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Merchants without Borders: Qusman Traders in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, c. 1850-1950

Mansour Alsharidah
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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Merchants without Borders:
Qusman Traders in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, c. 1850-1950

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Mansour Alsharidah
Qassim University
Bachelor of Social Sciences in History, 2006
King Saud University
Master of Arts in History, 2013

July 2020
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

Joel Gordon, Ph.D.
Dissertation Director

Nikolay Antov, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Robert Brubaker, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Abstract

This dissertation is a history of the economic, social, and political life in Arabia, the Arabian Gulf, and the Indian Subcontinent from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. It draws on materials from al-Qasim, Kuwait, Bahrain, Karachi, Bombay, Calcutta, and London, in addition to travelers' accounts. These materials and accounts are used to explore the extent and significance of al-Qasim's international trade between Arabia and India through the Arabian Gulf. It further examines how Qasimi merchants mobilized commodities and traded in the port cities of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, taking advantage of changing regional and global political trends to create vast commercial enterprises that dominated regional trade.

Hence, the dissertation traces the economic, political, social, and cultural effects of Qusman's commercial travels both in their home country and trading centers where they resided. It argues that because of these travels, al-Qasim became the wealthiest district in Najd. Politically, the dissertation argues that these Qusman played a crucial economic role during the formation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Also, the connection of Qasimi traders to the outside world made al-Qasim different socially and culturally from the rest of Najd and more connected than other areas to global economics and cultures.

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It is said that “No one succeeds alone.” Indeed, if receiving a Ph.D. degree is considered success, I refer this success to many people around me, for whom I will always be thankful. On the top of my list is my father, who often spends a few hours every day reading. He is not only interested in history and literature, but has already published several books in these fields. I greatly benefited from him as one of my oral sources. Since he is old, my father has met several people about whom I have written this monograph and heard many stories about them. In addition to my father, I want to thank my mother, who, although illiterate, has been very strict in matters related to my educational progress. Growing up in such an environment has had a clear impact on me. While away from home in the US, my wife and children have been very patient of me being always busy. My family is my most effective motivation to achieve this accomplishment.

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‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Ardah at his house. He provided me with the needed information about his father’s residence in Kuwait and gave me copies of his father’s documents and papers. Via phone, I talked to ‘Abd Allah ibn Sulayman al-Rawwaf for a couple of hours. He generously answered my questions about his father and grandfather’s residence in Oman. I also phoned Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam in Kuwait. From him I gained significant information about his family’s business in India. In ‘Unayzah, I visited ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam. He has not only provided me with the needed information about his family’s history and business in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and India, but he is till this day responsive via phone whenever I need his help. In al-Khobar, I was the guest of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Zamil. He told me about his trip to Bahrain and about the al-Zamil trading house there. Special thanks also to my host’s son, Salah, who coordinated this meeting. In Bahrain, I met ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam at his house. In spite of his disability, al-Bassam was a generous host. I gained sufficient information from him about his father and the Najdis in Bahrain. These interviews together were very important to my monograph.

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Contents

Preface	1
Chapter 1: Historical Background	8
Al-Qasim's Trade Caravans	23
Chapter 2: The Qusman's Types of Trades	30
The Horse Trade	33
The Weapon Trade	41
Pearling Industry	45
The Slave Trade	54
The Carpet Trade	59
The Sugar Trade	61
The Rice Trade	64
The Textile Trade	69
The Tea Trade	81
The Date Trade	82
The Gold and Currency Trade	89
The Perfume Trade	92
The Spice Trade	94
The Coffee Trade	95
Chapter 3: The Qusman's Trading Destinations in the Indian Subcontinent	103
Chapter 4: The Qusman's Trading Destinations in the Arabian Gulf	125
Iraq	125
Bahrain	138

Kuwait	164
Al-Hasa	176
Local Merchants with International Links	181
Chapter 5: The Economic and Social Effects of the Qasimi Merchants of the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean	187
The Economic Influence	187
The Social Influence	195
The Qusman: Solidarity and Regional Pride	205
Chapter 6: The Political Impact of the Qasimi Merchants of the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean	208
A History of al-Qasim’s Political Economy	208
Political Activists Abroad	218
A State Cofounders	223
Ibn Sulayman: From a Trader to a Minister	229
Chapter 7: The Cultural Impact of the Qusman’s Travels in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean	248
Friends of Foreigners	248
From Poverty to Welfare	253
Art Lovers	254
Language Influences	256
Pioneers of Modern Education	258
Knowledge Seekers	262
Health Awareness	268

Activists for Modernity	271
Conclusion	273
Bibliography	277
Appendix	299

Terms

- *Ahl al-hadra* (اهل الحدره) or *al-hadrat* (الحدرات) (people of downward): the Najdis trading with the Gulf ports, especially Kuwait and Bahrain.
- *bida'a* (بضاعة) or *mudaraba* (مضاربة): seed money often used by the 'uqaylat.
- *al-jama'a* (الجماعة) or *jama'at ahl Buraydah* (جماعة أهل بريدة): the 'uqaylat leaders who usually daily attended *majlis al-amir* (ruler's court) and efficiently cooperated with the *amir* in taking significant decisions.
- The *jamamil* (الجماميل) or *al-rihiliyya* (الرحيلية) (sing. *jammal* (جمال) and *rihili* (رحيلي): cameleers who often functioned as goods carriers.
- *Khawa* (خاوة): money paid for nomadic chiefs for protection.
- *Al-'uqaylat* (العقيلات) or *'uqayl* (عقيل) (sing. *'uqayli* (عقيلي): Qasimi caravanners who exported camels, horses, and sheep, as well as animal and agricultural products to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt. When returning, they brought anything needed in al-Qasim, such as rice, wheat, clothes, and coffee pots.

Preface

In the morning of one of Calcutta's chilly, rainy days in the winter of 1899, Hamad ibn Sulayman al-Bassam, the famous Qasimi merchant, woke up after hearing a tapping on the door of his small house that was located in the merchant neighborhood. Since it was still about 7:00 A.M., he knew that the knocker was the delivery man. He, then, remembered Hussa, his wife, who he left in 'Unayzah. In her last correspondence two months before, she promised Hamad that he would learn good news about his son, Sulayman, in the following letter. While daydreaming about his family and hometown, the knocks of the impatient postman became louder. Hamad rose quickly, opened the door, and received the letter. It was obvious from its envelope that the letter had come from Arabia. He immediately opened it and began to read: "We inform you, oh Hamad, that Sulayman, God protect him, has recited the Quran ... We, also, inform you that he will begin to learn reading and writing ... Your relatives in 'Unayzah are all well. Let us hear from you and tell us about your business ... Do not make us wait a long time for your letters."

In the second half of the nineteenth century, India became the chair of the British Viceroy, so all the British colonies and protectorates in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean were ruled from India. This change enhanced the economic importance of India, making it the most attractive trading center in the Indian Ocean region, which encouraged many Qusman to head to the trading centers of the Gulf and India. Hamad al-Bassam had followed this pattern. He left 'Unayzah seeking his livelihood in India, where a number of his relatives had preceded him to Bombay, Karachi, and Calcutta.

It was the first time that Hamad felt that his wife, Hussa, and his son, Sulayman, were thousands of miles away. However, he could overcome all the challenges, especially with the

presence of several Najdi merchants in Calcutta whose trading shops were often next to each other. In contrast, the young boy, Sulayman, who was eleven at the time, could not bear the absence of his father. In order to calm him down, Husa began to read Sulayman bedtime stories about his ancestors. She told him how trade in his family was a tradition whose destiny was to continue. She explained how generations after generations of his town's people had roamed Najd, the Hijaz, al-Sham, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, India, and al-Hasa, challenging history, geography, and even political conditions, before returning to al-Qasim. These stories decreased Sulayman's worries at night. He spent his days attending his *katatib* school to learn reading and writing.

As he grew up, Sulayman's emotions towards his absent father became stronger. Thus, the only way for him to relieve his thirst was to return time after time to that small iron box in which his mother kept his father's letters. As he learned about this traditional long-distance trade, he felt proud of his father, his relatives, the town's people, and al-Qasim in general.

One morning in 1904, Sulayman's mother came running and shouting: "Wake up, wake up, Sulayman!" Sulayman was shocked and did not know what was going on. "Your father is in Mecca. He wants us to join him. Get prepared, we may never return to 'Unayzah," she said. Sulayman immediately jumped from his bed, still not believing that he would see his father again. From that moment, Sulayman forgot all his hard times. During the time preparing for the trip, he thought solely about one thing: how he would meet his beloved father.

After a long journey, Husa and Sulayman's caravan arrived at the frontiers of Mecca, where many caravans had already gathered. Husa noticed the people traveling in her caravan began to whisper to each other with fear on their faces. She might have thought that some Bedouins, who often attacked such caravans, were around. However, she discovered that this

was not the cause of the chaos around her. She heard that a deadly plague had spread in Mecca and many people had died. Although he hardly understood what plague mean, Sulayman realized from his mother's reaction that something scary had occurred.

These awaiting caravans were divided into two groups. One group decided to take the risk and enter Mecca, while the other refused to proceed to the sacred city. Husa decided to wait for a few days hoping to hear good news. Unfortunately, such news never came. One morning, Husa's companions asked about her decision. She replied: "As long as Sulayman's father is in this city, I will go on." Indeed, the caravan moved, heading closer to Mecca.

Ultimately, Sulayman saw his father after five hard years. Sulayman's emotion and happiness were difficult to explain. Nonetheless, these happy moments did not stay for long. As the seas suddenly brought Sulayman's father, the plague unexpectedly took his mother. He cried bitterly for his dear mother. He had never imagined that once he reunited with his father, he would lose his mother.

During the few months he stayed in Mecca, Sulayman received serious practical lessons in life. Losing his mother, forced him to learn how to depend on himself. Secondly, in this universal city, Sulayman had the chance to experience a new world that was completely different from the small world he had known in 'Unayzah. Mecca has always been one of the most diverse cities in the world, where many races were integrated, dissimilar languages were spoken, and multiple sects worshipped side by side.

After Sulayman returned from the market one day in the summer of 1905, his father asked him: "Are you ready?" "For what?" "To begin your own business," his father replied. Sulayman inquired: "Am I going to work here in Mecca or in 'Unayzah?" "No," his father answered, "You are going to go to Bahrain." A moment of silence dominated the atmosphere.

Sulayman might have been thinking that he was only seventeen years old while his father wanted him to travel to a country that he had never been to, where he knew no one, and which he had never thought of. "Do not worry," his father cut his thread of thoughts, "Bahrain is a promising place these days for trade. You, also, have several relatives there, to whom I will send with you some letters, so they will help you." Sulayman, then, was relieved.

A new story about another generation of Qasimi merchants began when Sulayman's camel caravan began to move, leaving Mecca and heading to Jeddah. He spent a night in the famous, historical port-city before getting on a large commercial steam ship, which was about to sail to India since there were no direct steam-ship trips from Jeddah to Bahrain. Because he traveled for the first time by sea, the trip was long and exhausting. While taking a nap one day in October 1905, the annoying steam-ship's horn awoke him. He climbed up to the ship's deck to see what was going on. He found many travelers enjoying the vista of Bombay's coasts, buildings, and streets.

At the port of Bombay, several members of the al-Fadil trading house of 'Unayzah were waiting for Sulayman. These old friends of Sulayman's father had already received a letter from Hamad al-Bassam in which he informed them that Sulayman would stay in Bombay for a few days before his next trip to Bahrain. When Arab merchants learned that someone would travel to Bahrain, Sulayman was hailed by many letters to be delivered to their merchant counterparts in that port city. From this moment Sulayman was treated by these merchants as one of them. Thus, some of them gave him gold to be delivered to some Bahraini merchants as well as many goods that had been loaded on the ship under the name of Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam.

Unlike his feelings during the trip from Jeddah to Bombay, Sulayman felt comfortable and confident during the trip from Bombay to Bahrain for several reasons. First, he met famous

Qasimi and Arab merchants in Bombay, and they all praised him as the son of a notable merchant in India. Second, he was treated in Bombay as an experienced, adult merchant. Third, as his father had already told him in Mecca, Sulayman was again told in Bombay that Bahrain was a promising market for beginner merchants, so for him, whose father had already given an appropriate amount of money to start with, the mission was possible.

At the port of Manama, Mansur al-Khunayni, an old friend of Hamad al-Bassam, was waiting for Sulayman. For a few days, Sulayman was Mansur's guest before the former rented a house. Later, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam became one of the most famous and successful Qasimi merchants in Bahrain. In the chapters of this study more details about him and other Qasimi merchants will appear.

The story of Sulayman is a story of generations of Qusman. Poverty in al-Qasim, and Najd in general, forced many people to leave home and family, to travel as far as Egypt, al-Sham, (present Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine), Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and India seeking a livelihood. Like Sulayman, many Qusman tasted the bitterness of both poverty and the absence of fathers. This hard life made them hard men, so they left their home country for tens of years to return proud of themselves. They did not only support their family, but also participated in building the newly founded Saudi Arabia.¹

In this monograph, I study the Qasimi traders' activities in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, c. 1850-1950. The economic and cultural links between Arabia and India have a long history that goes back to at least two thousand years. However, these links had been distorted since the arrival of the Portuguese in the region in the early sixteenth century. The Portuguese

¹ The story of Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam is extracted from the work of his grandson: Khalid al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib: Sirat al-Tajir wa-al-Muthaqqaf Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, 1888-1949* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-al-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr, 20018), 45-67.

were followed by the Dutch, French, and British. Therefore, the Indian Ocean region became the battleground for these colonial powers, a situation that severely hurt the area's local economies from the early sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, Britain emerged as the master power in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf, especially after the Arab rulers of the Gulf signed the peace agreement with the British in 1820, which enabled Britain to control the trade between India and the Arabian Peninsula. The British authorities, moreover, provided local people of the Gulf with a sense of commercial security in order to enhance the regional economy. As a result, the trade between Arabia and India fully recovered.

With the spread of steamships in the second half of the nineteenth century and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean were re-integrated in the global economy and local products, such as pearls and dates, found their way to the markets of Europe and North America while European and American products were sold in the markets of the Gulf ports. The recovery of the region's economy did not only encourage local people to resume the historical links between Arabia and India, but also people of internal districts, such as Najd, participated in this trade.

Of course, the Qusman were not the only Arab merchants who traded with India. Instead, they were a minority compared with Kuwaitis, Bahrainis, Qataris, Emiratis, and Omanis. People from these Gulf ports had a long history of trading with India. However, the Qusman trading with India were a majority when compared with their counterparts in the rest of Najd and the Hijaz. That is the main reason this monograph is solely focused on the Qusman. The second reason is that this trade represents the second major section of al-Qasim's two types of trades; *al-'uqaylat* and *al-hadrat* (this will be further explained in the following chapter). While *al-*

'uqaylat's trade, which was mainly an overland trade exporting camels to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt, has been studied by several academic scholars, *al-hadrat's* has not been studied yet.

The period under study witnessed incidents that boosted the commercial activities between the Gulf and India and others that reduced such activities. First, as previously mentioned, the peace agreement of 1820 between the British and the Arab rulers of the Gulf principalities restored the Arabian-Indian commercial links. Second, the long-term conflicts in Najd throughout the nineteenth century between Al Saud and Muhammad 'Ali Pasha's forces, Al Saud and al-Qasim, Al Saud and Al Rashid, and al-Qasim and Al Rashid, forced many people to leave Najd. As this unstable situation got worse, the number of people fleeing increased, which resulted in the prosperity of the *'uqaylat* and *hadrat's* activities. However, while the curve of the Gulf trade continuously increased in the nineteenth century, it began to decrease in the early twentieth century. Third, the British policies during World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945), which sometimes totally shut the imports of many kinds of products to the Gulf, harshly damaged the interests of the Gulf merchants. Fourth, the Great Depression (1929-1933) was another reason that caused a remarkable decline in the Gulf economy. Due to all these factors together, in addition to the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938, the numbers of people migrating from al-Qasim to the Arabian Gulf and India began to decline.

My study of Qusman trade over the course of a century, from 1850 to 1950, aims to explore the impact of this trade upon those who moved goods back and forth between India and Arabia, their commercial activities and the ways in which their lives changed as did life for their families back home.

Chapter 1:

Historical Background

Central Arabia, Najd, which is a vast territory stretching from Jabal Shammar, Ha'il, in the north to the Wadi al-Dawasir in the south and from the al-Dahna' sands in the east to the inland side of al-Sarawat Mountain in the west, may have been one of the poorest areas not only in Arabia but also in the entire world since the periods prior to Islam until the discovery of oil. This economic condition was caused by two factors: first, since its weather is so hot in summer and cold with rare rain in winter, Najd has always been a dry area, which has made its agriculture irregular and undependable, although Najdi agricultural products were sometimes surplus and exported to neighboring regions; second, because of its inland location, Najd was an isolated region. Thus, trade had been the most appropriate alternative for people of Arabia since ancient times. Trade caravans linked al-Ahsa (aka al-Hasa), eastern Arabia, to the Hijaz, western Arabia, through Najd as a part of Arabia's domestic trade. People of Arabia guided trade caravans even outside their homelands by carrying commodities between northern and southern Arabia through Najd and the Hijaz. They traded in goods coming from Yemen, Oman, and India, and redistributed them in the regions ruled by the Persians and Byzantines.

During most of the Islamic period, Najd was an isolated region and its history is to a great extent unknown. Beginning with the sixteenth century, however, local chroniclers began to record major events and incidents, so the writing of local history gradually developed, which provided a solid surface for later researchers to stand on. In addition to local chroniclers, European travelers and political agents presented interesting details about Najdis' social life, a subject about which local chroniclers did not often mention. Nevertheless, As Altorki and Cole demonstrate, those travelers and agents did not always exactly reflect the situation in the Arabian

Peninsula but, instead, they sometimes misrepresented the social realities. Altorki and Cole mention that one of the most common stereotypes about Najd is that it was a Bedouin zone, where the most common source of livelihood was camel breeding.² This distorted conception about Najd is rebutted by Philby when describing a meal he had in ‘Unayzah in 1918 (see figure 1). Philby mentions that “there was rice and chicken, fried eggs and tomatoes stuffed with mince, lady’s fingers, figs, peaches and dates of three kinds—all the fruit being from the adjoining garden in which, having washed down the meal with cow’s buttermilk, we enjoyed a stroll in the cool shade of the rich foliage.”³



Figure 1: Old ‘Unayzah. From Munira bint Hamad al-Bassam and Badir ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, *Rihlat ‘Umur al-Duktur Hamad ibn ‘Abd Allah Hamad al-Bassam* (N.p.: 2017), 20.

² Soraya Altorki and Donald P. Cole, *Arabian Oasis: The Transformation of ‘Unayzah* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 5.

³ Harry St. John Bridger Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 168.

Thus, Najd is the home of settled communities of craftspeople, merchants, farmers and of nomadic tribes. Today, Najd is divided into three major districts: Ha'il in the north, al-Qasim in the middle, and Riyadh in the south (see figure 2). Najd was a territory that often enjoyed a degree of autonomy from the central state throughout much of history. Inhabitants of Ha'il, Buraydah and 'Unayzah, the two major towns of al-Qasim, were *hadar* (sedentary folk) that lived in these urban cities with their own *amirs* (rulers) who led them to defend their cities. These cities and villages were surrounded by the stretching desert which was dominated by autonomous *baduw* (Bedouins).⁴

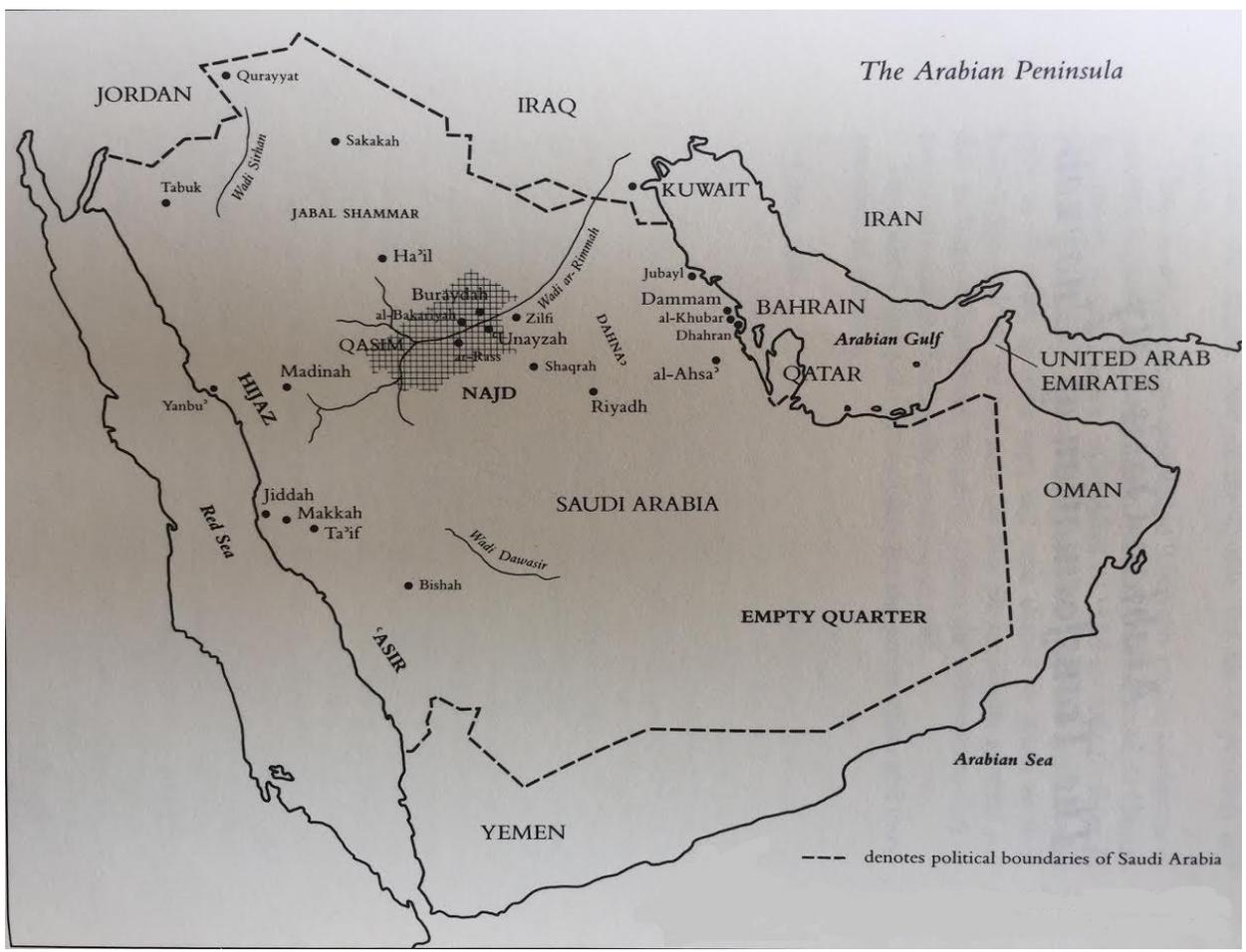


Figure 2: Map of the Present Saudi Arabia. From Altorki and Cole, introduction to *Arabian Oasis*.

⁴ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 17.

Although this brief introduction covers Najd in general, this monograph is focused on the presence of the Qusman (sing. Qasimi, inhabitants of al-Qasim) in the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and the impact of their trading travels both on their homeland and on the places where they traded in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. While Arabs had traveled to India since the times before the advent of Islam, the arrival of the Portuguese and other European powers in the early sixteenth century created a barrier between Arabia and India and almost blocked the trade between the two regions.

Commercial links between the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea, on one hand, and the Indian Ocean region, on the other, began to gradually recover. In the nineteenth century, the Gulf ports, especially Kuwait and Bahrain, were not only fully recovered but even witnessed an economic prosperity as the pearling industry flourished. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many Qusman began to travel to the Gulf ports and India for trading purposes, creating massive commercial networks that extended from India to Egypt covering Arabia, Iraq, and al-Sham (present Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine). By the middle of the twentieth century, most parts of present-day Saudi Arabia had already been united by Ibn Saud and oil had already been discovered, so the entire Saudi economy improved and Saudis did not need to travel anymore.

Linguistically, al-Qasim means the sandy land that is rich with shrubs. Indeed, 50% of al-Qasim's lands are sandy and rich with shrubs.⁵ This district, which was "well-known as the heart of Najd," consisted of many towns and villages.⁶ The two major towns are Buraydah and 'Unayzah, "the largest two trading towns in the heart of Arabia."⁷ They were ruled by different

⁵ Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Salman, *al-Ahwal al-Siyasiyya fi al-Qasim fi 'Ahd al-Dawla al-Sa'udiyya al-Thaniya, 1823-1891*, 2nd ed. (N.p.: N.p., 1999), 1.

⁶ Salah al-Din al-Mukhtar, *Tarikh al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya al-Sa'udiyya fi Madiha wa-Hadiriha* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, N.d.), 1: 23.

⁷ Hafid Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin*, 3rd ed. (N.p.: Dar al-Afaq al-'Arabiyya, N.d.), 3.

families. In the case of Buraydah, the house of Al Abu ‘Ulayyan was the founder of the town as a walled, protected village approximately in the early eighteenth century. Al Abu ‘Ulayyan ruled Buraydah for about a century and a half before Muhanna Aba al-Khayl forcefully took the emirate establishing the emirate of the house of al-Muhanna, which in turn lasted for about fifty years before al-Qasim became a region ruled by Ibn Saud’s governors. In the case of ‘Unayzah, the house of Al Fadil was the founder of the town as a walled, protected village in the early seventeenth century. Later, the house of al-Sulaym took the emirate of ‘Unayzah and continued to rule it autonomously until al-Qasim became part of Ibn Saud’s state in the 1900s when members of the al-Sulaym family began to function as ‘Unayzah’s governors. It is significant to note that the authority of the ruling families in Buraydah and ‘Unayzah was sometimes interrupted for brief periods by the forces of Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha of Egypt, Al Saud, and Al Rashid. Also, since the history of Buraydah and ‘Unayzah before the building of walls around them is vague and unreliable, the foundation of strong walls, which could protect the town from enemies, is considered the real beginning of the foundation of these towns, although Najdi chroniclers provided some details about the previous periods of the two towns’ histories.

After Buraydah and ‘Unayzah comes al-Rass which is located to the west of the two rival towns and is considered the third town in al-Qasim with the respect to size. The house of al-‘Assaf was the ruling family in al-Rass for much of the period under study. Then, ‘Uyun al-Jawa` to which the famous pre-Islam warrior and poet ‘Antara ibn Shaddad al-‘Absi is often referred. Although this town was much less important than Buraydah and ‘Unayzah, it was famous with its numerous merchants. With less significance, come the rest of the towns and villages of al-Qasim, such as al-Bukayriyya, al-Hilaliyya, al-Bada`i`, and al-Khabra`.

The early stages of the establishment of the towns in al-Qasim, especially Buraydah and ‘Unayzah, were similar, although ‘Unayzah was founded before Buraydah. In the case of ‘Unayzah, some agricultural settlements began to appear in the fourteenth century around which a wall was built surrounding the inhabitants’ houses and groves. These settlements steadily continued to grow until they became one village. A bigger wall was built to protect the town during times of insecurity. The new wall also encompassed some agricultural lands whose products would support the town for months when it was surrounded by enemies (see figure 3). As the town got bigger, the people of ‘Unayzah neglected the old walls and built new and stronger ones.⁸ Roughly by the end of the eighteenth century, ‘Unayzah became a united emirate.⁹

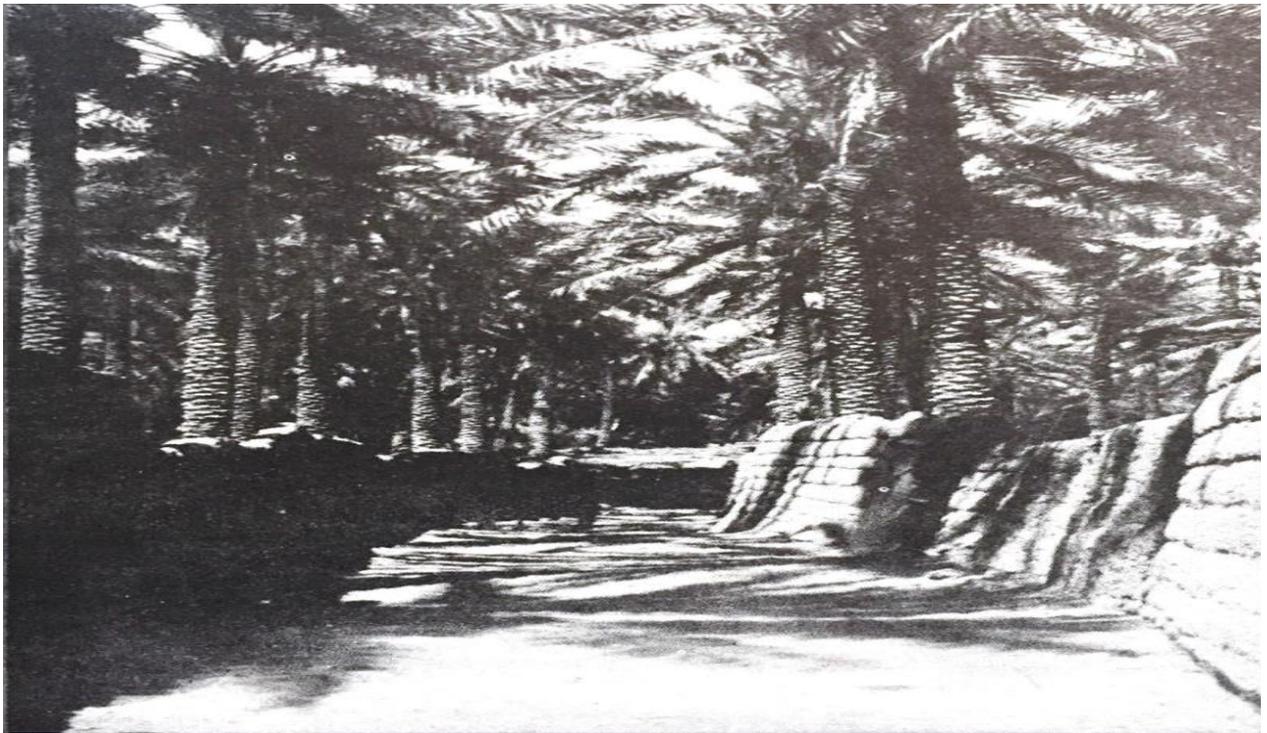


Figure 3: A photo of a lane between ‘Unayzah’s groves taken by Philby in 1918. From Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 162.

⁸ ‘Abd al-Rahman Sadiq al-Sharif, *Mantiqat ‘Unayza: Dirasa Iqlimiyya* (Riyadh: Matba‘at al-Riyad al-Haditha, N.d), 201-202.

⁹ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 16.

Like any area in the world, the link between the local environment on one hand and the methods and materials of the town buildings was strong. As people of mountains built their houses from rocks and people of woodlands built their houses from woods, plainsmen built their houses from clay. As oases rich with tamarisk trees (*athl*) and surrounded by sand dunes in the middle of the desert, buildings of al-Qasim's towns were always built from clay with the usage of *athl* woods and palm leaves to support building roofs (see figure 4).¹⁰ People of Buraydah and 'Unayzah, especially the latter since it was surrounded by sand dunes from three sides, grew *athl* trees around the towns to block the sands from moving toward the towns' walls.¹¹ These *athl* trees also functioned as a barrier that prevented sand from blowing up into the town and from inundating crops.¹²



Figure 4: A photo for the clay houses of 'Unayzah taken from the groves' side. From Nwayyir bint Mubarak al-'Amiri, "'Unayzah fī 'Ahd al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1904-1953" (M.A. thesis, Jami'at Umm al-Qura, Mecca, 2017), 466.

¹⁰ Al-Sharif, *Mantiqat 'Unayzah*, 207-208. Al-Sharif here particularly focuses on 'Unayzah, but there are many parallels between 'Unayzah and Buraydah, so I sometimes refer to his work and draw upon 'Unayzah for parallels.

¹¹ Amin al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-'Arab*, 8th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1987), 2: 606. Al-Rayhani here talks specifically about 'Unayzah, but the situation in Buraydah is often similar, so I sometimes draw upon 'Unayzah for parallels.

¹² Peter C. Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia London: Empires and Regional Actors at the Crossroads of al-Qasim" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, New York, 2015), 63.

Located on *Tariq al-Hajj al-Basri* (the pilgrimage route from Iraq and Persia to Mecca and Medina, aka *Darb Zubayda* since the Abbasid time), al-Qasim was always a significant station for pilgrims. This 700-mile route had been used for thirteen centuries before being neglected since World War II, when the usage of cars spread in Saudi Arabia.¹³ The route's long-period of prosperity and continuity boosted the population in al-Qasim and enhanced the development of Buraydah and 'Unayzah as major trading centers. Until the twentieth century, however, social and economic lives in al-Qasim, and in Arabia in general, had not changed since medieval times.¹⁴ Although al-Qasim's agricultural production was larger than that of the Najdi neighboring districts and its trade was more active, the economic patterns in the region of al-Qasim mostly followed that of Najd. Since they were mostly settled people, the Qusman often sought livelihood in agriculture and trade, unlike the Bedouins of Najd who mostly depended only on animal husbandry.

Agriculture was always essential for al-Qasim as throughout centuries it had provided the productive basis of the economy.¹⁵ Both Qasimi men and women worked in agricultural fields, which provided wage-labor for many people. Farm owners often cultivated their lands, while sharecroppers worked in lands belonging to others, such as merchants.¹⁶ The two most significant crops were dates and wheat. These were important since they were the major products sold to local Bedouins and exported outside al-Qasim. Dates were and still culturally significant as they were, and are, served both with coffee and with almost every meal. Wheat was also

¹³ Al-Salman, *al-Ahwal al-Siyasiyya fi al-Qasim*, 5.

¹⁴ Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 30.

¹⁵ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 32.

¹⁶ Donald P. Cole and Soraya Altorki, "Production and Trade in North Central Arabia: Change and Development in 'Unayzah," in *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. Martha Mundy and Basim Musallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146. Cole and Altorki's essay is focused on 'Unayzah; however, the situation the whole region of al-Qasim is often similar, so I sometimes refer to their work and draw upon 'Unayzah for parallels.

equally important in the Qusman's diet as it was used in making bread.¹⁷ Crops cultivated in al-Qasim also included peaches, melons, figs, pomegranates, grapes, millet, barley, alfalfa, squash, pumpkin, peppers, onions, eggplant, watercress, okra, black-eyed peas, cumin, leeks, watermelons, and fenugreek.¹⁸

Although al-Qasim is an agricultural area, the Qusman were famous for their trade caravans which linked al-Qasim with Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt. To these destinations the Qusman exported camels, horses, and sheep, as well as animal and agricultural products. When returning, they brought anything needed in al-Qasim, such as rice, wheat, clothes, and coffee pots. People engaging in this trade were known as *al-'uqaylat* or *'uqayl* (sing. *'uqayli*). In spite of the vagueness around the beginnings of this trade, the *'uqaylat*'s trade had been active at least since the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1810, however, the Indian Ocean was regarded as an "English lake" after the British defeated the French and seized Mauritius, holding all the strategic ports.¹⁹ The Arabian Gulf became part of this "English lake" in 1820 after the British signed the General Treaty of Peace with the local rulers, which also marked the re-integration of the Arabian Gulf into the world economy. This development did not only boost the commercial activities in the Gulf ports, but also opened a new window of livelihood for the Najdis in general, not only the Qusman.²⁰

Although Arabs have always been linked to the desert, their contact with the sea has a long history that extends back thousands of years. Since ancient times, Arabs of Oman had sailed

¹⁷ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 42, 44.

¹⁸ J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* (Geographical), (N.p.: N.p., 1908), 1487; Cole and Altorki, "Production and Trade," 146.

¹⁹ Richard Hall, *Empires of the Monsoon: A History of the Indian Ocean and its Invaders*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 354.

²⁰ Fahad Ahmad Bishara, "A Sea of Debt: Histories of Commerce and Obligation in the Indian Ocean, c. 1850-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, Durham, 2012), 59.

through the Indian Ocean and Arabs of Bahrain had known pearl fishing. With the advent and expansion of Islam, the links between people of Arabia and the sea became greater, especially with the prosperity of commercial relations between Arabia and the ports of the Indian Ocean. The golden period of the Arabian-Indian commercial relationships extended for about a millennium, during which the Indian Ocean was to a great extent an Islamic sea. However, these commercial links were almost destroyed with the arrival of the Portuguese to the region in the beginning of the sixteenth century. The competition between the European powers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also negatively impacted the seaborne commercial activities of local people around Arabia. Also, as the decline of the Ottoman Empire undesirably affected overland trade in Arabia and the surrounding regions. Nevertheless, people often overcame hardships seeking livelihood, so trade activities between Arabia and India may have been weakened during some periods but never stopped.

As a result, people from Najd began to migrate to the Gulf ports, especially Kuwait and Bahrain. However, the Gulf ports were not the Najdis' last trading destination. Rather, since most goods imported to the Gulf ports had come from the Indian ports, the Najdis traveled to India itself and resided in the major trading centers, such as Karachi, Bombay, and Calcutta. The Najdis associating with the Gulf ports, especially Kuwait and Bahrain, were known as *ahl al-hadra* or *al-hadrat* (people of downward). Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Qusman had established an economic network that connected their homeland, al-Qasim, to many trading centers, such as Cairo, Damascus, Gaza, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Basra, Kuwait, Bahrain, al-'Uqayr, al-Jubayl, Mecca, Madinah, Jidda, Karachi, Bombay, and Calcutta. According to Doughty, who visited al-Qasim in 1877, "the Kusman are prudent and adventurous ... Almost a third of the people are caravanners, to foreign provinces, to Medina and Mecca, to Kuweyt,

Bosra, Bagdad, to the Wahaby country, to [Jabal] Shammar. And many of them leave home in their youth to seek fortune abroad.”²¹

Before discussing the Qusman’s commercial activities, let us shed light on the factors that drove all these numbers of Qusman away from home. There are two major reasons: poverty and insecurity. First, like most of the districts of Najd, al-Qasim suffered from irregular rainfall, scarcity in water, hot weather, interior location, and insufficiency in agricultural productions. Consequently, famines occurred in al-Qasim many times in the recent centuries. Second, since the arrival of Muhammad Ali Pasha’s forces in 1811, al-Qasim had not enjoyed security until 1904 when the region became part of Ibn Saud’s recently founded state. For about a century, al-Qasim was the battleground for the wars between Muhammad Ali Pasha’s forces versus the first Saudi state, the Qusman versus Al Rashid of Ha’il, the Qusman versus Al Saud, Al Saud versus Al Rashid, and between the Qusman themselves. These factors together drove many Qusman out of al-Qasim.

Al-Qasim’s pre-oil commercial activities can be divided into three kinds: regional trade, long-distance overland trade, and maritime trade. The regional trade was usually a kind of goods exchanging between al-Qasim’s major trading centers, mainly Buraydah and ‘Unayzah, and between these trading centers and the Bedouins of the district. For instance, Bedouins bought agricultural products, such as wheat and dates, and commodities imported by local traders, such as cloth, rice, sugar, tea, coffee, and cardamom. According to Lorimer, as many as 1,000 of the Bedouins’ tents might be seen at one time struck outside Buraydah’s walls during summer months.²² In return, Bedouins sold camels, horses, sheep, and goats, and animal products, such as *samn* (ghee) and *iqat* (dried goat’s cheese), at the markets of Buraydah and ‘Unayzah or to al-

²¹ Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, N.d), 2: 312.

²² Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 327.

Qasim's long-distance traders (the *'uqaylat*) and goods carriers (the *jamamil*), who traveled out to the Bedouins camps.²³ In these commercial exchanges between al-Qasim's *hadar* and *baduw*, cash was often used. However, the Bedouins sometimes used their products as a value to exchange with towns' merchants, although these deals were calculated in money. For example, a Bedouin may have given a merchant some ghee in exchange for dates.²⁴

Since the *jamamil* or *al-rihiliyya* (sing. *jammal* and *rihili*, cameleers) often made their long trips during winter and spring seasons, some of them spent summer traveling between Bedouin camps to buy their products. In the words of Abu Mish'al, a *jammal* from 'Unayzah in his eighties when Altorki and Cole interviewed him, "during the summers, we did not make trips. We usually made three or four trips a year, but in summer we stayed put. Sometimes, however, I would take money from people to go out to the desert to buy things from the Bedouin. That would take most of the summer. I and some of my *subiyan* traveled as far as Bishah looking for the Bedouin who would be camped around wells because it was summer and their camels had to drink. I would buy camels and ghee and dried cheese from them."²⁵

The second type of al-Qasim's commercial activities was the long-distance overland trade, which is known as the trade of *al-'uqaylat* or *'uqayl*. *Al-'uqaylat* is a term that refers to the overland Qasimi traders, who bought camels, horses, and, sometimes, sheep from the Bedouin and exported them to neighboring countries, such as Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt. In addition to their original occupation, trade, *al-'uqaylat* worked as guides and guards of trade caravans and pilgrimage caravans. According to Vassiliev, "in the late eighteenth century [*al-'uqaylat*] enjoyed a monopoly over the right to form, guide and guard the caravans that crossed the Syrian

²³ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 24.

²⁴ Cole and Altorki, "Production and Trade," 148.

²⁵ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 71-72.

desert.”²⁶ Moreover, some of the *‘uqaylat* served as soldiers in the Ottoman armies and in the army of Sharif Husayn of Mecca during World War I. The Qusman used the term *al-‘uqaylat* as if it was an occupational category or identity, saying “They called us *‘uqaylat*” or “I was an *‘uqayli* in those days.” The *‘uqaylat* continued to export camels to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt until the outbreak of World War II, when their movement was curtailed. With the establishment of national borders, the situation became more difficult for the *‘uqaylat*. Eventually, the development of motor transportation and the appearance of the new economy after the exploration of oil brought the end of the *‘uqaylat* trade.²⁷

The commercial activities of *ahl al-hadra* of the Qusman often refers to their trade and work in the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Subcontinent. During the time under study, many people from al-Qasim migrated to the ports of the Arabian Gulf, particularly Kuwait, Bahrain, and the ports of the Indian subcontinent, Bombay (present Mumbai), Calcutta, and Karachi, as well as the eastern ports Arabia, al-Jubayl and al-‘Uqayr, in the later periods. In these port cities and towns, the Qusman sought livelihood although they varied between humble workers to very successful businessmen. Most of these merchants worked in importing, exporting, and redistributing goods, including fabric, rice, sugar, and spices, from India and Europe.

Like those of the *‘uqaylat*, the travels of *ahl al-hadra* can be divided into two types with respect to the periods they spent away from home: short-term and long-term trips. In the short-term trips the Qusman went for seasonal travels, during which they did not stay away from home more than several months. For instance, some of the Qusman went to the ports of the Gulf to carry cargo to al-Qasim. Such a trip may not have taken more than a month. Also, some of the

²⁶ Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, 36.

²⁷ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 73-74, 76.

Qusman went to Kuwait and Bahrain during the pearling season, which means that they did not stay more than six months. However, the long-term trips refer to those who resided in the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean for many years. A number of the Qusman migrated to Bahrain and India, for example, and lived there for fifty years, some of whom never returned home.

One of the earliest accounts mentioning the importance of al-Qasim as a center for regional and long-distance trade was by Khurshid Pasha, the commander of the Egyptian forces in Najd. In 1838, Khurshid wrote in his report to Ibrahim Pasha that “this city [‘Unayzah] is a center for trade greatly frequented by merchants from Baghdad, and Syria, seeking trade, just as the Bedouin head here with their goods of all kinds”²⁸ (see figure 5).

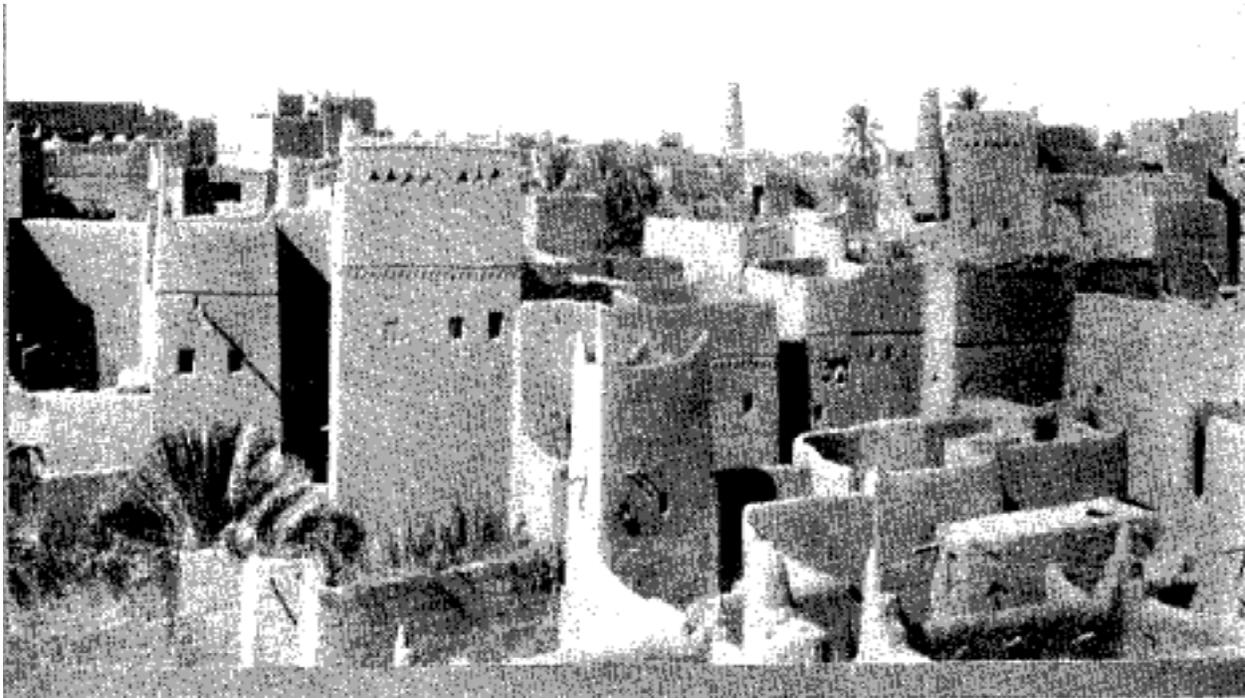


Figure 5: A picture of the town of ‘Unayzah taken by Philby in 1918. From Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 253.

²⁸ Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 220, 222.

Thus, al-Qasim's external trade began approximately in the eighteenth century with the *'uqaylat*'s travels to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt. This trade was extended by *ahl al-hadra* in the nineteenth century to cover most of the Arabian Gulf ports as well as the ports of the Indian Subcontinent. As Peter Valenti argues in his dissertation, since the Qusman could find foreign markets for al-Qasim's local products and brought in goods and foreign currency to their region, making al-Qasim an entrepôt in Najd, al-Qasim demonstrated that Najd was incorporated into the global economy by the nineteenth century, if not even earlier. However, Valenti argues, in spite of the important role of al-Qasim as key actor in the region's economic and political events, the local history of al-Qasim has not yet been studied sufficiently, at least in the English-language historiography. As Valenti asserts, "there has not been a history of this region written in English."²⁹

Therefore, this research is focused on the Qusman's presence in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and the impact of their commercial activities. The Qusman's commercial activities in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean was phenomenal since it is not common for a desert people to engage in maritime activities. The Qusman did not only engage in such activities, but even became influential in the communities among which they lived. However, when concentrating on *ahl al-hadra* of al-Qasim, one cannot neglect the other two kinds of the Qusman who contributed to al-Qasim's long-distance trade, the *'uqaylat* and the *jamamil*, simply because all the three types ultimately functioned as one network. It is true that there was a kind of a specialization, so local traders often stuck with regional businesses and the nature of the *'uqaylat* trade was different from that of *ahl al-hadra*'s. However, there was an overlap between people of each section. It was common for young Qusman who had no money to either become

²⁹ Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia," 7, 13, 15.

'uqaylat or migrate to the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Subcontinent. After earning some money and getting older, some Qusman decided to return home and opened small shops from which they earned sufficient income for the rest of their lives. During his short stay in al-Qasim in 1918, Philby mentions that one of his hosts in 'Unayzah was 'Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Sulaym, who had reached India in 1908, and knew Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo.³⁰ Al-Sulaym is one example of the overlap between the two major types of al-Qasim's trades, proving that the specialization in each trade did not create a strict partition between them.

Al-Qasim's Trade Caravans

Throughout the history of Arabia, its overland trade prospered in times of security and declined in times of insecurity. The security of Arabia, in return, depended on the political situation: strong rulers often enforced security while weak rulers usually could not. During periods of political vacuum or weak polity routes were very dangerous, so merchants could not transport their goods between Arabia's trading centers unless they paid a lot of money to tribal chiefs. This money was called *khawa* (money for protection). For instance, before Ibn Saud united Najd and al-Hasa, a trader coming from Bahrain had to pay *khawa* to the tribe of al-'Ijman before even stepping down on the coast of al-'Uqayr. For the next five miles, the trader had to pay fifty riyals as *khawa* to the tribe of al-Manasir. After the Manasir and until the merchant arrived in al-Hasa, there were several tribes, such as Bani Murra and Bani Hajir, each of which took fifty riyals to protect the caravan for only about five miles.³¹ Indeed, in 1892, more than 35 merchants of al-Hasa sent a long letter to Istanbul complaining of the lack of security in their region, which

³⁰ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 252.

³¹ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-'Arab*, 2: 558.

encouraged the surrounding Bedouin tribes to plunder any trading caravan coming to al-Hasa in spite of the presence of an Ottoman force there, which did not intervene.³²

Ports of the Gulf were Najd's gateways to the world. Kuwait was historically Najd's gate to the sea because of its free-trading policy during some periods of its history. Bahrain appeared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a real rival for Kuwait, especially when Bahrain became a distributor of international products in the region. Beginning with the 1920s, Ibn Saud encouraged three ports on the Arabian Gulf, al-Jubayl, al-Qatif, and al-'Uqayr, to compete with Kuwait and Bahrain in controlling trade in the western coast of the Gulf, especially al-'Uqayr, which was the most significant port for Ibn Saud before entering the Hijaz.³³ According to Zwemer, who visited it twice in 1893 and 1905, the port of al-'Uqayr was the landing-place for massive quantities of Manchester piece-goods and Indian rice shipped through Bahrain into Najd. Although al-'Uqayr had neither a settled population nor a bazar, caravans of 500-1,000 camels left its harbor every two weeks.³⁴

As an internal area, al-Qasim imported most of its supplies from neighboring trading centers, especially due to the fact that Najd was a very poor region with insufficient agricultural and industrial production. Every year, many commercial caravans left al-Qasim for the port cities of the Arabian Gulf, to the trading centers outside Arabia, and to the holy cities of the Hijaz. The Qusman often exported animals, such as camels, horses, and sheep; agricultural products, such as dates and wheat; and animal products, such as ghee. Returning, they bought the needed commodities in al-Qasim and neighboring regions. While in Buraydah in 1877, Doughty faced

³² Suhayl Saban, *Min Watha'iq al-Ahsa' fi al-Arshif al-'Uthmani, 1871-1913*, (N.p.: Nadi al-Ahsa' al-Adabi, 2009), 132-36.

³³ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-'Arab*, 2:515.

³⁴ S. M. Zwemer, "Oman and Eastern Arabia," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, Vol. 39, No. 10, (1907), 603.

some of the *'uqaylat* and described them and their commercial activities in the following passage: "In that there came up some principal persons of the town; clad in the (heavy) Mesopotamian wise. A great number of the well-fairing sort in Boreyda are *jemmamil*, camel masters trading in the caravans. They are wheat carriers in Mesopotamia ; they bring down clothing and temmn [a kind of rice grown in Iraq] to Nejd ; they load dates and corn of Kasim (when the prices serve) for el-Medina. In autumn they carry samn [ghee], which they have taken up from the country nomads, to Mecca ; and from thence they draw coffee."³⁵

The Qusman were not necessarily active in all these previously mentioned trading centers at the same time, but their existence often grew and declined in accordance with the prosperity and decline of the city itself. For example, the Qusman had never traded in Bahrain before 1820 when the British dominated the Arabian Gulf, which resulted in the appearance of Bahrain as a thriving trading center. Likewise, Kuwait was al-Qasim's "supply-base" in the 1910s because of the attractive trading policies that Kuwait's governors had issued.³⁶

There was a clear division between al-Qasim's two kinds of merchants, *al-'uqaylat* whose famous overland caravans were always remembered with the great number of camels that they exported to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt, and *ahl al-hadra* who traded at the ports of the Arabian Gulf. Since they traded and worked in the Gulf ports, *ahl al-hadra* were familiar with goods coming from India, so many of whom extended their trading journeys and reached India itself. Thus, while it was uncommon that an *'uqayli* traveled to the Indian ports, *ahl al-hadra* were very likely to extend their commercial activities from the Gulf ports to the Indian ports. The majority of *'uqaylat al-Qasim* (the *'uqaylat* of al-Qasim) were from Buraydah, and *ahl al-hadra*

³⁵ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:319-320.

³⁶ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, 75; Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 171.

of the Qusman were often from ‘Unayzah.³⁷ Although there is no obvious factor for this specialty, it is likely that the reason was that some young Qasimi merchants began their career by accompanying their older counterparts and others headed to trading centers where their relatives had settled down. By following these patterns, merchants of Buraydah often frequented Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt where their counterparts of the *‘uqaylat* had preceded while merchants of ‘Unayzah followed their counterparts of *ahl al-hadra* who preceded them to Bahrain, Kuwait, and India.³⁸

While *al-‘uqaylat* usually owned the commodities that they carried, whether these commodities were animals, animal and agricultural products, or manufactured goods, *ahl al-hadra* were often based in the port cities of the Gulf and India and did not transfer their goods by themselves. Thus, there was a third part that played a significant role in the Qusman’s international trade, which is the role of the *jamamil*. The *jamamil* were specialists in transporting goods from the port cities of the Gulf to the Najdi cities. They were hired by merchants of Kuwait and Bahrain, and their agents in al-‘Uqayr, al-Jubayl, and al-Qatif, to carry imported commodities to their clients in the Najdi markets. Abu Mish‘al, a jammal from ‘Unayzah in his eighties when Altorki and Cole interviewed him, reports that merchants often sent a *jammal* with a paper to their agents in the Gulf ports. In Abu Mish‘al’s words, “when we arrived in Jubayl, I went to find the agent of ... I had a paper for him instructing him to give me things to take back

³⁷ I specify *‘Uqaylat al-Qasim* because the *‘Uqaylat* were not only from al-Qasim. There were *‘Uqaylat al-Jabal* (*‘Uqaylat* of Ha’il) and *‘Uqaylat al-‘Arid* (*‘Uqaylat* of Riyadh). However, since *‘Uqaylat al-Qasim* were larger in numbers and their commercial activities continued for longer time, the term *‘Uqaylat* was often related to the Qusman.

³⁸ Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Ali al-Zamil, personal interview, July 26, 2018. Al-Zamil left ‘Unayzah to Bahrain for trading purposes in c. 1944. He is now roughly in his early nineties residing in al-Khobar, Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

to ‘Unayzah.’³⁹ The trip of camel caravans from al-Jubayl or al-‘Uqayr to al-Qasim took between seven to ten days.⁴⁰

According to Altorki and Cole, the *jamamil* of ‘Unayzah numbered about forty in the 1920s, each of whom had a caravan that consisted of from 40 to 140 camels. Until the late 1930s, these *jamamil* linked ‘Unayzah to the ports of the Gulf, like Kuwait and al-Jubayl, Mecca, Medina, and Riyadh. They even carried goods from al-Hasa to Riyadh. Locally, some of the *jamamil* worked back and forth between ‘Unayzah and Buraydah since ‘Unayzah was the distribution center for goods that had been imported from al-Jubayl to be sent to merchants in Buraydah. The major way through which a *jammal* obtained his camels was the process known as the *bida‘a* (seed money). This process was a widespread practice among al-Qasim merchants as a means of investing in goods. A merchant would buy a camel and give it to a *jammal*, who carried goods on it until its cost was covered by the money gained from the transport of commodities. At this point, the *jammal* and the merchant both became owners of the camel. If they did not want to continue the association, the camel was sold by an auction and the money was split in half after the sale. However, if they both wished to continue the association, the merchant would give the *jammal* half the market price of the camel. As the camel had been newly bought then, the entire process would start over again. On the other hand, the merchant would receive half the value of the camel if the *jammal* wanted to buy out the merchant’s share. As a result, the merchant would have received his capital investment in addition to a percent of the value of the camel. If the *jammal* did not purchase the camel, the original payment would be returned to the merchant in addition to the camel.⁴¹

³⁹ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 70.

⁴⁰ ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mushayqih, personal interview, Buraydah, July 23, 2018.

⁴¹ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 67-69.

In spite of the specialty of each trade, the interaction between *al-‘uqaylat* and *ahl al-hadra* is obvious. The two kinds of trades were sometimes even united, especially in terms of family trade. Although some Qasimi families were specialized in the *‘uqaylat*’s trade and some families were *ahl hadra*, other families did not devote themselves to one division, but, instead, had commercial agents both in trading centers attended by both the *‘uqaylat* and *ahl al-hadra*. For example, the family of Rasheyd of ‘Unayzah had several members trading in different places at the same time. According to Doughty, “Rasheyd [after whom the family was named] grew, and traded in the North : he became one of the great coast merchants ; and now his traffic was chiefly at Bosra [Basra]. He had merchant sons at Zbeyer [al-Zubayr] and Amara [al-‘Imara]; and a third in Kuweyt [Kuwait]. Beside them a son-in-law of his was a trader in Wady Runnya [Wadi Rania] in the Bishy [Bisha] country ; and another son was lately a tradesman, at Aden.”⁴² Thus, a single family had agents in Iraq, which was a significant destination for the *‘uqaylat*; Kuwait, which became an important destination for *ahl al-hadra*; the bordering region between Najd and the Hijaz; and Yemen at the same time.

Ahl al-hadra connecting ‘Unayzah with al-Jubayl primarily brought commodities, such as rice, coffee, tea, sugar, cardamom, and kerosene. They brought the same goods from Kuwait, as well as spices and cloth. Although they sometimes carried ghee, *ahl al-hadra* often left ‘Unayzah empty and returned from the Gulf ports loaded with these items. They usually made three to four round trips a year to al-Jubayl; a trip took about twenty days one way. In the late 1920s, the cost per camel was from 15 to 20 Maria Theresa Dollars. Each camel usually carried about 440 pounds, which equaled two large bags of sugar.⁴³

⁴² Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 4, 416.

⁴³ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 68, 71.

In al-Jubayl, there were some Qasimi merchants who had connections with the other Qusman in Bahrain, who, in their turn, had links with the Qusman in India. Thus, those in India sent goods to their Qasimi counterparts in Bahrain who in turn reexported these goods to their clients in al-Jubayl, from which goods were transported to al-Qasim. An appropriate example of this process is al-Suhaymi of ‘Unayzah who resided in al-Jubayl. Al-Suhaymi received goods from ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam who was one of the leading merchants in Bahrain. At al-Jubayl port, al-Suhaymi unloaded these goods from boats and loaded them on camels before the caravan moved to al-Qasim.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd ‘Allah al-Bassam, personal interview, July 26, 2018. He lives now in Bahrain and seems in his late sixties.

Chapter 2:

The Qusman's Types of Trades

Most of the Qusman who migrated to the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean left home while they were in their late teens or early twenties. Having had no experience, they often did not immediately get into the business. Instead, they usually headed to the previous generation of Qasimi merchants to work for them as apprentices. Regardless of their families' social and economic classes, young Qasimi merchants did not feel ashamed of being apprentices although some of them retained this job for years. This occupation made these youth well experienced and qualified, and helped them understand how the system worked before beginning their own businesses.

The best example of this process is 'Abd Allah ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan (Ibn Sulayman) who later became the first Finance Minister in Saudi Arabia. Ibn Sulayman was born between 1885 and 1887 in a middle-class family. At the age of five, he attended a *kuttab* (plu. *katatib*; traditional Islamic schools that provided basic education often for free), where he learned writing, reading, and algebra.⁴⁵ Roughly in 1900, Ibn Sulayman departed 'Unayzah accompanying Sulayman al-Dhukayr, a member of the famous trading family, who encouraged Ibn Sulayman to join him. It was a tradition among Qasimi merchants to encourage younger generations to accompany them during their trading travels since the Qusman often preferred to deal and work with people from their own region (this might be true among merchants everywhere). The first stop for Ibn Sulayman was al-Hasa, although he did not stay there for

⁴⁵ Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz fi Sirat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz*, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li-al-Malayin, 1988), 311; Muhammad 'Ali Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz fi al-Qarn al-Rabi'* 'Ashar li-al-Hijra (Jeddah: Tihama, N.d.), 1: 111; 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Sa'ad al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman al-Hamdan: Sira wa-Tarikh* (Riyadh: Tara al-Dawliyya, 2018), 17-19.

long, preferring Kuwait due to its prosperous trade. In Kuwait, Ibn Sulayman met the famous pearl merchant, Muqbil al-Dhukayr of ‘Unayzah, who invited Ibn Sulayman to accompany him to Bahrain. However, Ibn Sulayman preferred to travel to Basra where his older brother, Muhammad, resided. Like many Najdis who fell ill when residing in Iraq, arguably due to its uncomfortable weather, Ibn Sulayman was constantly sick in Basra. Thus, Muhammad decided in 1910 to send his younger brother, ‘Abd Allah, to Bombay, to work for the leading ‘Unayzah merchant there, ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan. Ibn Sulayman became an apprentice to al-Fawzan. According to Ibn Sulayman himself, he even did the daily groceries for al-Fawzan, which Ibn Sulayman later considered a significant training that affected his future life. While working for the al-Fawzan Agency, Ibn Sulayman also devoted his free times to learning Urdu, mastering speaking, reading, and writing, which was advantageous for him later.⁴⁶

After two years of work, al-Fawzan gave Ibn Sulayman more responsibilities. He became the manager of al-Fawzan’s trading shop. The shop’s financial records including all incomes and outgoings were under his administration, in addition to the shop’s storage and goods. Ibn Sulayman retained this occupation for about seven years. Although he received a monthly salary, it was not enough for him, especially after his younger brother, Hamad, came to live with him in Bombay after the death of their parents in ‘Unayzah. To overcome this problem, Ibn Sulayman took advantage of his strong links with many merchants, who had been trading with al-Fawzan Agency, to convince them to sell him goods even though he had no money. Ibn Sulayman bought commodities from these merchants and paid only 25% of the costs. After selling these goods, Ibn Sulayman took his profit and paid the remaining 75% of the goods’ costs to the suppliers. Nevertheless, Ibn Sulayman’s income was still insufficient, so he decided to send his brother

⁴⁶ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 311; Maghribi, *A‘lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 111; Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 20-21, 23-24.

Hamad to Bahrain to open a trading shop there with the hope of making a more profitable business.⁴⁷

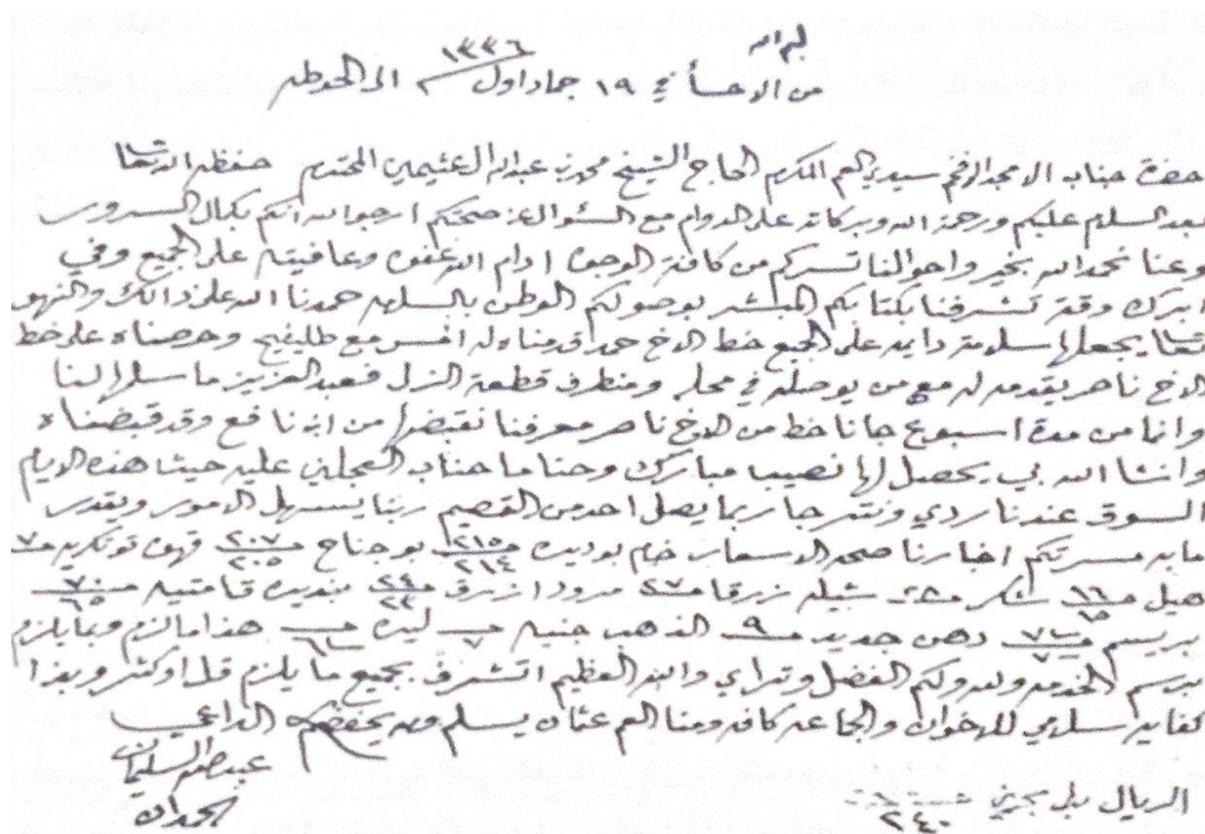


Figure 6: A letter sent by Ibn Sulayman in 1918 from al-Hasa to al-Hawta (southern Najd) in which he mentioned the goods he traded in, the prices, and the economic situation in Bahrain. From Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 27.

Approximately in 1917, Ibn Sulayman arrived in Bahrain with capital that he had gained from his business in Bombay in addition to some money he had borrowed from other merchants. In Bahrain, Ibn Sulayman and his brother traded in rugs, coffee, cardamom, incense, and textiles. However, as Ibn Sulayman himself pointed out in a letter sent to Najd, the market in Bahrain was depressed during this specific time (see figure 6). It is highly likely that this economic situation in Bahrain was caused by the ongoing First World War. Ibn Sulayman was active during this

⁴⁷ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 311; Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 111; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 24-25.

period traveling permanently between Bombay, Bahrain, and al-Hasa to help his brother manage their business, which was not satisfactory. He suffered some economic damages that increased his debts. He fought for two years for his business to survive before being recruited by Ibn Saud to work at his court in 1920.⁴⁸

Another example of the process that most young Qusman followed before entering the market is Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Ali al-Zamil. Al-Zamil left ‘Unayzah in c. 1944 when he was about 14 or 15 years old and headed to Bahrain, where his uncle, ‘Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Zamil, was a merchant. At the beginning, Muhammad was an apprentice for his uncle, doing basic tasks like grocery shopping. Sometimes Muhammad served coffee for his uncle and his guests. In this training period during which he was an apprentice, Muhammad did not receive a salary. He helped his uncle with basic services and learned from him while the uncle provided Muhammad with the necessary needs such as food and accommodation. Having become aware of prices and currency values, Muhammad began to take on some secretarial duties, such as taking responsibility of record books. Later, he entered the market.⁴⁹

The Horse Trade

Horses in Arabia had always been considered precious, especially those of Najd, whose horses were considered among the best. The rulers of Najd, Al Saud of Riyadh and Al Rashid of Ha’il, frequently sent horses as presents to the Ashraf of Mecca, the Khedives of Egypt, and the Ottoman Sultans. For example, in 1783, the second ruler of the first Saudi state, Imam ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Muhammad, sent horses and camels to the Ottoman *wali* (governor) in Mecca as a gift

⁴⁸ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 311; Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 26-28.

