During the age of Portuguese rule, its beating heart was its fort, located in its northern tip due to the good anchorage of the nearby waters. However, the fort didn't exist when the Portuguese arrived in 1507, only a royal palace and a wooden pier. There was no port. Larger ships loaded and unloaded their goods to smaller vessels that were beached and then dealt with. The anchorage point was mainly to the east of the promontory but could occasionally be to the west due to eastern winds or private business. There were several alterations to the layout of the island, essentially on the northern part, where the town was located. During the sixteenth century a fort was constructed, the royal palace was destroyed and several houses were razed at the orders of the Portuguese. It is commonly accepted that the population of Hormuz in the mid sixteenth century was around 50.000, and primarily Muslim, although this number is subject to debate. The high mobility of the island's

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<sup>42</sup> Ghoncheh Tazmini, 'The Persian-Portuguese Encounter', pg. 8.

population made it possible that only in part of the year the higher numbers were achieved<sup>43</sup>. When the Portuguese arrived, Hormuz was the capital of a semi-autonomous Kingdom controlling several possessions along the Gulf's shores, either on the Persian or Arab side. The fact that Hormuz was the capital of the Kingdom and the other territories were politically subordinated to its King does not mean they were dependent on it. Actually, the reality was much the opposite. Hormuz was dependent on the nearby islands and the mainland for its very survival<sup>44</sup>.

The lack of natural resources, previously noted, didn't refer to the sparse existence of spices, gold or other commodities of the age that could help to make a certain territory or state a significant power or, at least, a rich one. At Hormuz, as with many places of the Gulf, one of the permanent problems was the lack of basic potable water. This, together with the harsh climate and landscape, where the hot and arid air was mixed with sand dunes and clay buildings, would make any town unappealing as one can imagine<sup>45</sup>. In fact, nothing was cultivated at Hormuz and the city had to be supplied everyday by hundreds of small vessels with vegetables, grains, fruit, meat and, of course, water from the neighbouring islands and the Persian mainland. The only product that Hormuzians could supply for themselves was the abundant fish that could be caught at sea<sup>46</sup>. Even so, despite the work and logistics involved on supplying the island, reports suggest that Hormuz was always well provisioned regarding victuals<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 10-19.

<sup>44</sup> Nicola Melis, 'The importance of Hormuz', pg. 108.

<sup>45</sup> Rudi Matthee, 'The Portuguese Presence', pg. 4-5.

<sup>46</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 19-23.

<sup>47</sup> Nicola Melis, 'The importance of Hormuz', pg. 109.

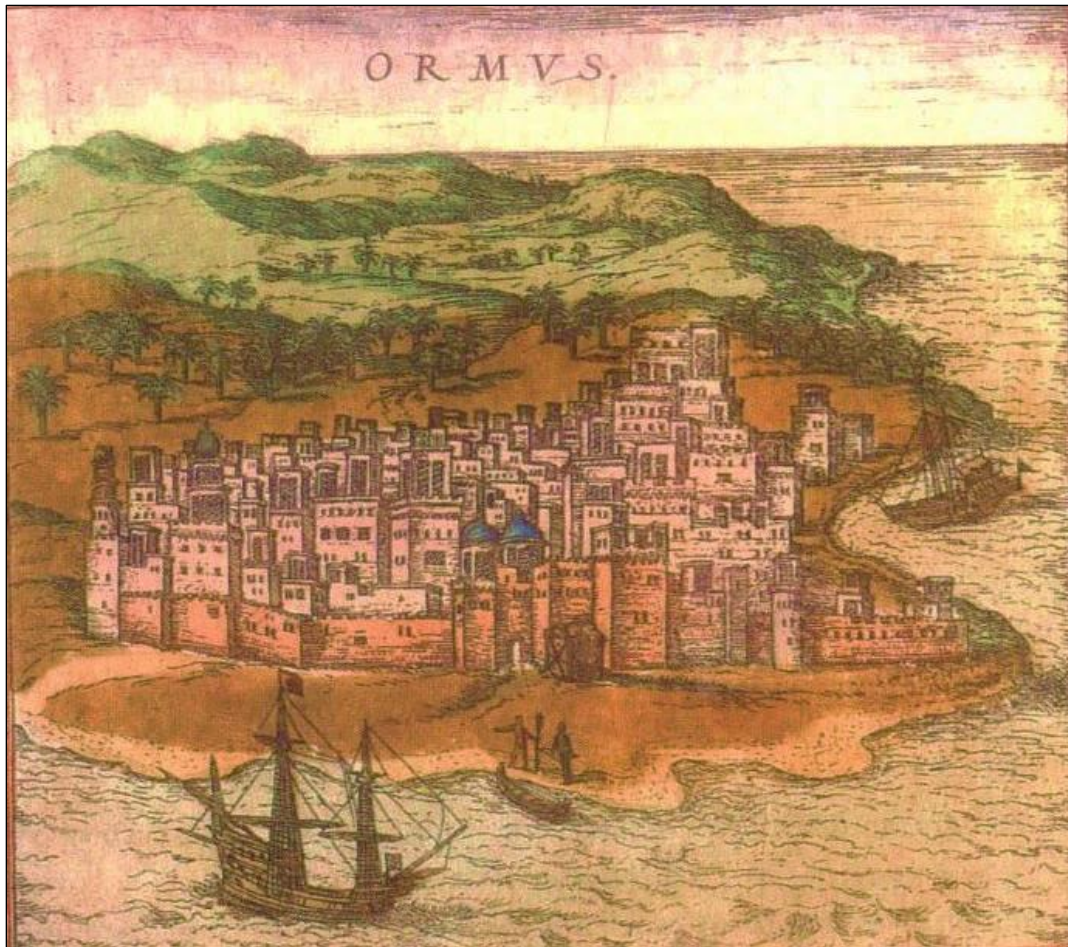


Figure 3 - Island of Hormuz in 1572

Source: COUTO, Dejanirah & LOUREIRO, Rui Manuel; *Ormuz 1507-1622 – Conquista e Perda*, Tribuna da História, 2007

When studying the geographic characteristics of Hormuz, it's difficult to imagine a more dependent place. And yet it was, at the time of the Portuguese defeat of 1622, the most important Portuguese commercial outpost in the Gulf and one of the most lucrative entrepôts in the entire *Estado da Índia*, alongside Diu, only second to the capital, Goa<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Francisco Bethencourt & Kirti Chaudhuri, *História da Expansão Portuguesa Vol. II*, pg. 300.

## 2.3 The Arabian Fortress

Today, anyone visiting the 1.4 million people city of Muscat<sup>49</sup> would easily miss the location of its historical roots. In fact, while the twenty first century metropolis sprawls for about 30 km along the Al Batinah coastal plains, four hundred years ago Old Muscat was a small town of about 5.000 people<sup>50</sup>, enclosed between a stretch of the Central Hajar Mountains and the sea, east of the city of today. One can imagine the emotions felt, in 1622, by the fleeing Portuguese who saw the Arabian coast for the first time. Their sight couldn't be more different from the one they were used to. While Hormuz was a large city, located on an open plain of an island, Muscat was a much smaller town, located at the tip of a continental mountainous region.

Muscat had tremendous geographic advantages to providing protection, as it was surrounded by very rough arid terrain and the sea. Apart from small mountain passages to the northwest and southeast, it is completely surrounded by high mountains, difficult to negotiate by any army. To the southwest, the rugged terrain at first appears to be gentler, but it quickly becomes impassable. Other than these geographical advantages, Muscat was also presented with one of the best ports in the Gulf, and certainly the most concealed one. The cropped coast in and around Muscat has its finest showpiece on the port entrance. Along the northern side there are two promontories of high mountains running along for 1.5 km until one encounters the two forts, Al-Mirani and Al-Jalali<sup>51</sup>, one on each side. But, for the Portuguese, the single geographical feature that helped elevate Muscat to the status of a strategic location was the depth of the harbour's waters. As the development of shipbuilding brought with it larger tonnage vessels, the advantages of Muscat became more evident and, thus, it became the main port of the Omani coast in the course of the sixteenth century, to the loss of Qalhat<sup>52</sup>. Muscat was not perfect, though. Despite the distinctiveness of its shape and its protective advantages, the harbour had the drawback of being exposed to northerly winds and undulation, customary for much of the year<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> United Nations Data Booklet, pg. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 335.

<sup>51</sup> These forts were known as Fort *Boqueirão* and Fort *São João* in the seventeenth century.

<sup>52</sup> Dejanirah Couto, 'New Insights into the History of Oman', pg. 132.

<sup>53</sup> J. E. Peterson, 'Muscat as a Port City', pg. 153-155.

The city itself had little space to grow, for the distance from the sea to the bottom of the surrounding mountains doesn't exceed 1 km. The urban layout seems to have been pretty much in line with what was seen in Muslim coastal settlements of the era in the Indian Ocean, with densely packed houses divided by narrow streets, some constructed of stone and lime<sup>54</sup>, others from stone and palm branches<sup>55</sup>. Contrary to Hormuz, fresh water seems to have been abundant in Muscat, for between several palm gardens in existence outside the urban perimeter, one of them is specifically mentioned as being the source of the fresh water used in the town and fortress in the seventeenth century<sup>56</sup>. As one can see from António Bocarro's<sup>57</sup> illustration of the seventeenth century, the city was well fortified, with the intention of protecting it both from sea and land, a clue of the impending dangers threatening Muscat at the time. In 1625, after the fall of Hormuz, the Portuguese built the outer wall with defensive towers, as seen in the illustration, roughly in the place of a simpler existing structure. The town became a total enclosed space, between the harbour and its outer walled perimeter, with every passage guarded by a piece of artillery<sup>58</sup>.

Muscat was especially important for being an almost exclusive producer of *cairo*, a natural fibre used for ships cables. This, together with the availability of fresh water, were the two most important resources of the city. Furthermore, the role of entrepôt was noteworthy, because it exported cattle that came from the interior and, in the other direction, supplied the mountainous cities of Nizwa, Bahla or Izki with rice and spices from India<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Dejanirah Couto, 'New Insights into the History of Oman', pg. 130.

<sup>55</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 336.

<sup>56</sup> M. A. K. Al-Belushi, 'The heritage prospective', pg. 554.

<sup>57</sup> António Bocarro was a Portuguese chronicler of the seventeenth century that lived in India and wrote the history of the *Estado da India* between 1590 and 1617. One of his most notable works was a compilation of all Portuguese fortresses in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>58</sup> Dejanirah Couto, 'New Insights into the History of Oman', pg. 132.

<sup>59</sup> Dejanirah Couto, 'New Insights into the History of Oman', pg. 136.

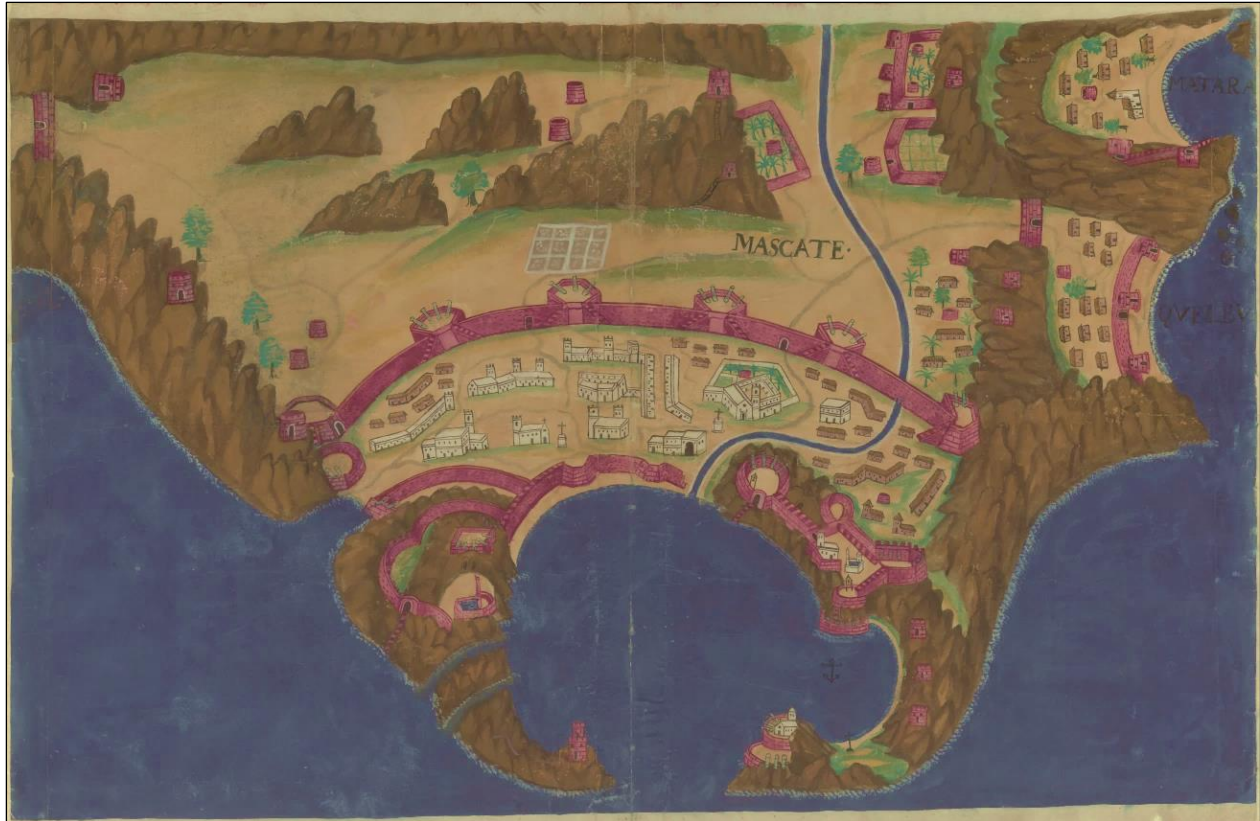


Figure 4 - Fortress and city of Muscat

Source: BOCARRO, António – Livro das plantas de todas as fortalezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da India Oriental (<http://purl.pt/27184/3/#/1>)

The internal politics of Muscat and the Omani region were more complicated than in Hormuz. The continental area around Muscat was not as easy to control as the island of Hormuz and the Portuguese were satisfied to maintain their rule along the coast, not inland. When Albuquerque first arrived at the Gulf, during the lightning campaign of 1507, the region's political system was fragmented<sup>60</sup>. At the time, Muscat was subordinated<sup>60</sup> to the King of Hormuz and the government of the city lay in the hands of a Persian Governor who tried to rule the city with two objectives in mind; the restraint or total prohibition of trade of naval construction materials, for preventing the built up of local fleets that could put in danger the leadership of Hormuz, and the strict control of the rights of trade of the port, in order to increase the revenue of the Kingdom<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 239.

<sup>61</sup> Dejanirah Couto, 'New Insights into the History of Oman', pg. 134.

The Portuguese-Omani relations were to prove very complex during the sixteenth century and although Portuguese officials tried to take advantage of some anti-Persian feelings of the Omani elite to gain their favour, this strategy didn't stop two uprisings in the 1520's. A turning point in this uneasy balance took place in 1589, when Sheikh Qays bin Rāshid, the ruler of Muscat, was forced to forsake half of his revenue from the custom's house in favour of the Portuguese King, Philip I. This led to discontent and some of the local merchants took their business elsewhere, namely to Sohar, that had become an important rival to the economic prospects of Hormuz and Muscat<sup>62</sup>.

Regarding Muscat one should note that by 1622, despite the natural advantages of its location and port, it was a city in need of political pacification and military preparation, inside a territory that had been ravaged by instability and war for years. The Portuguese refugees leaving Hormuz in search of a safe haven would not find a stable and powerful stronghold in Muscat. A lot of work needed to be done, and quickly.

## 2.4 Ports and Cities

The Gulf region of the seventeenth century was a dynamic place with important ports and cities related to Portuguese trade, navigation and the overall balance of power. One could easily construct a narrative that would include places like Bahrain, Qatif, Julfar, Jask, Qeshm or Bandar-Abbas. However, that is not the purpose of this work and, as such, the focus will remain, largely, on the Omani coast. Nevertheless, there are two primary locations well worth writing some lines about; the city of Basra and the port of Kong.

In the summer of 1517, a small Portuguese fleet commanded by Captain João de Meira left Hormuz and sailed northwest, heading for the mouth of the Shatt al Arab River. Its destination was Basra, a city located half-way between the Gulf coast and the confluence of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. João de Meira's mission was a commercial one (he was instructed to buy wheat

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<sup>62</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 249.



for the fortress of Hormuz), but his voyage marked the beginning of a long relationship between the Portuguese and that city, which echoed well into the seventeenth century and beyond<sup>63</sup>. Although its importance as a major commercial centre is not fully identifiable before the Portuguese arrival, the agitation that a new external force provoked in the commercial relations of the Middle East changed the dynamics. Until the Portuguese arrival, the Red Sea was an equally important route for the import of goods from the east to the Levant and Europe. However, in the beginning of the sixteenth century the Portuguese made several incursions on the Red Sea, including a fierce attack by Afonso de Albuquerque on Aden in 1513<sup>64</sup>. Panic broke out in the region, with this disruption leading to a change of commercial routes and the emergence of Basra as an important hub, mainly due to its connections to Damascus and Baghdad to the west, and Persia and the Gulf to the east. If Hormuz was the most important hub of the Gulf, Basra assumed significant importance regarding Asian goods heading west<sup>65</sup>. The town was one of the largest cities in the Gulf. Ottoman estimates put its population at some 35.000 people towards the end of the seventeenth century<sup>66</sup>. When the Portuguese first arrived at Basra the city was under Safavid influence, but during the Ottoman-Persian hostilities of the sixteenth century it eventually fell into the Ottoman sphere, by 1534. Later, it was fully incorporated into the Ottoman Empire from 1546 until 1612, when local tribes ejected the Turks. The new local dynasty ruled acknowledging the Sultan as their overlord for more than 50 years, after which direct Ottoman rule was re-established. These changes in the balance of power were not without Portuguese influence. There were several instances where the Portuguese were asked to militarily assist the local rulers in repelling invasion or pacifying the region against Ottomans, Safavids and local tribes. Examples of this can be found in 1529, 1546, 1605 and 1624<sup>67</sup>. Commercially, although there were various conflicts with the Ottomans in the mid sixteenth century, the Portuguese were able to establish a factory in the city, in 1547<sup>68</sup>. It can be said that, independently of the governing power, and although not always smooth, Basra's relations with the Portuguese *Estado da India*

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<sup>63</sup> Ronald Bishop Smith, *The First Age Of Portuguese Embassies*, pg. 59-61.

<sup>64</sup> Roger Crowley, *Conquerors*, pg. 324-338.

<sup>65</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 143-153.

<sup>66</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 496-497.

<sup>67</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 154, 161, 189, 544-574.

<sup>68</sup> Francisco Bethencourt & Kirti Chaudhuri, *História da Expansão Portuguesa Vol. II*, pg. 288.

remained close, an indicator on how Portuguese military power was considered an important asset.

Remembering the year of 1622 and the start of our narrative, while Portuguese interaction with Basra had a century's history, the Portuguese investment in the port of Kong was a consequence of what happened next. The town and port of Kong, located in the Persian shores of the Gulf, a few kilometres east of the modern city of Bandar-Lengeh, was chosen by the Portuguese for the establishment of a factory, as part of the peace negotiations that followed the Portuguese-Persian hostilities of the 1620's<sup>69</sup>. The city itself was unimpressive because of its surrounding sterile plain, lack of potable water and frequent sandstorms in the summer. Also, its port was not sheltered against gales and the ships were forced to anchor far offshore to avoid sandbanks<sup>70</sup>. One can look at the decision to install a factory in this tiny town with mistrust. The port of Kong would never reach the status of an international trading hub for commercial domination such as Hormuz<sup>71</sup>, or never have the geographical characteristics of a military stronghold such as Muscat. However, it is interesting to note that, by the 1680's, the revenues levied by the Portuguese at Kong, although seldomly received, would make it the *Estado da India's* most profitable port in Asia<sup>72</sup>. The Portuguese presence at Kong is important to our narrative because, from 1630 onwards, it would become the only Portuguese foothold on the northern shores of the Gulf. In fact, the factory at Kong would remain the symbol of the Portuguese Empire's demise in the Gulf, being a preposterous entity well into the eighteenth century, finally being abandoned in 1721<sup>73</sup>.

The broad geographical framework for the Gulf of the seventeenth century is complete. Its most important entities and places are known and distinguished. From the Ottomans and Persians as regional powers, to the Dutch and English as European competitors, it's possible to have an idea of the general geopolitical outlook of the region from the beginning of the century. However, it's important not to forget the role played by the local tribes around the Gulf, especially

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<sup>69</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 429.

<sup>70</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 45-46.

<sup>71</sup> A. Botelho de Sousa, *O Período de Restauração*, pg. 81.

<sup>72</sup> Rudi Matthee, 'The Portuguese Presence', pg. 11.

<sup>73</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 475.

in the Omani inland, and these will be addressed later in detail. Also, it's possible to perceive and identify the main characteristics of the two main centres of Portuguese interest, Hormuz and, particularly, Muscat, and acknowledge two other locations that play smaller but important roles in the narrative, Basra and Kong. With this background established, the opening of the narrative starts in 1622.

### 3. HORMUZ IN 1622 – INCOMPETENCE AND DISUNITY

The importance of Muscat and the Omani coast for the conveyance of Portuguese affairs in the Gulf in the second quarter of the seventeenth century was only possible due to the loss of Hormuz. Without it, it's doubtful to say the least, that Portuguese officials would have enhanced Muscat's status. The pattern revealed since a century before demonstrates it clearly. Thus, to understand Portuguese actions in and from Muscat for the period of analysis, it's imperative to understand the events leading to the change in the *status quo*.

