

Working paper Number 173

Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View From the Edge

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Ceremonial and elaborate protocols are commonly associated with kingship, authority and power and imbued with a sense of an ancient past. Yet traditions, particularly as pertaining to European practices, are often made up, choreographed and then formally instituted in a matter of a few years. Throughout Europe and the developing world, traditions have been, and continue to be, invented and kingship, oligarchy, and other institutions are set up, supported and occasionally simply maintained by such ceremony. Once established these rituals tend to take on a life of their own, sometimes thriving in an inverse relationship to the actual realities of power and authority.

In the Middle East few studies exist which examine the study of royal rituals – invented and derived. Morocco, perhaps more than any other state, has been the focus of a number of such studies a few others considered aspects of ceremonial and monarchy in Jordan. In the case of Oman, however, there are no studies at present which consider the relationship between created ceremonial in the consolidation of power and authority in the perception of the citizens of that state. This article will briefly explore the creation and elaboration of ceremonial and court ritual in the Sultanate of Oman after the accession of Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970. It will attempt to show that while the creation of rituals of royalty were important for building a sense of national belonging among even the most remote communities in the country, these same ceremonials and created traditions developed lives of their own, stultifying courtly behaviour, and contributing little to the organic sense of Omani citizenship.

May 2009

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In the early months of 1980, shortly after my arrival in the Sultanate of Oman, I was offered an opportunity to join a small convoy of vehicles crossing the deserts of Oman. The trip was to take a week and would start in Salalah, the capital of Dhofar, the southern region of Oman, and end up in Muscat. It was not quite the retracing of the steps of the English explorers Bertram Thomas in the 1930s and Wilfred Thesiger in the 1940s, but it felt like it. We travelled in four-wheel drive vehicles instead of on camel, as Thomas and Thesiger had done, and we had access to some graded roads as well as the recently-opened 1,000 kilometre tarmacked dual-carriageway connecting Muscat with Salalah; but the landscape was the same, vast tracts of seemingly untouched open scrub, gravel, rock and sand. The purpose of the journey was largely to permit a medical team to trace several lapsed tuberculosis patients from tribes in the interior and to provide immunization vaccines to the children of these communities. Several days into our journey, and half way across our proposed itinerary, we came across a small group of nomadic pastoral Harasiis tribe families preparing to attend a wedding. We stopped and took the opportunity to seek their permission to begin a course of immunization for their children “Why”, we were asked, “did we want to do this”? Our reply was, “The Sultan of Oman wishes to see all Omanis immunized against these diseases”. “Why”, they continued, “should he want to do this for us”? We were initially lost for an answer, having assumed that the sense of belonging to one nation, and the obligations of leadership had reached these parts of the country. They had not.¹

Ceremony and elaborate protocols are commonly associated with kingship, authority and power. The pageantry, for example, which is associated with the British monarchy in its public ceremonials, is imbued with a sense of an ancient past. Yet, these traditions are recent inventions derived from the late Victorian period². Traditions, particularly as pertaining to European practices are often made up, choreographed and then formally instituted in a matter of a few years, rapidly gaining a sense of permanence³. Sometimes entirely new symbols and devices are made up to confirm gravitas, substance and rallying points for the new entity (e.g. Marianne, John Bull or Uncle Sam). Traditions have been, and continue to be, invented and kingship, oligarchy, and other institutions set up, supported and occasionally simply maintained by such ceremony. Once established, these ceremonial rituals tend to take on a life of their own, sometimes thriving in an inverse relationship to the actual realities of power and authority. Created or invented rituals and traditions serve several purposes: they may establish or symbolize legitimate relations of authority; or particular institutions; or they may be used to inculcating a certain set of beliefs systems and conventions of behaviour⁴. While the first two purposes were commonly used in British and French colonial contexts in Africa⁵ and South Asia⁶, the third purpose generally characterized the inventions of rituals in the Middle East and North Africa. In this region, the general socialization of highly fragmented sets of societies and cultures was enhanced by the marking out of rituals, ceremony and new traditions. The creation of such practices, which included processions, bands, regalia and anniversaries worked to give the state and its often oligarchic leadership greater legitimacy while at the same time creating a sense of commonality among the diverse peoples in the

country.