⁴⁹ Al-Zamil, personal interview.

to allow people of Najd to perform the *hajj*.⁵⁰ When performing the *hajj* in 1800, Imam Sa'ud ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz presented thirty-five horses as gifts.⁵¹

Horse trade in Arabia has a long history. The *'uqaylat* had exported Arabian horses along with camels to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt since approximately the early eighteenth century. For centuries earlier, India had imported Arabian horses from the Arabian Peninsula for military purposes. However, with the arrival of the Portuguese colonizers in the early sixteenth century, the commercial links between Arabia and India were almost cut since they prevented Arab merchants from trading outside the Gulf without permission from the Portuguese. These European colonizers also prohibited the export of horses from the Gulf to India in order to weaken the Muslim resistance in India.⁵²

With the British colonization of India, Bombay appeared as a major center for horse trading. An article that appeared in *The Times of India* in 1894 proudly states that “the greatest foreign market for Arab horses is, and has for the last hundred years been, Bombay.”⁵³ Indeed, the Swiss historian, geographer, and traveler John Lewis Burchhardt, who visited the Hijaz in 1814-1815, mentions that Arabian horses were sent to India, where their prices were considerably high.⁵⁴ Also, the commander of the Egyptian forces in Najd, Khurshid Pasha, sent a letter on December 11, 1839, to Egypt in which he frankly states that “the British had been buying horses from al-Qasim, and Najd in general, at any price through their agents in these districts since 1825.”⁵⁵ Thus, we can assume that Arabian horse trade with India had already

⁵⁰ Husayn ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh Najd*, ed. Nasir al-Din al-Asad, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994), 158.

⁵¹ 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Bassam, *Tuhfat al-Mushtaq fi Akhbar Najd wa-al-Hijaz wa-al-'Iraq*, ed. Ibrahim al-Khalidi. (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Mukhtalif li-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi', 2000), 244.

⁵² Sabri Falih al-Hummadi, “Tijarat al-Bahrayn fi al-Qarnayn al-Thamin 'Ashar wa-al-Tasi' 'Ashar,” *Al-Wathiqa*, Vol. 23, No. 46 (July 2004), 47.

⁵³ “The Arabian Horse,” *The Times of India* (June 14, 1894), 4.

⁵⁴ John Lewis Burchhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys*, (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 1: 207.

⁵⁵ Al-Salman, *al-Ahwal al-Siyasiyya fi al-Qasim*, 349.

recovered at least by the end of the eighteenth century, if not even before. The British imperialists depended heavily on horses for military purposes in Northern India during the first half of the nineteenth century, which stimulated the horse trade with Arabia.⁵⁶ Indeed, horse trade between Arabia and India flourished and reached its peak during the nineteenth century. In 1869, the value of horses exported to Bombay was about £28,500.⁵⁷

The pioneer port on the Gulf in exporting Arabian horses to India was Kuwait, which began to engage in this trade in the late eighteenth century. Since these horses were important for racing and military purposes in British India, some sources indicate that the government of Bombay signed several agreements with the rulers of Kuwait to ensure a free trade in horses.⁵⁸ In addition to the remarkable demand for Arabian horses in India, which definitely led to the increase in their prices, Arab horse traders greatly benefited from India's rules that exempted imported horses as well as from duties. According to the Indian Custom House's schedule of import tariff in 1915, "horses, cattle, sheep, and other living animals of all kinds" were duty free.⁵⁹

According to Philby, in addition to Mesopotamia, Persia, and Kurdistan, Najd was one of the major regions that supplied India with horses during the period under study. Many people from Najd and Kuwait collected these horses and exported them to India.⁶⁰ Palgrave, who visited Arabia in 1862-63, mentions that "more than half of the export of Arab horses to Bombay ... passes by the seaport of Koweyt."⁶¹ According to Lewis Pelly, the British Political Resident in

⁵⁶ 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Dura, "Tijarat al-Khayl fi al-Kuwayt," *Al-Wathiqah*, Vol. 23, No. 46 (July 2004), 146; Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia," 15.

⁵⁷ 'Imad Jasim Hasan, "Tasa'ud Nashat al-Bahrayn al-Milahi wa-al-Tijari Khilal 'Ahd Hakim al-Bahrayn al-Shaykh 'Isa ibn 'Ali al-Khalifa," Vol. 33, No. 65 (August 2014), 172.

⁵⁸ Al-Dura, "Tijarat al-Khayl," 144, 146.

⁵⁹ *Thacker's Indian Directory, 1915* (Government of Bombay) (Calcutta: Thacker's Directories Ltd., 1915), 27.

⁶⁰ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 274.

⁶¹ William Gifford Palgrave, *Personal Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63)*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1868), 135.

the Arabian Gulf (1863-1865), who visited Najd in 1865, horse dealers gathered their horses from Najd at the fort of al-Jahra, near the town of Kuwait.⁶² These dealers must have been agents for Kuwaiti merchants. Indeed, one source points out that there was a person in al-Qasim whose job was to collect horses and send them to Kuwait. While one source indicates that Kuwait and Basra exported 1500 horses to India in 1816, Pelly mentions that Kuwait exported 800 horses annually to India, 600 of which went directly from Kuwait and 200 from Basra.⁶³

Kuwaiti merchants were very careful in shipping horses to India, so they redesigned the boats on which horses were often carried. This kind of boats is called the *baghla*, which was the most common type of boats in the Gulf in the nineteenth century. The length of the *baghla* reached 135 feet with a capacity of 150-500 tons. On each *baghla* from 80 to 100 horses were shipped. Each horse was placed in a small room in order to prevent it from sitting or lying down, which would hurt its arms and legs. Horses continuously stood during the whole time of the trip, which was often between 16 and 21 days. Horses' tails were directed to the sea and their heads were directed inside the boat toward the feeding tubs. They were placed on two decks. The crew made sure that horses on the upper floor were covered at all times from seeing the sea, which, as they believed, could make horses sick.⁶⁴

Qasimi merchants abroad played a notable role in exporting Arabian horses to the Indian markets. Doughty, who visited al-Qasim in 1877, states that there was no breeding of horses in Buraydah or 'Unayzah, nor in any town in Najd. However, horse-brokers purchased young stallions from Bedouin Arab tribes.⁶⁵ Similarly, Philby, who visited al-Qasim in 1918,

⁶² Lewis Pelly, "A Visit to the Wahabee Capital, Central Arabia," *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 35 (1865), 182.

⁶³ Al-Dura, "Tijarat al-Khayl," 146, 152.

⁶⁴ Al-Dura, "Tijarat al-Khayl," 148.

⁶⁵ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 389.

emphasizes that ‘Unayzah had a special reputation as a collecting center (*marbat*, pl. *marabit*) for horses that had been bought from the Bedouin tribes, such as al-Dafir, ‘Utaybah, Harb, ‘Iniza, and Mutayr.⁶⁶ In addition to their value, Arabian horses required special care since they were unable to tolerate thirst while Najd is dry and hot in summer.⁶⁷ Thus, Bedouins carefully raised foals, providing them with a special diet, which included camels milk, wheat, and some dates.⁶⁸ Doughty mentions that ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni, a forty-year old man who had gone in his youth from ‘Unayzah to Bombay and grown to be one of the most notable Qasimi merchants based in Basra, and Shaykh Nasir al-Sumayri, one of ‘Unayzah’s merchants based in Jeddah, were partners in buying three or four young horses every year from the nomads in order to ship them to Bombay for sale. While in al-Qasim, Doughty heard that some horses had been exported from Buraydah a few days before his arrival.⁶⁹

These *marabit* of ‘Unayzah were well organized, as they were the temporary stables for the precious Arabian horses. According to Doughty, who visited one of ‘Unayzah’s *marabit*, these horses were put in a *marbat*, located often amongst the city’s agricultural fields after being bought from the Bedouins. He observed how the person in charge, who often was not one of the Qasimi merchants abroad, took care of horses, and informs his readers that he saw “two stallions feed head to head at a square clay bin; and each horse is tethered by an hind foot to a peg driven in the ground. Their fodder is green vetches (jet): and this is their diet since they were brought in lean from the desert, through the summer weeks.”⁷⁰ One of ‘Unayzah’s horse stables was owned

⁶⁶ Burchhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins*, 1: 211; Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 274.

⁶⁷ “The Arabian Horse,” 4.

⁶⁸ Burchhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins*, 1: 210; Pelly, “A Visit to the Wahabee Capital,” 183.

⁶⁹ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:350, 390-91.

⁷⁰ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:389-90.

by a member of the famous trading family of al-Bassam, Muhammad ibn Hamad ibn Ibrahim al-Bassam (died in 1928).⁷¹

Horses were often bought in the winter before the monsoon blew in the Indian Ocean, which signaled the next shipping season, so they were driven from al-Qasim to Kuwait.⁷² Prices of horses in the Gulf ports between 1800 and 1945 averaged 300 Indian rupees (Rs) for a horse at the age of three years.⁷³ According to the horse's features, including color, height, tail length, and above all the pureness of its blood, the price increased. The care and feeding of a horse during the time of the trip from Kuwait to India cost about Rs. 200. In Bombay, a horse was sold for about Rs. 600-900, which was profitable for the horse merchants.⁷⁴ The most famous market in Bombay for Arabian horses was the market of Byculla (see figure 7).⁷⁵ In 1894, *The Times of India* described this market as follows: "There is no market in the world, however, for the Arab horse like our own Byculla."⁷⁶ Furthermore, the best kinds of the horses imported from Kuwait were often taken to Bengal, where a horse might have been sold for Rs. 1800-2500.⁷⁷

⁷¹ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal interview, 'Unayzah, July 27, 2018.

⁷² Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 389-90.

⁷³ The Indian rupee is the currency most referred to in this monograph because it was the dominant currency in the Gulf during the time of study. While Maria Theresa dollar was the dominant currency in the inner regions of Arabia, the Indian rupees began to dominate the coastal districts of the Gulf with the British dominance after 1820. In 1905, one Maria Theresa dollar equaled one rupee and five anna while one sterling pound equaled 15 rupees. (Nura Muhammad al-Qasimi, *Al-Wujud al-Hindi fi al-Khalij al-'Arabi* (Sharjah: Manshurat Da'irat al-Thaqafa wa-al-I'lam, 1996), 128-29).

⁷⁴ Al-Dura, "Tijarat al-Khayl," 151.

⁷⁵ Major-General W. Tweedie. *The Arabian Horse: His Country and People*. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1894), 299.

⁷⁶ "The Arabian Horse," 4.

⁷⁷ Al-Dura, "Tijarat al-Khayl," 152.

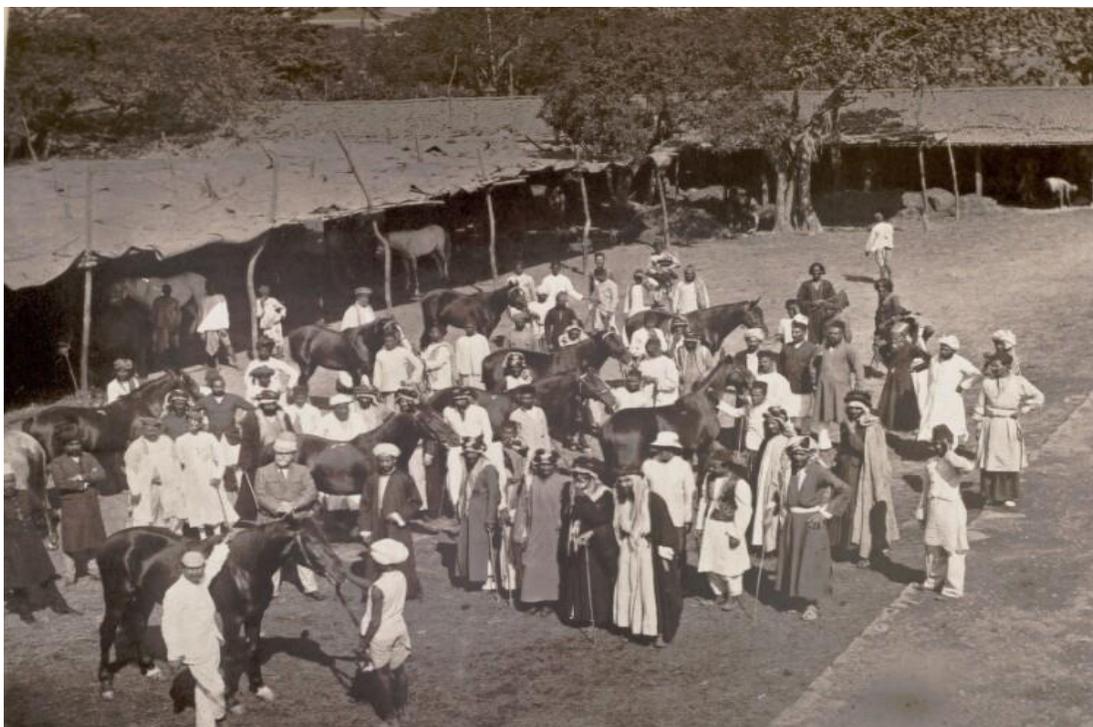


Figure 7: The horse mart at Byculla where Arab dealers sold Arabian horses. From Tweedie. *The Arabian Horse*, 301.

The effect of the First World War, however, was harsh on the horse trade, although it was not the sole factor for the decline. Philby points out that Ibn Saud told him that the decline of the horse trade was caused by the previous shortage in the number of horses available in Arabia, a situation that was made worse by the continuous local wars, during which a remarkable number of horses were killed. Consequently, the Bombay horse-dealers might have sought elsewhere for their requirements, which may have in turn been the cause of the decrease in horse prices.

According to Philby, Ibn Saud himself sent approximately ten horses to Bombay during World War I, making a profit of only Rs. 1,000.⁷⁸

By the end of World War I, the horse trade seems to have slightly recovered. In September of 1918, Philby saw in ‘Unayzah a batch of fourteen horses that had recently been

⁷⁸ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 216.

collected to be taken to Kuwait for shipment to India. Philby mentions that this batch may have been the first to be sent to the Indian market with the end of the war. According to Philby, the two chief Arab horse merchants in Bombay during the era of World War I were from Iraq, Jar Allah ibn Talib of Mosul and Ibn Faris of al-Zubayr. Although they were preceded by Ibn Mani ‘ of Shaqra’ in Najd, The Qusman did not appear as leading horse merchants in Bombay.⁷⁹ Since ‘Unayzah was a famous *marbat*, the Qusman are highly likely to have played a role in at least the initial stages of horse trade, such as buying horses from Bedouin tribes and selling them at the port cities of the Arabian Gulf to horse merchants who exported them to India. In some cases, the Qusman did not need to carry horses to port-cities of the Gulf, but, instead, merchants of the Gulf sent their agents to al-Qasim to buy and transport horses.

One of the Qusman who traded in horses in India was Muhammad ibn Hamad al-Shubayli of ‘Unayzah, who went to India himself and sold a few horses there, two of which were bought by a senior British official. According to Muhammad al-Zamil’s account, members of al-Shubayli family stayed in India for a while specializing in the horse trade.⁸⁰ Although Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam was a famous textile trader in Bombay, he had strong relations with the Kuwaiti trading house of al-Ibrahim, that traded in horses. The al-Ibrahim did not only export horses to India, but also participated in horse races in Bombay and won many times. Since Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam was a friend and an agent of al-Ibrahim, it is very possible that he was involved in the horse trade (see figure 8).⁸¹

⁷⁹ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 274.

⁸⁰ Al-Zamil, personal interview.

⁸¹ Husa al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya: al-Mawsu‘a al-Kamila wa-al-Musawara, 1895-1965*, N.p.: N.p., 2017, 206-07.



Figure 8: (from right to left) Hamad ibn Hasan al-Ibrahim, Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam, Shakur Sit, and ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Bassam. From Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 118.

The Weapon Trade

Several companies from Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium had exported weapons to Muscat, which reexported them to the Gulf ports. These weapons were always demanded by people from the internal areas of Arabia, Iraq, and Iran. Therefore, Kuwait was one of the most important weapon markets for Najdis. However, the British officials tried to prevent the spread of weapons in the Gulf region generally and Kuwait particularly after signing an agreement in 1900 with the ruler of Kuwait, Mubarak al-Subah.⁸²

⁸² Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hadi Jamal, *al-Hiraf wa-al-Mihan wa-al-Anshita al-Tijariyya al-Qadima fi al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: Markaz al-Buhuth wa-al-Dirasat al-Kuwaytiyya, 2003), 296.

In spite of the British efforts, the French, who were the lords of the weapons trade in the Indian Ocean, continued to supply Muscat. *Lughat al-‘Arab* journal, which was published in Iraq, mentioned in 1912 how the French were active in the weapons trade and what was the British reaction. According to the journal, “The French subjects publicly sell weapons in Muscat and Oman, but it is decided these days that all the weapons coming to these countries are to be kept in special storage until the negotiation between France and England regarding the weapons trade ends. In addition, it is said that France has offered to the amir of Kuwait to open commercial storages for the same reason, which the Shaykh did not accept.”⁸³ This passage reflects to what extent Britain was trying to stop weapons trade in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf while France was attempting to boost it.

In spite of the British efforts, weapons smuggling from Muscat to the other Gulf ports continued. As *Lughat al-‘Arab* points out, when a boat filled with many weapons left Muscat (which supposedly was heading to Kuwait) in 1913, a British naval ship traced it. The British sent a boat equipped with two guns, which attacked and captured the boat. Nonetheless, having hidden guns under their clothes, the smugglers opened fire on the British officials, killing them, restoring all the weapons the British had taken, and sinking the British boat. In the wake of this incident, the British consul in Kuwait announced that anybody who provided information about these people would be awarded with Rs. 2,000.⁸⁴ In November 1913, six months after this incident, the British bought all the weapons displayed in the markets of the Gulf ports, especially the markets in and around Muscat, and reached an agreement with the French to keep the Gulf a weapons free region.⁸⁵

⁸³ “Akhbar Khalij Faris,” *Lughat al-‘Arab*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (December 1912), 263.

⁸⁴ “Al-Inkiliz fi Masqat,” *Lughat al-‘Arab*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (May 1913), 534.

⁸⁵ Tariq Nafi‘ al-Hamadani, *Akhbar al-Khalij al-‘Arabi al-Tarikhyya fi Majallati Lughat al-‘Arab wa-al-‘Arab al-Hindiyya*, (Baghdad: al-Warraaq li-al-Nashr, 2010), 81.

Some historians argue that the British did not seriously want to stop the weapons trade, but to control it. According to these historians, the British were completely aware that some of the Gulf rulers were trading in weapons. For instance, some sources indicate that Kuwait imported about 1,000 Martini rifles per month and that the ruler of Kuwait earned about 50,000 dollars annually from this trade.^{86 87} Similarly, Bahraini boats continued to import weapons from Muscat in spite of the British restrictions. In 1896, the ruler of Bahrain, Shaykh ‘Isa ibn ‘Ali Al Khalifa himself, was engaged in this trade. As a result, Bahrain’s income from the weapons trade in the same year was about Rs. 95,400.⁸⁸ The British also knew that Ibn Saud depended on Kuwait to arm his forces and that the prohibition of this trade might affect the balance of power in Najd.⁸⁹

The information about the weapons trade during the period under study is notably rare, a situation that is completely understandable since the British strictly banned the smuggling of weapons in huge parts of the Indian Ocean, including the region of the Arabian Gulf. Consequently, there are not enough details about the engagement of the Qusman in weapons smuggling between the ports of the Arabian Gulf or the Indian Ocean. However, there are some pieces of evidence that indicate that the Qusman were engaged in such a trade.

While in ‘Unayzah in 1918, Philby met Sulaym al-Sulaym, a member of the ruling family, aged thirty-five at the time. According to Philby’s account, al-Sulaym and his father had at least once carried rifles from Muscat to Kuwait during the time of their exile from ‘Unyazah. This occurred between the defeat at the battle of al-Mulayda’ in 1891 (which resulted in the

⁸⁶ The source does not clarify what type of dollars these are. However, since Maria Theresa dollars were the most common currency at that time in Arabia, it is highly likely that the currency mentioned here was Maria Theresa dollars.

⁸⁷ Jamal, *al-Hiraf wa-al-Mihan*, 298.

⁸⁸ Hasan, “Tasa‘ud Nashat al-Bahrayn,” 174-75.

⁸⁹ Jamal, *al-Hiraf wa-al-Mihan*, 298.

collapse of al-Qasim by the hand of Al Rashid, the ruling family of Ha'il), and the conquest of Riyadh by the hand of Ibn Saud in 1902 that led to the returning of the ruling families to al-Qasim within two years.⁹⁰

Another example of the Qusman engaging in weapons trading was Sulayman ibn 'Abd Allah al-Rawwaf of Buraydah.⁹¹ Sulayman was arguably born in 1908, which was the same year that witnessed his father's departure from the town.⁹² After leaving, 'Abd Allah resided in Yemen for about sixteen years before moving to Oman where he spent the rest of his life in the town of Ju'lan.⁹³ In his late teens, Sulayman decided to go to Oman in order to see his father. Between Oman, India, and Eastern Africa, Sulayman spent about twenty years of his life before returning to al-Qasim. It seems that most of al-Rawwaf's time abroad was spent between Oman and India, since he, according to his son's account, spoke Hindi. One of the commercial activities al-Rawwaf engaged in was weapon trading. According to his son, al-Rawwaf smuggled weapons from Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, to the western ports of the Indian Ocean and the Gulf. Ultimately, he was arrested and jailed by the British. The punishment for weapons smuggling from Eastern Africa could reach the death penalty. However, al-Rawwaf was lucky when somebody helped him escape.

⁹⁰ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 284.

⁹¹ Most of the information about Sulayman al-Rawwaf was obtained from his son 'Abd Allah by personal interview, July 8, 2018.

⁹² Sulayman's son, 'Abd Allah, told me that his father was born in the same year that his grandfather, 'Abd Allah, departed Buraydah, which was 1909. Actually, this approach of dating some incident was so common in Najd since literacy was limited, so ordinary people bound their private memories with the important incidents that occurred in the same time. For al-Rawwaf family, the departure of 'Abd Allah was a significant incident with which they recalled the birth of his son, Sulayman. However, I believe that it was in 1908, which witnessed a semi-civil war in Buraydah between those who preferred Ibn Saud and those who preferred Al Rashid. When Ibn Saud and his supporters won, some of the supporters of Ibn Rashid fled Buraydah and the others who stayed asked Ibn Saud to forgive them. 'Abd Allah al-Rawwaf was one of those who departed the town and never returned. Thus, it is highly likely that the birth of Sulayman was in the same year of his father's departure, which is 1908. (For more details about 'Abd Allah ibn Ahmad al-Rawwaf's role in the war between Ibn Saud and Al Muhanna, the rulers of Buraydah: Muhammad ibn Nasir al-'Ubudi, *Mu'jam Usar Burayda* (Riyadh: Dar al-Thaluthiyya, 2010), 8:279.

⁹³ Al-'Ubudi, *Mu'jam Usar Burayda*, 8: 280-81.

Pearling Industry

In the nineteenth century the Indian Ocean region began to integrate into the world economy, as a number of goods made their way from around the Indian Ocean to markets in South Asia, Europe, and the United States. In the late nineteenth century, the demand for Gulf pearls in Europe and North America increased enormously. With the emergence of these new pearl markets, the value of the Gulf pearls skyrocketed. Between 1865 and 1874, the value of exported pearls from the Gulf nearly doubled from £400,000 to £800,000. Although the value of exported pearls from the Gulf was not steady, witnessing ups and downs, the chart of exported pearls continually increased. Between the early 1890s and early 1900s, the value of exported pearls from the Arabian Gulf tripled from about £500,000 in 1893-94 to approximately £1.5 million in 1903-04. This increase was notable between 1873 and 1906 specifically in Bahrain, where the value of exported pearls grew by 600-800 percent.⁹⁴

Thus, the pearling industry was the largest source of employment for people of the Gulf. More than three thousand boats gathered at pearl banks between Muscat and Kuwait carrying tens of thousands of men.⁹⁵ According to Lorimer, the pearl banks of Bahrain were the most significant in the Arabian Gulf, at least in the early twentieth century. The number of boats engaged in the pearl industry of Bahrain was about 917 boats, upon which between 17,000 and 20,000 men worked.⁹⁶ In the case of Kuwait, Lorimer mentions that the town in 1904 possessed

⁹⁴ Fahad Bishara, "A Sea of Debt," 59, 64-66, 373; Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 82.

⁹⁵ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 82.

⁹⁶ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, (Geographical), 243; Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 90.

461 pearl-boats on which 9,200 men worked.⁹⁷ By 1922, pearling boats in Kuwait increased to about 800 boats while the workers rose to about 25,000.⁹⁸

Each pearl-boat consisted of one *nawkhada* (captain; plu. *nawakhida*), an equal number of *ghawawis* (divers; sing. *ghawwas*) and *siub* (haulers; sing. *sib*), *radafa* (assistants; sing. *radif*), and *awlad* (apprentices; sing. *walad*). The *nawkhada*'s responsibilities were to gather his crew members, pay them at the end of the season, decide what pearl banks to be fished, lease a boat if he did not possess one, provide the needed supplies for the boat, maintain order aboard, and try to sell the pearls at high prices. The *ghawawis* wore only loincloths and were equipped with only a knife, leather fingertips, and a pair of pincers (a clothespin-like clip made of horn, shell, or bone, that functioned to prevent water from entering the nose). Several heavy stones were kept onboard since their weights helped the *ghawawis* to quickly reach the sea floor by binding them to the *ghawawis*' feet. The *ghawawis* often dove to depths of fifty to eighty feet and lasted for one to two minutes. Upon reaching the sea floor, the *ghawwas* tried his best to collect as many oysters as he could using his knife to extract the shells from the rocky sea floor. He put oysters into a net basket bound to his waist.⁹⁹ A *ghawwas* usually dove between forty to fifty times a day.¹⁰⁰ The *sib*, who worked with the *ghawwas* in pairs, pulled the weight back onto the boat when the *ghawwas* released its rope. When the *ghawwas* tugged the second rope that was tied to his waist, the *sib* quickly pulled him back to the surface before his air expired.¹⁰¹ The *ghawwas* breathed for only a few minutes before returning to the sea floor (see figure 9). This process began in early morning until afternoon when the *ghawawis* had a break for only one hour before

⁹⁷ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, (Geographical), 1053.

⁹⁸ 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rishid, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, ed. Ya'qub 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rishid (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1978), 72-73; Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 78.

⁹⁹ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 83-84.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Hamadani, *Akhbar al-Khalij al-'Arabi al-Tarikhyya*, 86.

¹⁰¹ Al-Rishid, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt*, 77; Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 83-84.

returning to work until sunset.¹⁰² The pearl-diving season in the Gulf lasted roughly for five to six months, beginning in May or June.¹⁰³ At the end of the season, the *tawawish* (middlemen; sing. *tawwash*) began to visit the pearl banks and offer the *nawakhida* cash for the collected pearls. The *tawawish* bought pearls from the *nawakhida* and sold them to larger jewel merchants. The main destination of Gulf pearls throughout the nineteenth century was Bombay. However, in 1907 Paris appeared as the center of the world pearl market and retained this position for twenty-five years.¹⁰⁴



Figure 9: The pearl fishery in the Arabian Gulf. From Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 84.

¹⁰² Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 83.

¹⁰³ Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 90; Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 90-92.

As the Gulf pearl industry entered its golden age in the first decades of the twentieth centuries, the numbers of workers at the pearling fields increased markedly. Under the title “Soldiers of Divers,” *Lughat al-‘Arab* mentions how many young men who had been working for Najdi princes and nomadic chiefs headed to the Gulf to work as divers. The contemporary source emphasizes that working in the pearling industry became more profitable economically for those men than working for local political and tribal leaders. As a result, these chiefs were left almost without soldiers.¹⁰⁵ This caused Ibn Saud to procure 5,000 soldiers, who had just returned from the pearling fields, with arms and *rikab* (animals to ride; often camels) and paid a lira for each one monthly to ensure their presence around him all the time.¹⁰⁶

The Qusman who worked in pearl fishing often had no capital to begin their own trade, so they were forced to enter the industry as workers. Although pearling did not attract a considerable number of the Qusman as they were not experts in dealing with the sea, there were some people from al-Qasim who found no better choice than to work in pearling. As Lorimer emphasizes, the lower and middle economic classes of Kuwait were often hired as pearl divers.¹⁰⁷ In fact, it was typical in all the Gulf region, not only in Kuwait, that lower economic classes found no choice but to work in sectors like the pearl industry.

According to Abu ‘Ali, who was seventy-two years old when he was interviewed in ‘Unayzah by Altorki and Cole, “the sons of the poor almost never had any chance to do anything except help their fathers and mothers. The only other opportunity the sons of the poor had in the past was to go to the Gulf—to Kuwait or Bahrain—to work as pearl divers there.” Abu ‘Ali’s statement implies that the number of the Qusman who worked in pearl fishing was not small,

¹⁰⁵ “Al-Ghaws fi Khalij Faris,” *Lughat al-‘Arab*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (January 1913), 320.

¹⁰⁶ “Junud min al-Ghawwasin,” *Lughat al-‘Arab*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (September 1913), 157.

¹⁰⁷ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, (Geographical), 1053.

even though the Qusman are rarely mentioned in the references that study the pearling industry of the Gulf. This might be explained by the fact that since the Qusman were not a maritime people, they were not adjusted to spend days in the sea, were not good swimmers, and were not expert in pearl fishing. Most of them did not work as divers for long, but instead found another job or even quickly returned to al-Qasim. According to another statement by Umm Mansur, who was then over sixty years of age, her father had worked as a pearl diver, but preferred to return to ‘Unayzah and became a sharecropper.¹⁰⁸

The best example of the Qasimi pearl merchants is Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr of ‘Unayzah, who was based in Bahrain. Al-Dhukayr entered the pearl trade around 1870, when the industry was rocketing. Although beginning with a humble budget, al-Dhukayr had become one of the leading pearl merchants in the Gulf by 1890.¹⁰⁹ Like most pearl traders, al-Dhukayr bought pearls from the pearl market in Bahrain and sold them in India, especially when the prices decreased in the Gulf. In a letter dated October 22, 1912, and sent to one of the Arab merchants in India, al-Dhukayr points out that the prices in Bahrain were not attractive and that he was sending some pearls to the latter hoping that he could sell them for more appropriate prices (see figure 10).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 48, 57.

¹⁰⁹ Khalid al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza'ir al-Lu'lu'*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: al-Mu'assa al-'Arabiyya li-al-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr, 2007), 11-12.

¹¹⁰ Al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira' ila al-Bukhar*, 104.

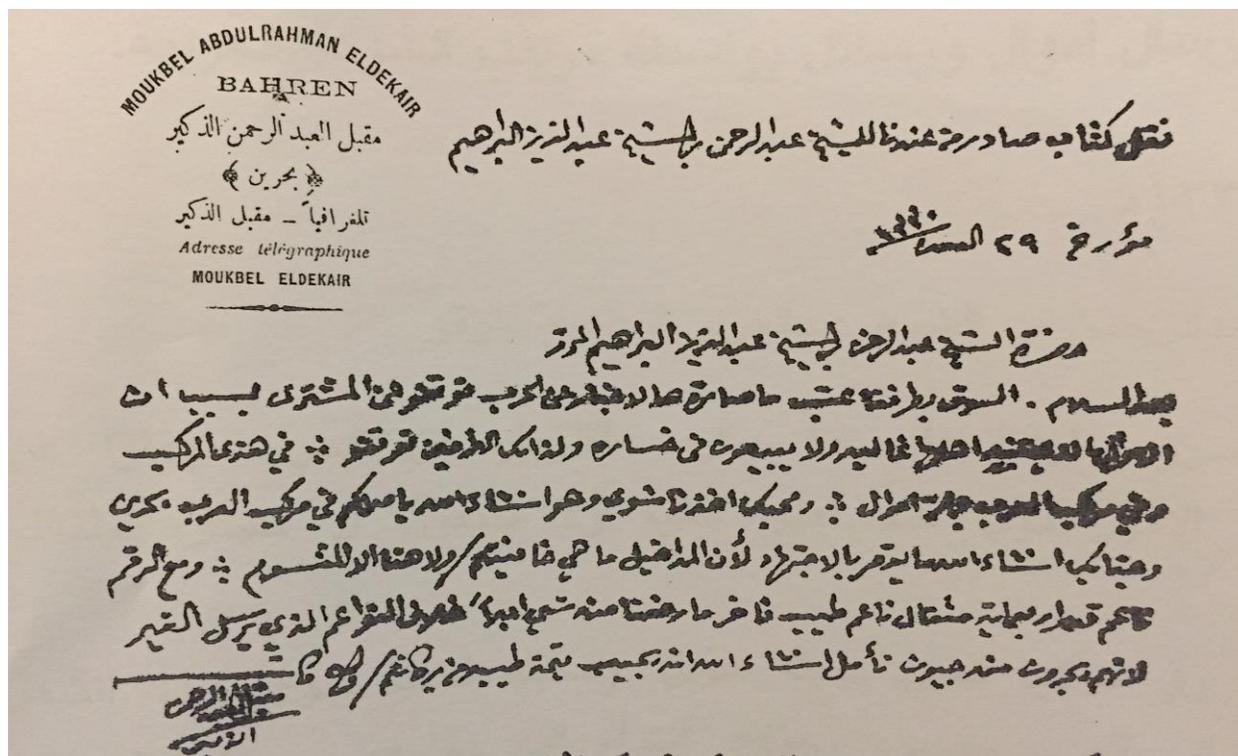


Figure 10: A letter sent on October 22, 1912, from Muqbil al-Dhukayr to India regarding the sale of his pearls in the Indian markets. From Ya‘qub Yusuf al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira‘ ila al-Bukhar: Qisat Awwal Sharikat Milaha Bahriyya ‘Arabiyya* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Rubay‘an li-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi‘, 2003), 104.

Nevertheless, a few months prior to the outbreak of World War I, pearl prices harshly decreased, which hurt most of the leading pearl traders in India and Bahrain, some of whom declared bankruptcy.¹¹¹ In this year, 1914, the value of Bahrain’s pearl exports was Rs.15,000,000 (30 million franc).¹¹² The decline of Bahrain’s exports caused a depression in the Indian markets. Indeed, the famous Qasimi trader in Bombay, ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan (1861-1960), wrote a letter in 1914 and sent it to the Kuwaiti merchant, Muhammad ibn Bishr al-Rumi, in which the former complains of the depressed markets in India. He, also, points out that the

¹¹¹ “Al-Lu’lu’ fi al-Bahrayn,” *Lughat al-‘Arab*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (February 1914), 448; Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 66.

¹¹² “Al-L’ali’ fi al-Bahrayn,” *Lughat al-‘Arab*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (May 1914), 615.

pearl market was not an exception and that European pearl traders did not buy pearls at that time.¹¹³ Like most merchants and workers of Bahrain, some of the Qusman there could not overcome the economic challenges caused by the war. Consequently, some of the Qusman returned home during the war years. For instance, al-Dhukayr, who had once been known as *Fakhr al-Tujjar* (Pride of Merchants), was bankrupted in 1917.¹¹⁴ He, then, decided to return home, where he lived for a few years before dying in c. 1922.¹¹⁵ Another example of the impact of the First World War on the Qusman of Bahrain is mentioned by Philby, who records that while in ‘Unayzah in 1918, he met a young man who had worked in pearl fishing off the western coast of the Arabian Gulf. Philby emphasizes that the outbreak of the war led to the decline in the pearling industry, which forced this man to leave Bahrain and to serve under the Sharif of the Hijaz for a while before returning to ‘Unayzah and working as a peasant.¹¹⁶

Since Bombay was one of the most significant markets for pearls, the Qusman there did not stay away from this important commercial sector. Although the details about the Qusman’s trading in pearls in India are insufficient, the correspondences between them uncovered their engagement in such trade. For instance, ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan, who was based in Bombay, sent a message in 1945 to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam (1888-1949) in which al-Fawzan talked about the agricultural and commercial situations in India emphasizing the harsh decline in the pearl trade.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 66.

¹¹⁴ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza’ir al-Lu’lu’*, 13, 18.

¹¹⁵ ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd Khilal Thamaniyat Qurun*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dar al-‘Asima, 1999), 6: 428.

¹¹⁶ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 292.

¹¹⁷ Nwayyir Mubarak al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind: ‘Unayzah Namudhajan,” *Al-Majalla al-‘Arabiyya*, No. 485 (February 2017), 85.

According to Bowen, the pearling industry of the Gulf had begun to confront difficulties since the great depression after the First World War.¹¹⁸ However, the real ruin of the Gulf pearl industry was by the hands of Kokichi Mikimoto, the Japanese magnate of cultured pearls (see figure 11). In 1894, he mastered the method of culturing pearls by inserting a round piece of mother-of-pearl into an oyster shell and stimulating the oyster to generate a pearl. Benefiting from the industrial technology of mass-production, Mikimoto planted one million oysters in his pearl beds in 1905. The quality of the Japanese cultured pearls reached their level of perfection in 1913 when they could not be differentiated from the natural pearls. At the same time, Mikimoto offered cultured pearls for a quarter of natural ones' price. By the end of the First World War, cultured pearls became cheap to a level that working-class women in Western countries could afford pearl necklaces. Consequently, pearl consumption increased, but demand for expensive natural pearls decreased. The Gulf pearl industry was steadily declining beginning in 1919 until 1929 when the Great Depression brought the collapse of this historic industry.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, the number of men working in the pearl industry harshly decreased along the Gulf coasts. In Kuwait, for example, the number of the divers for pearls declined from 10,000 in the early 1920s to less than 3,000 in the mid of the 1930s.¹²⁰ Likewise, the number of people engaging in the pearling industry in Bahrain shrank from 19,300 in 1930 to 9,800 in 1936. In the same years, Bahrain's income from pearl exporting declined from Rs. 2,150,000 to 657,000. While Bahrain's pearling boats were more than 500 in 1930, the number decreased to about 260 in 1936.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Richard LeBaron Bowen, "Marine Industries of Eastern Arabia," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (July 1951), 400.

¹¹⁹ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 182, 191-92, 194.

¹²⁰ Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 78.

¹²¹ Mamlakat al-Bahrayn, *Banadir al-Turath* (N.p.: 2003), 9.



Figure 11: Kokichi Mikimoto, 1945. From Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 192.

The Slave Trade

Since the early nineteenth century, slave trade between Africa and Arabia began to encounter serious difficulties. The ninth article of the General Treaty of Peace, which was signed between Britain and the Gulf states in 1820, literally prohibited the importation of slaves from Africa to the Gulf (see figures 12 and 13). In 1845, the British forbade shipping slaves from Zanzibar to Arabia.¹²² In 1855, the Ottomans prohibited importing slaves, and the British banned seaborne slaving in Bahrain in 1861.¹²³ In 1873, ultimately, the seaborne slave trade was formally abolished. Nonetheless, since the British officials still viewed slavery in Arabia as “gentle” or “mild” compared to its counterparts around the world, especially Atlantic slavery, it was tolerated to a degree. British imperial officials believed that the slavery that existed in the Gulf region was unique since enslaved Africans there were often incorporated and accepted into the households of their masters. Some domestic slaves in Arabia were even better off than many free men. Some of these slaves were well fed and looked after. As a result, the British Royal Navy’s anti-slave trade efforts were not directed to limit the transit of local slaves, but to limit the continuity of slave importation from Africa into Arabia. Although British officials claimed that slave trade between Africa and Arabia had been suppressed by 1883, slave trafficking continued. In 1901, about 1,000 slaves were still imported to Sur, Oman, annually.¹²⁴

¹²² Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 20.

¹²³ Paul Dresch, “Arabia to the End of the First World War,” *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 5 (2010), 142.

¹²⁴ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 39, 111-12, 158, 160, 197.

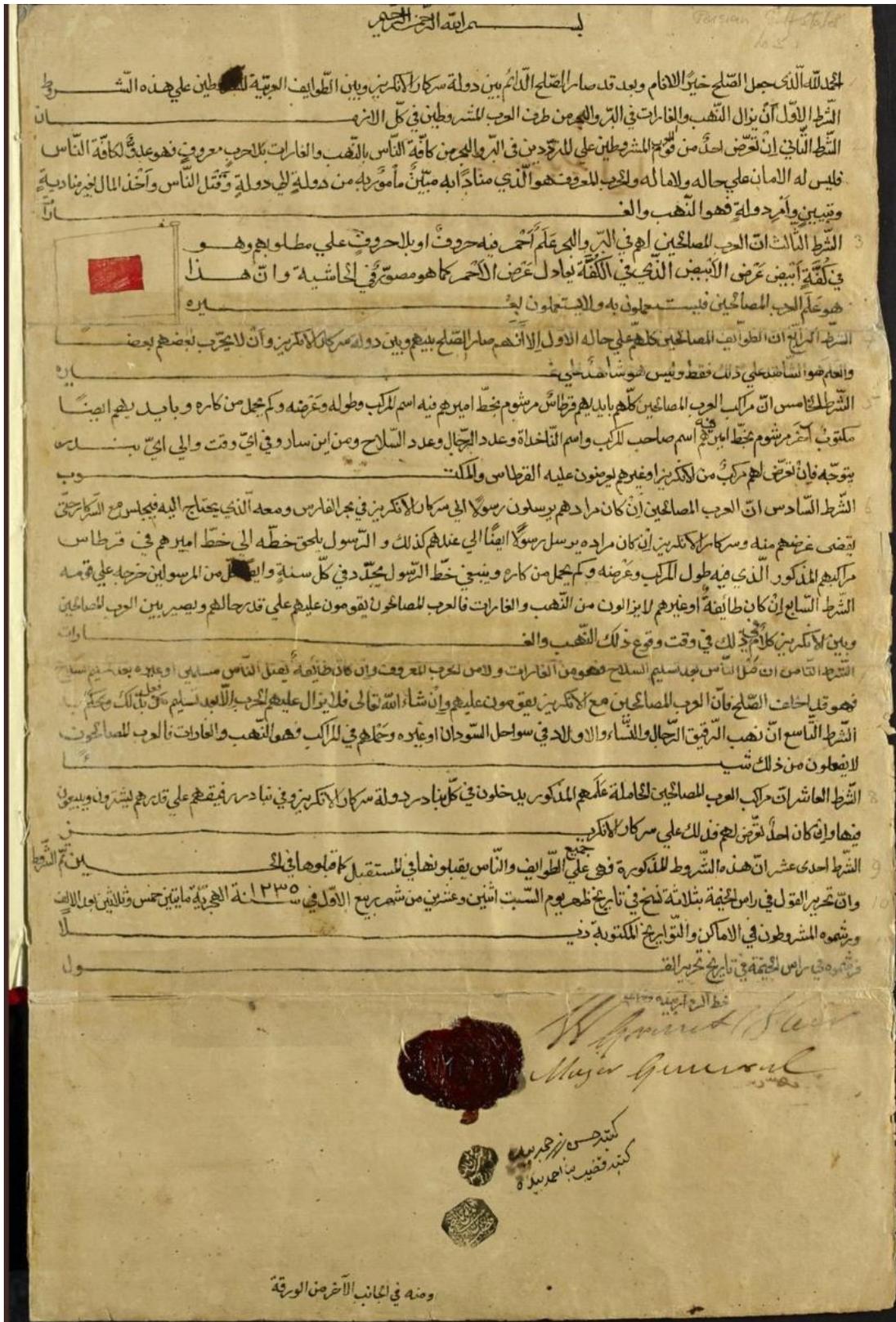


Figure 12: First page of General Treaty of Peace between Britain and the Gulf states, 1820.

Others argue that the British officials did not neglect slavery in the Arabian Gulf region only because of its uniqueness, but rather to avoid causing any chaos in the region. In 1873, an enslaved pearl diver swam off from his master's pearling boat to a British cruiser begging British protection. The British granted the enslaved African asylum. As soon as the *nawakhida* of all seventy-three pearling boats at the pearling banks between Abu Dhabi and Doha heard of the incident, they weighed anchor and departed with no fear that the Royal Navy may discover that there were more slaves on the boats or that the slaves might flee. In the following weeks, the British officials realized that the pearl industry would face devastation if domestic slaves were given asylum by British vessels, since most of the divers were from this class. In 1875, the British officials issued the infamous "Circular No. 33," which prohibited all British ships around the world from accepting runaway slaves unless a slave's life was threatened.¹²⁵

In any event, the slave trade was not completely stopped in Arabia until about the middle of the twentieth century. According to Hopper, the Gulf witnessed an economic boom in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century because of the remarkable increase in the export of pearls and dates. Both pearl-diving and date-farming sectors depended heavily on slave labor. This led many merchants to participate in the slave trade. However, the prosperity and the decline of this trade in the Gulf coincided with the global demand for these two main products of the Gulf: dates and pearls. When the trade of dates and pearls prospered, the slave trade flourished in return, and vice versa. Hopper argues that of 64,000 men working in the pearling industry during its golden time in 1915, between 25% and 50% were from African origins.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 142-43.

¹²⁶ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 20, 22-23.

Najd, in general, was not a major trading center for slaves for two reasons. First, the Najdis were mostly not wealthy while prices of slaves were usually high. Second, slaves brought to Najd were usually used as soldiers, especially by Al Rashid of Ha'il, and private guards, often by Al Saud of Riyadh. Thus, there was no significant demand for slaves in Najd, especially in al-Qasim, compared with some neighboring regions that were known as slave trading centers, such as al-Hijaz, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman. Nonetheless, Qasimi merchants abroad worked in slave trafficking, not necessarily to Najd, but to the formerly mentioned slave trading markets.

Doughty states that his friend 'Abd Allah al-Khunayni, whom Doughty met in 1877, had traded in slaves, bringing them from Zanzibar, which was governed by the Sultanate of Oman.¹²⁷

As Hopper concludes, the end of the East African slave trade to the Arabian Gulf was hardly caused by the British intervention. Rather, the collapse of the two major export industries of the Gulf, pearls and dates, which had greatly depended on slave labor, caused the decline in demand for East African slaves. In addition to this chief reason, multiple factors contributed to the end of this trade, such as the Portuguese intervention in Mozambique in 1902 and the emergence of alternative laborers from Baluchistan in the 1910s. In 1902, the Portuguese colonial authority in Mozambique arrested over 100 Omanis who had captured over 700 Africans to ship them to the Gulf. The Omani men were imprisoned at Mozambique Island for about a year, during which time at least thirty of the Omanis died in the Portuguese prisons before trial. Ultimately, some of these men were sentenced to be sent to Angola for twenty-five years' exile, and the others were sentenced to seventeen years. This incident was a significant turning point in the history of the East African slave trade.¹²⁸ In the early twentieth century, Baluchistan became a new source of labor, proving to be a cheaper and less risky option than

¹²⁷ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:362.

¹²⁸ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 196-99.

imported East African slaves. While international demand for Gulf dates and pearls was continuously growing in the early twentieth century, the import of East African slaves became almost impossible with the Portuguese intervention. As a result, producers in the Gulf looked to Baluchistan to compensate for the shortage in labor. As it had been a major market for East African slaves, Oman appeared as the center for Baluchi slave trade. By 1925, prices of Baluchi slaves in the Gulf ranged between MT\$ 400-\$600 (Maria Theresa Dollars).¹²⁹

One of the Qusman who traded in Baluchi slaves was Sulayman ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Rawwaf. Since he was a resident in Oman when the country was the major market for the Baluchi slave trade, al-Rawwaf invested in such commerce.¹³⁰

With the development of the oil industry, the economy of the Gulf improved, providing new sources of income for the region’s inhabitants. At the same time, the League of Nations pressed the British administration in the Gulf to formally declare the abolition of the slave trade. Under British pressure, Bahrain prohibited owning slaves in 1937. Qatar formally abolished slavery in 1952. Saudi Arabia legally abolished slavery in 1963. Oman made the same decision in 1971.¹³¹

The Carpet Trade

The Qusman abroad traded in several kinds of carpets, which they bought in the Gulf ports and then moved inland to Arabian destinations, including al-Qasim. They even shipped such products as far as to the Hijaz. A letter sent on August 5, 1929, between Ibrahim and Sulayyim al-Zamil of Bahrain and ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-‘Umari of Madinah indicates that the latter had

¹²⁹ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 203-05.

¹³⁰ Al-Rawwaf, personal interview.

¹³¹ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 208-09.

ordered from the former 40 large carpets (*zuliyya*) and 40 small ones (*bisat*). The Shipment was supposed to be received by the famous Ibrahim ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fadil in Jeddah before it was transferred to Madinah (see figure 14).¹³² This letter shows how Qasimi traders in Bahrain supplied almost the whole of Arabia with carpets. It also shows that the Qusman always attempted to deal with Qasimi traders as all the names mentioned in this letter were originally from ‘Unayzah.

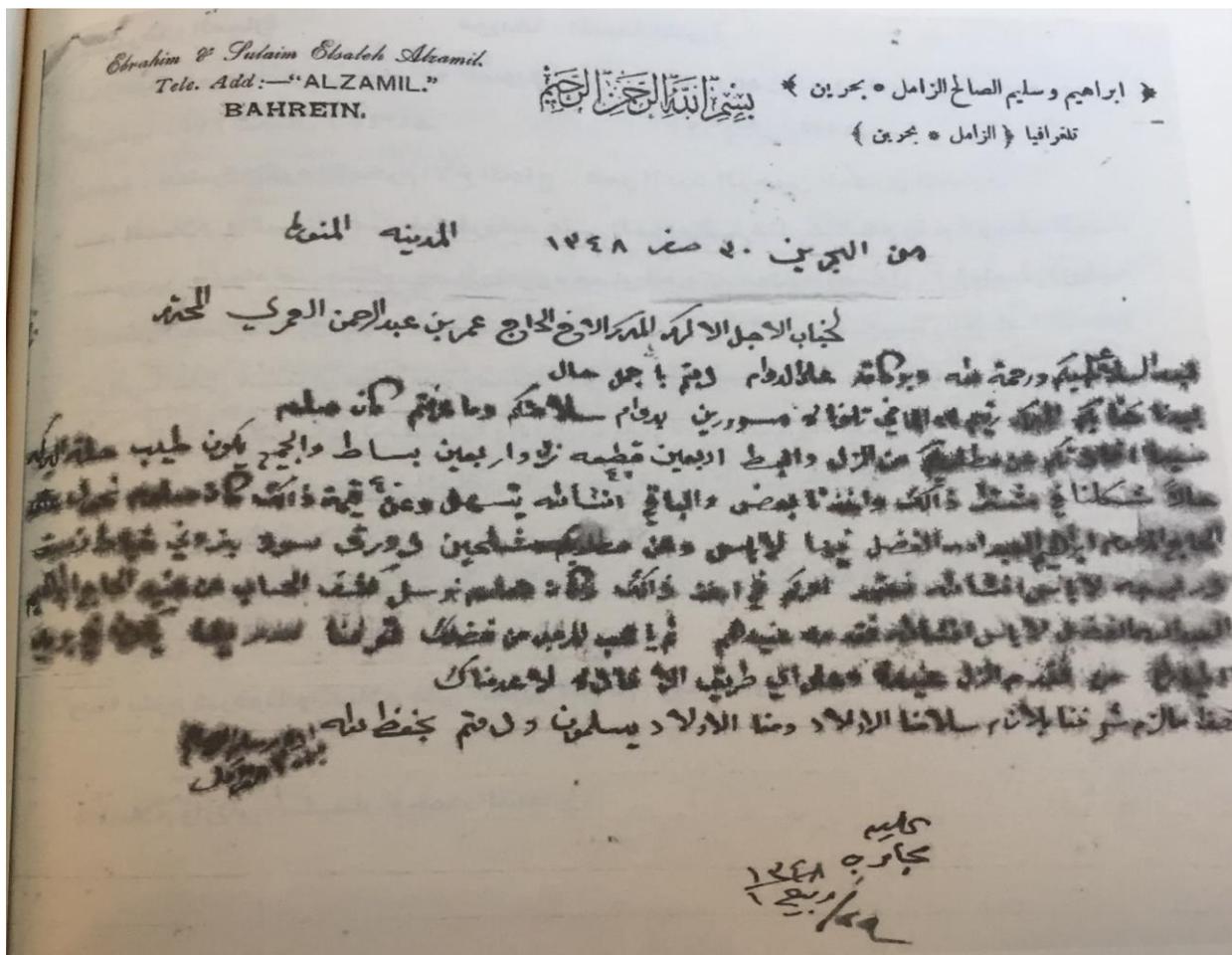


Figure 14: A letter dated August 5, 1929, indicates that Qasimi traders in Bahrain reexported carpets as far as to Jeddah and Madinah. From ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Allah al-‘Umari, *Suwar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya fi ‘Unayza* (N.p.: al-Salman li-al-Tiba‘a, 2015), 1: 112.

¹³² Al-‘Umari, *Suwar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya*, 1: 112.

These kinds of fine carpets, which were often imported to Najd and the Hijaz from the Gulf ports, were a significant feature in the houses of the wealthy classes. Indeed, when entering the house of ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni, in 1877, Doughty “found within a large coffee-hall, spread with well-wrought grass matting, which is fetched hither from *el-Hasa* ... A Persian carpet spread before his fire-pit was the guests’ sitting place.”¹³³

The Sugar Trade

Qasimi merchants abroad traded in sugar between the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Some of the Qusman traveled to the countries where sugar was produced. For example, Doughty points out that his friend ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni of ‘Unayzah, whom Doughty met in 1877, “navigated for sugar to Mauritius.” Although Doughty does not give detailed information about this trip, it is very likely that al-Khunayni benefited greatly from this trade for two reasons. First, the sugar trade, in general, was profitable for all merchants who had invested in it. Second, according to Doughty, al-Khunayni was “the greatest merchant’s fortune in Aneyza [‘Unayzah] at £24,000.”¹³⁴ It is significant to mention, however, that al-Khunayni did not only trade in sugar, but also in rice, slaves, and horses.

The trading house of al-‘Assafi of ‘Unayzah was a major importer and distributor of sugar in Iraq. According to one of al-‘Assafi’s hundreds of commercial records, that are now preserved at the archives of Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, dated June 29, 1881, indicates that he received a large cargo of sugar, and in two days he distributed it

¹³³ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 341.

¹³⁴ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 362-63.

to fifteen local Iraqi traders, which reflects his leading position as a retailer for imported commodities (see figure 15).¹³⁵

The image shows two pages of handwritten Arabic commercial records. The top page is dated 'يوم الاثنين ٢٠ شعبان' (Monday, 20th of Shaaban) and the bottom page is dated 'يوم الأربعاء ٢ شعبان' (Wednesday, 2nd of Shaaban). Both pages contain detailed lists of goods and their prices, organized in a tabular format with columns for item names, quantities, and prices. The handwriting is in Arabic script.

Figure 15: Two of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated June 29 and July 1, 1881, show that he was a major importer and distributor of sugar in Iraq. From *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records*, Folder 4979, Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University Archives, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, June 29 and July 1, 1881, 4.

In the later periods, al-Jubayl and al-‘Uqayr appeared as prosperous ports in Eastern Arabia. In addition to other goods, most of the sugar that was imported to Najd made its way through these two ports. Therefore, the leading traders in al-Qasim stationed commercial agents in al-Hasa whose job was to receive goods, including sugar, at al-‘Uqayr and al-Jubayl and send them to al-Qasim. One of the local trading houses that imported sugar to al-Qasim was that of

¹³⁵ *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records*, Folder 4979, June 29, 1881, 4.

Al-Mushayqih of Buraydah. According to ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mushayqih, his brother, Sulayman, who was the commercial agent for their grandfather, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, in al-Hasa, was very interested in importing sugar to al-Qasim prior to the Second World War. As ‘Abd al-Rahman emphasized, sugar was one of the goods that was very profitable for his family.¹³⁶ Indeed, Sulayman mentioned in an interview that from 1927 until World War II, he traveled almost monthly to al-Jubayl and Bahrain in order to buy goods for his grandfather. He claimed that he once bought ten thousand sacks of sugar from Bahrain.¹³⁷

The biggest problem sugar merchants often encountered was unprofessional methods of storing and transporting sugar sacks. When the sugar loads arrived in al-Jubayl port, the *jamamil* would carry them to al-Qasim. Since they often operated during winter and spring seasons, the biggest problem they may have encountered was the rain. In the words of Abu Mish‘al, who was about eighty years old when Altorki and Cole interviewed him, “it was a big problem whenever a rain came. We had to build a tent as big as this room and then rush to pile all the sacks inside, especially the sugar. That was really a problem. I remember once a merchant took a *jammal* to court because he did not bring back all his sugar. The *jammal* said ‘the rains took it’ and the *qadi* did not pass judgement on the case. Also, sometimes the wadi would fill up with water and we would have to wait for days to cross.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Al-Mushayqih, personal interview; Al-‘Ubudi, *Mu‘jam Usar Burayda*, 20: 68.

¹³⁷ Sulayman al-Mushayqih, “Mishwar 60 ‘Aman ma‘ al-Tijara wal-al-Wada’if al-Hukumiyya, wa-Hadith al-Dhikrayat ma‘ al-Shaykh Sulayman al-Mushayqih,” Interview by Muhammad al-Wu‘ayl, *al-Jazira*, December 4, 1987, 4.

¹³⁸ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 70-71.

The Rice Trade

Since rice was, and remains, the main food dish for people of the Gulf, most Qasimi traders abroad traded in it, whether by exporting this significant foodstuff from India, importing it to the Gulf ports, or reexporting it to the internal regions of Arabia. One of the earliest known Qasimi traders engaged in exporting rice from India to the Gulf was ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni of ‘Unayzah, whom Doughty met in 1877 and mentioned that the former had invested in the rice trade during his sojourn in Bombay.¹³⁹ The other famous Qasimi trader, who was engaged in exporting rice from India to Arabia, was Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan. Al-‘Assafi’s commercial records show that al-Fawzan was a leading rice exporter who supplied the traders of Jeddah, in addition to his clients in the Gulf ports. According to one of al-‘Assafi’s trading papers dated April 14, 1884, al-Fawzan had shipped 1,020 sacks of rice owned by al-‘Assafi from Calcutta to be sold in Jeddah (see figure 16).¹⁴⁰

عدد نقلت	عدد سفينة	عدد سفينة
٩٥	٥١	١٥
١٥	١٥	١٥
١٥	١٥	١٥
١٥	١٥	١٥

Figure 16: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated April 14, 1884, shows that Muhammad al-Fawzan shipped rice from Calcutta to Jeddah for the benefit of al-‘Assafi trading house. From *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, April 14, 1884, 59.*

¹³⁹ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:362.

¹⁴⁰ *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, April 14, 1884, 59.*

There are several documents that indicate that throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, rice was always one of the major items in which Qasimi traders in India traded. As the previous document shows, that the Qusman had been exporting rice to Arabia apparently since the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. Another document, dated May 10, 1934, reveals the continuity of this pattern. In this letter sent by Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam (d. 1942) of Bombay to ‘Umar al-‘Umari of Madinah, al-Bassam mentioned that he had shipped a hundred sacks of rice to the port of Yanbu‘, where another Qasimi trader would receive them and resend them to Madinah (see figure 17).¹⁴¹

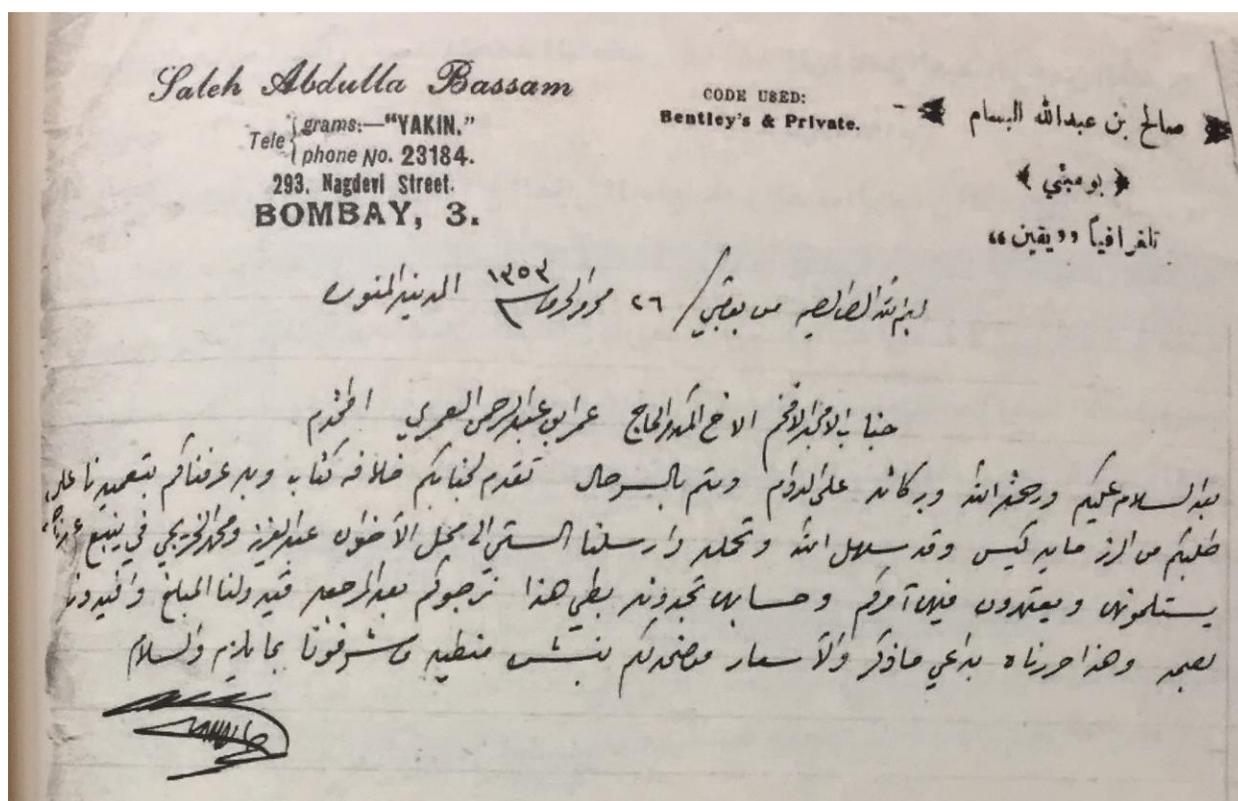


Figure 17: A letter sent on May 10, 1934, from Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam to ‘Umar al-‘Umari regarding the export of rice from Bombay to Madinah. From Al-‘Umari, *Suar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya*, 4: 194.

¹⁴¹ Al-‘Umari, *Suar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya*, 4: 194; Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat ‘Umur*, 70-71.

After appearing as a major port in Eastern Arabia, al-‘Uqayr became the landfall for many kinds of Indian goods, including rice. Therefore, many Najdi traders, including Qusman, functioned in carrying goods from al-‘Uqayr to Najd. Indeed, Samuel Zwemer, who visited al-‘Uqayr, the port of al-Hasa, twice in 1893 and 1905, mentions that the port was the landing-place for massive quantities of Indian rice shipped through Bahrain into Najd.¹⁴²

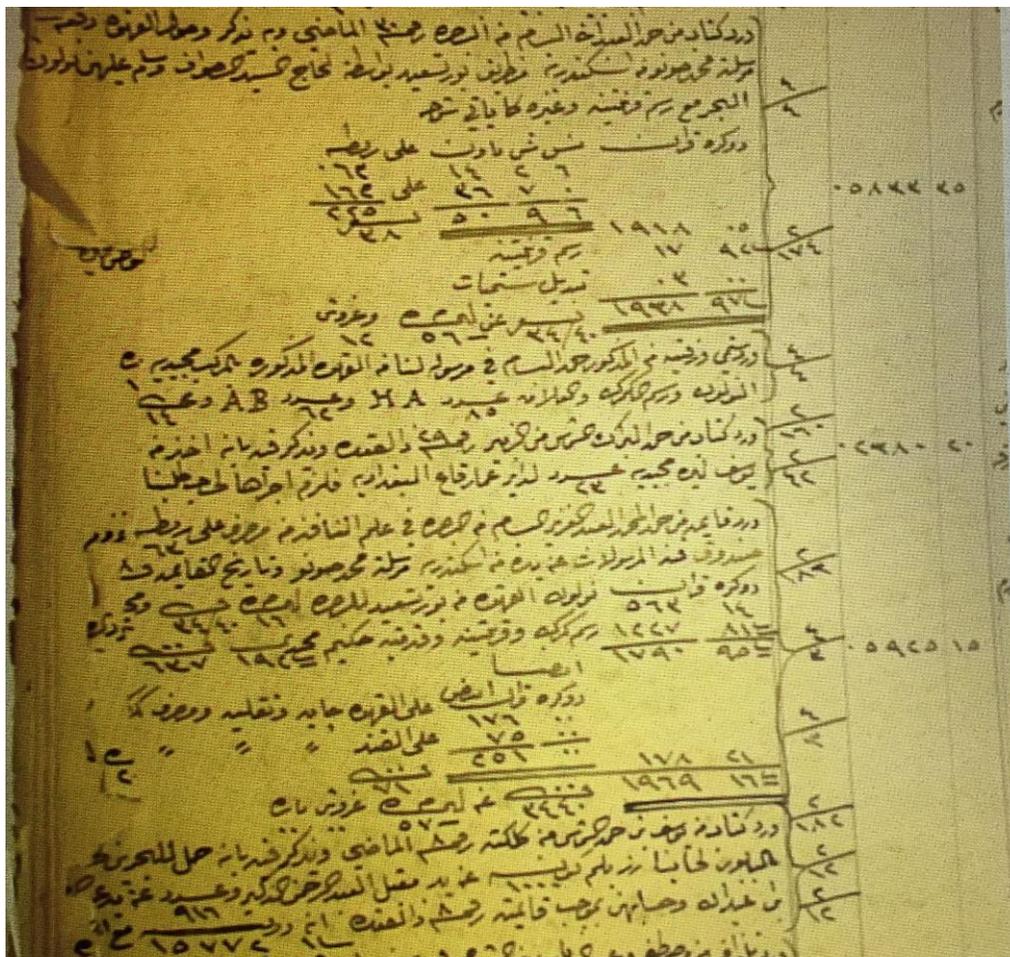


Figure 18: A commercial record indicating the imports of rice by Qasimi traders from Calcutta to Bahrain and Basra. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, April 17, 1899.

¹⁴² Zwemer, “Oman and Eastern Arabia,” 603.