#### 3.1 Allies and Enemies

In 1611 an awkward meeting took place at Hampton Court, on the outskirts of London. The English King, James I (r. 1603-1625), was about to receive the Persian ambassador, on behalf of Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629), in a routine diplomatic exchange. This time, however, it was not to be an uneventful meeting, given that the Persian ambassador was, in fact, an Englishman. Sir Robert Sherley had been in Persian service for several years, and he had come to his home country to charm the English to aid the Shah in getting rid of the Portuguese settlement at Hormuz. The decoy, nevertheless, was to be an economic one, the direct export of silk from Persia to Europe, with the condition, of course, that the new partner would *deal* with the inconvenience of Turkish bitterness and, most importantly, Portuguese opposition that, from Hormuz, controlled the waters<sup>74</sup>. Although an English ambassador was sent to Persia in the aftermath of the meeting, in 1613<sup>75</sup>, the affairs only gained momentum in 1617, after a mission from English factors to Isfahan, with the objective of obtaining commercial privileges from the Shah. The Safavid ruler was eager to seek the friendship of Portuguese competitors and indulged the English with bales of silk which they dispatched from their new base at Jask, north of Muscat, on the Persian shores of the Gulf

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<sup>74</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 103.

<sup>75</sup> The English ambassador, Sir Thomas Powell, died in Sind after a troubled landing attempt at Gwadar.

of Oman, dangerously close to Hormuz, just about 200 km<sup>76</sup>. In this way the Shah hoped to achieve two purposes. The first was to explore a viable alternative to the current land route, through Ottoman territories, for the export of silk from Persia to Europe; and the second, perhaps more importantly, was to gain allies with naval capacity, something the Persians always lacked, in order to help him deal with the Portuguese at Hormuz.

It's important to note that Sir Robert Shirley, acting on behalf of the Shah, was also trying to appeal to the Portuguese-Spanish court regarding some sort of agreement. One may wonder what kind of foreign policy was being conducted or what kind of official endorsement Shirley had. What is certain is that in an effort to subjugate the Hormuzian (Portuguese, *de facto*) possessions of Bahrain, Qeshm and Bandel de Comorão between 1602 and 1614, the Persians were not shy in seeking allies wherever they could. Apparently, Shirley presented a wild plan for a joint-attack on Aden, with the objective to harm the Ottomans, but nothing came of it<sup>77</sup>.

At this point it's important to pause the narrative for some lines and make some brief remarks about the general politics of the beginning of the seventeenth century regarding the involved parties. In fact, Portugal was in the middle of an uneasy dynastic union with Spain (1580-1640), Spain was in a quasi-continuous state of warfare with England and the Dutch Republic<sup>78</sup>, and the Persians, under Shah Abbas I, were in the middle of a war of reconquest of territories lost to the Ottoman Empire in the end of the sixteenth century<sup>79</sup>. Political interests were extremely complex and, sometimes, conflicting. Owing to this delicate state of affairs, it's easy to understand there were many interconnected interests.

Returning to unfolding events, the Portuguese were not diplomatically idle during these years of English overtures in the Gulf. After the losses of Bahrain in 1602<sup>80</sup>, Qeshm in 1608<sup>81</sup> and Bandel de Comorão in 1614<sup>82,83</sup>, the Portuguese were on the defensive. Realizing relations with

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<sup>76</sup> William Foster, *The English Factories in India – 1618-1621*, pg. 25-26.

<sup>77</sup> *Miscelâneas Manuscritas do Convento da Graça*, Tomo II E, Cx 6, pg. 231-233 [Lisbon, c. 1612].

<sup>78</sup> Malyn Newitt, *Portugal na História*, pg. 133-139.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Axworthy, *Iran – Empire of the Mind*, pg. 134-141.

<sup>80</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 202.

<sup>81</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 209.

<sup>82</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 215.

<sup>83</sup> Mohammed Hameed Salman, *Aspects of Portuguese Rule*, pg. 204.

the Persians were deteriorating and Hormuz was becoming seriously threatened, it was the intention of King Philip II of Portugal to seek the Shah's friendship. To that end, ambassadors were dispatched to Persia. In 1612 the King nominated D. Frei António Gouveia as Portugal's ambassador to the Persian Shah in order to promote an alliance between Portugal and Persia<sup>84</sup>. In Madrid, the Council of State decided, in the same year of 1612, to dispatch another ambassador to Persia, a 64-year-old Spanish nobleman, Don García de Silva y Figueroa<sup>85</sup>. Figueroa's embassy had the objective of luring the Shah into some sort of an alliance against the Ottoman foe and the redirection of the silk routes to *proper* channels. However, the embassy was, in time, surpassed by the course of events. Departing from Lisbon in 1614 it was not until 1618 that he was able to be received by the Shah in Qazvin<sup>86</sup>. By this time the Portuguese had lost Bandel de Comorão, the English had gained a foothold on Jask and the Persian Shah was about to sign a treaty with the Ottomans. Suddenly, Figueroa had a lot to ask for and nothing to offer in return. The ambassador's mission would eventually result in failure after several delays and setbacks that saw him stay in the east from 1614 to 1624<sup>87</sup>. However, the enterprise shows the willingness of the Habsburgs<sup>88</sup> to obtain the favour of the Shah, although more in order to keep their common enemy the Ottomans at bay in Europe, than to secure a convenient settlement regarding Hormuz<sup>89</sup>. The Hormuzian question was being dragged to European political calculations and the long-lasting fear of Ottoman aggression in the Mediterranean was the perfect pretext.

As relations with Persia worsened and territories were being lost, the Portuguese felt the need to secure the southern shores of the Gulf. In 1616, the Viceroy in Goa urged the officials in Hormuz to attack Sohar, 200 km west of Muscat. Sohar, while nominally part of the Kingdom of Hormuz, had been ruled by an Arab chief called Mamet, who had been challenging the commercial rules of the Portuguese for 40 years. The expedition was successful and the city was taken, but the commercial disruption regarding the trading routes and the consequent lack of

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<sup>84</sup> Regimento de Filipe II a D. Frei António de Gouveia, bispo de Sirene; BA: 51-VII-11, fols. 162 r-163 v.

<sup>85</sup> Rui Manuel Loureiro, 'The Indian journeys', pg. 51-52.

<sup>86</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 221-222.

<sup>87</sup> Rui Manuel Loureiro, 'The Indian journeys', pg. 55.

<sup>88</sup> The Habsburg dynasty ruled the Dynastic Union of Portugal and Spain from 1580 to 1640.

<sup>89</sup> Graça Almeida Borges, 'El Consejo de Estado', pg. 38.

customs payment remained<sup>90</sup>. Sohar was not the only town that drew the attention of the Portuguese in this period of crisis. In Khor Fakkan, a town with an excellent supply of drinking water some 120 km north of Sohar, the Portuguese built a small fort in 1620<sup>91</sup>. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Comorão, which had been long lost and Qeshm, which was being seriously threatened, were the two main sources of fresh water for Hormuz. Uneasiness grew in Goa as old problems resurfaced. The Viceroy, perfectly aware that some fortifications had fallen into disrepair, wrote to the King in February 1620, asking for funds to repair, among other places, the defences of Hormuz, Muscat and Sohar<sup>92</sup>. Based on the inspection of official documents from the years between 1616 and 1622 one can clearly understand the increasing solicitude Portuguese officials were devoting to Gulf matters.

As the seventeenth century unfolded, Shah Abbas I closed in on the Portuguese presence in Hormuz. The English arrival in the Gulf was perfectly timed with Persian interests for it came in a time of relative peace with the Ottoman Empire and in the follow up of the conquests of Bahrain and Bandel de Comorão. With the English commercially seduced into an uncomfortable association, the stage was set for the main attack on Hormuz. As for the Portuguese, the union with Spain began to show its negative aspects. Spanish enemies now had a lawful excuse to harass Portuguese dominions<sup>93</sup>. In addition, for the Iberian crown, Hormuz was only one small problem amid a myriad of other, more pressing issues. Even so, although Portuguese officials in the Gulf and in Goa tried to stabilize the situation through actions in their southern flank, their major hope of reversing a deteriorating situation would come from Lisbon. In the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1619, Commander Rui Freire de Andrade, raised anchor on the Tagus River at the command of a fleet of five warships and two thousand men. Their destination was Hormuz<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 224-226.

<sup>91</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 340.

<sup>92</sup> *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Livro 12, f. 71-71v.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Although Spain and England were technically at peace since the Treaty of London was signed in 1604, tensions were starting to arise in the Netherlands where both countries had profound interests, which led to open war in 1625.

<sup>94</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 13.

### 3.2 Anglo-Persian offensive

In the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1620, after an arduous 15-month journey, Rui Freire's fleet arrived at Hormuz with four ships<sup>95</sup>. The King had delivered him precise instructions, albeit conflicting ones. In an extensive and detailed document, Philip II had ordered Rui Freire to seek and destroy all European vessels from the waters of the Gulf without, and he was adamant on this, harming Persian interests. The Kingdom of Portugal was at peace with the Persians and it should remain so. To this end Rui Freire should, as soon as he entered the Gulf of Oman, assure the Sheikhs of Qalhat and Quriyat of his peaceful intentions and ask them to provide information about the presence of European ships, their type and number. Only then should he proceed to Muscat<sup>96</sup>. It's interesting to note the King's instructions were to, first, rely on the Sheikh's information and only then go to Muscat. One can conclude that, at this point, relations with the local Sheikhs were friendly to the point of trusting their information to commit a war fleet. However, the King's orders were not complete. In a separate letter, he commanded Rui Freire to build a fortress in the island of Qeshm, some 22 km from Hormuz. The island was, since 1608, under the rule of the Shah's forces and building such a fortress would be seen as an act of aggression. The King thought the action would perhaps be seen as small local affair and would not disturb the general peace, such as the assault on Bandel de Comorão by Persian forces in 1614<sup>97</sup>. Whatever the King's designs, events would reveal the true implications of the order to build a fortress at Qeshm.

After the arrival of the Portuguese forces, Rui Freire informed the King of Hormuz, Mohammed Shah IV, and the Captain of Hormuz, D. Francisco de Sousa, of his intention to execute the King's orders and land at Qeshm to build the fortress. It was not a straightforward decision and discord started brewing. The Hormuzian King, fancying that *"all the coasts that the Persian possesses are mine by right, and moreover the island of Queixome is equally mine<sup>98</sup>"*, approved the venture and offered men and money to Rui Freire. On the other hand, Francisco de Sousa

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<sup>95</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 15-16.

<sup>96</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 12, fol. 566-568.

<sup>97</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, Ormuz – 1507-1622, pg. 83.

<sup>98</sup> D. T. Potts, 'The Portuguese on Qeshm', pg. 108.



argued strongly against it. He felt such an action was unnecessary because the Persian officials in Qeshm had been continuing to provide water to Hormuz, and it would destabilize the situation and end the peace with the Shah<sup>99</sup>. Eventually it was agreed to consult the Governor in Goa<sup>100</sup>. As he waited for a reply, in November, Rui Freire set up a four-warship squadron and headed out towards Jask in order to wait for the English fleet that was supposed to arrive from Europe.

Off the coast of Jask, on the dawn of the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1620, Rui Freire de Andrade's squadron sighted two English carracks and an additional captured ship. The Portuguese Commander immediately set sail and started a pursuit that saw the enemy ships escape to the safety of Surat. After realizing he was unable to reach his prey, Rui Freire ordered his ships to turn back into their anchorage point at Jask<sup>101</sup>. The element of surprise had been lost. The English had confirmed the presence of the Portuguese squadron, the type of ships and their numbers. Eight days later, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, the first major battle between European powers in the Indian Ocean took place. Learning from the information provided by the first encounter, an English fleet of four ships, totalling 206 cannons, overpowering the 158 in the Portuguese ships, appeared off the coast of Jask. After a first brief skirmish, the two fleets prepared for battle the next day. A great exchange of artillery fire took place with no decisive outcome. Although English losses, numbering at 190 between dead and wounded, were far greater than those of the Portuguese of around 75<sup>102</sup>, the English fleet had not been destroyed and remained at full capacity. During several days the two fleets faced each other, with the English avoiding any contact. Frustrated by the English refusal to fight, Rui Freire adopted the strategy of using his squadron in a static position to cut off English access to the port of Jask and, thus, denying the English the means to make their commercial exchanges<sup>103</sup>. This was to prove a fatal mistake. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January the English attacked the Portuguese formation and slaughtered the Portuguese flagship. A temporary calm in the winds prevented the other three Portuguese ships from manoeuvring to help the main galleon. The 64-cannon ship bore the heavy brunt of the attack and when the English broke off,

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<sup>99</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates* Vol. V 1604-1625, pg. 264.

<sup>100</sup> José Gervásio Leite, *Rui Freire de Andrada*, pg. 16.

<sup>101</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates* Vol. V 1604-1625, pg. 267.

<sup>102</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates* Vol. V 1604-1625, pg. 272.

<sup>103</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Ormuz – 1507-1622*, pg. 87-88.

the Portuguese had sustained about 360 casualties, dead and wounded, against 7 from the English side<sup>104</sup>. In the aftermath of the battle, a vigorous storm swept away the Portuguese fleet and, on their return on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January, the English had already landed at Jask and quickly loaded the cargo of 520 bales of Persian silk intended for shipment to England<sup>105</sup>. They sailed for Surat immediately. Unable to destroy the English fleet or to prevent the shipping of the valuable silk, Rui Freire returned to Hormuz to repair his ships and launch his assault on Qeshm.

After the arrival of the battered fleet at Hormuz, a council took place in the first months of 1621. All the major officials of the island participated, together with the local King. A letter written on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, had been received from Goa with unfavourable views regarding the attack on Qeshm<sup>106</sup>. Arguments were discussed as in the previous year. The Captain of Hormuz, Francisco de Sousa, remained strongly against the attack on the grounds that it would mean war with Persia and the King of Hormuz argued firmly in favour. Backed by a passionate case for aggression from Mohammed Shah IV and the order given to him by King Philip, Rui Freire pressed for the attack. The decision to approve was nearly unanimous and preparations began for the expedition<sup>107</sup>. Meanwhile, in Goa, the Governor had probably by now heard of the battle at Jask. He hastily equipped two galleons and sent them to reinforce Rui Freire's squadron in Hormuz together with renewed instructions for him not to attack Qeshm and to proceed to Muscat where he was to stay, safely, until August, when he was to join the main fleet of the *Estado da India* in Goa. After that, or so the Governor devised, the fleet would search for the English and fight a decisive battle for supremacy over the trade routes of the Indian Ocean<sup>108</sup>. It was not to be. As it was, Rui Freire was undeterred.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, 1621, the Portuguese Commander appeared off the coast at Qeshm at the head of a Portuguese force of thirty-three vessels and 3.000 men, two thirds of the force being Portuguese soldiers and one third Hormuzian ones. He was about to launch an unprovoked attack on Persia, a typical case of a *casus belli*. Defending the area in and around Qeshm were

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<sup>104</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, *Como se Perdeu Ormuz*, pg. 38.

<sup>105</sup> William Foster, *The English Factories in India – 1618-1621*, pg. 29-30.

<sup>106</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 281.

<sup>107</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Ormuz – 1507-1622*, pg. 90.

<sup>108</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 280.

about 4.000 Persians<sup>109</sup>. A force of 1.000 Persian cavalry tried to prevent the Portuguese landing but to no avail. The heavy bombardment from the Portuguese vessels proved too strong and the Persians were driven back. Rui Freire was able to land his forces and start the construction of the fortress<sup>110</sup>. Contrary to the idea that the attack could go unnoticed or be quietly accepted, the Persians reacted fast. Hearing of the situation the governor of Lar, Imam Qoli Khan, immediately sent a force to expel the Portuguese<sup>111</sup>. Later, Shah Abbas expressed his satisfaction with the situation to the EIC<sup>112</sup> agent in Isfahan, for it would allow him to retake Hormuz. Accordingly, he dispatched a force of 10.000 men to Qeshm. After erecting a fortified camp near the Portuguese fortress, the Persians waited, as a further 25.000 men were expected soon<sup>113</sup>. The newly built Portuguese fortress was totally besieged by land on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, 1621. Despite the enormous Persian advantage in terms of manpower, the Portuguese had a strong defensive position and still commanded the sea, which meant they could cause a lot of damage to Persian interests along the coast. During the 9-month siege the Portuguese attacked, sacked and burned several coastal towns on the Gulf, like Kuhestak, Bandel de Comorão, Jask, Kong<sup>114</sup>, Laft, Rams, Bramey and Julfar. It's interesting to note the majority of the military operations of the fleet were centred on the northern shores of the Gulf, with Julfar being the only exception. At this point one can easily understand Rui Freire was preoccupied with harming Persian towns and disrupting the movement of soldiers from the continent to the island of Qeshm, mainly through attacks on Laft. However, in a time when military prestige and the show of force were important means of diplomacy, the Commander didn't want to allow a break in the vassalage ties binding several towns on the Omani coast to the Portuguese. Regarding this, the Portuguese had intercepted a small vessel with two Arab chiefs from Rams with presents for the Shah, and an offer of friendship<sup>115</sup>. Realizing rebellion could spread quickly, an expedition was hastily sent to subjugate Rams and Julfar<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>109</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, Ormuz – 1507-1622, pg. 90-91.

<sup>110</sup> D. T. Potts, 'The Portuguese on Qeshm', pg. 108.

<sup>111</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 228.

<sup>112</sup> EIC – English East India Company

<sup>113</sup> D. T. Potts, 'The Portuguese on Qeshm', pg. 111.

<sup>114</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 229.

<sup>115</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, Como se Perdeu Ormuz, pg. 66-69.

<sup>116</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 228.

Meanwhile, the situation in Qeshm saw little change. There were various skirmishes between the Persians and the Portuguese garrison, but no advance was made by the former. The Portuguese were still strongly entrenched. In October, the Governor in Goa learned Rui Freire had not followed his instructions to leave Qeshm alone and, although disappointed, sent a squadron of ten vessels under the command of Simão de Melo to reinforce the Portuguese forces in Hormuz. He was perfectly aware the annual English fleet would arrive at Jask at any moment<sup>117</sup>, and he was right. The English did, in fact, arrive. The sight, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, of a five ship<sup>118</sup> English force could not have come at a better time for the Persian officials. At Kuhestak, a meeting took place between Imam Qoli Khan's representative and the EIC officials during which it was agreed the English would use their navy to help dislodge the Portuguese from Qeshm and Hormuz<sup>119</sup>. In exchange for this alliance with a Muslim nation in an open attack against a fellow Christian one, the English were seduced with promises of commercial advantages on the Persian port of Bandar-Abbas<sup>120</sup>, increasing trading rights, a share of the plunder and a veiled threat of not getting the expected silk if they don't cooperate<sup>121</sup>. Although Rui Freire tried to disrupt the negotiations and enter a separate agreement with Imam Qoli Khan, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1622 the Anglo-Persian alliance was concluded<sup>122</sup>. War was coming to Hormuz.

In the meantime, after receiving the Governor's reply to his dispatches on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, Rui Freire attended the council in Hormuz to discuss its content<sup>123</sup>. For the Commander, the state of affairs was proceeding according to plan; the fortress was constructed, the Persians were being kept at bay and the fleet was being prepared to fight the English at Jask. It was Rui Freire's intention to command the fleet at Jask but the council decided otherwise. He was to remain at Qeshm, which he reluctantly did, renewing his attacks on Laft along with sorties against the Persian camp. Towards the end of December Simão de Melo's squadron arrived and supplied Qeshm and Hormuz with men, food and ammunition. As the year headed towards its

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<sup>117</sup> D. T. Potts, 'The Portuguese on Qeshm', pg. 112.

<sup>118</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 104.

<sup>119</sup> D. T. Potts, 'The Portuguese on Qeshm', pg. 113.

<sup>120</sup> Bandar-Abbas was the name of the Persian city that evolved from the Portuguese held port of Bandel de Comorão. In some sources the name Gombroon can also be associated with the place.

<sup>121</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 105.

<sup>122</sup> D. T. Potts, 'The Portuguese on Qeshm', pg. 113.

<sup>123</sup> José Gervásio Leite, *Rui Freire de Andrada*, pg. 30.

end, the Portuguese fleet had been reinforced, Qeshm was well supplied and Hormuz seemed as safe as ever. Morale was high. All that was about to change. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, a ship that had been patrolling the sea off Jask arrived with gloomy news. An English fleet of nine ships was heading for Hormuz<sup>124</sup>.

Most of the sources agree on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January as the date of the English fleet sighting of Hormuz. This would put more than one full month between the arrival of the news that a fleet was seen off Jask and the arrival of the attacking force. Thus, it creates a challenging problem because the distance between Jask and Hormuz is less than 250 km, one that any fleet of the age would sail in days, not weeks or, even less likely, a month. Additionally, besides the previously said date of the Anglo-Persian agreement in the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, John Keay, in his book about the EIC, claims the final decision to attack Hormuz was only settled in mid-January<sup>125</sup>. It seems possible the ship bringing the news didn't see the fleet at first hand but may have heard reports from another ship that a fleet had departed from Surat.

What is certain is that in the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1622 the English appeared off the coast of Hormuz. Realizing the Portuguese fleet was not giving battle and that Rui Freire was besieged in Qeshm, they set sail and anchored close to Qeshm. During the night, a small ship that had been shadowing the English managed to get to Qeshm and inform Rui Freire of the dire situation. The Commander was about to be cut-off and isolated, and the official pleaded with him to leave immediately for Hormuz. However, Rui Freire didn't want to leave Qeshm without official authorization<sup>126</sup>, a stand that seems difficult to understand by a person who had previously, many times, asserted his position. Motivated by a pure sense of duty, pride or foolishness, he decided to stay. At Hormuz the Captain, Simão de Melo, who had replaced D. Francisco de Sousa who had died a few months before, stationed the fleet close to the fortress<sup>127</sup>. And so, a situation was reached, in which the Portuguese had the fleet Commander controlling the defence of a besieged fortress and a Captain responsible for a fleet he didn't want to use. It's difficult not to think about

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<sup>124</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 288-289.

<sup>125</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 105.

<sup>126</sup> José Gervásio Leite, *Rui Freire de Andrada*, pg. 31-32.

<sup>127</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Ormuz – 1507-1622*, pg. 97.

incompetence or, at the very least, lack of coordination between the Portuguese Commander and Captain, a situation that would eventually lead to disaster.