In the Middle East few studies exist which examine the rituals of royalty – invented and derived. Morocco has been the focus of a number of studies examining the longevity of Moroccan kingship⁷. For centuries, Moroccan monarchs have conducted royal progressions (*harkas*) with elaborate entourages throughout the country embodying in their person and their companions royal authority and power⁸. In Jordan, a few studies have emerged considering aspects of ceremonial, monarchy and national identity⁹. In the Gulf States the relationship of the rulers to local merchants and the later effort to create a ‘national identity’ have also been explored¹⁰. In the case of Oman, however, there are no studies at present which consider the relationship between ceremony in the consolidation of power and authority and the perception of the nationals of that state¹¹. This article explores the creation and elaboration of certain ceremonials and court rituals in the Sultanate of Oman after the accession of Sultan Qaboos in 1970. It seeks to determine the relationship between the development of these ceremonial and ritual events and the perception of leadership and authority in the person of the Sultan as well as the development of a sentiment of common nationality. Its ethnographic underpinning is the most remote and marginal of Oman’s people, the nomadic pastoral Harasiis tribe of the central desert of Oman¹². It attempts to show that, while the creation of rituals of royalty were important for building a sense of national belonging among this most cut-off and distant of communities in the country, these same ceremonies and created traditions developed lives of their own. Over time these rituals ossified Sultanic courtly behaviour, contributing little to the organic sense of Omani citizenship, and eventually disillusioning some of these marginal groups.

Background to the Dearth of Ceremony in Recent Al Bu Saidi Courts

The Al Bu Said Dynasty came to power in 1744¹³. Over the centuries this dynasty underwent swings in authority and power¹⁴. The mid 19th century saw a rapid decline in Al Bu Said fortunes and British interests in Oman came to be directed and managed from Delhi rather than from Whitehall. For the whole of the 20th century and into the 21st century, Oman has had only four rulers: Faysal (1888- 1913), Taymur (1913-1932), Said (1932 -1970) and Qaboos (1970 to the present). All four rulers owed their position to British support in one way or another.

The indigenous population of the country was relatively large and markedly heterogeneous. In the north it included a small, elite urban merchant class with strong cultural ties and trade links with India and the coast of East Africa. Along the coast, subsistence fishing settlements were common, and in the mountains and intervening valleys, terraced farming communities maintained ancient systems of water collection and distribution¹⁵. The few towns in the interior were centres of regional trade as well as of religious learning. The population of the south of the country, in Dhofar, was distinctly of South Arabian or Himyaritic descent sharing a distinct culture, history and language base. In the middle of the country’s central desert, hundreds of kilometres from agrarian and urban settlements, were a number of nomadic pastoral tribes some with cultural and social links derived from central Arabia and others from Himyaritic Yemen. This thinly-populated desert region played only a marginal role in Omani dynastic history. Until recently these pastoral tribes of the interior of

Oman had little knowledge of the secular government of the Sultan on the coast; some were only marginally more physically connected with the Ibadi Imam in the Jebel Akhdar of Oman.

By the 1920s, the Omani coastal strip under the control of the Sultan was increasingly in debt to the Indian merchants of Muscat. Loans were secured from the British government to free the Sultan from dependence on these Indian merchants. But these loans carried with them a growing dependence on Great Britain and its political and civil service. In 1925, for example, Bertram Thomas was seconded to Oman as the British Financial Advisor for Muscat. In actual fact, he assumed the position of Prime Minister and virtually ran the government during Sultan Taymur's frequent absences abroad.

By the time Said was formally recognized as the ruler of Oman in 1932, the 21 year-old had inherited a country riddled with financial difficulty. Only through frugal, nearly parsimonious, budgeting over the next 38 years was the Sultan able to repay the British their loans and thus wrestle some control of the state back into his own hands. Eradicating the Sultanate's long-term public debt through unenviable economizing was to set a pattern for economic management. In the late 1930s and 1940s Sultan Said was able to implement a modest modernization programme and he cooperated completely with the British during World War II.