Qasimi merchants residing in Basra and Bahrain also traded in rice. According to one of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated April 17, 1899, rice cargo had been shipped from Calcutta to Bahrain. This cargo was owned by both Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr of Bahrain and Hamad al-‘Assafi of Baghdad. Al-Dhukayr sold the rice in Bahrain, took fifty percent of the profit, and saved the other fifty percent as credit for al-‘Assafi (see figure 18).¹⁴³ The commercial records of al-‘Assafi show that his share of the profit was often not sent to him in Baghdad. Rather, his commercial agents and associates kept the money for future purchases. Al-Dhukayr, for example, sent part of al-‘Assafi’s profit from the sale of the rice cargo, Rs. 1151, to a Bombay merchant, according to one of al-‘Assafi’s papers dated June 8, 1900 (see figure 19).¹⁴⁴ This amount of money might have been a payment of debt or a deposit for future purchases.

¹⁴³ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, April 17, 1899.

¹⁴⁴ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, June 8, 1900, 55.

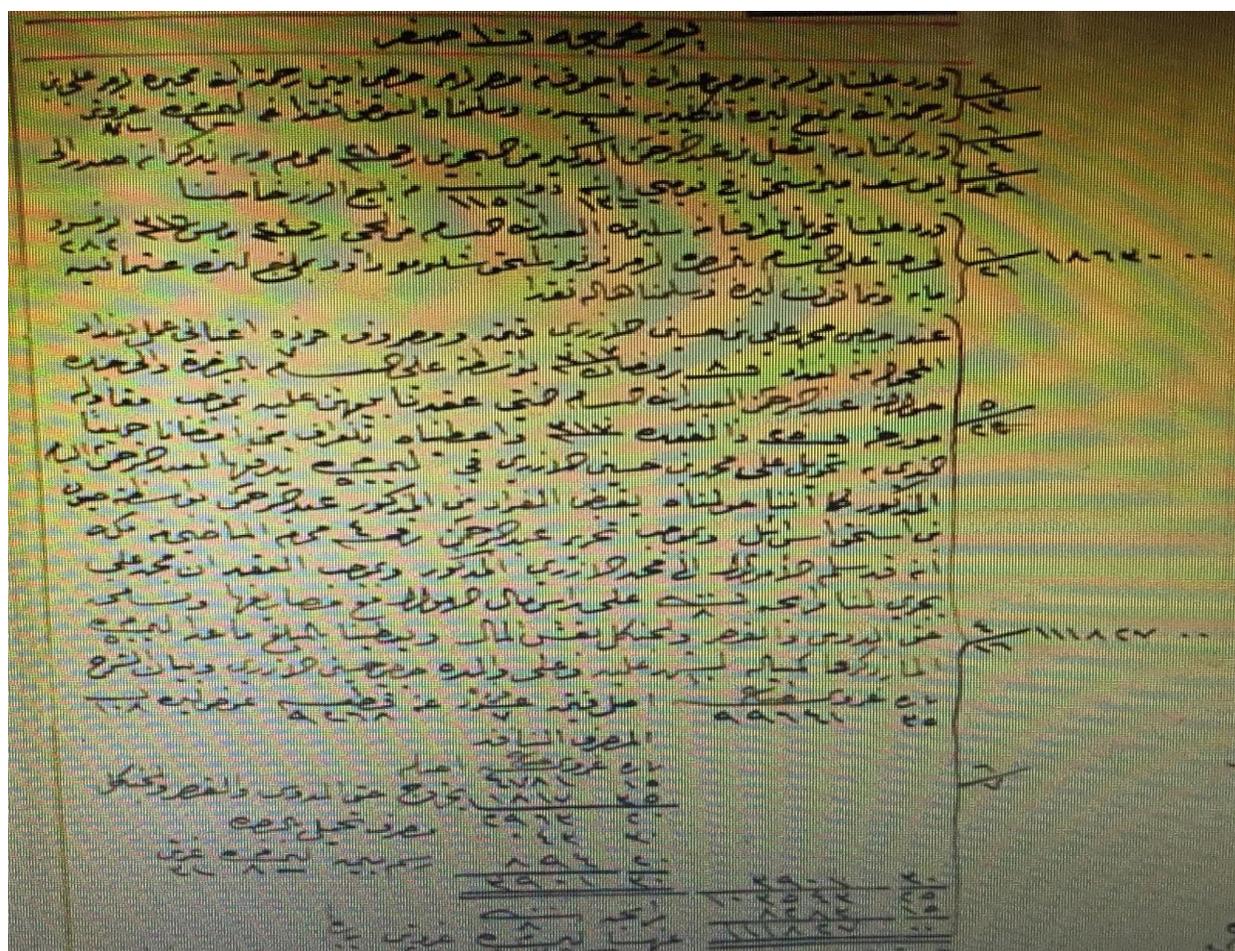


Figure 19: One of al-‘Assafi’s papers shows that he owned half of rice cargo that was sold by Muqbil al-Dhukayr of Bahrain and that part of al-‘Assafi’s profit was resent to India directly from Bahrain for future deals. From *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, June 8, 1900, 55.

Not only those residing in the Gulf ports traded in rice, but also the traders who did not leave al-Qasim had commercial agents in the Gulf ports in order to carry rice cargo back to al-Qasim. One example of these kinds of traders is ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Humud al-Mushayqih of Buraydah who, during the period before World War II, stationed his grandson, Sulayman, in al-Hasa as a commercial agent. Sulayman provided his grandfather in Buraydah with many kinds of goods, including rice.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Al-Mushayqih, personal interview; Al-‘Ubudi, *Mu‘jam Usar Burayda*, 20: 68.

The Textile Trade

As an internal region, al-Qasim depended on the Gulf ports, particularly Kuwait and Bahrain, to cover its needs for imported goods, including foods items and textiles. While comparing commodities' prices in Buraydah and 'Unayzah, Doughty points out that clothes that were brought from the Gulf ports were cheaper in 'Unayzah, whose trade was more connected with the Gulf ports than that of Buraydah which was more linked with the overland trade of *al-'uqaylat* with Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt.¹⁴⁶ At the time of his sojourn in 'Unayzah in 1877, a caravan of 200 camels arrived from Basra. The share of one of the caravan merchants, Rasheyd, was seventeen loads (about three tons) of clothing bought from Kuwait.¹⁴⁷ Although Buraydah's trade heavily depended on exporting camels by the *'uqaylat* to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt, Lorimer reports that "Buraidah is partly dependent on Kuwait for food-stuffs and entirely so for cotton goods."¹⁴⁸ Therefore, Qasimi merchants who migrated to the Gulf and Indian ports were interested in trading in these types of goods. Later, some of these traders exported textiles, and other goods, from India to the Gulf ports, through which these goods were carried to al-Qasim.

One of the Qusman who migrated to India and traded in textiles was Salih ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam of 'Unayzah. At the age of twenty-five, al-Bassam arrived in Bombay in 1887. He made a considerable wealth from such trade, especially after 1928 when he became the commercial agent for *al-Shimagh al-Ahmar* (the Red Kufiyya). Although Salih al-Bassam left Bombay before the Second World War and resided in Basra until his death in 1942, his nephew, Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Bassam (c.1897-1985), and later his sons, 'Abd Allah and 'Abd al-'Aziz, continued to develop the company, which became later *Shimagh al-Bassam* (al-Bassam's

¹⁴⁶ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 348; Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 75.

¹⁴⁷ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:438.

¹⁴⁸ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 327.

Kufiyya).¹⁴⁹ Muhammad devoted all his time to business. According to his children, he bought a house for them in Pune, about 90 miles to the southeast from Bombay, and visited them only on weekends.¹⁵⁰ As a result, *Shimagh al-Bassam* continuously developed until becoming one of the best *shimagh* brands. Even though *Shimagh al-Bassam* is not privately owned today by the al-Bassam family, the brand is still one of the most famous for *shimagh*.

For another example, Hamad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam who resided in Bombay traded in Indian and British textiles. He exported textiles to the Gulf ports, particularly Bahrain, where his client Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam was one of the leading merchants. In a letter sent in January 1945 to Sulayman, Hamad explains the policies of exporting the British manufactured cotton and wool from India to the Gulf. He also mentions that he is willing to help Sulayman in choosing the good types and sending them to Bahrain (see figure 20). This letter indicates that these two merchants dealt with each other, which also reflects the strong commercial links between the Qusman abroad. We already know from other trading letters that Sulayman also exported goods, mostly imported from India, from Bahrain to al-‘Uqayr. Thus, the Qusman from India through Bahrain and al-‘Uqayr to al-Qasim, at least partly, controlled the goods exported from India to al-Qasim.

¹⁴⁹ Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 85.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal interview.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 من حماد بن عبد الله البسام
 إلى حماد بن سليمان بن حماد البسام
 في يوم الاثنين ١٤٤٠ هـ الموافق ١٩٤٠ م
 وصدقكم وانتم مسودين
 ثم أتت ببالغ حزنكم / انزعاجكم من كثرة استرجاعات قطنية ومبروفية
 وحرر مبنائي، فسيبها جيداً لمحب، وإقامتها على قدر وجودها مناسبتاً ومحدوداً
 فأذا يوجب حزنكم يصدر لكم منها شيء فيجد حزنكم مع هذا مثل خطا...
 علاؤا...، وتقدمونني إلى النائب السياسي بطرفكم، وإن حصل مع ذلك
 فراجعونه شخصياً فمؤحسن، لأجل يعطوني توصية (توصية فقط، ليس
 خصم قورين) إلى "انديا أوفيس" في لندن. وتذكرونه مقداركم لمن
 تريدون بكل فرح. وأسرع ما يكون اجابة الطلب عندهم إذا كان التصريح
 من هاتين الدولتين لا يوجب المسكرية، ثم لأجل ضرورات البلاد، ثم لأجل كسب
 سائر الناس، وهذا الترتيب. والأشكال أما حزنكم فقدر حزنكم، أو
 نتمه نلتفق معهم، على عينيكم. أما الفايض فلا أمكننا إرسالها شيئاً،
 ولكن اعتماداً على جودة النسيج ومناسبة الأسعار. وأذا أخذتوا
 التوصية من النائب السياسي فنفسخوه بأرسالها إلينا، والله
 هو نبيها، فلازم ترسلوه لنا نقلها لأجل مخارج العكلاء.
 هذا وبما يلزم تشرف. وما السلام على الأخوان الكرام
 والباري يحسنه لأئمة الغاص
 حماد بن عبد الله البسام
 المبادي...
 زجور...
 المبادي...
 زجور...
 المبادي...
 زجور...

Figure 20: A letter sent in 1940 from Hamad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam regarding the policies of exporting British textiles from India to the Gulf. From Khalid al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib: Sirat al-Tajir wa-al-Muthaqqaf Sulayman al-Hamad al-Bassam, 1888-1949* (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya li-al-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr, 2008), 107.

Some Qasimi traders of India not only exported goods to the Gulf Ports, but also supplied those of the Red Sea, particularly Jeddah and Yanbu‘. The al-Fadil trading house of ‘Unayzah was one of the leading exporters from the Indian ports to the Red Sea ports because al-Fadil had originally established their commercial activities in Jeddah. Al-Fadil’s exports to Yanbu‘ and Madinah were mentioned in a letter written on July 14, 1929, by the al-Khurayji trading house of ‘Unayzah, that was a major importer in Yanbu‘ with active trade in Madinah, to ‘Umar al-‘Umari of ‘Unayzah, who was then a leading merchant in Madinah. In this letter, al-Khurayji

informs al-'Umari that the textiles that had been sent to him by Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah al-Fadil from Bombay had been unloaded in Yanbu' and soon would be carried to Madinah (see figure 21).¹⁵¹

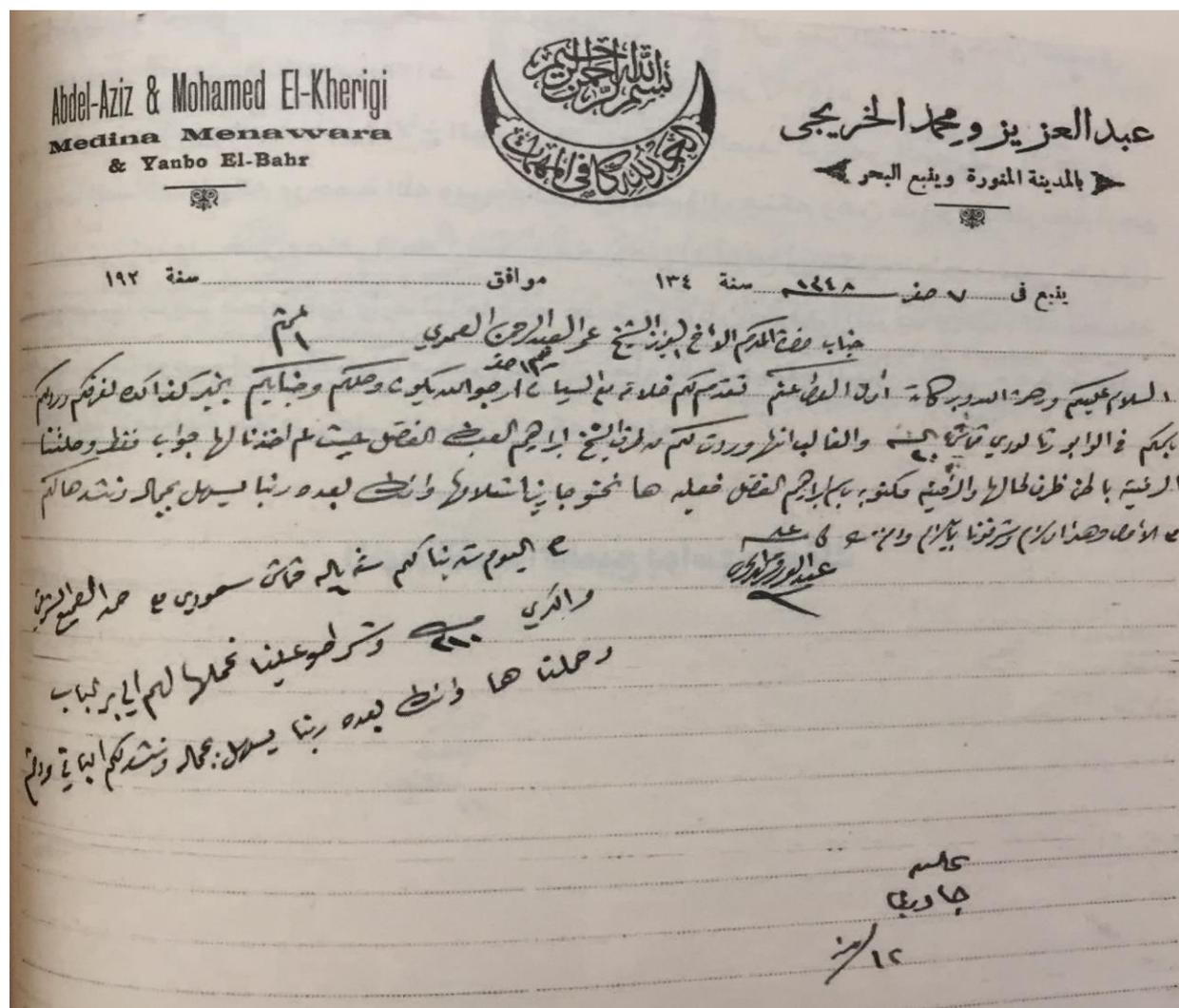


Figure 21: A letter sent on July 14, 1929, from al-Khurayji in Yanbu' to al-'Umari in Madinah regarding the arrival of textiles from al-Fadil of Bombay. From Al-'Umari, *Suwar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya*, 3: 20.

Qasimi traders residing in Iraq also traded in the Indian textiles. Al-'Assafi trading house in Baghdad and Basra was a leading importer and distributor of Indian textiles. Al-'Assafi often

¹⁵¹ Al-'Umari, *Suwar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya*, 3: 20.

187 rolls of the textile of Surat that had been sent by Mr. Bahay. Al-‘Assafi immediately redistributed these textiles to the local traders of Baghdad. On December 18, al-‘Assafi recorded that the merchants Shaul Zalkha, ‘Abudi Huqayl Ya‘qub, and Khayyun Ishaq Israel had received a number of these textile rolls (see figure 23).¹⁵³

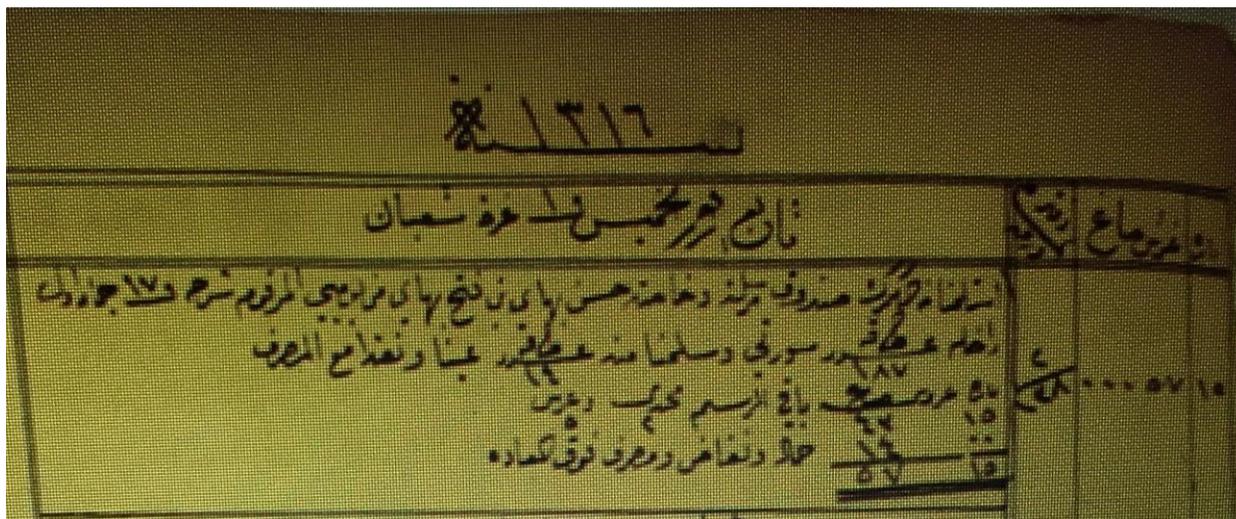


Figure 23: A record indicating the arrival of the Surat textiles at al-‘Assafi trading house in Baghdad. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 15, 1898.

As they imported textiles from overseas, the Qusman of Basra also imported fine types of Syrian textiles. According to one of al-‘Assafi’s papers, on Saturday October 29, 1898, a letter arrived at al-‘Assafi trading house in Baghdad from Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Shubayli of ‘Unayzah, who seems to have been a commercial agent in Basra, in which he informed that he had sold 351 rolls of *ghazl al-Sham* textiles, which seem to have been manufactured in Syria (see figure 24).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 15, 1898.

¹⁵⁴ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, October 29, 1898.

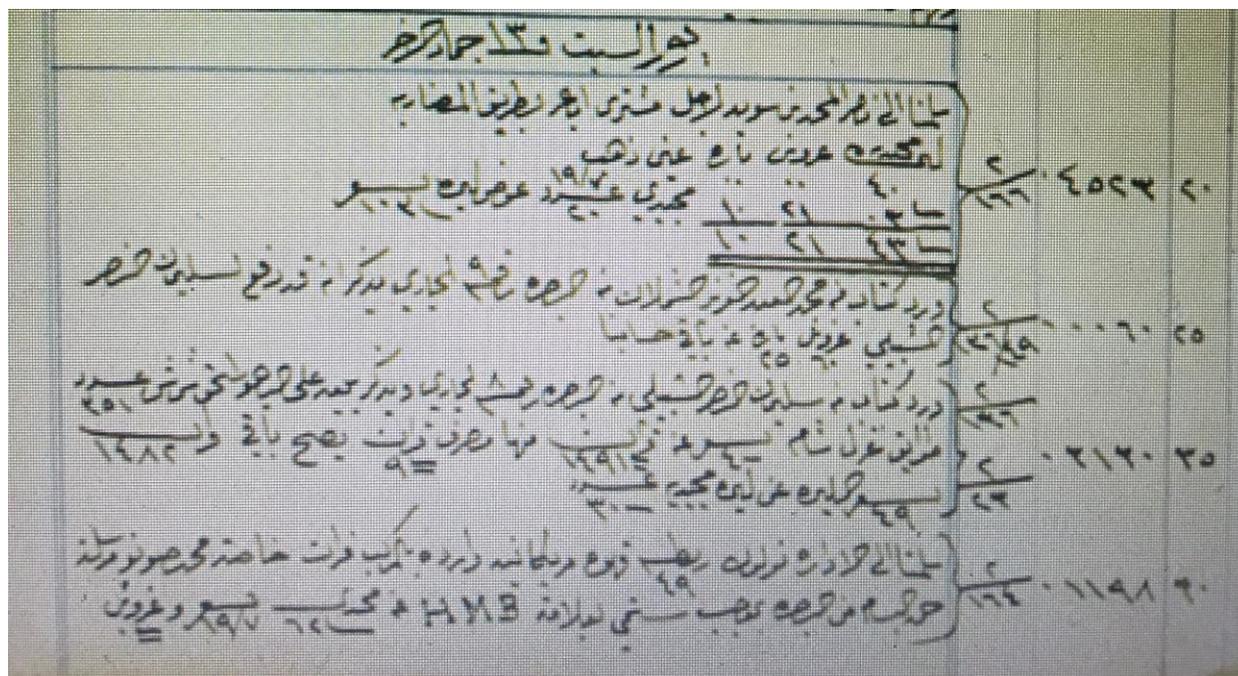


Figure 24: A letter from Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Shubayli in Basra to al-‘Assafi trading house in Baghdad regarding the sale of Syrian textiles. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, October 29, 1898.

Al-‘Assafi trading house also imported textiles from Europe. Several commercial records of Muhammad al-‘Assafi indicate that he imported multiple kinds of textiles from Manchester. One record dated May 20, 1884, shows that al-‘Assafi had received 400 rolls of Manchester textiles (see figure 25).¹⁵⁵ Another record dated October 18, 1884, uncovers that al-‘Assafi had received woolen fabrics, some of which were spun in Bombay while others were spun in London (see figure 26).¹⁵⁶ However, the latter seems not to have been shipped directly from Britain like the former.

¹⁵⁵ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, May 20, 1884, 61.

¹⁵⁶ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, October 18, 1884, 71.

However, al-‘Assafi did not only sell these imported textiles locally in Baghdad and Basra, he also distributed them to other regions as far as Jeddah, Mecca, Istanbul, Malta, and Tunisia. He often dealt with other Qasimi traders to retail and deliver his redistributed goods in other trading centers. For one example of this process, one of al-‘Assafi’s trading papers dated December 22, 1900, shows that he shipped a large cargo with numerous pieces of textiles from Baghdad to Mecca through Basra and Jeddah, where Qasimi merchants were to take care of it (see figure 27).¹⁵⁷ On March 28, 1901, al-‘Assafi recorded that he had shipped a cargo of textiles to Istanbul through his agent in Basra Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Shubayli. Another shipment was sent on the same day to Malta in order to be delivered to Tunisia (see figure 28).¹⁵⁸

Figure 27: A commercial record shows that al-‘Assafi trading house in Baghdad and Basra redistributed the imported textiles to other trading center as far as Jeddah and Mecca. From *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 22, 1900, 86.

¹⁵⁷ *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 22, 1900, 86.

¹⁵⁸ *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, March 28, 1901, 97.

Al-‘Assafi, also, targeted the internal regions of Iraq and Najd. The proof that al-‘Assafi was a leading well-known distributor of imported goods, is that ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Mut‘ib Al Rashid of Ha’il appointed al-‘Assafi to provide textile goods. According to his papers of February 2 and 3, 1902, al-‘Assafi had bought hundreds of textiles and clothing pieces for the benefit of Ibn Rashid (see figures 29 and 30).¹⁵⁹ Since Ibn Rashid frequently hired al-‘Assafi to buy goods for him, therefore, al-‘Assafi can be considered a commercial agent for the ruler of Ha’il in Baghdad. Ironically, Ibn Rashid’s order of this large cargo of textiles came immediately after Ibn Saud’s conquest of Riyadh, which was on January 15. Thus, it is highly likely that Ibn Rashid wanted to distribute this cargo in kind of gifts to tribal chiefs and notable people to insure their loyalty.

Figure 29: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records reveals that al-‘Assafi supplied Ibn Rashid with textiles and clothing pieces. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, February 3, 1902, 132.

¹⁵⁹ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, February 2 and 3, 1902, 132.

After ibn Saud conquered al-Hasa in 1913, al-‘Uqayr became Najd’s main port, through which Najdis imported all types of goods. Therefore, many Najdi merchants resided in al-Hasa and functioned as traders or agents for other Najdi merchants. For example, Sulayman ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mushayqih, who was the commercial agent in al-Hasa for his grandfather, imported textiles to the port of al-‘Uqayr and sent them to his grandfather’s shop in Buraydah before the outbreak of the Second World War.¹⁶⁰ In an interview, Sulayman himself mentioned that he once bought a large cargo of the Japanese textiles from Bahrain and sent them to his grandfather in Buraydah.¹⁶¹

The Tea Trade

Some of the Qasimi merchants in India traded in tea, which was an extremely fruitful business. In general, those who resided in Calcutta often traded in tea since the city was the center of the trade. The al-Bassam trading family of ‘Unayzah was one among those who traded in tea. The brothers Muhammad and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam did not only trade in tea locally, but also exported it to the Gulf region. For example, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, a leading merchant in Bahrain, was a client of the al-Bassam brothers in Calcutta who frequently supplied him with loads of tea.¹⁶² In a letter, dated June 9, 1944, sent from Calcutta to Sulayman al-Bassam, the sender informs al-Bassam that his orders of tea were shipped from Calcutta to Bombay. He, also, highlights the new policies of the export of tea from India (see figure 31). Although the sender’s name is missing, it is probable that it was the al-Bassam brothers since they provided Sulayman’s shop in Bahrain with tea.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Mushayqih, personal interview.

¹⁶¹ Sulayman al-Mushayqih, “Mishwar 60 ‘Aman.”

¹⁶² Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 114.

sugar, metals, indigo, and cotton piece goods for the dates. Oman and Eastern Arabia also extensively traded in dates with India, particularly in exchange for rice. While India and Persia continued to be major importers of Iraqi dates, the Indian imports of dates jumped from 30,000 tons in the 1880s to nearly 60,000 tons by the 1920s. Bombay's share of Iraqi dates at the turn of the twentieth century was 65 percent. Iraq was India's biggest supplier of dates (58 percent) followed by Eastern Arabia and Oman (28 percent).¹⁶³

The Qusman participated in exporting dates out of the Gulf, particularly to India. One example of these merchants who specialized in exporting dates to India is Hamad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam. His father, Muhammad, and uncle, Sulayman, left 'Unayzah for Mecca roughly in the late 1910s or early 1920s. In Mecca, Hamad attended an Ottoman school where he learned Turkish. When Ibn Saud entered Mecca in 1925, Sulayman fled to Sudan and settled there until his death while Hamad went to India where he worked for his relatives as a record keeper and learned English and Hindu languages. In the early 1930s, about five years later, Hamad moved to Bahrain when he was hired by 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Ali al-Bassam as a record keeper and assistant. In addition to his occupation, Hamad began to trade in *al-suluq*, (cooked and dried *al-Khunayzi* dates that were grown in al-Qatif, located in the Eastern Province of present Saudi Arabia). *Al-suluq* was frequently exported to India whether via Bahrain or directly from al-Qatif.¹⁶⁴ In India, some Qasimi traders, such as Salih ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam, specialized in importing the Gulf dates. By exporting the Indian goods and importing the Gulf dates, al-Bassam achieved considerable wealth.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 54, 71-72.

¹⁶⁴ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview.

¹⁶⁵ Al-'Amiri, "Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind," 85.

Also, many of the Qusman who resided in Basra traded in dates. In addition to their participation in exporting Basra's dates to India and other countries, the Qusman of Basra supplied the internal regions of Iraq. According to one of al-'Assafi's commercial papers dated December 11, 1898, Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Shubayli, who seems to have been an associate and a commercial agent of al-'Assafi in Basra, sent about 300 pounds of dates from al-'Assafi's date-palm groves to Amarah, a town located between Basra and Baghdad (see figure 32).¹⁶⁶

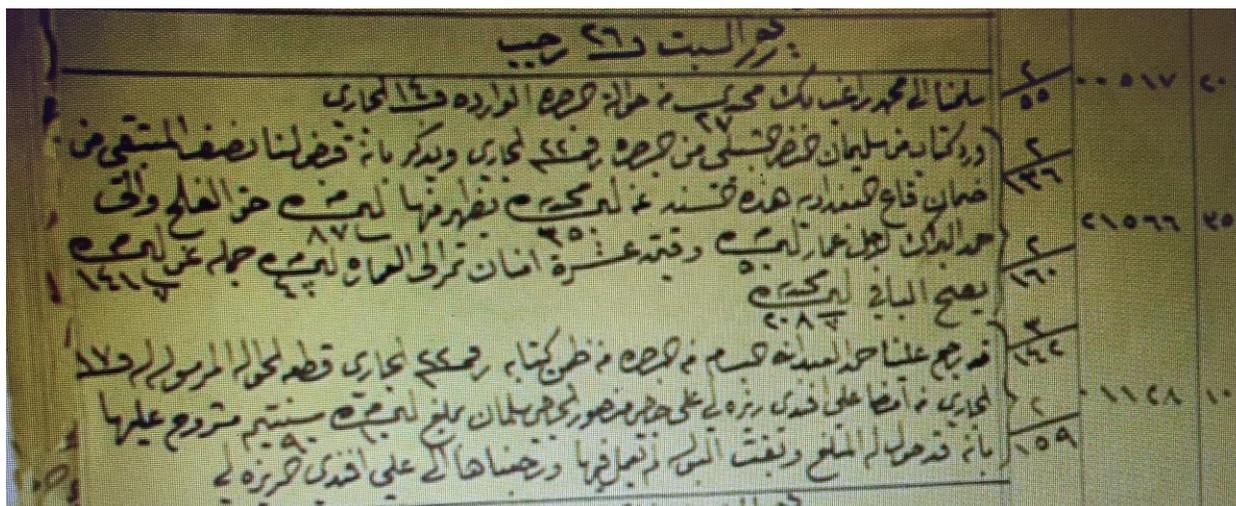


Figure 32: One of al-'Assafi's trading papers that indicates the Qusman's engagement in date trade in Basra and internal Iraq. From Daftar Tijari, Al-'Assafi's Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 11, 1898.

While most of the dates exported from the Gulf went to India before being re-exported to Europe and other markets, al-'Assafi's papers show that the Qusman in Baghdad and Basra exported the Iraqi dates directly to the Mediterranean. On November 1, 1901, for example, al-'Assafi wrote that he had shipped 400 sacks of dates market by his commercial brand, which was (SS), from Baghdad to Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Shubayli in Basra, who would re-export them to

¹⁶⁶ Daftar Tijari, Al-'Assafi's Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 11, 1898.

Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey. This cargo was divided as 150 sacks of dates were shipped to Beirut, 100 sacks to Jaffa, 100 sacks to Mersin, and 50 sacks to Haifa (see figure 33).¹⁶⁷

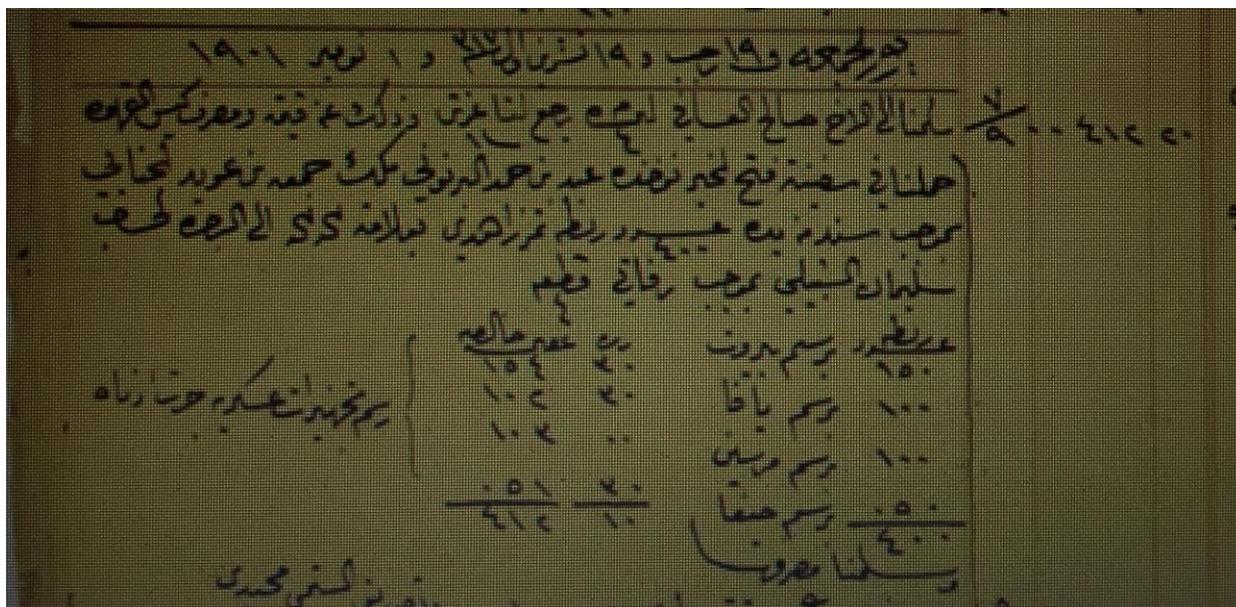


Figure 33: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records shows that the Qusman in Baghdad and Basra exported dates to Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey. From *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, November 1, 1901, 121.*

During the “Age of Steam and Print”—between approximately 1850 and 1930—commodities, technologies, and ideas spread with unprecedented breadth and speed. These new technologies did not only reduce the dependence of maritime trade on monsoon winds, but even led to a rapid intercontinental transport, connecting regional trading centers to one another and re-integrating isolated regions, such as the Arabian Gulf, into the global economic system. The steamship, the telegraph, and the Suez Canal, which was opened in 1869, enabled the date trade from Arabia to America to expand. Thus, Basra joined Muscat in supplying the American market. By the end of the nineteenth century, merchants in America were able to communicate

¹⁶⁷ *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, November 1, 1901, 121.*

by telegraph to buyers in date centers of the Gulf. Via the Suez Canal, steamers cut about a third of the voyage from New York to Muscat.¹⁶⁸ Before the turn of the twentieth century, quantities of Iraqi dates exported to the United States surpassed those of Oman (see figure 34). With the opening of the Suez Canal, Basra date exports jumped from £67,000 in 1868 to £126,000 in 1869. American imports of dates from Oman decreased in only five years from about 27 percent in 1906 to roughly 13 percent in 1911. By 1929, 83 percent of American imports of dates came from Iraq with a continuous increase in demand for Iraqi dates by America and Britain.¹⁶⁹

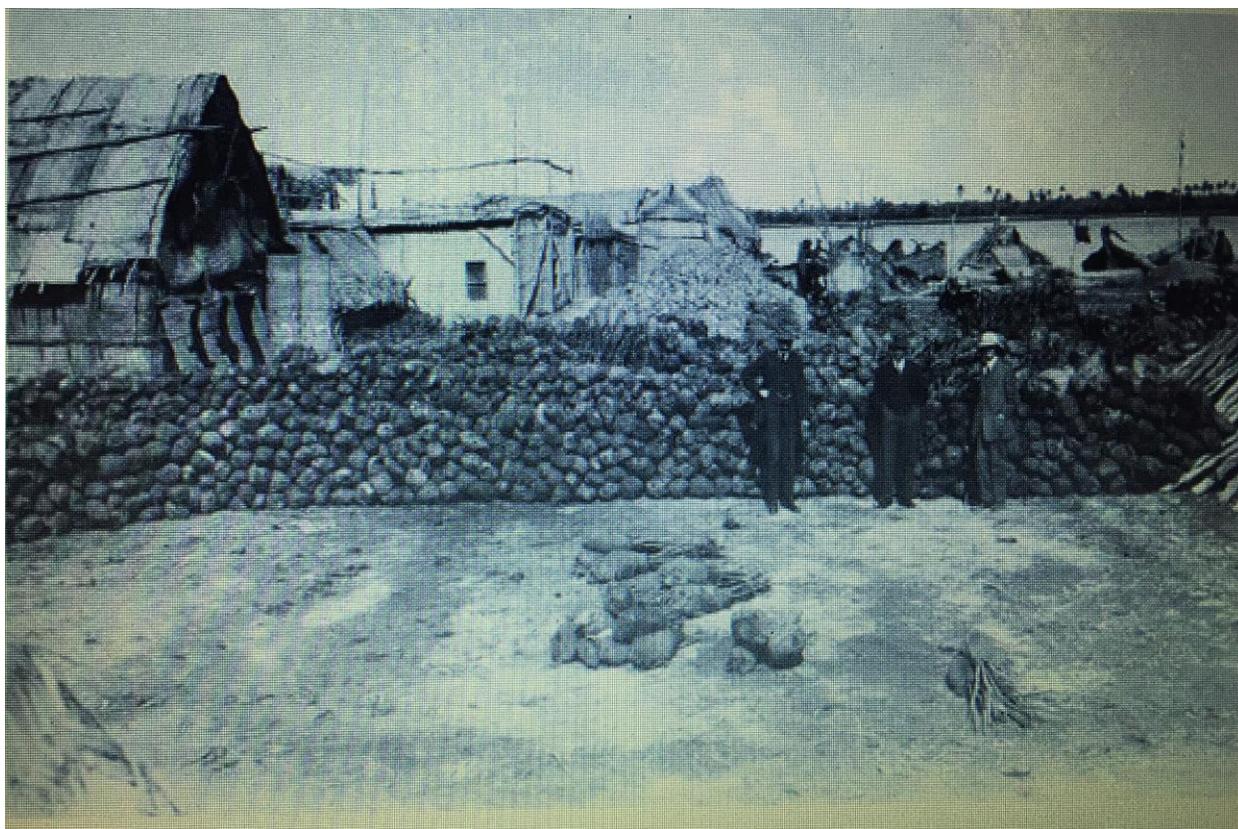


Figure 34: Shipment of date-palm offshoots from Basra to the U.S. in 1913. From Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 186.

¹⁶⁸ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Wujud al-Hindi fi al-Khalij*, 116; Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 68-69.

¹⁶⁹ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 71.

With the turn of the twentieth century, according to some estimations there were about 90 million date palms in the world more than half of which were grown in the region of the Arabian Gulf. Iraq alone possessed about 30 million palms. The share of Oman was around 4 million date palms. The date industry in Eastern Arabia not only fed regional and local diets for centuries, but even became an international product in the late nineteenth century, reaching ports in Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. Particularly, the American market grew in the nineteenth century to become the Gulf's most important foreign customer, importing about 80 million pounds of dates per year by 1925. Since most of the Gulf dates ripened in August, American ships had enough time to catch the monsoon winds, make the hundred-day journey, and arrive home just before the time of the winter holidays. With their arrival in New York in the autumn, the Arabian dates became an American tradition in the time of Thanksgiving (see figure 35). As a result, Omani producers, the major suppliers of the American market, expanded their date production to meet increasing American demand. In 1866, The W. J. Towell Company opened an office in Muscat, becoming the first American export company in Muscat. This company's sole purpose was to ship Omani dates to America. American date imports rapidly increased through the first quarter of the twentieth century from an average of 10-20 million pounds per year between 1893 and 1903, 20-30 million pounds between 1903 and 1913, 32-53 million pounds between 1920 and 1922, and 79 million pounds in 1925.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 52-54, 57-58.



Figure 35: Dromedary date advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*, 1913. From Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 74.

Beginning in 1890, The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) imported sixty-eight young palms and planted them in Arizona, New Mexico, and California. The American attempts to grow date palms were repeated in 1902, 1905, and 1912 when plant explorers were sent to Iraq, Baluchistan, Muscat, al-Hasa, Algeria, and Tunisia to bring back offshoots of palms. More than nine thousand date palm seedlings were brought back, most of which were from the Gulf. By 1914, two hundred thousand date palms had been planted in California (see figure 36). As soon as America established its own date industry, the Gulf's prosperous date market in North America declined. After 1925, the quantity of imported dates to the United States precipitously decreased.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 181-84, 190-91.



Figure 36: Paul Popenoe, an American date farmer and a prominent importer of the Gulf's date-palm offshoots, and Mullah Najji, an Iraqi date grower, Iraq, 1913. From Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, 190.

The Gold and Currency Trades

After the harsh decline of the Gulf's pearling industry, which had been caused by the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the spread of cultured pearls in 1925, and the Global Depression in 1929, many Gulf merchants shifted their interests to the gold trade. During these years, many international currencies declined and some vanished entirely. The value of the Indian rupee decreased in the Gulf, although it was still strong in India. Therefore, the Gulf traders bought gold, which was imported from Switzerland to the Gulf, for Rs. 50 and trafficked it to India where it was sold for between Rs. 100-120. Then, they bought sterling pounds, which equaled

Rs. 28 in India, and sold it in Kuwait and other Gulf ports for between Rs. 60-107.¹⁷² Thus, the gold trade between the Gulf and India was remarkably profitable since merchants' interests were sometimes between 300-400%.¹⁷³

Although the British authorities prohibited exporting gold from the Gulf to India, Gulf merchants illegally smuggled it. Because of the gold smuggling activities between the Gulf and India, the demand for gold in the markets of the Gulf ports increased. Indeed, in 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Umari's two-volume study, *Watha'iq 'A'iliyya min Burayda* in which he has published his father's collection of more than three hundred familial letters, the author shows several letters in which a Kuwaiti merchant frequently emphasized that he preferred to receive the value of the goods he sent to al-Qasim in gold.¹⁷⁴

Qasimi merchants participated in exporting gold from Najd to the Gulf. According to al-'Umari, the *'uqaylat* brought gold from the Hijaz, al-Sham, and Egypt to al-Qasim.¹⁷⁵ However, since the gold trade in Najd was not as prosperous as it was in the Gulf ports, its prices were lower in Najd than in the Gulf, which encouraged Qasimi merchants to export it from al-Qasim to the Gulf. For example, 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Bassam points out that his father had traded in gold and currency between al-Qasim and the Gulf before settling down in 'Unayzah and opening a trading shop.¹⁷⁶

The Qusman of Bahrain also participated in trafficking gold from the Gulf to India. When large boom boats (the largest locally crafted vessels that traded within the Gulf, and between Eastern Africa and the Indian Subcontinent) began to be loaded with goods for export to India,

¹⁷² Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-'Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 87-88.

¹⁷³ Al-Zamil, personal interview; 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview.

¹⁷⁴ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Ibrahim al-'Umari, *Watha'iq 'A'iliyya min Burayda: min Muqtanayat al-Walid Ibrahim ibn Sulayman al-'Umari Rahimahu Allah* (Riyadh: Dar al-Thaluthiyya, 2016), 2: 809.

¹⁷⁵ Al-'Umari, *Watha'iq 'A'iliyya*, 2: 809.

¹⁷⁶ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal interview.

the Qusman, and other Gulf inhabitants, hid gold in these boats. Sometimes, they would ask the *nawkhada* to hide it in his boat and hand it to somebody upon arriving in India. Although it was very likely that this shipment would be discovered and seized by the British, people of the Gulf believed that it was worth an attempt. One of the Qusman who specialized in trafficking gold from Bahrain to India was Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam.¹⁷⁷ Since Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam of Bombay traded in gold and had a strong links with the Qasimi traders in the Gulf, it is possible that they exported gold to him. In addition to several other goods, al-Bassam’s investment in gold was considerably profitable.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, some of the Qasimi traders in the Gulf and Indian ports traded in currency. One of these traders was Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam, who made considerable wealth from such a trade.¹⁷⁹ The nature of this trade was to buy a currency from a specific city or country and to transfer it to another where its value was higher. Under some circumstances, these traders had sums of a currency that began to lose its value, so they attempted to sell it off somewhere else. An example of this situation is clarified in a letter sent on June 21, 1928, by Ibrahim ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fadil of Bombay to ‘Umar al-‘Umari of Madinah. The letter indicates that al-‘Umari had sent 1,000 majidis to al-Fadil via a third Qasimi party, who were Ibrahim and Sulayym al-Zamil of Bahrain. The one thousand majidis were sold in Bombay for Rs. 997 (see figure 37).¹⁸⁰ Al-‘Umari seems to have deliberately avoided sending this sum directly from the ports of Yanbu‘ or Jeddah since exporting currencies to India was prohibited by the British authorities. Consequently, he sent it via Bahrain, which was a major outlet for trafficking gold and currencies to India. It seems that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Saudi conquest of

¹⁷⁷ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview.

¹⁷⁸ Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 85.

¹⁷⁹ Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 85.

¹⁸⁰ Al-‘Umari, *Suwar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya*, 2: 56.

the Hijaz led to the decline of the value of the Ottoman currency, which forced local merchants to find an appropriate way to sell what they had of this currency or to tolerate a harsh loss.

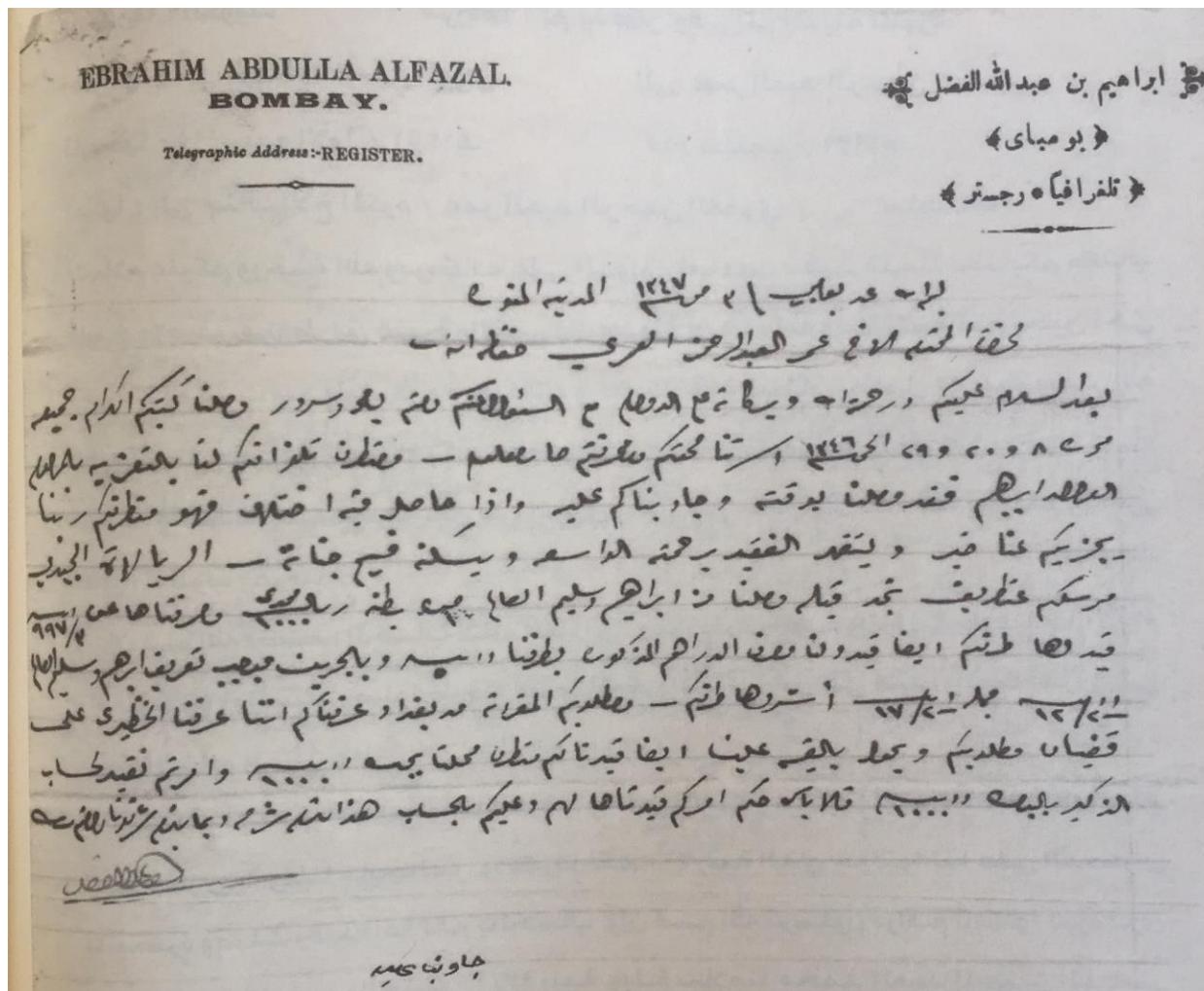


Figure 37: A letter dated June 21, 1928, from al-Fadil in Bombay to al-'Umari in Madinah regarding the trade in currency between Arabia and India. From Al-'Umari, *Suwar min al-Haraka al-Tijariyya*, 2: 56.

The Perfume Trade

Since ancient times, Arabia has imported perfumes and incense from India. During the period under study, Qasimi traders residing in the ports of the Gulf and India continued to trade in the

traditional Indian perfumes. For example, one of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated June 27, 1899, reveals the engagement of Qasimi merchants in the perfume trade. Al-‘Assafi wrote that ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Bassam of Calcutta had sent to him six jars of perfume (see figure 38).¹⁸¹

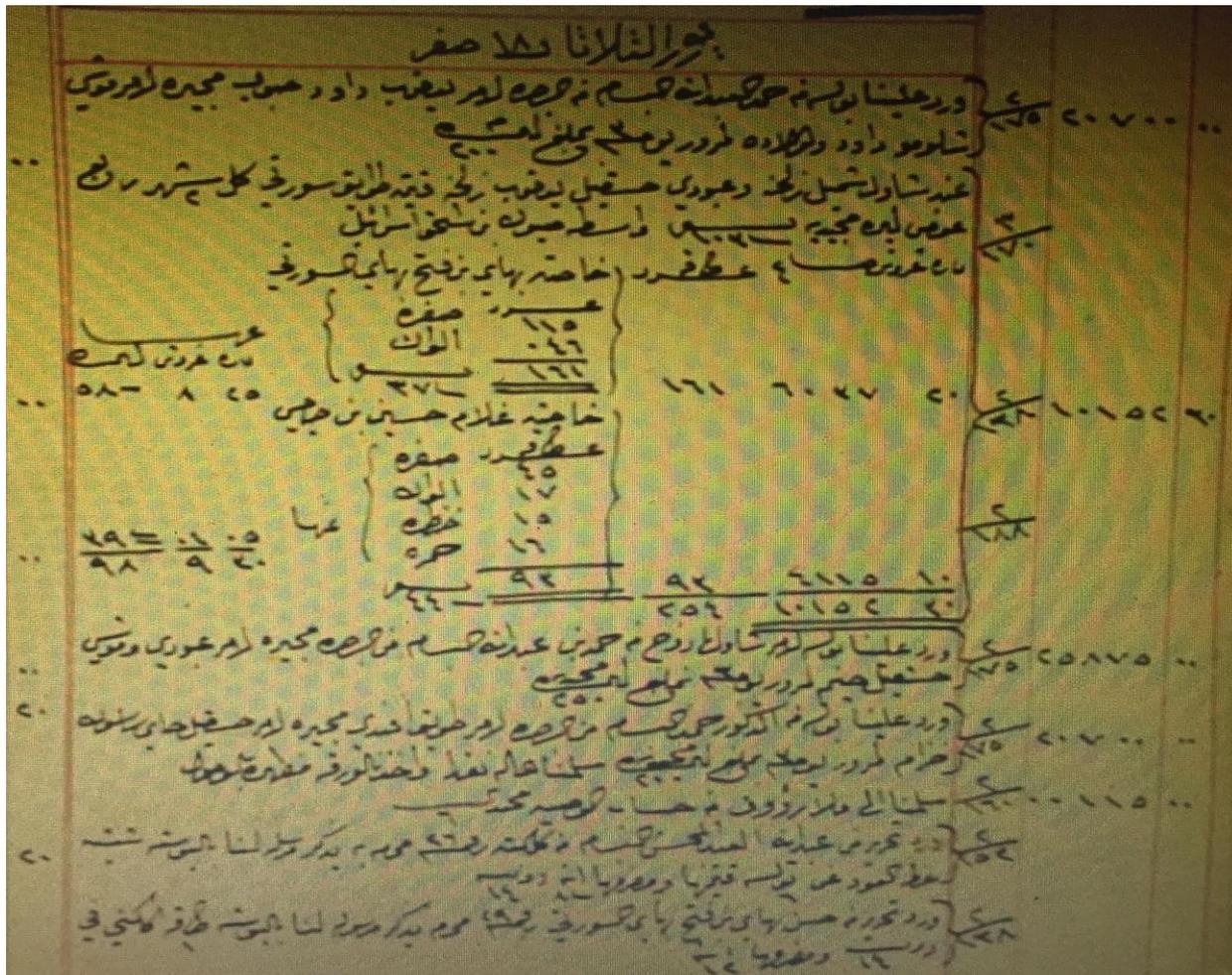


Figure 38: A commercial record uncovering the engagement of Qasimi traders in the perfume trade between Calcutta and Baghdad through Basra. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, June27, 1899, 22.

¹⁸¹ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, June27, 1899, 22.

The Spice Trade

Since ancient times, India had exported spices to most markets of the old world. In the modern period, India retained its leading position as a spice market and the Qusman in the Gulf and India participated in exporting spices from India to the Gulf ports. For instance, al-‘Assafi trading house in Baghdad, which had been founded by Muhammad ibn Salih al-‘Assafi and run later by his sons Hamad and Salih, was a major depot for Indian spices.¹⁸² Muhammad al-‘Assafi imported large quantities of spices and redistributed them in Iraq. One of his commercial records dated May 19, 1881, shows that he had received fifty-four sacks of black pepper (see figure 40). The document indicates that al-‘Assafi immediately redistributed some of these sacks to local Iraqi traders, whose shares varied from one to ten sacks. On May 26, al-‘Assafi also received 205 sacks of black pepper, which doubtlessly means that the al-‘Assafi trading house was a leading distributor of Indian spices at least in Baghdad (see figure 39).¹⁸³

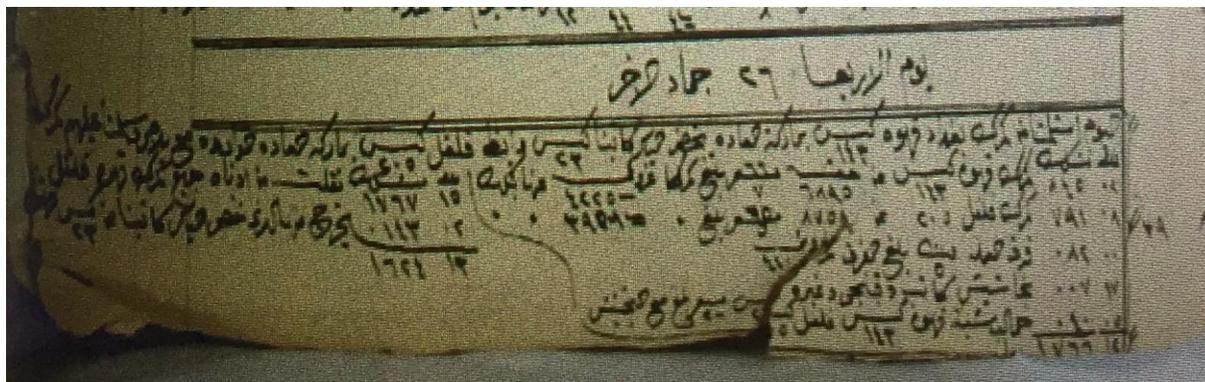


Figure 39: A commercial record indicating that the al-‘Assafi trading house imported black pepper from India. From *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, May 26, 1881, 3.*

¹⁸² Muhammad ibn Nasir al-‘Ubudi, *Mu‘jam Usar ‘Unayza* (N.p.: N.d.), 10: 427

¹⁸³ *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, May 19, 1881, 3.* The commercial records indicating al-‘Assafi’s imports of black pepper are many. However, I deliberately provide only one or two documents as evidence for the commercial activities I discuss in this monograph.

that he should sell them in Bahrain if the prices were appropriate or reexport them to al-Hasa (see figure 41).¹⁸⁴

Figure 41: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records showing that Muqbil al-Dhukayr sold goods in Bahrain and al-Hasa for the benefit of al-‘Assafi trading house. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, April 14, 1884, 59.

Hamad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam and his brothers, who founded trading houses in Jeddah, Basra, and Bombay, traded in coffee while in Basra. Hamad al-Bassam was a distributor for the goods coming to the Gulf ports, including coffee, not only inside Basra, but also to the internal regions, such as Baghdad. According to one of al-‘Assafi’s trading papers dated October 29, 1898, forty-nine sacks of coffee beans that had been sent by Hamad al-Bassam, whose commercial mark was HMB, from Basra, had arrived at the al-‘Assafi trading house in order to be delivered to a Baghdadi local trader (see figure 42).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, April 14, 1884, 59.

¹⁸⁵ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, October 29, 1898.

commercial records dated July 11, 1884, 150 sacks of Javanese coffee and 84 sacks of black pepper, which had been sent from the Malabar and Bombay by Salih al-‘Assafi, arrived in Baghdad (see figure 44).¹⁸⁷

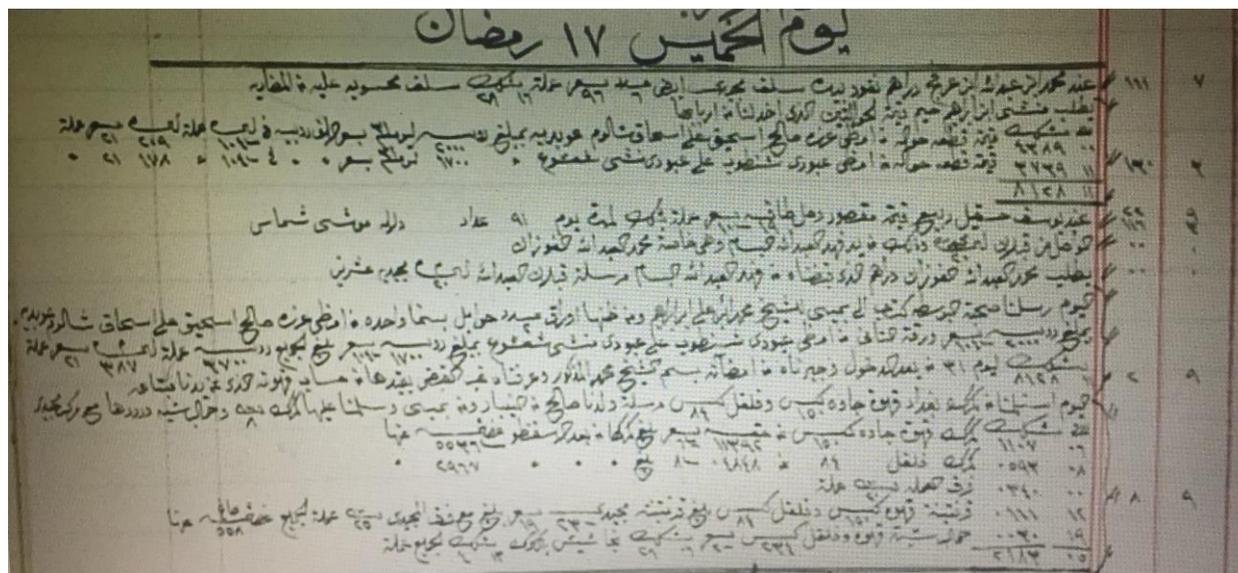


Figure 44: A commercial record indicating that Salih al-‘Assaf traveled to India in order to supply his father in Baghdad with goods. From *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records*, Folder 4979, July 11, 1884, 64.

Although coffee often arrived in the Gulf from, or through, India, the Qusman residing in Basra sometimes went further by importing coffee from other markets. Several documents of al-‘Assafi’s indicate that Qasimi traders of Basra imported coffee from Alexandria and redistributed it to the local traders in Iraq. While coffee imported from India was often Malabari, whereas the imports through Alexandria was usually American. On January 1, 1899, al-‘Assafi recorded that a letter had arrived from Muhammad Effendi Sunu of Alexandria in which he wrote that he had shipped 126 sacks of coffee to Basra. This cargo would be divided in halves between Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam and al-‘Assafi (see figure 45).¹⁸⁸ In another record dated February 27,

¹⁸⁷ *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records*, Folder 4979, July 11, 1884, 64.

¹⁸⁸ *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records*, Folder 4978, January 1, 1899, 7.

1899, al-‘Assafi wrote that he had received a letter from Sunu in which he mentioned that he had shipped sixty-two sacks of coffee to another leading Qasimi trader in Basra, Hamad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, whose commercial mark was (AB) (see figure 46).¹⁸⁹ Since Hamad and his five brothers were at the same time residing in Basra, al-Zubayr, Bahrain, Jeddah, and Damascus, and functioning as commercial agents for their father, who preferred to stay in ‘Unayzah, Hamad named his commercial mark after his father.

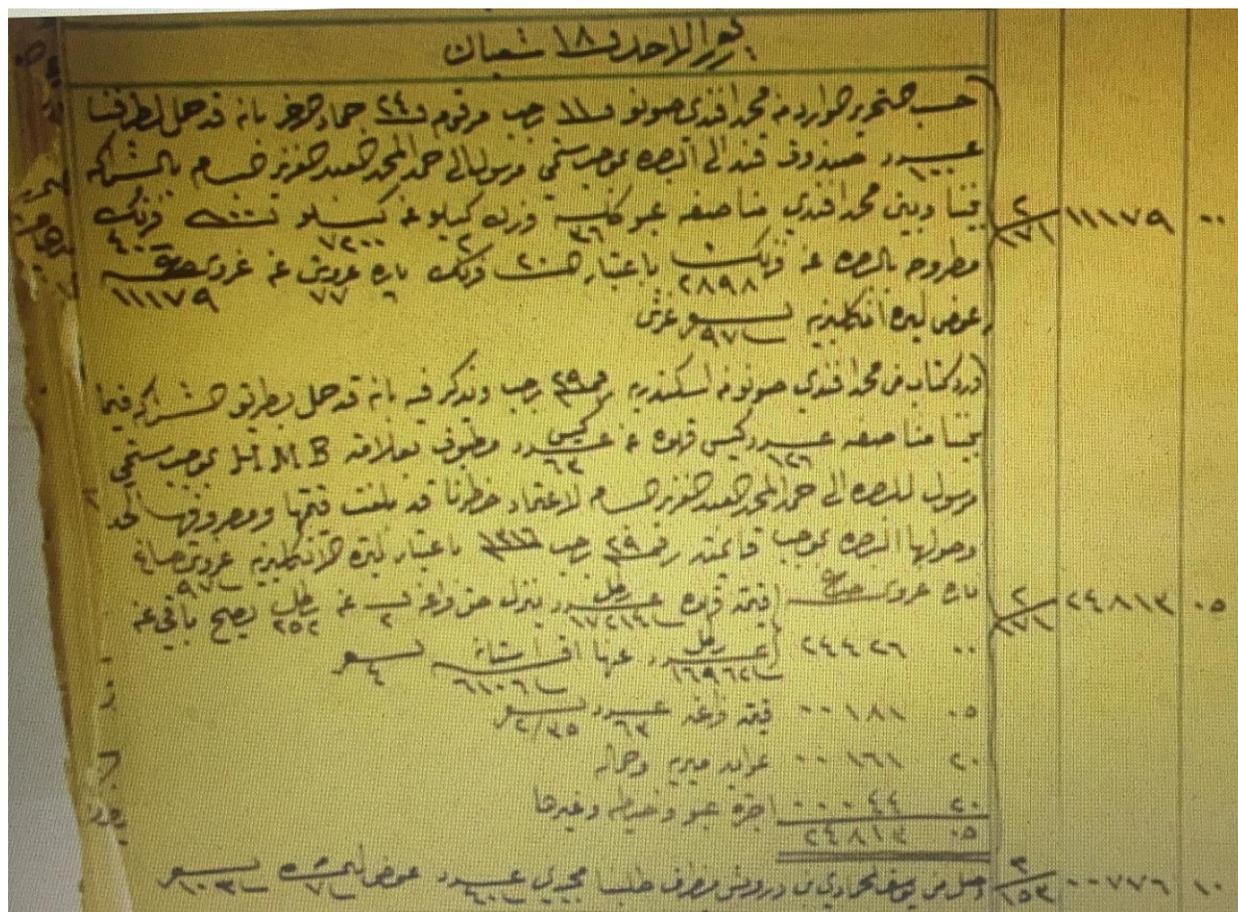


Figure 46: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records indicating the import of coffee from Alexandria to Basra by Qasimi traders. From *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, January 1, 1899, 7.

¹⁸⁹ *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, February 27, 1899, 11.

Since Arabia was then still underdeveloped, services for commercial transportation were not available. Therefore, the transportation of coffee beans from the ports to the internal regions sometimes encountered some difficulties. As in sugar transportation, the unprofessional storing and transporting methods were the biggest challenges in the coffee trade. When it rained during coffee caravans traveling from al-Jubayl or al-‘Uqayr to al-Qasim, it was highly likely that the coffee was affected by humidity, which markedly decreased its quality. According to ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mushayqih, his grandfather, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, was once lucky when one of his coffee caravans got hit by rain. While ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was thinking what to do with this eighty-camel-load of corrupted coffee, a letter from Ibn Saud arrived, in which Ibn Saud said that he wanted to give some notable Bedouins coffee beans and cardamom as gifts and asked al-Mushayqih if he had any. Al-Mushayqih then got rid of the load of coffee by giving it to the Bedouins.¹⁹⁰

In addition to trading in coffee, the al-Mushayqih trading house also traded in coffee utensils. The usage of glass utensils was uncommon in Najd before the Second World War. However, according to ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mushayqih, his brother, Sulayman, who was the family’s agent in al-Hasa, imported glass coffee cups and sent them to al-Qasim. Since these glass cups were rarely used in Najd before World War II, the al-Mushayqih trading house benefited enormously from importing such goods. These cups cost Sulayman only a few *halall* (sing. *halala*, 100 *halala* equals 1 Saudi riyal). However, his grandfather, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, sold them in Buraydah for 25 *halala* since the demand for them was extremely high, as they were newly introduced to the society.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Al-Mushayqih, personal interview.

¹⁹¹ Al-Mushayqih, personal interview.

Chapter 3:

The Qusman's Trading Destinations in the Indian Subcontinent

There were no direct commercial relationships between al-Qasim and India, like those between India and the Gulf ports, because al-Qasim was an internal region. Nevertheless, since “al-Qasim was the most internal region in the Arab world that had connections with the outside world,” al-Qasim’s commercial links with India were obviously made by the considerable number of the Qusman who traveled to India.¹⁹² Many of these Qusman resided in India for several years, some of whom never returned home. The Qusman in India, like all Arab merchants, began their businesses by trading locally. When finding some success, they often engaged in exporting Indian goods to the Gulf ports. Qasimi merchants often retained trading links with the local merchants in al-Qasim by sending goods from India to al-Qasim via Bahrain, and then to the ports of al-Hasa. Most of the Qusman of India had commercial agents in al-Qasim, mainly in ‘Unayzah and Buraydah, whose job was to receive the Indian goods and to redistribute them inside al-Qasim or in the neighboring regions, such as Ha’il and Riyadh. Although they had Kuwaiti, Omani, and Bahraini commercial agents, the most targeted market by the Qusman of India was Bahrain.