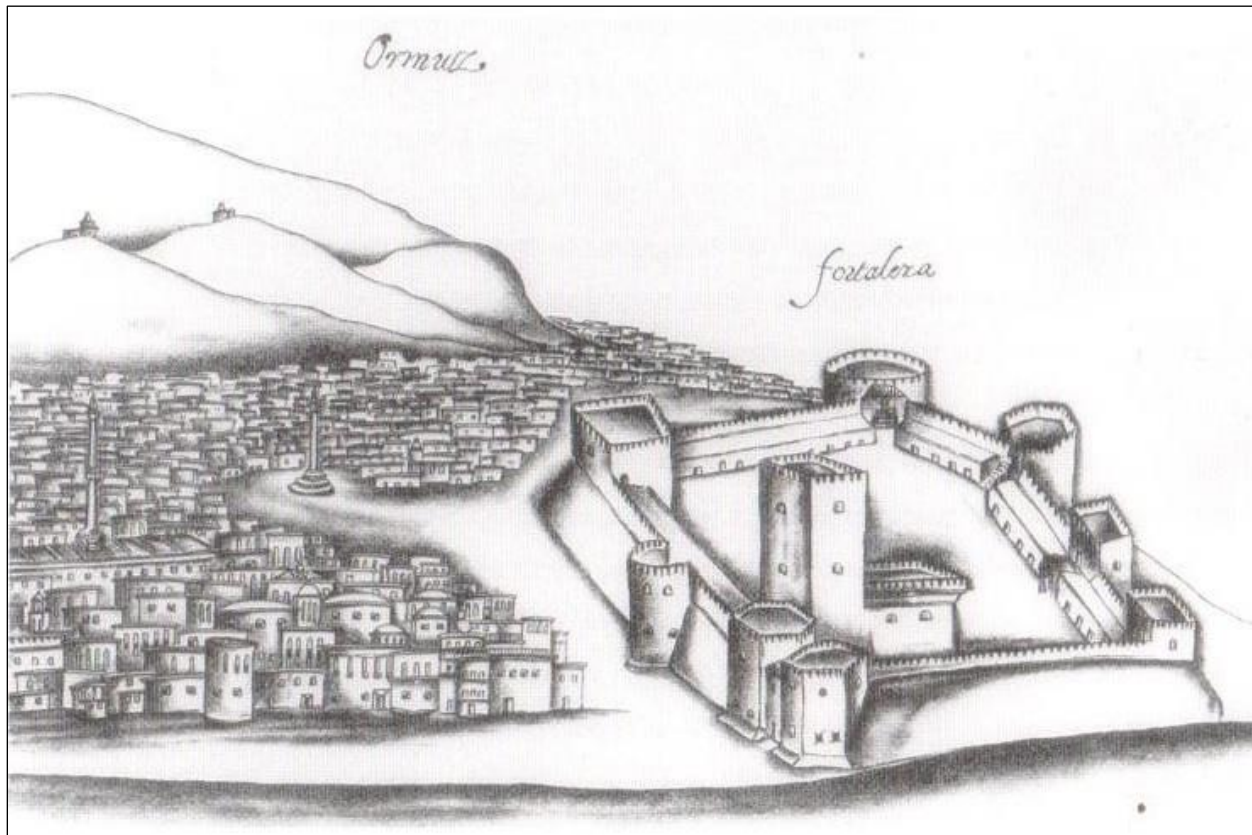


Figure 5 - Fortress and city of Hormuz in the mid-sixteenth century

Source: CORREIA, Gaspar; *Lendas da Índia, Tomo II*, Typographia da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1860

At Qeshm, Monox, the English factor and Rui Freire had a meeting, but negotiations failed and the English started bombarding the fort from their ships<sup>128</sup>. After having landed several pieces of artillery the bombardment continued from sea and land, which was made worse by the infantry attacks from the Persian side. Even so, the Portuguese held firm for several days. The situation was, however, becoming desperate. Although a small naval attack on the English was made by a squadron returning from its blockade of Laft<sup>129</sup>, the main Portuguese fleet was not put

<sup>128</sup> D. T. Potts, 'The Portuguese on Qeshm', pg. 113.

<sup>129</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 295.

to sea and the besieged came to the realization they were on their own. Rui Freire continued to refuse surrender, but his men had had enough. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, after confused negotiations in which Rui Freire was side-lined, capitulation terms were agreed, and the Portuguese surrendered. Rui Freire was imprisoned by the English and sent to Surat. The Portuguese officials and soldiers were allowed to retreat to Hormuz but the Hormuzians were handed over to the Persians and slaughtered<sup>130</sup>. Friendship with the Portuguese was costly. As for the Portuguese fortress, dispossessed of its creators, it still stands on the eastern tip of Qeshm, after 400 years.

### 3.3 Fall and retreat to Muscat

The victorious didn't stay long at Qeshm. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February the English fleet appeared off Hormuz, after stopping at Bandar-Abbas. Inexplicably, no specific measures had been adopted to reinforce the island's defences. One of the main Portuguese possessions in the *Estado da India* was tremendously vulnerable. Apparently, the Captain of Hormuz, Simão de Melo, had named D. Gonçalo da Silveira Captain of the fleet and instructed him to take charge of the ships on the beach. D. Gonçalo, realizing that many small vessels were departing from Bandar-Abbas took charge of some 30 or 40 small galleys and gave battle to the Persian ships. The engagement, that took several hours, was a tremendous success for the Portuguese, who sank several ships and killed many enemies. However, for some reason, orders came from Hormuz for him to retreat to the fortress<sup>131</sup>. With Rui Freire imprisoned on an English ship, the Portuguese leadership continued to show a tremendous lack of unity and assertiveness. Due to D. Gonçalo's more feisty temperament and his intention to give battle again, Simão de Melo ordered all galleys to be anchored along the fortress. This paved the way for the enemy's invasion of the island. That same day, the Persians landed 9.000 soldiers and sappers<sup>132</sup>.

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<sup>130</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, Ormuz – 1507-1622, pg. 98.

<sup>131</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625, pg. 298.

<sup>132</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, Ormuz – 1507-1622, pg. 99-102.

The Portuguese didn't make any attempt to fight off the invading fleet, took no action to prevent the Persian landing and made no effort to defend the city, an attitude that shocked the English factor<sup>133</sup>. Due to fear or incompetence, inactivity was paramount. The Portuguese hastily retreated to the fortress despite the protests and distress of the Hormuzian King and several Portuguese officials<sup>134</sup>. And so, the siege began. Although Persian actions of mining and tunnelling had a great effect and succeeded in breaching some walls, the Portuguese managed to hold and fight off every assault. For two months, while the Portuguese fleet was being systematically destroyed by the English in the beaches, the garrison was courageously keeping the Persians at bay on land<sup>135</sup>. Some sorties were made from the fortress<sup>136</sup>, with considerable success, and several attacks were repelled, including six in one night that cost the attackers an estimated 800 dead at the expense of almost 200 Portuguese casualties<sup>137</sup>. The situation was, however, increasingly desperate, for water was becoming unhealthy, food was affected by worms and dysentery was spreading fast<sup>138</sup>.

Pausing for a moment, it's important to point out the fact that, throughout the Qeshm and Hormuz sieges, no relief force was ever sighted, called or expected from Muscat or any other Portuguese held port in the Gulf. During those fateful months, the interactions that existed between the besieged Portuguese and their southern possessions had the sole purpose of buying supplies or subduing rebellious local chiefs. Apparently, the officials in Muscat had neither the authority or the power to maintain their coastline in order. Additionally, no usable Portuguese naval force was to be found off the coast of Oman, which can only confirm its secondary role in the general context of affairs in the region.

At Hormuz, although a letter from the Governor had managed to reach the fortress with the report that a fleet of 20 small galleys with 1.000 soldiers had already departed from Goa, it was already too late<sup>139</sup>. The situation in the fortress was hopeless. Apart from the supply

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<sup>133</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Ormuz – 1507-1622*, pg. 102.

<sup>134</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, *Como se Perdeu Ormuz*, pg. 111-115.

<sup>135</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 106.

<sup>136</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, *Como se Perdeu Ormuz*, pg. 128.

<sup>137</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, *Como se Perdeu Ormuz*, pg. 136.

<sup>138</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 299.

<sup>139</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, *Como se Perdeu Ormuz*, pg. 140.



situation, there had been more breaches in the walls<sup>140</sup>. In the beginning of May events turned decisive. Reports differ on which side asked for negotiations but it seems plausible to assume the Portuguese were the most interested. Again, it's unclear who was responsible for the terms on the Portuguese side, one more example of the lack of command and sharp disunity that was felt inside the fortress. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1622 the unthinkable happened, when the Portuguese Captain, the vilified Simão de Melo, handed over the keys of the fortress to an Anglo-Persian delegation<sup>141</sup>. The surrender would bring dismay to Portuguese officials in Goa and Lisbon, and would trigger a legal procedure aiming to find those guilty for this shameful outcome<sup>142</sup>.

According to some sources there were 1.400 dead from the Portuguese side during the siege. The survivors totalled 2.500 and experienced different fates, as in Qeshm. The Hormuzians that had sided with the Portuguese were handed over to the Persians and killed<sup>143</sup>. As for the Portuguese, according to the Italian traveller Pietro Della Valle who was on the Persian province of Lar at the time, there were 300 or 400, although these numbers can be exaggerated. They were kept under English watch<sup>144</sup> and subsequently ferried to Muscat and Sohar in two English vessels<sup>145</sup>. A particular fate awaited the King of Hormuz. Mohammed Shah IV was imprisoned by the Persians and taken to Shiraz where he died around 1635<sup>146</sup>. It seems that after being treated harshly initially, he was later released by the Shah and given proper means of sustenance<sup>147</sup>

The fall of Hormuz and the rise of Muscat as the centre of Portuguese operations in the Gulf was marked with a bit of irony. Sailing towards their refuge in the Arabian coast, the survivors sighted a war squadron coming the opposite way. It was the Portuguese relief force that had been sent by the Governor, under the command of Constantino de Sá Noronha. Apparently, Noronha's expedition to Hormuz was painfully slow, the squadron being delayed several days in Goa and heading first to Muscat instead of directly to Hormuz, spending a full week there waiting for

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<sup>140</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 106.

<sup>141</sup> Dejanirah Couto & Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Ormuz – 1507-1622*, pg. 104-105.

<sup>142</sup> *Livro das Monções*, Tomo IX, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1978, VII.

<sup>143</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 299.

<sup>144</sup> Elio C. Brancaforte, 'The Italian Connection', pg. 199.

<sup>145</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 40.

<sup>146</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 230.

<sup>147</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, *Como se Perdeu Ormuz*, pg. 152.

stragglers<sup>148</sup>. One last time the Portuguese leadership didn't show initiative and resolve in saving Hormuz. Muscat was living its first days as the base of Portuguese power in the Gulf.

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<sup>148</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, *Como se Perdeu Ormuz*, pg. 144-145.

#### 4. THE PORTUGUESE IN ARABIA

Even in those days, news travelled fast. Especially bad news. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, the Governor of the *Estado da Índia*, Fernão de Albuquerque, received a letter from Muscat. In it, Constantino de Sá Noronha, relates the fall of Hormuz, the precarious situation at Muscat and the impossibility of defending Sohar. Noronha's letter and the Council of State's decision for the reply are a gloomy portrait of the Portuguese situation in the Gulf in May 1622. Muscat was running out of water, its bay was vulnerable to attack, the galleons had been lost and Sohar was to be abandoned and given to a friendly Sheikh<sup>149</sup>.

Shortly after Noronha had arrived at Muscat with his squadron from Goa, an unexpected visitor had also landed at the city. Rui Freire de Andrade, the Commander sent by the King of Portugal to make war on the English and build the fortress at Qeshm, had made a legendary escape from the English at Surat. On Easter Sunday he had managed to inebriate the ship's crew with a special herb obtained for him by a loyal servant. He had proposed a proper feast to commemorate Easter and the English, gallantly, consented. Shortly after dinner, taking advantage of the English ineptitude, he took a small boat and made for the coast. With his captors giving chase, he managed to get to Daman the next day. At the city, the officials offered him money and he hastily went to Bassein where he bought and armed a galiot, setting sail, with 50 soldiers, to Muscat, still hoping to get to Hormuz in time<sup>150</sup>.

Noronha and Rui Freire stayed in Muscat for some months, stabilizing the situation and reorganizing the command. The fortress of Muscat was given to Martim Afonso de Melo<sup>151</sup> and the fleet to D. Gonçalo da Silveira<sup>152</sup>. In August they set sail for Goa. The next months remained calm at Muscat. The English didn't expand their military involvement in any other places in the Gulf and the Persians seemed, at first, more committed to securing their newly conquered fortresses of Hormuz and Qeshm, and to dismantling the city of Hormuz, taking all the valuable

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<sup>149</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. I, Doc. 37.

<sup>150</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 40-41.

<sup>151</sup> Paulo Craesbeeck, Commentarios, pg. 155.

<sup>152</sup> Luciano Cordeiro, Como se Perdeu Ormuz, pg. 165.

possessions from its houses<sup>153</sup>. Things in Goa would gain momentum in December, with the arrival of the new Viceroy, D. Francisco da Gama, Count of Vidigueira<sup>154</sup>.

#### 4.1 The shaken Empire strikes back – the Omani priority

The last months of 1622 saw Rui Freire de Andrade in seclusion at the Augustinian convent in Goa. Upon his arrival in the city, he was welcomed by his peers but coldly received by the Governor. After all, he had acted against his advice about the construction of the fort in Qeshm. Fernão de Albuquerque was determined to find those responsible for the loss of Hormuz and ordered an inquiry in which the Commander was to be his main target. In the meanwhile, Rui Freire decided to dedicate his life to prayer and becoming a friar<sup>155</sup>. The arrival of the new Viceroy of the *Estado da Índia*, in December, the Count of Vidigueira D. Francisco da Gama, improved Rui Freire's prospects and, hence, the Empire's attitude towards the situation in the Gulf. Da Gama inherited a delicate situation and with no antagonism towards Rui Freire, decided to rehabilitate the Commander, nominating him General of the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. Six galliots were fully armed, with which Rui Freire was to join Noronha's fleet at Muscat and make war on the enemies of the Portuguese. In April 1623 the General set sail towards Muscat<sup>156</sup>. This way, the Viceroy set in motion a thunderous offensive that would resonate throughout the Gulf.

Meanwhile, in January 1623, there were reports of a large force being assembled at Bandar-Abbas with the objective of conquering Muscat<sup>157</sup>. Apparently, there had been negotiations between the Persians and the English for a new joint-attack on the Portuguese, this time on the Arabian shores of the Gulf, but nothing came of it<sup>158</sup>. Instead, the Persians directed their assault on Sohar. It must be said that, due to the indirect system of control and vassalage the Portuguese used extensively in the Gulf, many Omani towns and ports had, in the past, vowed

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<sup>153</sup> Elio C. Brancaforte, 'The Italian Connection', pg. 200-204.

<sup>154</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 42-43.

<sup>155</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 42.

<sup>156</sup> Paulo Craesbeeck, Commentarios, pg. 156.

<sup>157</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 326.

<sup>158</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, The Countries and Tribes, pg. 203.

their allegiance to the King of Hormuz, which in turn gave his allegiance to the King of Portugal. This means that when, in the aftermath of the fall of Hormuz, the King of Hormuz was imprisoned by the Persians, many of those coastal towns became vassals of the Persian Shah. Thus, some ports near Muscat and others around the Cape Musandam peninsula, like Khor Fakkan, Diba, Limah, Khasab, Rams and Julfar fell under Persian rule. However, in Sohar, there was a Portuguese garrison to keep in check the inhabitants, who were not very pro-Portuguese after the bloody affair of 1616. But when the Persians disembarked 4.600 troops at Diba, the Portuguese soldiers were withdrawn from Sohar to Muscat and left the town to the Persians<sup>159</sup>.

At this time Portuguese officials in Muscat tried to explore anti-Persian sentiment that existed in some sectors of Arab society<sup>160</sup>. Approaching the Imam of Nizwa, possibly through a group of Portuguese *casados*<sup>161</sup> that lived in Muscat, they managed to forge an alliance with the objective of recapturing Sohar. Mustering 15.000 men at Rustaq the Arabs proceeded to Sohar, besieging the Persians while waiting for the Portuguese fleet<sup>162</sup>. After their arrival a fierce first assault took place, in which the Portuguese were repulsed. But the siege proceeded with vigour and the Persians were forced to surrender to Rui Freire, who let the garrison withdraw in good order<sup>163</sup>. With Sohar secured, Rui Freire advanced to Khor Fakkan where he was received with enthusiasm by the local population and the Arab Captain who had fought alongside the Portuguese some time before<sup>164</sup>. While still at Khor Fakkan, the Commander received news that in Diba the Arab population had rebelled against the Persians and massacred 800 Safavid troops. The next target was Limah where the fort was destroyed, its garrison and population massacred. Khasab was already empty, for the population had fled to the interior in fear. They eventually returned after Rui Freire had pardoned them. In all these coastal settlements, the Portuguese installed trusted rulers and established customs-houses. It was important to keep the commerce

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<sup>159</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 326.

<sup>160</sup> The animosity between Persians and Omanis derives from different ethnical, cultural and, mainly, religious backgrounds. Different conceptions of Islam and Islamic history are at the centre of the religious strife.

<sup>161</sup> *Casados* were Portuguese that lived for many years in a given region of the Empire, marrying locally, and who normally had a better understanding and knowledge of the society they were integrated, than the officials that arrived from Portugal or other parts of the Empire. It's possible to better understand the concept on Andrea Dore's paper 'Os casados na India Portuguesa', pg. 510-533.

<sup>162</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 234.

<sup>163</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 189.

<sup>164</sup> Paulo Craesbeeck, *Commentarios*, pg. 162.

flowing and to divert the trading routes to Portuguese-held ports. Rui Freire then sent a squadron to pacify the coast east of Muscat<sup>165</sup>. In the aftermath of his attack on the Arabian coast of the Gulf, Rui Freire accomplished more in a few months than anyone had in many years of Portuguese neglect. Apparently, he made an appearance at Hormuz in late summer where he tried to burn one English vessel and one Dutch one, the first Dutch ship on those waters, with no success. In October he withdrew to Muscat, to safeguard the fleet throughout the winter<sup>166</sup>.

In the Gulf, the Portuguese were halting the Persian expansion. Meanwhile, straightforward orders came directly from the King in Portugal to the Viceroy regarding Muscat. In a letter dated March 1623 he was precise, “...*you must issue orders for everything that you deem is necessary so that it is preserved and so that the merchants and friendly nations that flocked to Hormuz find there the trade and refuge that they had in Hormuz, while Hormuz is out of our grasp, diverting the Persian trade to Basra, al-Qatif and the lands of the Sa’id Mubārak, and efforts should be made to ensure that the carracks from Sindh and the north go to Muscat*”<sup>167</sup>. It was intention of the Portuguese King, while the recapture of Hormuz didn’t take place, to preserve Muscat and make all necessary efforts to enhance its status and its commerce. The idea of losing Muscat was unthinkable. His plan to somehow prioritize what was achievable and focus the approach on the commercial problem seems to have made an impact at Muscat.

Sometime during the second half of 1623, a ship arrived at Muscat with an envoy from the Ottoman Pasha of Basra. The city was being threatened by Imam Qoli Khan, the victorious Safavid general of Hormuz, and the Pasha was looking for potential allies in the Gulf. The Portuguese were an obvious choice, due to their powerful fleet and their ongoing war with the Persians. Therefore, Afrasiyab Pasha, ruler of a local dynasty, requested the support of six war galliots, paid at his expense, that were to protect the mouth of the Euphrates river. At Muscat the council approved the request and Rui Freire sent D. Gonçalo da Silveira to Basra with the requested squadron plus

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<sup>165</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 327-328.

<sup>166</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 329-330.

<sup>167</sup> In the Portuguese original “...*deveis ordenar tudo o que julgardes por necessário, para que se conserve, e os mercadores, e nações amigas que acudiam a Ormuz, enquanto ele se não recobra, achem ali o comércio e abrigo que lá tinham, divertindo o dos Persas por Bassorá, Catifa e as terras do Bombareca, e procurando que as naus do Sinde, e do norte vão a Mascate...*” in *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Livro 18, fol. 365-365v.<sup>9</sup>

seven merchant vessels. They arrived at Basra in February 1624<sup>168</sup>. One may understand the reasons behind the support to the Pasha. After all Basra was an important entrepôt for the Portuguese, one that gained even more importance due to the loss of Hormuz. The city represented the ending point of a route that started in India and was directed to the Middle East and the Mediterranean and so, it was an important part of the plan to re-direct the trading routes to *proper* channels. Alliances came and went in the Gulf between the 1500s and 1700s, and at this point the Ottomans were on the same side. However, if Rui Freire (and Goa) were truly committed to the recapture of Hormuz it would be, perhaps, preferable to maintain the valuable Silveira's squadron together with the main forces. But it seems that Hormuz wasn't the immediate objective.

Having rested his fleet, Rui Freire started his campaign of 1624 in April, again attacking and destroying Limah, which was defended by 400 Persian soldiers. He then landed in Khasab, only 80 km from Hormuz, where he was well received this time. Here, he fortified and prepared the city as a base of an attack on Hormuz itself. After that the fleet passed the Cape Musandam and visited Rams and Julfar, where the Portuguese were again well received<sup>169</sup>. At Julfar, where a supposed relative of the King of Hormuz was commanding the fortress, the Portuguese established a factory and a garrison of about 50 soldiers<sup>170</sup>. Before returning to Muscat, Rui Freire sent a small squadron east of Muscat to subdue any possible revolting port, something that didn't happen<sup>171</sup>.

All was quiet in the Omani coast in the summer of 1624. The Persians had been expelled, all ports from Al Hadd in the east to Julfar in the west, deep into the Persian Gulf, had been subdued, and pro-Portuguese garrisons were installed in the most important fortresses. Furthermore, the Portuguese had managed to ally themselves with some of the Omani tribes and were enthusiastically received in some of the cities they captured. One can say, with a degree of controversy of course, that this was Portugal's finest hour in their imperial rule of the Omani world. As it's perceptible, it seems that the priority of the immediate counter-attack of 1623-1624

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<sup>168</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 545-547.

<sup>169</sup> José Gervásio Leite, *Rui Freire de Andrada*, pg. 47.

<sup>170</sup> Paulo Craesbeeck, *Commentarios*, pg. 166.