Oil exploration commenced in Oman during the 1930s. In the central desert of Oman, both the Harasiis and the Jeneba nomadic pastoral tribes were affected by these activities. Interviews with these tribesmen indicated that these incursions into their traditional territory were the first occasions many had had with Europeans. The Jeneba tribe living between the Indian Ocean and the edge of the Jiddat il-Harasiis closely watched the oil exploration activities and then formally laid claim to the Jiddat maintaining that it was their land which they merely permitted the Harasiis to occupy. Sultan Said and his advisor, Bertram Thomas, decided, however, that occupancy was the determining factor in land right issues and dismissed the Jeneba claim. Wilkinson, moreover, suggests that the Sultan's true motive in coming down on the side of the Harasiis was his confidence that the Harasiis were potentially stronger allies in his claim to future oil rights in the central desert interior¹⁶. Pastoral tribes in the north of the country, such as the Duru, bordering on areas under the control of the Ibadi Imam were increasingly being drawn into the political and armed conflict between the Sultan on the coast and the Ibadi Imam in the interior.

In 1955 an exploratory search party landed at Duqm on Oman's eastern coast and made its way across the Jiddat il-Harasiis to arrive at Fahud in Duru tribal territory. Sultan Said, determined to consolidate his area of interests and sovereignty over this region, contended in his negotiations with the oil concerns, that the Harasiis tribe in the interior and the Jeneba tribe along the coast near Duqm had no relationship with the Ibadi Imam in the north and were, by default, part of his domain. For the Jeneba, this was a problematic assertion as their leader maintained a residence in an area within the Ibadi Imamate¹⁷. For the Harasiis, however, there was no strong link either to the Imam or to the Sultan; neither had a representative or local governor (*wali*) in the Harasiis tribal territory. The Harasiis were, at that time, marginal to the extent and administration of the Sultan's government

During this period, Sultan Said's relationship with Great Britain was cemented by two near simultaneous crises. In 1952, Saudi Arabia attempted to occupy part of Oman in the al-Buraymi Oasis¹⁸. In the same year, the Imam (who allied himself with Saudi Arabia) launched his rebellion which spilled over into a contestation over ownership of any oil finds by oil company exploration teams. In 1959 a combined assault by the Sultan's forces and

those of the British on the Jebel Akhdar ended with the defeat and retreat of the Ibadi Imam and his rebels. The success of the 1959 campaign heralded a period of uncontested and genuinely close cooperation between the Sultan and British authorities.

This period also saw Sultan Said search for ways to develop the country without 'modernizing' it. He prohibited the general importation of cars. He banned sunglasses and torches and insisted that the gates of the capital of Muscat be closed at sunset. He permitted only three schools to operate over the entire country admitting 100 boys a year, who he personally chose. For most of the 1960s, Said withdrew to his palace complex in Salalah, Dhofar. The Harasiis and Jeneba leaders, as well as other prominent tribal members from the interior deserts made annual trips to Salalah to receive monetary gifts from the Sultan in recognition of their political importance to him. However, his increasingly petty and eccentric behaviour and occasionally outlandish rules for his subjects resulted in growing discontent and sporadic outbreaks of violence against him and his rule¹⁹.

Yet Sultan Said, himself, was a cultured and cosmopolitan man. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he made annual trips to the United Kingdom, generally in the summer²⁰. He was a keen music lover and enjoyed opera. His summer sojourns were often passed in London where he frequently met and negotiated expenditure for military hardware and troops with British politicians and Foreign Office officials. During this time, British concerns over the Sultan's isolation in his palace in Salalah culminated in the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Selwyn Lloyd, pointedly informing him that the Queen did not spend all her time in Balmoral Castle²¹.