It is unclear when the Qusman began to consider India as a trading destination, although some Najdi merchants had made their way to India by the middle of the nineteenth century. According to al-Bassam, Dahi ibn ‘Awn of Harma, a small town located in Sudayr district between al-Qasim and Riyadh, died in Bombay in 1844 leaving more than 500,000 Indian rupees (Rs) as an inheritance.¹⁹³ It is highly likely that Ibn ‘Awn had lived in India for many years.

¹⁹² Wahba, *Jazirat al-‘Arab*, 60.

¹⁹³ Al-Bassam, *Tuhfat al-Mushtaq*, 324-25.

Also, he was not supposed to be the first Najdi merchant to have arrived in India. Therefore, it is very possible that Najdi merchants made their way to India at least by the beginning of the nineteenth century, if not even earlier. However, since most Qasimi merchants were engaged in the *'uqaylat* overland trade, they might have made their way to India about fifty years after the merchants of Sudayr and al-Washm (two Najdi districts located between al-Qasim and al-'Arid, which is Riyadh and its neighboring towns and villages).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, several successful Qasimi merchants appeared in India. One of these businessmen was Muqbil ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr of 'Unayzah (1844-1922).¹⁹⁴ Although al-Dhukayr is well-known as one of the earliest Qasimi traders who resided in Bahrain around 1877, the documents reveal that he had traded in India for several years before moving and settling there. Like most Qasimi traders who came after him, al-Dhukayr traded in foodstuffs, buying them from the Indian markets and exporting them to the Gulf ports. According to a letter dated March 9, 1872, for example, al-Dhukayr shipped a cargo of black pepper and coffee beans from Talgeri, a port on the historical Malabar coast (known today as Sanikatta), to another Qasimi trader in Basra, Muhammad ibn Nasir al-Shubayli (see figure 47).¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 6: 428; Hamad ibn 'Abd Allah al-'Anqari, "A'lam wa-Tarajim min al-Khalij al-'Arabi fi al-Watha'iq al-Biritaniyya," *Darat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (February 2005), 178.

¹⁹⁵ 'Abd Allah Yusuf al-Ghunaym, *Qira'at fi Watha'iq Usrat al-Nnisf* (Kuwait: Markaz al-Buhuth wa-al-Dirasat al-Kuwaytiyya, 2016), 15.

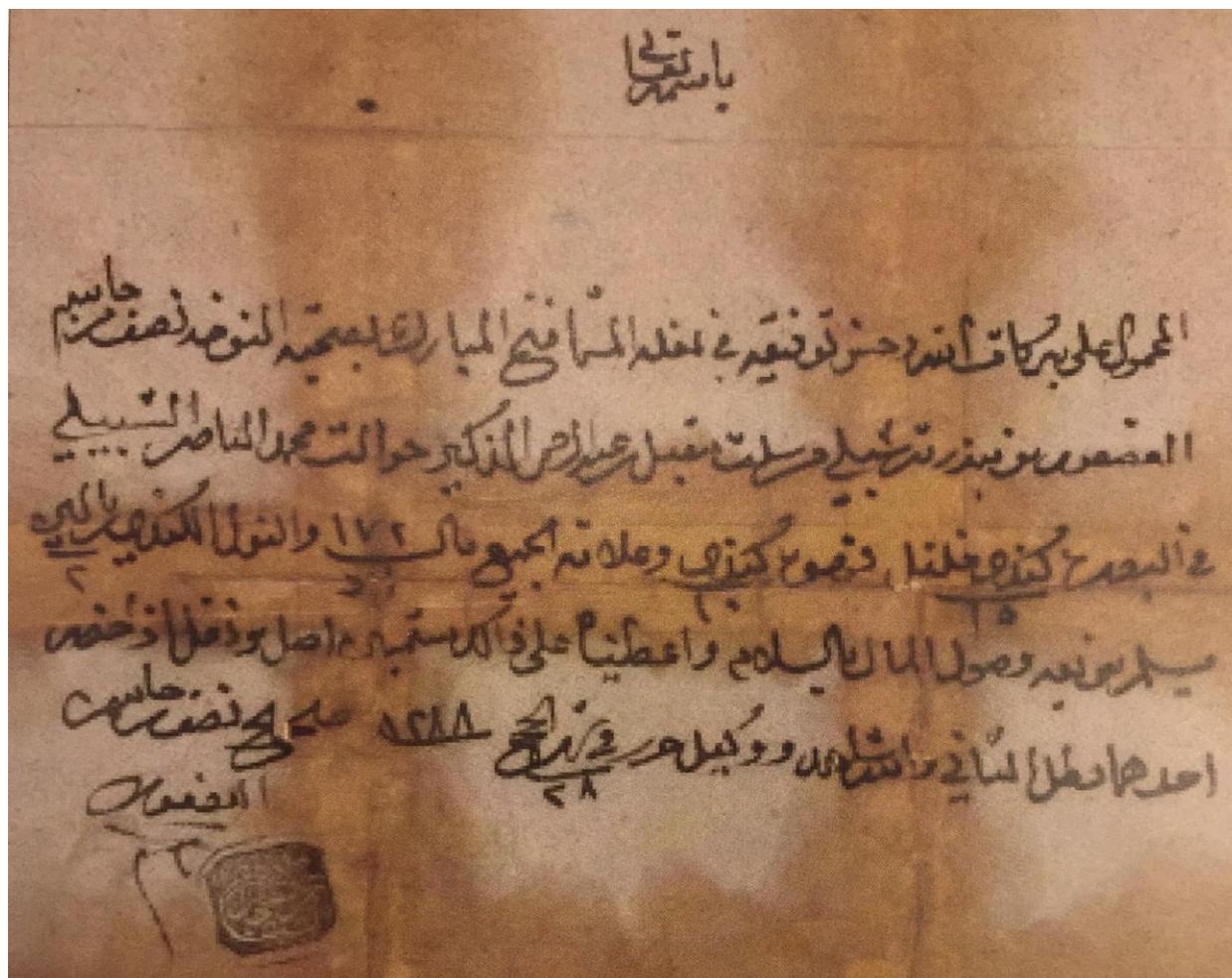


Figure 47: A letter dated 1872 indicates that Muqbil al-Dhukayr exported foodstuffs, such as black pepper and coffee beans, to the Gulf ports, like Basra. From Al-Ghunaym, *Qira'at*, 15.

Another Qasimi trading house was the house of al-Fawzan of ‘Unayzah. Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan was a notable trader in India engaging in exporting goods to the Gulf. Like all Qasimi traders who arrived in India before the 1880s, al-Fawzan first resided and traded in Calcutta. One of al-Fawzan’s clients in the Gulf was Muhammad al-‘Assafi, who founded a successful trading house in Baghdad with a branch in Basra. According to al-‘Assafi’s

commercial records, on June 23, 1882, he received the cargo that had been sent by al-Fawzan from Calcutta (see figure 48).¹⁹⁶

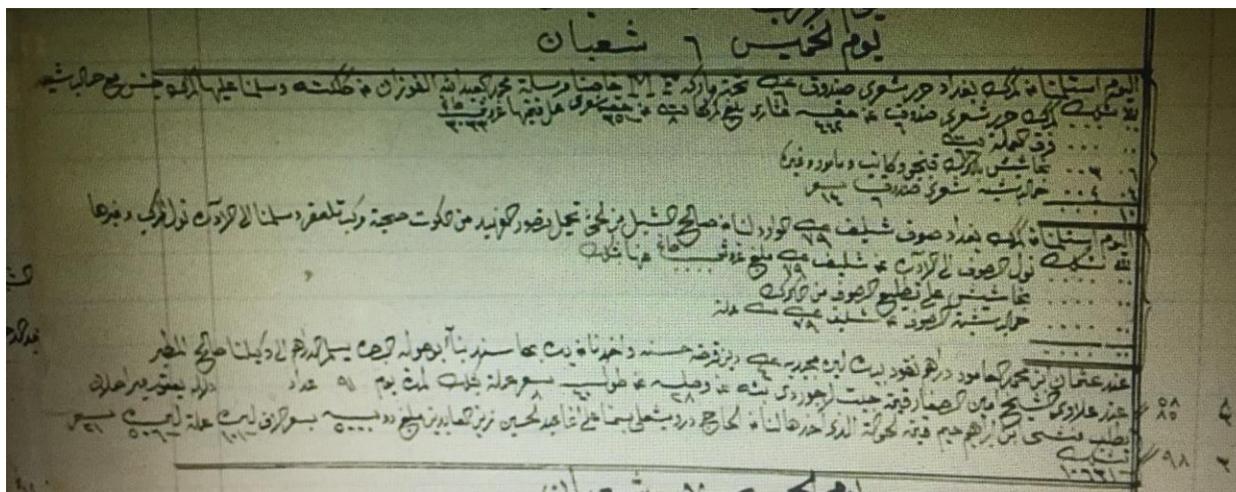


Figure 48: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records indicates the trading links with Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan in Calcutta. From *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records*, Folder 4979, June 23, 1882, 23.

Muhammad al-Fawzan’s son, ‘Abd Allah, was, also, a leading Qasimi trader in India (see figure 49). ‘Abd Allah was born in ‘Unayzah in 1861.¹⁹⁷ When he was seventeen years old, in 1878, al-Fawzan traveled to India in the company of his father. After Bombay took Calcutta’s economic position, the young ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan became a successful merchant trading between Bombay, Iraq, and Najd. He exported everything Najd and the Hijaz needed from India and imported dates from Iraq. In addition to trading with the famous Qasimi trading houses in India, such as the houses of al-Fadil, al-Qadi, and al-Bassam, al-Fawzan traded with Kuwait’s rulers’ commercial agents, such as Humud al-Shayi‘ and Husayn ibn ‘Isa’, and merchants of Bahrain and Oman. He also stationed his son, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, in Jeddah to function as the family’s commercial agent. Since al-Fawzan was one of the leading Qasimi merchants in

¹⁹⁶ *Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records*, Folder 4979, June 23, 1882, 23.

¹⁹⁷ Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Qash‘ami, “Mu‘tamadu al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz wa-Wukala’ah fi al-Kharij,” *Darat al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2009), 115.

Bombay, several Qusman, who later became famous, had worked at al-Fawzan's trading shop. From 'Unayzah, the brothers Muhammad and 'Abd Allah al-Hamdan, who became later Ibn Saud's assistants, and from Buraydah, Sulayman ibn Salih al-Dakhil, who later became known later as an intellectual, historian, and first Najdi journalist in Iraq.¹⁹⁸ The nature of their job was to do everything that al-Fawzan would ask them to do, although they were often responsible for commercial records. Al-Fawzan was also Ibn Saud's political representative in India during the formation years of Saudi Arabia. He spent the rest of his life in Bombay and died at the age of 100, in approximately 1960.¹⁹⁹



Figure 49: 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan of 'Unayzah (1861-1960). From Al-Qash'ami, *Mu'tamadu al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz*, 65.

¹⁹⁸ Al-Bassam, *Ulama' Najd*, 2:285; Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qash'ami, *Mu'tamadu al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz wa-Wukala'ah fi al-Kharij* (Beirut: al-Intishar al-'Arabi, 2015), 68.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Qash'ami, "Mu'tamadu al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz," 115, 119-20; Al-'Amiri, "Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind," 84.

The al-‘Assafi family of ‘Unayzah, that had founded a leading trading house in Iraq, particularly in Baghdad and Basra, extended the family’s business to India. Several commercial records of Muhammad al-‘Assafi, who was based in Baghdad, show that his son, Salih, sent multiple kinds of goods from Calcutta, Mangalore, and Bombay to his father in Baghdad. For example, on April 21, 1881, Muhammad al-‘Assafi recorded that he had received 264 sacks of coffee which had been sent by his son from Mangalore (see figure 50).²⁰⁰ On February 11, 1882, Muhammad al-‘Assafi, also, wrote: “today, our son Salih al-‘Assafi traveled from here heading to Bombay” (see figure 51)²⁰¹ Therefore, these commercial papers reveal that Salih al-‘Assafi frequently traveled to India in order to send goods to his father in Baghdad. The records also prove that al-‘Assafi had reached India as early as in 1881, if not even earlier.

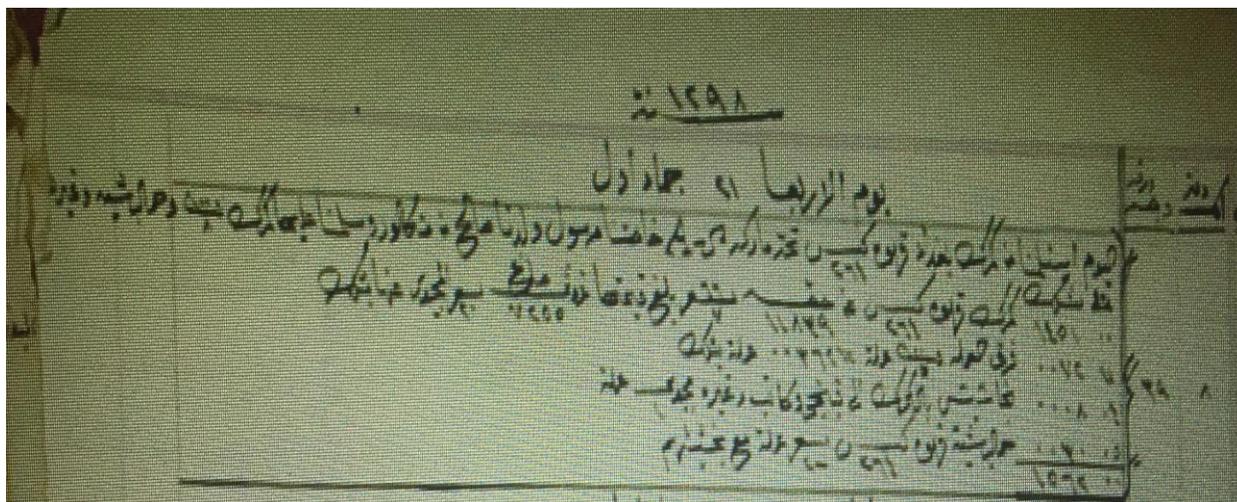


Figure 50: Muhammad al-‘Assafi recorded that he had received the coffee cargo that his son had sent from India. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, April 21, 1881, 2.

²⁰⁰ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, April 21, 1881, 2.

²⁰¹ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, February 11, 1882, 15.

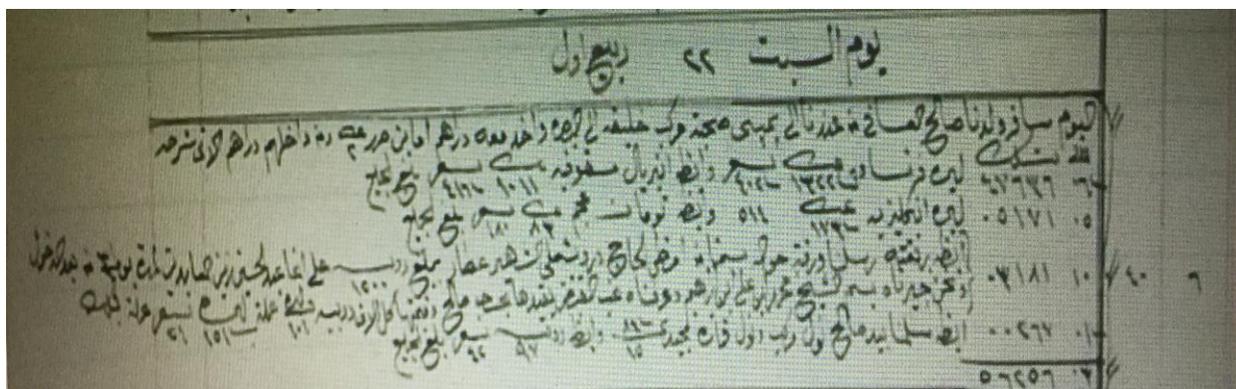


Figure 51: One of Muhammad al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated February 11, 1882, in which he mentions that his son Salih had traveled to Bombay. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, February 11, 1882, 15.

Al-Bassam family of ‘Unayzah might have been the most famous Qasimi trading house not only in India but even in all of the Qusman’s trading destinations. Several members of this family left al-Qasim for business purposes and later built economic empires with many trading agents stretching from the Hijaz to India. One branch of al-Bassam trading house reached Calcutta when it was the commercial center for British India before the emergence of Bombay. ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Hamad al-Bassam was the first merchant of al-Bassam who opened a trading shop in Calcutta in c. 1864. Like most Qasimi merchants abroad, he traded in everything that was profitable and popular, such as tea, sugar, textiles, perfume, and incense. Al-Bassam exported all these products from Calcutta to the Gulf ports, Iraq, and the Hijaz. With the turning of the century, al-Bassam’s three sons, ‘Abd al-Muhsin, Muhammad, and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, accompanied their uncle, Muhammad, to join their father in India. By the time of ‘Abd Allah’s death, his three sons were already well experienced and qualified, so they could at least retain their father’s accomplishments after his death. When ‘Abd al-Muhsin died in 1934, his brothers, Muhammad and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, carried on the family’s business. In 1938, however, Muhammad also died. Consequently, the shop steadily

declined until 1953 when ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and his sons, ‘Abd al-Rahman and ‘Abd Allah, who were born in Calcutta, decided to close their office in Calcutta and transfer their business to Bombay. Their business in Bombay was not as successful as it had been in Calcutta, so they did not keep it for a long time.²⁰² In the 1960s, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and his sons moved to Baghdad, then Beirut, before returning to Saudi Arabia.²⁰³

When ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Bassam took advantage of the economic prosperity in Calcutta and opened his commercial office there, this office was one of only two commercial offices that were opened by Najdi merchants in India. Commercial offices were then often established only by massive trading companies not by merchants working individually. However, these two offices were established by members of the al-Bassam family, which means that the al-Bassam trading family had built a substantial economic empire abroad. While this first office was opened by ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Bassam and was active for about fifty years, the other was opened by Hamad ibn Sulayman al-Bassam. However, unlike ‘Abd Allah, who spent all his life in Calcutta, Hamad closed his office in 1904 and transferred his business to Jeddah.²⁰⁴

The other branch of the al-Bassam trading house was that of the sons of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, who was killed in the battle of *Ma‘rakat al-Matar* (Rain Battle) in 1863 between the people of ‘Unayzah and Imam ‘Abd Allah ibn Faysal Al Saud. At the time of his death, Muhammad al-Bassam’s sons were still young. The four brothers, whose father left them without any properties, dramatically later built an economic empire.²⁰⁵ In a kind

²⁰² Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam, personal correspondence, Kuwait, 7 August 2019; ‘Uhud ‘Abbas Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam wa-Dawraha al-Tijari wa-al-Thaqafi fi al-‘Iraq,” *Dirasat Tarikhiyya*, Vol. 7 (September 2009), 114; Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 217.

²⁰³ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 114.

²⁰⁴ Muhammad al-Bassam, personal correspondence; Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 85.

²⁰⁵ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 4: 426.

of solidarity, the brothers' relatives wanted to support them by giving them some money. However, Hamad (1847-1906) did not accept that his brothers and himself were treated as orphans, so he told his relatives that he would be grateful if they would lend him some money in order to begin his family's business. His relatives liked his decision and lent him some money.²⁰⁶ In the beginning, he traded between 'Unayzah and Suq al-Shuyukh, in southern Iraq. When his brothers grew up and became able to help him, Hamad opened a trading shop in Jeddah. The family business continuously grew, so the four brothers decided to transfer their business to Basra. While having great success in Basra, Hamad traveled to Bombay where he opened another trading shop becoming the first person from al-Bassam trading house to open a trading shop there, while other members of his family had traded in Calcutta.²⁰⁷ Therefore, Hamad and 'Abd al-Rahman (1863-1942) became responsible for the family business in Basra while 'Abd al-'Aziz (d.1918) and 'Abd Allah (1858-1927) took care of the business in India.²⁰⁸ With this wide commercial network that extended from Najd and the Hijaz to reach Iraq and India, these four orphans whose father left them without any fortune became among the richest merchants in Najd.

Although some sources indicate that Hamad had traveled early to Bombay, it is very likely that the four brothers did not open a constant trading house there until about 1880 because 'Abd Allah mentions in his memoirs that he visited India for the first time in 1882.²⁰⁹ In fact, Abd Allah's memoirs give an example of how long the Qusman stayed in India. He mentions that he traveled to India four times. The first time, as has been already mentioned, was in 1882. It

²⁰⁶ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal interview.

²⁰⁷ Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 4: 426-27; 'Abd al-'Aziz A. al-Bassam, personal interview; Ahmad, "Usrat al-Bassam," 117.

²⁰⁸ Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 4: 426-27, 429; Ahmad, "Usrat al-Bassam," 112, 116.

²⁰⁹ Ahmad, "Usrat al-Bassam," 117; Yusuf ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muhanna, "Rihlat al-Shaykh Ibrahim ibn 'Isa ila al-Hind Sanat 1323 AH," *Darat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (April 2016), 18.

seems that ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam did not stay for a long time in India this time since he did not give many details about this trip as he would do later. ‘Abd Allah’s second trip was in c.1885, and he stayed in India for about six years until c.1891. The third trip extended to around five years from c.1892 to c.1897. His fourth, and last, trip was in c.1903, and he returned in 1913.²¹⁰ If ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Bassam is considered a typical Qasimi merchant who grew up in al-Qasim, traded abroad, and returned to die in al-Qasim, we find that he spent more than thirty years of his life away from home. While he visited al-Qasim every five to ten years, other Qasimi merchants did not.

It is significant here to highlight that ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Bassam was also a *talib ‘ilm* (a knowledge seeker). He was very interested in history, literature, and politics. When the second generation of this trading house became able to take care of the family’s business, ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam decided to return to ‘Unayzah in c.1911 after about thirty-five years of travels between Najd, the Hijaz, Iraq, and India. In ‘Unayzah, he completed his chronicle *Tuhfat al-Mushtaq fi Akhbar Najd wa-al-Hijaz wa-al-‘Iraq*, which he had begun in India. This history is considered by many specialists one of the most significant chronicles of Najdi history.²¹¹

The long stay in India, which extended to three generations, had clear cultural, intellectual, and economic influences on several members of the al-Bassam trading house. The founder of this trading house, Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam, later sent his sons, ‘Abd Allah (1878-1943) and ‘Abd al-Rahman (1887-1968), to Bombay to work with their uncles, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and ‘Abd Allah, and to help them manage the family’s business (see figure 52). Since he lived in Bombay for many years, ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Hamad al-Bassam was fluent in English

²¹⁰ Al-Muhanna, “Rihlat al-Shaykh Ibrahim ibn ‘Isa,” 18.

²¹¹ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 4: 426-29.

and Urdu.²¹² Moreover, Hamad's grandson, Hamad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Bassam (1911-1991), studied in Bombay and graduated from the medical college in 1943, becoming the first physician in Najd.²¹³

DESCRIPTION SIGNALEMENT		Wife Femme	
Profession } Merchant	Place and date of birth Lieu et date de naissance } Najd Arabia, 1878		
Residence Domicile } Bombay	Height Taille } 5 ft. 5 in.		
Colour of eyes Couleur des yeux } Black	Colour of hair Couleur des cheveux } Black		
Visible distinguishing signs Signes particuliers } Two scars on right forearm	CHILDREN ENFANTS		
Name Nom	Date of birth Date de naissance		Sex Sexe

SIGNATURE OF WIFE ET DE SA	
(Photo)	Abdulla Bin Hamad Bassam

Figure 52: The passport of 'Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Bassam (1878-1943), that was issued by the government of British India. From Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat 'Umur*, 37.

²¹² Ahmad, "Usrat al-Bassam," 117; Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat 'Umur*, 32, 36-37.

²¹³ Ahmad, "Usrat al-Bassam," 124-25.

Although many Arab merchants in India enrolled their children in Indian schools, they later realized that they needed a school that provided Arabic lessons in order to preserve their children's Arab identity. Indeed, after the famous Hijazi merchant, Muhammad 'Ali Zaynal, established *Madrasat al-Falah* (al-Falah School) in Bombay in 1925, many Arab traders enrolled their children. For instance, the famous Qasimi trader, 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan's sons, 'Ali (d. 2005) and Yusuf (d. 1977), graduated from *Madrasat al-Falah*. 'Ali later became a Saudi diplomat in Afghanistan, India, and Malaysia. Yusuf, also, worked as a Saudi political agent in Bombay in 1938, the first Saudi consul in Basra, and an official representative in Jerusalem, as well as the Saudi ambassador to India, Iran, and Spain.²¹⁴

Furthermore, the Kuwaiti government funded the establishment of *al-Madrasa al-'Arabiyya al-Kuwaytiyya fi Bombay* (The Kuwaiti Arabic School in Bombay) in 1952. Among many other Arab merchant, some of the Qusman, such as Dr. Hamad al-Bassam, who himself had graduated from an Indian school, Ahmad 'Abd Allah al-Qadi, 'Abd Allah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Bassam, and Muhammad al-'Ali al-Bassam, enrolled their children in the Kuwaiti school.²¹⁵

After the death of Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam in 1906, his son, 'Abd Allah, took charge of the family business in Bombay (see figure 53). In addition to the traditional goods in which Qasimi merchants traded, such as cardamom, coffee, tea, sugar, and textiles, 'Abd Allah al-Bassam developed the furniture store that his father had established on Chakla Street, where many Najdis lived (see figure 54). Under 'Abd Allah's management, the store became well known among the Arab merchants of Bombay.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-'Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 368-69.

²¹⁵ Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-'Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 93.

²¹⁶ Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat 'Umur*, 56-57.

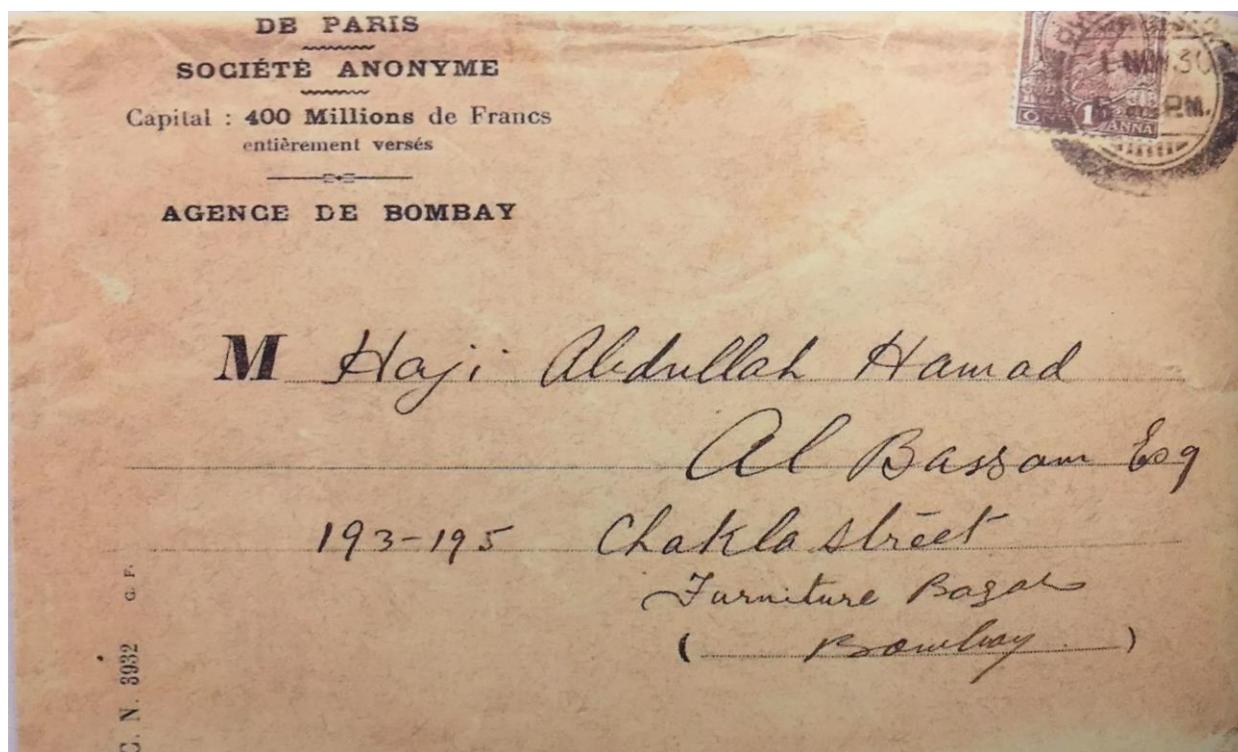


Figure 53: Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Bassam's postal address. From Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat 'Umur*, 57.



Figure 54: A present picture for 'Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Bassam's furniture store (photo by author).

Although having graduated from King Edward's Medical College Bombay, Hamad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam took care of the family business in Bombay, that had been established by his grandfather Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam. At the same time, Hamad worked at a hospital and took care of the family business. He had powerful commercial links with the trading shop of Muhammad and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Bassam in Calcutta and Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam in Bahrain. As most Qasimi traders in India, Hamad invested in exporting goods, such as spices and textiles, to the Gulf ports and transferring money from and to India.²¹⁷ He took between one to five percent as fees, according to the political and economic conditions, for the services he provided for his clients. Like most merchants around the world, Hamad was hurt by the effects of World War II. Consequently, he sent a letter in December 1943 to his client Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, and probably to all his clients, announcing that his services are available and that he was willing to export goods and transfer money. However, because of unsteady commercial condition and the frequent changes in the Indian trading regulations, he states that his clients must accept a few conditions if they wish to continue to deal with him. Hamad promised to do his best to stock all the goods his clients had ordered in advance to be exported. At the same time, he said he was not responsible for any delay or loss that might occur under any circumstances. His second condition was that any order must be paid for in advance. As his third condition, the service fee rose to three percent as long as the war continued (see figure 55). By reviewing the most important conditions that Hamad lists in his letter, it is easily seen that he, and other traders, were struggling during the war period.

²¹⁷ Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat 'Umur*, 61.

Hamad Abdulla Bassam
 "Bassam House"
 9-II, Military Square Lane,
 Fort, BOMBAY, 1
 Tele. Add: "BASSAM"

اسم الله
 محمد بن عبدالله البسام
 تفرافيا: «بسام»
 بومبي

يسرنا ان نخبر حضرتكم باننا مستعدون لانتشرفونا بقضائه من لازمكم - سواء كان ذلك
 طلب اموال من طرفنا او ارسال امول الى جهتنا حسبما تسمح به الظروف - وبما ان الاحوال
 التجارية في هذا الوقت اصبحت مضطربة وعلى غير قرار مستمر خصوصا من جهة صدور القوانين
 وتعديلها وتبديلها في اوقات لا يمكن ضبطها ومواعيد غير معروفة او متغيرة فأتنا تعرض على حضرتكم
 استعدادنا للقيام بلازمكم تحت الشروط الآتية :-
 اولاً - علينا الاجتهاد بقضا. مطلوبكم من كل وجه وبفضل ما في الامكان لابقه مصلحتكم كالركن
 انتم تزاوون العمل بأنفسكم، ولكننا لا نتحمل اية مسؤولية عن تعطيل او نقص او تلف او عدم
 اجابة الطلب اذا حالت الظروف دون ذلك او غير ذلك مما هو ليس في الحيات
 ثانياً - كل طلب يلزم ان يكون مصحوباً بما يكفيه من الدراهم
 ثالثاً - السعي مدة الحرب بالمائة ثلاثه على الصادر . اما الوارد (كاللؤلؤ مثلاً وغيره اذ سمحت
 الظروف) فسعينا عليه كالعاده
 رابعاً - يلزم افادتنا هل المطلوب تحميل المال في السفن اذا ما امكن للركب او اتنا مفوضين
 من قبلكم بهذا الخصوص
 خامساً - يلزم على كل من يقدم طلبا من العراق ان يثبت لنا « رخصة توريد »
 الداعي
 محمد بن عبدالله البسام
 بومبي ٢٥ - ١٢ - ١٣٦٢

Figure 55: A letter sent in December 1943 from Hamad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam of Bombay to his clients regarding new dealing conditions. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 123.

One of the most well-known members of al-Bassam trading house in Bombay was Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Hamad ibn Sulayman ibn Hamad. At the age of twenty-five, Salih arrived in Bombay in 1887. In the early twentieth century he became a notable merchant, trading with the Gulf in gold, currencies, dates, spices, and textiles. While residing in Bombay, Salih also possessed agricultural lands in Basra, so it is very possible that the Qusman exported the date products of their lands in Basra to India where they, or their agents, sold them in their trading shops. The remarkable development in his career occurred in 1928 when he became the commercial agent for *al-Shimagh al-Ahmar* (the Red Kufiyya), which later became the famous *Shimagh al-Bassam*.²¹⁸

Not all the members of the al-Bassam family who traveled to India were merchants. Rather, those who traveled with no money to begin their own business with or traveled while still young often were hired by their relative merchants at their shops or offices. For instance, Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam, arrived in India approximately in 1925, and worked for his merchant cousins as a secretary. Although being kin was a helpful factor to get hired by Qasimi merchants abroad, qualifications were definitely more significant. In the case of Hamad, he had studied at the Ottoman school in Mecca, so he spoke Turkish and learned English and Hindi after arriving in India. Since he was well qualified, Hamad was not considered by his employer to be merely an apprentice, as most Qasimi migrants were, but was an employee with a determined salary. Even after moving to Bahrain in the early 1930s, Hamad worked as a secretary for the famous Qasimi merchant in Bahrain, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam (c.1893-1976).²¹⁹

The al-Qadi family of ‘Unayzah was also one of the important Qasimi trading families in India. One member of the al-Qadi trading house was Hamad ibn ‘Ali al-Qadi. Hamad was born

²¹⁸ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 116.

²¹⁹ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview.

in ‘Unayzah in 1890. At the age of fourteen, he traveled for first time. Al-Qadi worked for a merchant in al-Zubayr as a record keeper for one or two years. Then, he moved to Bombay, where he worked for the al-Bassam trading house. After gaining the sufficient experience, al-Qadi decided to establish his own business. Indeed, he opened a trading office in Bombay, investing in exporting foodstuffs and textiles to the Gulf. Since his business was successful, al-Qadi expanded his trading activities by opening another office in Karachi. After spending more than forty years in Bombay, al-Qadi decided in 1947 to reside in Karachi, leaving the trading house of Bombay under the management of his son, Ibrahim, and his cousin, Ahmad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Qadi. In 1953, Hamad ultimately moved to Kuwait, where he spent the rest of his life before dying in Beirut in 1973.²²⁰

One of the documents that reveals some details about al-Qadi’s business is an announcement of his shop’s “list of prices and conditions of dealing.” In this announcement, that was dated July 24, 1941, al-Qadi clarifies his banking-like services, such as the fee on the transferred money whether to or from India, which was one percent. This announcement, also, included all the kinds of goods available at his store, like tea, sugar, spices and their prices (see figure 56).

²²⁰ Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 371, 373, 376.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، عهده ١٢٤٩ هـ - نشرة الاسعار وشروط المعاملة كادناه -

السمن على الاموال الصادرة والواردة في المائة واحد - تحويل قيمة المال مع الطلب ولا قبل سحب على المال الوارد اكثر من نصف ثمنه على شرط تعرض البيع لاجتهادنا - كل مال نشتره يكون صاحب الطلب مقيد بشروط مقابله البيع ولا علينا اي مسئولية غير اجتهادنا.

١٠٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١٢٨	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١٠٨	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١١٤	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١٥٤	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١٦٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١٧٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١٨٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
١٩٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٠٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢١٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٢٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٣٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٤٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٥٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٦٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٧٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٨٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٢٩٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٣٠٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
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٣٥٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٣٦٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٣٧٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٣٨٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٣٩٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٤٠٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
٤١٥	شاي	١٠٥	شاي
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NAME AL ALRAZI
 78000, main building, 100
 DUBAI, U.A.E.

Figure 56: A list of goods and prices available at Hamad ibn ‘Ali al-Qadi’s shop and his conditions of dealing. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 141.

Another member of this family was Ahmad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Qadi (1922-1994). When his cousin, Hamad ibn ‘Ali al-Qadi, left Bombay in 1947, Ahmad took charge of the al-Qadi trading house in the city.²²¹ Ahmad was well known among Arab merchants in Bombay since they often attended his daily luxury gathering at the royal Taj Mahal Hotel.²²²

Several members of the house of al-Hamdan of ‘Unayzah also worked in India. Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan, his younger brother, ‘Abd Allah, and, later, Muhammad’s son, ‘Ali, traveled from ‘Unayzah to India seeking livelihood. Muhammad and his brother, ‘Abd Allah, worked at ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan’s trading shop, where they had their first opportunity to work as accountants and secretaries.²²³ This experience enabled the two brothers to later become Ibn Saud’s financial managers. Indeed, Muhammad al-Hamdan was Ibn Saud’s assistant when Philby visited ‘Unayzah in 1918. Since he was al-Hamdan’s guest, Philby witnessed the arrival of al-Hamdan’s son, Ali, who “had spent four years in business at Bombay, six months at Jubail and two or three years in the Hasa.”²²⁴

It is obvious, thus, that the Qusman’s trade in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean was a connected network. Sometimes, a Qasimi trader’s agents in Bombay, Karachi, Bahrain, Kuwait, Basra, Jeddah, Buraydah, or ‘Unayzah were not merely commercial agents, but also his own brothers or relatives, which means that this network was sometimes a family business with many branches.

Since Gulf trade was completely tied with India and the importing and exporting activities were very prosperous in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the leading

²²¹ Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 377.

²²² ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview.

²²³ Hamad al-Jasir, “Min Dhikrayat al-Rahalat,” *Majallat al-‘Arab*, Vol. 17, No. 3-4 (1982), 205; Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 84.

²²⁴ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 235, 269, 285.

merchants of the Gulf decided to end the British monopoly of the shipping activities between the Gulf and India. According to some sources, this decision was caused by the irregular and unorganized trips of the British steamships in the Gulf in 1910 as well as their unfair deeds in the Gulf ports, which financially hurt many Arab merchants. The prominent Kuwaiti merchant, Jasim bin Muhammad al-Ibrahim, enthusiastically encouraged the Gulf merchants to participate in the establishment of a shipping company. Since most Arab merchants were unsatisfied with the British monopoly, several merchants supported al-Ibrahim. The ruler of Kuwait, Mubarak al-Subah, and several other members of the ruling family bought stocks in this company. Ultimately, the Gulf merchants established a shipping company called The Arab Steamers, LTD. in 1911, which provided regular service from Bombay and Karachi to the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea. Beside several merchants from Kuwait, Bahrain, Bandar Lengeh, the famous Qasimi trader in Bahrain, Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr was a co-founder of this company (see figure 5).²²⁵

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ مِنَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ فِي الْبَيْتِ ١٣١٣

بَارِي مَا بِنَاغِ الشَّيْخِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ الشَّيْخِ عَبْدِ الْغَنِيِّ الْبُرْهَيْمِ ١٣١٣

التاريخ	المبلغ
١٧ شوال ١٣١٣ مولانا محمد علي كاج صالح وبراھيم الفضل	٣٧٥
١٧ ح ٢٢ القيمة ضمانية سهم فاصتنا في شركة الزفاير باعها لنا موهيب لفرقة	٥٠٠٠
١٥ شعبان ١٣١٣ لانا محمد علي كاج صالح وبراھيم الفضل	٥٠٠
السهمنا بالشركة المذكورة عن السنة الماضية	

Figure 57: Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr’s trading record dated May 24, 1913, shows that he received Rs. 500 as a profit from The Arab Steamers. From Al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira ‘ila al-Bukhar*, 100.

²²⁵ Thacker’s *Indian Directory*, 1915, 83; al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira ‘ila al-Bukhar*, 91-95; Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 38.

The company was established with one ship Budrie, which sailed between Bombay, Karachi, and the Gulf ports. In July 1911, the company bought two other ships, Kowait and Bahrain. In the first two years the company was not only successful, but even distributed 5% of profits to the owners. The company then expanded its fleet by purchasing two more ships. With its five ships, the company was able to organize regular voyages every two weeks, serving merchants, pilgrims, and regular travelers.²²⁶

However, since the British shipping company provided weekly voyages and had a larger fleet, The Arab Steamers could not provide services better than those of the British. Consequently, travelers, including Arabs, preferred to travel and to send goods with the British company in order to avoid any delays that might have occurred in the voyages of the Arab company.²²⁷

With the outbreak of World War I, the British forces seized one of The Arab Steamers' ships to use it for military purposes. Moreover, thinking that most Arabs and Muslims were sympathetic to the Ottomans, the British restricted traveling activities between the Gulf and India. Also, the government of British India issued a regulation that The Arab Steamers had to allow non-Arabs to invest in the Company. These factors together led to the demise of the company in 1914.²²⁸

Generally, the Qusman's commercial activities were not always prosperous in India, rather, they sometimes confronted some barriers and difficulties. For example, a clash that broke out in the late 1920s between Hindus and Muslims led to a harsh effect on the Qusman trading there. In his message to 'Umar ibn Abd al-Rahman al-'Umari, Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah al-Fadil

²²⁶ Al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira' ila al-Bukhar*, 95, 97, 99, 101, 109.

²²⁷ Al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira' ila al-Bukhar*, 111.

²²⁸ Al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira' ila al-Bukhar*, 111, 113.

wrote in 1929: “a disorder occurred these past days in Bombay between the Indians and Muslims, and all the commercial activities at the shops were generally stopped.”²²⁹

The 1940s were not a stable period for the Arab merchants in British India. The Second World War and its aftermath, including the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, completely changed the old, traditional method of trade between the Gulf and India. The modern states’ borders and the new trading policies appeared as new barriers for the Gulf traders. In addition, the discovery of oil in the Gulf states led to the rise of new local jobs. All these factors together did not only discourage migration to India, but also encouraged Arab merchants in India to return home.²³⁰

²²⁹ Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 85.

²³⁰ Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat ‘Umur*, 73-74.

Chapter 4:

The Qusman's Trading Destinations in the Arabian Gulf

Iraq

Since Basra is located on the way between Kuwait and Baghdad, the *'uqaylat* caravans had frequented this city. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, some of the Qusman of *ahl al-hadra*, who were more connected to the Gulf trade, began to trade and reside in Basra. As a significant port for the Gulf trade with huge agricultural lands, the numbers of the Qusman residing in Basra gradually increased. The Qusman in Basra often traded in agricultural products, such as grains, rice, and dates.²³¹ One of the earliest Qusman who traded in Basra was 'Abd Allah al-Khunayni of 'Unayzah. According to Doughty, who visited 'Unayzah in 1877, al-Khunayni, who was the richest merchant in 'Unayzah, with a fortune of £24,000, had been a grain merchant in Basra.²³² Although al-Khunayni had traded in sugar, slaves, and horses, Doughty's account shows how grain trade in Basra was profitable for the Qusman.

The second important trading house in Basra was the house of al-Bassam. The first known member of the al-Bassam family who opened a trading shop in Basra was 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam. When his business prospered in about 1860, al-Bassam stationed his sons 'Abd al-Rahman and Sulayman in Jeddah, Ibrahim in al-Zubayr, Hamad and 'Ali in Basra, Muhammad in Damascus, and Fahad in Bahrain. 'Abd Allah's sons functioned as his commercial agents in these trading centers while he resided in 'Unayzah and frequently visited his sons in order to insure the successful development of each trading shop. It is said that 'Abd

²³¹ Ahmad, "Usrat al-Bassam," 116.

²³² Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 341, 363.

Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam was the first Najdi who founded a family business with numerous branches in several trading centers.²³³

The other trading house of al-Bassam is that of the sons of Muhammad al-Bassam, who was killed at the battle of *Ma‘rakat al-Matar* (Rain Battle) in 1863.²³⁴ Al-Bassam left four children: Hamad, who was then about sixteen years old; ‘Abd al-‘Aziz; ‘Abd Allah, who was four years old; and ‘Abd al-Rahman, who had not been born yet. Since their father did not leave any money for the children, Hamad decided to establish a family business. In the beginning, he traded between ‘Unayzah and Suq al-Shuyukh, southern Iraq. When his brothers grew up and became able to help him, Hamad opened a trading shop in Jeddah. The family business continuously expanded, so the four brothers decided to transfer their business to Basra.²³⁵ With this wide commercial network that extended from Najd and the Hijaz to reach Iraq and India, these four orphans whose father left them without any fortune became among the richest merchants in Najd.

Since Basra was, like al-Qasim, well-known for date production, many Qusman residing in Basra invested in this profitable sector. Although the trading house of al-Bassam did not specialize in specific types of trade, the four brothers bought large sectors of agricultural lands in Basra, making the date trade a part of their commercial activities. The trading house of al-Bassam, and maybe most of the Qasimi trading houses in Basra, did not only trade locally in dates, but also had large warehouses in which they stored their agricultural products, particularly dates and grains. When the season for voyages to India began, these products were loaded on boats and exported to India and Britain.²³⁶ However, al-Bassam did not only invest in dates as

²³³ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 111-12.

²³⁴ For more details about *Ma‘rakat al-Matar*, its factors, and its aftermath: Al-Bassam, *Tuhfat al-Mushtaq*, 342.

²³⁵ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 4:426-27; ‘Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 112.

²³⁶ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 112, 121.

most Qusman in Basra, but they did something unusual when they exported date-palms to al-Qasim itself. According to some sources, ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Bassam was the first person who introduced the *barhiyya* date-palm to al-Qasim. Since the *barhiyya* dates were among the tastiest kinds of dates in Basra, ‘Abd Allah carried two offshoots of *barhiyya* palms on a camel’s back in 1892 and took them to ‘Unayzah.²³⁷ Today, the Barhiyya dates are among the most beloved dates in al-Qasim.

The outbreak of World War I had a direct effect on al-Bassam’s date trade in Basra. When Britain invaded Iraq in November 1914, the British took one of al-Bassam’s lands, al-Bassamiyya, cut the date-palms, and turned the land into a military base. Although sources state that ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Bassam traveled to London in the mid-1920s to sue the British army, it is unknown if he won the case or not.²³⁸

During the life of the four brothers and founders of this economic empire, their children formed a second generation who followed the traditional pattern. While in charge of the family’s business in Basra, Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam sent his son, ‘Abd al-Rahman, to Bombay to help his uncles ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and ‘Abd Allah. After spending many years there, ‘Abd al-Rahman returned to Basra in 1940 where he traded in tea, sugar, grains, and spices, as well as managing the family’s agricultural lands. Similarly, after the death of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Muhammad al-Bassam in 1918, his son, Sulayman, took charge of the family business, so he continued to manage their agricultural lands in Basra until his death in 1958. Although ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Bassam decided to settle down in ‘Unayzah in 1913, after more than thirty years of travels, and did not leave the town until his death in 1927, his son, Sulayman, followed the family’s tradition. He left ‘Unayzah after the end of World War I and headed to

²³⁷ Al-Salman, *al-Ahwal al-Siyasiyya fi al-Qasim*, 336.

²³⁸ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 115.

Basra where he became a date trader. Sulayman continued to trade in Basra dates until his death in 1942.²³⁹

The third Qasimi trading house in Iraq was that of al-‘Assafi of ‘Unayzah. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Muhammad ibn Salih al-‘Assafi founded a trading house in Baghdad.²⁴⁰ He also bought several date-palm groves in Basra. Al-‘Assafi, and his sons, often spent summers in Basra to take care of their date groves at the time of harvest. To have some rest and to enjoy the nice weather, they spent some time during winters in al-Zubayr, in southern Iraq, before returning to Baghdad. The family’s business quickly proved an outstanding success, so al-‘Assafi’s commercial connections extended to reach India and several Arab countries. After reaching this stage, the al-‘Assafi trading house appeared as a famous and trusted cargo distributor in the Gulf.

Muhammad al-‘Assafi was one of the first Qasimi traders who directly imported goods from India and redistributed them in Iraq. His commercial records show that as early as 1881, he had connections with Arab and Indian merchants in India. While Qasimi merchants in Iraq and Bahrain often preferred to deal with the Qusman of India, al-‘Assafi’s trading papers indicate that he imported goods from Arab and Indian traders, not Qusman. It is very possible that the Qusman in India at that time had not yet become leading merchants specializing in exporting goods to the Gulf. Thus, al-‘Assafi’s papers indicate that he frequently dealt with the famous Bahraini merchant in India, Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Zayyani. In one of these records dated May 6, 1882, al-‘Assafi wrote that he had transferred Rs. 15,000 to Ibn Ibrahim as a credit for al-‘Assafi’s son, Salih (see figure 58).²⁴¹ Since Salih al-‘Assafi regularly traveled to India in

²³⁹ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 116-17.

²⁴⁰ Muhammad al-‘Ubudi, *Mu‘jam Usar ‘Unayza*, 10: 427

²⁴¹ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, May 6, 1882, 20.

order to send goods to his father in Iraq, it is highly likely that he used this credit for purchases whether from Ibn Ibrahim or other merchants. For one example of the deals between al-‘Assafi trading house and Ibn Ibrahim, Muhammad al-‘Assafi recorded on August 27, 1883, that he had received in Baghdad 82 sacks of coffee that had been sent by Ibn Ibrahim from Bombay (see figure 59).²⁴²

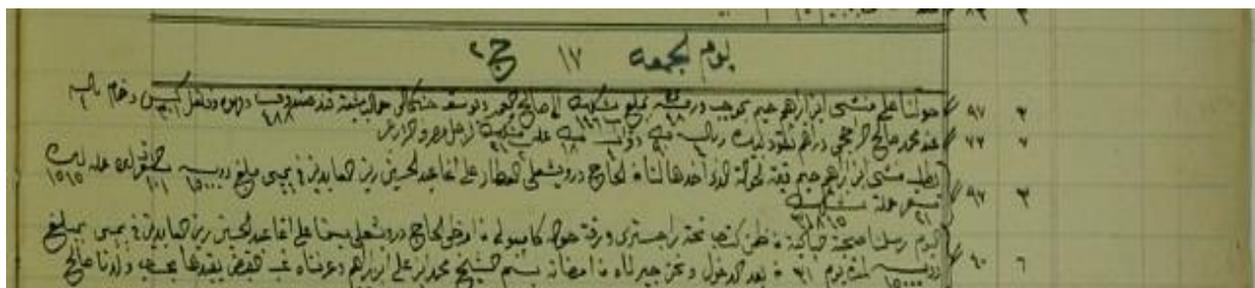


Figure 58: One of Muhammad al-‘Assafi’s commercial records indicates a transfer of money from al-‘Assafi to the Bahraini merchant in Bombay Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim. From *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, May 6, 1882, 20.

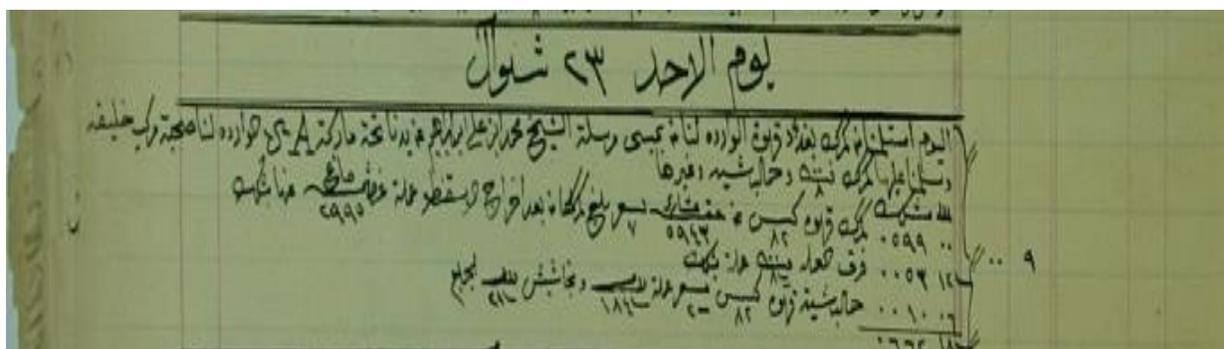


Figure 59: A record indicates that the al-‘Assafi trading house in Baghdad was a client for Ibn Ibrahim, importing from him several kinds of goods, such as coffee. From *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, August 27, 1883, 45.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the Qusman in Bahrain and India had secured respectful positions as leading traders. As a result, the number of deals between al-

²⁴² *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4979, August 27, 1883, 45.

‘Assafi trading house and these Qasimi traders remarkably increased. Al-‘Assafi’s commercial records show that the famous Qasimi pearl trader in Bahrain, Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr, was a client who transferred money to some trading houses in Iraq via al-‘Assafi trading house. Moreover, al-‘Assafi seems to have been a client for the Qusman in Bombay and Calcutta. According to one of their trading papers, al-‘Assafi received a letter on November 21, 1898, from ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and ‘Abd Allah, sons of Muhammad al-Bassam of Bombay, informing him that they had transferred Rs.1,000 to ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Bassam in Calcutta as a credit for al-‘Assafi trading house (see figure 61).²⁴³ Likewise, al-‘Assafi recorded on December 19, 1898, that a letter had arrived from Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr of Bahrain in which al-Dhukayr reports that he had transferred Rs. 8,000 to ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam as credit for al-‘Assafi (see figure 60).²⁴⁴ In another trading paper dated March 12, 1899, al-‘Assafi wrote that a letter arrived from ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam of Bombay pointing out that they had received Rs. 23,000 that had been sent by Muqbil al-Dhukayr of Bahrain as a credit for al-‘Assafi. They also mentioned that they had deducted Rs. 1,000 from this money and transferred it to ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Bassam of Calcutta as a credit for al-‘Assafi (see figure 62).²⁴⁵ These documents reveal how Qasimi merchants from Cairo to Calcutta were almost one commercial network. The Qusman in the Gulf exported pearls and dates to their counterparts in India. At the same time, those of India exported tea, sugar, rice, coffee, and textiles to their counterparts in the Gulf, who redistributed these goods to the internal regions of Najd, Iraq, and as far as Syria.

²⁴³ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, November 21, 1898.

²⁴⁴ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 19, 1898.

²⁴⁵ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, March 12, 1899.

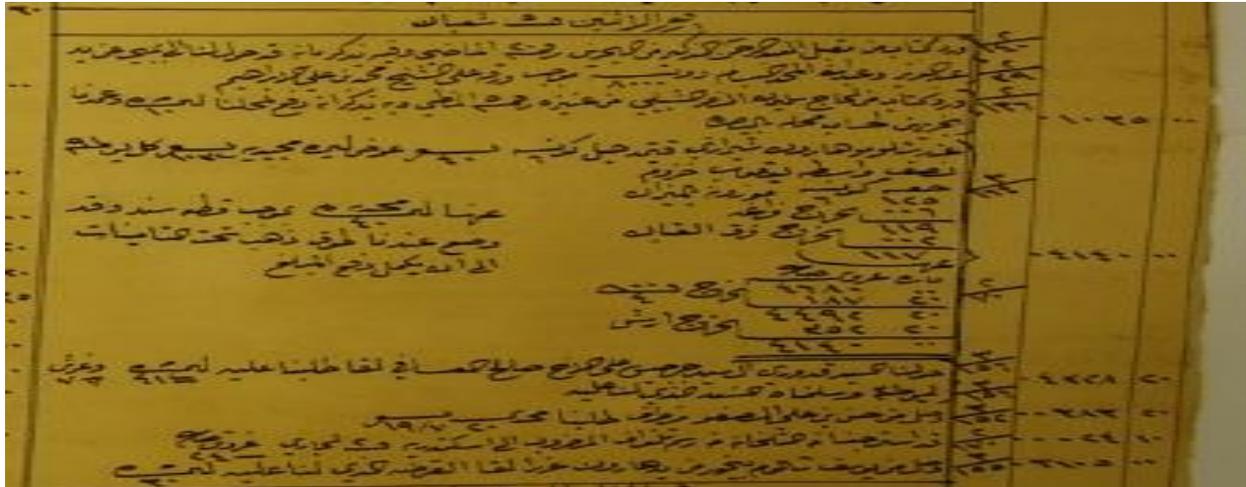


Figure 60: A record indicating a transfer of Rs. 8,000 from al-Dhukayr in Bahrain to al-Bassam in Bombay as a credit for al-‘Assafi in Baghdad. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, December 19, 1898.

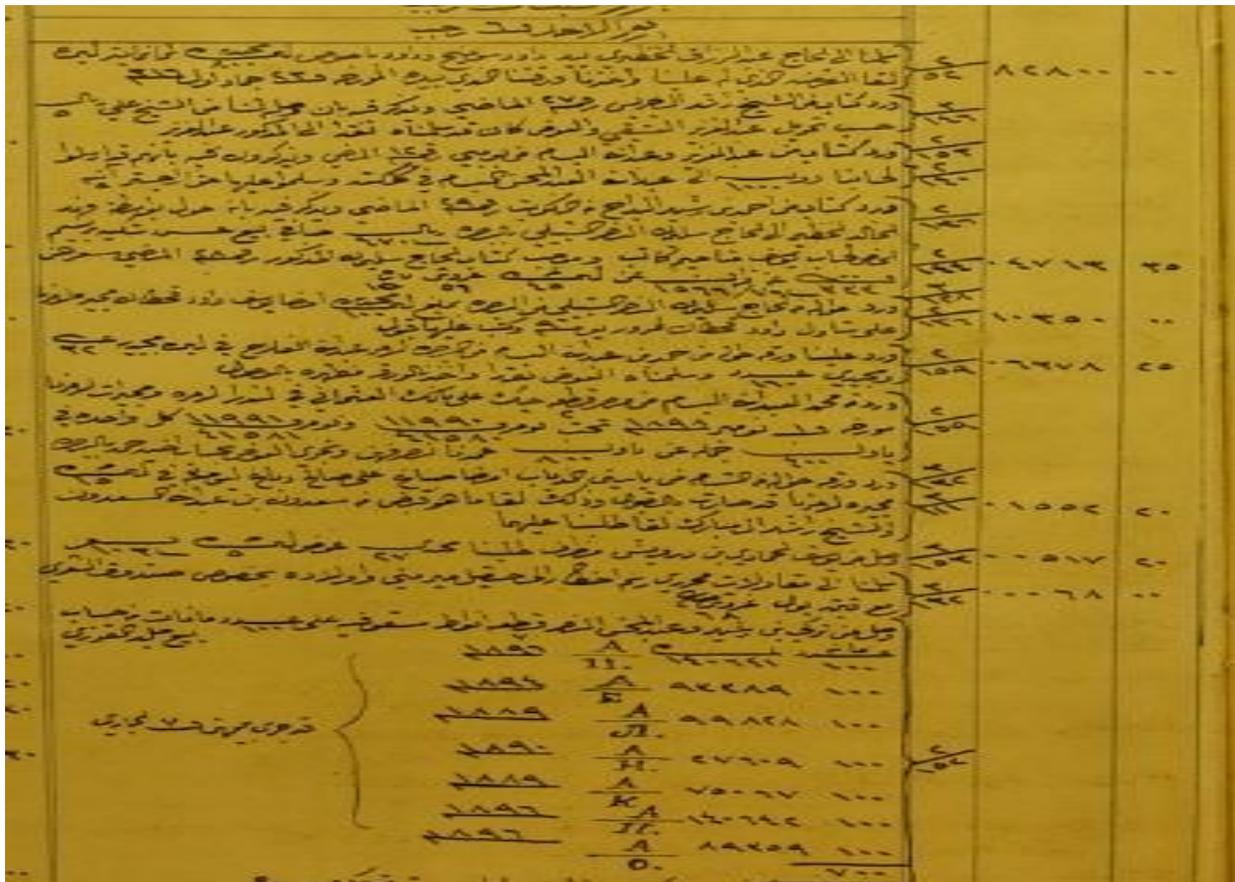


Figure 61: One of the trading papers that shows a side of al-‘Assafi’s commercial links with the trading houses of al-Bassam in Bombay and Calcutta. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, November 21, 1898.

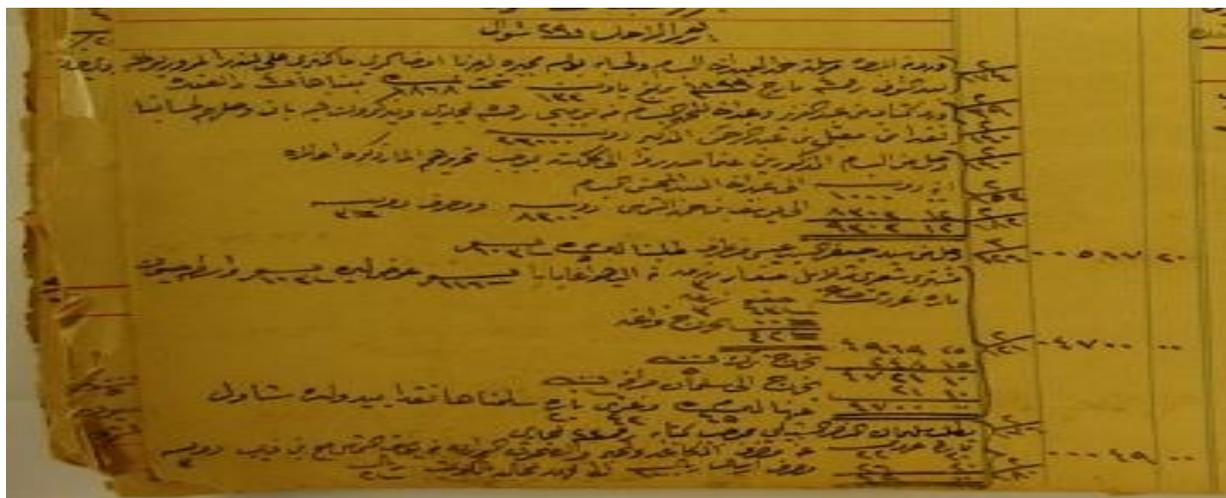


Figure 62: A record revealing the transfer of money between the Qasimi trading houses in Baghdad, Basra, Bahrain, Bombay, and Calcutta. From *Daftar Tijari, Al-'Assafi's Commercial Records*, Folder 4978, March 12, 1899.



Figure 63: The *'uqayli* 'Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Ribdi (c.1876-1965) and his son 'Abd Allah, Damascus 1912. From 'Abd al-Latif al-Wuhaybi, *al-'Uqaylat: Ma'athir al-Aba' wa-al-Ajdad 'ala Duhur al-Ibil* (Riyadh: al-'Ubaykan, 2017), 3: 827.

The al-‘Assafi trading house also had commercial links with al-Sham in addition to the connections with the Gulf ports and India. Al-‘Assafi’s commercial activities reflect how *ahl al-hadra* of al-Qasim were trading with their counterparts of *al-‘uqaylat*. According to one of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records, the famous *‘uqayli* of ‘Unayzah Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam, who was often based in Damascus, sent £300 to al-‘Assafi trading house on September 16, 1898 (see figure 64).²⁴⁶ In another record dated September 9, 1899, al-‘Assafi named ‘Ali ibn Humud al-Mushayqih (c.1820-1899) and ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Ribdi (c.1876-1965), who were two famous *‘uqaylat* of Buraydah, as his clients (see figures 63 and 65).²⁴⁷ Al-‘Assafi’s records also show that after the death of ‘Ali al-Mushayqih, his son Sulayman, who became later the political representative of Ibn Saud in Syria, continued to deal with the trading house of al-‘Assafi in Iraq (see figure 66).²⁴⁸

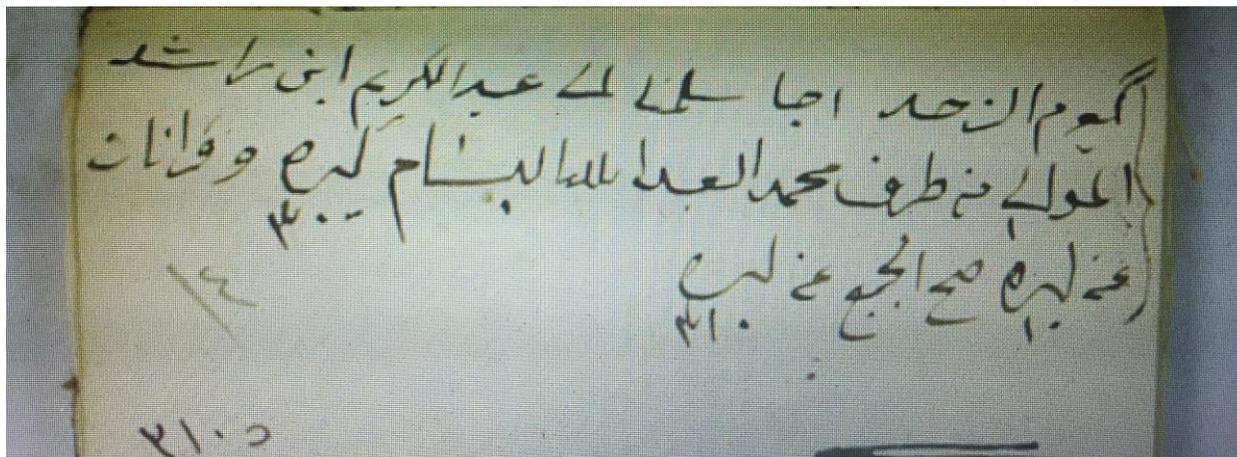


Figure 64: A commercial record dated September 16, 1898, in which al-‘Assafi mentions that he received £300 from the *‘uqayli* Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam. From *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 14.

²⁴⁶ *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 14.

²⁴⁷ *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 86; Al-Wuhaybi, *al-‘Uqaylat*, 3: 827, 5: 1740.

²⁴⁸ *Daftar Tijari*, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 92.

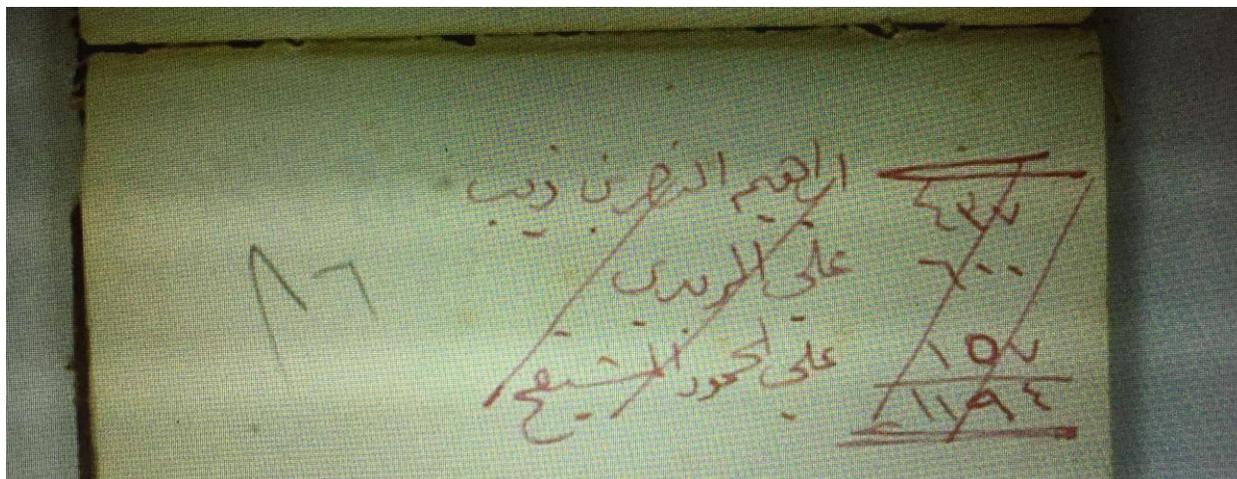


Figure 65: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated September 9, 1899, in which the ‘*uqaylat* ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Ribdi and ‘Ali ibn Humud al-Mushayqih were mentioned as clients. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 86.