<sup>171</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 339.

was not to recapture Hormuz, but to preserve, pacify and consolidate the Omani coast. The Portuguese elite must have sensed their foothold on the Gulf was at risk after the fall of Hormuz and a campaign to consolidate what was realistically possible to consolidate made more sense. However, with the southern shores of the Gulf under control, the Portuguese were going for the big prize, the retaking of the island.

#### 4.2 The recapture of Hormuz – a bridge too far

In September 1624 a squadron of 10 galliots with 300 men and ammunitions sent by the Portuguese Viceroy, D. Francisco da Gama, arrived at Muscat. This was part of a military build-up that was to be made by the *Estado da India* in the Gulf in the coming months. As ever, to reinforce Portuguese positions, the officials believed, it was necessary to guarantee naval supremacy. The squadron also informed Rui Freire of the arrival in Goa of a powerful fleet sent by Lisbon<sup>172</sup>. At that time the forces at Rui Freire's disposal were 20 galliots and 20 *terranquins*<sup>173</sup>, being manned by a total of 1.600 troops. A few weeks later Rui Freire made the first push for Hormuz.

The siege of Hormuz of 1624 began with Rui Freire cutting off the island from the mainland. During the siege it was reported that maritime trade ceased to exist in those waters<sup>174</sup>. Besides besieging the island, the Portuguese also attacked enemy shipping, having destroyed numerous small vessels and, more damaging for the Persians, made destructive assaults against Persian ports. The first major assault was made on Bramy, east of Hormuz, which was sacked and burnt, and two thousand inhabitants killed. Strategically more important were, perhaps, the six galliots and the more than four hundred small vessels destroyed by Rui Freire's men. Next the Portuguese set their eyes further west and attacked several small ports. Kong, the most notorious one, was also sacked and burnt, and its inhabitants were all killed<sup>175</sup>. The magnitude of the raid on Kong can be questioned by subsequent events. If the destruction were as reported it would

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<sup>172</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 47-48.

<sup>173</sup> *Terranquim* was a type of small oared ship that had sails also – it was extensively used in India.

<sup>174</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 48.

<sup>175</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625, pg. 339-340.



be unlikely that the Portuguese had installed a factory there a few years later. Nevertheless, it's important to mention that there was no assault on Hormuz itself as apparently the Portuguese lacked the necessary artillery and manpower to take the city and fortress. After four months the siege was lifted and Rui Freire set sail to Muscat<sup>176</sup>. One can wonder what Rui Freire's real intentions were regarding this raid. One year earlier he had dispatched six galliots to Basra but now he was short on fire and manpower. What is important is that his actions of 1623 and 1624 show the Portuguese more committed to strengthening their control of the Omani coast and to sack Persian ports, than to recapture Hormuz. Despite official rhetoric, the resources needed for such an enterprise were beyond the *Estado da India's* capabilities.

Further east, the Portuguese fleet arriving at Goa in the beginning of September was seen as a gift from heavens. All eight warships that had set sail from Lisbon in March arrived safe and sound, an unusual occurrence in those days. The Viceroy's war fleet totalled, by then, 12 galleons. Having heard the latest news on the English and Dutch naval movements, he decided to send 8 galleons to destroy their forces at Surat. To attest the importance of this decision it must be said that the 4 galleons remaining in Goa were unarmed<sup>177</sup>. The Viceroy was gambling hard. At Bassein, where two of the galleons were being made ready, the fleet Commander Captain-General Nuno Álvares Botelho received reliable intelligence that there were no enemy ships at Surat. They had departed for Hormuz. Accordingly, the Portuguese Commander set a new destination, Muscat. In the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1625, 8 galleons with 226 cannons and 2.100 men set sail. All significant naval power of Portugal in the Indian Ocean was converging to the Gulf<sup>178</sup>.

Meanwhile, arriving at Bandar-Abbas, the English and the Dutch had encountered the port strongly fortified and discovered that Hormuz castle had been strengthened by the Persians as well. They were alarmed with Portuguese raids on their shores. The commerce had been tremendously disrupted by Rui Freire, and Persian officials in the region were actively seeking naval assistance to repulse the attacks. Moreover, there was an ongoing war with Basra where help was required. Negotiations with the English began and terms were still being discussed when

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<sup>176</sup> Paulo Craesbeeck, *Commentarios*, pg. 171.

<sup>177</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates* Vol. V 1604-1625, pg. 343.

<sup>178</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal – Fundo Geral, Códice 465, fol. 61-69.

the Portuguese fleet appeared on the horizon. As for the Dutch, there were rumours that the Shah was considering giving them Hormuz in exchange for naval support<sup>179</sup>. It must be said that relations between the English and the Dutch were not in their prime at the time but when news that a powerful Portuguese force was on route to the Gulf, they agreed to join forces<sup>180</sup>.

Botelho arrived at Muscat but did not linger there. He never set foot in the city. As soon as he heard the latest reports, he went straight to Hormuz<sup>181</sup>. The sources are confusing when one tries to understand the position of Rui Freire at the arrival of the Portuguese and Anglo-Dutch fleets at Hormuz. In the *Commentarios* it's mentioned that Rui Freire and his squadron were at Larek<sup>182</sup>, but Saturnino Monteiro, in his work, writes that they were besieging Hormuz<sup>183</sup>. A third possibility is open by an account of the events, written in Bombay that December, that states Rui Freire appeared off Hormuz the next day with three ships<sup>184</sup>. Anyway, what is certain is that, in the first days of February 1625, the Portuguese sighted the Anglo-Dutch fleet off Bandar-Abbas. It was to be the largest naval battle the Gulf had ever seen. During several days various engagements took place between the two fleets. The first few were inconclusive but probably saw the Portuguese ships bear the brunt of the artillery exchange that took place. Eventually the fleets broke off from one another, with the allied ships withdrawing to Persian shores and the Portuguese to Larek for repairs. At this point, a delicate diplomacy exchange took place in the allied camp. The Dutch decided to leave and the English, feeling they were unable to face the Portuguese alone, decided to follow suit<sup>185</sup>. The Shah would run out of allies. As soon as the enemies were sighted fleeing to Surat, Botelho set sail to intercept them. The Portuguese squadron of 8 ships was about to attack the allied fleet of 14. In the last engagement of this major battle, the Portuguese flagship *São Francisco* took on heavy fighting with two English galleons with no decisive outcome achieved by either side. Using the cover of the night, the English and the Dutch managed to break off and escape from the Portuguese. In the morning, Botelho,

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<sup>179</sup> William Foster, *The English Factories in India – 1624-1629*, pg. 9-10.

<sup>180</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 344.

<sup>181</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 345.

<sup>182</sup> Paulo Craesbeeck, *Commentarios*, pg. 173.

<sup>183</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 345.

<sup>184</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal – Fundo Geral, Códice 465, fol. 61-69.

<sup>185</sup> William Foster, *The English Factories in India – 1624-1629*, pg. 12.

realizing what happened, set off in pursuit but abandoned the chase soon after, for the distance was far to greater for him to reach the allied ships<sup>186</sup>.

In the somewhat anti-climactic battle, the Portuguese failed to destroy the allied fleet and disrupt their trade but, on the other hand, managed to remain a powerful naval power in the Gulf. At least for the moment, Portuguese prestige had been restored. The Persian officials were forced to accept Portuguese presence in their doorstep and negotiate, something that they didn't want to do before. This battle, that is seen as the strongest effort of the Portuguese counter-attack following their demise at Hormuz in 1622, cost the lives of 200 Portuguese<sup>187</sup>.

Three years had passed since the loss of Hormuz and the transfer of power to Muscat. In this period the main Portuguese officials had strongly reinforced Portuguese forces in the Gulf. King Philip III, who ascended the throne in 1621, had been utterly displeased with the loss of Hormuz and the damage in prestige that was associated with it<sup>188</sup>. As previously noted, he had sent instructions for his Viceroy in Goa to reinforce the forces in the Gulf and that course of action was dutifully fulfilled to the extreme. However, regarding the actual recapture of Hormuz, one must question if that was ever a practical objective. Despite rhetoric and official dispatches from Lisbon or Goa, it's hard to identify, from 1622 to 1625 and beyond, a real and feasible strategy to recapture Hormuz. Rui Freire returned to the island in late 1625 and set up a blockade, and again in 1627 a plan was put forward. In both occasions nothing positive came of it<sup>189</sup>. In 1631 there were designs to forge an agreement with the Safavids that would include the return of Hormuz but, again, nothing conclusive happened<sup>190</sup><sup>191</sup>. But the failure in recapturing the *jewel island* didn't mean defeat for the Portuguese. The years after 1622 saw Portuguese influence grow in other areas of the Gulf. Persian coastal towns and ports were being systematically attacked by Portuguese raids, the English (and the Dutch) were being permanently harassed in their commercial dealings by Portuguese squadrons, Portuguese positions on the Arab shores were greatly enhanced, and trade between Muscat and Basra improved. Under Portuguese control,

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<sup>186</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 355-356.

<sup>187</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates Vol. V 1604-1625*, pg. 356.

<sup>188</sup> Rui Manuel Loureiro, 'After the fall of Hormuz', pg. 264.

<sup>189</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 49-54.

<sup>190</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 193.

<sup>191</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 57.

Muscat became an important centre, with regular commercial ties with diverse areas of the Indian Ocean world<sup>192</sup>. The city, more peripheral, didn't have substantial market prospects in the Arab peninsula as Hormuz had in the Persian mainland but, nevertheless, the Portuguese were determined to develop their new base. Although the Hormuz obsession would continue to be present for many decades, for the Portuguese in the Gulf, Muscat and Oman were the future.

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<sup>192</sup> Rui Manuel Loureiro, 'After the fall of Hormuz', pg. 266.

## 5. THE RULE OF PORTUGUESE OMAN

With Hormuz gone for good, the Portuguese moved their Gulf's powerbase to the Arabian shores. While military operations throughout the Gulf continued for several years and were, in fact, part of the normality, there was much more to the Portuguese rule of Oman than just a base for attacks on Hormuz and other Persian ports. Muscat became an important port of the Gulf and a very important asset for the *Estado da India*. This chapter addresses the government of Portuguese Oman, its politics, the new trading patterns that emerged from Portuguese actions and the conflicts that arose from them.

### 5.1 The Government – politics and finance

It's important to remember that, for the Portuguese in the seventeenth century, the Empire was all about commerce, revenues and profit. The earlier crusading ideas that took Portuguese armies to the barren shores of Morocco to fight the Moors were long gone. On the other hand, the concept of territorial domination, economic and cultural colonialism that found in Africa the perfect developing ground was still to come. At this point the basic concern in Goa was to keep the *Estado da India* financially afloat, in other words, to maintain a positive balance between revenues and expenditures<sup>193</sup>. Regarding this matter the Omani possessions of the Empire never performed favourably enough and that defined much of their future.

Politically, the Portuguese tried to emulate the Kingdom of Hormuz in Arabia. As noted, the allegiance of many coastal settlements of the Arabian shores was due to the Portuguese through the King of Hormuz. As such, through the nephew of the imprisoned King, who had escaped to Muscat just before the fall of Hormuz, Portuguese officials maintained a certain degree of apparent political normality<sup>194</sup>. At Muscat the administration was modelled mirroring

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<sup>193</sup> Susana Miranda, 'The center and the periphery', pg. 3.

<sup>194</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 346.

the one that existed at Hormuz. A staff list for Muscat in 1634 shows several of the common positions of any major Portuguese port of the age like military captains, civil clerks, factory officials, surgeons or priests<sup>195</sup>. Apart from all these standard positions, during the Portuguese presence in Oman after 1622 until its fall in 1650, the important posts of Captain-General of the Strait of Hormuz and Captain of Muscat coexisted but were, many times, the source of jurisdictional problems and lack of cooperation<sup>196</sup>. These difficulties were not favourable to the stability of government.

Although nominal power could be justified through the King of Hormuz's descendants, that was not enough. And so, the Portuguese set about earning the trust of the local Arab Sheikhs. To this end they started by marrying the young Hormuzian prince with a woman of the local nobility, but this didn't suffice either. Mohammed Shah V was not his uncle and never proved to be a reliable and strong ally of the Portuguese. In time, the Portuguese felt the need to increase direct power. To this end they established peace agreements with an Arab Sheikh named Sanané, proceeded in making similar arrangements along the Al Batinah coast and gave the control of Sohar to another local Sheikh<sup>197</sup>. Earlier in 1616 there was a fine example of Omani-Portuguese cooperation, or at least a group of the Omani, with the help of Sheikh Amir al-Umair during the Portuguese attack on Sohar<sup>198</sup>. However, this policy of exploitation of particular features of politics and power in tribal Oman in order to achieve total control, obedience and peace, lacked the success the Portuguese were hoping for. The grip of the Portuguese on the conducting of the affairs, especially the firm supervision of commerce and the control of the political changes that were happening in the territory was insufficient, to say the least. Nevertheless, the European presence at Oman was always used by several Omani factions to try to get an edge over others, if the situation so required. Examples of this were the actions of Nasir bin Katan<sup>199</sup> and Mohammed bin Omeyr, two opponents of Imam Nasir bin Murshid, that sought refuge with the Portuguese at Sohar after 1633, as shall be discussed further ahead<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>195</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 343.

<sup>196</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 344.

<sup>197</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 250.

<sup>198</sup> Eric Staples, 'The Formation of Oman's Maritime Power', pg. 190.

<sup>199</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, *History of the Imams*, pg. 71.

<sup>200</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, *The Annals of Oman*, pg. 53.

Despite taking natural part on the struggles for power that were going on between the local elites, the Portuguese remained pretty much ignorant about what was happening beyond the fortresses they controlled. The Omani interior was mountainous, unpopulated and had no significant market from which to profit. There was also no international trading route passing throughout the sands of east Arabia, as opposed to the situation on the Persian mainland<sup>201</sup>. The business was in the ports, on the shores and on the sea. No real advantage or danger could come from the inland impoverished villages, for the time being.

If politically the Portuguese had a plan and managed, for some time, to successfully navigate the loves and hates of the Omani elite, regarding the financial prospects of their Omani possession's things were not so straightforward. For the *Estado da India* a well-managed outpost was a profitable one and, although strategic necessities could justify the holding of some loss-making strongholds, the negative balance of Muscat and its satellite forts were cause of worry.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1627 a concerning letter was written in Goa. The Viceroy, D. Francisco da Gama, was reporting to King Philip III regarding the enormous financial difficulties the *Estado da India* was having. There was no money for salaries, including the Viceroy's salary, he said. There was also a veiled critique of the King himself, for Gama believed that if the next fleets arriving at Goa would bring as meagre assistance as the last one, some fortresses and fleets could be at risk. Even though financial problems were not, by any means, something new, this letter represents an astonishing document that reflects the extreme difficulties the Empire was going through in the 1620's. In it, Muscat stood out as a textbook example of what was wrong. Gama stated that the supplies needed to maintain Muscat and the fleet of the Strait of Hormuz totalled 100.000 *pardaus* and the revenues produced by the city's customs house was a little above 20.000 *pardaus*<sup>202</sup>.

Hormuz was important not because it was Hormuz, but because in controlling it enabled the Portuguese to access a wide variety of markets that Muscat was unable to provide. Nevertheless, at Muscat, if the concerns over the loyalty of the local Sheikhs were present, the intention of rebuilding the commerce of the region was also a priority. The link to Basra was

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<sup>201</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 228.

<sup>202</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 24, fol. 80.

revived as seen before and, with the loss of Hormuz, Muscat is said to have become the main port for procuring horses which were highly wanted in India<sup>203</sup>. However, this can be challenged by the budget list of revenues and expenditures of 1634 in which the horse trade represented less than 1% (250 *pardaus*) of the total amount of revenue at Muscat, about 44.750 *pardaus*<sup>204</sup>. Comparing the financial information in the Viceroy's letter of 1627 with the revenues list of 1634 it is clear the evolution of the amount the Customs House of Muscat was making. The Portuguese were trending in the right direction. In just 7 years, the House more than doubled its income. If we compare the income with the general expenditure that was going out of Muscat's treasury, although the balance continued to be largely negative, it was improving. The deficit of around 80.000 *pardaus* the Viceroy so dramatically stated in 1627 had fallen to a much lower level of around 35.000 *pardaus* in 1634<sup>205</sup>. Also, in 1631, the Viceroy wrote again to the King of Portugal complaining about the difficulty of raising money to Muscat and detailing that every year about 33.000 *pardaus* were sent to Muscat in advance<sup>206</sup>. This amount, that almost covers the deficit identified for 1634, can suggest that the situation, although not ideal, was at least stable.

Year	Income	Spending	Balance
1627	20.000	100.000	-80.000
1634	44.750	80.635	-35.885

Figure 6 - Budget of revenues and expenditures of Omani possessions in *pardaus*

Source: Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 24, fol. 80 & Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal – Fundo Geral, Códice 1783.

One may find in some sources an implied connection between the dire financial situation in the 1620's and the investment that was made in several fortresses along the coast and its garrisons<sup>207</sup>. In fact, it's interesting to note that the number of military personnel in the Straits of

<sup>203</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'From Slumber to Assertion', pg. 179.

<sup>204</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal – Fundo Geral, Códice 1783.

<sup>205</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal – Fundo Geral, Códice 1783.

<sup>206</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 29, fol. 103-103v.º.

<sup>207</sup> Pius Malekandathil, 'From Slumber to Assertion', pg. 179.



Hormuz increased heavily between 1623, when the Portuguese had 727 men at arms, and 1633 when 1.739 men were at service<sup>208</sup>. However, as seen before, the records show the deficit improved in this period, which means that although Portuguese forces in the region increased and a heavy investment in fortifications was made, the finances actually improved. The explanation for this can be found in commerce.

## 5.2 Trading patterns

Between 1622 and 1650 the Portuguese-held Omani possessions saw a revival on their commercial importance in the region. Having lost Hormuz, the Portuguese tried to increase the importance (and the revenues) of Muscat as an important port for trade. This attempt was made, specifically, by trying to enhance the role of Basra, to retake Bahrain, to trade with Sind and, after 1630, by re-connecting with the Persian mainland routes through Kong.

As seen, even during the Portuguese counter-attack in the Gulf, steps were taken to increase Portuguese presence and influence at Basra. D. Gonçalo da Silveira's squadron sent to aid the Pasha in 1624 had been part of the counter-Safavid actions that took place after the loss of Hormuz, but commerce followed suit. The fact that there were agents and factors of the *Estado da India* in Basra, a strong anti-Persian sentiment in the city and its strategic position commanded a solid investment on this relationship. And, in fact, it was a mutual beneficial association. Trade in Basra increased with Portuguese presence and Portuguese war ships often escorted the town's merchant vessels on the Muscat-Basra route<sup>209</sup>. Given the war with Safavid Persia until 1630, the lack of relevant entrepôts along the Arabian shores of the Gulf and the presence of other European competitors at the entrance of the Gulf, the trade relationship with Basra was of vital importance for the officials at Muscat. One can perceive the importance of the Basra trade by a meeting of the Council in Goa in 1642, with the presence of the Viceroy, that discussed the difficulty that was being felt at Kong to hire pilots that could guide the vessels to Basra. In the

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<sup>208</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 348.

<sup>209</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 526-529.

meeting it was said that if the situation was not solved in a positive manner, the merchants could not get ultimately to Sind and, thus, the Customs House at Muscat could be lost<sup>210</sup>. It's an interesting example of the system's interconnections as they worked well into the eighteenth century.

As of Bahrain, the indefatigable Rui Freire de Andrade allied himself with the local Sheikh of Qatif and tried to subjugate the port in 1624 but failed. The pearl commerce was interrupted but the city didn't fall to the Portuguese. In 1627, without Goa's endorsement, Rui Freire tried again to attack Bahrain using his own forces, that had been reinforced by Goa due to fears of English or Dutch attack on Muscat<sup>211</sup>. To this end he sent his aide D. Gonçalo da Silveira with 12 galleys and several smaller ships to the region where he stayed until April 1628, but nothing major came of it<sup>212</sup>. The Qatif-Bahrain connection was an important commercial asset because of the pearl trade and, especially, the horses, deemed to be the best in the Gulf. One of the ways the Portuguese traded those items was textiles from Sind<sup>213</sup>, one of the important ports of this period.

The Sind trade was stimulated when Goa started to send frigates to escort merchant vessels from Diu and Sind to Muscat and Basra yearly. It was hoped that this would increase revenues of Muscat, by allowing the checking of merchandise at the Customs House and obtaining consent for its traders to transact business anywhere in the Gulf except, of course, Hormuz and Bandar-Abbas, the main Persian ports. Adding to these *offers* of military escort to the trading fleets the Sind merchants also benefited from loans from the Portuguese, on the condition they would use the Portuguese escorts<sup>214</sup>.

The last port that came to action in the trading patterns during the rule of Portuguese Oman was the Persian port of Kong. This port was chosen by Rui Freire following negotiations with the Safavid governor of Fars province, probably during the year of 1630. The timing can be understood. From the Persian point of view Portuguese attacks from Oman to the Persian shores were crippling coastal commerce and disrupting the trade of the smaller communities in the area.

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<sup>210</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. II, Doc. 135.

<sup>211</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 345-347.

<sup>212</sup> José Gervásio Leite, *Rui Freire de Andrada*, pg. 54-55.

<sup>213</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 347.

<sup>214</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 348.

On the Portuguese side, despite all the raids and overwhelming military power against Persian activities they still hadn't managed to recover the influence they had before 1622 regarding the business taking place in mainland Persia. The Persians were offering the possibility to choose a port to install a factory and the right to half the customs revenues of that port<sup>215</sup>. Probably the options at Rui Freire's disposal weren't great and the choice turned out to be the least bad of what was offered. In any case, Kong was to be important as a stopping point of the Sind-Basra route, serving mainly the Basra market and, to a lesser extent, the Persian mainland. It was here, at Kong, that the problem in getting a pilot to navigate the fleet to Basra arose. Pearl trade had a major importance here as much of Bahrain's pearls were sold at this port<sup>216</sup>. At Kong the Portuguese never truly managed to perform as imagined and the revenues were always hard to collect, but the location of the port was strategic enough to help secure the link between Sind and Basra<sup>217</sup>. The port competed with Muscat in terms of market share and even managed to lower the importance of the Omani capital, but in the end the general state of affairs of the Portuguese in the Gulf gained with the addition<sup>218</sup>.