In 1964, oil was discovered in the central desert of Oman and, by 1967, it began to be exported. Projected revenues jumped dramatically, but even then Said remained cautious about spending money he did not yet have. Thus, although he commissioned plans for a new port at Muscat and a hospital in Ibri among other projects, he took his time giving the go-ahead to implement these works. Until his overthrow by his son, Qaboos, Said continued to act and behave with the shrewdness and calculation of someone always on the edge of financial ruin. His household and his retainers were kept under very tight fiscal control, no excess or flourish in décor or entertainment was tolerated. His hold over authority and power revolved around his relations with his armed forces and his British political agents and not upon any pomp or ceremony to celebrate or consolidate his reign or impress his fellow Omanis.

The unrest and growing unpopularity of the Sultan was compounded by a rebellion in the mountains above Salalah supported by the neighbouring People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. By the summer of 1970, fearful that the Marxist-Leninist rebellion might become successful, British forces quietly instigated and supported a coup d'état led by his son, Qaboos. Unlike his father, and grandfather before him, Qaboos was not educated in India or Baghdad. The only son of a Qara, Dhofari tribeswoman, he had remained in Salalah until the age of 16, never once having visited the north of the country. At this point in Qaboos' life, his father agreed to dispatch him to the United Kingdom to complete his education. He was sent first to the home of Philip Romans in Bury St Edmunds, East Anglia. Philip Romans was the retired Head Master of Baroda College of the University of Bombay who had established a school for students from the Arabian Gulf called Feltsham House. Upon leaving Feltsham House he was enrolled in the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He graduated in 1962 and became an officer of the British Army's Scottish Rifles (the Cameronians), serving in Germany for one year. The next year, the Foreign Office secured for him several months at the Bury St Edmunds Council to observe public administration and accounting. During this

intense residency in the UK, Qaboos, not surprisingly, began a lifelong love affair with military pageantry.

The years in the UK and, in particular, in the British Military deeply affected the young man. In 1964, after a world tour chaperoned by retired British General, F.C.L. Chauncy and his wife, Qaboos returned to Dhofar and was placed under a virtual 'house arrest' in the Royal Palace of Salalah by his father. There he was instructed to study Islamic Law but denied any opportunity to take up an active administrative role in the government. Some scholars believe that, as the rebellion in Dhofar grew in intensity the British began to work surreptitiously towards a 'quiet' Palace Coup. Others saw instead, that Qaboos, chaffing at his house arrest, began to make cautious inquiries through carefully screened personal visitors as to whether the British would support the overthrow of his father²². On the night of July 23rd, July 1970 Qaboos launched a nearly bloodless palace coup; a small group of supporters stormed through the palace doors and up into Said's apartments. There they were met by a fusillade fired by Said and his personal slaves. Sultan Said was wounded in the foot. Peterson maintains that this was a self-sustained injury which occurred when Said cocked one of two pistols he used to defend himself²³. Said was flown out of Salalah by the British RAF to Bahrain, where his wounds were dressed, and then taken on to the United Kingdom where he lived out the last years of his life in a suite at the Dorchester Hotel on London's Park Lane.

After the palace coup of 1970, Sultan Qaboos encouraged all Omanis living abroad to return to the country to help build a government infrastructure nearly from scratch²⁴. The advisors to the new Sultan set about distancing the royal son from his father by over-stating, exaggerating and occasionally distorting known facts about the father's 'miserliness' and eccentricities²⁵. In the early years of Qaboos' reign, this information was used to distinguish the old order of Sultan Said from the 'New Dawn' of Qaboos. It remained, for many years, generally understood that the father's eccentricities had been damaging to the Oman people and thus justified the palace coup which brought the modern, British educated son to power.

In a very short period of time, the armed forces, the police force, the internal security service, the civil service, and government ministries of health, education, social affairs and labour, agriculture and fisheries, water and electricity, communications and roads among others were rapidly set up. The trappings of a modern state were put into place almost overnight. Thousands of miles of roads were tarmacked, and Muscat was connected for the first time by a modern road network to Salalah. The social and economic transformations of the coastal areas and the mountains behind in both the north and the south of the country, funded mainly by petroleum wealth, were enormous. The same was not true of the interior desert areas of the country which remained isolated from the rapid political, social and economical transformation taking place along the coastal region of Oman and Dhofar.