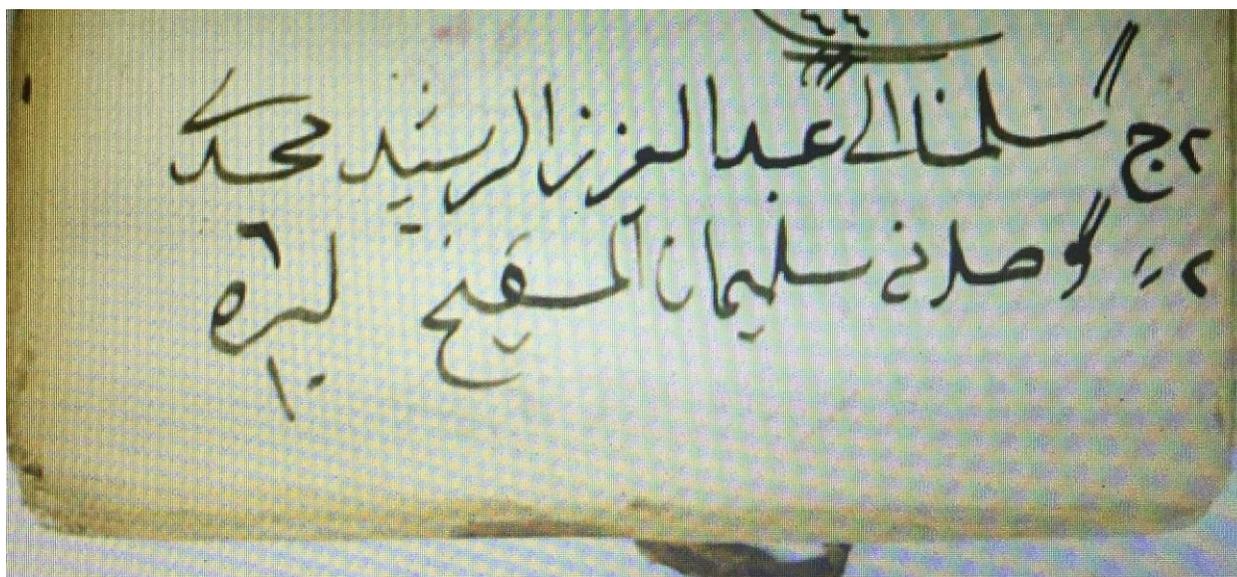


Figure 66: A commercial record dated October 6, 1899, indicates the continuity in the dealing between the ‘*uqaylat* trading house of al-Mushayqih and al-‘Assafi trading house. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 92.

Al-‘Assafi trading house was engaged in a kind of investment that was more common among the ‘*uqaylat*. This type of investment was known as *bida‘a* or *mudaraba*. The giver of the *bida‘a* is often a wealthy man who did not need to leave home and travel with the ‘*uqaylat* or a person who could not travel himself for any reason. The receiver of the *bida‘a* is usually a young

man who was willing to travel, but had no money. The profits were divided between the giver and receiver in two ways. First, if some of the *bida'a* would be spent on the expenses of the *'uqayli's* trip, the profit of the giver was two thirds and the receiver's share became one third. Second, if the *'uqayli's* trip was self-funded, then his share of the *bida'a* became two thirds and the giver took one third. Al-'Assafi's papers uncover that he frequently paid money to the *'uqaylat* as *mudaraba*. One of these commercial records shows that Hamad al-'Assafi on April 14, 1900, gave two of the *'uqaylat*, who were about to buy camels, £200 as *mudaraba*. The *'uqaylat's* share of the profit was the third without taking any responsibilities in the case of loss (see figure 67).²⁴⁹

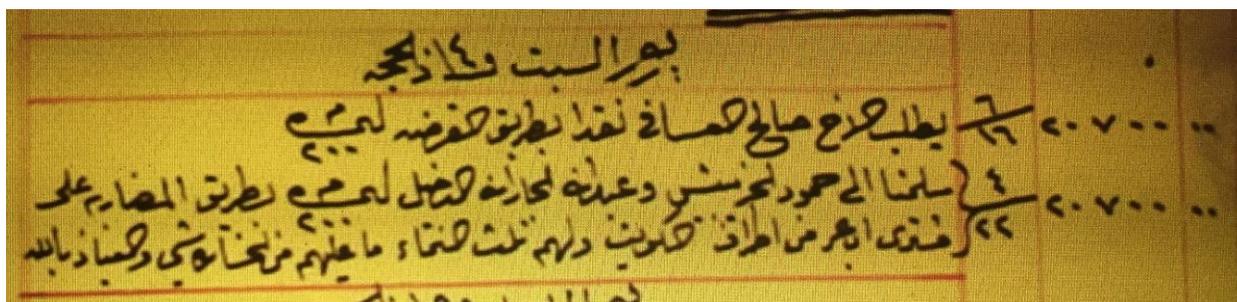


Figure 67: A commercial record shows the engagement of the al-'Assafi trading house in the *mudaraba* investment system that was more common among the *'uqaylat*. From Daftar Tijari, Al-'Assafi's Commercial Records, Folder 4978, April 14, 1900, 50.

Like most Qasimi traders abroad, al-'Assafi also worked as a banker.²⁵⁰ When a trader wanted to travel from Kuwait to Basra, he did not need to carry his money with him. Instead, he would go to one of these bankers and take a money order referenced to one specific banker in

²⁴⁹ Daftar Tijari, Al-'Assafi's Commercial Records, Folder 4978, April 14, 1900, 50.

²⁵⁰ Al-'Assafi's trading papers include many examples of money transfers, which prove that al-'Assafi trading house had wide links as it sent money to, and received from, Mecca, Jeddah, Damascus, Bahrain, Bombay, and Calcutta. However, I show in my research only two or three examples that reflect the transition of money between Qasimi traders.

Basra. Therefore, a merchant could travel from Kuwait to Basra, or anywhere, without risking his money by carrying it, and receive it upon arriving. One example of these very common transactions appears in al-‘Assafi’s commercial records. On October 15, 1899, al-‘Assafi recorded that he received a money order of £80 from Nasiriya, Iraq, in the name of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Fahad al-Bassam of ‘Unayzah, and that the money was handed to him (see figure 68).²⁵¹ In another commercial record dated October 29, 1899, al-‘Assafi wrote that the British, Ottoman, and Austrian currencies Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam had sent from Damascus to his brother ‘Ali in Basra had arrived at the al-‘Assafi trading house. After six days, these sums of money were sent to Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam in Basra, who was supposed to hand them to his cousin, ‘Ali (see figure 69).²⁵² This document is significant because it shows how the barriers between the trades of *al-‘uqaylat* and *al-hadrat* completely disappeared under some circumstances. In this case, some of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam’s sons were *‘uqaylat*, while others were *hadrat*, although they all were semi-agents for their father who spent most of his time in ‘Unayzah.

²⁵¹ Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 1898, 81.

²⁵² Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 94.

عبد الهادي صاحب كالم

جمع دخول حصر لبرك

ورود علينا من الناصرية من عبد الغفران الفهد

السلام حواله ثمانين ليرة كدين جرجي

وسلاما بيده نقد

Figure 68: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated October 15, 1899, that uncovers al-‘Assafi’s banking activities. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 81.

برك من محمد العبدان قاسم من قاسم علي بن علي

ببره حصر جرجي لبرك

عبد الكريم	٢٤٩
عثمانه	٢٨
فهاد	١١٤
المجموع	٤٧٩

لاور عبادنه الفهد لبرك

٢١٢

٢٤٧

٢٤٧

٢٤٧

Figure 69: One of al-‘Assafi’s commercial records dated October 29, 1899, shows how the money was frequently transferred between Qasimi traders of *al-‘uqaylat* and al-hadrat through al-‘Assafi trading house. From Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4954, 94.

The House of al-‘Assafi retained its position as one of the leading Qasimi trading houses abroad until 1920 when Britain colonized Iraq. Because of the new restrictions on free trade and the introduction of new policies, al-‘Assafi’s commercial activities were limited.²⁵³

The fourth Qasimi trading house in Basra is that of al-Dhukayr. The two sons of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr, Sulayman and Hamad, founded a large business. According to some sources, the house of al-Dhukayr was, during a specific period, the most famous trading house in Iraq. Unlike most Qasimi trading houses abroad that often traded in goods, al-Dhukayr trading house specialized in two kinds of businesses: real estate and date palms. They owned many properties in Iraq.²⁵⁴ Although al-Hussun mentions in his memoirs that al-Dhukayr trading house once possessed about 75 percent of the date palms in Basra, which gives a sense of the extent of al-Dhukayr’s trade, the percentage seems to be exaggerated.²⁵⁵

Bahrain

In the nineteenth century, Bahrain began to emerge as an active trading center. In 1824, the value of Bahrain’s exports was more than £320,000, more than 97% of which were pearls. Bahrain continued to develop until reaching its golden age in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century when it became the largest trading center in the Gulf, with a trade value of more than 45% of the total value of all Gulf ports’ trade.²⁵⁶ Bahrain was then the most significant importer from India. In 1875, the value of goods Bahrain imported from India was more than Rs. 1,167,000.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 5: 512-14.

²⁵⁴ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 6: 428.

²⁵⁵ Ibrahim Muhammad al-Hassun, *Khawatir wa-Dhikrayat* (Mecca: al-Maktaba al-Makiyya, 2003), 1: 20.

²⁵⁶ Al-Hummadi, “Tijarat al-Bahrain,” 47, 57.

²⁵⁷ Hasan, “Tasa‘ud Nashat al-Bahrain,” 176.

One of the major factors that enabled Bahrain to become a prosperous trading center is that its rulers, Al Khalifa, did not levy taxes on trade letting merchants enjoy an almost free trade.²⁵⁸ During this time, Bahrain possessed about 100 trading vessels that ran to al-Qatif, al-'Uqayr, Qatar, the present United Arab Emirates, the Persian coast, India, Southern Arabia, and Zanzibar.²⁵⁹ Moreover, Bahrain became the most significant pearl market in the Gulf where pearl merchants from Kuwait, Qatar, and al-Qatif sold their pearls before being exported to India and Europe.²⁶⁰ The income of Bahrain's pearling industry almost doubled in less than fifteen years, from 1893 to 1907. The income increased from Rs. 3,693,000 in 1893-1894, Rs. 5,167,000 in 1896-1897, Rs. 6,824,000 in 1899-1900, Rs. 10,275,000 in 1903-1904, Rs. 10,488,000 in 1904-1905, to dramatically reach more than Rs. 12,000,000 in 1906-1907. Bahrain then possessed about 917 pearl boats, on which more than 17,000 men worked.²⁶¹ In addition to pearl trade, Bahrain appeared as a major exporting and importing center. While importing rice, textile, coffee beans, sugar, tea, and tobacco from India and Europe, Bahrain exported pearls to India and Europe, and redistributed the goods that arrived from India and Europe to Qatar, al-Hasa', and Najd.²⁶²

This period of economic prosperity in Bahrain did not only attract many Najdis to seek livelihood there, but Bahrain's market was conceived as one of the markets inside Najd's economic sphere in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, after observing the amount of the goods coming from India, Iran, Europe, and the United States, and being redistributed by Bahrain into Najd, al-Rayhani argues that it would not be a mistake to consider Bahrain a Najdi

²⁵⁸ Hasan, "Tasa'ud Nashat al-Bahrain," 165.

²⁵⁹ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 245.

²⁶⁰ Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 91.

²⁶¹ Muhammad Hasan al-'Aydarus, *Tarikh al-Khalij al-'Arabi al-Hadith wa-al-Mu'asir*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: 'Ayn li-Dirasat wa-al-Buhuth al-Insaniyya wa-al-Ijtma'iyya, 1998), 208-09.

²⁶² Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 91.

market.²⁶³ Thus, the number of Qusman trading in Bahrain naturally increased and the caravans between al-Qasim and Bahrain became more frequent. On his way from Bahrain to Riyadh via al-‘Uqayr in November 1917, Philby encountered two Qasimi traders heading to Bahrain, one was from Buraydah and the other was from ‘Unayzah. While describing a night on the road between al-‘Uqayr and al-Hufuf, Philby states, “We shared the camping-ground with ‘Abdullah ibn Sharida, scion of a Buraida family, who was returning from a visit to the interior to his adopted home at Bahrain.”²⁶⁴ In another place, Philby writes, “We passed a large caravan from the Qasim wending its way wearily eastward with Bahrain as the goal of a wealthy ‘Anaiza merchant.”²⁶⁵

The Qusman of Bahrain can be divided according to their wealth into established merchants and beginning merchants, although both were driven out of al-Qasim by poverty. The merchants were those who came to Bahrain with some capital, so they immediately entered the market and began their own business. The beginners, on the other hand, were those who arrived in Bahrain with no money to begin with, so they often were apprentices for the previous generation of Qasimi merchants until gaining some experience and collecting enough money to begin their own business. Qasimi merchants in Bahrain were often from ‘Unayzah. Due to the available opportunities, a considerable number of the Qusman made successful businesses in Bahrain in spite of their very humble beginnings.

The earliest known Qasimi merchant in Bahrain is Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr (see figure 70). Like most Qusman, al-Dhukayr had traveled to several trading centers, such as Jeddah, India, and Basra, before settling down in Bahrain. Although the information

²⁶³ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-‘Arab*, 2:692, 695.

²⁶⁴ H. St. J. B. Philby, *The Heart of Arabia: A Record of Travel & Exploration* (London: Constable and Company LTD, 1922), 1:14.

²⁶⁵ Philby, *The Heart of Arabia*, 1:54.

about his dwelling in India is very scarce, al-Dhukayr seems to have spent a long time there, especially since some sources state that he understood Hindi.²⁶⁶ Around 1877, al-Dhukayr arrived in Bahrain, where the pearl industry was rocketing. At *suq al-tawawish* (the pearl-merchants market), al-Dhukayr might have, for the first time, heard the auctioneers jumping from hundreds to thousands of rupees. In spite of the humble budget that he brought, al-Dhukayr wanted to make his fortune.²⁶⁷ By 1890, he found himself one of the most respected pearl merchants not only in Bahrain but in the Gulf in general. Al-Dhukayr was not a person who only cared about business, but was also interested in public and cultural activities. He regularly attended the public gatherings in al-Muharraq and al-Manama. He also joined the intellectual circles where books were read and religious, national, and public issues were discussed. In his business, al-Dhukayr had clean hands and ethically practiced commerce in a greedy environment, which made his reputation outstanding. Since he was a social and intellectual person, in addition to his economic status, al-Dhukayr was titled: *Fakhr al-Tujjar* (Pride of Merchants).²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Al-'Anqari, "A'lam wa-Tarajim," 178.

²⁶⁷ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza'ir al-Lu'lu'*, 11; Al-'Anqari, "A'lam wa-Tarajim," 178; Al-Ghunaym, *Qira'at*, 15.

²⁶⁸ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza'ir al-Lu'lu'*, 12-13.



Figure 70: Fakhr al-Tujjar (the Pride of Merchants) Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr.
From Al-Ibrahim, *Min al-Shira‘ ila al-Bukhar*, 102.

Although based in Bahrain and well-known as a pearl merchant, at the same time al-Dhukayr had trading shops in Jeddah and Basra. According to some sources, al-Dhukayr decided to return home after getting old. Indeed, he spent the rest of his life in ‘Unayzah until his death in c. 1922.²⁶⁹ Since he was primarily a pearl merchant, however, it is highly likely that he decided to leave Bahrain and return home after noticing the steady decline of the pearl industry.

²⁶⁹ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 6: 428.

Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dhukayr (c.1883-1944) (the nephew of the previously mentioned famous pearl merchant), was another Qasimi merchant in Bahrain. In 1895, Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz accompanied his uncle Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman to Kuwait. Since the junior Muqbil was only twelve years old, the senior Muqbil left him at the house of Shaykh Yusuf ibn Ibrahim to learn with the latter’s children while he went to Bahrain. In 1896, Mubarak al-Subah killed his two brothers Muhammad, who was the Amir, and Jarrah, becoming the Amir of Kuwait. Shaykh Yusuf fled from Kuwait since he was one of the previous Amir’s relatives. The junior Muqbil, then, traveled to Bahrain. While living in his uncle’s house, the junior Muqbil began to work for some Bahraini merchants as a writer and record keeper.²⁷⁰

Later, Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dhukayr left Bahrain and moved to al-Hasa. Although it is unclear when that actually occurred, he was Ibn Saud’s administrator of al-Hasa’s finance department in 1924. Al-Dhukayr retained this occupation until resigning in 1930.²⁷¹ Since the government occupations had no specific salaries when al-Dhukayr was appointed at al-Hasa finance administration, it is unlikely that he stopped his business. After his resignation, however, al-Dhukayr was naturally more active in business. In the 1930s, he had strong links with the Qusman of Bahrain, particularly Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, as it is shown in the following pages.

²⁷⁰ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 6: 429-30.

²⁷¹ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 6: 431.

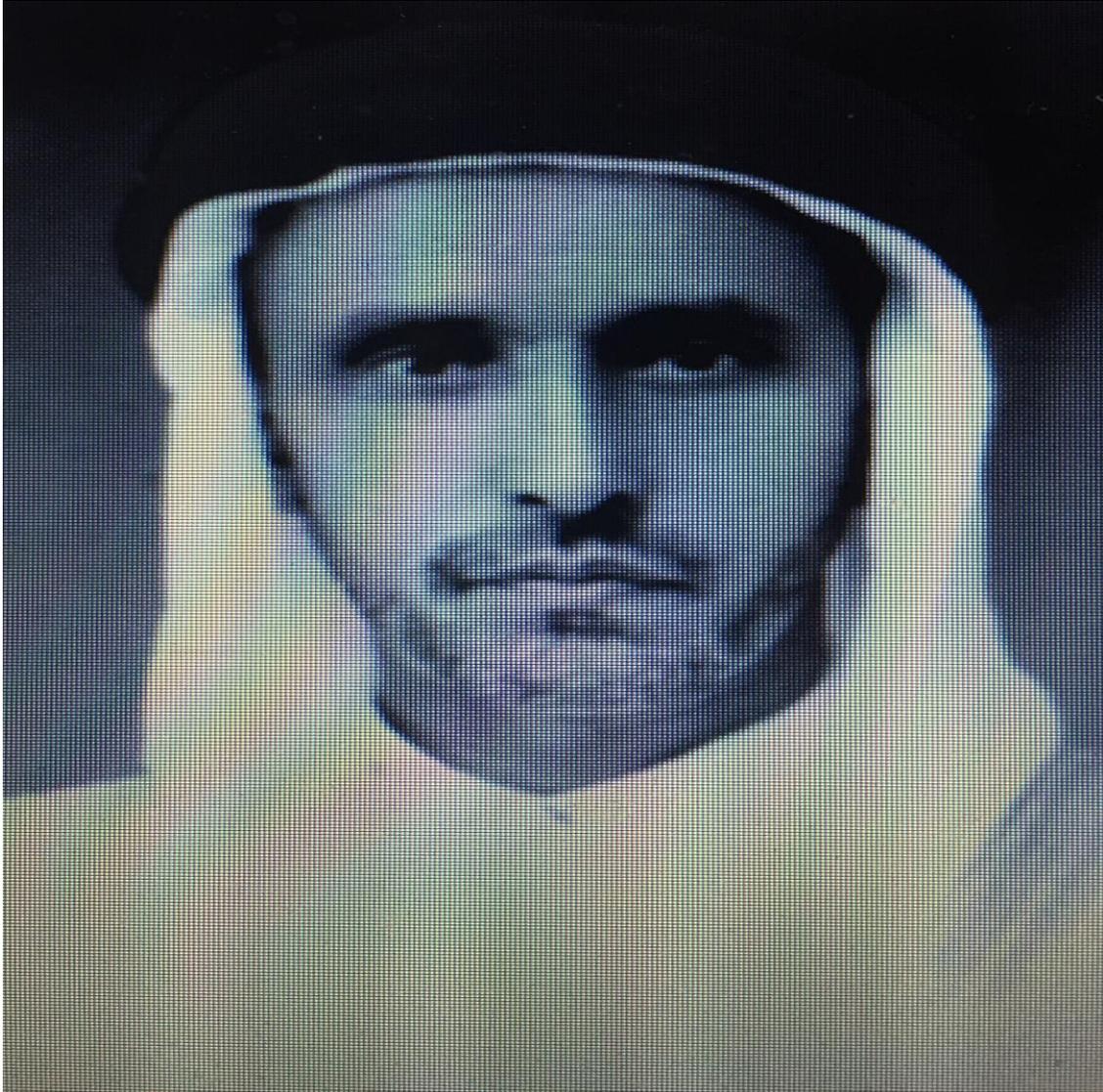


Figure 71: The arguably wealthiest merchant in Bahrain, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam (c.1893-1976). From Al-Badir, “al-Bassam,” 84.

The famous ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam (1893-1976), who later became among the leading merchants of the Bahraini market, is an appropriate example of the second generation of the Qusman in Bahrain (see figure 71). When he was about twelve, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz left ‘Unayzah for the first time in the company of his father heading to Mecca. ‘Ali al-Bassam hoped that the prosperous trading activities in Mecca could help him find a job and pay off his debts in ‘Unayzah. After two years in Mecca, however, ‘Ali found that his debts had inflated, so he

returned to ‘Unayzah. When he turned fifteen, in 1907, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz left ‘Unayzah again for Basra, where he was received by his cousin, Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam, who was a prominent trader there. Since he did not find a job in Basra, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz traveled to Kuwait, where conditions were no better than Basra for him. He was about to return to ‘Unayzah empty-handed, when he received a letter from Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Qadi, a Qasimi trader in Bahrain, which changed ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s destiny. Al-Qadi told al-Bassam that he might find a job if he came to Bahrain. After arriving in Bahrain, al-Qadi helped al-Bassam to find a job at the famous Bahraini trading house of al-Qusaybi. Although the work environment at al-Qusaybi’s was not satisfactory for al-Bassam since he was lodged with many workers at the same place, al-Bassam worked for al-Qusaybi until he paid off all his father’s debts.²⁷²

After becoming familiar with life in Bahrain, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam began to look for better opportunities. Indeed, he had the chance to work as a records keeper for the famous Bahraini pearl merchant, Yusuf Kanu, who provided al-Bassam with a private room. While working for Kanu, al-Bassam recognized that Bahrain was a very promising market for starting his own business. Therefore, he decided to keep working for Kanu in the mornings and to take care of his own business in the evenings. To assist him, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz hired his cousin, Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam, who had just arrived from India, to help manage his business. When he saw that his business was growing, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz decided to quit his job at Kanu’s and to devote all his time to his own business.²⁷³

In 1920, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam opened his trading shop in the market of al-Manama (see figure 72). At the beginning, he was a commercial agent for his cousins in India, importing

²⁷² ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview; ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Badir, “al-Bassam: Rihlat al-Arzaq wa-al-Dhahab wa-al-‘Aqarat,” *Majallat al-Iqtisad*, No. 477 (September 2012), 84-85.

²⁷³ Al-Badir, “al-Bassam,” 85.

from them foodstuffs, such as rice, sugar, tea, spices, and grains. He was a distributor of these foodstuffs not only inside Bahrain, but also to the other Gulf ports. Al-Bassam greatly benefited from the foodstuff trading, becoming one of the leading merchants in Bahrain by the age of thirty.²⁷⁴



Figure 72: The historical market of Manama (photograph by author).

Unlike most Qasimi traders abroad who followed the pattern of the traditional trade, al-Bassam realized that new trading sectors had just emerged and that he should vary his investments. At the same time when most merchants in the Gulf were still investing in the

²⁷⁴ Al-Badir, “al-Bassam,” 86.

pearling industry, although it had already begun to decline, al-Bassam invested heavily in the gold trade. He became the commercial agent for Swiss Bank, from which al-Bassam bought gold and retailed it to gold traders in the Gulf. Moreover, while some merchants in the Gulf were still making jokes about traders investing in real estate, claiming that the latter “put their money in dust,” al-Bassam was eagerly investing in this sector. Since he invested in some sectors that were abandoned by the majority of merchants, al-Bassam achieved incomparable success (see figure 73).²⁷⁵



Figure 73: A monumental shop sign on which the name of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam appears in the historical Manama market as one of unforgettable merchants in Bahrain (photograph by author).

²⁷⁵ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal interview; Al-Badir, “al-Bassam,” 86-87.

Like most of the Qusman in Bahrain who re-exported surplus goods to Najd in general and al-Qasim in particular, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam exported goods to the ports of Eastern Arabia, such as al-Jubayl and al-Khobar. Furthermore, unlike many merchants who rented shipping boats, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was the only Qasimi merchant who possessed his own shipping boat and used it in transporting goods between Bahrain and the ports of al-Hasa. Since it was not common for Qasimi merchants to possess a boat, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was called the *nawkhada* (captain).²⁷⁶ This boat was able to carry up to 2,000 sacks that weighed more than 440,000 pounds. He exported all kinds of goods that usually were imported by Najd through Bahrain, such as rice and sugar. At the ports of al-Hasa, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz had some clients, such as al-Suhaymi, who carried these goods to al-Qasim.²⁷⁷



Figure 74: Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam (1888-1949). From Al-Bassam, the cover of *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*.

²⁷⁶ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal interview.

²⁷⁷ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview.

Another famous Qasimi merchant of the second generation in Bahrain was Sulayman ibn Hamad ibn Sulayman al-Bassam (1888-1949), who arrived in 1905 (see figure 74).²⁷⁸ Although being only seventeen years old when arriving in Bahrain, al-Bassam was fortunate because his father, who had been a famous merchant in Calcutta, had provided him with some money to begin his business. Al-Bassam's first trading activity began after opening a small shop at the market of Manama in association with his father's old friend, Mansur al-Khunayni. It is highly likely that Sulayman's father did not want his beginner son to walk the first steps in business alone, although he had enough money to do so. The two Qasimi merchants imported incense, perfume, and silk from India, and sold them at their trading shop (see figure 75). Under the supervision of the experienced Qasimi merchant, al-Khunayni, al-Bassam learned the secrets of success.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 45, 60.

²⁷⁹ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 59, 66.

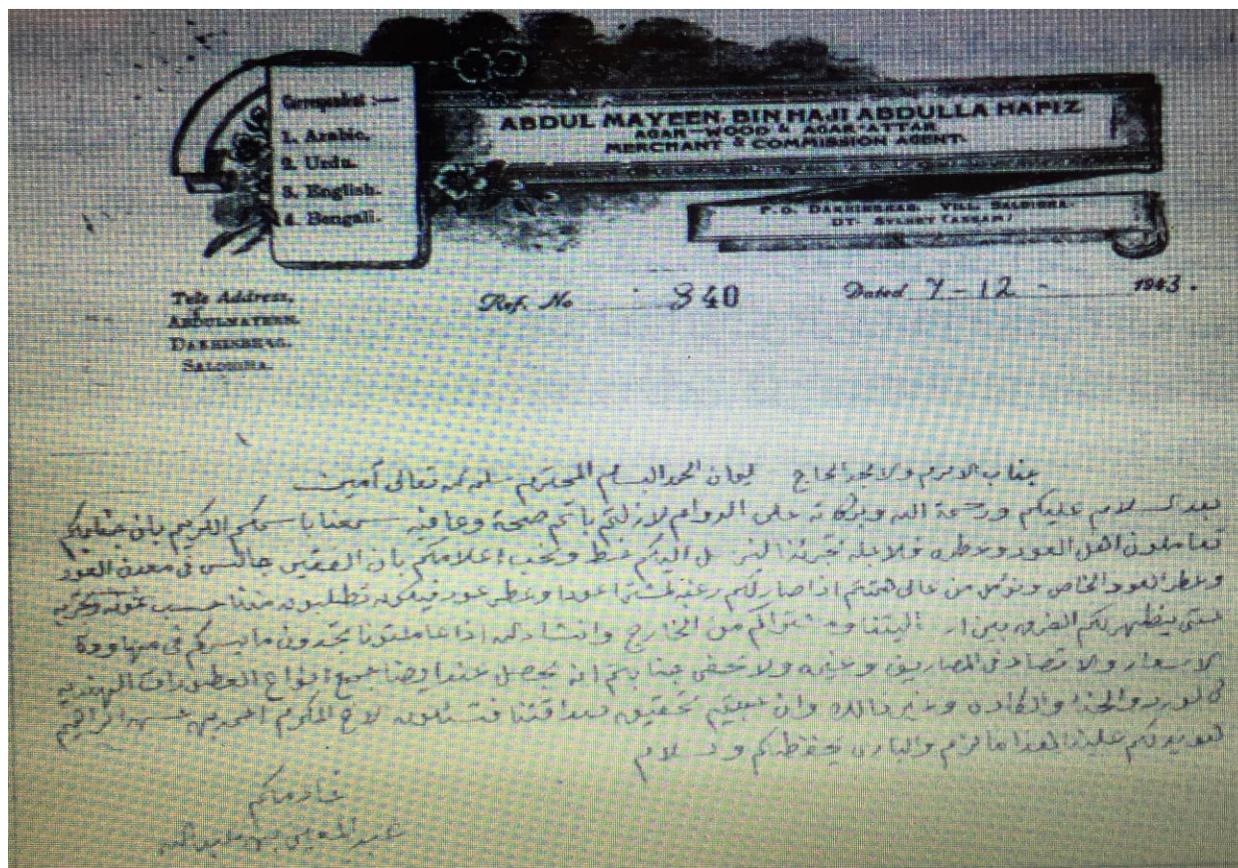


Figure 75: A letter written on December 7, 1943, by ‘Abd al-Mu‘in ‘Abd Allah, a perfume and incense Indian merchant. ‘Abd Allah told Sulayman al-Bassam that he had heard of al-Bassam as a perfume and incense trader and offered to send samples to al-Bassam. ‘Abd Allah promised that his prices would be appropriate if al-Bassam became a client. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 149.

After five years of profitable work in Bahrain, Sulayman received a letter in 1910 from his father, Hamad, who asked him to come to Mecca, where Hamad lived. Indeed, Sulayman left the shop under the management of his associate, al-Khunayni, and traveled to Mecca. Upon arriving in Mecca, Sulayman realized that his father had summoned him in order to have him married. Ironically, at the same time, Sulayman and his father got married to the two daughters of Muhammad ibn Hamad al-Bassam. Sulayman’s marriage extended his vacation to three years,

during which time his wife gave birth to a girl, who was named after Sulayman's mother, Husa.²⁸⁰

Since travel for the Qusman was a tradition, Sulayman left Mecca and returned to Bahrain in 1913. After a few months, nevertheless, Hamad al-Bassam died, so Sulayman quickly returned to Mecca to take care of his and his father's families. After some hesitation, Sulayman found that 'Unayzah would be the most appropriate place for the family to live. He, thus, found himself forced to settle down in 'Unayzah for a year because of these familial conditions.²⁸¹

In 1914, Sulayman al-Bassam left his family in 'Unayzah and returned to Bahrain. Unfortunately, Sulayman's arrival coincided with a harsh decline in the economic activities of Bahrain due to the First World War, which forced many Qusman to return home. Although Sulayman's associate, Mansur al-Khunayni, was one of those who left Bahrain during this time, Sulayman had already decided to invest in Bahrain. For eleven years, Sulayman devoted his time to his trade, even though he sometimes visited his family in 'Unayzah. In 1925, he felt, unlike most Qusman, that Bahrain for him was more than merely a trading destination. Thus, Sulayman decided to bring his family and to make Bahrain home.²⁸²

Upon settling down, Sulayman rented a store in 1926 for Rs. 280 per year (see figure 76). In the following year he rented two stores for Rs. 550 annually with a contract of eight years (see figure 77). It seems that his business was prosperous, so he rented two stores instead of one to offer more room for his goods. Indeed, during this time, Sulayman expanded his interests from only importing incense, perfume, and silk to also import foods, such as rice, sugar, coffee, and

²⁸⁰ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 68, 73.

²⁸¹ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 74-76.

²⁸² Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 78, 81, 83.

tea from India, and ghee and dates from al-Hasa. Therefore, he became a leading goods distributor in Bahrain.²⁸³

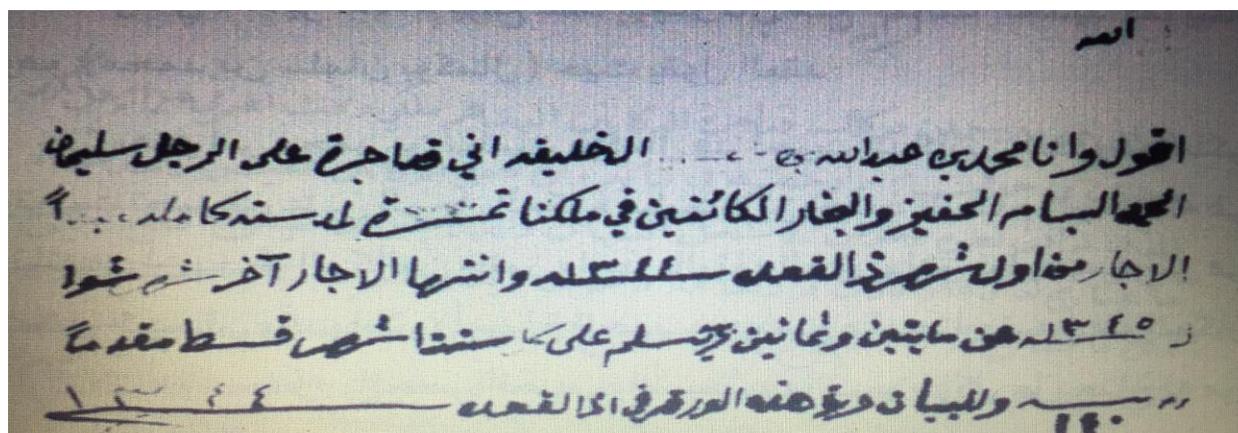


Figure 76: A contract proving that Sulayman al-Hamad al-Bassam rented a store from Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Khalifa in 1926. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 101.

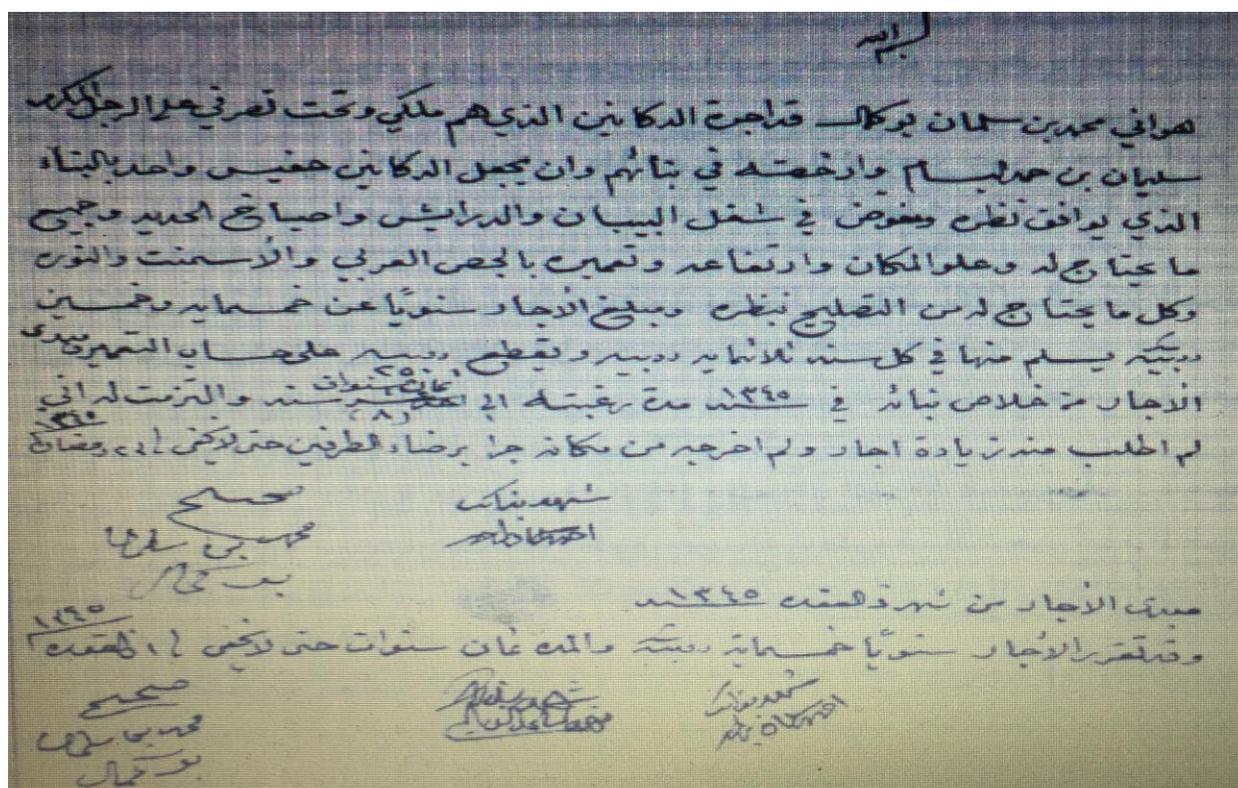


Figure 77: According to this contract, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam rented two stores from Muhammad ibn Salman bu Kamal in 1927. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 103.

²⁸³ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 96, 100-03.

Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam's commercial activities seem to have gone further than importing goods from as far as Bombay and Calcutta and redistributing them in Bahrain and al-Hasa. According to one letter, al-Bassam had commercial links with Syrian merchants. In 1944, Muhammad Musa al-Tawil of Damascus sent a letter to al-Bassam informing him that the sums al-Bassam had sent in Indian currency, rupee, were not accepted by local banks anymore. Moreover, the Syrian merchant asked al-Bassam if he could recommend any available goods in Bahrain, whether from India or any other country (see figure 78).²⁸⁴ This letter proves that al-Bassam exported goods to, and imported from, Syria as well.

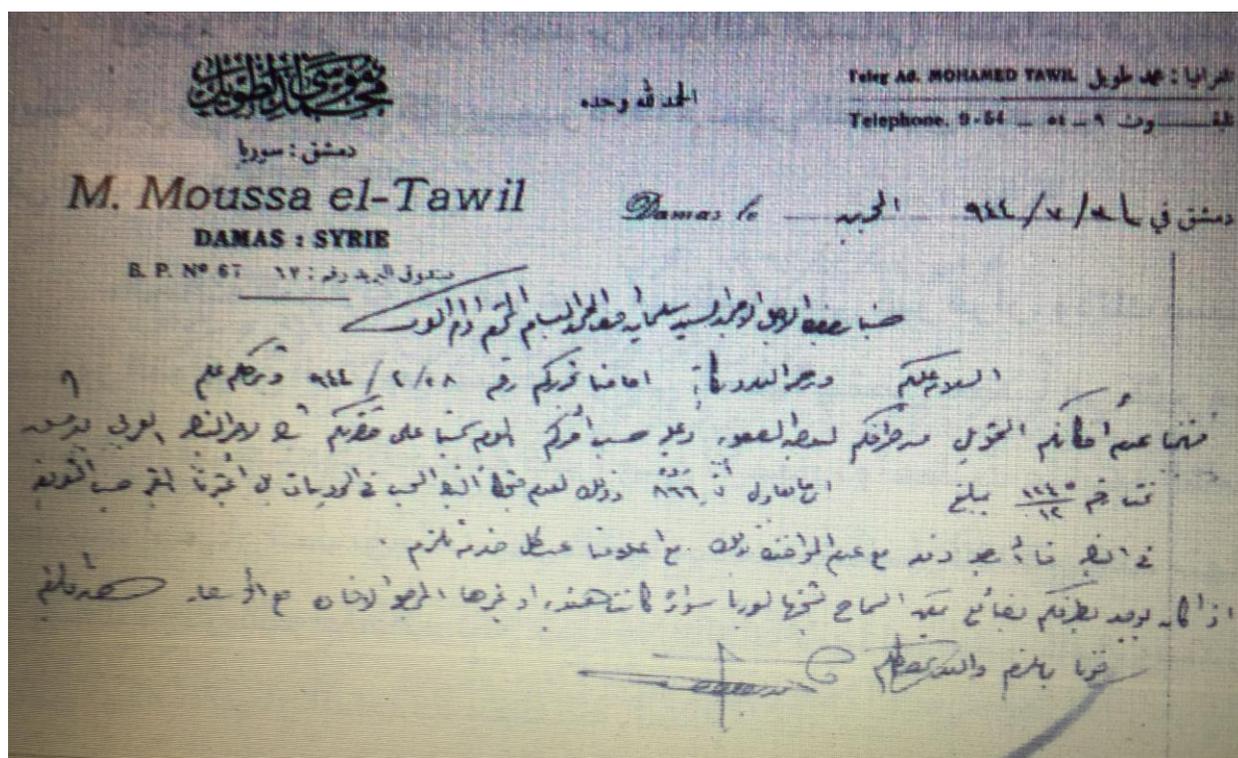


Figure 78: A letter proving that Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam had commercial links with Damascus' merchants. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 127.

²⁸⁴ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 126.

Likewise, another letter indicates that in addition to his deals with Qasimi traders, Sulayman al-Bassam was a commercial agent for some leading Kuwaiti merchants in Bombay. On 30 June 1942, ‘Ali al-Humud al-Shayi’ of Kuwait begged al-Bassam to do his best in distributing al-Shayi’s cargo of coffee beans, that he had sent to al-Bassam, whether in or outside of Bahrain. Al-Shayi’ also informed al-Bassam that he would send a shipment of textiles (see figure 79).

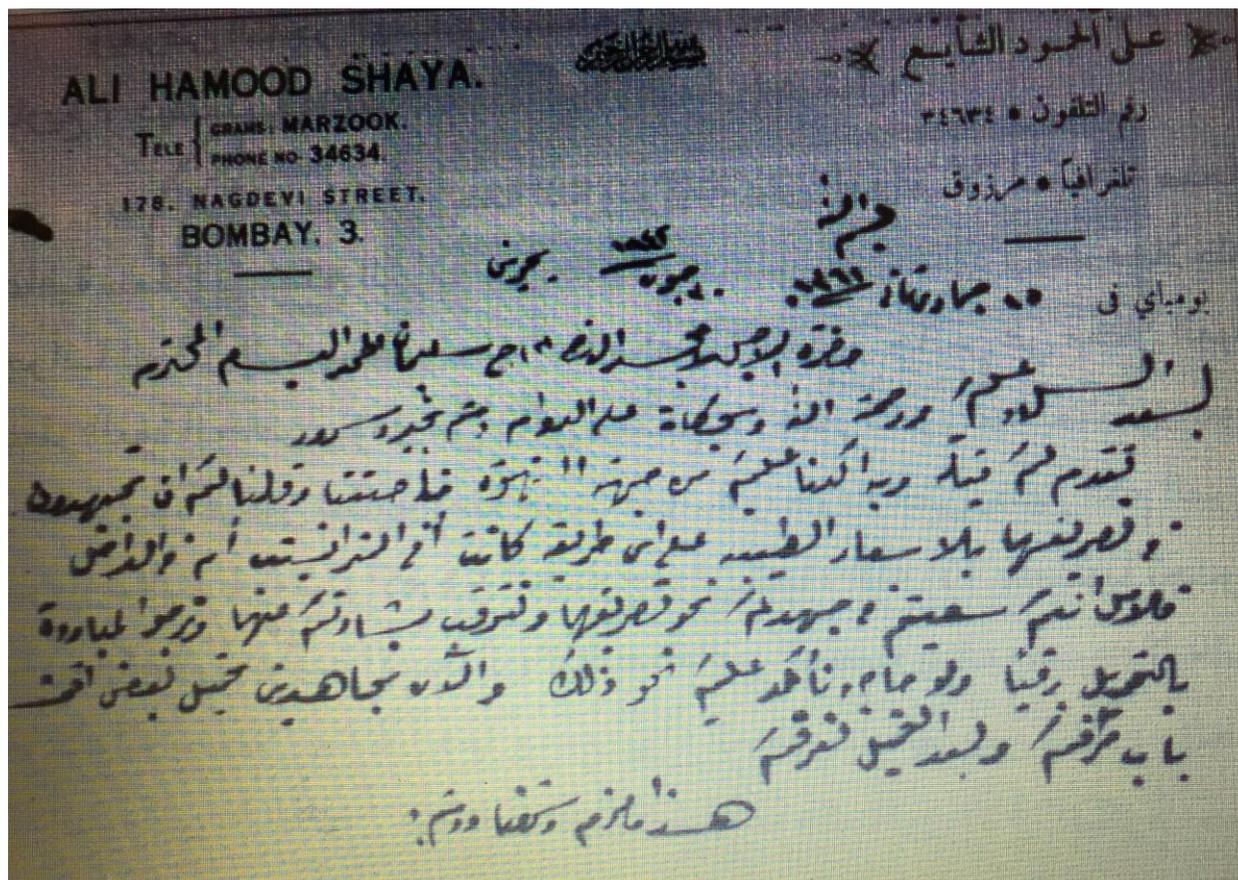


Figure 79: A letter from ‘Ali al-Shayi’, based in Bombay, to his commercial agent Sulayman al-Bassam in which the former insisted that the latter quickly dispose of the commodities al-Shayi’ had delivered. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 147.

Like most of Qasimi traders abroad, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam was interested in trading with Najd by exporting goods from Bahrain via the port al-‘Uqayr. Although no trading letters were found between al-Bassam and merchants in al-Qasim specifically, or Najd generally,

there are some letters between him and Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dhukayr of ‘Unayzah, who had resided in Bahrain before moving to al-Hasa. Al-Dhukayr might have been the commercial agent of al-Bassam in al-Hasa, according to a letter he sent to al-Bassam, in which he explains the reasons for the decline in al-Hasa’s date market. Possibly, al-Dhukayr bought dates from al-Hasa and exported them to al-Bassam in Bahrain. At the same time, he might have received and taken care of the cargo that al-Bassam sent to the port of al-‘Uqayr. Other than the letters sent between al-Dhukayr and al-Bassam, there is a letter from al-Bassam to the headmaster of al-‘Uqayr customs, which proves that al-Bassam frequently exported goods to Najd via al-‘Uqayr. Although undated, the latter is supposed to be sent in the late 1920s or early 1930s, which was the prosperous period of al-‘Uqayr. In this letter, al-Bassam complains of the unqualified staff at al-‘Uqayr customs who deliberately delayed the cargo and did not care about the quality of saving goods at the customs’ storage, which might have damaged the cargo (see figure 80).²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 154.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

من
 جناب حضرة القوم نافع جارك مملكة نجد ومطعمان
 الى
 الموقر والامير الفاضل
 سلاماً واحداً كما
 بعد فديتكم ولدينا نرجو ان نثبت شكركم اولى الامر مما يعقل مساعينا النجايد في سائر الشهور
 في وقت هي اوج ما يكون الى المساعدة والتعاضد ما من شأنه ان يكون حايث دون نمو التجارة وتوسع نطاقها
 على ان يراعى التجار ويحفظ الاستبشار والتفادى بالمستقل ان يكون على رأس الذخيرة بغير مطلق بقدر التجارة لا
 ويسمى لتعريفها والذلة ما يهبط من العزيم بكل الوسائل الممكنة ولقد كان للمعاملة التي يادقها الوكلاء القصر
 من موقوف الجرك وما يصحب ذلك من تعطيل الدول والاحتفاظ بما يشبه هذا العمل من الضرر وعدم الارتكبات
 الى ما يدير الوكلاء من الملاحظات الضرورية لحفظ الدول والوقوف على حيز النصل كل ذلك ما يكون حايثاً دون نشاط
 الروح التجارية وتغير صلواته
 ونظراً لجمارك على وجه كبير في هذا السبيل لوزن وجهة ورثة اختصاصك فقط بل من وجهة عرق التجارة وتربك
 وتشجيع العاملين بها - واول ما يجب على دولنا ان نعمله ان يرهق بينهم بين التجار او وكلاء التجار وما طيبة وان
 يعطوا من الرضا والرفق لو ان خلقوا عريضة جديدة هي خارجة عن موضوعهم فصلاً بقية صحتهم من تفويض النظام
 وقد جاز لتطبيقه لعمد كانت البلاد موزونة منذ طلال السنين
 وهذه الرضا التي نرسن هذه الكلمة تمهيداً لها لانشك ان في تحقيقه فائدة كبرى للوطنين على اننا نسلم لحضرتكم
 اولاً بالعمل على ذلك ما يشكوا من الوكلاء بالمعدين منطوق الجرك والوكلاء هم ناية عن التجار
 بجملة منطوق الجرك ان يرفعوا عن اعصابهم حكماً غيرهم وان يطردوا روع العنت والفساد من بينهم
 اوان يساروا بالبداهة بالاولى فاولا وجهم حتى لا تقع الهمم بين الطرفين وتضع المسؤولية ويكون التجار الضحية
 عدم تعطيل الدول والامن على تجارة سواء من التفرغ من السفن او الدرك مع الجمال
 حفظ كل وسائل الحفظ داخل مستودعات الجرك
 اعتبار كلمة التجارة فيما يتعلق بالرباياتهم على ان يعمل التاجر بتجهيزه فيما خذ توفيق الحاج عبد العزيز الذي يقول
 ما اذا امرت بالمارع على العمل بهذه المود المنوعدة تكونوا علمتم بوجوبهم المقدس ويكون ذلك مستجماً لساعة الرضا
 ما من شأنه ان يزيد في نمو التجارة وتوسيع نطاقها
 ويجب ان ينسب مع الاعراض راً ضد محيط التربة وتمش هذه بصدف وان انطوى
 ان وقت لم يجمع اجيب او توفيقه شايح الطول بيسر فعدا امهات الجرك
 واجب على كل من يراه بها تروء

Figure 80: A letter sent from Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam to the headmaster of the custom house at the port of al-‘Uqayr. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 155.

The economic sector in any country is naturally affected by the local and global changes and developments. This was true in the case of the Qusman’s commercial activities in the Gulf and India. For example, when the excavating activities for oil began in the Saudi eastern province, many local people were employed by the American companies, which caused a remarkable shortage in workers at date-palm groves in al-Hasa. Since several Qasimi merchants in al-Hasa and Bahrain were trading in dates, this change hurt them. In August 1937 (the season of date harvest), Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dhukayr sent a letter to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-

Another example of the impact of the local and global changes on the Qusman's trade in the Gulf and India is stated in two letters sent in March and May 1944 from the trading shop of the brothers Muhammad and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Bassam of Calcutta to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam in Bahrain regarding a new regulation for tea exportation (see figure 82). It is obvious from the brothers' letters that they were responses to other letters sent by Sulayman in which he complained about the frequent delays of tea shipments. The brothers responded that the delays were caused by new regulations issued by India, which, from their perspective, ended the privilege of free trade (see figure 83).²⁸⁷ Since they, either in Bahrain or India, were very interested in the tea trade, Qasimi traders must have been hurt by India's new commercial regulations. These letters that indicate that Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam retained strong commercial links with Qasimi merchants, especially those of al-Bassam trading house, in both Bombay, from which he imported textiles, and Calcutta, from which he imported tea. Moreover, in the second letter that was sent in May, the brothers point out that they received the Rs.50,000 that Sulayman had transferred from Bahrain via Hamad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam in Bombay, which reflects that the Qusman worked as one commercial network.

²⁸⁷ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 114.

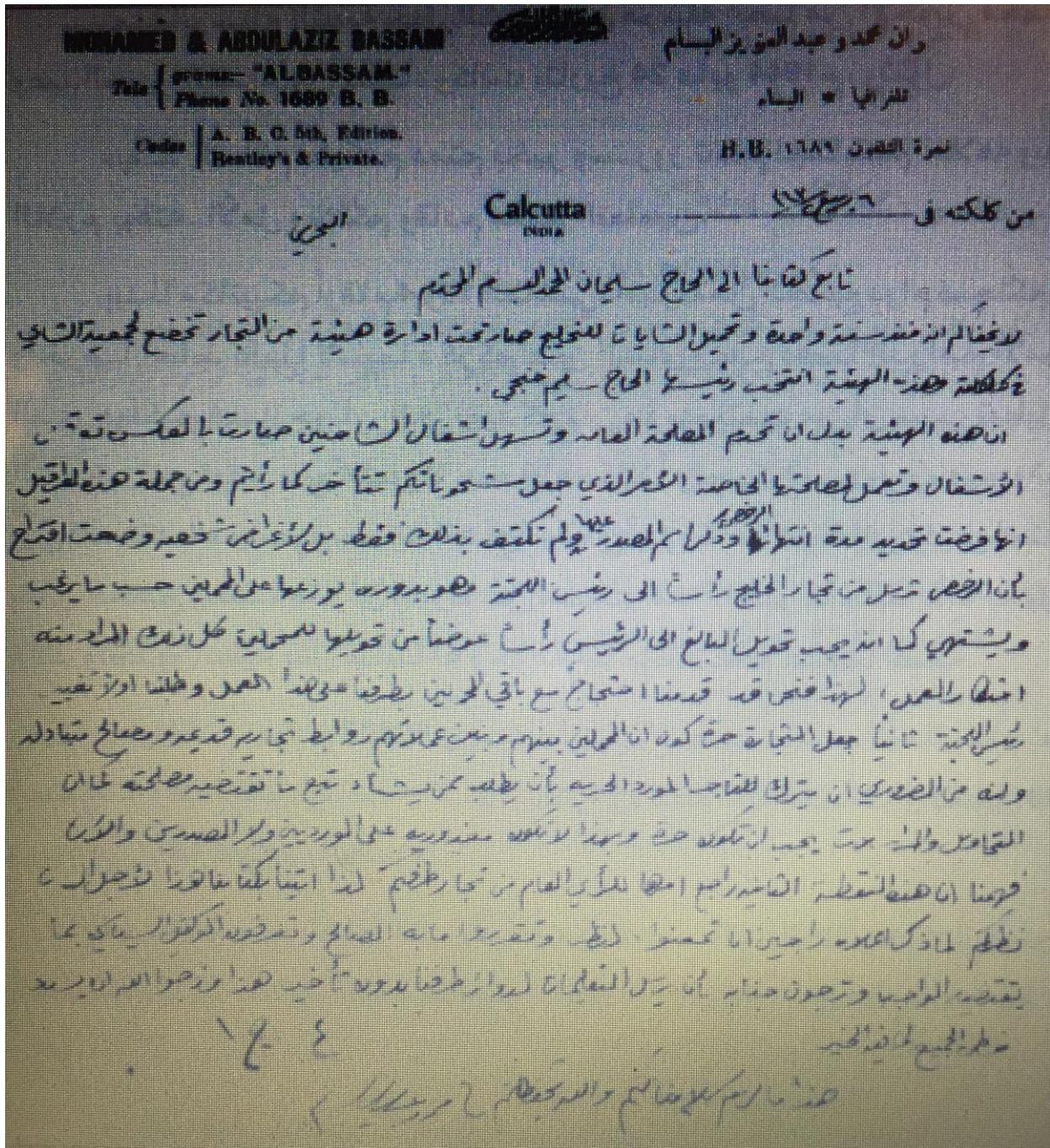


Figure 82: A letter sent from Muhammad and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam in March 1944 to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam regarding new Indian regulations on tea exportation. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 115.

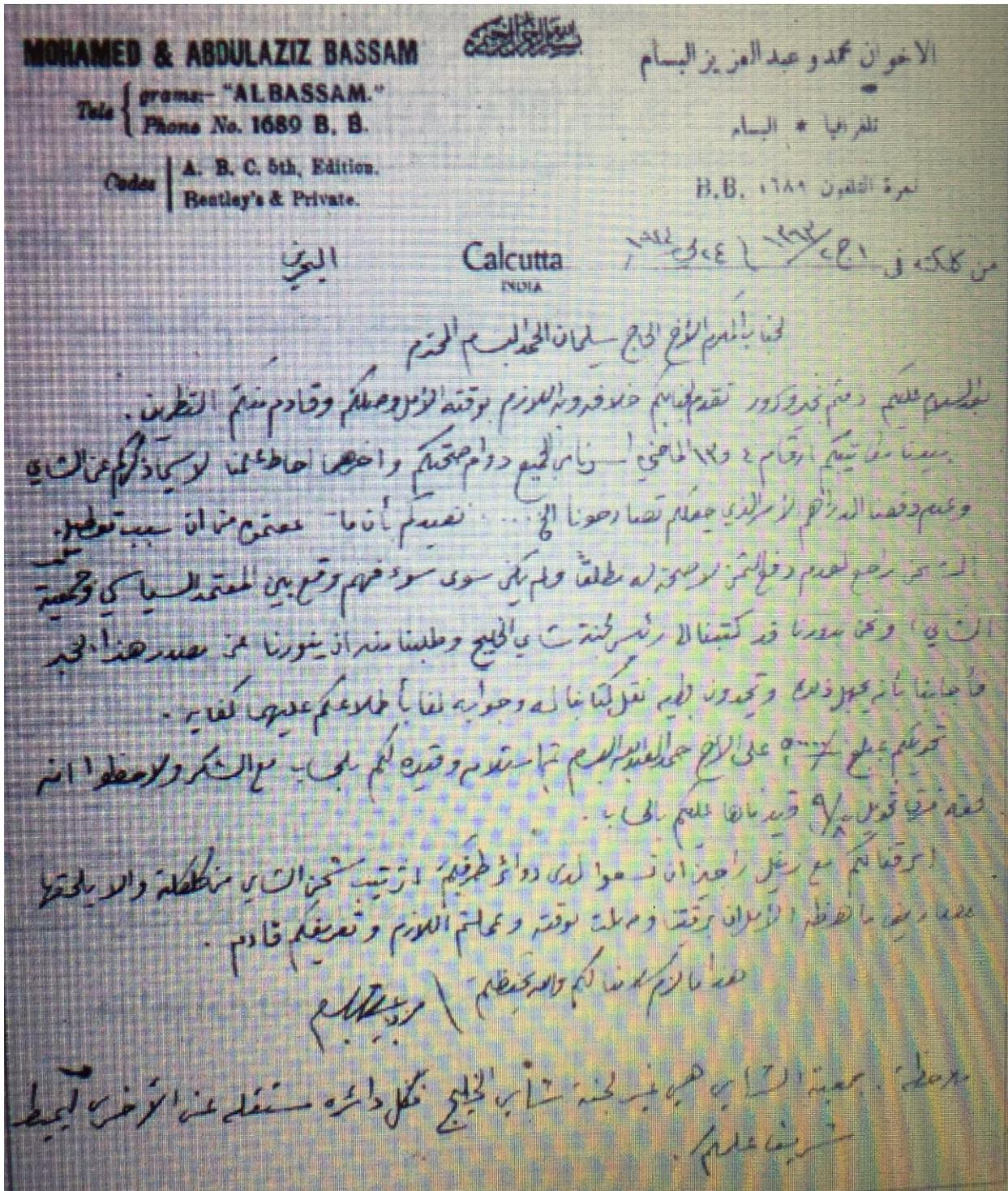


Figure 83: A letter sent from Muhammad and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam in May 1944 to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam regarding the cause of delays in tea shipments from Calcutta to Bahrain. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 117.

As a well-known distributor of rice in Bahrain, Sulayman al-Bassam's trade was affected by natural events. For instance, 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan of Bombay sent a letter to al-Bassam in September 1945 informing al-Bassam that heavy rains in that year caused a shortage in rice production. In the same letter, al-Fawzan mentions that the pearl market was completely depressed after the peace agreement with Japan (see figure 84). This letter implies that al-Fawzan exported rice from Bombay to al-Bassam in Bahrain, so al-Fawzan explains the causes of the shortage for his client. Likewise, the letter uncovers how World War II revived the Gulf's pearling industry because Japan was unable to export its cultured pearls. Indeed, in another letter sent in July 1941, al-Fawzan tells al-Bassam that pearl prices in Bombay notably recovered (see figure 85).²⁸⁸ It is highly likely that al-Bassam had exported pearls from Bahrain to al-Fawzan in Bombay, so the latter informed the former that Bombay's pearl market severely declined as soon as the war ended.

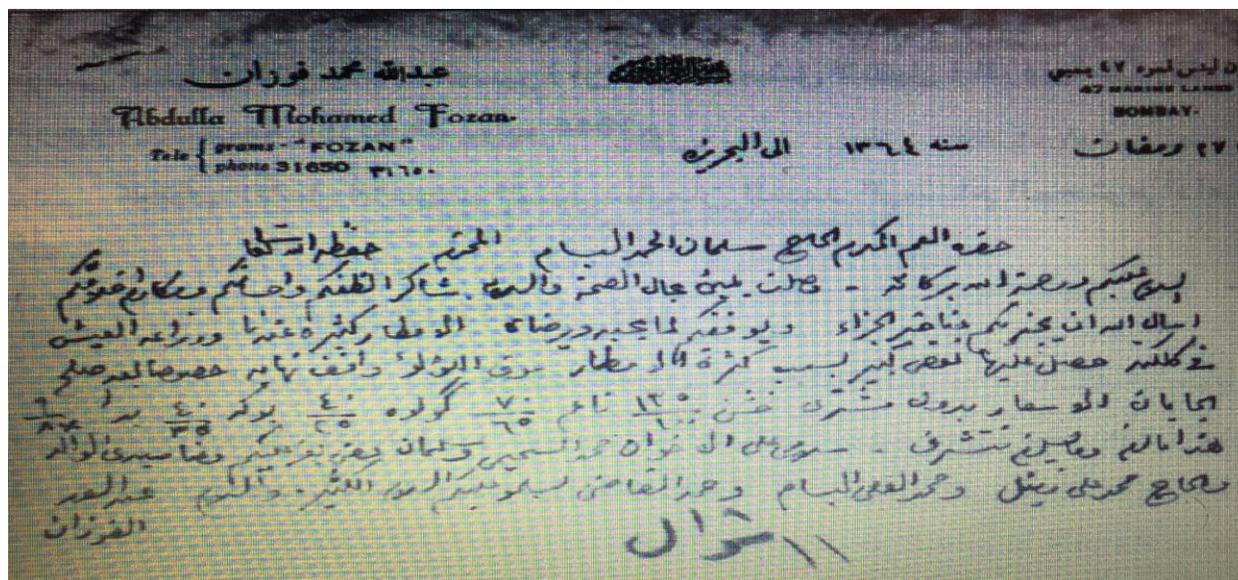


Figure 84: A letter sent from 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam in 1945 regarding the shortage in rice production in India because of the heavy rains. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 125.

²⁸⁸ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 124, 143.

بسم الله في يومه ١٧ جماد الثاني ١٣٦٠
 OFFICE 25469
 RESIDENCE 87525
 حفة الم سليمان العم البسام التتم
 السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته لتأمد عن كتبكم ارجو ان يكون المانع في
 الاصل كثير في بيبي وقد انقطع الم الماص مع داخل الهند ووقف حركه
 الحديد كما انه انقطع اسلاك الهاتف في الهند وازداد اسلاك
 الذهب في بيبي الراهة واحد اي بالمهاية مائة مثل الم النظر وطلب
 يمكن بعد يوم عشرة يصلح الطريق انه الم بيبي مطر نسل الله يكتب
 غير الجاه زاد طرفنا كثيرا حاله مع تحمل قسم كبير الم الله والله
 والله انكار حاله مع تحمل بيبي الم الم الله الله مع
 عشرين الف جوفيه
 انشا الله في سنة لنا باح حساب الكسبي وقاية هدي الحساب
 الرزق كثير يطرفنا حاله هلا ب زعفران ررب ب كحل ب
 هرة ب دار دخان ب القطن زاد حاله ب اسكان ب
 ١٦ ١٥ ٢٧ ٢٥
 فضة ب ذهب ب جنة ب سرق اللؤلؤ ب
 ٦٣ ١٢٤ ٤٧٦ ٢٨
 كثير والاسلام طيب لوز كثير اعنيا الهند يشترى من باسعد
 لو بالو غير الم الم الله لاسد في الم الم الله خط الم الله
 سعة فقهه لوز الم الم الله الم الم الم الم الم الم الم الم
 عبد القدر العززان

Figure 85: A letter sent in July 1941 from al-Fawzan of Bombay to Syलयman ibn Hamad al-Bassam of Bahrain regarding the increase of prices, including the Gulf pearls. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 143.

The Qusman's third generation in Bahrain can be represented by Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam who arrived in the early 1930s. Hamad was a qualified person since he spoke Turkish, English, and Hindi. In addition to his proficiency with languages, he had long experience as a secretary, as he had worked for his relatives in India for about five years. After moving to Bahrain, Hamad was hired by 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Ali al-Bassam as his own secretary. Hamad's job at 'Abd al-'Aziz's shop began daily in the early mornings until the sunset. After the shop was closed by dark, they went to 'Abd al-'Aziz's house to complete their daily records and calculations until midnight.²⁸⁹

A perfect example of the Qusman's humble beginnings in Bahrain that later turned into remarkable successes is Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Zamil. As already mentioned, al-Zamil came to Bahrain c. 1944 while in his mid-teens and began as an apprentice for his merchant uncle. Ironically, al-Zamil began his business with only Rs. 1.00 by which he traded in soccer balls. According to his account, balls that he used to know in 'Unayzah were made of merely rolled material. However, he saw the new manufactured balls for the first time in his life in Bahrain. He found them sold at one shop for half a rupee each and at another one for Rs. 3.00 each. Al-Zamil then bought two balls from the first shop with his Rs. 1.00 and went to the other one and sold them for Rs. 2.00 each, immediately growing his capital from Rs. 1.00 to Rs. 4.00. Although this beginning seems humble, al-Zamil, at the time, considered it a great success and felt extremely happy with it. As he said, al-Zamil hence knew the path of business and took it.²⁹⁰

The house of al-Zamil was one of the famous Qasimi trading families in Bahrain. 'Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Zamil (1897-1961), the founder of Zamil Group, which is today one of the leading companies in the Middle East employing more than 21,000 employees, began his career

²⁸⁹ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, personal interview.

²⁹⁰ Al-Zamil, personal interview.

in the 1930s in Bahrain.²⁹¹ He was the uncle of Muhammad al-Zamil, just mentioned in the previous paragraph, for whom Muhammad was an apprentice. ‘Abd Allah al-Zamil opened a shop in Bahrain trading in rugs that were imported from Iran, *dilal* (sing. *dalla*, coffee pots) and *shumugh* (sing. *shimagh*, kufiyya) from Syria, and barley from Iraq.²⁹²

Kuwait

Since Kuwait was not an agricultural land and its inhabitants were not good at industry, trade was necessary for Kuwaitis. As early as the town was founded in the early eighteenth century, Kuwaitis imported most of their needs from neighboring Basra and exported pearls to Baghdad. The town’s commercial links steadily extended, reaching as far as India.²⁹³ As its trade grew, Kuwait’s dependence on seaborne trade increased. While the value of its sea imports was about Rs. 500,000 in 1839, the value of goods imported via sea by Kuwait amounted to almost Rs. 5,000,000 in 1905.²⁹⁴ Kuwait’s exports, on the other hand, grew in the early twentieth century, especially in the pearling sector with a value of more than Rs. 1,000,000 in the years of 1906 and 1907. During this time, Kuwait possessed about 461 pearling boats, on which more than 6,000 men worked. In only five years, Kuwait’s income from the pearling industry grew 500 percent reaching Rs. 6,000,000 in 1912 with about 812 pearling boats.²⁹⁵

As has already been mentioned, al-Qasim’s external trade is divided into two major types: the trade of the *‘uqaylat* and the trade of *ahl al-hadra*. The *‘uqaylat* exported animals, particularly camels, horses, and sheep, as well as some agricultural and animal products to Iraq,

²⁹¹ Zamil Group’s official website: <http://www.zamil.com/history.html>.

²⁹² Al-Zamil, personal interview.

²⁹³ Al-Rishid, *Tarikh al-Kuwait*, 61-62.

²⁹⁴ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Wujud al-Hindi fi al-Khalij*, 35.