When referring to the trading patterns of the Omani possessions, one single item is worth to highlight, rice. The supply of this fundamental product came mainly from an area of the Indian coast, south of Goa. There, the port-town of Basrur led much of the production. There's evidence that suggests the exclusive supply of Basrur's rice to the garrison of Muscat and the Portuguese fleet in the 1620's and 1630's<sup>219</sup>. This shows a glimpse of the city's businesses concerning its own sustenance and how far could reach its commercial exchanges.

It can be said that, with the access to the vast Persian market gone, the Portuguese quickly developed new trading patterns that were centred on the link with Basra. This expanded to Sind at the other end of the line. Muscat and Oman remained as the main linkage point between the two worlds, trying to emulate the role Hormuz had played. At the same time actions were taken to expand control over Bahrain and its pearl business, and to continue to disrupt the trade in

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<sup>215</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 429-430.

<sup>216</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 441-442.

<sup>217</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 251-252.

<sup>218</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 350.

<sup>219</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The Portuguese, the port of Basrur', pg. 453-454.

Persia. This led to the surrender of Kong by the Persians, which became a second link in the middle of the trade chain, with connections to a bigger market inside Persia. Slowly but consistently Muscat was gaining its position in the region's interchanges. As Floor refers, "*by 1640 Masqat had become a full part of the Persian Gulf trading network (...) this meant an increase in revenues of Masqat*"<sup>220</sup>. Adding to this idea R. J. Barendse curiously states, when analysing the trade patterns on the Arabian Seas, that "*the trend of trade within the Arabian seas is one of contraction from 1590 and 1620, recovery from 1620 to 1660, stagnation or decline from 1660 to 1690, and growth lasting roughly from 1690 to 1720*"<sup>221</sup>. Both allegations are somehow corroborated by the increase in the revenue of Muscat's customs between 1627 and 1634. Trading was on the rise during the Portuguese rule in the Omani coast, with revenues increasing, but this was not enough to keep the enterprise viable.

### 5.3 Tensions and smugglers

Hand in hand with the lack of financial viability, Portuguese presence on the Omani coast was also marked by a constant tension between the main officials in Muscat, between them and Goa and also by the lack of cooperation regarding the many problems the Portuguese had to face. Adding to this situation, on many occasions there were reports of top officials involved in smuggling activities, a recurring issue in the *Estado da India's* history.

Until 1633, year of his death, it's impossible to dissociate the actions of the Portuguese in the Gulf from the life of Rui Freire de Andrade, General of the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. When analysing the events that led to the loss of Hormuz and the subsequent actions of the Portuguese, in the region, in the next 10 years, one may be tempted to imagine what a warmonger and difficult man Rui Freire was to work with. He had disagreements with the Captain of Hormuz D. Francisco de Sousa at his arrival, he did not follow Goa's instructions regarding Qeshm and during the siege he failed to cooperate with the new Captain of Hormuz, Simão de

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<sup>220</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 351.

<sup>221</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 204.

Melo. At Muscat he also had problems with the Captain. Apparently one of the sources of the dispute was over the issuance of passes to the Sind merchants, a capacity that Rui Freire felt should be exclusively his but about which the Captain, Martim Afonso de Melo, had different ideas. This led to some merchant vessels holding Portuguese *cartazes*<sup>222</sup> being arrested and goods seized, with Goa having to intervene to solve the matter. More broadly, it's possible to say that Rui Freire's attacks on the Persian mainland after 1623-24 never seemed to be in accordance to the general objective of letting the trade flow<sup>223</sup>. Coordination between policy and actions seemed, many times, shaky. In 1626 Goa made clear its discontent about the maintenance, in Portuguese hands, of Sohar, that was supposed to be handed over to Mohammed Shah V. However, Rui Freire thought that Sohar was too important to relinquish control. Also, his intention to build forts at Julfar and Gwadar was denied by Lisbon, that argued it was not the time for expansion and that there were no resources to spend for such adventures<sup>224</sup>. There were two very different visions of the situation, the one from the officials in the region, and the other from the bureaucrats in Goa or Lisbon.

Rui Freire may be guilty of many wrong doings after arriving at the Gulf in 1620, especially lack of prudence and excessive militarism, perhaps. But he always remained true to his beliefs and loyal to the Crown. Events after his death prove the system was rotten from within, as problems of conduct, poor management and unprofessionalism continued to amount. According to official dispatches one can perceive that these problems were not isolated affairs caused by the distinctive character of one Captain or another, but a generalized practice. Perhaps, the fact that Muscat and the Omani world were on the periphery of the Estado da India's main possessions meant that there was less scrutiny and more opportunity for deviations and incompetence.

In February 1636, at Goa, the Viceroy held a meeting of his council to deal with one of those problems. One of the items to discuss was the actions taken by the Captain of Muscat, Francisco Moniz da Silva, who had made unsanctioned agreements with Qeshm, Bahrain and

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<sup>222</sup> *Cartazes* were a permission issued by the Portuguese authorities that allowed vessels to trade and navigate in Portuguese controlled waters.

<sup>223</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 344-345.

<sup>224</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 347-348.

Ranel<sup>225</sup>, and had issued *cartazes* to some *pimenteiros*<sup>226</sup>. The Viceroy, Pêro da Silva, took immediate action, removing the Captain from his command, recalling him to Goa and nominating a new one<sup>227</sup>. The administration of business was not going according to the wishes of the *Estado*. The Captain had proved himself not to be up to the task. The repercussions of these kinds of problems, which were not new, reached Lisbon, half a world away. In March 1637 the King of Portugal, Philip III, wrote to his Viceroy at Goa mentioning the discovery made, some years earlier, of the issuance of safe-conducts from the Captain-Major of the Strait of Hormuz, António de Abreu Borges, to *pimenteiros*. In this letter the King reiterates his shock about the situation and, although the culprit had died in the meanwhile, his stance should be publicly known, especially in Muscat, that these actions and behaviour should not be tolerated<sup>228</sup>. Again in 1640 the Council at Goa had grave problems at Muscat to deal with. The Captain of the Fortress and the Captain General were, once more, at odds with each other regarding jurisdictions, merchandises and self-interests. The council's document couldn't be clearer, problems between officials were still a dark reality in Portuguese Oman. Both Captains were to return to Goa and be relieved of their jobs. Not even the increasingly present danger of the Arabs was enough to unite the Portuguese in a common effort<sup>229</sup>. This lack of cooperation led to distrust. In 1644 the Viceroy, Count of Aveiras João da Silva Menezes, had to pronounce detailed instructions to safeguard the cash in Muscat. The instructions were that a safe should be installed and three keys should be distributed to the Captain, the Vicar and the Factor. No money could be removed from the safe without the presence of all three persons<sup>230</sup>. The way Portuguese Oman was being poorly ruled was forcing the elite of the Empire to spend its time on petty decisions.

Although the damaging behaviour of some top officials should have been grave enough and functioned as a deterrent for the implementation of a coherent and professional policy regarding the Omani possessions in the Gulf, they were the reflection of a general attitude that was transversal to a community that lived in the fringes of the Empire. In fact, Muscat and the

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<sup>225</sup> There's some uncertainty to where Ranel is located but it's possible that it refers to a port near Surat.

<sup>226</sup> *Pimenteiros* were people that traded several types of merchandise illicitly.

<sup>227</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. II, Doc. 19.

<sup>228</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 39, fol. 63.

<sup>229</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. II, Doc. 98.

<sup>230</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. III, Doc. 28.

other Omani ports were very far from the decision centre of Goa and this remoteness had driven many Portuguese to, let's say, less loyalist and more self-interested actions. Since the sixteenth century, a relevant number of Portuguese lived in Muscat outside royal authority and devoted to smuggling. These Portuguese were, many times, soldiers who had deserted their service and found in illicit trading a way of life<sup>231</sup>.

As discussed, the rule of Portuguese Oman was marked by some crucial aspects. On the political side the intention of maintaining appearances and legitimacy through the King of Hormuz and the necessity of dealing directly with Arab leaders. Financially the revenues did slowly increase with time due to the booming trade of the 1630's but it was not enough to cope with the expenses that were necessary to maintain the *status quo*. Regarding trade, despite the few resources and increasing competition from other powers, the Portuguese managed to divert the relevant network between Basra and Sind from Hormuz to Muscat and, in 1630, add Kong to the route. These adaptations took form as the years went along, which helped to increase the revenues. However, the prospects were severely hampered by the actions of many officials, who put their self-interests above those of the Empire, an attitude that led to mistrust, lack of cooperation and inefficiency.

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<sup>231</sup> Dejanirah Couto, 'New Insights into the History of Oman', pg. 152.

## 6. THE ARABS OF THE MOUNTAINS

In the fateful month of May 1622, by retreating to Muscat, the Portuguese started a period of direct domination and permanent presence on the Arabian Peninsula, which had an impact on several communities along the Omani coast and inland. But who were these people? How were they organized and how did they govern themselves? What kind of society was this? This Chapter will focus on the Omani society, its religious background and the political changes happening during the Portuguese rule of their coastal strongholds.

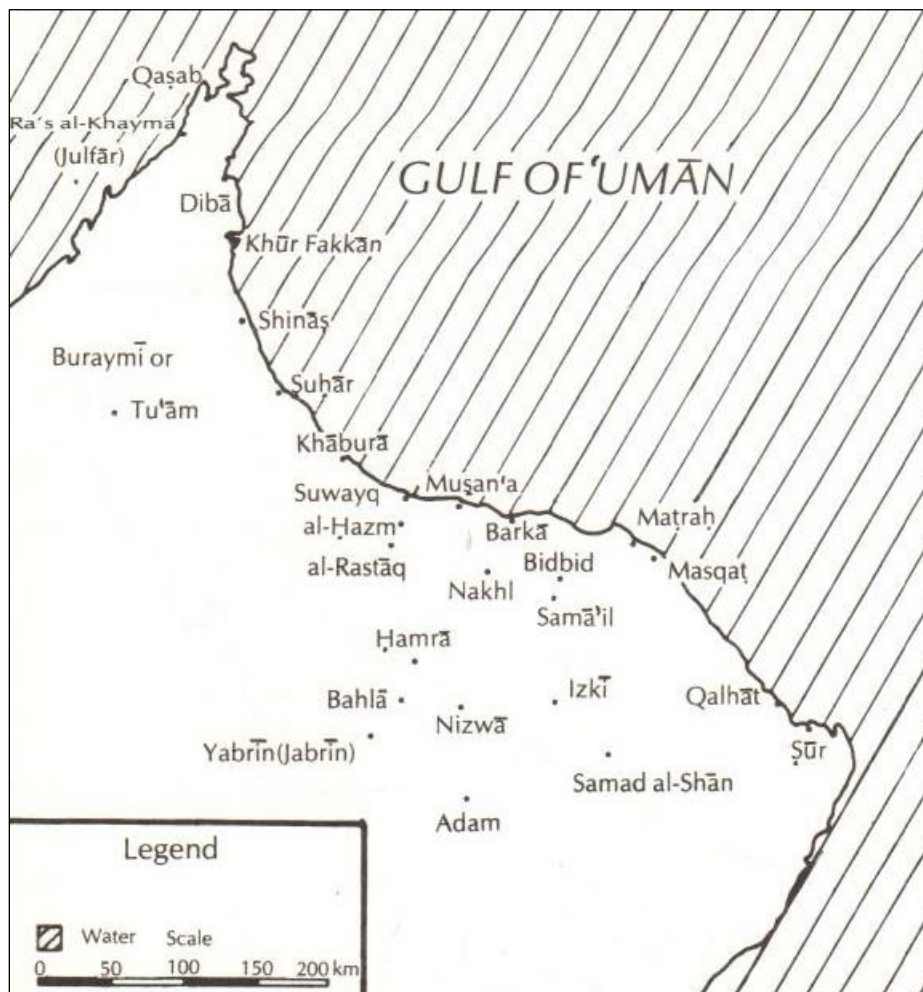


Figure 7 - Towns and Ports of Oman in the seventeenth century

Source: RISSO, Patricia; *Oman & Muscat – An Early Modern History*, Croom Helm, 1986



## 6.1 A tribal society

Since the first days of the Islamic revelation and expansion, in the seventh century, Oman assumed a very particular place among the lands that embraced the new faith. In fact, the conversion of Oman to Islam was unique due to the fact that it was done through diplomacy, not conquest. The ruling tribe of that time, the Azd, used the peaceful acceptance of the Prophet's word to retain a high level of sovereignty over the territory and its peoples, enhancing particular social developments. However, this doesn't mean that they remained a world apart from the new Umayyad Empire under Caliph Umar. They provided soldiers and fought side by side with their fellow Muslims in some of their expansionist campaigns and profited from that. In particular, the victory over the Sassanids in Iraq allowed the Omanis to establish themselves as the keepers of the Strait of Hormuz, with access to the main port of the time for merchant goods, Basra<sup>232</sup>.

The development of a particular sect of Islam, Ibadism, which will be addressed in the next sub-chapter, and the struggles for temporal and spiritual power brought up a distinct feature of Omani society, tribalism. This concept was characterized by strong feelings of belonging to a very particular community, which lead to frequent conflicts between the several tribes of the Omani world, many times developing from small village conflicts into generalized unrest. It was tribalism that caused many of the minor civil wars the territory experienced throughout the centuries. There are many examples of this. Perhaps one of the most distinct earlier cases of civil unrest started in 851 and ended in 891 with the fall of the Second Ibadi Imamate to the Abbasid Empire. During this long period many tribes challenged the ruling Imam and tried to seize power and establish an Imam of their own tribe. In 891 some tribes in Sohar elected a second Imam which prompted an attack from the acting ruler. Omanis fought Omanis and, as a result, the victor (the acting ruler Imam Azzan bin Tamim) inherited an impoverished state over which he had little power or control. It was not surprising that just two years later, in 893, the Abbasids prepared a large force and conquered Oman, ending the Imamate<sup>233</sup>.

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<sup>232</sup> Connor D. Elliott, 'Developing Tolerance and Conservatism', pg. 154-155.

<sup>233</sup> Connor D. Elliott, 'Developing Tolerance and Conservatism', pg. 157-158.

Due to the constant rift between tribes, Oman fell into a period of decadence and unimportance in the regional state of affairs. Well into the second millennium the Hormuzian rulers, of Persian background, keen on controlling the Strait, set about developing the southern shores of the Gulf, specially Qalhat, the main Omani port of the age. This led to a change in tribal relations, with some adopting a basic notion of association or alliances<sup>234</sup>, a feature that would play an important role during the Portuguese presence in the region.

The period leading to 1622 was, again, a turbulent one in the Omani heartland. In 1595 a young leader just twelve years old came to power to govern all districts of Oman, Suleiman bin Modhaffar. After a hasty tax collection of the towns under his control, revolt emerged. The people of Nizwa were unhappy with the new ruler and a battle ensued, resulting in the death of the rebel leader and destruction of his army by Suleiman's men. At the same time, the lord of Sohar received word the Persians were about to attack the city and asked for help from Suleiman to repulse the Safavid threat. The alliance worked and the Persians were decisively defeated. Nevertheless, Suleiman's position was never an easy one. Due to tribal differences and associations, the Benu-Hinah tribe also rebelled against Suleiman and more battles occurred, which only served to devastate the countryside. No decisive outcome was reached and war went on. In 1610 Bahla, under Suleiman's control, was attacked and its fort destroyed by the ruler of Samail, who had joined the Benu-Hinah. Only four months later Suleiman returned and again reconquered Bahla. Disruption was the order of the day in the desert mountains of eastern Arabia. It's interesting to note that, although originally from a conflicted society, the leaders showed a high level of chivalry towards their enemies, for in both sieges of Bahla the victorious allowed the losing party to leave the city unmolested. It was a common practice. Anyway, Suleiman died just after the last siege. A bad situation turned chaotic with several leaders succeeding one after the other, with relentless military operations that included Portuguese intervention<sup>235</sup>.

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<sup>234</sup> Patricia Risso, *Oman & Muscat*, pg. 10-11.

<sup>235</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, *The Annals of Oman*, pg. 35-40.

The fates of Omani tribalism appeared once again on the Portuguese doorstep in 1616. As previously noted, at the time Sohar was being ruled by an Omani prince since 1580<sup>236</sup>. After some dramatic events inland, a rival noble, Amir al-Umair, was keen to get revenge from the ruler of Sohar, who had killed his brothers. He then sought Portuguese military support at Muscat for an attack on Sohar and political avail from the King of Hormuz, the nominal ruler of the Omani coastline. The Portuguese were glad to help, but not without compensation. The coordinated attack on Sohar was set in motion. Amir's large army attacked the city but the decisive engagement only happened when the Portuguese disembarked their men and material. The town was completely burnt and many people were killed. In the end, the Portuguese got their city and Amir his revenge. Conflict in the interior continued for some time, with a delicate balance of power being achieved between four tribal leaders. In the beginning of the 1620's there was no unified rule of Oman<sup>237</sup>.

Oman had, for centuries, unique characteristics regarding the development of society and the control of power. Owing much of this distinctiveness to its geography the region maintained a high level of sovereignty, even when integrated in larger states, with different tribes struggling for local power and sharing it when none was strong enough to dominate others. Although Omani civil wars had major political and temporal features, religious spiritual power was, many times, at the basis of it.

## 6.2 Ibadism and the other Islam

Oman is today the main representative country of a lesser known branch of Islam named Ibadism. Ibadism, which represents less than 1% of the world's Muslims, developed its teachings from the first sectarian movement in Islam, the Khārijism. The roots of this secession are somewhat unclear but derived from theological and political issues emerging during the rule of Uthmān bin Affān, the controversial third caliph of Islam (644-656). One of the most striking

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<sup>236</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 248.

<sup>237</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, The Annals of Oman, pg. 42-44.

characteristics of Khārijism, inherited by Ibadism, is the idea that an Imam should be chosen, not due to his tribe or lineage, but according to the wishes of the community as a whole, being selected by a council of scholars within that community due to his piety and leadership skills<sup>238</sup>. In the seventeenth century Ibadism had already taken deep roots in Omani society.

The political leadership, not just the religious one, held a place in Ibadi doctrine. A categorization of leader types according to the political situation is a fine example of this. The *hidden imam* should take place in a time of oppression and weakness. This occurred in the early days of Ibadi development when its followers congregated at Basra in secrecy. The *activist imam* would emerge when at least 40 men chose to die to allow the establishment of a righteous imam. The *imamate of defence* would arise through the election of someone to lead the community in case of an invasion or attack. And a *manifest imam* would be created after the defeat of the enemies due to the necessity to regain stability<sup>239</sup>. In any of these cases the Imamate was to be personified by a member of the community. The Imam was required to be an adult male, physically and mentally able and, above all, of a distinct character. The eligible candidates for the Imamate were the *Ulama*, the guardians of religious knowledge, which means that they were, at the same time, candidates and electors. Due to the democratic approach of the selection, it was virtually impossible for a candidate to be elected without the support of a large clan and a large consensus, which means that, in practice, the Imamate became dependent on the allegiances and structures of the Omani tribal society<sup>240</sup>.

Ibadism consists of a very particular theoretical approach to the non-followers. The Ibadi doctrine, rigid in its core, states there are two groups of unfaithful. The first group, which they call *hypocritical unbelievers*, puts together all non-Ibadi Muslims and the un-repenting sinners from the Ibadi sect. Following Ibadi thought, these two sub-groups of people are not totally alienated from the community, and are given the same legal protection as the rest of the Ibadi society, for they are treated as if they have received the word from God and the Prophet but turned their backs on the Truth. The second group, which it's known as the *unbelievers*, include

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<sup>238</sup> Valerie J. Hoffman, 'Ibādism: History, Doctrines', pg. 297-298.

<sup>239</sup> Valerie J. Hoffman, 'Ibādism: History, Doctrines', pg. 303.

<sup>240</sup> Patricia Risso, *Oman & Muscat*, pg. 27-28.

all non-Muslims. According to Ibadi teachings this group have chosen as their fate, for they have a right to self-determination, not to follow the path which the Prophet proposed for them and will be condemned to perpetual hell. In their doctrine the *unbelievers* would be punished in the afterlife. However radical this may sound, the truth is the Ibadis never used the sword on campaigns of religious cleansing or preached violence against those of different faiths. Instead they reserved the right to practice the *Bara'a*, or disassociation<sup>241</sup>. The ambiguity of the Ibadi teachings regarding the *unbelievers* consisted in express moral superiority in religious matters towards all other religious groups, but at the same time, allowed them to take part in public life, which made tolerance a central part of Ibadi communities and, consequently, Omani culture. Ibadis could even have love relations with the other groups, as long as it remained perfectly clear there was a distinction between the temporal and religious levels<sup>242</sup>.

Due to its tribal nature and a more conservative approach to religious matters, although asserting a degree of tolerance, Ibadism took deep roots in the more “concealed” lands of the Omani interior, where interactions with external ideas were less prevalent. As such, despite the merchant society that developed freely after 1650, the Omanis always considered themselves as being Ibadi, and the *Ulama* viewed with scepticism the more cosmopolitan atmosphere of the port towns<sup>243</sup>. Regarding these differences between the interior and the coastal regions of Oman, it’s interesting to note that during the years the Portuguese firmly controlled the main Omani ports, the tribes of the interior seemed, most of the time, to live in a world of their own. However, that started to change in 1624.

### 6.3 The united front from Nizwa

In 1624 an extraordinary meeting took place in a small village, some 150 km inland west of Muscat, named Rustaq. This council would be a pivotal event in the history of the Omani

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<sup>241</sup> Connor D. Elliott, 'Developing Tolerance and Conservatism', pg. 160-161.

<sup>242</sup> Connor D. Elliott, 'Developing Tolerance and Conservatism', pg. 162-163.