Recognizing the Need to Create Traditions

When Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, there was a decided lack of public ceremonial or palace ritual associated with monarchy in the 20th century. This fact was played up and used to lay the groundwork for the elaboration of new rituals and traditions associated with the Sultan Qaboos' court as well as the development of a cult of personality far removed from the established eccentricities of his father. There was only one residence in Muscat for the Sultan (which had lain unoccupied for the previous 12 years) and another compound in Salalah. Rituals of hospitality were simple and reflected general Omani culture found throughout the

country. Protocol for the occasional state visitor to Muscat remained peculiarly lacking in substance and lustre as states in other parts of the world came to increasingly sport a competitive inventiveness to ceremonially enhance the position of the head of state.

Until the late 1960s, most state visitors to Oman arrived by boat and were greeted on shore by a small representation of family members and others from Muscat's small merchant elite appointed by the Sultan for the occasion. An internal British government memorandum from the British Consul General Phillips in Muscat dated August 27th, 1960 revealed British Government concern for what seemed to be a questionable 'national salute' or anthem. The letter contends that the national salute was written by "the bandmaster of a cruiser in about 1932", and that the only band in Oman which might have been able to play it was "now disbanded in or around 1937 (Muscat Infantry Band)". There were no occasions, according to General Phillips, at which the 'Salutations' was now officially played.

Even after the Palace purse was no longer so meagre²⁶, Sultan Qaboos' father was loathe to develop too much elaboration around the court ceremonials or occasions of state arrivals and departures. He did, however, decide to purchase a twelve-man whaler for use in Muscat harbour to 'meet and greet' important guests. Working with the offices of Charles Kendall and Partners in London, he commissioned a new conveyance for ceremonial occasions which conceptually had significance not unlike a new state carriage for the British monarch²⁷. As the order neared completion, Sultan Said was asked by John Kendall – the son of the founder of the firm - what kind of dress/uniform he wished for his oarsmen in Muscat to wear. Sultan Said replied none, just the white long dress (*dishdasha*) commonly worn by all men in Oman. John Kendall, taking on much the same role as that of Reginald Brett, the 'eminence grise' in British governing circles at the beginning of the 20th century', pushed for some greater identifying marker for these men to show that they belonged to the Royal Palace²⁸. Kendall continued the conversation making the suggestion of a ceremonial uniform of white *dishdasha* but with straightforward waist-coats and braid. Still the Sultan declined to order any special uniform or 'dress' for these oarsmen, explaining, that such elaboration would be pompous in his mind and not suitable to his Sultanic court²⁹.

Sultan Qaboos came to the throne with vastly different experience and perspectives. Unlike his Anglo-Indian educated father and grandfather, Sultan Qaboos had no experience of the world outside of Dhofar until he was sent to the United Kingdom. Adding to this background would have been his years at Sandhurst and a further year with the Scottish Rifles. Thus, in a very short time, a young man from the south Arabian coast town of Salalah with practically no international experience would develop a love of many things Western, and particularly British: classical music, military pageantry, horsemanship, and bagpipes. After the coup which brought him to power, Sultan Qaboos had to set about uniting the disparate elements of his country - the interior with the coast and the north with the south. This unity, which he recognized would centre upon the person of the Sultan, needed new traditions to support it.

Sultan Qaboos was befriended by the Shah of Iran and King Hussein of Jordan – both of whom sent significant troop numbers to Dhofar to help Qaboos put down the rebellion in the mountains by the mid -1970s. King Hussein, also a Sandhurst graduate about six years his senior, developed a particularly close relationship with Qaboos. The King frequently visited the Sultan and it was said by many close to the Royal Court that he also tutored the Sultan in 'monarchic' protocol. One story which circulated for years was that King Hussein advised the young Sultan that it was befitting his status to keep his guests and petitioners waiting; the only exception to this rule was never to be late for the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II.