²⁹⁵ Al-‘Aydarus, *Tarikh al-Khalij*, 207-08.

al-Sham, Egypt, and the Hijaz. When returning from these trading centers, they imported clothes, utensils, coffee, cardamom, and sugar. *Ahl al-hadra*, on the other hand, migrated to the ports of the Arabian Gulf whether to work or to trade. Kuwait, thus, was the sole destination that was frequented both by the *'uqaylat* and *ahl al-hadra*.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Kuwait was not only a commercial destination for the Qusman, but even might have been their most significant destination. Indeed, Colonel Hamilton, the English Political Agent in Kuwait who visited Buraydah in 1916, emphasized Kuwait's commercial significance for al-Qasim by describing Kuwait as "the lever of Qasim."²⁹⁶ Moreover, al-'Umari finds that forty of the trading letters exchanged between his grandfather Sulayman ibn Muhammad al-'Umari of Buraydah and 'Uthman ibn Rashid al-Humaydi of Kuwait were exchanged in 1915 and 1916, concluding that Kuwait during these years was al-Qasim's main commercial outlet.²⁹⁷

Although this monograph is focused on *ahl al-hadra* of the Qusman who migrated to the Gulf and some of whom later went further to India, the division between the *'uqaylat* and *ahl al-hadra* in the case of Kuwait is hardly seen. For instance, while on his way from Riyadh to Kuwait in 1918, Philby encountered a caravan of about twenty persons among whom was Mansur ibn Sharida and more than twenty camels returning from Kuwait and heading to Buraydah.²⁹⁸ Although al-Sharida was one of the *'uqaylat's amirs*, he actively traded with Kuwait. Of course, he was not an exception, but, rather, he was only one example out of many.

Maybe the only clear difference between al-Qasim's *'uqaylat* and *ahl al-hadra* in the case of Kuwait is that the *'uqaylat* naturally preferred not to settle down, but to move as they

²⁹⁶ Diary of Colonel Hamilton's Visit to Nejd 1918 (19 September 1917 - 28 December 1918), The British Library (BL): India Office (IO) IOR/R/15/5/104.

²⁹⁷ Al-'Umari, *Watha'iq 'A'iliyya*, 807.

²⁹⁸ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 372.

were always goods carriers. *Ahl al-hadra*, on the other hand, often migrated to the Gulf ports and stayed there for a several months, years, or permanently in some cases whether working there or trading. Thus, the Qusman who resided in Kuwait whether for a short time, months, or for years, might be considered of *ahl al-hadra* while those who went to Kuwait to sell or buy goods for a few days at Kuwait's markets were more likely to be of the *'uqaylat*. Of course, this was not always the case, as some of the *'uqaylat* stayed in Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt up to twenty years.

Unlike Bahrain which was a center for the Qusman's merchant class, Kuwait was a center for both the Qusman's working class and merchant class. While most Qusman who migrated to Bahrain were from 'Unayzah, the Qusman of Kuwait were from Buraydah, 'Unayzah, and from the rest of al-Qasim's towns and villages. Since Buraydah's merchant class were often *'uqaylat*, its working class found a great need for labor in Kuwait. In contrast, *ahl al-hadra* of 'Unayzah in Kuwait were often merchants. Of course, exceptions always existed in both sides. For instance, several members of al-Muzayni family of Buraydah were notable merchants in Kuwait. On the other side, a few migrants from 'Unayzah were workers.

Thus, the following discussion of the Qusman's presence in Kuwait is divided into two major parts: first, the Qusman's working class and, second, the Qusman's merchant class. One example of this working class is Muhammad al-Ardah of Buraydah.²⁹⁹ Al-Ardah was born c.1908. Al-Ardah lost his father by the time he was ten. When his mother remarried, al-Ardah felt that the new husband did not want him to be part of the household. Therefore, the young man migrated to Kuwait, where his uncle, Muhammad al-'Ujayri, had preceded. Although al-Ardah's son, 'Abd al-Rahman, does not know when his father migrated to Kuwait, it is very likely that he was in his late teens then since most of the Qusman of his, and following, generations left al-

²⁹⁹ All the information about al-Ardah was obtained from his son 'Abd al-Rahman, personal interview, Buraydah, 23 July 2018.

Qasim while in their late teens. Thus, al-Ardah traveled to Kuwait approximately in the mid of the 1920s.

The first work al-Ardah got in Kuwait was pearl fishing. On the same pearling boat, several men originally from al-Qasim worked as well. Although having no experience, al-Ardah became a *ghawwas* (diver). Since the *ghawwas*' share was greater than the *sib*'s (helper), the Qusman often preferred to work as divers. However, like most of the Qusman, al-Ardah supposedly worked in the pearling industry for only one season since this strenuous job gave little profit.

Al-'Ardah's second job in Kuwait was at his uncle's school. Since al-'Ujayri was educated, one of Kuwait's merchants helped him to open a school by providing a room for the simple school to take place. The school was of the *katatib* kind, which provided basic learning focusing on Quran, writing, reading, and arithmetic. At this school, al-Ardah helped his uncle in teaching Quran. However, the development of al-Mubarakiyya School, the first modern school in Kuwait, founded in 1911, and the increased acceptance of students caused the decline in traditional *katatib* schools. Consequently, al-'Ujayri closed his school roughly in the late 1920s.

Al-Ardah's third, and last, job in Kuwait was at the British clinic. He was an assistant at the clinic pharmacy. This job enabled him to learn at least basic phrases in English, and to gain some information about medicines and their usage. After returning to al-Qasim, therefore, al-Ardah arguably became the first pharmacist in Buraydah. Although his son, 'Abd al-Rahman, does not know how many years his father stayed in Kuwait, he mentions that his father returned with one of the *'uqaylat*'s camel caravans. The usage of camels for traveling between Najd and Kuwait was still common until the end of the Second World War. His son also points out that his father became the private writer for the prominent Fahad ibn 'Ali al-Rushudi, who died in

1948.³⁰⁰ Therefore, it is highly likely that al-Ardah returned to al-Qasim before or during the war and lived in Kuwait for roughly twenty years.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Kuwait was still an attractive destination for the Qusman, and Najdis in general, in spite of the hardships that Kuwait had encountered after the depression of its pearl industry and despite the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938. While the flow of the Qusman's merchant class continued to Kuwait, it also attracted the Qusman's working class after the discovery of oil in Kuwait also in 1938. After the discovery of oil, Kuwait witnessed a boom in construction projects, which required numerous workers. 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Muhammad al-'Ulayqi of Buraydah is one of the Qusman who worked in Kuwait during this period.³⁰¹ Al-'Ulayqi was born c. 1933 and raised in a peasant family (see figure 86). Since opportunities were so limited in al-Qasim, many Qusman of al-'Ulayqi's generation traveled to Kuwait seeking livelihood, so he decided to do so c. 1951. According to al-'Ulayqi's account, many of the Qusman of his generation who traveled to Kuwait still preferred to travel by camels, or even by foot, since cars had only been recently introduced to the region and not yet commonly used for public transportation. Traveling by a car, due to frequent breakdowns and the hardships of moving through the geographic environment, al-'Ulayqi's trip from Buraydah to Kuwait took twelve days.

³⁰⁰ Al-'Ubudi, *Mu'jam Usar Burayda*, 1: 510.

³⁰¹ All the information about al-'Ulayqi was obtained by a personal interview, 23 July 2018. Al-'Ulayqi is one of many Qusman who went to Kuwait and worked there. He is now roughly in his late eighties living in Buraydah's suburbs.



Figure 86: ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Muhammad al-‘Ulayqi, in al-Qusay‘a, one of Buraydah’s suburbs, July 23, 2018 (photograph by author).

As al-‘Ulayqi emphasizes, the increasing construction activities in Kuwait was a perfect opportunity for the Qusman’s working class since industrial machines were not common yet. Thus, when al-‘Ulayqi arrived in Kuwait, many Qusman of his generation had already arrived before him. Since they lived in the same neighborhood, these young men often gathered at al-Mirqab Street every evening after being dismissed from work. To describe how numerous the Qusman were in Kuwait, al-‘Ulayqi emphasized that when somebody entered al-Mirqab Street in the evenings, he would feel that all people of al-Qasim had migrated to Kuwait. Even though males mostly traveled from al-Qasim to Kuwait, in some cases the whole family relocated. According to al-‘Ulayqi, a family consisting of father, mother, and six or seven sons from al-

Rubay‘iyya, a village located to the east of Buraydah, left their village for Kuwait. The father and his sons worked as laborers and the mother took care of the household. After two years in Kuwait, the family’s economic level remarkably improved.

After a few days looking for a job, al-‘Ulayqi and his friends became construction workers. They participated in building a mosque and a house for Rs. 4.00 (SAR 2. 2/3) daily. However, the worker’s position was not secured on a daily basis. These young men woke up early every day and gathered around the house of the *stad* (master builder) who was in charge of the project. After having morning coffee and breakfast the *stad* appeared. If there was much work to do, he would ask all these youths to follow him. If not, he would call on a few of them that he already knew. The unlucky ones, who were not chosen, would go to *suq al-ma’* (water market) where they gathered and waited for anybody who needed workers.

The second job al-‘Ulayqi got was based on monthly payments, although similar to the first one in construction. Al-‘Ulayqi and about twenty-seven of his friends were hired for Rs. 120 (SAR 80) per month. Although the payments at this job were no better than the first one, both paid Rs. 4.00 daily, this job was better in terms of job security since al-‘Ulayqi and his friends were now paid for every single day. Because the construction supervisor wanted to assure that all of his workers cooperated with each other, and to avoid any disputes, all twenty-seven working with al-‘Ulayqi were from Buraydah and its suburbs. Other groups of Qusman were also working on different construction sites.

The third job al-‘Ulayqi had in Kuwait was building *‘uruq* (roots).³⁰² These *‘uruq* were bases made from clay often to signify the limits of a property or a farm. Al-‘Ulayqi built each *thira’* (an arm length), 18 inches, for Rs. 1.00. Although he was not completely satisfied with his

³⁰² At that time, they likened the wall's base to the tree's roots, which are *‘uruq* in Arabic (عروق). Thus, there job was to dig the ground in order to build bases for walls.

income, al-‘Ulayqi saved, in twenty months in Kuwait, enough money that enabled him to get married immediately after returning to al-Qasim, which cost him Rs. 600. Some of the Qusman’s working class bought their families’ needs from Kuwait’s markets, since they were cheaper than Najd’s, and sent them to al-Qasim. Al-‘Ulayqi, for instance, frequently bought coffee and cardamom, and sent them to his father in al-Qasim. He bought each 5.5 pounds of coffee for Rs. 25. They usually sent between eleven to twenty-two pounds of coffee. Since the usage of tobacco was very rare particularly in Buraydah, it was not easy for a smoker to buy cigarettes. Thus, when buying goods for their families, the Qusman whose fathers were smokers, also bought tobacco and sent it to al-Qasim. To avoid feeling ashamed, they often hid it very carefully by putting it in a bag inside the cardamom bag which would also be hidden inside a coffee sack. Furthermore, some of these workers frequently sent even money to their families in al-Qasim, who suffered from poverty.

Al-‘Ulayqi returned to Kuwait twice until c.1953, but he stayed each time for only four to five months. Since buildings in Kuwait were often still constructed with clay and gypsum, most construction was carried out during the summer, so Qasimi workers preferred to return home in the winter. In c.1954, most of the Qusman’s working class left Kuwait and returned to al-Qasim since building projects began to depend on construction companies and industrial machines, so opportunities for the Qusman shrank.

Another example of the Qusman’s working class in Kuwait is Salim al-Raysh of al-Rubay‘iyya, a village 23 miles to the east from Buraydah (see figure 87).³⁰³ At the age of 17 in 1950, al-Raysh left Buraydah heading to Kuwait where he worked for three years. According to

³⁰³ All the information about al-Raysh was obtained by a personal interview, August 1, 2018. Al-Raysh is one of many Qusman who went to Kuwait, al-Dammam, and al-Hufuf seeking livelihood. He is now eighty-six years old living in Buraydah.

his account, the work in Kuwait was hardly profitable. Most of the workers' income was spent on their expenses there. When returning to al-Qasim with the little money they had saved, the Qusman found themselves broke again in only a few months. Consequently, these workers had no choice but to return to Kuwait.



Figure 87: Salim al-Raysh

Apparently due to the declining opportunities for the Qusman in Kuwait, beginning in 1953, al-Raysh and his friend 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Musa of al-Shimasiyya, a village 24 miles to the east of Buraydah, decided to travel to al-Dammam, which had just appeared as a new destination for the working Saudis after the developing oil production. Al-Raysh and al-Musa hoped to have an opportunity to work in the project of the al-Dammam-Riyadh railroad, which was under construction. For some reason, these two friends did not work on the railroad project. Rather, they worked in building construction, a job that they were already familiar with from Kuwait. However, they did not last even a single business day since this kind of job required great physical effort and paid little money, as al-Raysh claims. Therefore, al-Raysh and al-Musa left al-Dammam heading to al-Hufuf, an internal town in al-Hasa. In al-Hufuf, al-Raysh and al-Musa

found jobs as police officers. The declining opportunities for the Qusman's working class in Kuwait and the spread of governmental salaried jobs in Saudi Arabia set the endpoint of the historical Qasimi *hadra* to Kuwait.

The Qusman's working class in Kuwait may have worked in any sector, not only in construction. One of al-'Ulayqi's bosses hired a man called 'Ali who was originally from al-Subakh, one of Buraydah's suburbs, as a cook and coffee server. 'Ali also spent his free time in fixing the damaged construction tools. Al-'Ulayqi saw others digging sewer lines. Such jobs were not respected back in al-Qasim, so, according to al-'Ulayqi, those who worked in such places did not tell their families about the nature of their jobs when visiting al-Qasim. Instead, some may have told their wives that they had been merchants in Kuwait.

Furthermore, according to al-Raysh, some of the Qusman worked in Kuwait in extracting rocks offshore in order to use them in constructions. Since wide areas of Kuwait's coastal surface were rocky, Kuwaitis used these rocks in building houses, walls, and sewers. People working in extracting sea rocks often rented small boats that carried from four to six men. About 50% of the workers' income went to the rental expenses. Sometimes a *nawkhada* hired a number of workers and paid them a set salary, while he later sold the extracted rocks and took the whole profit for himself. Since these sea rocks were somewhat expensive and only wealthy families could buy them and use them in building their houses, many workers saw this sector as attractive and profitable.³⁰⁴

The rights and working environment of Qasimi workers in Kuwait were very poor. While the custom in Najd was that the employer provided the worker with food, breakfast was not provided in Kuwait. Although lunch was often provided, it sometimes was not even fit for

³⁰⁴ Jamal, *al-Hiraf wa-al-Mihan*, 126.

human consumption. This following passage by al- ‘Ulayqi will help the reader to imagine what kind of meal these workers ate: “One day about noon the boss came carrying a sack in which there was a cow belly, bowels and stomach, in addition to the cow’s head. The sack was leaking black liquid. I swear by God in Heaven it stank. I think that cow had been slaughtered a year before. Do you think we left it? No, we ate it.” Another example of the absence of workers’ rights is told by al-Raysh. One of his friends, Ibrahim al-Musa of al-Shimasiyya, died while working in rock extraction offshore, since he worked in this sector although did not know how to swim.

The second part of this discussion is focused on the presence of the Qusman’s merchant class in Kuwait. According to al-‘Ulayqi’s account, by the middle of the twentieth century, several merchants from ‘Unayzah had cloth and textile shops in Kuwait while others invested in real estate. He also mentions that traders of Buraydah often bought all the goods that were needed in al-Qasim, such as textiles, *bishut* (sing. *bisht*, a woolen cloak that is worn over men clothes), rugs, cardamom, coffee, utensils, and kerosene.³⁰⁵ They rented houses in Kuwait and used them as storehouses. When these storehouses became full of goods, Qasimi merchants exported the goods to al-Qasim. By selling these goods at Buraydah’s market, the traders made at least 30% profit, according to al-‘Ulayqi’s account.

Since both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait began to take custom taxes on the goods exported from Kuwait to Saudi Arabia, al-‘Ulayqi informs, Qasimi merchants encountered some hardships. Claiming that these taxes damaged their trade and left them without any profits (this is not necessarily true), some of the Qusman turned to illegal methods when transporting these goods from Kuwait to Saudi Arabia. Since there was no way to avoid the Kuwaiti custom house,

³⁰⁵ Al-‘Umari, *Watha’iq ‘A’iliyya*, 807.

some of these merchants may have bribed the Kuwaiti custom-house brokers to mark their goods as already taxed. Upon entering Saudi Arabia, they unloaded their goods from cars and loaded them on camels, so they could avoid check stations by following desert roads.

Although the division between the Qusman's working class and merchant class was obvious in Kuwait, al-'Ulayqi emphasizes that there was a kind of cooperation between them. As much money as a merchant could invest, his investment would often bring a profit. However, some of the Qusman's merchant class in Kuwait were willing to make bigger deals, but they had no more money. The Qusman's working class, on the other hand, worked every day and saved what they earned until they began to prepare for the return journey to al-Qasim. They bought new clothes for themselves and all that their families needed back in al-Qasim. Therefore, some merchants advised the workers that it was better for them if they lent some of their money to the merchants as loans. In this way, both the merchants and the workers made better profits since the workers would receive part of the profits the traders made. As it has been already mentioned before, this kind of investment was known as *mudaraba* or *bida'a*.

Although the *bida'a* existed between the Qusman in Kuwait, the shares were not divided the same way. Rather, the worker gave the merchant any amount of money, which the latter attempted to grow. However, both sides' shares were not clearly determined. For instance, al-'Ulayqi mentioned that after collecting Rs. 500 in six months, he decided to give them to a trader as a *bida'a* hoping to make greater profits. After only two months, nevertheless, al-'Ulayqi felt worried that his money might not return to him, so he went to that merchant claiming that he needed his money so he would travel to al-Qasim. Al-'Ulayqi was shocked when that merchant gave him Rs. 1,000, which meant that his profit was 100%. After this happy surprise, al-'Ulayqi wanted to repeat this experience by giving another merchant another Rs. 500. After six months,

al-‘Ulayqi’s money returned only Rs. 525. Therefore, the *bida‘a* profits varied greatly in Kuwait, possibly as a result of the situation of the market or the honesty of the merchant.

Al-Hasa

Most goods imported to Najd had arrived via the ports of Kuwait and Bahrain. After conquering al-Hasa in 1913, however, Ibn Saud wanted to develop a port for his state on the Arabian Gulf. As a result, al-‘Uqayr became Najd’s port, through which rice, sugar, coffee beans, and textiles were imported (see figure 88).³⁰⁶ On his way to Riyadh in November 1917, Philby disembarked at the port of al-‘Uqayr. He describes the importing and exporting activities at the port in the following passage: “At the time of our visit there were seven *dhow*s in port discharging a mixed cargo of rice, sugar, coffee, and empty kerosene-oil tins, which with piece-goods, tea and spices make up the sum of Central Arabia’s requirements from the outer world, the empty tins being required for packing dates and *saman* [ghee].”³⁰⁷ When arriving in al-‘Uqayr in his following trip of 1918-19, Philby mentions that he “had an opportunity of seeing something of the local trade ; at intervals dhows, heavily laden with merchandise – rice, coffee, tea, sugar, piece-goods and other articles from India – sailed into the harbour to be met by camel and donkey convoys, bringing dates, mats, and clarified butter from the interior.”³⁰⁸ Unlike Bahrain and Kuwait where the Indian rupee was the semi-official currency, Philby points out that the *riyal*, which was the Maria Theresa dollar, was the standard coin in Arabia, although rupees were freely used in al-Hasa. At the time of his trip in 1917-1918, 100 dollars equaled Rs.230-260.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Wahba, *Jazirat al-‘Arab*, 74.

³⁰⁷ Philby, *The Heart of Arabia*, 1: 6.

³⁰⁸ H. St. J. B. Philby, “Across Arabia: From the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 6 (1920), 448.

³⁰⁹ Philby, *The Heart of Arabia*, 1: 6.



Figure 88: A photo of the customs at al-'Uqayr taken by Steineke in the 1930s. From William Facey and Gillian Grant, *Saudi Arabia by the First Photographers* (London: Stacey International, 2002), 103.

Since al-'Uqayr had not been inhabited, however, most Qusman resided in the interior town of al-Hufuf. Unlike Kuwait, which was a significant center for the Qusman's working class, the Qusman in al-Hufuf were often commercial agents, *jamamil* (cameleer), and camel traders. The commercial agents' task was to receive goods coming from Bahrain at al-'Uqayr and send them to al-Qasim. Some of these commercial agents resided in al-Hasa while others were back and forth between al-Qasim and al-Hasa. For instance, Sulayman ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Mushayqih was his grandfather's agent in al-Hasa. While sometimes staying in

al-Hasa for long periods of time and sending caravans with other people, Sulayman occasionally led caravans by himself.³¹⁰

The *jamamil* were those who owned camels and worked for merchants or commercial agents as carriers of goods from al-‘Uqayr to al-Qasim. However, not all the *jamamil* working between al-‘Uqayr and al-Qasim were Qusman. Rather, the *jamamil* of al-Zilfi, 70 miles to the east of Buraydah, were famous as pioneers in this occupation. Thus, they sometimes carried goods from the Gulf to al-Qasim. According to Abd al-Rahman al-Mushayqih, the *jamamil* of al-Zilfi worked for his grandfather, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, as trade carriers from al-‘Uqayr to al-Qasim. Trading caravans between the Gulf ports and al-Qasim often consisted of 80-100 camels.³¹¹

Since camels were the sole means of carrying goods from al-‘Uqayr to the interior districts of Najd, the camel market in al-Hufuf flourished during the period of al-‘Uqayr’s prosperity. Having been experts in the camel trade, the Qusman began to trade in camels in al-Hasa, exploiting the local consumption of camel meat and investing in the high number of camels the *jamamil* continuously brought into al-Hufuf to carry the imported goods. According to al-Raysh’s accounts, when he and his friend ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Musa entered the parlor of Khalaf ibn ‘Ali al-Khalaf (c.1914-2010), an *‘uqayli* who resided for a while in al-Hufuf trading in camels, c.1953, there were at least twenty of Qasimi camel auctioneers in the parlor. Al-Raysh emphasized that these Qusman could easily be distinguished from local inhabitants since they wore “*zibnawat al-Sham*” (aka *zubun al-Sham* or *al-zubun*, which was a luxury winter garment made in Syria and often worn by the *‘uqaylat*. Its summer version is called *al-saya*). Speaking of the *‘uqaylat*, al-Khalaf and his brothers ‘Abd Allah (c.1921-1995) and Ibrahim (c.1927-2012), both were *‘uqaylat* trading in camels between Trans-Jordan and Egypt. They were a good

³¹⁰ Al-Mushayqih, personal interview.

³¹¹ Al-‘Ubudi, *Mu‘jam Usar Burayda*, 20: 68.

example of the strong links between the commercial activities of the Qasimi *hadrat* and *'uqaylat*. Although the markets of al-Sham and Egypt were very attractive for the *'uqaylat* during the last period of their trading trips during the first half of the twentieth century, 'Abd Allah and Ibrahim sometimes sent camels from Trans-Jordan to their brother Khalaf when prices in al-Hufuf were more profitable.³¹²

One of the Qusman who resided in al-Hasa was Muqbil ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dhukayr of 'Unayzah. Al-Dhukayr had lived in Bahrain for several years, which enabled him to build strong links with its traders, especially the Qusman there. He was not only a merchant in al-Hasa, but also worked for Ibn Saud as the administrator of al-Hasa's finance department between 1924 and 1930 when al-Dhukayr resigned from this job.³¹³ As most Qasimi merchants, al-Dhukayr is likely to have traded in imported food items, including rice, tea, sugar, coffee, and textiles, as well as in exporting dates from al-Hasa. In August 1937, al-Dhukayr sent a letter to the famous Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam of Bahrain in which he complained of the decline in date prices in al-Hasa because many peasants had been hired by the oil company.³¹⁴ This letter reveals that both al-Dhukayr and al-Bassam were engaged in the date trade. Since thousands of tons of dates were exported annually from Kuwait and Bahrain to India, it is possible that these Qasimi traders participated in exporting dates from al-Hasa to India via Bahrain.

In 1921, Ibn Saud banned his subjects from trading with Kuwait due to disagreements between the two countries on custom duties. Ibn Saud's declaration of the economic war on Kuwait, which would continue until 1940, resulted in the immediate appearance of a new port in the north of al-Hasa, which is al-Jubayl (see figures 89 and 90).³¹⁵

³¹² Al-Wuhaybi, *al-'Uqaylat*, 2: 738-39.

³¹³ Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 6: 431.

³¹⁴ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 105.

³¹⁵ Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 74, 77.

Local Merchants with International Links

Most Qasimisi merchants abroad did not completely cut their commercial ties with local merchants in al-Qasim. Instead, many of the Qusman abroad exported goods to local merchants in al-Qasim making some profit both for themselves and for the local merchants, who sold these goods in al-Qasim and redistributed the surplus to surrounding regions. By providing two examples of al-Qasim's local merchants, the reader can imagine how al-Qasim local trade was connected with the Qusman's trade abroad. The first example is 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Humud al-Mushayqih (c.1864-1953), representing the merchants of Buraydah. The second example is 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam (c.1895-1985), representing the merchants of 'Unayzah.³¹⁶

Unlike many of the Qusman who traveled to many trading centers, al-Mushayqih did not, simply because he did not need to. He was one of the richest merchants in Najd, if not the richest. Al-Mushayqih had commercial links with the Gulf ports from which he imported foodstuffs and goods coming from India, China, and Europe, such as rice, coffee, cardamom, sugar, and tea, as well as textiles and glass utensils (see figure 91). Also, he traded in currency with the Hijaz. With Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt he gave many of the *'uqaylat a bida'a* (start-up funds) to trade in these countries. In addition, al-Mushayqih owned real estate and invested in date-palm groves.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal correspondence, March 6, 8, and April 24, 2019; Al-'Ubudi, *Mu'jam Usar Burayda*, 20: 159, 207.

³¹⁷ Al-'Ubudi, *Mu'jam Usar Burayda*, 2:567, 20: 161.

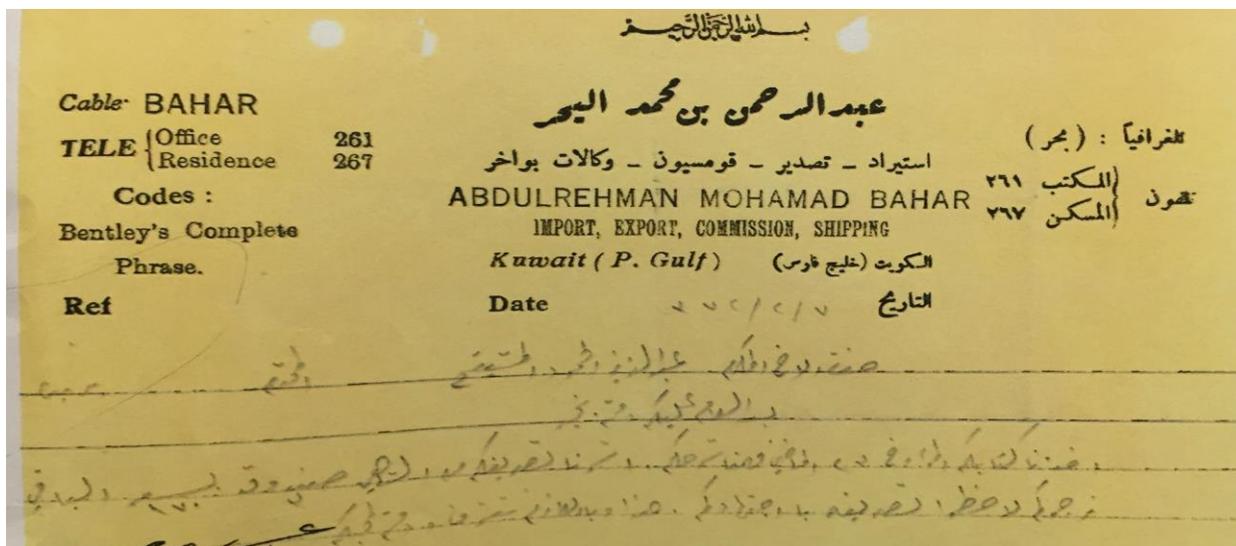


Figure 91: A letter dated October 27, 1952, indicates that ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Humud al-Mushayqih imported tea from Kuwaiti merchants and sold in al-Qasim. This letter was obtained from ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Mushayqih, a grandson of the famous ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mushayqih.

According to al-‘Ubudi, his friend ‘Abd Allah ibn Sulayman al-Thuayni of Buraydah (born between 1896 and 1901, died in 1992) worked for al-Mushayqih trading house as a *jammal* (see figure 92).³¹⁸ His job was to carry the goods from al-Mushayqih’s trading agents in the Gulf ports, such as al-Jubayl and al-‘Uqayr, and to bring them to Buraydah. He also carried gold coins from al-Mushayqih in Buraydah to their customers in Madinah.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Al-‘Ubudi, *Mu‘jam Usar Burayda*, 2: 565; Al-Wuhaybi, *al-‘Uqaylat*, 2: 483.

³¹⁹ Al-‘Ubudi, *Mu‘jam Usar Burayda*, 2: 567.



Figure 92: ‘Abd Allah ibn Sulayman al-Thuayni, one of Buraydah’s *‘uqaylat* and *jamamil*. From Al-Wuhaybi, *al-‘Uqaylat*, 2: 483.

The second example of al-Qasim’s local trade is Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam (see figure 93). As did most people in Najd at that time, al-Bassam grew up in a family with low-income. While al-Bassam was only one or two years old, his father died, so he was raised by his grandfather, who also died when al-Bassam was 15 years old. Al-Bassam then felt that his mother and sisters became dependent on him, so he began to work in order to support his family. He traveled with the *‘uqaylat* to Kuwait, Iraq, and al-Sham trading in camels and currency.



Figure 93: 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam of 'Unayzah (c.1895-1985). I gained the photo from 'Abd al-Rahman's son, 'Abd al-'Aziz.

After these travels, al-Bassam decided to settle down. He opened a shop in 'Unayzah's main market, *al-Musawkaf*, and began to import goods from the Gulf ports and India and distribute the surplus goods to surrounding areas of Najd. Al-Bassam imported textiles, tea, sugar, coffee, cardamom, rice, and various grains. He also possessed some real estate and farms, becoming one of the leading merchants in 'Unayzah. Al-Bassam had commercial relationships

with his uncle Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam in Bombay; Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam’s agent in Kuwait; his cousin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam and Sulayman ibn Fahad al-Bassam in Bahrain; Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Si‘di in al-Jubayl; ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-‘Awhali in Mecca; Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Bassam in Jeddah; ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Si‘di, Zamil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Zamil, and ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Qublan in Riyadh; Muhammad al-Khwaytir in Buraydah; and Salih al-Rashid in al-Rass.

It is obvious from the previous sentence that although Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, and many other merchants in ‘Unayzah and Buraydah, seemed to only have a humble shop in the town’s market, the goods he received in this shop arrived from places as far as India, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the Hijaz. What is unique when reviewing the merchants’ names with whom ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam traded is that the reader finds that almost all these merchants were originally from ‘Unayzah, including Muhammad al-Khwaytir who was then based in the neighboring town of Buraydah. This proves that Qasimi merchants expressed strong solidarity. Although many of them made very successful businesses abroad, the Qusman often preferred to trade with merchants who were originally from their own hometowns, simply because they wanted to support each other.

Benefiting from his travels and relations with merchants abroad, al-Bassam was aware of the significance of having a telegraphic address since merchants frequently used the telegraph to quickly get updated about goods and prices. Thus, al-Bassam had a telegraphic address in Buraydah, where telegraphic services had been established in c.1933, even before the establishment of telegraphic services in ‘Unayzah in c.1946. Al-Bassam was also one of the first three people in ‘Unayzah who owned radios in c. 1943 when the owner of a radio then had to have a license. Since al-Bassam bought this radio during the Second World War, in addition the

importance of the radio as an educational tool at that time, his *majlis* (parlor) was occupied by his friends daily, morning, noon, and evening. Much of the talk then was about the war, and the attendees were divided between those who supported the Axis Powers versus those who preferred the Allies.

Chapter 5:

The Economic and Social Effects of the Qasimi Merchants of the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean

As Michael Field emphasizes in his book *The Merchants*, merchant families of Arabia had obvious influence, particularly during pre-oil periods. These families were influential not only economically, but they were also the major actors in the political, social, and cultural spheres. This description is precisely true in the case of al-Qasim's merchants. Valenti argues that "the participation of Qusman in the political economies of regions outside of the Najd also meant that upon returning to the Najd they brought with them not only strengthened economic links with those regions but also new sociocultural practices that further stimulated developments in the Najd."³²⁰

The Economic Influence

The economic impact of the Qusman's trade abroad, including their overland trade with Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt, and their maritime trade in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, was clear not only to themselves and in their homeland al-Qasim, but also on the trading destinations where they resided. For example, Qasimi merchants in Bahrain participated in improving and modernizing the Bahraini economy by contributing to the establishment of the first bank in Bahrain. In a petition presented to the ruler of Bahrain in 1918, the elite merchants requested that a bank be opened in Bahrain, emphasizing that it would be beneficial for everyone. Among these

³²⁰ Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia," 42, 75.

merchants there were at least five Qasimi traders, such as Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dhukayr, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, and Muhammad and ‘Abd Allah al-Qadi, all of whom signed on the petition.³²¹

Many Qusman had been driven out of al-Qasim by poverty, so they sought livelihood in the ports of the Gulf and India. Because of their travels, they returned home later very wealthy. For instance, Doughty mentions that his friend ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni had been “so needy in the beginning that he might hardly buy himself a pair of shoes.”³²² After leaving ‘Unayzah, al-Khunayni traveled to Baghdad, trafficked slaves from Zanzibar, traded in sugar in Mauritius, exported rice from Bombay, and finally grew grains in Basra. When Doughty met him in 1877, he was the greatest merchant in ‘Unayzah with a fortune valuing £24,000.³²³ Of course, al-Khunayni was one out of many.

Moreover, Qasimi trading families were considered the wealthiest in their communities, so they were often the hosts of the visitors to their towns. When visiting ‘Unayzah in 1918, Philby was often hosted by either the members of the ruling family or notable members of merchant families that had prestige in the ports of the Arabian Gulf and India. These families were the prominent trading families of ‘Unayzah whose external trade helped them to be the leading families in their community and, at the same time, to make them more hospitable with foreigners. For instance, Philby states that he was once hosted by the al-Dhukayr family, which he says: “Like many of Anaiza [‘Unayzah] families, has spread far and wide from its homeland, and at this time was represented at Basra, Amara and Bahrain.”³²⁴ Another example was Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fadil who hosted Philby for coffee and dinner. According to Philby, Salih al-

³²¹ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 183-86.

³²² Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:363

³²³ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:362-63.

³²⁴ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 165-66.

Fadil left ‘Unayzah the following year, 1919, for Karachi to take charge of a significant branch of his family’s business, which was also represented in Bombay and the Hijaz.³²⁵

Because of the Qusman’s commercial activities outside Arabia, trade in the two rival towns of al-Qasim, Buraydah and ‘Unayzah, was not only prosperous, but they were the most important commercial centers in Najd.³²⁶ Once his eyes fell for the first time on the city of Buraydah in 1877, Doughty did not compare it with any city in Najd, nor in all of Arabia, but with Jerusalem, which was a populated city with an active trade then. In the following passage, Doughty expresses his feelings: “We journeyed an hour and a half, and came upon a brow of the Nefud, as the sun was going down. And from hence appeared a dream-like spectacle!—a great clay town built in this waste sand with enclosing walls and towers and streets and houses! and there beside a bluish dark wood of ethel trees, upon high dunes! This is Boreyda! and that square minaret, in the town, is of their great mesjid. I saw, as it were, Jerusalem in the desert!”³²⁷ (see figure 94) Although visiting Buraydah when Ha’il was the leading political power in Najd under the powerful Muhammad ibn Rashid, Doughty argues that “if we compare the towns, Hayil is a half Beduin town-village, with a foreign suk ; Boreyda is a great civil township of the midland Nejd life.”³²⁸ Lorimer also emphasizes in the early twentieth century that both Buraydah and ‘Unayzah were wealthier than Ha’il.³²⁹

³²⁵ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 168.

³²⁶ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 86.

³²⁷ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:314.

³²⁸ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:322.

³²⁹ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 1488.



Figure 94: A photo of Buraydah taken from the northern side by Shakespear in 1914. From Facey and Grant, *Saudi Arabia*, 68.

Similarly, Ibn Saud hoped that his capital Riyadh would one day become like ‘Unayzah, after entering the town in 1904 and passing through its market.³³⁰ According to Altorki and Cole, people of ‘Unayzah proudly “recount the story of a man who went to Riyadh many years ago and complained to a companion about not being able to buy anything in the then very small market at ‘Abd al-‘Aziz’s capital. His companion, they say, answered him thus: “where do you think you are—in ‘Unayzah?”³³¹ According to Philby’s estimations in 1918, there were no fewer than 1,000 shops at ‘Unayzah’s markets, and no less than 800 shops in Buraydah’s markets (see figure 95).³³²

³³⁰ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 21.

³³¹ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 61.

³³² Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 174, 200.

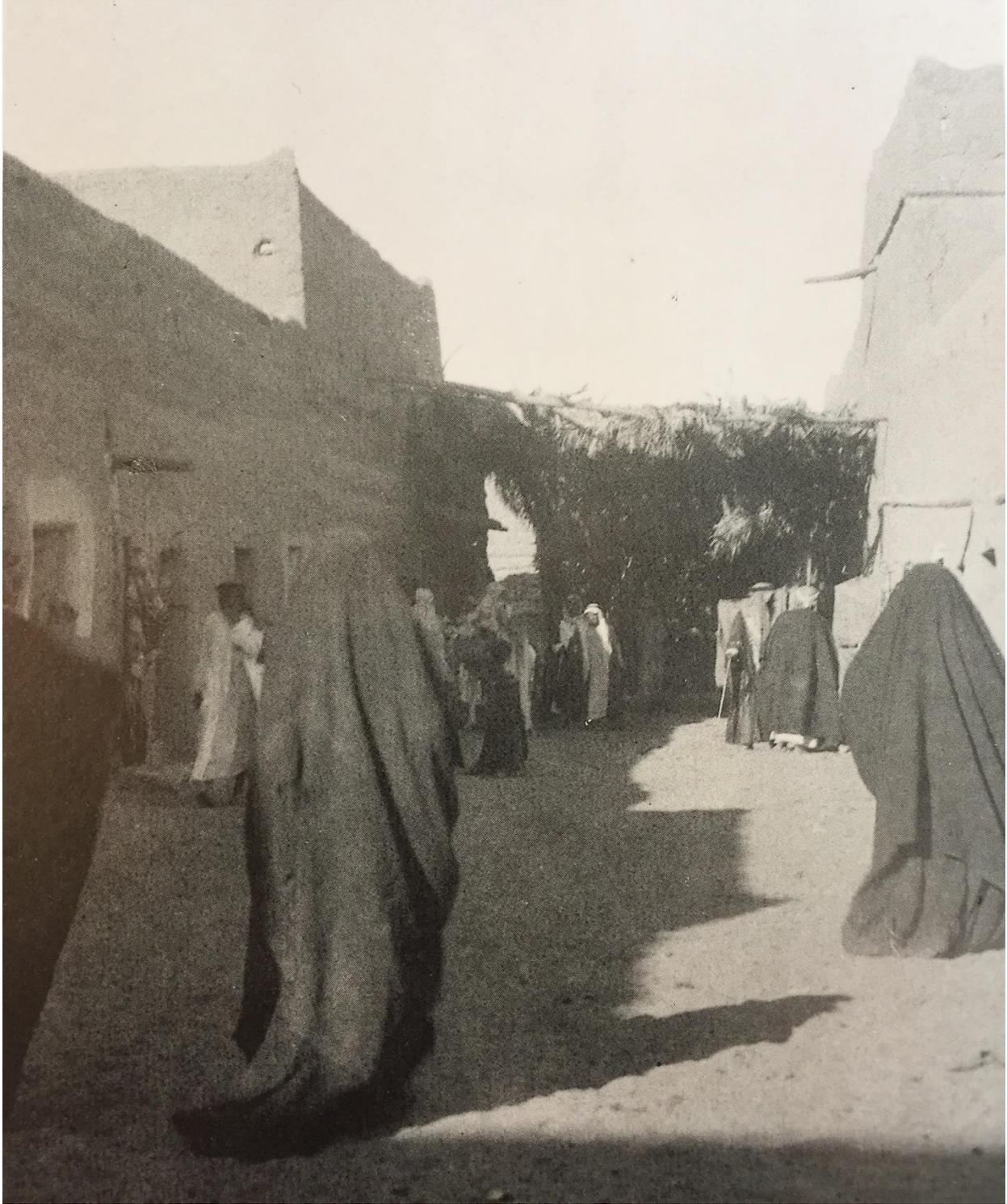


Figure 95: A photo of the market of Buraydah taken by Philby in 1918. From Facey and Grant, *Saudi Arabia*, 69.

Doctor Louis Dame, who visited ‘Unayzah in January 1924, emphasized that the town was totally different from the others that he had seen. In one of his letters that he sent to the Board of Foreign Missions in the United States of America, Dame wrote on March 24, 1924:

Aneiza has the finest gardens I have seen in Arabia. In fact in every respect Aneiza is in a class by itself. The houses are better, the people are more intelligent, better informed and more humane and friendly, and the gardens are superior. The merchants from Aneiza are famous over all the Arabic-speaking world. They own property and carry on extensive business in Mecca, Jidda, Damascus, Busrah, Baghdad, Egypt and Bombay as well as other places in India. But they always come back to Aneiza. It is the only Arab town I know of possessing a civic pride. This might be illustrated by an incident occurring in our Bahrein school a few years ago. The teacher was giving a geography lessons on Arabia. Aneiza, among other places, was pointed out on the map. After the lesson a small boy, a son of one of the Aneiza merchants in business here, came to the teacher and asked to be shown Aneiza again. After looking at the spot on the map reverently a moment he bent his head and kissed it saying, “that is my homeland.” Since my return I have met a number of Aneiza people here and the first question they ask is, ‘how did you like our country?’ They take a personal pride in the artistically painted doors and little tables of which I brought home some samples.³³³

Indeed, when visiting ‘Unayzah in 1923, al-Rayhani described it as “Queen of al-Qasim, the castle of freedom, and the destination for travelers. ‘Unayzah is the pole of etiquette and manner. It is Paris of Najd.”³³⁴ About its market al-Rayhani says “there is a big market ... that amuses you with its various goods. It reminds you with American and British lands and takes you to India and Japan.”³³⁵ In ‘Unayzah’s main bazar English medicines, such as cod-liver oil, were available in the early twentieth century, when they hardly existed in other Najdi markets.³³⁶

The Qusman’s external trade did not only improve the economy of al-Qasim by exporting its productions and importing international goods, but also al-Qasim’s merchants abroad

³³³ Correspondence, Louis P. Dame to W. I. Chamberlain, 24 March 1924, Correspondence to and from the Board of Foreign Missions, 1923-1936, Joint Archives of Holland at Hope College Library, W06-1308.5. Dame, Louis P. (1886-1953). Papers, n.d., 1917-1955, accessed <https://hope.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16051coll5/id/3>, 1-2.

³³⁴ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-‘Arab*, 2: 606.

³³⁵ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-‘Arab*, 2: 607.

³³⁶ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 75.

participated in improving their homeland's economy as they always sought for innovative ideas that they had seen in their travels and tried to imitate them in al-Qasim. Doughty informs his readers that while being in 'Unayzah in 1877, his friend 'Abd Allah al-Khunayni who had an orchard asked him if he had some smart notions to improve his agricultural production. Al-Khunayni wondered: "You, a man of Europa, might be able to help us! For we suppose you have learned geometry; and may have read in books which treat machines, that are so wonderful in your countries."³³⁷ Al-Khunayni did not only dream of new inventions, but he, indeed, asked a smith to make him a tool that was unknown in 'Unayzah. About this tool Doughty gives sufficient information in the following: "I had seen to-day a hand-cart on wheels, before a smith's forge! A sight not less strange in an Arabian town, than the camel in Europe; it was made here for the Kenneyny [al-Khunayni]. The sany [*sani*': manufacturer] had fastened the ends of his tires unhandsomely, so that they overlapped: but his felloes, nave and spokes were very well wrought ... Abdullah's dates had been drawn home on this barrow, in the late harvest ; and the people marvelled to see how two men might wield the loads of two or three great camels !"³³⁸

The Qasim's long-distance overland and maritime trades had a very deep influence on the two rival cities, Buraydah and 'Unayzah. While in al-Qasim, Philby noticed that the two cities were designed according to the nature of their trades. In an evening at a house in 'Unayzah, the conversation turned to be comparative between 'Unayzah and Buraydah. Some of the attendees jealously asked Philby if he agreed that the houses of their city's competitor, Buraydah, were better built than theirs. They also asked him if he thought that Buraydah's street were more elegant than 'Unayzah's. Philby, then, gave a very rational answer, arguing that Buraydah's inhabitants were *jamamil*, so it is logical that they needed broader streets for the passage of their

³³⁷ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 352.

³³⁸ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 352-53.

camels.³³⁹ Indeed, most of the *'uqaylat*, who exported camels from Najd to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt, were from Buraydah. In contrast, Unayzah's people often traded in the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Subcontinent.

Not only were the plans of al-Qasim's towns affected by the Qusman's trade, but even the demography of al-Qasim had been drawn according to its economic activities. Altorki and Cole argue that the inhabitants of al-Qasim were mostly settled, not only because their land was agricultural, but also trade, labor, and crafts migration were significant elements that participated in drawing the demographic map of al-Qasim.³⁴⁰

Although there was no precise census in Arabia in general during the time under study, travelers' accounts show that the population of al-Qasim continuously grew. Without doubt, the economic prosperity resulted in the increase of al-Qasim's population. One of these accounts is by Doughty, who visited al-Qasim in 1877 and estimated that the population of Buraydah and its suburbs was 6,000 souls.³⁴¹ In the early twentieth century, Lorimer supposed that Buraydah's population was about 7,500 souls.³⁴² In 1912, Leachman visited Buraydah and estimated that its population was about 10,000 souls.³⁴³ When visiting al-Qasim in 1918, Philby mentions that the population of Buraydah was no less than 20,000 souls.³⁴⁴ In the case of 'Unayzah, Lorimer supposed that its population in the early twentieth century was between 10,000 and 15,000 souls.³⁴⁵ At the time of his visit, Philby estimates that 'Unayzah's population, including its suburbs, at the time of his visit was no less than 15,000 souls.³⁴⁶ After only five years from

³³⁹ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 241.

³⁴⁰ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 20.

³⁴¹ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 329.

³⁴² Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 326.

³⁴³ G. Leachman, "A Journey through Central Arabia," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (May 1914), 511.

³⁴⁴ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 201.

³⁴⁵ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* (Geographical), 74.

³⁴⁶ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 174.

Philby's sojourn in 'Unayzah, however, al-Rayhani visited the city and claimed that its population was about 30,000.³⁴⁷ Al-Rayhani's estimation seems to have been imprecise.

Because of their trading travels, the Qusman often had economic insight, so they invested in non-traditional sectors. Their quality of their choices benefited both themselves and the economies of the countries where they resided. For example, Ibn Sulayman returned to practice his avocation, trading, after retiring from Finance Ministry in 1954. However, Ibn Sulayman did not establish a traditional business. Since witnessing the boom in the constructions of modern facilities in Saudi Arabia, he, instead, decided to establish a concrete factory. In spite of the difficulties he encountered in the beginnings, Ibn Sulayman ultimately established the first concrete factory in Saudi Arabia in 1959.³⁴⁸

The Social Influence

As the Qusman's trading travels had obvious economic effects both on themselves and on their country, these travels also impacted the Qusman's social life in many ways. The Qusman's journeys improved their methods of communication both with each other and with the others in general. According to Hafid Wahba, who was one of Ibn Saud's closest assistants and the later the Saudi ambassador in London, "People of al-Qasim more flexible than those of al-'Arid [the region of Riyadh] since they travel very much and communicate with other countries, such as al-Sham, Palestine, and Egypt."³⁴⁹

During times of insecurity or famines, the merchant class, including the *'uqaylat* and *hadrat*, were influential as the local people had so much respect for them. For instance, 'Abd

³⁴⁷ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-'Arab*, 2: 607.

³⁴⁸ Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 121; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 245, 248.

³⁴⁹ Wahba, *Jazirat al-'Arab*, 6.

Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam of ‘Unayzah, who stationed his sons as commercial agents in Jeddah, Damascus, Basra, and Bahrain, was titled in ‘Unayzah *al-‘amm* (the uncle).³⁵⁰

Therefore, when Al Rashid, the rulers of Ha’il, destroyed the second Saudi state and dominated al-Qasim, al-Bassam was offered the rule of ‘Unayzah in the name of Al Rashid. However, he politely rejected the offer.³⁵¹ This incident reflects the high position that the merchant elite in al-Qasim had secured, which was almost equal to that of the rulers.

Because of the fortunes they gained from travels abroad, Qasimi traders secured a special position amongst their society. The families of these merchants were not considered prominent only by ordinary people, but even by the rulers. One aspect of the Qasimi traders’ respected social position appears in Ibn Saud’s several marriages to daughters of merchants’ families. Since he was well known for his many marriages to daughters of leading families, Ibn Saud got married to two women of the al-Dhukayr trading house of ‘Unayzah. One of these marriages occurred before Philby’s visit to al-Qasim in 1918, during which he noticed that one of Ibn Saud’s three wives then was Madawi bint Ahmad al-Dhukayr.³⁵² Ibn Saud also got married to another woman of the al-Dhukayr family, Lulwa bint Yahya.³⁵³ Immediately after the battle of al-Sabala in 1929, where Ibn Saud annihilated the *ikhwan* forces, he went to ‘Unayzah and got married to a woman from the al-Shubayli trading house. According to al-Mani’, by this marriage, Ibn Saud wanted to express his gratitude to the people of ‘Unayzah for their effective support for him before the battle.³⁵⁴ In 1937, Crown Prince Saud ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, later king, got married to

³⁵⁰ This title was very common in Buraydah and ‘Unayzah. The most respected people of the economic elite were called *al-‘umuma* (the uncles, sing. *al-‘amm*). It is not clear when this title became common, but in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century the title was common.

³⁵¹ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 112.

³⁵² Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 193; Al-‘Amiri, “‘Unayzah fi ‘Ahd al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 298.

³⁵³ Al-‘Amiri, “‘Unayzah fi ‘Ahd al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 298.

³⁵⁴ Muhammad al-Mani’, *Tawhid al-Mamlaka al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa‘udiyya*, Trans. ‘Abd Allah al-Salih al-‘Uthaymin (N.p.: N.p., N.d), 153.

Madawi bint Sulayman al-Bassam, of the famous trading house, and Ibn Saud himself attended the wedding in ‘Unayzah.³⁵⁵ In contrast, some traders got married to women of the ruling families, which means that the merchant class was considered equal socially. For example, Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr, the famous pearl trader in Bahrain, got married to Lulwa bint Zamil al-Sulaym, whose father was one of the strongest rulers of ‘Unayzah throughout its history.³⁵⁶

Likewise, ‘Unayzah’s leading trading families were the usual hosts of Ibn Saud when he was in ‘Unayzah. As Philby points out, Ibn Saud stayed in ‘Unayzah in late August of 1918 at the houses of different hosts, such as the ex-*amir*, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Sulaym; Salih al-Fadil, a member of the al-Fadil trading family that were represented in Bombay, Karachi, and the Hijaz; Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Shubayli, who was a rich trader owning many properties in Basra; and Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan, who had traded in Bombay before becoming one of Ibn Saud’s official assistants.³⁵⁷ Ibn Saud was not only interested in visiting Qasimi merchants when in al-Qasim, he also visited them during his official visit to Bahrain in 1939. The Najdi merchants there agreed that the house of the famous ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam was the most appropriate to host Ibn Saud and the ruler of Bahrain, Shaykh Hamad ibn ‘Isa. Also, when King Saud ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz visited Bahrain in 1954, al-Bassam was among the people who received him.³⁵⁸

Qasimi merchants abroad were not only highly respected by the ruling families of Najd, but also by most of the ruling families of the trading centers where they existed. On his way from al-Qasim to Jeddah, Doughty met with one of the Ashraf (sing. Sharif) of Mecca in ‘Ayn al-

³⁵⁵ Al-‘Amiri, “‘Unayzah fi ‘Ahd al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 299.

³⁵⁶ Al-‘Anqari, “‘A‘lam wa-Tarajim,” 178.

³⁵⁷ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 211, 236.

³⁵⁸ Al-Badir, “al-Bassam,” 87.

Zima, the last watering station that Najdi pilgrims passed by before entering Mecca. Even though this person was a Sharif, which means that he was from a wealthy dynasty as descendants of the Prophet (PBUH) and rulers of Mecca for approximately a thousand years, he spoke highly of the al-Bassam family after learning that Doughty was a friend. He viewed their social position in Jeddah not only as great merchants, but even as kings!³⁵⁹

Likewise, Qasimi traders in Bahrain were often respected by the rulers, British authorities, and the community. For instance, when the board of the city hall of al-Manama began to be elected in the 1930s, the famous Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam received a letter on April 28, 1946, from Charles Belgrave, the British advisor of Bahrain Government, in which he informs him that the elections for the city hall board was about to begin and asks if al-Bassam would like to nominate himself (see figure 96).³⁶⁰ Although al-Bassam had no desire to nominate himself, this letter reflects his social position and to what degree he was qualified for leadership in the Bahraini society.

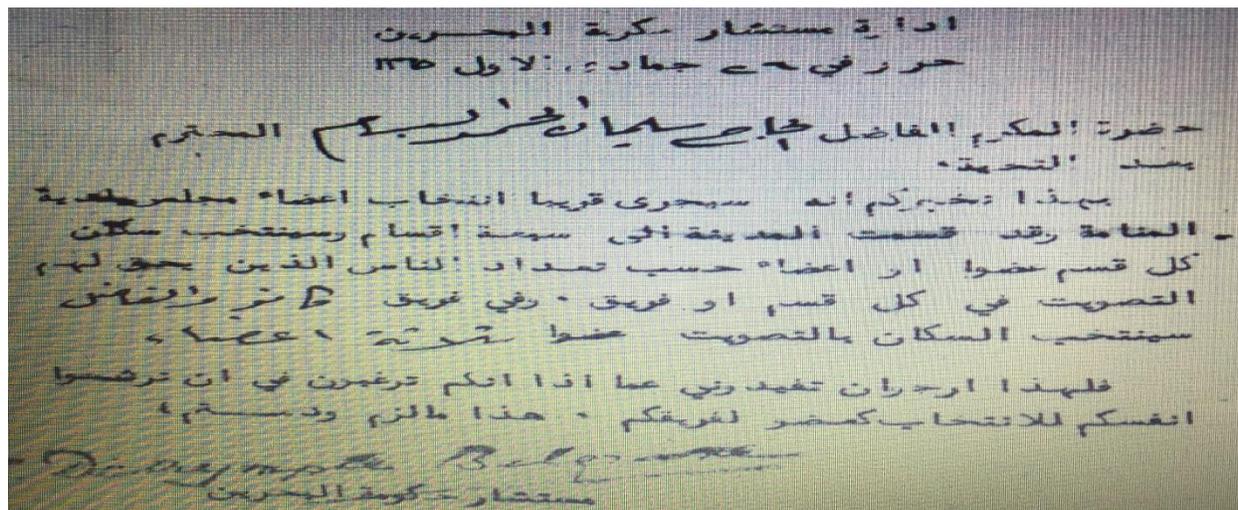


Figure 96: A letter written on April 28, 1946, by Charles Belgrave, the British advisor of the Bahrain Government, and sent to the merchant Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam regarding the elections of al-Manama city hall. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 187.

³⁵⁹ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 490.

³⁶⁰ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 186-87.

Similarly, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam was often invited by the royal family of Bahrain. For example, on March 18, 1939, al-Bassam received an invitation letter from the Crown Prince of Bahrain, Salman ibn Hamad al-Khalifa, to attend an occasion organized by the prince (see figure 97). Moreover, when Ibn Saud visited Bahrain in 1939, al-Bassam was hailed by invitations whether by the Bahraini government or the elite to attend all the celebrations that were organized specifically to greet Ibn Saud (see figures 98 and 99).³⁶¹

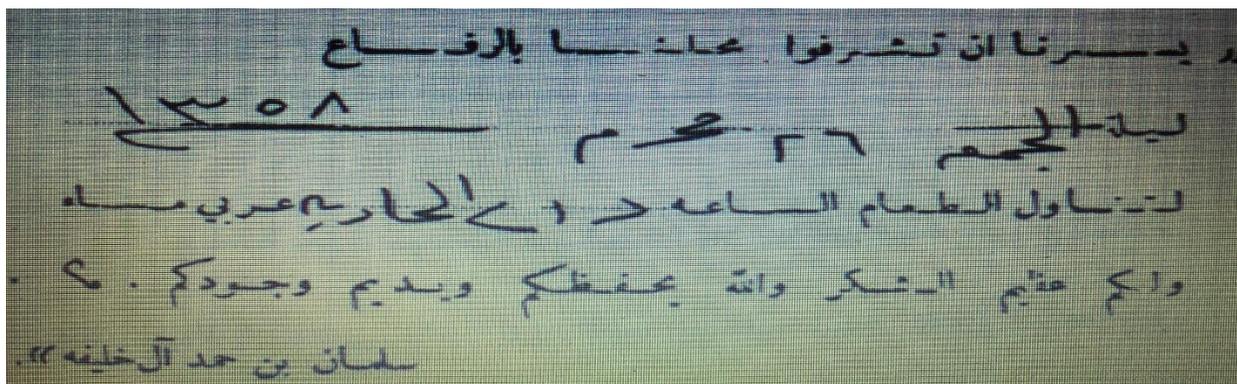


Figure 97: A letter of invitation letter from the Crown Prince of Bahrain to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, 1939. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 192.

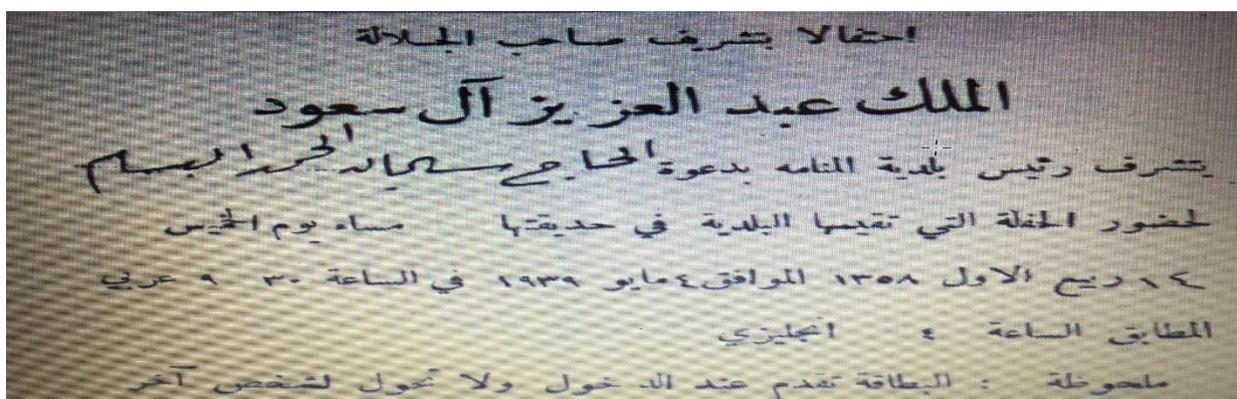


Figure 98: An invitation letter from the administrator of al-Manama's municipality to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam to attend the celebration of Ibn Saud visit on May 4, 1939. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 196.

³⁶¹ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 192, 196-97.

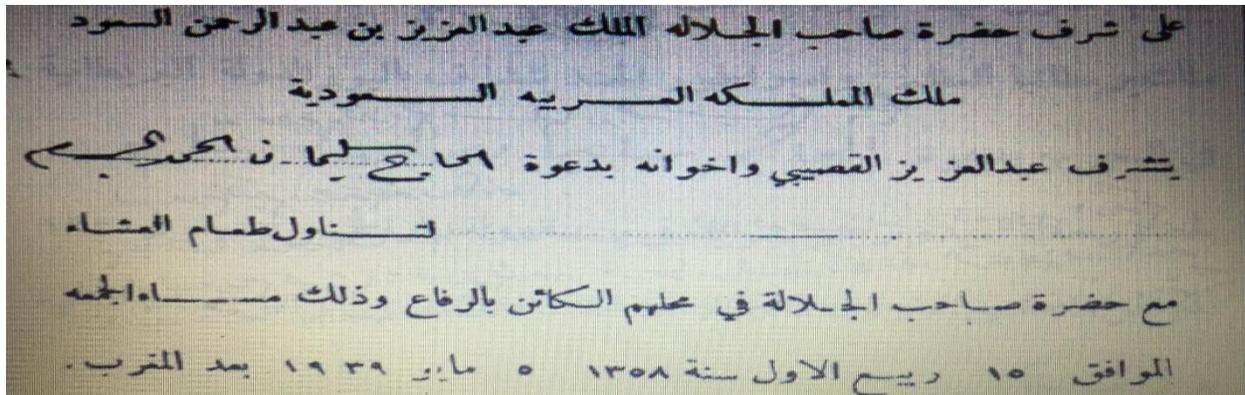


Figure 99: A letter of invitation letter from the famous al-Qusaybi trading house to Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam to attend the reception of Ibn Saud on May 5, 1939. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 197.

Some of the Qusman, who traveled to the ports of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, were philanthropists, giving to numerous charities and endowing valuable properties for the public interest. For example, Hamad al-‘Assafi of ‘Unayzah, who had a commercial agency in Baghdad, frequently sent money to al-Qasim in order to be delivered to needy people. According to one of his commercial records, dated April 8, 1899, al-‘Assafi wrote that his commercial agent in Basra, Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Shubayli, had delivered al-‘Assafi’s donations to al-Qasim. According to the document, al-‘Assafi dedicated 500 riyals (Maria Theresa dollars) to Buraydah, 250 riyals to ‘Unayzah, and 60 riyals to a specific poor family he knew (see figure 100).³⁶² In 1914, furthermore, al-‘Assafi endowed the profits of his farms to be annually sent to al-Qasim and spent on needy people, relatives, mosques, and religious scholars (see figure 101).³⁶³

³⁶² Daftar Tijari, Al-‘Assafi’s Commercial Records, Folder 4978, April 8, 1899.

³⁶³ Al-‘Amiri, “‘Unayzah fi ‘Ahd al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 139.

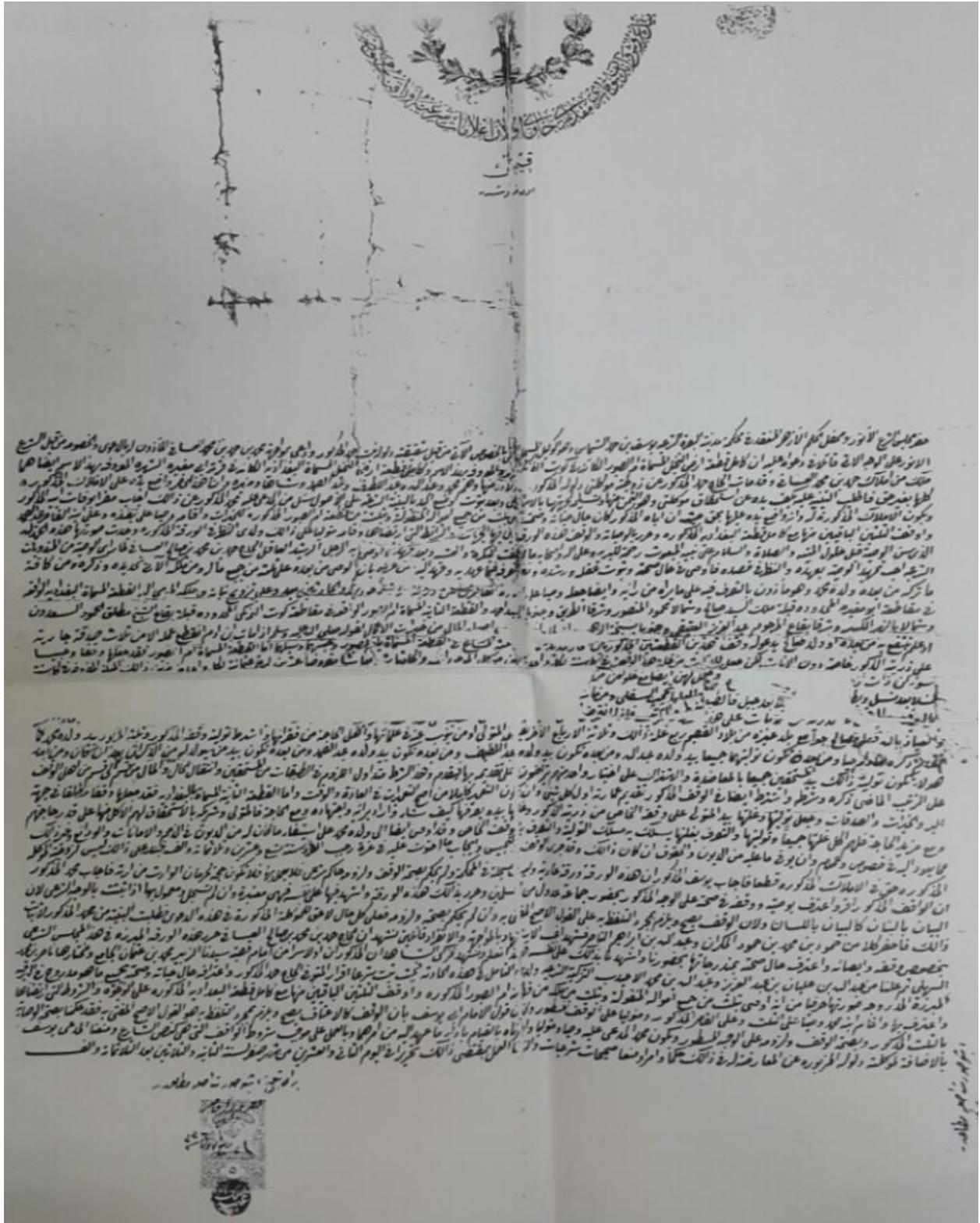


Figure 101: An endorsement written at the Court of Basra on January 19, 1914 indicating that Hamad al-'Assafi's had endowed part of his farms' income to needy people, relatives, ulama, and mosques of 'Unayzah. The author received this document from Nwayyir al-'Amiri.

Even those who stayed in Bahrain, Bombay, and Basra for many years often sent *zakat* back to al-Qasim to be distributed to the poor of their families and the poor of the community as well as to be used in the construction of mosques.³⁶⁴ For example, Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fadil, who began his business in Bombay in the late nineteenth century then moved to Karachi where he died in 1923, did not cut ties with ‘Unayzah although he never returned. He dedicated part of his charities to be sent to ‘Unayzah.³⁶⁵ Also, for more than fifty years until the 1960s, Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam of Bombay, and later his nephew and associate, Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam, sent *zakat* to ‘Unayzah periodically, in particular to ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam, a local merchant in ‘Unayzah and a relative of Salih, to be given to needy people. It is said that the amount of their *zakat* was between SAR 250,000 and 300,000 (USD 66,000-80,000).³⁶⁶

Qasimi traders abroad were interested in sending charity back to al-Qasim because they knew that people of al-Qasim were very needy compared to the trading centers where these merchants resided. However, when feeling that their charity was needed elsewhere, Qasimi merchants sometimes gave accordingly. In 1924, for instance, the Islamic Council in Palestine announced that some of the buildings in al-Masjid al-Aqsa (the Grand Mosque of Jerusalem) needed repairs, which would cost about 150,000 Egyptian pounds. This announcement was sent to all Islamic countries in multiple languages in order to meet the high cost of the repairs. Bahrain was one of the countries whose people passionately donated. Among the Bahrainis was the Qasimi trader Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, who felt that it was an obligation to participate in repairing one of the three sacred mosques for Muslims. Bahrain’s donations

³⁶⁴ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 113.