<sup>243</sup> Patricia Risso, Oman & Muscat, pg. 32.

people, triggering an age of prosperity and expansion. Seventy of the Omani elite joined in a session set to elect a new Imam. It was said they were living in a time of ignominy for the people, and that they were being stripped of their wealth and subject to bloodshed. After deliberations an election was held and, surprisingly or not, there was harmony in the choice, for there was not a single vote against the rise of Nasir bin Murshid to the Imamate. Little is known of the Imam's previous life, but it seems he was from a nearby village called Kesra, at the time under the rule of Rustaq<sup>244</sup>. One can imagine a peaceful rule by someone who was unanimously elected, but it was not to be. He had a spiritual mandate from the *Ulama* of Rustaq but he would have to earn his secular power throughout the region.

The new Imam should have been a respected member of the community and happened to be cousin of the ruler of Rustaq. When the news of his election reached him, he gathered his followers and headed to the town, whose castle and fort his cousin surrendered to him on the sight of the Imam's banners, according to some sources<sup>245</sup>. Others claim members of the el-Yahmad tribe, who supported the Imam, seized the two strongholds during the night<sup>246</sup>. In any case, this quick acceptance of suzerainty didn't set the standard for his upcoming campaigns. The priority of the Imam was to assert his power in the mountain villages. His operations saw him in conflict with several towns of the Omani interior, like Nakhl, Samail, Izki, Nizwa, Manah, Ibra, Bahla, Makaniyat, Ibri, Yankal or Dhank. It seems that in some cases there was a kind of invitation by the population, Izki and Manah for instance, but generally an army had to be sent to open the gates. It must be said that this process of pacification was full of setbacks. Enemy tribes occupied some of the submitting towns like Nakhl, Bahla, Makaniyat or Samail, forcing the Imam to put down many revolts as they occurred. He was even besieged in his brand-new fort at his capital of Nizwa. But the local leaders of different tribes never managed to put together a capable alliance to evict the Imam from power. The resistance to his rule came from separate towns and the rebellious coalitions that were forged were few and weak<sup>247</sup>.

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<sup>244</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, History of the Imams, pg. 53-54.

<sup>245</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, History of the Imams, pg. 55.

<sup>246</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, The Annals of Oman, pg. 46.

<sup>247</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, The Annals of Oman, pg. 47-50.

Regardless of the resistance, the Imam managed to maintain the upper hand in his many engagements with the local Sheikhs. In this he was mainly aided by the el-Yahmad and Benu-Riyam tribes, although treasons were common, involving the change of sides and false pledges of loyalty<sup>248</sup>. The mixed allegiances and confusing relations of the Omani tribal society were perfectly clear during the unification process that took place after 1624. Perhaps, for this reason, for almost ten years the Portuguese represented a secondary concern for the Imam as he devoted his efforts to the troublesome mountain villages. A wise man would pacify his own lands first before engaging an external enemy, and Nasir bin Murshid proved to be just as wise. However, some restive Sheikhs sought refuge in the coast and, in the end, those pockets of resistance to his authority did manage to bring the Portuguese into the conflict. Winds of war were approaching the sea.

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<sup>248</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, History of the Imams, pg. 57.

## 7. THE FALLBACK

After Rui Freire's counter-attack to drive the Persians out of Oman and his raids on the Persian mainland, the Portuguese situation in the Gulf stabilized and, in time, commerce started to flow. Despite this, the loss of Hormuz was still a major strategic blow to the Portuguese and, obviously, their dominance over the Gulf was never the same again. Beyond the *jewel island's* demise, the Portuguese also suffered with the growing naval power of the English and, later, the Dutch. They were not masters of the sea anymore and, thus, could not dictate the rules in the region. Inland also trouble was brewing, for the Arabs were united under the new Imam's leadership and his eyes were increasingly set on the coast. The 1630's were to see the start of Portugal's final decline in the Arab shores of the Gulf.

### 7.1 Increasing pressure

Between 1631 and 1635 several disturbing correspondences were circulating between Muscat, Goa and Lisbon. In September 1631, Rui Freire wrote to Goa with the news of a Safavid military build-up aiming, he thought, for Basra or Arabia. The impending menace compelled the council at Goa to immediately re-evaluate the previous order of Muscat having to participate in the military effort to recover Mombasa by dispensing some ships and men. To make matters worse, there was also discussion about the lack of money in the *Estado da India's* treasury and the necessity of counting on private rich people to contribute to the common military effort<sup>249</sup>. Fortunately for the Portuguese, the threat was not real. But, although no aggression was imminent, there were some ongoing discussions about it inasmuch as, once again, Fars Governor Imam Qoli Khan was formally requesting English and Dutch assistance in an attack on Muscat. These diplomatic exchanges continued throughout 1632 and in the second half of the year the Safavid general was, in fact, raising an army counting on the support of the Dutch fleet<sup>250</sup>. Reports

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<sup>249</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. I, Doc. 125.

<sup>250</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 332-333.



of this must have reached Muscat for Rui Freire once again resorted to asking Goa for reinforcements<sup>251</sup>. In the end nothing would come of it. The three ship Dutch squadron that reached Bandar-Abbas in 1632 was too small for an attack, which discouraged Imam Qoli Khan, who gave up the idea. It was one of his last decisions since he was executed on Shah Safi's (r. 1629-1642) orders a few months later<sup>252</sup>. He was not the only main figure to go. Sometime in late 1632 also or 1633 Rui Freire de Andrade, the main architect of Portugal's strategy in the Gulf also died, from dysentery, at Muscat. Apparently, he had been very ill for some time but, although weakened, had remained active until the last moments<sup>253</sup>. It must be said that, although the clarity and judgement of some of his actions may certainly be questionable, his resolute character, courage and determination were some of the reasons the Portuguese were still active in the Gulf in 1633.

Rui Freire and his Persian nemesis's deaths didn't mean the end of hostilities. Although a peace treaty was signed with the English EIC in 1635<sup>254</sup>, the Dutch remained competitors. The Anglo-Portuguese truce nearly pushed the Dutch into the arms of the Persians as considerations for attacking Muscat were made until late 1636. However, the Dutch had absolutely no interest in a military venture of this kind. Their main concern was trade and as long as the Portuguese didn't interfere in their commercial businesses, there was no real reason for embarking on a military adventure in the Arabian shores. Nevertheless, small scale military engagements at sea were common and Portuguese losses increased<sup>255</sup>. It was a time of an all-out assault by the Dutch on Portuguese Eastern positions. Goa suffered annual blockades from 1636, Ceylon was under threat beginning in 1638, Malacca was subjected to a long siege between 1640 and 1641 and fell, and Cochin was lost later, in 1663<sup>256</sup>. As for the Gulf, it's important to note that both the English and Dutch's relations with the Shah were not always smooth. In the 1630's the Dutch were having a particularly hard time with their trade in Persia due to a change in customs policies by the

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<sup>251</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. I, Doc. 148.

<sup>252</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 334.

<sup>253</sup> José Gervásio Leite, Rui Freire de Andrada, pg. 57-58.

<sup>254</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 108.

<sup>255</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 334-335.

<sup>256</sup> André Murteira, 'The English and Dutch', pg. 24-25.

Safavids and a period of scarcity of silk. Tensions led to war in 1645, with VOC<sup>257</sup> ships blockading Persian ports and attacking Qeshm. The conflict, that was only settled in 1652, proved that diplomatic interactions in the region were of great complexity<sup>258</sup>. As of 1642 the Portuguese also settled a 10-year truce with the Dutch, valid in the Indian Ocean<sup>259</sup>. It would seem as if pressure could start to ease, but that was not the case, since the Portuguese, by then, had to worry as much about the Europeans as about the Arabs.

Although some of the local Arab Sheikhs rebelling against the rule of Nasir bin Murshid took sanctuary in Portuguese held towns such as Sohar, the first assault of the Imam's troops on the coast was not on a Portuguese controlled port, but at Julfar, ruled by a Persian. As it was, in the first half of 1633 the Imam's troops assaulted the nearby fort of el-Sid which they took after a fight that saw the Portuguese navy give artillery support to the Persian Commander. The presence of a Portuguese squadron on the waters off Julfar may be explained by the fact that the town's fort was controlled by the Portuguese. After subduing the fortress of el-Sid, the Arabs attacked the Julfar fort and, after a brief siege, an arrangement was made in which the Portuguese evacuated the place and the Arabs readily took possession of it<sup>260</sup>. Next, in July 1633, the Arab incursion targeted Sohar. Besides being one of the main Portuguese possessions on the Gulf, it had also been the major refuge site for disgruntled Arab rulers. The Imam had ordered the construction of a fort in front of the one held by the Portuguese. For the Portuguese, Sohar was of much greater importance than Julfar and severe fighting erupted until a small conference between the two parties was held at Mutrah, on the outskirts of Muscat. It's unclear who asked for this meeting or what was discussed in detail but it was certain that due to the negotiations the attack on Sohar was called off<sup>261</sup>. It appears to have been a short-lived truce for in the same year or in the year after Arab troops in the name of the Imam appeared at Sur, on the east part of the Omani coast, and attacked the Portuguese held fort, capturing it. Next, they headed to Quriyat which, according to the 1634 budget list, had a Portuguese captain and around 80

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<sup>257</sup> VOC – Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company).

<sup>258</sup> Willem Floor, 'Dutch Relations', pg. 240-241.

<sup>259</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 335.

<sup>260</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, History of the Imams, pg. 66-67.

<sup>261</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, The Annals of Oman, pg. 52.

lascars<sup>262</sup>, although this number may be inflated. Here also, after a fierce fight, the Arabs conquered the fortress, evicting the Portuguese<sup>263</sup>. Although it's uncertain if these two attacks resulted in definitive acquisitions for the Imam, one can say that around 1634, only the areas around Muscat and Sohar were firmly in Portuguese hands<sup>264</sup>.

After these incursions the Imam had, once again, to deal with unrest coming from several tribes, some of them under the guidance of a certain Nasir bin Katan. This Sheikh, who had some contact with Portuguese officials at Sohar, attacked the Imam's territory for much of the 1630's, apparently from his bases deep in Arabia, causing havoc in some areas of the interior<sup>265</sup>. Only in 1643, the Imam renewed his attacks on Portuguese possessions. Again, the spark came from a rebellious Arab chief, named Mohammed bin Saif, ruler of Lawa, who asked for Portuguese help to block the Imam's rule. Although the Portuguese sent a small detachment from Sohar to help him, the force was intercepted by the Imam and captured. Without Portuguese help, the Sheikh hastily submitted to the Imam and the later pushed further his success by laying siege to Sohar itself<sup>266</sup>. The detailed events are somewhat unclear but apparently some of the guards were careless in their duty<sup>267</sup>, which led to the fortress being taken despite being well stocked with supplies. And so, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1643, the Portuguese lost their second most important city on the Omani coast to Imam Nasir bin Murshid. In the process, some of the garrison soldiers were killed and thirty-seven were captured<sup>268</sup>.

The loss of Sohar was not treated as a minor incident like that of Sur or Quriyat some years earlier. The King in Lisbon was informed of the event and it was discussed in a council held in Goa on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1644. Once more, the notes recorded from the meeting represent a gruesome example of the state of affairs within the *Estado da India*. One of the main possessions of the *Estado* in the Gulf had been lost to a local enemy but there was no sign of astonishment or a fighting spirit of revenge. Although the top officials present agreed that Sohar should be taken

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<sup>262</sup> Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal – Fundo Geral, Códice 1783.

<sup>263</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, History of the Imams, pg. 69.

<sup>264</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, The Countries and Tribes, pg. 193.

<sup>265</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, The Annals of Oman, pg. 53-54.

<sup>266</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, The Countries and Tribes, pg. 194.

<sup>267</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. III, Doc. 2.

<sup>268</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 48, fol. 290-291v.º.

back from the Imam, all realized that, for now, time was for a truce with the Arabs in order to gain time and wait for things to get better. What emerges from this meeting besides this gloomy pragmatism, is the complete incapacity of Goa to help, in any way, the Portuguese forces still present in the Gulf<sup>269</sup>.

To put it simply, the *Estado da Índia's* resources were exhausted. At the end of 1644, a dispatch was sent by the Viceroy in Goa to the King of Portugal summing up the situation, which ironically also summarizes the mounting pressure put on Portuguese possessions by both Europeans and Arabs. In the letter, Filipe de Mascarenhas, pessimistically reports the few resources existing at Goa. The galleons that arrived from Portugal had fewer than 150 soldiers, no money and not even materials for repairs. The *Estado's* treasury didn't have any money, even for the basic needs of government. This wretched situation was happening at a time when the *Estado da Índia* had lost Negombo in Ceylon and Sohar in Arabia, the Imam was closing in on Muscat and the Dutch were blocking the harbour of Goa itself. The miserable situation of the forces in the Gulf meant that a truce was indeed signed with the Imam, although the recapture of Sohar was considered a relatively easy military task, if there were some reinforcements<sup>270</sup>.

## 7.2 European policies impact the East

While intense military pressure was being felt in various Portuguese positions throughout the Indian Ocean in general and in the Omani coast in particular, the political front continued to be an important channel in which the future of Portuguese Oman was in the balance.

In 1630, the Portuguese King, Philip III, and the English monarch, Charles I, reasserted peace prospects between the two ruler's domains, which extended to the Indian ocean. At the time Portugal was still linked to Spain in a dynastic union that would last until 1640. The dealings between the two Kings triggered a significant change in the balance of power in the east. The new president of the EIC, William Methwold, arrived at Surat in 1633 and immediately conveyed his

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<sup>269</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. III, Doc. 2.

<sup>270</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 48, fol. 187-188v.º.

predisposition for peace to Goa<sup>271</sup>, through a Jesuit priest named Paulo Reimão. At Goa, the council, having met in August, decided to ask for an English emissary to negotiate and decided, for the time being, not to make war on the English unless they fired first<sup>272</sup>. Apparently, the negotiations were quick since the so-called Convention of Goa was signed in January 1635, between William Methwold, president of the EIC, and the *Estado da India's* Viceroy, Miguel de Noronha. The deal, that came more from the resumption of hostilities in the Indian Ocean between the EIC and the VOC than from the *friendship* between two European Kings, predicted the opening of Portuguese held ports to English commerce and the implicit collaboration of the English fleets in the war against the Dutch, now a common enemy<sup>273</sup>. Although at the time the advantages were not so clear, the reality is that the agreement forged at Goa enabled the English to expand their trade as never before, without harassment, and the Portuguese to halt attacks from a powerful enemy, an invaluable assurance in a time of advanced decline<sup>274</sup>. It's hard to imagine the Portuguese being able to sustain an attack on Muscat sometime between 1633 and 1636, as it was feared, if it had been accomplished by a combined Anglo-Dutch force. The Convention of Goa may not have prevented Portugal's demise in the Gulf, but surely helped slow down the outcome<sup>275</sup>.

After some years, in March 1641 a single Portuguese vessel arrived at Goa with extraordinary news. In December of the previous year, John, the 8<sup>th</sup> Duke of Braganza, had been acclaimed King of Portugal as John IV following a revolt over increased Spanish meddling in Portuguese affairs. After 60 years of a dynastic union with Spain, the Portuguese had, once again, a Portuguese King<sup>276</sup>. The small squadron of two ships (an additional carrack joined the first ship) that brought the news also had a message from the Portuguese King to convey to the Dutch Commander who was blocking Goa: the causes for war were gone and an armistice should be declared<sup>277</sup>. King John IV was being naïve. Although the rule by a Spanish King had been

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<sup>271</sup> Rogério Puga, 'A Convenção de Goa', pg. 81-82.

<sup>272</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. I, Doc. 156.

<sup>273</sup> Rogério Puga, 'A Convenção de Goa', pg. 82-83.

<sup>274</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company*, pg. 108.

<sup>275</sup> G. V. Scammell, 'England, Portugal and the Estado da India', pg. 177.

<sup>276</sup> Glenn Ames, 'Priorities in the Reino', pg. 17-38.

<sup>277</sup> A. Botelho de Sousa, *O Período de Restauração*, pg. 7.

instrumental in maintaining a prolonged war with the Dutch, it would now take more than a Portuguese one to end the hostilities. In the 1640's the Dutch had interests of their own and profits to safeguard. Besides, the Dutch Commander obviously didn't accept the proposition, and war continued. Earlier that year Malacca had fallen and the Far East was opened up to Dutch shipping. The Viceroy had only rowing ships and no power to reinforce any of his dominions. Although the regional Dutch capital of Batavia assumed a ten-year truce with the Portuguese in 1642, in practice the blockade of Goa, the harassing of shipping and the war in Ceylon continued until November 1644, when the Dutch ambassador finally arrived at Goa to sign the truce<sup>278</sup>. This delay had some effect in the Gulf, for in January 1643 the Viceroy reported to the council he had been informed about the presence of some Dutch ships at Surat that could attack Muscat under the cover of an ill-intentioned friendship proposal. The danger must have been a serious one because he sent four ships from the Northern Fleet with a hundred soldiers to reinforce Muscat, at the expense of some of the Indian possessions. The Viceroy also instructed the Captain of Muscat to pay his soldiers and to keep the information in confidence in order not to promote desertions<sup>279</sup>. There was no ease in the pressure.

As seen, due to more convenient winds that came from Europe in the 1630's and the 1640's, the Portuguese managed to make peace agreements with their main European competitors in the Indian Ocean. In a time of extreme decline in resources, these events should have signalled a decrease in the pressure for men and material, and represented some sort of halt in the weakening of the *Estado da India's* efforts to develop its main possessions. However, this did not happen. It was, perhaps, too late. Even so, one cannot accuse the Portuguese of giving up.

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<sup>278</sup> A. Botelho de Sousa, *O Período de Restauração*, pg. 12.

<sup>279</sup> *Assentos do Conselho de Estado*, Vol. II, Doc. 141.

## 8. THE END OF PORTUGUESE ARABIA

Well into the 1640's, while the great powers of the age were drawing their lines regarding their imperial ambitions, in the sandy shores of Oman the Portuguese were struggling to maintain the Arabs at bay and to keep the trade lines open at Muscat. Times of grand operations and talks of attacking Hormuz were long gone. It was all about survival. This chapter examines the constant threats on Muscat and other Omani ports raised by Portuguese officials on site and the adopted preparations to counter those perils, as well as the last Arab offensives on the Portuguese strongholds, with a natural focus on the last Portuguese breath at Muscat, in 1650.

### 8.1 Fears and preparations

As previously noted, as early as 1633 the Arabs made the first significant incursions on the coast with attacks on Julfar, Sohar, Sur and Quriyat. Of these Portuguese possessions, only Sohar survived the onslaught. One can only imagine the concern felt at Muscat about the events. However, had the Arabs attacked the city that summer they would not find it unprepared or undefended. In 1623 a wall with towers had been built around the city, on its south inland side, to protect it from threats from the interior, and in 1625 the Portuguese were improving those defences. The tower line system envisaged in that period encompassed a set of watch towers that would extend to the nearby port of Mutrah with special attention in securing the mountain passages. Also, perhaps recalling the dramatic events at Qeshm and Hormuz, where the quest to secure adequate fresh water supplies had centre stage, Rui Freire had ordered, in 1627, the construction of a tower to protect a well and a food garden<sup>280</sup>. The Portuguese had been investing in the enhancement of Muscat since they made it their Gulf capital. Their intention was to stay for a long time and that interest was developed in the 1630's with renewed vigour.

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<sup>280</sup> Ana Lopes & Jorge Correia, 'Mascate, Cidade ou Território', pg. 82-83.

Apparently, the year before the Arab attacks, the unrelenting Rui Freire had been engaged in enhancing Muscat's position, with the help of the Viceroy and the avail of King Philip III<sup>281</sup>. In 1633, very likely before the Arab attacks, the bastion of *Santo António* was constructed on a promontory at the northwest side of the bay. However, the venture was intended to boost the defence against attacks from the sea, not inland incursions<sup>282</sup>. After the death of Rui Freire, in a rare demonstration of command unity, the new Captain-General of the Strait of Hormuz, Gaspar de Melo, together with the Captain of Muscat and the Captain of the Fleet appealed to Goa to reinforce the fortification of the stronghold. Accordingly, the council at Goa, strongly influenced by the engineer Manuel Homem de Pina, issued various precise instructions on what should be done at Muscat<sup>283</sup>. As a result, in the following year, major updates started to be made on the two main fortifications, Fort *Boqueirão* and Fort *São João*. At the city a moat was dug around its perimeter, a dock was built at the end of the fresh water course and, on a civilian level, a new Customs House was also built<sup>284</sup>. In 1636 Muscat was already considered an extremely capable stronghold and plans were being made to improve the bay's defences<sup>285</sup>. Some years later, around 1640, the works were complete and reports declared the forts impregnable<sup>286</sup>. At the time Muscat had impeccable fortifications, besides enjoying its long-time favourable geographical defensive position.

Although these works might have created some reassurance, real safety and concrete control of the situation were an illusion. In September 1641 a concerned Viceroy was, again, reporting danger to the King. A Dutch fleet of ten carracks had been seen off Goa, coming from Jakarta, and it was feared Muscat could be one of its targets (the truce with the Dutch Republic was not in force at the time, as seen before). The fortress, João da Silva Menezes said, was facing an extreme shortage of men and Goa was not able to reinforce it because it also lacked manpower. The King was asked to send as many men and ships as it could in order to supply fortresses and fleets, whether or not the Dutch made peace. If that would happen, then it would

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<sup>281</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 30, fol. 124.

<sup>282</sup> Ana Lopes & Jorge Correia, 'Mascate, Cidade ou Território', pg. 81.

<sup>283</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. I, Doc. 155.

<sup>284</sup> Ana Lopes & Jorge Correia, 'Mascate, Cidade ou Território', pg. 81 / 83.

<sup>285</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. II, Doc. 39.

<sup>286</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 336.



be perfectly possible for things to return to the golden days of Portuguese mastery<sup>287</sup>. With this last delusion, the Count of Aveiras was evidently trying to entice the new King, John IV, into a renewed interest (and investment) in the East. However, there were no resources to spare. Even Lisbon was going through hard times<sup>288</sup>. Goa could only rely on itself.