Setting up the Structures to Elaborate Ceremony and Ritual

Within a month of the coup d'état, Sultan Qaboos appointed his uncle Prime Minister and he immediately set about creating the core structures of a 'modern' state. All British government employees - with the exception of those in the Defence Department - were replaced and Omanis were appointed as the new ministers and other high-level government post holders³⁰. The Sultan embarked on a programme designed to reinforce and celebrate his reign. The old Beit al-'Alam Palace in Muscat was demolished and replaced by the new and spectacular Palace, Qasr al-'Alam. Used for ceremonial occasions and state visits rather than as a regular residence, it was a symbol of the privileged 'renaissance' of the Al Said dynasty. In addition, a building programme of palaces and royal guest houses commenced so that by the early 1980s, Sultan Qaboos had at least three residences both in the north and the south of the country befitting his role of political leader of the nation. By the beginning of the 21st century Sultan Qaboos had at least seven royal residences in the north and three in the south as well as residences and estates in the United Kingdom and in Germany.³¹

By naming roads, ports, schools, hospitals, mosques, sports stadiums and residential areas after him, Sultan Qaboos was inscribing his presence upon the national geography³². His concern for 'his people' was affirmed by the constant repetition of his name on radio and television, by the hanging of his photographs – each in a similar poised attitude of hands crossed across his lap - in a variety of national dress or military uniform on the walls of offices, businesses and private. The written press and television coverage of all the Sultan's meetings, his comings and goings, the telegrams of greetings and congratulations from other heads of state was a daily diet consumed by all Omanis. The linking of his name with all that was new, modern and progressive was in many ways like the official discourses found in support of state leaders in other countries of the region. One examples of such linkage of the state with the person of the ruler is in the Syrian Arab Republic. Here, the regular depiction of Hafez al-Asad in the decades before his death in 2000, as the omnipresent and omniscient leader was an attempt to control the symbolic world of Syrian society. Official rhetoric and images operated as a form of power helping to enforce and sustain the reign of Hafez al-Asad³³. Thus in Oman, we can see that symbols, rhetoric, pageantry and ceremony worked to not only represent the person of the Sultan, but also to produce and consolidate his political power.

Creating the Glue that Binds

Sometimes symbols, created traditions and pageantry have been used to create a separation between one ruler and the state or to totally break from the government of the past as, for example, in Iran and in the Former Soviet Union. In Oman, however, the continuity of the ruling dynasty was unquestioned even if the personality and approach to rule was regarded as diametrically opposed. Sultan Said was replaced by his son, Qaboos. There was no immediate break with the past or profound change of direction which the elaboration of new ceremonials, traditions and pageantry confirmed. Rather it was the recognition that the parsimonious and miserly qualities of the previous leadership had resulted in an almost total lack of ceremony of statesmanship which needed to be corrected and elaborated in the effort to unite a country

which had seen two serious insurrections in the previous two decades. The country of Muscat and Oman needed to be glued together and this required the entry of the new Sultan and his iconography into the religiously infused mountains of the north of the country as well as the secessionist-leaning south.

The consolidation of the Sultan Qaboos' secular leadership with the spiritual or religious aspects of the society was problematic, as the decades-old division between the Sultan and the Ibadi Imam in the Interior had created a disjuncture in the way in which the religious and the political were regarded by most Omanis³⁴. Gradually, through a concerted programme of building mosques – many named after him - and establishing his presence in these places of worship each Friday, Sultan Qaboos made his leadership felt. The splendid main mosque in Ruwi and the mosque of Nizwa were the first two mosques to be built by the Sultan³⁵. This programme of building religious establishments continued throughout the following decades and culminated with the inauguration of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Bausher on May 4, 2001. This immense structure covers an area of 416,000 square metres. With its minarets and domes, it echoes the heights of the Ottoman Empire. Its five minarets – each representing one of the pillars of Islam – thus surpass even the three minarets of the Grand Umayyad mosque of Damascus.