³⁶⁵ Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 84-85.

³⁶⁶ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal correspondence; Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 116.

amounted to 2,681 Egyptian pounds, and was the fifth largest amount of donations exceeding those of Kuwait, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey, and coming after Palestine, India, the Hijaz, and Iraq.³⁶⁷

The Qusman abroad sometimes sent or collected charities for needy people even far away from the countries where they resided. Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr, who was a prominent pearl merchant in Bahrain, was known for his passion to help poor Muslims anywhere. According to a British Agent’s report, a prominent Indian Muslim wrote on April 11, 1914, to al-Dhukayr asking the latter to collect as much as he could to help Muslims in one of the Indian provinces.³⁶⁸

In addition to the charities, some of the Qusman who traded in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean endowed religious and public institutions, whether in the trading centers where they resided or in al-Qasim. For instance, the famous traders in Basra, Sulayman and Hamad, sons of Muhammad al-Dhukayr of ‘Unayzah, built a mosque in 1922 in al-Zubayr. This mosque was named after them, *Masjid al-Dhukayr* (al-Dhukayr Mosque).³⁶⁹ Also, Ibn Sulayman, who later became the first Finance Minister in Saudi Arabia, endowed and prepared a land in ‘Unayzah to be a cemetery.³⁷⁰ He also contributed in providing the first public water supply system in ‘Unayzah. Ibn Sulayman established a *waqf* (endowment) to annually provide fund for ‘Unayzah people wanting to perform their pilgrimage.

The Qasimi merchants abroad were socially open to local communities of the ports in which they resided. Some of them married women of these communities. While in ‘Unayzah in

³⁶⁷ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 163-64.

³⁶⁸ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza’ir al-Lu’lu’*, 18.

³⁶⁹ Muhammad ibn Hamad al-‘Assafi, *Masajid al-Zubayr*, ed. Qasim al-Samurra’i (Riyadh: Dar al-Faysal al-Thaqafiyya, 2001), 53

³⁷⁰ Al-Sharif, *Mantiqat ‘Unayzah*, 227.

1877, Doughty met the ten-year old Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni who was born of an Indian woman when his father was a resident in Bombay. Doughty also met in ‘Unayzah’s one of its merchants who was often a resident in Aden. This merchant told Doughty that he would return to Aden since he left a wife and a little son there.³⁷¹ Such marriages were very likely to have softened the Qusman’s view of the others.

The Qusman: Solidarity and Regional Pride

By tracing the history of the Qusman’s travels abroad, a reader can find many examples of their social solidarity. Although the *‘uqaylat*’s history is rich with such examples, in the next paragraphs I will show only a few instances of the solidarity of *ahl al-hadra* of the Qusman, on whom this monograph is focused.

The Qusman’s solidarity did not only appear in business, but even in their social relations. When a person arrived from al-Qasim whether in Bahrain, Kuwait, al-Hasa, or India, one of the Qusman often received this newcomer as his own guest until he found a job and became able to support himself. This was a tradition that most Qusman followed. For instance, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, one the prominent merchants in Bahrain in the first half of the twentieth century, never closed his door to guests, especially those newly arrived from al-Qasim. Instead, he allowed them to stay in his parlor for many days until they found appropriate jobs.³⁷² Also, ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan, the provost of Bombay’s merchants and the representative of Ibn Saud, had a parlor in which he accommodated any person coming from Arabia.³⁷³

³⁷¹ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 362, 440.

³⁷² ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, personal interview.

³⁷³ Al-Qash‘ami, “Mu‘tamadu al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 1: 119.

Another example of the Qusman's solidarity is told by Salim al-Raysh. When arriving in al-Hufuf coming from Kuwait in c.1953, his friend 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Musa and he had no single piece of money. They sat at a corner near the camel market waiting for their destiny. After the camel merchants left the market, Khalaf ibn 'Ali al-Khalaf of Buraydah passed by them and guessed they were from al-Qasim. Al-Khalaf then asked them and they confirmed that they were Qusman. He then invited them to his house. Al-Khalaf encouraged these two young men to take a shower before entering his parlor. After taking showers, al-Raysh and al-Musa found that their old, dirty clothes were replaced by new ones. After a night at al-Khalaf's house, he found jobs for these young men at his friend's business shop.³⁷⁴

In Bahrain, the Qusman often resided next each other, which boosted their strong links.³⁷⁵ In addition, the Qusman usually resided next to each other in all destinations they settled in. Likewise, almost a whole neighborhood in Kuwait was filled by the Qusman.³⁷⁶ As a result, since these merchants were often connected both with each other and with home, trade of al-Qasim did not only prosper, but also appeared as one international connected commercial network.

The Qusman were also so patriots, even though some of them left al-Qasim while in their teens and never returned. For instance, 'Abd Allah al-Fawzan, who left 'Unayzah at the age of seventeen and later became the provost of Bombay's merchants, was known for his patriotism. Even though he never returned home, al-Fawzan did not tolerate any kind of mockery of Najd in general and 'Unayzah in particular. In one of his travels from Bombay to Karachi, Al-Fawzan was the guest of a member of al-Marzuq trading house of Kuwait. While eating lunch together at

³⁷⁴ Salim al-Raysh, personal interview.

³⁷⁵ Al-Zamil, personal interview.

³⁷⁶ Al-'Ulayqi, personal interview.

al-Marzuq's house, one of the attendees mentioned that the meat was delicious. Another one responded: "This is Karachi's meat, which is better than Bombay's." He ironically continued: "It is like Najd's meat. Well, poverty made any food delicious." Al-Fawzan, then, felt that this person was mocking Najd, so he immediately stood up in order to leave. However, all the attendees stood up apologizing for what the man had said. Al-Fawzan, then, said: "When somebody left his country and made some business, he should not deny his past and forget how his people live over there."³⁷⁷

Another example of the Qusman's nostalgia is mentioned by Louis Dame, the doctor in charge of the Mason Memorial Hospital in Bahrain in the 1920s and 1930s. While talking about the missionary school in one of his letters, Dame wrote: "The teacher was giving a geography lessons on Arabia. Aneiza, among other places, was pointed out on the map. After the lesson a small boy, a son of one of the Aneiza merchants in business here, came to the teacher and asked to be shown Aneiza again. After looking at the spot on the map reverently a moment he bent his head and kissed it saying, "That is my homeland." Dame added: "Since my return I have met a number of Aneiza people here and the first question they ask is, 'how did you like our country?'" They take a personal pride in the artistically painted doors and little tables of which I brought home some samples."³⁷⁸ Thus, both the adults and the child, who might have never seen their hometown, seemed very proud of it as if they always dreamed to see it one day.

³⁷⁷ Al-Qash'ami, "Mu'tamadu al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz," 1: 120-21.

³⁷⁸ Correspondence, Louis P. Dame to W. I. Chamberlain, 24 March 1924, CBFM 1923-1936, JAHW06-1308.5, 2.

Chapter 6:

The Political Impact of the Qasimi Merchants of the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean

A History of al-Qasim's Political Economy

The Qasimi merchants abroad benefited greatly from their travels, especially those who visited India which was the center of the colonial British at that time, to broaden their political understanding. While visiting 'Unayzah in 1877, Doughty noticed that these merchants had a clear conception about global politics. Doughty points out that his elder friend, 'Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, who had been a merchant based in Jeddah and the chief of the famous trading family of al-Bassam, opened a conversation on one occasion about the Western world, pronouncing the names of some British ministers, such as Palmerston and Disraeli, and criticizing Ottoman corruption and misrule. Al-Bassam showed his anger when comparing how some grand ministers did not sit more than three months in Istanbul while their British counterparts might have served for many years. The attendees also talked about the enmity between Prussia and France. Then, the conversation turned to the Ottoman-Russian war. Doughty credits their political awareness to their interest in reading an Arabic newspaper published in Istanbul and distributed in all Arab countries. He later saw this newspaper in the houses of the Najdi merchants in Bombay.³⁷⁹

In addition to the Qusman's travels, the regional and international political significance of their district enabled the elite class among them to be politically aware. Valenti summarizes al-Qasim's political importance in both the regional and international spheres by demonstrating "that by the 1820s al-Qasim became thoroughly intertwined and dependent on three imperial

³⁷⁹ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 350, 370-71.

worlds, or depending on the relationship in question we might say three imperial markets: the Ottoman Empire, the Egyptian Empire, and the British Empire (especially its manifestation in India). Input (in the form of men, money, goods, and alliances) from al-Qasim was a regular feature of these empires, and in some cases this input was essential to the successful functioning imperial system.” In the case of the Ottoman Empire, many of the Qusman served as soldiers and provided the Ottoman urban centers with particular goods. Realizing the significance of al-Qasim as a possible new resource, thus, the Ottomans attempted to integrate it into the Ottoman zone. In the case of Egypt, input from al-Qasim was important for the local consumption. Camels that the Qusman exported to Egypt were also essential for the Ibrahim Pasha’s military campaigns in Syria and Anatolia. In the case of the British Empire, the export of the Najdi horses to India reflected that Najd was incorporated into the global economy, this trade specifically was crucial for the British military interests in India.³⁸⁰ As a result, “for at least 200 years,” Valenti argues, “al-Qasim has played an important role in Najdi history, and at times, a quite central role in the rise and fortunes of the various outside powers of Al Sa‘ud, Al Rashid, Al Sabah, and Hashemites (we can also add the British, given their obsession with al-Qasim during World War I but also earlier relevance due to their Indian interests).”³⁸¹

Although focusing on the *‘uqaylat* who were active in the Ottoman frontiers, Valenti argues that merchants of al-Qasim were local intermediaries between people of al-Qasim and surrounding powers, including Al Saud, Al Rashid, al-Ashraf, Al Subah, and the Ottomans. However, what often motivated the Qusman was their personal and regional interests, which often relied on al-Qasim’s historical identity as an emporia. Since it is an internal district, al-Qasim was unable to thrive, nor perhaps to survive, without reaching and trading with port cities.

³⁸⁰ Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 14-15.

³⁸¹ Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 38.

Thus, when feeling that these interests were threatened by a specific political power, the Qusman did not hesitate to counter it.³⁸² Rulers of Najd and political entities, particularly Al Saud and Al Rashid, not only well understood this issue, but, according to Valenti, believed that protecting trade and securing commercial routes was a significant part of “the state-building enterprise.”³⁸³ This is logical since protecting trade would not be possible without enforcing security in the ruled territories. Making people feel safe was sometimes sufficient for a ruler to be legitimate. For instance, Gertrude Bell was noted in 1914 that the *amir* of Ha`il, Ibn Rashid, compensated all the *samn* (ghee) caravans that were attacked by Shammar and ‘Inizah tribes while coming out of Najd.³⁸⁴

Even the Ottoman officials were very concerned with protecting trade caravans coming out of Najd as a sign of providing security for its subjects. Drawing on a letter dated in August 1893 and sent from the Ottoman governor in Salt, in Jordan today, Eugene Rogan points out that the Ottoman local authorities compensated the *‘uqaylat* merchants whose caravan was plundered by a branch of Bani Sakhr. The governor in Salt reacted to this incident by requesting support from Damascus, which in turn sent a detachment of 300 cavalry. The district governor led these troops to Bani Sakhr, and presented a list containing the articles stolen from the *‘uqaylat*. Consequently, the governor successfully returned all the stolen properties, including cash, merchandise, and livestock.³⁸⁵

The clearest example of the significance of the protection of the Qusman’s interests by the surrounding powers occurred in Buraydah after the conquest of the town by Ibn Saud. As is

³⁸² Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 13, 43.

³⁸³ Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 80.

³⁸⁴ Gertrude Bell, *The Arabian Diaries*, ed. Rosemary O’Brien (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 164.

³⁸⁵ Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 68.

known, the second Saudi state disintegrated after Al Rashid, the strongest rivals of Al Saud, defeated the Qusman, the allies of Al Saud, in the battle of al-Mulayda', a village in al-Qasim around which the battle was fought, in 1891. After reconquering Riyadh in 1902 and the surrounding regions in the following year, Ibn Saud was interested in conquering al-Qasim for three reasons. First, Ibn Saud had already knew that at least al-Qasim's rulers, Al Muhanna of Buraydah and Al Sulaym of 'Unayzah, and al-Qasim's elite, *al-'uqaylat*, were willing to help in ousting Al Rashid from al-Qasim. Second, as a populated region whose men would be a crucial supplement to his army, Ibn Saud found al-Qasim naturally a strategic martial target. Third, as a region blessed with an active trade and rich with agriculture, al-Qasim was economically significant for Ibn Saud. However, since the aftermath of Ibn Saud's conquering of Buraydah in 1904, the *'uqaylat*, whose opinion was greatly respected, were then divided amongst themselves; some preferred Al Rashid and others preferred Ibn Saud, although the latter side were the majority. What obviously demonstrates that the supporters of Ibn Saud were the majority is that about three thousand men of the Qusman returned from Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt to defend their homeland and to support Ibn Saud in his wars against Al Rashid. Those *'uqaylat* played crucial roles in these battles, especially in the significant battle of al-Bukayriyya that immediately followed Ibn Saud's conquest of al-Qasim. Although there was no clear victor in this battle, it proved to the powerful 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Mut'ib Al Rashid (Ibn Rashid) who was supported by Ottoman troops that al-Qasim could not be forcefully subjugated any more.

However, Ibn Rashid did not give up; instead, he insistently continued his attempts to reconquer al-Qasim until his death in al-Qasim in 1906. Upon Ibn Rashid's death, the relations between Ibn Saud and the *amir* of Buraydah, Salih ibn Hasan al-Muhanna, tensed. As a result, Ibn Saud took the *amir* of Buraydah and imprisoned him in Riyadh. Later, according to some

accounts, Salih al-Muhanna was killed after a failed attempt to escape. In Buraydah, the *amir* became Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Muhanna, the cousin of the former *amir*. To take his cousin’s revenge, Muhammad al-Muhanna restored the relationships with Al Rashid who in turn was attacking the ‘*uqaylat*’s caravans whose routes from al-Qasim to Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt were through, or around, the territories of Al Rashid. It is unclear if the ruler of Ha`il plundered these caravans only for booty or as a revenge, since most of the ‘*uqaylat* preferred Ibn Saud. What is clear is that the *amir* of Buraydah did not protect the ‘*uqaylat*’s trade, or even attempt to do so. To protect their interests, consequently, several leaders of the ‘*uqaylat* secretly contacted Ibn Saud asking him to come to al-Qasim. When he secretly arrived, these leaders forcefully opened one of the towns’ gates. After quick clashes that resulted in no more than three or four casualties, the *amir* of Buraydah was overthrown. The leaders of the ‘*uqaylat* took the oath from Ibn Saud that Muhammad al-Muhanna would leave the town without being hurt in any way. This story, therefore, proves that the Qasimi merchants, as Valenti suggests, were willing to encounter any political power threatening their interests even if this political power was their own *amir* in this case.

However, this was not the first time the Qusman shifted their alliance. In fact, the Qusman frequently shifted alliances between Al Saud and Al Rashid in the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. Valenti attempts to understand why the Qusman from decade to decade supported Al Saud, switched to Al Rashid, then returned to Al Saud. He denies the argument that this behavior was an act against the Wahhabi doctrine simply because the Qusman, from Buraydah in particular, were Wahhabis as well as the house of Al Rashid who were officially Wahhabis. Thus, switching from Al Saud to Al Rashid is obviously not an anti-Wahhabi movement. Valenti emphasizes, “to say that Qusman were anti-Wahhabi is not the

same as saying anti-Saudi.”³⁸⁶ Instead, he argues, “they [the Qusman] could be good Wahhabis while pursuing their own local, personal interests, even to the point of being anti-Saudi.”³⁸⁷ In other words, Valenti believes that leaders of al-Qasim desired most importantly to protect their investments. Thus, when supporting Al Rashid served this purpose, the Qusman did so. When Al Rashid threatened the Qusman’s interests, however, they then switched to Al Saud.³⁸⁸

While partially agreeing with Valenti, I believe that combining Vassiliev’s argument, which focuses on the political factor, with Valenti’s, which concentrates on the economic motivation, would lead to a rational explanation of al-Qasim’s shifting alliances during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Vassiliev depicts the relations between al-Qasim and Riyadh during this period as continuous attempts by the Al Saud to reassert their central authority, which was challenged by al-Qasim’s resistance. Valenti, on the other hand, frames the situation as if the Qusman were solely following their economic interests. While I believe that both are correct, I think that everyone approaches this case from different angles. My reading of the situation is as follows. Buraydah and ‘Unayzah were ruled by two different powers: first, the political authority represented by the ruling families; and, second, the economic authority represented often by merchant families. These merchants usually daily attended *majlis al-amir* (ruler’s court) and were known, especially in Buraydah, as *al-jama‘a* or *jama‘at ahl Buraydah*. *Al-jama‘a*, varied in numbers from time to time roughly between five to fifteen, and was often composed of the *‘uqaylat* leaders who efficiently cooperated with the *amir* in making significant decisions. Although the political and economic authorities often worked for al-Qasim’s interests

³⁸⁶ Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 279-80.

³⁸⁷ Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 283.

³⁸⁸ Valenti, “State-Building in Central Arabia,” 285.

in general, their own political and economic interests sometimes contrasted, which may have led to inner clashes.

Towns of Najd, having experienced a kind of autonomy long before the advent of Wahhabism, their desire for independence was still obvious until the unification of present Saudi Arabia. In the time of the first Saudi state, al-Qasim, especially Buraydah, was a strong ally for Al Saud. However, rulers of al-Qasim's towns were often not appointed by al-Dir'iyya, so al-Qasim enjoyed a kind of autonomy. In the second Saudi state, especially during the reign of Faysal ibn Turki, Riyadh persistently attempted to expand its central authority to al-Qasim. Consequently, the political authorities of al-Qasim tried to ally surrounding powers that would help the Qusman to preserve their autonomy. For this sake, the Qusman did not hesitate to contact the Ashraf of the Hijaz in 1847, to ally with Al Rashid in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, and to seek the Ottoman support in the early twentieth century as well. Thus, al-Qasim's political authority did not prefer Al Saud simply since Riyadh did not allow the Qusman to maintain their autonomy.

Nevertheless, the economic authority, represented by merchant families, often preferred Al Saud. Before and after becoming the rulers of Ha'il, Al Rashid were *'uqaylat*. The founder of the ruling Al Rashid family, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Ali ibn Rashid, had been an *'uqayli* in Iraq. After taking the emirate of Ha'il, 'Abd Allah's second son, Mut'ib, who would later become the third *amir* of the Al Rashid dynasty, became the *amir* of Ha'il's *'uqaylat* in Iraq. The competition between *'uqaylat* of Ha'il under the leadership of Mut'ib and *'uqaylat* of al-Qasim became too aggressive. Mut'ib attempted to forcibly take the privilege of leading and protecting the Iraqi *hajj* caravans that had been led by *'uqaylat* of al-Qasim. There was going to be an armed confrontation between *'uqaylat* of al-Qasim and those of Ha'il had the governor of Baghdad not

intervened. Benefiting from the increasing power of Ha'il and that the way of the Iraqi *hajj* caravans may have been via some lands ruled by Ha'il, Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Al Rashid (r.1869-1897), third son of the founder of the emirate and later the strongest ruler of Ha'il, became the *amir* of the '*uqaylat* of Ha'il and the leader of the Iraqi *hajj* caravans. After becoming *amir* of Ha'il, Muhammad ibn Rashid made his capital an important station for *hajj* caravans. This act was detailed by Musil in the following passage:

Muhammad [ibn Rashid] made a brilliant use of his position. By means of presents and threats he induced all the caravan leaders to conduct their caravans by way of his capital, Hajel [Ha'il]. Thus the pilgrim caravans traveled no longer by al-Hasa' and ar-Rijad [Riyadh] but by Abu Rar, Tkajjec, and Hajel. Even the trade caravans from al-Kasim had to take the route through Hajel. Every one of the pilgrims, who sometimes numbered ten thousand, had to pay for water and for his camel thirty megidijjat (\$27.00) on the outward and fifteen megidijjat on the return journey. Furthermore, a portion of all goods imported or transported by the pilgrims was exacted as toll. In this manner Muhammad increased the prosperity not merely of the ruling house but of the settlers who acted as merchants and of the Bedouins who were accustomed to hire out their camels to the caravans.³⁸⁹

Thus, since three of Ha'il's rulers had been themselves '*uqaylat* and direct rivals of their counterpart Qusman, there were no competitors threatening the trade of al-Qasim more dangerous than the rulers of Ha'il. Indeed, the Qusman lost the privilege of leading the Iraqi *hajj* caravans by the hands of Al Rashid, in addition to the frequent cuts of the road between al-Qasim and al-Sham and the plunder of the '*uqaylat*'s caravans. Al Saud, on the other hand, never threatened al-Qasim's trade, which made them preferred by al-Qasim's merchant families, especially the '*uqaylat*.

The only exception that did not follow this pattern was the family of al-Bassm. During the conflict between Ibn Saud and Al Rashid in the first decade of the twentieth century the position of al-Bassam was not clear. They did not want to publicly oppose Ibn Saud who was

³⁸⁹ Alois Musil, *Northern Negd: A Topographical Itinerary*, ed. J. K. Wright (New York: Czech Academy of Science and Arts, 1928), 243.

supported by most of the Qasimi political elites and merchant families, although they secretly stood to Al Rashid's side. The economic motivator appeared again as a dynamic player in Najd's political history, as explained by Valenti. He points out that al-Bassam's "economic interests were better served by the Al Rashid."³⁹⁰ Several members of the al-Bassam family were then *wukala'* (sing. *wakil*, agent) of Ibn Rashid. For example, Sulayman ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam was the *wakil* of Ibn Rashid in the Hijaz.³⁹¹ In Basra, also, members of al-Bassam functioned as Ibn Rashid's *wukala'*.³⁹² During the first attempt to restore Riyadh, made by Ibn Saud in 1901 and supported by Mubarak al-Subah of Kuwait and the exiled ruling families of Buraydah, al-Muhanna, and 'Unayzah, al-Sulaym, Fahad al-Bassam, Ibn Rashid's *wakil* in Basra, made it clear to the British consul that he "was dependent on Ibn Rashid so far as his commercial interests were concerned, and that his father and other close relatives resided in Nejd and were completely in the *amir*'s power. He was not, therefore, in a position to incur the *amir*'s resentment."³⁹³ Thus, there were not political factors that kept them loyal to Al Rashid, but, instead, they knew that they may lose their wealth if they opposed Al Rashid.

To sum up, the political factor was not the sole motivator for al-Qasim shifting alliances in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The political authority did not often prefer Al Saud since they stole the Qusman's autonomy while other powers, including the Ashraf, Al Rashid, and the Ottomans, sometimes supported it in order to weaken Al Saud. The economic authorities, preferred Al Saud since the Saudis never threatened the Qusman's commercial interests, while the Al Rashid were the most dangerous for al-Qasim's trade. According to their

³⁹⁰ Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia," 335.

³⁹¹ Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia," 335.

³⁹² Robin Bidwell, *The Affairs of Kuwait 1896-1905* (London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1971), vol. I, part. III: 41-42, 106, 135-36, 152; vol. II, part. V: 44-45.

³⁹³ Bidwell, *The Affairs of Kuwait*, vol. I, part. III: 135-36.

interests, the political and economic authorities attempted to balance their alliances. When their interests conflicted, an internal clash occurred.

During the conflicts between the Qusman and the second Saudi state, particularly during Imam Faysal ibn Turki's reign, Qasimi family merchants played crucial roles as mediators between local people and the Saudis. For instance, Imam Faysal made many attempts to crush Qasimi revolts against the Saudi rule using different methods, including the appointment of new *amirs* from among rival clans in Buraydah and 'Unayzah or even launching war against them. However, all these attempts failed in bringing al-Qasim into the circle of Saudi centralized authority. Consequently, Imam Faysal decided to appoint an outsider *amir* in al-Qasim; he proclaimed his brother Jiluwi the *amir* of al-Qasim and installed him in 'Unayzah in 1849. Jiluwi's administration was poor, so people disliked him, which resulted in a revolt against him in 1854. Nevertheless, some elite families in 'Unayzah did not support the rebellion, particularly Al Bassam. Al Bassam's position was caused by two specific factors: first, they wanted to fulfill the oath that one of their members had given five years prior; and, second, they attempted to avoid any disruptions to caravan traffic, and 'Unayzah's trade in general.³⁹⁴ This is further evidence that although Qasimi merchant families were politically influential in Najd, they were always concerned with their commercial interests, and that these interests did not always coincide with the ruling families' interests which were often based on their desire for independence from the Saudi central authority.

Ultimately, the purpose of tracing the Qusman's switching alliances here is not only to prove that the Qusman followed their economic and political interests but also to show how their changing alliances affected the region politically. Al-Qasim's alliances, which were often made

³⁹⁴ Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia," 312-16.

and switched by the merchant elite, frequently changed the political balance in Najd. During the long conflicts between Al Saud and Al Rashid, al-Qasim was often the region that tilted the scale towards the benefit of one party. For instance, the emirate of Al Rashid did not appear as a superior power to Al Saud until al-Qasim switched its alliance from Al Saud to Al Rashid in c. 1875, which eventually led to the collapse of the second Saudi state. Likewise, Ibn Saud did not emerge as superior to Ibn Rashid until al-Qasim became part of his newly founded state.

Political Activists Abroad

Poverty was the main reason that drove many Qusman, and many other Najdis to seek livelihood in the Hijaz, Egypt, al-Sham, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and India. Nevertheless, there was also another influential factor that forced many Qusman to leave Najd, which was the political instability. Since the invasion of the forces of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha on Najd that resulted in the destruction of al-Dir'iyya, the capital of the first Saudi state, in 1818, Najd lost its short-term security and returned to its situation of chaos. Moreover, with the reestablishment of the second Saudi state in Riyadh and the rise of the state of Al Rashid emirate in Ha'il, al-Qasim's political autonomy and economic interest were often threatened by these two strong polities, Riyadh in the south and Ha'il in the north. Consequently, al-Qasim was engaged in many armed conflicts with both Al Saud and Al Rashid until both al-Qasim and Riyadh lost in 1891 and the *amir* of Ha'il became the master of Najd. Since all the losers, Al Saud of Riyadh, Al Muhanna of Buraydah, and Al Sulaym of 'Unayzah, became refugees in Kuwait, a kind of alliance united them to restore their political power and to destroy the political advantage of Al Rashid. Indeed, Ibn Saud reconquered Riyadh in 1901 while Al Sulaym and Al Muhanna reconquered 'Unayzah and Buraydah in 1904.

During these long years of instability (from 1818 to 1904) many Qusman left al-Qasim and resided in one of the trading centers that spread from Egypt to India. As soon as Ibn Saud and his Qasimi allies began their armed struggle to restore Riyadh and al-Qasim, Qasimi merchants abroad actively reacted either by standing by Ibn Rashid's side or by eagerly supporting their political leaders. For example, a few months before conquering Riyadh, Ibn Saud left Kuwait and made al-Hasa his base from which he began to attack Ibn Rashid's Bedouin allies in the region. Ibn Rashid, in turn, complained to the Ottoman government that Ibn Saud had been active while the Ottoman authorities in al-Hasa did not react. Having been incapable of militarily stopping Ibn Saud, the Ottomans allowed Ibn Rashid to install an agent in al-Hasa to watch Ibn Saud's activities. Furthermore, the Ottomans promised Ibn Rashid that they would not allow Ibn Saud to buy any supplies from al-Hasa. Indeed, Ibn Rashid sent Sa'ad al-Hazimi as an agent in al-Hasa. Al-Hazimi's ambitions were not limited only to preventing Ibn Saud from supplying his forces from al-Hasa, but also aimed to prevent Bahrain and Qatar from sending any kind of supplies to Ibn Saud. Al-Hazimi traveled himself to Qatar and met with its ruler, Shaykh Qasim al-Thani and handed him a letter from Ibn Rashid regarding the same purpose. Similarly, al-Hazimi went to Bahrain in December 1901 and became the guest of the most prominent Qasimi merchant in Bahrain at the time, Muqbil ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr.³⁹⁵ Although the sources do not clarify how al-Dhukayr, and the rest of the Qasimi traders in Bahrain, reacted to al-Hazimi's visit, the visit itself clarifies how the Qusman abroad were influential not only in al-Qasim, but also in most of the incidents in Najd at that time.

In 1904, the Qusman abroad used the diplomatic approach in order to convince Ibn Saud to release some elite Qusman whom he had detained in Riyadh. After conquering al-Qasim, Ibn

³⁹⁵ Muqbil ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dhukayr, *al-'Uqud al-Durriyya fi Tarikh al-Bilad al-Najdiyya*, ed. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam (Riyadh: Dar al-'Asima, 1998), 349-52.

Saud was skeptical about the loyalty of the house of al-Bassam of ‘Unayzah. Consequently, he took about ten men and detained them in Riyadh. Since the al-Bassam had trading houses in the Hijaz, al-Sham, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and India, Ibn Saud received several letters from influential people, such as Shaykh Qasim ibn Thani of Qatar, Sharif ‘Awn al-Rafiq of Mecca, and the Ashraf of Basra, regarding these members of the al-Bassam family. Moreover, Qasimi traders in Bahrain, particularly the prominent pearl merchant Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr, attempted diplomatically to help the detainees. Since he knew that Mubarak al-Subah of Kuwait had encouraged Ibn Saud to detain these members of the al-Bassam, al-Dhukayr sent a letter to Shaykh Mubarak begging him to write a good word about the al-Bassam and send it to Ibn Saud. These efforts collectively resulted in the release of the detained members of the al-Bassam family, some of whom returned to ‘Unayzah and others who decided to leave Najd forever and to reside in the Hijaz and Iraq.³⁹⁶

However, most Qasimi traders, including both the *‘uqaylat* and *ahl al-hadra*, were supporters of Ibn Saud simply because their business had been threatened by Ibn Rashid. On January 9, 1905, Ahmad Mukhlis Pasha, the *wali* of Basra, received a telegraph from Istanbul, including an order to arrest Muhammad and ‘Abd Allah, sons of ‘Uawyyid al-Shu‘aybi and Hamad ibn Hammad al-Shibil, the commercial agent of al-Shubayli, the famous Qasimi trading house in Basra. According to the sources, the arrest order for these three merchants who were originally from ‘Unayzah was caused by the complaining of the *amir* of Ha’il about their role in the conflict of Najd between Al Rashid and Al Saud.³⁹⁷ Although the sources do not give more details about the nature of the roles these merchants had played, it is obvious that ‘Abd al-‘Aziz

³⁹⁶ Al-Dhukayr, *al-‘Uqud al-Durriyya*, 418-20, 426-27.

³⁹⁷ Al-Bassam, *Tuhfat al-Mushtaq*, 395-96; Al-Dhukayr, *al-‘Uqud al-Durriyya*, 391.

ibn Rashid would not complain if their roles had not been effective. In any event, all the three Qasimi traders were arrested and sent to Konya for a while.³⁹⁸

Since most of them were either passionate about Muslim causes or supporters of Arab nationalism, Qasimi merchants abroad were often interested in politics not only in Najd, but across the Muslim world. For instance, some Qasimi traders in Bahrain eagerly supported the Syrian Arab nationalists against the Ottomans. According to a British report, Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr and Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam led campaigns in 1910 in the major towns of Bahrain in order to collect donations for the Arab nationalists in Syria who were struggling against the Ottomans. The report suspected that the two Qasimi traders could collect a considerable amount of money.³⁹⁹

However, when World War I broke out, some Qasimi merchants might have felt that the whole Muslim world was under threat, so it was an obligation to support the Ottomans. For example, al-Dhukayr, who had supported the Arab nationalists against the Ottomans, now exploited his wide relationships and good reputation in leading a huge fundraising campaign in Bahrain to support the Ottoman Empire and encouraging the elites in the Gulf states to do the same. The donation that he received in 1915 from the ruler of Qatar, Qasim ibn Muhammad al-Thani, which was Rs. 125,000, is clear evidence that al-Dhukayr’s campaign was effective. In addition to his dynamic role in raising fund for the Ottomans, al-Dhukayr also led another campaign to support the Libyans who had been colonized by the Italians.⁴⁰⁰

Qasimi merchants’ interest in the Arab and Muslim causes appeared again in 1939 when Palestinians began to resist British colonialism and the Zionist ambitions. Several Qasimi traders

³⁹⁸ Al-Dhukayr, *al-‘Uqud al-Durriyya*, 391.

³⁹⁹ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 162-63.

⁴⁰⁰ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza’ir al-Lu’lu’*, 17-18.

in Bahrain, such as ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam, Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam, and Muhammad ibn Hamad al-Qadi, participated in establishing the first commission in Bahrain that expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause. To avoid any obstacles that the British Political Resident in Bahrain might have created, this commission was named the Palestinian Orphans Aid Commission (*Lajnat I‘anat Aytam Filastin*), while the commission directly supported the Palestinian resistance. This commission held a conference in Bahrain and encouraged people to donate for the Palestinians. After the conference, *The Bahrain Newspaper (Jaridat al-Bahrayn)* listed the names of the donors, of whom eight of the forty-eight were Qasimi merchants (see figure 102).⁴⁰¹

اسماء المتبرعين لايتام فلسطين	
خالد المشاري	٥٠
الاستاذ محمد امين البناي	٥٠
الحاج يوسف بن عيسى بوخضرة	٥٠
محمد حورشيد الكردي وابنيه	٥٠
يوسف ناجيه	٥٠
علي بن موسى المرزا	٥٠
عبدالله بن علي تابع الشيخ حمد	٥٠
محمد صالح الشتر سلاوي رئيس بلدية النامة	٥٠
انجمن درزيان - (جميعه عندي)	٥٠
الحاج اسمر علي	٥٠
السيد جنيد	٥٠
الحاج نعم الله ومحمد ايتام من العابدين	٥٠
ابراهيم وسليم الزامل	٥٠
الحاج محمد العلي السلام	٥٠
حمد الحمد السلام	٥٠
عباس علي ابو القاسم شيرازي	٥٠
مبارك بن حمد الفاضل	٥٠
ابراهيم بن حمد الدوي	٥٠
شهاب بن احمد شهاب الحرز	٥٠
الشيخ احمد بن الشيخ حمد الخليفة	٢٥٠
علي بن الشيخ محمد الخليفة	٢٥٠
بارك بن الشيخ حمد الخليفة	٢٥٠
علي بن عبدالله الخليفة	٢٥٠
بن احمد امير الرفاع	٢٥٠
الحاج سايان الحمد البسام	٢٥٠
علي بن عبدالله ابل	٢٥٠
يوسف علي اكبر رضا	٢٥٠
غاييل ابراهيم المؤيد	٢٥٠
احمد بن علي القصير	٢٥٠
جبر بن محمد المسلم	٢٥٠
الشيخ عبدالنور بسكي	٢٥٠
عبدالله الموجان واخوانه	٢٥٠
حمد الروق وعبدالله الزامل	٢٥٠
نادي البحرين في المحرق	٢٥٠
عبدالله بن علي نازم وتبرع ايضا	٢٥٠
جميع المطبوعات	٢٥٠
علي بن عبدالله وجاسم الشيرازي	٢٥٠
عبدالعزيز السلطان البسام	٢٥٠

Figure 102: *Jaridat al-Bahrayn*'s (al-Bahrain Newspaper) list of the names of donors to Palestinian Orphans Aid Commission in Bahrain. The donations ranged from Rs. 50-200. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 169.

⁴⁰¹ Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 164, 166, 169.

A State Cofounders

The Qusman's travels outside Arabia were not only fruitful for them in terms of improving their political awareness, but even made them qualified to work in political sectors as well as in economic fields. During the formation time of the present Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud decided to import many experts from the Arab countries to help him establish his new country. Ibn Saud's decision was definitely caused by the lack of experienced politicians among his Najdi people. The sole exceptions were those Najdi merchants who had traveled outside Arabia. Therefore, Ibn Saud depended on several of these merchants as his personal assistants, while hiring others as unofficial representatives for his state even before conquering the Hijaz in 1924.

One of the earliest Qasimi merchants who were appointed to high positions in the recently founded Saudi state was Muqbil ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dhukayr of 'Unayzah. Since he had been one of the Qasimi merchants in Bahrain, Ibn Saud named al-Dhukayr as the administrator of al-Hasa's finance department in 1924 before the foundation of a finance ministry. Al-Dhukayr successfully managed and organized the province's finance issues. In 1930, however, al-Dhukayr resigned from this job.⁴⁰²

During the clashes between Sharif Husayn of Mecca and Ibn Saud in the late 1910s and early 1920s, several Qasimi trading houses were located in the Hijaz. Therefore, both Ibn Saud and Sharif Husayn wanted these merchants to serve their agendas, which reflects the political influence of Qasimi merchants both in al-Qasim and the Hijaz. Because of their Najdi origins, these merchants were often secret supporters of Ibn Saud, although Sharif Husayn was insistent that they should work openly against Ibn Saud. As a result of these tensions, the Sharif expelled Salih ibn 'Abd Allah al-Fadil of 'Unayzah from the Hijaz and arrested his son and nephew. The

⁴⁰² Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 6: 431.

Sharif accused these members of the al-Fadil trading house of leaning towards Ibn Saud, so he left them in the prison for several years. Before leaving the Hijaz, al-Fadil appointed Qirun al-Dahlawi as a commercial agent, who seems from his name to be of Indian origin. This appointment reflects how strong the relations were between the al-Fadil trading house in India and local people, so al-Fadil preferred not to appoint a Hijazi or even Najdi agent, but an Indian. After leaving the Hijaz, in any event, al-Fadil stayed in ‘Unayzah for a while before traveling to Bahrain.⁴⁰³ In 1919, he left for Karachi to take charge of a significant branch of his family’s business, which was also represented in Bombay and the Hijaz.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, in 1919, Sharif Husayn summoned the merchants of ‘Unayzah, who numbered about twenty-seven residing in Mecca and Jeddah, and forced them to sign a letter that was later sent to ‘Unayzah in which they begged their people to oust and boycott the *ikhwan*, Ibn Saud’s Bedouin forces. The Sharif warned the people of ‘Unayzah that if they did not do so, he would imprison the merchants and seize their fortunes.⁴⁰⁵

A member of the al-Fadil trading house who had been arrested by the Sharif was ‘Abd Allah ibn Mhuammad al-Fadil. This merchant might have been the first Qasimi who officially worked in Ibn Saud’s royal court. Al-Fadil later acquired a distinguished position as one of Ibn Saud’s assistants and consultants.⁴⁰⁶ According to Sir Gilbert Falkingham Clayton, a British official, al-Fadil was the only Najdi assistant around Ibn Saud when Clayton met him in 1925 in Bahrah, located on the road between Jeddah and Mecca, to draw the frontiers between Trans-Jordan and Iraq, and Najd. Clayton describes al-Fadil as “a very pleasant Arab merchant who

⁴⁰³ Muhammad al-‘Ali al-‘Ubayyid, *Al-Najm al-Lami ‘ li-al-Nawadir Jami*’, Manuscript, 208; H. St. J. B. Philby, *Arabian Jubilee* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1952), 163; Philby, *The Heart of Arabia*, 1: 314-15.

⁴⁰⁴ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 168.

⁴⁰⁵ Al-‘Ubayyid, *Al-Najm al-Lami*’, 208, 212.

⁴⁰⁶ Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, 163; Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 323.

belongs to a fairly large firm with headquarters at Bombay and branches at Jeddah, Mecca, and various places on the Red Sea and Persian Gulf.” The other of Ibn Saud’s private assistants who were present during the negotiations were Hafid Wahba and Yusuf Yasin, who were Ibn Saud’s direct consultants during the negotiations, and Ibn Saud’s physician, Dr. Mahmud Hammuda, who left Syria for political reasons after the entry of the French and the departure of Sharif Faysal ibn Husayn.⁴⁰⁷ While Wahba was Egyptian, Yasin was Palestinian, and Hammuda was Syrian, ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fadil was the only one of these assistants originally from the Arabian Peninsula. What made al-Fadil as qualified as these other assistants was his travels between Arabia and India. Even though these travels were made for business purposes, merchants like al-Fadil gained knowledge and had experiences not available to people who never left their homelands. As Wahba emphasizes, the Qusman were more flexible when compared with other Najdis since they traveled a lot, so Ibn Saud hired them in his court often in diplomatic reception services.⁴⁰⁸

Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fadil continued to serve his country and gradually rose in the diplomatic ranks. As he had worked as a consultant and assistant for Ibn Saud, al-Fadil also served as a consultant and assistant for the vice king in the Hijaz, Prince Faysal ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. Later, al-Fadil became the vice president of the recently founded Advisory Council in 1936 before serving as the president of the Advisory Council for more than two decades.⁴⁰⁹

According to al-Mani‘, who became an employee at Ibn Saud’s court in 1926, the employees of the royal court did not receive determined salaries. Instead, Ibn Saud treated them

⁴⁰⁷ Sir Gilbert Falkingham Clayton, *An Arabian Diary*, ed. Robert O. Collins (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 113.

⁴⁰⁸ Wahba, *Jazirat al-‘Arab*, 6.

⁴⁰⁹ H. St. J. B. Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, 163; Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 323; Fu’ad Hamza, *al-Bilad al-‘Arabiyya al-Sa’udiyya*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Nasr al-Haditha, 1968), 111.

the same way he treated his Bedouin forces to whom he gave money and clothes as gifts. Although Ibn Saud's generosity was felt even by the employees' families who frequently received gifts in kind of clothes, this method of payment did not allow the employees to control their expenses. Therefore, they appealed to Ibn Saud to receive regular salaries. The king, in turn, agreed and the court occupations became salaried.⁴¹⁰

In addition to these Qusman who were Ibn Saud's close assistants, other Qusman merchants abroad were his unofficial representatives in the countries where they resided. According to al-Mani', these merchants did not receive any compensation from Ibn Saud for their services, although they were socially respected because of this occupation. Among several Najdi merchants representing Ibn Saud abroad there was 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan of 'Unayzah, who represented Ibn Saud in Bombay.⁴¹¹

Al-Fawzan became Ibn Saud's representative in India before the establishment of the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His task was to keep contact with the Indian Muslim '*ulama* and to provide them with sufficient information about Ibn Saud's agenda and religious background. He also focused on easing pilgrimage journeys for Muslims of India and China by providing all the services they needed.⁴¹² Al-Fawzan was not only a representative for Ibn Saud in the early years of the Saudi state, but even helped Ibn Saud in choosing the appropriate personnel for the latter's court. For example, since Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan of 'Unayzah had worked for him in India, al-Fawzan was aware of al-Hamdan's quality as a financial manager. Therefore, when Ibn Saud was looking for somebody to take care of his state's finances, al-Fawzan recommended al-Hamdan.⁴¹³ Although Ibn Saud was completely

⁴¹⁰ Al-Mani', *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 215, 225-26.

⁴¹¹ Al-Mani', *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 246, 255.

⁴¹² Al-Qash'ami, *Mu'tamadu al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz*, 69; Al-'Amiri, "Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind," 84.

⁴¹³ Al-Jasir, "Min Dhikrayat al-Rahalat," 205.

satisfied with al-Hamdan, the latter fell sick and became unable to do his job. Whether al-Hamdan himself recommended his brother, ‘Abd Allah, to replace him or al-Fawzan did, ‘Abd Allah al-Hamdan immediately returned and joined the staff of Ibn Saud’s royal court.

When the Hijaz became part of the Saudi state in 1925, the establishment of diplomatic representation became essential, so Ibn Saud immediately founded a department for foreign affairs in Mecca and a branch in Jeddah. After five years this department was transformed into the Foreign Ministry.⁴¹⁴ In 1936, Fawzan al-Sabiq, who had been Ibn Saud’s unofficial representative in Egypt, was officially named the royal’s representative in Egypt. In 1947, ‘Abd Allah ibn Ibrahim al-Fadil of ‘Unayzah, whose family owned one of the famous trading houses in India, was authorized as minister in Cairo, and later became an ambassador.⁴¹⁵ In Karachi, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam, a member of the famous al-Bassam trading house, was appointed ambassador. While his father was Ibn Saud’s representative in Bombay, Yusuf ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan, who graduated from Saint Xavier College in Bombay, became a representative in Delhi and later the Saudi ambassador in India. Ibn Saud, also, appointed Muhammad ibn Hamad al-Shubayli of ‘Unayzah as a consul in Basra.⁴¹⁶

It is obvious that Ibn Saud preferred that his representatives be the Najdi merchants who resided for a while in the country or the city where he wanted them to represent his state. Ibn Saud’s decision was based on the fact that a merchant who resided in a country or a city for several years would be completely aware of its politics, economy, culture, and, sometimes, language. At the same time, when a merchant was appointed as a representative or agent for Ibn Saud in the country or city where he had resided, this merchant would be more known and

⁴¹⁴ Al-Qash‘ami, “Mu‘tamadu al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 86.

⁴¹⁵ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 324; Al-Qash‘ami, “Mu‘tamadu al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 89.

⁴¹⁶ Al-Qash‘ami, “Mu‘tamadu al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Aziz,” 90-91; Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 368.

trusted by the local people than if somebody new to the country was appointed. Therefore, Ibn Saud appointed two people from the al-Fawzan trading family in India as his representatives in Bombay and Delhi since the members of this family had been trading in India for many years before. Likewise, he named Fawzan al-Sabiq a representative in Egypt since al-Sabiq was one of the *'uqaylat amirs* and had been trading with Egypt for decades.

Similarly, since several members of the al-Shubayli trading family of 'Unayzah had resided in Basra, Ibn Saud chose one of this family's members to be his representative in that city. Muhammad ibn Hamad al-Shubayli was born in c. 1910 in 'Unayzah. Since the al-Shubayli trading house had many properties in Basra founded by Muhammad's paternal grandfather, Muhammad ibn Nasir al-Shubayli, his maternal grandfather, Sulayman al-Shubayli, and his uncle, Nasir ibn Muhammad al-Shubayli, his father frequently traveled to Basra and al-Zubayr in order to take care of his family's business. At the age of ten, Muhammad accompanied his father to Basra where he attended al-Raja' al-'Ali School, which was known also as The American School. While modern education had not yet been known in Najd, Al-Shubayli benefited greatly from such a developed school, where he gained a basic grounding in English. On their way from Basra to 'Unayzah in 1930, al-Shubayli and his father visited Riyadh. While in Riyadh, Ibn Saud appointed al-Shubayli as an employee at the royal court, which was the best place for al-Shubayli to develop his political and diplomatic skills. In 1943, he was appointed as the vice consul in Basra. In 1949, al-Shubayli became the Saudi consul in Basra.⁴¹⁷ Al-Shubayli continued to serve his country as ambassador in several countries: Pakistan (1957-1964), India (1964-1967), Iraq (1967-1971), Afghanistan (1972-1978), and Malaysia (1978-1987). In the following year, 1988, al-Shubayli died after about 60 years in service.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ 'Abd al-Rahman al-Salih al-Shubayli, *Muhammad al-Hamad al-Shubayli* (N.p.: N.p., 1994), 29, 31-32, 34-35.

⁴¹⁸ Al-Mani', *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 245; Al-Shubayli, *Muhammad al-Hamad al-Shubayli*, 36.

Although merchants, these Qusman provided significant diplomatic services to Ibn Saud's newly founded state. 'Abd Allah al-Fawzan, for instance, worked hard to explain Ibn Saud's agenda to Muslim Indians, especially when the Hijaz became a Saudi province. Al-Fawzan was concerned that Indians would continue their annual performance of pilgrimage since Indian pilgrims were an effective source of income for the Saudi state.⁴¹⁹

The second generation of the Qusman in India continued to play an important role in softening the political relationships between Saudi Arabia and India. Yusuf ibn 'Abd Allah al-Fawzan, the Saudi ambassador in India, was celebrated especially by Muslim Indians who saw in him their own representative since he was born in India. Indeed, when visiting Saudi Arabia during the reign of King Faysal ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, jokingly said to the King: "Take Abul Kalam Azad [Minister of Education in India] since he was born in Mecca and give us Yusuf ibn 'Abd Allah al-Fawzan since he was born in India and the son of the provost of Bombay's merchants."⁴²⁰

Ibn Sulayman: From a Trader to a Minister

'Abd Allah ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan of 'Unayzah (hereafter Ibn Sulayman) secured a high position in Ibn Saud's court, later becoming the first Finance Minister. Ibn Sulayman's elder brother, Muhammad, had served Ibn Saud for several years as his personal secretary.⁴²¹ However, Muhammad was injured in the battle of Turuba between Ibn Saud and Sharif Husayn in May 1919, after which he began to steadily lose his hearing. In about a year, Muhammad became unable to serve Ibn Saud because of this injury, so he recommended his brother, 'Abd

⁴¹⁹ Al-Qash'ami, "Mu'tamadu al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz," 116.

⁴²⁰ Al-Qash'ami, "Mu'tamadu al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz," 117.

⁴²¹ Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, 81.

Allah, to Ibn Saud to take his position. Although Ibn Sulayman preferred to practice his own daily business, Ibn Saud did not give him a chance to reject this appointment, insisting that Ibn Sulayman would be the best choice to replace his brother.⁴²² When Ibn Sulayman received his job, Ibn Saud gave him a house, a monthly salary, and paid off all his debts. At the beginning, Ibn Sulayman was one of about six writers and secretaries at Ibn Saud's court. However, since he was an outstanding accountant with a beautiful handwriting in addition to his ability to speak Urdu, Ibn Sulayman's star began to quickly rise in the eyes of Ibn Saud.⁴²³

The earliest practical appearance of Ibn Sulayman as Ibn Saud's financial manager was immediately after Ibn Saud's entry to Ha'il in 1921. Ibn Sulayman's task was to inventory all properties in Ha'il, such as what was in *bayt al-mal* (house of finance) of Ha'il and how much was Ha'il's *zakat* of agriculture and animals. Ibn Sulayman stayed in Ha'il for about six months writing *zakat* registers to be followed by the officials that he appointed. Having finished this task, Ibn Sulayman returned to Riyadh with 40,000 pounds, in addition to the animal *zakat*.⁴²⁴

Moreover, Ibn Sulayman was one of three men whom Ibn Saud had sent to Mecca in 1924 shortly before entering the Hijaz. In addition to Hafid Wahba, the Egyptian consultant of Ibn Saud, and 'Abd Allah al-Damluji, the Iraqi consultant of Ibn Saud, Ibn Sulayman arrived in Mecca to observe the political, economic, social, and cultural situations in the Hijaz before the arrival of Ibn Saud.⁴²⁵ Ibn Sulayman, also, played a dynamic role during the siege of Jeddah, which resisted Ibn Saud's armies for several months. It is natural for such a large military force, camping far away from Najd, to encounter some difficulties in providing the sufficient supplies. However, since he was originally a Qasimi merchant, Ibn Sulayman convinced the leaders of at

⁴²² Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 112; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 28-29.

⁴²³ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 311; Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 111-12; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 28-30, 32-33.

⁴²⁴ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 38.

⁴²⁵ Wahba, introduction to *Jazirat al-'Arab*; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 40.

least one Qasimi trading caravan filled with dates, ghee, rice, and grains heading to Mecca to sell it to Ibn Saud with the costs to be paid later. The role of these caravans coming from al-Qasim were crucial in supporting Ibn Saud's position before entering Jeddah in 1925. Ibn Sulayman also played a similar role in the battle of al-Sabala against the *'ikhwan* in 1929 by managing the army's expenditure, which enabled Ibn Saud to concentrate only on his military and the development of events. At al-Sabala, the number of Ibn Saud's forces was approximately 30,000 soldiers. Since most of these forces were Bedouins, Ibn Saud gave his order to Ibn Sulayman to assign six pounds for each tribal chief and three pounds for each man in order to ensure their loyalty. Ibn Sulayman treated Ibn Saud's fighters in such a way that kept their loyalty and successfully managed the battle budget, which, according to some sources, was about forty thousand pounds. Ibn Sulayman's efforts were a driving force in leading the battle to Ibn Saud's desired results.⁴²⁶

The Hijaz now came under his rule, Ibn Saud knew that the simple, tribal government would be inefficient in this developed region, compared to Najd. Since the first day after Ibn Saud's entrance into Jeddah, thus, he began to establish an institutional and well-organized new government. 'Abd Allah al-Damluji was appointed as Ibn Saud's consultant for foreign affairs, taking the responsibility of contacting and dealing with foreign consulates in Jeddah. The second significant man during this crucial period was Ibn Sulayman whom Ibn Saud had tested three times: in Ha'il, Mecca, and during the siege of Jeddah, and in all the three tests Ibn Sulayman proved that he was the right man in the right position. Ibn Saud, therefore, decreed that all the financial and economic affairs of the Hijaz should fall under Ibn Sulayman's administration. After one year, 1926, Ibn Sulayman became Manager of Finance and Economy (*mudir 'amm al-*

⁴²⁶ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 47-48, 58.

Shu'un al-maliyya wa-al-'iqtisadiyya). It was no easy task for Ibn Sulayman to manage the finance department of the Hijaz and the finance department of Najd at the same time. Thus, he took the first steps on the path to build a developed and organized ministry of finance. He decided to keep the departments of finance of each region, such as al-Hasa, al-Qasim, and Ha'il, under the management of each region's *amir*. The excess money at each department of finance was to be sent to the central finance department in Mecca. Later, Ibn Sulayman sent a financial manager to each region in order to help its *amir* in managing its finances. In the early 1930s, Ibn Sulayman was often called *al-wazir* (the minister).⁴²⁷ In 1932, the finance department became Ministry of Finance and Ibn Sulayman officially became Minister of Finance.⁴²⁸

Since Ibn Sulayman was the first appointed minister in the history of Saudi Arabia, many other sectors were supervised by his ministry. After the discovery of oil in 1938, the numbers of laborers at the oil fields greatly increased. As a result, the Saudi government issued a regulation for labor and laborers in 1947 and added this sector to the numerous responsibilities of the Ministry of Finance. Furthermore, a department of agriculture was established in 1948. This department was responsible for organizing and developing agriculture in Saudi Arabia by improving the irrigation systems, building dams, digging wells, fixing agricultural lands, giving agricultural loans, and providing agricultural machines. Again, the agriculture department was bound to the Ministry of Finance until 1950. Even the radio broadcasting that was established in 1949 was under the administration of Ibn Sulayman's ministry until 1955 when a department for radio broadcasting was founded. Several other sectors, such as the affairs of *hajj* (pilgrimage) and the affairs of employees and retired people, were under Ibn Sulayman's administration.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 94; Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 112; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 50-52.

⁴²⁸ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 95; Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 112; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 61.

⁴²⁹ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 95; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 64.

With the steady development of the recently founded state, Ibn Sulayman proposed to Ibn Saud to establish a national currency. At the beginning, the word Najd was stamped on some foreign currencies, particularly the Maria Theresa dollar. After Ibn Saud expanded his state into the Hijaz, the word Hijaz was added beside Najd on foreign currency. In c.1925, a national Saudi currency was struck with the name of Ibn Saud on one face and the value of the currency on the other. This first struck currency in Ibn Saud's state was made of copper. It was also presented in two categories: half *qirsh* and quarter *qirsh*.⁴³⁰

Ibn Sulayman also participated in establishing a Saudi factory for *kiswat al-Ka'aba* (the cloth that covers the Ka'ba). Since the age of the Ayyubid state, *kiswat al-Ka'aba* had been made in Cairo as several Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman rulers had many endowments in Egypt that were dedicated to be spent on *al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* (the two holy mosques of Mecca and Madinah). There were traditions that accompanied the transport of the *kiswa* from Cairo to Mecca. The camels that carried the *kiswa* and the other tools that would be used to clean the *Ka'aba* were called the *mahmal*. The Egyptian pilgrimage caravan, which was protected by a military force, were accompanied by the *mahmal* to Mecca every year. When the caravan began to move, leaving Cairo, musicians played music and hit drums as a farewell for the *kiswa*. Likewise, the *mahmal* was received in Madinah and Mecca with music and drums. Immediately after entering the Hijaz in 1926, Ibn Saud sent a letter to the Egyptian government expressing his refusal of the musical ceremonies that accompany the *mahmal* each year to the Islamic sacred lands and arguing that such deeds were *bid'a* (innovation in religious matters). When the Egyptian *mahmal* arrived in the same year and pilgrims began to perform their *hajj*, the so-called *mahmal* incident occurred in Mina. This incident happened on the day of Eid al-Adha, June 22,

⁴³⁰ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 65.

when pilgrims of the *Ikhwan* heard the drums and music and approached to see these musicians surrounding the *mahmal*. The *Ikhwan* did not tolerate seeing and hearing music played in such a sacred place, so they began to rain stones on the Egyptians. Since the *mahmal* was protected by military force, the Egyptians responded by opening fire on the *Ikhwan*, killing twenty-five of them. The *Ikhwan* took their arms to reattack, but Ibn Saud then intervened and ended the fight.⁴³¹

This incident impacted Saudi-Egyptian relations for years. King Fuad I of Egypt decided not to send the *mahmal* anymore. He also stopped sending *kiswat al-Ka'ba* and the charities that had been delivered to Mecca and Madinah every year, although the endowments of *al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* had been founded in Egypt since the time of the Ayyubid dynasty.⁴³² Until *Dhi al-Hijja* (the month of pilgrimage in the Islamic calendar) of 1927, Ibn Saud did not know if the Egyptian government would send *kiswat al-Ka'ba* or not. Thus, he ordered Ibn Sulayman to quickly prepare a *kiswa* for that *hajj* season. At this time, nobody in Mecca knew how to make *kiswat al-Ka'ba*. However, Ibn Sulayman took advantage of his strong links with Muslim Indians. He immediately contacted some of the Indian *'ulama*, who were in the Hijaz at the time, and the organizers of pilgrims' trips from India to the Hijaz, asking for their help in finding professional sewers, decorators, and workers that could make the *kiswa*. On the day of 'Eid al-'Adha', the first *kiswa* sewn in Mecca was ready to be put on the *Ka'ba*. It was made of a fine black silk and decorated with Quranic scripts in gold and silver colors. According to some references, some parts of the *kiswa* were made in India not in Mecca. Ibn Sulayman then proposed finding a factory for *kiswat al-Ka'ba* in Mecca, an idea that Ibn Saud warmly welcomed. Ibn Sulayman was appointed in charge of creating this factory. Again, Ibn Sulayman

⁴³¹ Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 126; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 75-78.

⁴³² Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 127; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 79.

benefited from his previous residence in Bombay by contacting merchants there to provide the needed tools and professional workers to establish the factory. In October 1927, the ship *Jahangir* arrived from India carrying 40 sewers and decorators, 20 workers, twelve sewing machines, painting materials, and various types of silk. Since the *hajj* season of 1928, *kiswat al-Ka'ba* has been completely made in Mecca (see figure 103).⁴³³



Figure 103: The factory of *kiswat al-Ka'ba* in Ibn Saud's reign, Mecca. From Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 87.

Although the staff of this factory was from India in the beginning, Ibn Sulayman did not neglect the importance of hiring Saudi workers. The professional Indians working at this factory had a secondary responsibility, which was teaching the Saudi workers who were working with them. These Saudis were prepared to be the second generation to take care of *kiswat al-Ka'ba*. Indeed, in 1934, the factory was completely operated by Saudi nationals and the *kiswa* was made by Saudi hands.⁴³⁴

⁴³³ Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazzini, *Rihlat al-Hijaz* (Cairo: Matba'at Fu'ad, 1930), 97; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 83-86.

⁴³⁴ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 87.

As the *mahmal* incident was the main reason for the establishment of *kiswat al-Ka'ba* factory, it also caused a diplomatic problem between the Saudi state and Egypt. During this time, Ibn Sulayman depended on his commercial relationships to calm down the tensions between the two countries. He used his friendship with the famous Egyptian businessman Muhammad Tal'at Harb Pasha as a bridge to return the Saudi-Egyptian links to their previous situation. Tal'at Harb, was called by *Al-Ahram*, the Egyptian newspaper, the pioneer of the Egyptian economy. He had accomplishments, such as establishing Bank Egypt in 1920, the Egyptian Press in 1922, the school of finance and accounting in 1925, the Egyptian company for cinema and theater in 1927, the Egyptian company of spinning and textile in 1931, Egyptian company for airlines in 1932, and an insurance company in 1933.⁴³⁵

Since he had the desire to extend his trading activities to the Hijaz, Tal'at Harb visited the region twice. In each of these visits, he met the viceroy in the Hijaz, Faysal ibn 'Abd al-Aziz and Ibn Sulayman, who, in return, visited Egypt several times beginning in 1935. However, unlike Tal'at Harb, who was merely interested in expanding his business to the Hijaz, Ibn Sulayman traveled to Egypt solely to discuss the Saudi-Egyptian relationship, which means that he was dispatched by Ibn Saud. Ibn Sulayman stayed in Egypt for twenty-four days, during which time he met Fawzan al-Sabiq of Buraydah, who was Ibn Saud's representative in Egypt, as well as the Saudi students who were studying at Egyptian colleges and institutions. Ibn Sulayman also visited a number of Egyptian facilities and companies, in addition to meeting many politicians, economists, and scholars (see figure 104). Ibn Sulayman's efforts ultimately led to the Friendship Agreement between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in November 1936. At the same time, he encouraged Tal'at Harb to invest in the Hijaz and participate in modernizing the region. Indeed,

⁴³⁵ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 107.

the Egyptian businessman founded the first hotels in Saudi Arabia in Jeddah and Mecca. This investment was followed by a notable spread of investment in hotels by Saudi businessmen.⁴³⁶

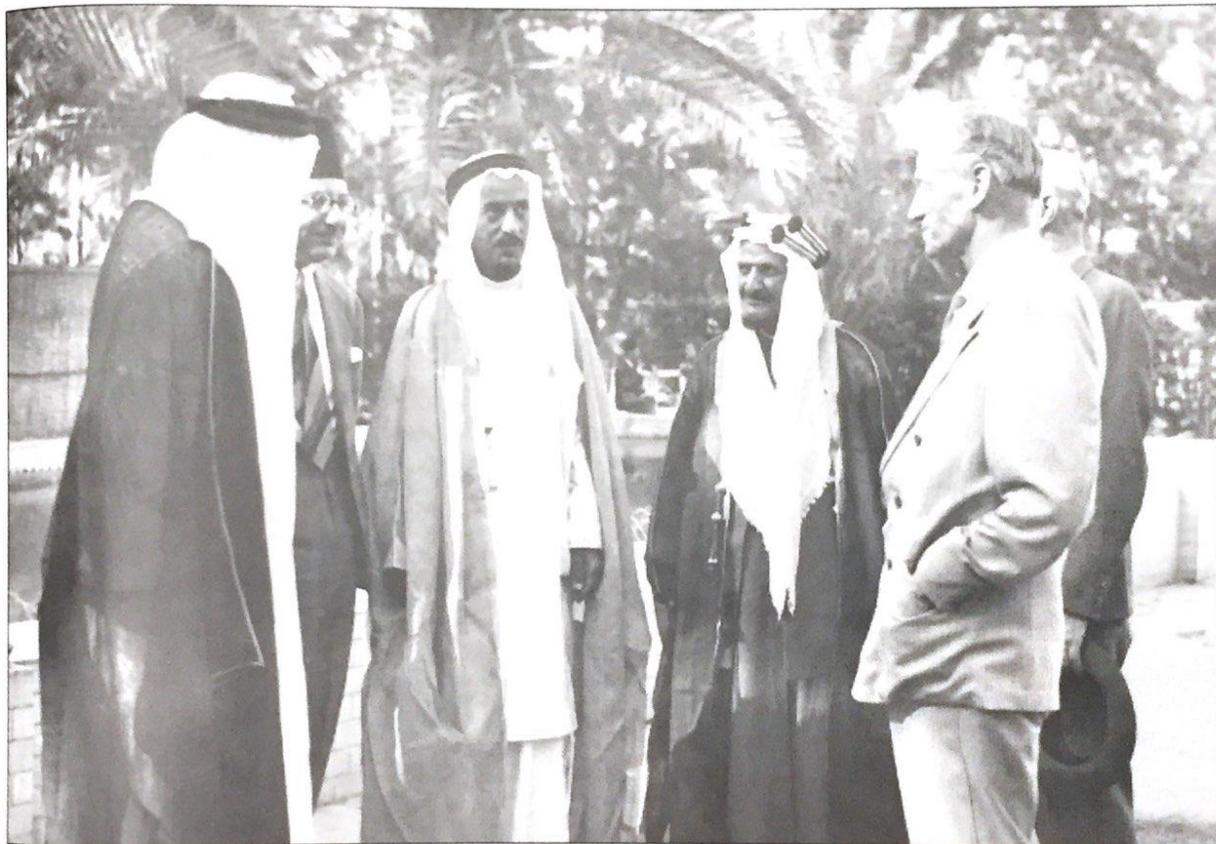


Figure 104: Ibn Sulayman in the middle and to his left stands Fawzan al-Sabiq while the British ambassador appears in the right of the picture, Egypt, 1936. From Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 108.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Ibn Saud’s state suffered from the global Great Depression as most world countries did. During that time, the recently founded Saudi state greatly depended on the *hajj* as a means of income. Because of the Great Depression, the numbers of pilgrims shrank from about 132,000 in 1927 and 100,000 in 1928 to only 20,000 in 1933. When the Saudi government became unable to pay its employees’ salaries in the early

⁴³⁶ Maghribi, *A‘lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 117; Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 109-14, 248-49.

1930s, Ibn Sulayman adopted some approaches to make the state's economic situation less harmful. For instance, he bought the products that the state needed from companies and merchants for postponed payments. He also invented a system for paying salaries not only in cash, but instead he divided the salaries in thirds: a third was paid in cash, another third was paid in supplies, and the other third was considered a debt on the government that would be paid later. By using these approaches, Ibn Sulayman saved about 80,000 golden pounds from the employees' third of salaries and 300,000 pounds from postponing the payments for the companies and merchants. Although these regulations were helpful to a degree, the global economy did not quickly recover. Consequently, Ibn Saud, with the consultation of Ibn Sulayman, decided to raise the customs on specific goods, such as sugar, tea, and gas. However, Saudi Arabia continuously suffered from the economic hardships until 1938 when oil was discovered in commercial quantities.⁴³⁷

Saudi Arabia's last solution to encounter its hardships was to encourage foreign investment. Ibn Saud was interested particularly in oil excavation since oil had already been discovered in surrounding countries. Although Ibn Saud was hesitant to make such a decision due to his previous unsuccessful experience with a British company, and because of the *Ikhwan*'s intolerant ideology toward foreigners, Ibn Sulayman was the most enthusiastic person among Ibn Saud's consultants to welcome foreign investments. The *ikhwan* forces, having been annihilated at the battle of *al-Sabala* in 1929, Ibn Saud got rid of a significant barrier that prevented him from benefiting from foreign companies. At this time, the *'uqayli* Fawzan al-Sabiq of Buraydah, who was then Ibn Saud's representative in Egypt, met the American Charles Richard Crane, who was one of two members in the King-Crane International Committee founded by the U.S.