## 8.2 The Arabs close in on Muscat

After the conquest of Sohar in 1643 the Omani Arabs under Imam Nasir bin Murshid appear to have been idle for some years in their war with the Christians on the coast. Apparently, only Muscat and the supporting port of Mutrah were firmly held by the Portuguese. Subsequent events and negotiations raise some doubts as to whether some other ports were still under Portuguese control. For instance, in 1645 a VOC detachment made a survey of the Omani shores and, at Diba, found a Portuguese Captain and a garrison of ten ill-equipped soldiers guarding the town and keeping the Portuguese flag flying above its fortress. This wretched representation of the *Estado da Índia* would be lost to the Arabs soon after, in 1647<sup>289</sup>. Anyway, in 1648, the Imam decided it was time for the final act. He raised an army and, perhaps too ill to lead it in person, dispatched it to attack Muscat under Said bin Khalfan. As Muscat was surrounded by mountains, the approach had to be carefully selected. The army chose an area near Mutrah as a camp for basis and logistics. Apparently, there was no fighting around Mutrah, with no reports of resistance to the Arab encampment in the area, despite its fortress still being held by the Portuguese. However, the Portuguese were aware of the Imam's advance and had made preparations as best they could, the forts being garrisoned, as well as the walls and the watch towers. As an attacking route the Arabs selected one of the valleys where some wells were located, an area more difficult to defend. Nevertheless, the first incursions were met with heavy musket fire by the Portuguese defenders and two artillery batteries were incessant in their aim towards the attackers. After some time, the situation resulted in a stalemate, with the Arabs firmly in possession of Mutrah

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<sup>287</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 48, fol. 90-93.

<sup>288</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 48, fol. 76-77.

<sup>289</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 48.

(but not the fort) and the Portuguese holding firm at Muscat<sup>290</sup>. The attacks on the city lasted from the 16<sup>th</sup> of August until the 11<sup>th</sup> of September. At that time the Arabs had worn out the Portuguese garrison and had destroyed the watch towers protecting the mountains west of the city<sup>291</sup>. Inside Muscat conditions must have been terrible for the plague was spreading fast, with 50 dead per day being reported<sup>292</sup>.

The battered Portuguese agreed to talks and received terms from the Arab general. A council was held at the Augustinian convent of Muscat in the 12<sup>th</sup> of September to discuss the matter. Said bin Khalfan made astonishing (and revealing) demands. The Portuguese should evacuate and destroy the fortress of Quriyat and Diba<sup>293</sup>, not because they were an affront to the Omanis and their right to rule their territory, but because they were of no use for the Portuguese, since they only generated expenditures and were a source of unrest due to their proximity to Arab strongholds. Khalfan also demanded that commerce in Muscat should run freely, without special preference towards any given individual, and that the Portuguese should pay him the total expenses incurred by his army during the war, which totalled 200.000 *pardaus*<sup>294</sup>. As it seemed, apart from the issue of the Portuguese having to destroy some of the fortifications, the Arabs didn't make any more demands regarding Muscat itself. Perhaps they felt the defences were too strong or considered the possibility of the arrival of reinforcements by sea. As long as the Portuguese could control the harbour and had the capability of getting ships into Muscat, the city could be held indefinitely. At the council, Portuguese officials were pressed to take a decision, which was expected until early evening. There was accordance in the arguments. A request for help had been sent to the fleet but any ships were yet to be seen. The urgent need of the hour was to secure the fortress, the bay, the customs house and, above all, gain time. War supplies were running low and ammunition would only last for no more than ten days, and this was only the more evident of many other shortages. It was the council's opinion that to accept the terms

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<sup>290</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, History of the Imams, pg. 79-80.

<sup>291</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, The Countries and Tribes, pg. 194.

<sup>292</sup> Willem Floor, The Persian Gulf, pg. 353.

<sup>293</sup> These demands imply that the Portuguese were not totally reduced to Muscat but had some hold on other parts of the Omani coast in 1648. However, there's an inconsistency with the date given by Barendse for the loss of Diba. Therefore, one should analyse this information with caution because the level of Portuguese presence or control over these ports is unknown.

<sup>294</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 59, fol. 70-71.

and gain a momentary peace was inevitable<sup>295</sup>. Although one can denote a certain level of pride from the council's records when it advised to negotiate with the Arab army with the greatest firmness possible, a sense of inevitability is clearly recognizable.

The truce with the Arabs was debated in Muscat but not in Goa, which had to be informed. Regarding this, the overseer of the Exchequer at Muscat, Valentim Correia, wrote to the Viceroy on two occasions in October 1648. His letters and its dates suggest that the initial Arab terms were not straightforwardly accepted, which is consistent with other sources claiming the war raged on for some time after the initial overtures<sup>296</sup>. The two letters, only 5 days apart, are shocking documents revealing a Portuguese official faced with an agonizing situation. Intended to convince Goa about the urgent need for peace, Correia extensively describes the existing problems of the Portuguese in Muscat, starting with the peril to commerce and diminished revenues. Due to the danger posed by the questionable loyalty of the *lascar* soldiers<sup>297</sup>, and a possible alliance between the Imam and the Dutch, it was imperative to keep the port secure and to relieve the ever-present lack of money, men and material. The situation was very dangerous and troublesome, and so, the Portuguese should not press for a war they knew they could not win, he stated<sup>298,299</sup>. At Goa the Viceroy was well aware of the dreadful situation in the Gulf. As early as September there were discussions about the unfolding events at Muscat and the best way to address them. The council agreed to help Muscat with everything it could. However, this was not much and, at the same council, it was decided to seek different means of stabilization other than military reinforcements. As such, the Viceroy decided to send Lopo Gomes de Abreu to Muscat, commanding a relief war squadron, with the purpose of exploiting the friendship he had with the Imam during the days he was Captain in the city, to secure the best possible terms in order to stop the conflict<sup>300</sup>.

The relief squadron sent from Goa never made it to Muscat on time, arriving only in the middle of November. Meanwhile, after some weeks of continuous fighting the two parties met

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<sup>295</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 59, fol. 70-71.

<sup>296</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 194.

<sup>297</sup> *Lascars* were soldiers from Indian origin that fought for the Portuguese in many of their Indian possessions.

<sup>298</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 59, fol. 78-80v.º.

<sup>299</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 59, fol. 82-84v.º.

<sup>300</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. III, Doc. 80.

again for renewed conversations<sup>301</sup>. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1648, at a beach near Mutrah, representatives of Imam Nasir bin Murshid and Portuguese high officials met to discuss terms. Gil Eanes de Noronha, the Captain-General of the Strait was the leading official on the Portuguese side, seconded by a concerned Valentim Correia. It was a time of sorrow. The terms were militarily light for the Portuguese but financially disturbing. The Portuguese fortresses of Quriyat and Diba were to be destroyed, as well as the one at Mutrah. The fortress the Arabs had built at Mutrah was also to be destroyed and its port was to remain open to both sides, with no artillery. The Imam's vassals would be exempt from paying customs at Muscat and their ships (one of the earliest mentions of an Imamate fleet) would be allowed to sail to any ports with a Portuguese issued *cartaz*. As for Muscat and its surroundings, the Arabs should destroy their fortifications and the Portuguese would not construct anything on top of them. The Portuguese would limit new constructions to areas they already held<sup>302</sup>. Such were the main clauses of the uneasy truce of October 1648, which, despite its harsh terms, kept the Portuguese in firm possession of Muscat and its harbour.

By January 1649 the situation was well known in Goa. Discussions followed. Once again, the Portuguese high officials in the *Estado da Índia's* capital sadly focused their attentions on petty questions and showed the same disunity and lack of understanding about the real situation in the Gulf and the decisions that had to be made on site, as had happened many times before. At a council in the 9<sup>th</sup> of January the letters of Valentim Correia, together with dispatches from the Captain-General and the records of four councils held at Muscat were discussed. Surprisingly, the news of the truce were coldly received by the Viceroy, Filipe de Mascarenhas. The same council that four months earlier was desperately seeking peace, was now scorning it. The truce was made with ill reputation, they said, and the Captain-General was to be called to Goa and replaced by Francisco de Tavora de Atayde, a noble who had served in the Gulf in the end of the 1630's<sup>303</sup>. Subsequent events show the indicted Captain-General and the Overseer of the Treasury arrested and confined at Goa for not holding out longer, until the arrival of the relief

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<sup>301</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 195.

<sup>302</sup> *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Livro 59, fol. 88.

<sup>303</sup> *Assentos do Conselho de Estado*, Vol. III, Doc. 81.

squadron<sup>304</sup>. One should not blame the officials at Muscat for the terms signed. It was a step back, for sure, but it did gain time. As previously mentioned, the conditions in the city were getting worse by the day and supplies were dangerously low. Had they waited for a few more weeks, as the high command wanted, one can wonder if the Viceroy would have a city to reinforce. It's true the agreed terms were severe for the Portuguese and, in some aspects, somewhat humiliating. However, they were more damaging for their reputation than for the military state of affairs. The Portuguese continued to hold the fortress of Muscat and, most importantly, the harbour, which could be used to reinforce the city and repel the attack, had the Portuguese leadership showed the iron will and the capability to do just that. To lift the siege and stabilize the situation a common effort and a more resolute attitude was required from Goa, and a strong leader was needed at Muscat. Yet, Goa never displayed that level of decisiveness and, at Muscat in 1649, there was no Rui Freire de Andrade.

Meanwhile, in the Gulf, there were no reports of the truce being broken. So, for the time being, the terms were upheld and the Portuguese, despite the lack of significant help from Goa, seemed secure. However, some time in 1649 Imam Nasir bin Murshid died. The date of his death is controversial. Floor refers August 1640<sup>305</sup>, which is the same year referred in Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan's book. But in Sirhan's case this is most surely a mistake because he, at the same time, points out that the Imam reigned for 26 years<sup>306</sup>. On the other hand, Salil Bin Razik, who also has some problems with the dates, reports the Imam's death in April 1649, which seems more likely<sup>307</sup>. Taking this last date into account, it represented a turning point in the final conflict between the Arab Omanis and the Portuguese in Arabia. The new elected ruler, a cousin of the late Imam, was named Sultan bin Saif<sup>308</sup>. He had been present in Mutrah, at the truce negotiations on behalf of the deceased Imam<sup>309</sup>, but for some reason never intended to honour the agreement. The new Imam made the eviction of the Portuguese from Oman his main goal and

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<sup>304</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 195.

<sup>305</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 353.

<sup>306</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, *The Annals of Oman*, pg. 55.

<sup>307</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, *History of the Imams*, pg. 74.

<sup>308</sup> Sirhan-bin Said-bin Sirhan, *The Annals of Oman*, pg. 55.

<sup>309</sup> *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Livro 59, fol. 88.

pursued it from the very beginning of his rule. As such, in just a few months he started a campaign that would see Muscat once again threatened by the Arabs. In October the final siege began<sup>310</sup>.

### 8.3 Last stand at the bay

*“Fighting around Muscat”*, it was through this laconic entry EIC agents reported to the Company headquarter the resumption of hostilities between the Arabs and the Portuguese in May 1649<sup>311</sup>. From this report one can assume the new Imam didn’t lose much time in putting the Portuguese of Muscat under pressure. Was there any breach of terms by the Portuguese that justified this? Or were the Arab manoeuvres the breach itself? It’s hard to tell. However, the records of the regiment the Viceroy gave to Francisco de Távora de Atayde in February can shed some light on the matter. It’s an extensive document with many operational instructions, but some of them are astonishing in letting us know Portuguese intentions at the time. The Viceroy commanded the Captain-General to maintain the truce only as long as it suited Portuguese needs and in a sly manner. Moreover, the Viceroy knew the Imam was in poor health and gave instructions for Atayde to enter negotiations with some of the Sheikhs, bribing them with the objective of cracking the Omani leadership unity the moment Nasir bin Murshid died. The focus was on regaining Mutrah. But, perhaps, the most surprising element in the document is the order to send an Armenian on a secret mission on behalf of the Portuguese to the Khan of Lar with a proposal of an alliance to attack the Omani shores. It’s hard to identify what, exactly, the Portuguese were offering in return for his support, for the document mentions the intention to regain Julfar and Sohar in the process, but says nothing about Persian interests<sup>312</sup>. Deceptively, the Portuguese intention was to play on the long-held Persian antagonism towards the Arabs and their desire to intervene on the southern shores of the Gulf, offering the Safavid officials transportation for their troops to land at Oman<sup>313</sup>. Although the document doesn’t mention a

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<sup>310</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 354.

<sup>311</sup> William Foster, *The English Factories in India – 1646-1650*, pg. 263.

<sup>312</sup> *Assentos do Conselho de Estado*, Vol. III, Car. 27.

<sup>313</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 448.

direct order to break the truce, it endows its receiver, the Captain-General, with a certain policy that Goa wanted to implement. In the end, Portuguese strategy for Oman in the spring of 1649 was not one of complying with the agreement and reinforcing the positions, but of concealment and betrayal of truce's spirit.

Therefore, it was with no surprise hostilities restarted. Arab attacks grew in intensity and danger as the year approached its end. The towers and walls around Muscat were overrun in December and the city fell to the Omanis in the beginning of the month<sup>314</sup>. Apparently, the walls were breached during the night, with two of the city gates being captured. Hastily, several hundred people among the population sought refuge in the harbour and boarded Portuguese vessels to escape. The factory, where weapons and ammunition were stored, was quickly surrounded by the Imam's men, and the official in charge fled, taking sanctuary in Fort *Boqueirão*. The city was totally under Arab control.

The capture of Muscat had cost the Arabs between 4.000 to 5.000 men, and as for the Portuguese, apart from those who had escaped to the sea and the 60 or 70 that held the main forts, all were put to the sword. It was reported some embraced Islam and were spared but the vast majority died<sup>315</sup>. One of the mysterious events about the loss of Muscat is the role of the fleet. Reports state the presence of a squadron at the harbour, but no intervention came from it and it sailed away to Goa. Were there any Arab ships nearby posing a danger to the Portuguese? It seems unlikely that a significant Arab naval force did exist at the time, but Arab sources mention the boarding and destruction of two Portuguese vessels<sup>316</sup>. What is certain is that in the beginning of 1650, Portuguese presence in the Arabian shores of the Gulf was reduced to the forts in the bay of Muscat.

In the first days of January 1650, a small vessel arrived at Diu with 500 refugees from Muscat. The Captain of the city wrote to Goa informing the city had fallen to the Imam but some Portuguese still held the forts. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of January the council met at the *Estado da Índia's* capital. Reports stated the city walls had been scaled and, although no cause for war was

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<sup>314</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 354.

<sup>315</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 195-197.

<sup>316</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 354.

mentioned, it was said the Captain-General, Francisco de Távora de Atayde, was responsible for not keeping the peace. It seems clear the regiment's indecisive instructions had done great damage. The Viceroy planned to send some ships and more than 200 men, together with a new Captain-General, but it would be too late<sup>317</sup>. Muscat's last bastions of Portuguese sovereignty would fall few days after the council meeting. Fort *Boqueirão* and Fort *São João* were lost just three days apart and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January Portuguese Muscat was no more<sup>318</sup>. It's not totally clear what led to the surrender or if it even was a surrender or, on the contrary, a betrayal. A letter from the Viceroy to the King in December 1650 puts heavy criticism on Portuguese conduct. Filipe Mascarenhas implies the fortress was better equipped and manned than at any other moment, and it was the actions of those in charge that led to the shameful outcome. He went further in saying the Arabs had displayed a high level of loyalty, contrary to the Portuguese, with some officials showing a poor attitude, almost seeming to want to deliberately lose the fortress. It was the Viceroy's intention to open an inquiry into the events but he was adamant in pointing out the guilty. Although the Captain-General, who had perished after the fall, and the Captain of the fortress, who was now a prisoner of the Arabs, were to be indicted, the more objectionable acts came from the fleet officials who had every opportunity and time to help the fortress and had done nothing<sup>319</sup>. These critics seem fair enough, but one cannot stop thinking of the obscure intentions behind his document to the Captain-General in February 1649 and the effects it had on the course of events. As many times before, the inconsistent acts and policies coming from Goa didn't have a beneficial effect on Muscat and the Gulf.

Muscat had fallen, after almost 2 years of an agonizing situation. The Portuguese had lost their regional capital in the Gulf, their influence all but gone. Only a small commercial presence in the Persian mainland port of Kong remained as a footnote of the Empire's once mighty power.

Contrary to the loss of Hormuz in 1622 or even Malacca in 1641, the fall of Muscat didn't have any European intervention. The English and the Dutch, with all their mighty naval power, were not to blame this time. Being true that the pacification of the Omani interior by the Imam

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<sup>317</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. III, Doc. 89.

<sup>318</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. III, Car. 29.

<sup>319</sup> Documentos Remetidos da Índia, Livro 58, fol. 95-95v.º.



posed a new challenge to the Portuguese officials, the sad reality is the Portuguese could only blame themselves. Since the loss of Sohar in 1643 attacks on Muscat were predictable. Although the city's defences were strengthened throughout the years, the supporting fleet was slowly decaying, with no massive galleons present in the area. Also, the men necessary to manage the defences were never in sufficient number and Portuguese officials had to rely heavily on auxiliary Indian soldiers whose loyalty was, many times, questioned. On the political side, it must be said that from Goa there was never a coherent strategy to cope with the existing problems in the city or a public relations guide to deal with the Imam. Too many times the Portuguese relied on supporting the right Sheikh in order to divide the Arab tribes and, when disaster struck, even wild ideas of Persian support were considered. The Viceroy, although keen to send what help and reinforcements he could, mismanaged the situation on several occasions and never provided a firm context for his officials to act. Nevertheless, it all comes down to a given moment in that specific place. Regarding this, it's tempting to imagine how the siege of Muscat would have unfolded had a man of greater courage and initiative been in charge of Portuguese positions. Notwithstanding all the shortcomings Portuguese Oman had suffered over the years from the central imperial power at Goa, Muscat could have been held.

## 9. THE AFTERMATH

More than 140 years after Afonso de Albuquerque had overwhelmingly overrun the Omani shores in his fierce attack on the Gulf, the Portuguese had lost its main regional stronghold which was, in 1650, Muscat. More particularly, the Portuguese presence in the Arabian shores was at an end after almost 30 years of an endeavour that started as soon as Hormuz was lost and saw the Portuguese as the main political entity of eastern Arabia. Although they could no longer count on the safety of a harbour to protect and reinforce their fleets, and a stronghold to help them develop their policies and trade, interest in the affairs of the region remained. The aftermath of this shocking demise is a history of an increasingly declining influence on the one hand, and the beginning of a large and costly war, on the other. In any case, subsequent events lift the tip of the veil about the Portuguese longevity in the Indian Ocean.

### 9.1 The Portuguese fading at the Gulf

When the Portuguese squadron of six ships sent to help the stranded forts arrived at Muscat, both the city and the forts were already lost. The squadron Commander, the new Captain-General of the Strait, Lopo Gomes de Abreu, informed Goa about the situation, arguing the season was not good for naval operations in the region and the Arabs posed a serious danger because of their numerous small armed ships<sup>320</sup>. Additionally, after the fall of Muscat, there were reports of Arab attacks on Kalbuh, a small cove between Muscat and Mutrah with no fortifications whatsoever, which imply the Portuguese seem to have maintained some sort of naval presence in the area<sup>321</sup>.

Nevertheless, the primary Portuguese response to the fall of Muscat came more than two years after the event. This delay may seem awkward given the gravity of the situation but when

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<sup>320</sup> Assentos do Conselho de Estado, Vol. III, Doc. 91.

<sup>321</sup> Salil-Bin Razik, History of the Imams, pg. 88.

one examines the situation at Goa, it seems understandable. Between 1641 and 1650 the number of ships arriving in Goa from Lisbon was only 28. This is a revealing element about the Portuguese growing weakness at sea. As a comparison, in a difficult decade like the 1620's, that number was 39 and one century before that, 67<sup>322</sup>. Resources were scarce and had to be stretched. Moreover, in 1651 the new Viceroy died on his way to India and the *Estado* had to be administered by a Council of Governors, composed by three nobles. Despite this turmoil, the Council continued the preparations of the fleet the previous Viceroy had started, with the objective of going in person to the Gulf. In early 1652 the fleet was ready. It was an impressive force of 27 ships, including two galleons and four galliots. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March the fleet set sail from Goa, captained by António de Sousa Coutinho, destined for Muscat. Off the Omani coast the Portuguese sighted the Omani fleet and set off in pursuit, which was not successful because the Arabs managed to get to Muscat in time. The Portuguese entered the bay and made some attempts to destroy enemy ships, but the Omanis were sheltered by the artillery coming from the forts and stayed safe. After some time, the Portuguese decided that, given the conditions, they were not capable of destroying the Omani fleet and set off towards Kong for provisions, with the objective of landing at Khasab and fortifying the fortress<sup>323</sup>. At this point it's interesting to reference a letter from the Council of Governors to the King in December 1651 mentioning some Arab Sheikhs who were willing to serve the Portuguese against their fellow countrymen<sup>324</sup>. At Khasab, there was certainly collusion with the local Sheikh<sup>325326</sup> and the Portuguese were able to land unopposed and started to prepare the fortifications. However, before any defensible works could become operational, the Imam himself advanced to Khasab forcing Coutinho to withdraw to Kong, choosing to send his two galleons to Goa<sup>327</sup>. It was a rather inexplicable decision the Portuguese Commander must have regretted soon after. When arriving at Kong, the Portuguese found the entire Omani fleet of nearly one hundred ships waiting. Severely outnumbered, Coutinho used the shallow waters near Laft to manoeuvre his ships and gain a tactical advantage over his enemy. The strategy would

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<sup>322</sup> Francisco Bethencourt & Kirti Chaudhuri, *História da Expansão Portuguesa* Vol. II, pg. 195.

<sup>323</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates* Vol. VI 1626-1668, pg. 313-316.

<sup>324</sup> *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Livro 61, fol. 108.

<sup>325</sup> *Assentos do Conselho de Estado*, Vol. III, Doc. 105.

<sup>326</sup> *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Livro 56, fol. 466-466 v.º.

<sup>327</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates* Vol. VI 1626-1668, pg. 316.

prove to be brilliant. In a very contested battle, on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1652, the Portuguese prevailed, with just 18 ships. It was one of their last major naval battles in the Gulf. Eleven of the main enemy ships were captured, almost fifty Portuguese cannons were recovered and about 3.000 Arabs were killed. On the Portuguese side one galliot was lost and about 70 men were killed<sup>328</sup>. However, the victory was not followed by an assault on Muscat, supposedly the main Portuguese objective of the campaign. It's possible the Portuguese feared the fort's artillery or the number of enemy vessels defending the bay, but it remains that no attempt was made and the main fleet returned to Goa. Only ten ships stayed in the Gulf<sup>329</sup>. As after the fall of Hormuz, the Portuguese counter-attack seemed to have missed the main objective.

In the coming years the Portuguese continued to intervene in the Gulf and confrontations with the Arab Omanis were a constant reality. However, the lack of a base from which to access the situation properly and act accordingly made the main incursions scarcer and more dependent on Goa. In 1667 and 1668 a fleet was specifically prepared to take Muscat but, inexplicably didn't make it to the Gulf, having turned back on both occasions. In December 1669, after an Arab attack on Diu, a Portuguese squadron was sent to the Gulf and, in a fierce battle against a much larger Omani fleet, managed to fight off the enemy ships and return to Kong<sup>330</sup>. As late as the eighteenth century there were some talks about restoring some of the power previously held by the Portuguese in the Gulf. In 1718 a Persian embassy arrived at Goa seeking an alliance with the Portuguese. The Persians were pressed in their possessions for they had recently lost Hormuz to the Turks and Bahrain to the Arabs. In February 1719, a fleet set off for Kong, the only place with a permanent Portuguese presence in the Gulf. After several encounters with the Arab fleet the Portuguese, again, won a tremendous victory, inflicting death on 500 of the enemy within the first days of the engagements, which lasted for about one month. However, the victory, once again, was not followed by any attack on Muscat. This time it seems the Persians refused to besiege the city as promised, and the Portuguese forces had to return to Goa before the end of the year<sup>331</sup>. Perhaps Portuguese interest in such an enterprise was not great as well. Whatever

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<sup>328</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates* Vol. VI 1626-1668, pg. 319-322.

<sup>329</sup> *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Livro 56, fol. 466-466 v.º.

<sup>330</sup> A. Botelho de Sousa, *O Período de Restauração*, pg. 72-74.

<sup>331</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 199.

the situation, the fact was that Muscat and the Arab shores were, indeed, gone for good. Gulf alliances came and went, but were never reliable enough to mount a medium or long-term strategy. The Portuguese, despite all their efforts to gain favour with the local rulers over the years, could only really count on themselves. With some few exceptions, the political panorama of the region was always too unstable and only allowed small arrangements to respond to specific immediate needs.

From 1650 on, Portuguese presence in the Gulf was reduced to the port of Kong, in mainland Persia, courtesy of Rui Freire de Andrade's agreement with the Governor of Fars in 1630. It was not a base or even a possession. It was only a factory with a few Portuguese officials in charge to collect the agreed revenues<sup>332</sup>. Although initially the revenues were rarely paid, after 1667 the Portuguese decided to force the collection of the payments due and to inspect merchant ships not possessing Portuguese *cartazes*. As a result, the prospects started to improve<sup>333</sup>. However small this representation may have seemed, Kong was to become, in the second half of the seventeenth century one of the most important sources of revenue for the *Estado da India* and, for a brief moment in the 1680's, its most lucrative port. At this time, it had the highest cost-benefit ratio of the entire Indian possessions, amounting for 6% of the *Estado's* revenues and only 0,9% of its expenditures in 1682<sup>334</sup>. The Portuguese hold on Kong was to be one of the main reasons the Portuguese kept sending a significant naval force to the Gulf on a yearly basis, until the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, despite many victories over Omani fleets, Muscat was never seriously threatened. A fine example of Portuguese detachment from the reconquest of Muscat or any Arab port came in 1673. That year a very successful campaign saw an Omani delegation in Kong asking for a truce, offering the opening of a Portuguese factory at Muscat or any other Omani port. Despite this recoil in Omani aggression and the possibility of recovering some of the previous commercial influence in the Arab shores, the Portuguese Commander showed no will to pursue negotiations and rebuffed the proposal<sup>335</sup>. The Portuguese were, by then, content to harass the commercial shipping of the region, taking prizes and

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<sup>332</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 441.

<sup>333</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 455.

<sup>334</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 467-468.

<sup>335</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 459-460.

confiscating merchandise. No coherent policy or even the will existed to recover the territories of the Omani coast.

As for Kong, the Portuguese always had pressing problems to solve. During the period of more than half a century, the conflicts with several Omani fleets for the supremacy of the Gulf were common, as were commercial and political quarrels with the Persian masters of the city. As such, due to increasing disruption caused by Omani raids on Kong and instability in the Persian realm, the port gradually lost its importance in the regional trading routes context. Other small ports, such as Rig and Bushire, attracted some of the trade and, by the end of the 1710's, Kong's importance was considerably reduced. In 1719 the last Portuguese fleet visited Kong and by 1722 the site had been abandoned by its population<sup>336</sup>. The slow but gradual Portuguese fading from the Gulf was complete. However, the conflict that had started in the sands of Arabia had spread fast to Africa and India.

## 9.2 The expansion of the war

The rise of the Yarubi dynasty from the mountains of inland Oman, the internal pacification process that united many of the warmonger Omani tribes that occurred in the years following 1624, and the conquest of Muscat at the expense of the Portuguese were events that had a profound effect on the affairs of the region in decades after 1650. The Omanis had elevated themselves, in just a few years, from an almost non-existent political entity to one of the main regional powers. One could hardly imagine in 1633, when an Arab force attacked Sohar, that it would be the beginning of an all-out war lasting for about a century. In fact, the shocking loss of Muscat to the Arabs was a turning point that echoed throughout the Indian Ocean, and the Portuguese soon felt the consequences of it.

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<sup>336</sup> Willem Floor, *The Persian Gulf*, pg. 474-477.



Figure 8 - Fort Jesus of Mombasa

Source: BOCARRO, António – Livro das plantas de todas as fortalezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental (<http://purl.pt/27184/3/#/1>)

As early as 1652 the islands of Pate, Pemba and Zanzibar, in the Swahili coast of East Africa, previously loyal to the Portuguese crown, revolted and sided with the Omani Arabs. There were ancient ties between some elites from Arabia and African tribes, not to mention the common religion, which facilitated these alliances. While the Portuguese garrison of Mombasa managed to suppress the Pemba rebellion, on the other two islands the support for the Portuguese was much reduced and the military resources to cope with the situation were insufficient<sup>337</sup>. By 1670 Mozambique was being harassed, the same period in which Mombasa started to be threatened. As a consequence of this pressure, the imposing Portuguese Fort of Jesus of Mombasa was under

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<sup>337</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 16.

heavy siege between 1696 and 1698, being dramatically lost that year<sup>338</sup>. The Portuguese were losing momentum year after year and even the traditional European advantage in technology and resources over the local Eastern powers became insignificant or was, at times, reversed. During the siege of Mombasa, the Omani artillery, originating from Muscat, far excelled that of the Portuguese<sup>339</sup>, and as for the Omani fleet, it had steadily become one of the most impressive and feared in the East<sup>340</sup>. While in the beginning of 1651 the Omanis had only a total of 7 ships, in 1669 that number was between 12 and 15, and in the beginning of the eighteenth century the fleet had been considerably expanded and included several ships with over 50 cannon each<sup>341</sup>. On the Portuguese side, the second half of the seventeenth century saw a gradual decline in the quality of the *Estado da Índia's* fleets. Goa was increasingly relying on rowing ships, which could be useful on coastal operations but ineffective against larger navies as the one the Omani's had at the time<sup>342</sup>.

East Africa was not the only region where the Portuguese had to deal with Omani belligerence. Far from limiting their attacks on marginal cities and ports of the Empire, the Arabs from Oman seriously threatened the *Estado da Índia's* heart. Bombay was attacked in 1661-62, Diu in 1668 and 1676, Bassein in 1674<sup>343</sup> and Goa itself was sacked by the Arabs in 1668<sup>344</sup>. One could imagine, given the continuous war of attrition that existed in the Gulf for several years, the Omanis would limit themselves to secure and develop their ports and keep their ambitions restrained, but that was not the case. As seen, they embarked on large scale operations to expand their influence. Mocha was attacked in 1696, Bahrain in 1694 and 1698, Zeila in 1702 and Mukalla was conquered in 1698. The Portuguese were not the only targets. The menace was such that in 1696 they threatened to blast Surat if the Moghuls didn't allow them to establish a fortified factory there. Along the west coast of India, the Omanis had a system of fortified warehouses<sup>345</sup>.

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<sup>338</sup> Patricia Risso, *Oman & Muscat*, pg. 13.

<sup>339</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 16.

<sup>340</sup> Patricia Risso, *Oman & Muscat*, pg. 13-15.

<sup>341</sup> Eric Staples, 'The Formation of Oman's Maritime Power', pg. 192.

<sup>342</sup> A. Botelho de Sousa, *O Período de Restauração*, pg. 75-76.

<sup>343</sup> Patricia Risso, *Oman & Muscat*, pg. 13.

<sup>344</sup> C. R. Boxer, *A Índia Portuguesa*, pg. 66.

<sup>345</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 16-17.



The ongoing war between the Portuguese and the Omanis was not a purely military one. Although the Arabs devised a bold strategy and acted with tremendous territorial ambition and military aggressiveness, the main achievement of their movements was significant prosperity. In the second half of the seventeenth century trading was on the rise in Muscat. As such, the Imam used his revenues (and slave manpower) to build a massive fortress in Nizwa, asserting his power over the ever-problematic tribes, and both him and the main Admirals of his forces had sugar cane plantations which they watered through newly built irrigation canals. The sugar exports from Muscat rose from 400.000 pounds in 1672 to 760.000 pounds at the end of the century<sup>346</sup>. Not all this wealth came from legitimate trade from newly acquired markets. There was also a high level of piracy which helped keep in check other naval powers, especially the English<sup>347</sup>. However, a state of war is always disrupting to commercial growth and the Portuguese, with their attacks on Omani shipping and raids on Omani villages managed to put significant pressure on Arab interests<sup>348</sup>.

On the Portuguese side problems were even bigger. Although the loss of some markets was significant, due to the fall of fortresses, ports or simply due to the damage done on influence, the revenues actually increased between 1682 and 1686 about 18%. The problem was the expenses incurred by the *Estado da India* in order to respond to the various crisis happening, like those of Pate and Zanzibar. It was impossible to defend all Portuguese interests. In the same period, expenses increased about 25%. In 1686 the balance between incomes and expenses was practically null<sup>349</sup>. One must not forget that between 1650 and 1700 the Portuguese suffered many attacks and experienced various setbacks, losing several positions in Ceylon and the Indian coast<sup>350</sup>, in addition to those in East Africa. Resources were needed and from Lisbon scarce help arrived. The average number of ships arriving at Goa each year from 1660 to 1700 was only 2<sup>351</sup>. Lisbon could not support all the Empire's vast possessions and their meagre resources were

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<sup>346</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 212.

<sup>347</sup> Patricia Risso, *Oman & Muscat*, pg. 14-15.

<sup>348</sup> Colonel S. B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes*, pg. 199.

<sup>349</sup> R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas*, pg. 322.

<sup>350</sup> Glenn Ames, 'Priorities in the Reino', pg. 28.

<sup>351</sup> Francisco Bethencourt & Kirti Chaudhuri, *História da Expansão Portuguesa Vol. II*, pg. 195.

directed elsewhere. From 1640, the priority was focused on developing Brazil, not defending India and its domains<sup>352</sup>.

Despite all these difficulties the Portuguese continued to fight on. Naval warfare of variable intensity against the Arabs would continue, with the Portuguese losing influence north of Cape Delgado in East Africa but succeeding in avoiding Arab encroachment in India. As for Muscat, the Arabian shores and the Gulf, notwithstanding the Yarubi decline after 1719 and the civil unrest that engulfed the Omani world, the Portuguese never had the will and power to regain a foothold in the region. The loss of Bassein in 1739 and its political and economic consequences sealed off the dream<sup>353</sup>.

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<sup>352</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 251.

<sup>353</sup> João Teles e Cunha, 'Oman and Omanis', pg. 251-252.

## 10. FINAL REMARKS

The final years of the fifteenth century brought enormous changes to the political and commercial state of affairs of the Indian Ocean. Portuguese fleets became the first representations of a globalized world, inaugurating a flow of direct interactions between Europe and Asia that has never stopped since. Taking note of the vast opportunities that were being presented to him, King Manuel devised a grandiose plan for Portugal's actions in the affairs of the region, which encompassed, besides immense economic opportunities, a serious idea of a crusade against the Mameluke power that ruled Jerusalem. This medieval ideal of war against the Muslim infidels linked well with the necessity of securing the new commercial prospects being discovered and accessed. The Indian Ocean was to be a Portuguese lake in which only Portuguese sanctioned ships were allowed to sail and trade, and three chokepoints were fundamental for the Portuguese to maintain control, Malacca, Aden and Hormuz. Although at Aden the Portuguese failed to strike a decisive blow, the other two became important assets.

With the submission of Hormuz, which became a vassal Kingdom of Portugal, the Portuguese managed to control the Persian Gulf shipping and many of the ports, especially on its Arabian shores. Although the Portuguese presence and influence in the Omani coast can be traced to the first attack from Afonso de Albuquerque in the region in 1507, the truth is while the Portuguese held Hormuz, the level of control asserted in the Omani ports and coastal towns was not as robust and incisive as could be expected. The centre was Hormuz. It was at the island the main trading lines were tied and through it the wealth flowed. Its vast markets covered the Levant, the Indian sub-continent, as well as the enormous Persian mainland, and it was also an important entrepôt for merchandise transferred from ships to land routes and vice-versa. Throughout the sixteenth century, the status of Hormuz, one of the most lucrative possessions of the Portuguese *Estado da India*, understandingly outshined the importance of Muscat and the other Omani ports in the eyes of Portuguese officials. But that changed in 1622.

That year, after several events that disrupted Portugal's position in the region and its dominance of the seas, an Anglo-Persian attack dislodged the Portuguese from their *crown jewel*

of the Gulf. Retreating soldiers, refugees and officials hastily withdrew to Muscat, making it the Portuguese base of operations and the regional capital of the Empire. The Muscat and Omani world represented, for the Portuguese, a completely different (and harder) challenge than the one they had dealt with at Hormuz. There are several reasons for this. One of the most obvious is geographical, Oman was not an island like Hormuz and, thus, the concept of government and defence could not be the same. While at Hormuz the Portuguese *only* had to maintain the command of the seas, at Muscat and the other ports, defences against land-based enemies were necessary, as well as allies. Which leads to the next point. While Hormuz was the capital of a dynasty of Kings ruling the island, the Omani world in 1622 didn't have a strong ruler who could be identified as the sovereign of the entire coast. This meant the Portuguese had to work through the comings and goings of the local tribal society and, importantly, the loyalty of the Arab leaders. For example, in order to pacify the region west of Muscat, it was not enough to submit the ruler of Sohar. Many other Sheikhs would remain unaffected. Another reason why Muscat and Oman were a totally different challenge for the Portuguese was commercial. While the island already had vast revenues and market access when the Portuguese arrived, Muscat, the main Omani port in 1622, represented a residual income for the *Estado da India*. For this reason, the Portuguese at Oman had to pacify the region politically and militarily, as well as develop its trading patterns and commercial infra-structures.

After Rui Freire de Andrade's return to Muscat following his short-lived religious seclusion at Goa, in the spring of 1623, the Portuguese started their military response to the setback at Hormuz the year before. However, Rui Freire's incessant attacks aimed first, and most importantly, at securing the Omani shores for the Portuguese crown. His campaigns cleared the Arabian ports of Persian presence, with Sohar, Khor Fakkan, Diba, Limah, Khasab and Julfar being subjugated. Although raids were conducted against the Persian mainland and a significant level of disruption was enforced on Persian commercial affairs, Hormuz itself never seemed seriously threatened. From Goa the pressure for the reconquest of the island would continue for years but events in the Gulf show it was never considered a serious enterprise by the officials in charge. Resources were never ideal but on more than one occasion, it is possible to identify the diversion of assets to pursue other intentions. Sending six warships to Basra in 1624 when, allegedly,

Hormuz was the main target of the campaigning season makes little military sense. But the decision shows another side of the Portuguese rule of Oman, which is the concern with trade. With no traditional robust commercial routes passing through Muscat or vast markets from which to access from the city, the Portuguese had to revive old bonds and the link with Basra and Sind was one of the instruments the Portuguese created to increase profitability. It worked. Although still at a loss, Muscat and the Omani port's revenues increased significantly in the 1630's due to the effort put in their conservation of the new *status quo* in the region. Nevertheless, the progress made was severely hampered by the government performance, which was never brilliant. In fact, several officials were indicted for misconduct, many times putting their self-interests before those of the crown. This was to become a pattern throughout the whole period of Portuguese direct rule of Oman, a shameful tradition on which the Viceroy and the King himself had to intervene.

The seventeenth century marked the beginning of a fierce competition for the dominance of the Indian Ocean between European powers. The English and the Dutch were, for many decades, a source of constant worry at Goa. Two of the most important possessions of the *Estado da India*, Hormuz and Malacca, both fell to the power of European naval might. However, the Europeans never attacked or blockaded Muscat or any of the other Portuguese Arab ports. In Oman the real danger would come from inland, an unusual occurrence in the East.

The several and distinct Omani tribes of the mountains, living in disruption and civil strife for decades, had united in the middle of the 1620's, an event that posed serious challenges to the way Portuguese were handling their conduct regarding the control of their possessions. As the Imam was asserting his power throughout the region, his enemies were increasingly looking to the Portuguese for protection and support. Slowly the Portuguese were dragged to the ongoing internal conflicts, always choosing to support the enemies of the Imam. This position caused a growing isolation of the Portuguese in their strongholds. And even these were getting fewer in time. Several smaller ports in the region were attacked and lost in and after 1633, and the major town of Sohar fell to the Imam in 1643. To be fair, the Portuguese officials in Oman never received concrete guidelines from Goa on what to do in any given situation or what should be the general policy towards the new Arab uprising. From the several dispatches, councils and letters emanating from and to Goa, one can hardly distinguish any long-term strategy. The Portuguese seemed, for

a long time, to downplay the threat they were in, to rely on the increasingly poor capabilities of their meagre fleets and, most painful perhaps, to lack the capability to do differently. While many times the will to help, to reinforce, to fight back emerges from the records, even these seem, at times, fainthearted. What is certain is that, as years went by, the *Estado da India* was struggling harder and harder to cope with the demands for men, money and material from its possessions. That is something fundamental regarding Oman. Despite the truces signed with the English in 1635 and the Dutch in 1644 the Portuguese still didn't manage to send Muscat a sizeable force to deal with the final attacks of the Imam.

In 1648 the final Arab push towards the last Portuguese stronghold began. The history of the final two years of Portuguese Muscat is one of isolation, war and disease. To the last moment, Goa was not coherent in its policies regarding the region, its governing body lacking the pragmatism to assess the situation properly and instruct the men on the ground clearly. It was not just resources the *Estado da India* was lacking in 1649. It was also in need of a vision, a strategy and a plan. Although one can sense a strong idea of inevitability when analysing the losses of the Portuguese Empire in Asia between 1630 and 1650, there's also a feeling that more could have been done. The fall of Muscat, an excellent natural harbour in an extraordinarily defensive position, while having a war squadron in the area that did nothing, is a sad example of this absence of command, professionalism and competence. Like Hormuz almost 30 years before, the loss of Portuguese Oman would also prompt legal proceedings and a frenzy to find the ones responsible for the outcome. However, the brave men that, in January 1650, held the two mighty Portuguese forts at the bay of Muscat for a month, waiting for the Empire to relieve them, are the last ones that should be blamed.

In the aftermath, the Portuguese still tried to maintain some sort of influence in the Gulf, changing the focus to the northern shores one last time. At mainland Persia, the port of Kong remained a small but, at times, profitable representation of Portuguese power. However, the times had changed. The Omanis were on the rise, their fleets were acting without much restrictions throughout the Gulf and beyond. The Arab expansion hit the Portuguese hard in East Africa and threatened the west coast of India several times. While at Africa the Portuguese suffered a series of defeats and had to abandon several ports, in India they were more successful.

As for Oman, there was talk about regaining Muscat for several decades, well into the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, events like Afonso de Albuquerque's conquests or Rui Freire de Andrade's attacks were in the distant past. The Empire's wavering power in the region was definitely over.

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## APPENDIX

### List of Governors / Viceroy of the *Estado da India* – 1622-1650

Fernão de Albuquerque	1619-1622
D. Francisco da Gama, Count of Vidigueira	1622-1628
D. Frei Luís Brito de Meneses	1628-1629
Nuno Alvares Botelho, D. Lourenço da Cunha, Gonçalo Pinto da Fonseca <sup>354</sup>	1629
D. Miguel de Noronha, Count of Linhares	1629-1635
Pêro da Silva	1635-1639
António Teles de Meneses	1639-1640
D. João da Silva Telo e Meneses, Count of Aveiras	1640-1644
Filipe de Mascarenhas	1644-1651

### List of Captains-General of the Strait of Hormuz – 1622-1650

Rui Freire de Andrade	1623-1633
Gaspar de Melo de Sampaio	1633-1634
Francisco Moniz da Silva	1634-1636
Gaspar de Melo de Sampaio	1636
Manuel Pereira	1637-1639
Francisco de Távora de Ataíde	1639-1641
Duarte Lobo	1641-1643
Gil Eanes de Noronha	1643-1649
Francisco de Távora de Ataíde	1649-1650

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<sup>354</sup> Council of Governors

## List of Imams – 1622-1650

Nasir bin Murshid	1624-1649
Sultan bin Saif I	1649-1680

## List of Captains of Muscat – 1622-1650

Miguel de Lima Torres	1620-1622
Pascoal Henriques	1623
Martim Afonso de Melo	1623-1626?
António Calado	1626-1627
<i>Vacant</i>	<i>1627-1630</i>
Luis Sequeira de Faria	1630-163?
Francisco ? / Julio Moniz da Silva	1633?-1636?
Antonio Botelho de Azevedo	1636
Miguel Feio de Melo	1636
Gomes Lobo da Silva	1636-1639?
Cristovão Rodrigues de Castelo Branco	1639?-1640?
António de Moura de Brito	1640-1641?
Lopo Gomes de Abreu	164?-1648?
Francisco Delgado Franco	1650