⁴³⁷ Al-Mani', *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 262, 296; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 127-28, 130, 155.

President Woodrow Wilson to study the situation in the Arab world. Crane expressed his desire to meet Ibn Saud, which immediately was transmitted by al-Fawzan to Ibn Saud who responded that Crane was welcome.

Crane arrived in Jeddah in 1931 accompanied by George Antonius, the author of *The Arab Awakening*, and met Ibn Saud. In that meeting, which was attended by Ibn Sulayman and other ministers, the attendees discussed the kingdom's actual and potential sources as well as its needs. Crane offered the services of Karl Twitchell, an American expert and engineer in metal excavation, to Ibn Saud for free. In about three months, Twitchell arrived in Jeddah and began his mission, which was to find water resources in the Hijaz to serve local people and pilgrims. He did not need much time to write a report to Ibn Saud and his Minister of Finance that there were no promising signs for rich water resources. Twitchell, however, suggested that he may search for metals in Ibn Saud's lands since he had seen many signs of the existence of metals.⁴³⁸

Ibn Saud informed Twitchell that he had the desire to conduct excavation projects, but he had not enough money to do so. Twitchell then promised Ibn Saud that he would encourage American companies to fund such projects. Indeed, Twitchell invited some American oil companies to have the privilege to excavate for oil in Saudi Arabia. When British companies learned of these negotiations between the Saudi government and the American companies, they immediately intervened trying to keep the Middle Eastern oil monopolized by British firms. The competition between the American and British companies was advantageous for the Saudis who could play on both sides attempting to get the best price. The competition was primarily between the British Iraq Petroleum Company and the American Standard Oil of California (SOCAL). Twitchell's task was then to represent SOCAL in the negotiation with the Saudi side and, at the

⁴³⁸ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 155-57.

same time, to find the appropriate funds for the Saudi projects. Ibn Saud ordered Ibn Sulayman to create a committee to negotiate the American offer. In addition to Ibn Sulayman, the committee consisted of ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fadil, one of the Qasimi merchants in India who became a close assistant of Ibn Saud, and Hasan al-Qusaybi, a member of a famous trading house in al-Hasa’ and Bahrain. After long negotiations between Ibn Sulayman’s committee and Loyd Hamilton, an administrator at SOCAL, the American company ultimately won the privilege to excavate for oil in Saudi Arabia (see figure 105). In Khuzam, a royal palace in Jeddah, the agreement was signed in 1933.⁴³⁹ SOCAL’s branch in Saudi Arabia took the name of California-Arabian Standard Oil Co (CASOC).



Figure 105: The Finance Minister Abd Allah ibn Sulayman and the administrator at SOCAL, Loyd Hamilton signing the oil privilege agreement, Jeddah, 1933. From Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 168.

⁴³⁹ Al-Mani’, *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 303-05; Al-Zirikli, *Al-Wajiz*, 150-51; Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 159, 164, 168.

After the discovery of oil in commercial quantities, many oil companies around the world began to try to find spots for themselves in Saudi Arabia. The British companies, which had failed to discover oil before the arrival of SOCAL, returned back to the scene. German and Japanese missions arrived in Saudi Arabia in 1939 hoping to receive a privilege for oil excavation in the zones that had not been given to SOCAL, such as the Saudi neutral zones between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. On the eve of World War II, the Americans conceived the German and Japanese attempts as strategic and political threats, so CASOC provided an unrivalled offer for the Saudi government. After a series of negotiations, Ibn Sulayman signed in 1939 a supplementary agreement on the agreement of 1933 with CASOC. After signing this agreement, CASOC paid 140,000 golden British pounds to the Saudi government. In addition, CASOC annually paid 5,000 pounds.⁴⁴⁰

In the newly founded state, Ibn Sulayman did not only play an important role in managing and developing its economy, but also was very influential politically. When Jizan and Najran, Saudi bordering regions with Yemen, became part of Ibn Saud's state in 1932, Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din of Yemen's worries increased. The disagreement on borders between Ibn Saud and Imam Yahya resulted in a war between the two parties in 1933. In 1934, Ibn Saud sent two armies to Yemen led by his sons Saud and Faysal, later kings of Saudi Arabia. While Saud's force encountered some difficulties since its plan was to traverse mountainous areas, Faysal's force successfully conquered several cities on the coastal regions of western Yemen. When Prince Faysal took al-Hudayda, a significant Yemeni port, Ibn Saud felt that leaving Faysal to himself with the Saudi armies in these deep regions of Yemen was dangerous. Ibn Saud, then, did not find a better choice than Ibn Sulayman to support Faysal. Ibn Sulayman's mission this

⁴⁴⁰ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 179-82.

time was to create a complete government that can govern in al-Hudayda. Indeed, Ibn Sulayman gathered his staff and traveled by sea from Jeddah to al-Hudayda. Ibn Sulayman's government immediately began to function as the ruling government in al-Hudayda. It also provided Faysal's army with money and supplies, which enabled the Saudi forces to move forward to Sana. While Faysal's force was around Sana, a letter from Ibn Saud arrived giving the order to Faysal to return to al-Hudayda. This decision was made after several Arab elites from Syria, Palestine, and Egypt visited Ibn Saud as a peace delegation. Ibn Saud's response to these Arabs was that he did not prefer war and to prove his position immediately ordered Faysal to pull back. This delegation's efforts resulted in the Ta'if Agreement between Ibn Saud and Imam Yahya in 1934, by which the war was ended and the armies of Princes Saud and Faysal, and Ibn Sulayman's government pulled out from Yemen.⁴⁴¹

Although he was officially Ibn Saud's Finance Minister, Ibn Sulayman was always around Ibn Saud. He was one of the most important men at Ibn Saud's court, if not the most important. Ibn Sulayman sometimes appeared as Ibn Saud secretary, consultant, personal aid, minister of foreign affairs, minister of finance, and even minister of agriculture. When Ibn Saud met U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt at Great Bitter Lake, between Suez and Ismailia, in February 1945, Ibn Sulayman was one of six people who attended the meeting with the king. In the same month, Ibn Saud met British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in Fayoum, Egypt, and Ibn Sulayman was there as always (see figure 106). In his book *The Second World War*, Churchill recognizes only three people of Ibn Saud's companions: his two sons and Ibn Sulayman whom Churchill calls "Ibn Saud's prime minister."⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 52-56.

⁴⁴² Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 134, 136-37.



Figure 106: Ibn Saud and Winston Churchill, and behind them from right to left Ibn Sulayman, Hafid Wahba, Bashir al-Sa'dawi, and Yusuf Yasin, Egypt, 1945. From Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 139.

After the end of World War II, the global demand of oil expanded, especially with the Marshal Plan of reconstructing Europe and the abolition of an economizing approach in gas in the United States, which led to a 50% rise in the number of cars in America between 1945 and 1950. These changes encouraged Aramco to increase its production and to find a way to reach Europe and America as fast as possible. The company decided to replace the classic method that depended on shipping oil by the huge carriers through the seas by a new method which depends on connecting the Arabian Gulf and the Mediterranean by pipes. In 1946, Trans Arabian Pipeline Company was founded in Beirut, Lebanon, to construct the pipelines. As always, Ibn Sulayman represented Saudi Arabia during the negotiations. He insisted that Aramco develop all areas that the pipeline passes by and all its stations by building schools, providing hospitals, and digging wells. When the representative of Aramco agreed to Ibn Sulayman's conditions, the agreement of the pipeline project was signed in 1947 by Ibn Sulayman, as representative of Ibn Saud's

government, and William Lenahan, who represented Trans Arabian Pipeline Company. In 1948, the construction began to connect a distance of about 1040 miles between the oil fields in eastern Saudi Arabia and Sidon, Lebanon, by more than 200,000 steel pipes. In 1950, oil carrier ships began to transfer oil to Europe and America directly from Sidon. Along the pipeline that extended through the desert between the east and the northwest of Saudi Arabia six stations were founded, around which small cities of about 5,000 souls grew. In these small cities, the pipeline company constructed mosques, service offices, airports, clinics, hospitals, and tennis and golf courts. In addition, more than 40 wells were dug along the pipeline, which provided water for about 100,000 Bedouins.⁴⁴³

One of Ibn Sulayman's political roles, when he visited the United States in 1946 on a mission, was to strengthen the Saudi-American relationship and to seek American economic support for some developing projects in Saudi Arabia (see figure 107). Upon arriving in Washington D.C., Ibn Sulayman met President Harry Truman in the White House. Ibn Sulayman explained to President Truman the Saudi wishes in building a railroad between Riyadh and Dammam and in developing the irrigation projects. Truman then suggested that Ibn Sulayman visit Arizona and California, whose weather is, to a degree, similar to Saudi Arabia's, and to take a look at the irrigation projects and date farms. Ibn Sulayman traveled to Phoenix, Arizona, where he saw the agricultural projects, modern irrigation systems, and Boulder (Hoover) Dam. After Arizona, he visited California for the same purposes. One of Ibn Sulayman's goals on this trip was to acquire a loan of 10 million dollars. Indeed, the Export-Import Bank agreed to lend Saudi Arabia that loan. Another goal was to build the Riyadh-Dammam railroad, which Aramco agreed to the project. One of the most significant factors that made Ibn Sulayman's trip to the

⁴⁴³ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 183, 185, 187-89.

United States exceedingly successful was that the Americans conceived of this visit as the practical step, after the Ibn Saud-Roosevelt meeting, which opened the doors for America to enter the region. Ibn Sulayman returned home carrying the signed contracts of many significant projects, such as the building of the Riyadh-Dammam railroad, the construction of the ports of Jeddah and Dammam, and the developments of irrigation systems.⁴⁴⁴

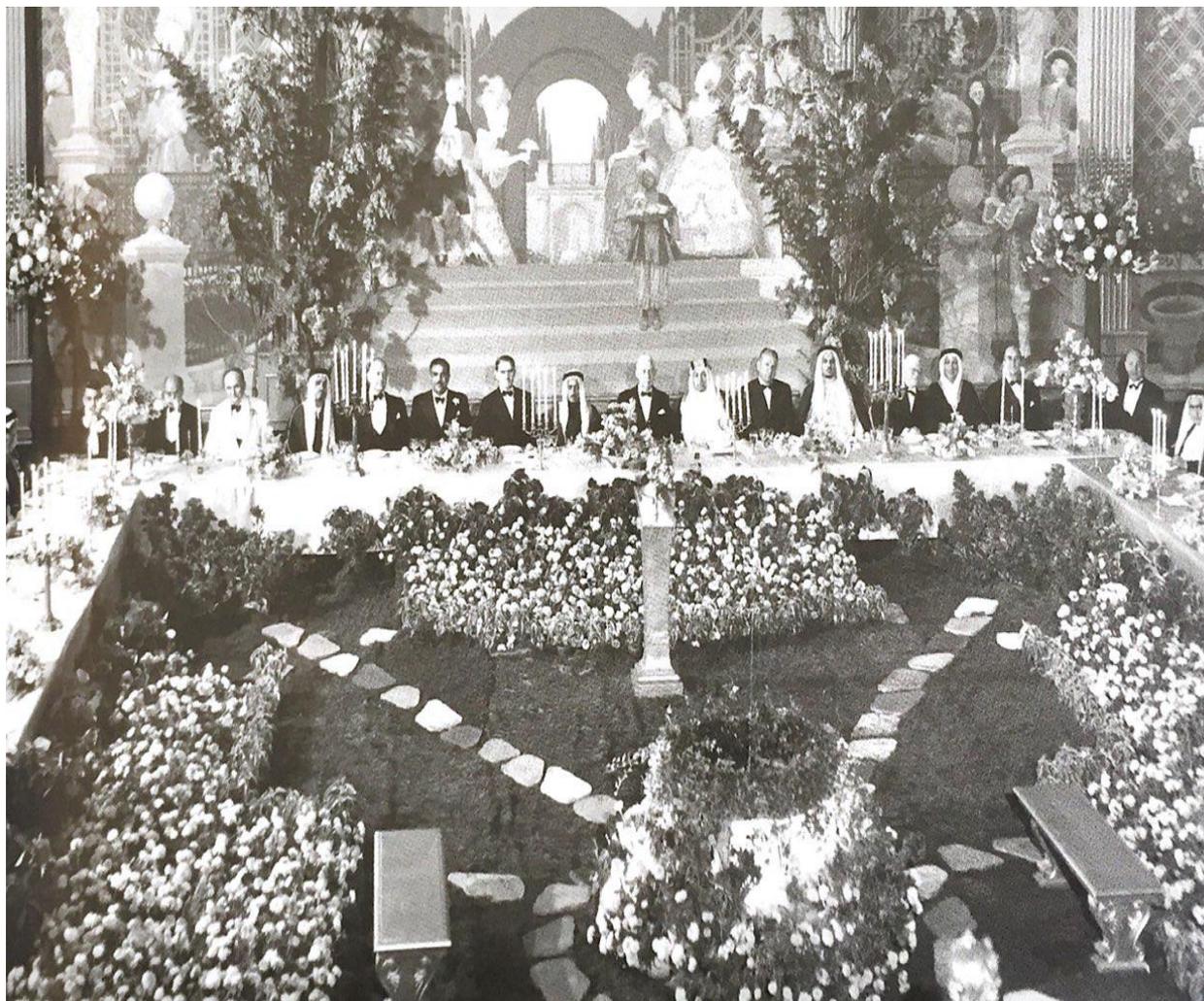


Figure 107: Aramco's reception for Ibn Sulayman, who appears in the middle, during his visit to the United States in 1946. From Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 186.

⁴⁴⁴ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 138-41.

Ibn Sulayman continued to play a significant role as one of the most influential consultants of Ibn Saud until the last years of the latter's reign. Beginning in 1948, the relationship between Aramco and the Saudi government was not as good as both sides wished. Ibn Sulayman and the Saudi government argued that although Aramco's profits increased, the Saudis' share did not change nor did the condition of the Saudi workers for Aramco improve. Ibn Sulayman, whom the Americans called "Mister No," required that Aramco review the agreements of 1933 and 1939, especially after Venezuela convinced the oil companies working in its lands to raise its profits to 50%. When Aramco initially refused Ibn Sulayman's demands, the latter threatened Aramco that the Saudi government would abolish the whole privilege agreement. With the breakout of the Korean war in 1950, the United States was concerned about keeping its strong links with Saudi Arabia. Thus, the American government advised Aramco to divide its profits with the Saudi government in half. The 50-50 agreement was immediately effective as Saudi Arabia's oil income rose from \$37 million in 1949 to \$103 million in 1951. After signing this agreement, Ibn Sulayman became the first person who brought the principle of the 50-50 profits in the Middle East. His initiative encouraged Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran to follow the same method.⁴⁴⁵

Having successfully convinced Aramco that the oil profits should be fifty-fifty between the company and the Saudi government, Ibn Sulayman suggested to Ibn Saud that his kingdom now had enough income and that there was no need to take any fees from pilgrims. The *hajj* season had always been an important means of income for the Hijaz in general and for rulers of the Hijaz in particular. This notion was welcomed by Ibn Saud who declared in 1952 the

⁴⁴⁵ Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 115; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 193-97.

abolition of the pilgrimage fees.⁴⁴⁶ Ibn Saud's decision was celebrated by Muslims around the world. Newspapers in Egypt, Lebanon, and Pakistan praised Ibn Saud for such a decision.⁴⁴⁷

Doubtlessly, Ibn Sulayman's travels to al-Hasa, Kuwait, Basra, Bombay, and Bahrain enabled him to know new cultures and to learn a new language, Urdu, which made him one of the most trusted men around Ibn Saud and his private secretary.⁴⁴⁸ Philby believes that it is was the few years Ibn Sulayman spent in India that made him well qualified and experienced to serve at Ibn Saud's court. According to Philby, Ibn Sulayman needed only three or four years to prove his capacity and to become, as described by Ibn Saud's words, the person who "listens to no man, but everyone listens to [him]."⁴⁴⁹ On another occasion, Ibn Saud said "'Abd Allah al-Sulayman 'usabat ra'si,"⁴⁵⁰ which literally means that Ibn Sulayman was Ibn Saud's head strap. This phrase is so common in Najd. When somebody describes his friend or cousin as *'usabat ra'si* (my head strap), that means that this person is the one that I most depend on and always find next to me when needing help. In addition to being one of the most qualified men in Ibn Saud's courts and one of his closest assistants, Ibn Sulayman was Ibn Saud's most trusted aid. In a letter sent to Ibn Sulayman in 1941, Ibn Saud frankly said: "I do not think that there is a person under the sky who has ever been trusted as I trust you."⁴⁵¹ Indeed, al-Mani', who worked at Ibn Saud's court, says: "I often thought of Ibn Sulayman as the uncrowned king of Arabia."⁴⁵² In another place of his chronicle, al-Mani' emphasizes, "Ibn Sulayman was the real founder of the modern system of employment and the founder of the ministries."⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁶ Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 115; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 100.

⁴⁴⁷ Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 115; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 103.

⁴⁴⁸ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 33.

⁴⁴⁹ Philby, *Arabian Jubilee*, 81, 230.

⁴⁵⁰ Al-Mani', *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 265; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 257.

⁴⁵¹ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 257-58.

⁴⁵² Al-Mani', *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 259.

⁴⁵³ Al-Mani', *Tawhid al-Mamlaka*, 261.

Even after Ibn Saud's death, his successors, Kings Saud and Faysal, always praised Ibn Sulayman for his outstanding career whenever they met him. When Ibn Sulayman was hospitalized in Helwan, Egypt, in 1957, Crown Prince Faysal visited him. In this friendly visit, Faysal expressed his great respect for Ibn Sulayman's lifetime service at Ibn Saud's court. Faysal then said to Ibn Sulayman: "You are among the state's founders."⁴⁵⁴

Chapter 7:

The Cultural Impact of the Qusman's Travels in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean

Friends of Foreigners

The cultural effect of the Qusman's trade abroad appeared in multiple manifestations. As they were accustomed to dealing with foreigners during their travels, the presence of foreigners in their homeland, al-Qasim, was usually kindly received. This is exactly what Doughty tells his readers after his travels in Arabia. Upon arriving at the northern villages of al-Qasim after leaving Ha'il in 1877, Doughty, who claimed that his name was Khalil, was hosted by a villager. The following conversation between Doughty and the Qasimi villager clearly illustrates the cultural impact of the Qusman's travels:

Our host asked me what country-man I was. "I am a traveller, from Damascus."—"No, thou are not a Shamy, thy speech is better than so; for I have been in Syria: tell me, art thou not from some of those villages in the Hauran? I was there with Ageyl [*'uqaylat*]. What art thou? Thou art not of the Moslemin; art thou then Yahudy [Jew], or of the Nasara [Christians]?"—"Yes, host, a Mesihiy [Christian]; will ye therefore drive me away, and kill me?"—"No! and fear nothing; is not this el-Kasim? Where the most part have travelled in foreign lands: they who have seen the world are not like the ignorant, they will treat thee civilly."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ Maghribi, *A'lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 114; Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 259-61.

⁴⁵⁵ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 313.

Almost the same thing happened to Doughty when he met for the first time ‘Abd Allah al Khunayni of ‘Unayzah, who would later be his closest friend. The first conversation between them reflects how the culture of Qasimi merchants, who traveled outside Arabia, was considerably more open than the local Qasimi culture. Immediately after meeting each other, al-Khunayni hailed Doughty with several questions: “Art thou ... an Engleysy [British]? but wherefore tell the people so, in this wild fanatical country? I have spent many years in foreign lands, I have dwelt at Bombay, which is under government of the Engleys : thou canst say thus to me, but say it not to the ignorant and foolish people ;—what simplicity is this! and incredible to me, in a man of *Europa*. For are we here in a government country ? no, but in land of the Arab, where the name of the Nasara is an execration.”⁴⁵⁶ Al-Khunayni then tried to explain why local people of Najd viewed the British this way: “In the late warfare between ‘Abdullah and Saud [sons of Faysal ibn Turki, the second ruler of the second Saudi state], their Resident on the Gulf sent hundreds of sacks of rice, secretly, to Saud [the wrongful part ; and for such Abdullah the Wahaby abhors the English name]⁴⁵⁷.—I see you will not be persuaded ! yet I hope that your life may be preserved : but they will not suffer you to dwell amongst them !.”⁴⁵⁸

Even though he was not happy with Buraydah’s hospitality, Doughty records that his condition might have been worse if he had gone to some other Najdi regions. While being a guest of Jaber, one of Buraydah’s amir’s men, Doughty was present when he was mentioned during a conversation between his host and a friend who said: “This [man] could not go to er-

⁴⁵⁶ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 342.

⁴⁵⁷ Brackets are from original text.

⁴⁵⁸ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 342.

Riath [Riyadh]; for they would kill him!” Jaber responded with a half-smile: “Ay, they are very austere there ; they might not suffer him amongst them.”⁴⁵⁹

In any event, it is obvious that merchants of ‘Unayzah, who travelled abroad were kind to Doughty during his sojourn in the town in 1877. That can be easily seen as Doughty on many occasions spent time with them and went in their houses as their welcome guest. In contrast, local people who never traveled abroad were often hostile to him, although some argue that Doughty did not present himself favorably to the local people of Najd in general. The hostility between Doughty and ordinary people is clear in his accounts of his daily encounters with people and how they treated him. The authorities of ‘Unayzah also did not welcome Doughty in the city. The *amir*, Zamil al-Sulaym, once sent his men at night and forced Doughty to leave ‘Unayzah in less than a couple of hours. It is very likely that Zamil, who is considered one of greatest *amirs* of ‘Unayzah in its history, decided to expel Doughty from the city secretly at night since he knew that ‘Unayzah’s long-distance merchants would have intervened if he had done so in front of them. This also mirrors to what extent these merchants were influential. Indeed, as Doughty learned later, when his friends ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni and ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam learned about the incident on the following day, they went to the *Amir* Zamil demanding that he recall Doughty. Since al-Bassam’s words were highly respected, Zamil agreed that Doughty could return and stay in ‘Unayzah until the next caravan departed.⁴⁶⁰

Likewise, Philby noticed, when visiting al-Qasim in 1918, that, unlike most Najdis, the Qusman, especially the inhabitants of ‘Unayzah, were not suspicious toward foreigners who visited their region. Philby’s feelings while preparing to enter ‘Unayzah are clearly expressed in his following statements:

⁴⁵⁹ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 324.

⁴⁶⁰ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 417-18.

I woke up to find myself in a new world as it were. Accustomed to independence amid the inhospitable and uncouth bigotry of Najd, I planned as I awoke to do a little sight-seeing before entering the town to pay my respects to the *amir* and other persons who would expect to be visited ... And, much as I had already heard of the difference between ‘Anaiza and the rest of Najd, of the open-handed hospitality of its people and of its complete freedom from any kind of religious or sectarian bigotry, I must admit that my actual experience astonished and bewildered me. It seemed to me that I had stepped suddenly out of barbarism into a highly civilised and even cultured society, where the stranger within the gates, far from being an object of aversion and suspicion, was regarded as the common guest of the community ... I was fortunate to have seen and experienced almost every province of Najd before coming to the Qasim and to have tasted the bitter in full measure before the sweet—doubly fortunate in that, though Buraida was yet to remind me that its sister-city was altogether exceptional, my last memories of Central Arabia are intimately associated with the days of my sojourn in this gem among Arabian cities.⁴⁶¹

After spending about a month in ‘Unayzah, Philby clearly expresses his feelings in the following sentence: “Each day of my sojourn at ‘Anaiza increased my gratitude for the ever-increasing kindness of all who had anything to do with me.”⁴⁶² Indeed, al-Rayhani, who visited ‘Unayzah in 1923, argues that ‘Unayzah people’s long travels had made them kinder with strangers to a degree with which a person would forget that he was a stranger in this city!⁴⁶³

Another account that also stresses the hospitality of the people of ‘Unayzah is that of Doctor Louis Dame, who visited ‘Unayzah in 1924. He describes how his companions and he were treated: “Nowhere were we treated as royally as at Aneiza. Frequently we were the guests of some of the leading families for meals, and every evening we made two or three social visits and were obliged to turn down as many more. Our evenings were usually booked a week ahead. Religious discussions were of course sometimes entered upon, but not in such bigoted, hateful,

⁴⁶¹ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 162-63.

⁴⁶² Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 269.

⁴⁶³ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-‘Arab*, 2: 607.

sheering manor as was usually the case in Riyadh and Shukra. The Moslem here was however as unrelenting as he is in any other part of Arabia.”⁴⁶⁴

There were many aspects Philby had seen in ‘Unayzah that made him consider al-Qasim strikingly different culturally from the rest of Najd not only in terms of hospitality. While being a guest of one of the ruling family members, Philby emphasizes that he was not only kindly treated, but was also provided with something that he had never seen previously in Najd. He mentions that the reception was regular with usual rounds of coffee. After that, nonetheless, the guests went into a private parlor (*mukhtasar*) on the ground-floor where Philby for the first time in Najd saw cigarettes passed round and smoked, although he emphasizes that smoking in public was not tolerated even in ‘Unayzah.⁴⁶⁵

Either in ‘Unayzah or Buraydah, Philby was often hosted during his sojourn in al-Qasim in 1918 by members of the ruling family and members of families with notable trading experience outside Najd. Although Buraydah’s hospitality was exceedingly less than that of ‘Unayzah, Philby was hosted by an *‘uqayly* whose name was Mansur al-Rumayh. Al-Rumayh at the beginning was afraid of public opinion if he had Philby as his guest, but in the end, he welcomed him. Similarly, while in ‘Unayzah, Philby was hosted by Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan, who, along with his younger brother ‘Abd Allah had traveled to Bombay. On other occasions Philby was also invited for coffee and tea by members of ‘Unayzah’s trading families. For instance, he was invited once by Salih al-Fadil, and in another instance by the al-Dhukayr family that had a thriving business and considerable property in Bahrain. Philby was also invited to the house of Fahad al-Bassam, whom Philby describes as “the ablest man in ‘Anaiza,” where

⁴⁶⁴ Correspondence, Louis P. Dame to W. I. Chamberlain, 24 March 1924, CBFM 1923-1936, JAHW06-1308.5, 2-3.

⁴⁶⁵ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 164-65.

Rose's lime juice was served.⁴⁶⁶ Especially in 'Unayzah, many other merchants with many experiences of traveling outside Najd received Philby as a guest.

The phenomenal difference between 'Unayzah and Buraydah is that 'Unayzah's external trade made its people more liberal while Buraydah's did not make a notable change on that religious city. Although the two neighboring cities competed commercially with each other for centuries, their intellectual lives were completely unlike. When he visited Buraydah in 1923, al-Rayhani described it as a "commercial city whose people have no time but for trading and praying."⁴⁶⁷ The only explanation for this phenomenon is the impact of each city's external trade. Buraydah specialized in the *'uqaylat*'s trade, which was an overland trade reaching commercial centers with Muslim majorities, such as Iraq, al-Sham, and Egypt. 'Unayzah, only twenty miles to the south of Buraydah, on the other hand, was more linked with the port cities of the Gulf and India where 'Unayzah's traders usually interacted with non-Muslim foreigners. This gradually changed 'Unayzah's conception of foreigners and made it more liberal than Buraydah.

From Poverty to Welfare

Since a considerable number of the Qusman traveled and traded in multiple countries outside Najd, their style of living improved to a prestigious level compared to the rest of Najd. For example, the usage of chairs was known in al-Qasim earlier than the rest of Najd. When visiting Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dhukayr's house in 'Unayzah in 1918, Philby saw a large rocking-chair of iron in his large well-furnished parlor that he had bought a few years before in Bombay.⁴⁶⁸ Philby saw this chair before the conference between Ibn Saud and Percy Cox, the

⁴⁶⁶ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 191, 235, 239-40, 243, 249-250.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-'Arab*, 2: 611.

⁴⁶⁸ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 258.

British representative, at which the ‘Uqayr Protocol of 1922 was issued. Ibn Saud’s servants built private tents for the British agent supplied with tables and chairs. Al-Rayhani, who accompanied Ibn Saud to this conference, notes that Ibn Saud sat on one of these chairs prepared for Mr. Cox and jokily invited him to have a seat on another chair as Europeans did to be civilized.⁴⁶⁹ Ibn Saud’s deed implies that the usage of chairs at that time was uncommon yet in the rest of Najd while chairs were used by Qasimi trading families. Indeed, Wahba points out that “the most civilized people in Najd are those of ‘Unayzah.”⁴⁷⁰ Likewise, when visiting Salih al-Fadil during the same sojourn in ‘Unayzah, Philby records that raspberry-flavored sherbets were served in long glasses set on a white Chinese tray with a nickel rim, while the usage of glass cups and Chinese trays did not reach the rest of Najd before the middle of the twentieth century.⁴⁷¹

Art Lovers

The impact of al-Qasim’s external trade also appeared in the Qusman’s interest in artistic works. That was true in Najd in general, wherever external trade was more active, the taste of arts, especially mural decorations, was high. As Philby mentions that Shaqra’s trading activities came next after Buraydah and ‘Unayzah’s, the interest in arts in Shaqra’ also came next after Buraydah and ‘Unayzah’s.⁴⁷² While traveling with Ibn Saud from Riyadh through al-Washm to al-Qasim in 1918, Philby noticed a huge difference between the three regions in the appreciation of the arts (see figure 108). After visiting the house of the *amir* of Mrat, a town in the district of al-Washm

⁴⁶⁹ Al-Rayhani, *Muluk al-‘Arab*, 2: 535.

⁴⁷⁰ Wahba, *Jazirat al-Arab*, 47.

⁴⁷¹ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 277; Sulayman ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Sharida, personal correspondence, Buraydah, 14 October 2018.

⁴⁷² Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 86.

located between al-Qasim and Riyadh, Philby compares the mural decorations in these three regions in the following passage:

The monotone of the clay walls was broken by six bands of gypsum frieze of varying width at varying intervals, each band being adorned with a different pattern. The effect of the whole was certainly extremely pleasing to eyes wearied by the drab void of *Wahhabi* art, and the simple crudity of a design relying for effect on endless variations of the only available theme—circles and triangles, pothooks and petals and stepped pinnacles and the like—was a welcome indication of a social atmosphere to some extent emancipated from the purely material outlook which governs the society of the *Wahhabi* capital and its surroundings. In Shaqra we were to find this tendency developed in a yet greater degree, and in the Qasim we were to find it culminating in as near an approach to art as modern desert Arabia is capable of.⁴⁷³

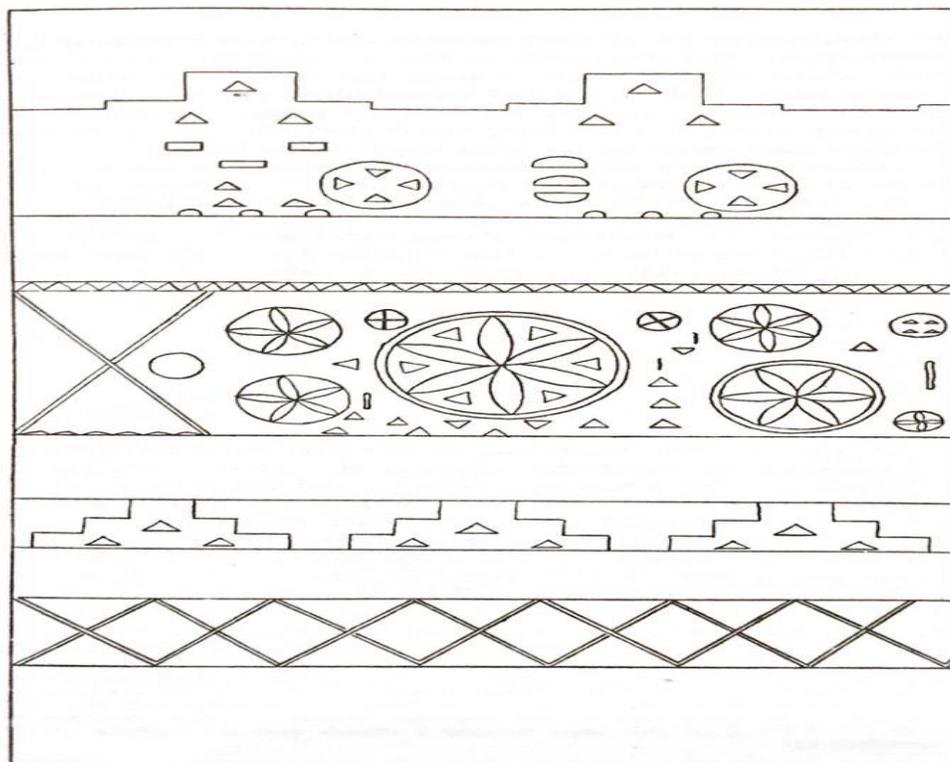


Figure 108: A drawing of the mural decoration that Philby saw at the house of Mrat's *amir*. From Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 91.

Indeed, the artistic works in al-Qasim were unique when compared with neighboring regions. That is why Doctor Louis Dame who visited Riyadh, al-Washim, and al-Qasim in 1923-

⁴⁷³ Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, 90.

1924 decided to buy artistically painted little tables and doors as samples from ‘Unayzah before returning to Bahrain.⁴⁷⁴

Speaking of arts, one of the Qasimi merchants’ children who was born in Bombay became a famous artist in India. Ibrahim ibn Hamad ibn ‘Ali al-Qadi, born in 1925, finished his general education in India before traveling to London to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He later became a notable director, artist, and photographer. In 1962, al-Qadi became the chair of the National School of Drama in New Delhi, from which a large number of Indian actors graduated. He, also, established the Alkazi Foundation for the Arts in New Delhi. In 2010, al-Qadi received the Padma Shri award, the fourth highest civilian award in the Republic of India, from Pratibha Patil, President of India.⁴⁷⁵

Language Influences

The cultural influence of the Qusman’s external trade appeared even in their language. According to Doughty, the Qusman’s trade abroad motivated them to learn some words and the alphabet of European languages from him since their commercial goods were in the hands of European shippers. He emphasizes that some of them wrote their names upon European bills in Roman letters. Others learned to read and speak in English, especially those who dwelt in the trade ports such as India. Doughty met some people in ‘Unayzah who spoke even “*Hindostani*” since they had lived in Bombay.⁴⁷⁶ Indeed, ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Hamad al-Bassam who worked in Bombay for many years spoke English and Urdu.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ Correspondence, Louis P. Dame to W. I. Chamberlain, 24 March 1924, CBFM 1923-1936, JAHW06-1308.5, 2.

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 373, 376.

⁴⁷⁶ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2:359.

⁴⁷⁷ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 117; Al-‘Amiri, “Tujjar Najd fi al-Hind,” 85.

Since the two kinds of al-Qasim's merchants, *al-'uqaylat* and *ahl al-hadra*, traded in countries mostly colonized by Britain, many English words have been used in al-Qasim and have become part of the Qusman's dialect. They use the word "coat" (كوت) as it is pronounced and meant in English. The Qusman also use the word "go" and pronounce it as *guh* (قوه), meaning let's go.⁴⁷⁸ People of the Gulf countries, including Najdis, call a cup of tea *istikana* (إستكانة). This word is originally English. The British officials in India used to take special large type of Indian cups of tea as gifts or souvenirs. Since these types of cups were uncommon in England, the British officials called them East Tea Cans, a name that was modified by the Arabs of the Gulf to *istikana*.⁴⁷⁹ Even non-English words, such as Turkish and Persian, were brought to al-Qasim by the Qasimi merchants abroad. While in al-Qasim in 1877, Doughty noticed that the Qusman used the word *khush* (خوش). They said a *khush rajjal* (man) and a *khush dar* (house), which means excellently good.⁴⁸⁰ This word seems to have Turkish or Persian origins.

Those who traveled to India imported many Indian words. For example, the Hindi word *lakh* (لك), which means one hundred thousand, was commonly used by the Qusman who traded in India.⁴⁸¹ Moreover, since the best kinds of wooden and iron boxes in al-Qasim, and Najd in general, were imported from India, their Indian name, *tujuri* (تجوري), was also imported. This word is commonly used till the present day. *Jabra* (كبره) is another Indian word that was used as a name for a roofed market. The Qusman imported this word and modified it to their dialect in which they sometimes pronounce the letter k in a sound between the letters t and s. Therefore, they pronounce this word as *tsabra* and write it as *kabra*. There is a market in the old Buraydah

⁴⁷⁸ Al-Sharif, *Mantiqat 'Unayzah*, 267.

⁴⁷⁹ Najm al-Din Mahmud Mas'ud, "Al-Shay Diyafa wa-Thaqafa: Mashrub 'Alami Mumti' dhu Anwa' Muta'adida wa-Alwan wa-Madaqat," *Al-Khaffi*, Vol. 43, No. 11-12 (November-December 2013), 14.

⁴⁸⁰ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 398.

⁴⁸¹ Al-Bassam, *Tuhfat al-Mushtaq*, 325.

that is still called *al-tsabra*. Another Indian word that is still used in al-Qasim is *numuna* (نمونه), which means a sample. *Sida* (سيدا), which means toward one direction, is one of the Indian words whose usage is still common all across the Gulf states. *Bakhshish* (بخشيش), which means tip, is still frequent in the Gulf region.⁴⁸² In addition to the word *istikana*, which is originally an English word people of the Gulf modified from East Tea Can, there is also another famous word with the same meaning. The *biala* (بيالة), originally an Indian word means a cup of tea, is still very common in al-Qasim, and in several regions of the Gulf countries.⁴⁸³

Pioneers of Modern Education

The Qusman's trade abroad enabled them to benefit from modern education; some studied at modern schools and others enrolled their children. Since they had known the tremendous impact of modern education on societies, many Qasimi traders were enthusiastic to establish and spread modern education whether in al-Qasim or in the trading centers where they resided. One example of the Qusman's participation in establishing modern schools abroad occurred in al-Zubayr. As it is already mentioned in Chapter 4, the famous 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam of 'Unayzah established a prosperous business in about 1860 and later stationed his sons, Sulayman in Jeddah, Ibrahim in Basra, Muhammad in Damascus, and Fahad in Bahrain, as commercial agents. In the early twentieth century, Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam (d.1923) was one of the leading traders in Basra. Therefore, when Shaykh Muhammad Amin al-Shanqiti established *Madrasat al-Najat al-Ahliyya* (al-Najat Public School) in al-Zubayr in 1920, which was the first

⁴⁸² Al-Qasimi, *Al-Wujud al-Hindi fi al-Khalij*, 225-26, 230.

⁴⁸³ Mas'ud, "al-Shay," 14.

school in the whole region of Basra, Ibrahim al-Bassam did not only donate to this school, but was also a member of the first school board.⁴⁸⁴



Figure 109: Salih ibn Nasir al-Salih. From ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Salih al-Shubayli, *Mashaynaha: Hikayat Dhat* (Riyadh: N.p., 2018), 66.

One of the Qusman who studied at *Madrasat al-Najat* was Salih ibn Nasir al-Salih (Ibn Salih) of ‘Unayzah. Ibn Salih was born in ‘Unayzah in c.1904 (see figure 109).⁴⁸⁵ At the age of twelve, his father died, so he went to live with his uncle in al-Zubayr. When *Madrasat al-Najat* was opened, Ibn Salih studied at the school. After traveling to Kuwait, he attended *al-Madrasa al-Mubarakiiyya* (Al-Mubarakiiyya School). Ibn Salih, later, became a teacher at *al-Madrasa al-Khalifiyya* (al-Khlaifiyya School) in Bahrain. After all these experiences at modern schools, Ibn

⁴⁸⁴ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 111, 113-14.

⁴⁸⁵ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 2: 549.

Salih returned to 'Unayzah and established the first modern school in Najd in 1929, ten years before the first state school for boys was established. This school was *Madrasat Ibn Salih al-Ahliyya* (Ibn Salih Public School). Here students did not only learn Quran, writing, reading, and algebra, which are the subjects at the traditional *katatib* schools, but they also learned sociology and science, as well as how to improve their calligraphy, speech, and conversation skills. At Ibn Salih's school, classes were divided according to students' learning levels and ages. Moreover, students were provided with entertainment and physical activities. Interestingly, at Ibn Salih's school, students were trained how to keep commercial records, which was obviously inspired by the town's prosperous internal and external trade. According to al-Bassam, some of the graduates of this school were those who later managed the businesses of the leading merchants in the Gulf, Iraq, and India.⁴⁸⁶

It is said that Ibn Saud was so fond of Ibn Salih's school that he twice attended its graduation parties. Moreover, those who graduated from Ibn Salih's school were the first employees in *al-Diwan al-Malaki* (royal Court) since they were the only Najdis who had received a modern education. Among those that graduated from Ibn Salih's school was the first Saudi to gain a Ph.D. degree, who became the rector of a prominent Saudi university, and who also held two ministerial positions. Another graduate from Ibn Salih's school became a mayor of a main city in Saudi Arabia, while another became a significant ambassador. It is common in al-Qasim that their early involvement with modern education was a result of their travels abroad.⁴⁸⁷

In addition to Ibn Salih, Ibn Sulayman was one of the pioneers who participated in developing the education in Saudi Arabia. Having had a chance to observe the modern education in India and Bahrain, Ibn Sulayman was enthusiastic to modernize education in his country.

⁴⁸⁶ Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 2: 549-52.

⁴⁸⁷ Altorki and Cole, *Arabian Oasis*, 20, 94.

After becoming the Finance Minister, he encouraged modern education, although only few schools in the country can be described as modern. Having no awareness yet about the significance of modern education, local people did not push their children to these schools. To resolve this problem, Ibn Sulayman agreed to devote monthly payments for students of the pioneer al-Sahra' Elementary School that was founded in 1946 in al-Musayjid, a village near Madinah. This resolution made people compete to enroll their children in the school. Ibn Sulayman believed that this school was the hope for development in the society. He took 15 of this school's graduates and enrolled them in the military school in Riyadh. Ibn Sulayman also directed 14 of al-Sahra' School's graduates to be enrolled in the railroad school in Dammam, and later to be sent to the United States for training in operating railroads and managing railroad stations. Every time he was in Madinah, Ibn Sulayman was eager to visit al-Sahra' School and listen to students in class.⁴⁸⁸

Some of the Qasimi merchants abroad who later secured high positions in Ibn Saud's state enthusiastically encouraged sending students to study abroad. For instance, 'Abd Allah al-Fawzan of 'Unayzah who was the provost of Bombay's merchants and became Ibn Saud's representative there, effectively supported the idea of sending young Saudis to study in Egypt.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, in 1928 Saudi Arabia sent dozens of students to study in Egypt. The other Qasimi merchant who supported this decision was Ibn Sulayman who had already been one of the most important assistants to Ibn Saud. Ibn Sulayman was always concerned about these students' development and visited them several times when in Egypt. When signing the privilege agreements with SOCAL and CASOC, the establishment of new schools was a significant

⁴⁸⁸ Al-'Urabi, *'Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 219-20.

⁴⁸⁹ Al-Jasir, "Min Dhikrayat al-Rahalat," 205.

condition that Ibn Sulayman always insisted on. When he learned that one of the Aramco schools in al-Jubayl was closed, Ibn Sulayman sent a letter criticizing Aramco for its misconduct.⁴⁹⁰

While in Germany on an official visit in November 1953, Ibn Sulayman was informed that Ibn Saud had died. He quickly returned to Saudi Arabia to bid his king a last farewell after being one of his closest aids for about forty years. After only a few months, Ibn Sulayman presented his resignation letter from his position as Minister of Finance to King Saud ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, who accepted it.⁴⁹¹ After retirement, however, Ibn Sulayman continued to participate in the developments of Saudi Arabia, particularly in terms of educational issues. For example, since 1947, the elites of Jeddah had expressed their desire for establishing a university in their city. However, until 1964 there was nothing on the ground. Although the establishing committee collected donations in this year to begin the construction work, the donations were not enough. In 1965, Ibn Sulayman invited the committee for a meeting in his house. At this meeting, Ibn Sulayman told them he would donate some real estate including a huge tract of land and four buildings, which at the time equaled 10-11 million Saudi Arabian Riyals (SAR). By this donation, the notion of establishing a university in Jeddah was transformed from a dream to reality.⁴⁹² On Ibn Sulayman’s properties, King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz University, which is now one of the most important universities in Saudi Arabia, was founded.

Knowledge Seekers

While books in Najd were often focused on religion and literature, the Qusman’s travels outside Najd enabled them to learn other subjects. Indeed, some of these merchants returned carrying

⁴⁹⁰ Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 222-23.

⁴⁹¹ Maghribi, *A‘lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 120; Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 243-44.

⁴⁹² Maghribi, *A‘lam al-Hijaz*, 1: 123; Al-‘Urabi, *‘Abd Allah al-Sulayman*, 250-251, 254-55.

types of books that were not usually seen in Najd. For instance, Doughty mentioned that he saw al-Bustani's *Encyclopedia* at the house of his friend, 'Abd Allah al-Khunayni.⁴⁹³ Al-Khunayni was one of those who traveled a lot, so it is highly likely that his travels made him more interested in such subjects and open to other cultures. Moreover, the Qusman who traveled to the Gulf ports and India did not only reach out to the books, literate journals, and daily newspapers that were printed in Bombay, but also kept in touch with those printed in Cairo since the publications of Cairo were imported to Bombay and the Gulf.⁴⁹⁴

The Qusman abroad were also pioneers in introducing cultural centers and bookstores to the Najdi society. Although Ibn Salih's contribution in founding the first modern school in Najd in 1929, which was *Madrasat Ibn Salih al-Ahliyya*, was by itself a remarkable accomplishment, he also participated in improving the cultural awareness in the community of 'Unayzah. Ibn Salih played a significant role as the cofounder of a cultural center and a bookstore in 'Unayzah.⁴⁹⁵

Another example of the Qasimi merchants who had a crucial role in spreading information and general knowledge is Ibn Sulayman. In the late 1930s, while he was the Finance Minister of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Sulayman received a letter from 'Unayzah's intellectual elite in which they informed him that the books located at the small library of 'Unayzah's *jami* (grand mosque) were not sufficient for *talabat al- 'ilm* (knowledge seekers). Ibn Sulayman, then, gave his order that this library would be supplied with a copy of all the books published by the Saudi government and a copy of all the books displayed at Mecca's books market as well as providing this library with new wooden shelves. When these books arrived in 'Unayzah, there was

⁴⁹³ Doughty, *Travels in Arabia*, 2: 344.

⁴⁹⁴ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Wujud al-Hindi fi al-Khalij*, 39.

⁴⁹⁵ Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 2: 552.

insufficient room in the small library for all of them. Consequently, local people appealed to Qasimi merchants abroad for help. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Si‘di, the most prominent shaykh in ‘Unayzah at his time, wrote letters to ‘Unayzah’s merchants abroad, especially Bahrain and India, asking them to participate in providing fund for building a new, bigger library. Indeed, several merchants in Bahrain and India sent their donations. When opened in 1940, this library became the first public library in Najd.⁴⁹⁶

The Qusman’s cultural influence was not only limited to their home region or country but was even effective in the countries where they resided. Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr of ‘Unayzah, who was one of the leading pearl merchants in Bahrain, was one of the best examples of the Qusman’s cultural impact. Since he was a respected merchant and a regular attendant in the literate circles at the same time, al-Dhukayr was chosen by these circles as the most qualified person to import Arabic newspapers and journals to Bahrain. Indeed, al-Dhukayr began in 1895 to import the most important journals, such as *al-Muqtataf*, *al-Mu’ayyad*, *al-‘Ahrām*, and *al-Manār*, becoming the trading agent of these journals in Bahrain.⁴⁹⁷ Thus, as a result of al-Dhukayr’s efforts the newspapers and journals came to Bahrain.⁴⁹⁸ Some of the Qusman in Bahrain went further than only being good readers for these newspapers and journals by buying subscriptions and paying fees annually (see figure 110). Qasimi traders in India were also interested in supporting Arabic journals and newspapers. For example, the famous ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan of Bombay was a leading subscriber to Arabic journals, such as *al-‘Arab* and *al-Nafir*.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Al-Bassam, *‘Ulama’ Najd*, 3: 264-65, 267.

⁴⁹⁷ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza’ir al-Lu’lu’*, 13, 15.

⁴⁹⁸ Khalid al-Bassam, *Ya-Zaman al-Khalij*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2016), 47.

⁴⁹⁹ Al-Harbi, *Tarikh al-‘Ilaqat al-Kuwaytiyya al-Hindiyya*, 369.



Figure 110: A letter from the subscription department at *al-'Ahrām* newspaper informing the famous Qasimi merchant in Bahrain Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam that his subscription for the year of 1940 was about to expire and encouraging him to renew the subscription. From Al-Bassam, *Al-Najdi al-Tayyib*, 241.

Speaking of newspapers and journals, the first Najdi journalist was Sulayman ibn Salih al-Dakhil of Buraydah (c.1877-1945). As it mentioned in Chapter 3, al-Dakhil traveled to India and worked there for the famous trader in Bombay ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan. Later, al-Dakhil resided in Baghdad and established *al-Riyadh Newspaper* in 1910. This weekly newspaper was published for four years until 1914. He also participated in the establishment of *al-Hayat Journal* in 1912. This monthly journal was stopped after publishing only four volumes. In 1931, al-Dakhil became the editor-in-chief for the weekly *Jazirat al-'Arab Newspaper*. In addition to his career in journalism, al-Dakhil, who was a historian as well, printed some important books in history and literature. For example, Ibn Bishr’s *Inwan al-Majd fi Tarikh*

Najd, which is one of the most significant sources of Najd history in the nineteenth century, was published for the first time by al-Dakhil. He himself wrote a chronicle, *Tuhfat al-Alibba' fi Tarikh al-Ahsa'*, and published it in 1912.⁵⁰⁰

Furthermore, with the increasing activities of the Christian missionaries along the Gulf coast and Eastern Arabia, Muqbil ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr led a cluster of religious scholars and intellectuals to encounter these Christian activities. Under the direction of the famous Priest Samuel Zwemer, the American Missionary opened a hospital, library, and school, where Zwemer and his assistants preached in the name of Jesus. Al-Dhukayr did not like the approach local religious scholars followed, which concentrated on encouraging people to neglect the missionary members and not to attend their associations. Instead, al-Dhukayr believed that the appropriate method to confront the missionaries was by establishing a cultural center that included a school. Indeed, in association with the famous Bahraini merchant Yusuf Kanu, al-Dhukayr founded the Islamic Cultural Club in 1913. Although such a center required large amounts of money, al-Dhukayr could afford the majority of the expenses. The club was opened exactly in front of the American Missionary's library in al-Manama *suq*. In the beginning, the club was merely two classes, where students were taught religion and science, and a library. After the opening of the club, the numbers of the missionary library's customers and the sale of books declined while the Islamic Club's library prospered.⁵⁰¹ The Islamic Cultural Club, which was chaired by al-Dhukayr himself, was also focused on writing articles and holding discourses to respond to the missionaries' claims.⁵⁰² Since he was the commercial agent for *al-Manar Journal*, published in Cairo, al-Dhukayr received donations from the regional political leaders,

⁵⁰⁰ Al-Salman, *al-Ahwal al-Siyasiyya fi al-Qasim*, 377-78.

⁵⁰¹ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza'ir al-Lu'lu'*, 15-16.

⁵⁰² Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 6: 105.

such as the ruler of Qatar Shaykh Qasim ibn Muhammad Al Thani, in order to print anti missionary books in Bombay.⁵⁰³

Nonetheless, not all Qasimi merchants saw the activities of the American Missionary in Bahrain from al-Dhukayr's perspective. According to one of Louis Dame's letters that he wrote on 24 March 1924, one of the Qasimi merchants had enrolled his son in the missionary school.⁵⁰⁴ Although we do not know how many merchants enrolled their children in this school, it is highly likely that this mentioned merchant was not alone.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, however, pearl prices dramatically declined, which affected the entire economic activities in Bahrain. Al-Dhukayr, once known as *fakhr al-tujjar* (pride of merchants), declared bankruptcy in 1917. According to some sources, al-Dhukayr's bankruptcy was not solely caused by the decline of pearl prices, but some merchants conspired against him. Although these sources claim that the conspiracy happened because the conspirators envied al-Dhukayr, who was famous for having numerous strong relationships and a good reputation, it is possible that his political, religious, and intellectual activities were the major factor for this conspiracy, especially with the fact that some of the other intellectual merchants who were politically active, such as the Yemeni merchant in Bahrian Sayid Muhammad Jamal al-Layl, faced the same fate. In any event, after declaring bankruptcy, al-Dhukayr became unable to fund the cultural club, so he had no choice but to close it.⁵⁰⁵

The Qusman's cultural influence abroad appeared also in spreading Salafism. For example, Muqbil ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Dhukayr, who traded and resided for a while in Bahrain (the

⁵⁰³ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Wujud al-Hindi fi al-Khalij*, 39.

⁵⁰⁴ Correspondence, Louis P. Dame to W. I. Chamberlain, 24 March 1924, CBFM 1923-1936, JAHW06-1308.5, 2.

⁵⁰⁵ Al-Bassam, *Rijal fi Jaza'ir al-Lu'lu'*, 18, 27.

cousin of the previously mentioned famous pearl merchant), funded the print of several Salafi books, such as some of Ibn Taymiyya's books.⁵⁰⁶

Health Awareness

The inhabitants of al-Qasim, and Najd in general, suffered from many kinds of sicknesses because of the poverty and the lack of care health. Consequently, those people eagerly welcomed anybody claiming to have knowledge about medicines. This situation encouraged many foreigners to visit Najd under the cover of providing medical treatments while they in fact had religious, political, or personal ambitions. For instance, travelers, such as Charles Doughty, frequently declared that he had medicines when feeling fearful or unwelcomed. Even the real doctors who visited Najd often had further goals beyond providing medications. Louis Paul Dame, a doctor working for the American Missionary in Bahrain, was insistent to say Christian prayers before providing treatments for the Najdis. In spite of his religious ambitions, Dame emphasizes that his medical efforts were most appreciated in 'Unayzah. This remarkable appreciation might have been caused by the travels of the people of 'Unayzah, which enriched their knowledge about the modern treatments. Dame describes the reaction of the people of 'Unayzah to his medical activities as "nowhere else was there such an appreciation of our work. The Ameer visited us several times, as did most of the leading men of the town. Everywhere we were greeted and treated cordially ..."⁵⁰⁷

Because of their travels abroad, the Qasimi trading class had the chance to see and know the modern medical services. For instance, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam (d. 1906) of 'Unayzah, whose sons were his commercial agents in Jeddah, Damascus, Basra, and Bahrain,

⁵⁰⁶ Al-Bassam, *'Ulama' Najd*, 6: 425.

⁵⁰⁷ Correspondence, Louis P. Dame to W. I. Chamberlain, 24 March 1924, CBFM 1923-1936, JAHW06-1308.5, 3.

was the first person in Najd who wore eyeglasses. Since they had never seen eyeglasses, the Bedouins called al-Bassam, *Abu Manadir* (the person with eyeglasses).⁵⁰⁸

Furthermore, the long stay in India, which extended to three generations, had clear cultural and intellectual influences, in addition to the economic, on several members of al-Bassam trading house. One example is Hamad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Hamad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Hamad al-Bassam, who was born in ‘Unayzah in 1910 (see figure 111). After receiving his early education, Hamad left ‘Unayzah in 1925, accompanying his uncle, ‘Abd al-Rahman, to join his father in Bombay. In addition to helping his father at the family trading shop, Hamad completed his general education at Saint Mary’s School. After graduating from Saint Xavier College, he attended King Edward’s Medical College at University of Bombay. In November 1943, Hamad graduated from the medical college, becoming the first Najdi doctor. Although he worked at a hospital in the mornings, Hamad went in the evenings to the family’s trading shop in order to ensure its improvement. Since he grew up in ‘Unayzah, lived in Bombay, and attended its schools and colleges, Hamad fluently spoke Arabic, English, and Hindi. Although he did not return to ‘Unayzah until 1968, Hamad brought many types of medications and gave them to ill people when visiting his hometown during vacations. Hamad saw ill people daily and treated those who could be treated with his simple tools. After a long life, Hamad died in 1990 in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Ahmad, “Usrat al-Bassam,” 111-12.

⁵⁰⁹ Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat ‘Umur*, 10, 34-35, 37, 49, 58, 60-61, 65, 133.



Figure 111: Hamad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Bassam, in suit, with other leading Arab merchants in India, such as Muhammad Zaynal of Jeddah, in the reception of King Saud ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz in 1954. From Al-Bassam and al-Bassam, *Rihlat 'Umur*, 82.

The Qusman's travels outside Najd enabled them to learn about the modern therapy. When returning home, those Qusman replaced the old traditional methods of treatment with the modern approach. The best example on this topic is Muhammad al-Ardah of Buraydah, who was one of those who migrated to Kuwait where he worked for the British clinic and learned about medicines and their usage. After about twenty years in Kuwait, during which he had several jobs, al-Ardah returned to Buraydah where he opened a drug shop roughly in the early 1940s. Arguably for the first time, chemical medicines were introduced to the community of Buraydah by al-Ardah's pharmacy. Since scorpion stings were common in Najd, al-Ardah brought a medicine for stung people. When somebody was stung by a scorpion, al-Ardah was called. He

quickly took his medicine and went to the stung person. Moreover, al-Ardah imported penicillin injections, an antibiotics immunization, and performed the injections himself.⁵¹⁰

Al-Ardah also was the first who brought eyeglasses to Buraydah. However, his measurements for people's sight were imprecise. He simply let people try multiple glasses and asked them which one was better. According to his client's answer, al-Ardah prescribed a pair of glasses. Al-Ardah, then, recorded the client's name and his sight's degree. When the client came after a while to buy a new pair of glasses, al-Ardah took the client's name and then brought the right glasses.⁵¹¹

Activists for Modernity

Because of their vast travels that extended from India to Egypt, the Qusman lived in modern countries and sought to bring modernity home. Indeed, several foreign travelers emphasized that al-Qasim was a modern district compared with the neighboring regions. Qasimi traders were sometimes considered more modern not only in al-Qasim, but also in the trading destinations where they resided. For example, the famous Qasimi merchant in Bahrain Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam was one of first people who bought a radio, which was then considered by many people prohibited in Islam because it broadcasts music. Consequently, al-Bassam received a letter in 1938 from 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Salih al-'Alji, who was considered a shaykh in al-Hasa, in which al-'Alji preached to al-Bassam and tried to explain how the radio is dangerous for al-Bassam's faith (see figure 112). Al-Bassam's interest in the modern technology and the so-called shaykh's reaction illustrates the intellectual gap between Qasimi traders abroad and local people.

⁵¹⁰ Al-Ardah, personal interview.

⁵¹¹ Al-Ardah, personal interview.

Conclusion

At the age of six, ‘Uthman, a child of a poor peasant family of ‘Unayzah, began to help his parents on their small farm. Everyday, the family woke up by dawn to begin their daily work. When he became nine, ‘Uthman realized that all these endless physical efforts were useless. The family was swimming in a sea of debt and its economic situation was not improving. At the age of eleven, ‘Uthman left ‘Unayzah for Mecca, where working children like him could find appropriate opportunities as apprentices at merchants’ shops, as shown in the previous chapters. After working in Mecca for a few years, ‘Uthman saved SAR. 220, an amount that could pay off his father’s debt. Thereafter, in the early 1950s ‘Uthman returned to ‘Unayzah and liberated his father from his debts.

At the age of fifteen, ‘Uthman traveled to al-Dahran to work for Aramco. However, he was not lucky enough to get employed. Therefore, he traveled to Ra’s Mish‘ab, a small port in the northeast of Saudi Arabia that prospered after the construction of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (Tapline), which, beginning in 1947, transported oil from the Arabian Gulf to Sidon in Lebanon. In Ra’s Mish‘ab, ‘Uthman worked loading and unloading commodities at the port. Later, he was lucky to find a job at a shop for which he was paid monthly SAR. 70. Then, ‘Uthman found a better job as a worker at Aramco. For some reason, however, he left Ra’s Mish‘ab for ‘Ar‘ar, which was a major pumping station for the Tapline in the very north of Saudi Arabia. Again, he worked at a shop for about one year and a half. After that, ‘Uthman returned to the east where he worked for the customhouse of al-Dammam for three years.

All these travels were not the end of ‘Uthman ibn Hamad al-Khwaytir’s story, however. He is a perfect example of the Saudis who successfully adapted to the changes caused by the discovery of oil. After returning to ‘Unayzah, ‘Uthman found that modern schools were opened,

so he finished his general education in his hometown in 1959. Then, he gained a scholarship from the Ministry of Education to study petroleum engineering in the United States. Indeed, he got his bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin in 1964. After working in several positions, this very poor child became the Vice President of Aramco, which is the largest petroleum company in the world.

In spite of his long successful career, al-Khwaytir has never forgotten his hometown, where he grew up. Thus, he decided in 2019 to establish three medical centers in 'Unayzah: a special needs medical clinic for men, a special needs medical clinic for women, and a Down syndrome medical care center. Al-Khwaytir was one out of many examples of young men who left al-Qasim because of poverty and returned later to participate in developing their home region.⁵¹²

Ahl al-hadra, such as al-Khuwaytir, were strikingly different from the *'uqaylat* in dealing with the changes that were caused by the establishment of the national borders and the discovery of oil. *Ahl al-hadra* seem to have easily adjusted to these changes and learned to manage their businesses according to the new situations, which enabled several *ahl al-hadra* trading families to not only preserve their businesses, but even invest in the oil-based economy and develop massive companies. The *'uqaylat*, on the other hand, seem to have been challenged by the recent changes, which not only stopped the overland trade forever, but even destroyed many *'uqaylat* merchants and left them bankrupt. It seems that several factors made the impact of the modern policies and changes on the *'uqaylat* differ from that on *ahl al-hadra*. First, the *'uqaylat* moved for more than two centuries in an area that did not know any kind of borders or barriers, so they

⁵¹² The story of 'Uthman al-Khwaytir is based on his c.v., which was written by al-Khwaytir himself, and an interview with him. This information can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGiM2-AbzEw>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmf90qVf1eo>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwzEZpg2xzk>.

were forced to give up their trade immediately after the establishment of the modern national borders. However, since most of *ahl al-hadra* had traveled to the Indian Subcontinent, which was under the British colonialism, they had already seen borders, had passports, and knew how to transport their trade through different countries. Second, unlike the *'uqaylat*, whose trade was mainly camels, which became obsolete after the spread of motorized vehicles, *ahl al-hadra* varied their trading goods. For example, they did not limit themselves to the old kinds of commodities, such as pearls, weapons, and slaves, but adjusted to the transforming markets by investing in the new kinds of business, such as real estate. Third, in contrast to the *'uqaylat*, who often dealt with Arabs, *ahl al-hadra* often dealt with foreigners, especially in India, which enabled them to learn languages and to gain greater knowledge about the modern global economy. Fourth, since the discovery of oil occurred around the Arabian Gulf, where *ahl al-hadra* resided, they were amongst those who took advantage of the upcoming great transformation.

Today, several Qasimi trading families, whose grandfathers had migrated to the Arabian Gulf and India, possess giant companies in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain. One of the best examples of these trading families might be that of al-Zamil. I have mentioned in the previous chapters that several members of the al-Zamil left 'Unayzah seeking livelihood in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean. One of these members was 'Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Zamil, who established his first trade and services business in Bahrain in the 1920s. By 1940, his business had expanded into real estate. By 1959, he built the tallest building in al-Khobar, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

Al-Zamil's business, which was transformed later into a massive company known as Zamil Group, prospered during Saudi Arabia's economic and industrial era. In 1974, Zamil Air Conditioners was established with a license from Friedrich Air Conditioning. Zamil Air

Conditioners was one of the first air conditioning companies in Saudi Arabia. In the same year, Zamil Group began to invest in architectural industries, manufacturing aluminum, steel, and plastic products. Over the following decades, Zamil Group became the first family company to be listed on Saudi Arabia's stock exchange. In 2003, the company expanded with offshore engineering and construction services to the oil and gas industry. Today, Zamil Group is a significant partner for local and international markets.⁵¹³

⁵¹³ For more details about Zamil Group, see: <https://zamil.com/index.php/our-story/?lang=en>.

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Appendix

The Qasimi Trading Houses and Merchants often Mentioned in this Study:

- **The al-Zamil trading house:** Bahrain.

The famous figures: ‘Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Zamil (1897-1961) – Bahrain.

Ibrahim and Sulayyim al-Zamil – Bahrain.

Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Ali al-Zamil – Bahrain.

- **The al-Hamdan trading house:** Iraq, Bahrain, and India.

The famous figures: Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan – Basra.

‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hamdan – Bombay and al-Jubayl.

‘Abd Allah ibn Sulayman – Bombay and Bahrain.

Hamad ibn Sulayman al-Hamdan – Bombay and Bahrain.

- **The al-Dhukayr trading house:** India, Bahrain, Iraq and al-Hasa.

The famous figures: Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dhukayr (1844-1922) – India and

Bahrain.

Muqbil ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dhukayr (c.1883-1944) – Bahrain and al-

Hasa.

Sulayman and Hamad, sons of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-

Dhukayr – Basra.

- **The al-Fawzan trading house:** India.

The famous figures: Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fawzan – Calcutta.

‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Fawzan (1861-1960) – Bombay and Karachi.

- **The al-Bassam trading house:** Bahrain, Iraq, and India.

The famous figures: Hamad ibn Sulayman al-Bassam – Calcutta.

Sulayman ibn Hamad al-Bassam (1888-1949) – Bahrain.

Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam (1862-1942) – Bombay and Basra.

‘Abd Allah and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, sons of Salih al-Bassam – Bombay.

Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam (c.1897-1985) – Bombay.

‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Bassam – Calcutta.

‘Abd al-Muhsin (d. 1934), Muhammad (d. 1938), and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, sons of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Bassam – Calcutta.

Hamad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam – Bombay and Bahrain.

‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Ali al-Bassam (c.1893-1976) – Bahrain.

Hamad (1847-1906), ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (d.1918), ‘Abd Allah (1858-1927), and ‘Abd al-Rahman (1863-1942), sons of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Bassam – Basra and Bombay.

‘Abd Allah (1878-1943) and ‘Abd al-Rahman (1887-1968), sons of Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Bassam – Bombay.

Hamad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Hamad al-Bassam (1911-1991) – Bombay.

Sulayman ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Muhammad al-Bassam (d. 1958) – Basra.

Sulayman ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Bassam (d. 1942) – Basra.

Hamad and ‘Ali, sons of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bassam –
Basra.

- **The al-‘Assafi trading house:** Iraq and India.

The famous figures: Muhmmad ibn Salih al-‘Assafi – Baghdad.

Hamad ibn Muhammad al-‘Assafi – Baghdad.

Salih ibn Muhammad al-‘Assafi – Baghdad, Bombay, and Calcutta.

- **The al-Fadil trading house:** India and Pakistan.

The famous figures: Salih ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fadil (d. 1923) – Bombay and Karachi.

Ibrahim ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Fadil – Bombay.

- **The al-Shubayli trading house:** Iraq.

The famous figures: Muhammad ibn Nasir al-Shubayli – Basra.

Sulayman ibn Nasir al-Shubayli – Basra.

- **The al-Qadi trading house:** India, Pakistan, and Kuwait.

The famous figures: Hamad ibn ‘Ali al-Qadi (1890-1973) – Bombay, Karachi, and Kuwait.

Ahmad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Qadi (1922-1994) – Bombay.

Hamad ibn Muhammad al-Qadi – Bahrain.

- **The al-Khunayni trading house:** Iraq, Bahrain, India, and Zanzibar.

The famous figures: ‘Abd Allah al-Khunayni – Basra, Bombay, Mauritius, and Zanzibar.

Mansur al-Khunayni – Bahrain.