Creating Ceremonials and Elaborating State Occasions

In the year following his accession (1971), a new celebration - perhaps inspired by British royal birthday tradition - became an important symbol of national unity. The Sultan's birthday took on significance beyond the personal. It came to be a marker for national celebration. The actual date of the coup which brought him to power was July 23rd³⁶. This unfortunately fell during one of the hottest months of the year. Sultan Qaboos decided instead to celebrate this important marker of his power in November, a relatively cooler time of the year which was also his birthday. November 18th, 1971 was the first official birthday celebration of Sultan Qaboos and became known as 'National Day' (Queen Elizabeth II's birthday also formally moved from April 21st to June in the UK to accommodate the possibility of better weather). It was marked by a formal tea party in the gardens of his residence for senior Omani dignitaries and military personnel, the diplomatic corps, foreign professionals, advisors and consultants as well as senior palace staff.

For most Omanis, however, the tea party was of little significance. Relatively few were invited in any one year. For the masses – even from the remote interior - it was the ceremonial military parades held in newly constructed stadiums, the precision military drill teams, and the show of fighting strength of the new military units (Air Force, Army and Navy) under the command of Sultan Qaboos which mattered. These spectacles and the invitations to attend them were eagerly anticipated each year. In the first decade of his reign the public responded to these events with fascination and astonishment. But by the early 1980s Omani nationals began to expect greater showmanship and extravagance particularly at the National Days marking five year intervals. The celebrations for the 5th, 10th, 15th, were each outdone by the next with the apex being reached at the 20th year celebrations in 1990 marked by a spectacular laser light show over the town of Muscat. The fact that the 25th anniversary celebrations in 1995 did not surpass those of the 20th was widely remarked upon with disappointment by many³⁷.

Interwoven in the fabric of these newly created National Day celebrations was the incorporation and 'modernization' of the traditional camel races of the interior of the country.

They had long been popular as a local and seasonal tribal activity. However, with the introduction of vehicles and the increasing obsolescence of camels as beasts of burden³⁸, camels came to be seen as imbued with cultural symbolism of revival based on the racetrack³⁹. Regional races were held to determine which camels should be brought to the capital area to compete in the annual races sponsored by the Sultan. For the first 15 years of Sultan Qaboos' reign these races were held on a simple open gravel plain near Seeb Palace. In 1991 this track was converted into a formal race course especially designed to hold camels within its boundary. The camel race had become part of the established tradition of marking Omani unity and nationhood. Its formal audience was the dignitaries and guests of the Sultan marking each annual National Day. But it was the months-long build-up of qualifying regional trails to the National Day event which both united and captured the attention of the camel-owning population of the country - mainly the nomadic and recently settled pastoral communities of Oman.

Creating Military Pageantry, Emblems, Decorations and Medals

Gradually over this first decade of Sultan Qaboos' reign, an elaborate structure of ceremonial units emerged. In 1970, the Dhofar Force, a private army acting as personal bodyguards to the Sultan in Dhofar, was incorporated into The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). Shortly thereafter the Royal Guard Regiment⁴⁰ was formed, taking on protection as well as ceremonial duties covering investitures and state dinners, as well as guards of honour for visiting dignitaries⁴¹ both in the north and the south of the country and abroad on his travels. This necessitated the creation of all the trappings which underpinned such ceremonial occasions: royal bands, mounted bands, the designing of uniforms, regimental colours, badges, emblems, flags and medals. By 1975 with the assistance of a succession of British advisors, regimental colours, facings of uniforms, berets and other requirements of ceremony had been determined. In rapid succession, the Royal Guard Regiment formed the Royal Band South and the Royal Band North and later the Royal Mounted Band. In 1978, a full mounted band performed on a National Day event⁴².

Along with the creation of special military units with ceremonial functions came the requirement to create a national emblem which set Sultan Qaboos' reign apart and gave it distinctiveness from previous Al Said rulers. The Al Said dynasty's emblem, later called the National Emblem or Royal Arms of Oman is a device consisting of crossed Omani swords with a superimposed dagger (*khanjar*), a local Arab curved dagger which is worn on a waist belt and placed centrally in front of the body⁴³. This National Emblem formed the cap badge of the entire Sultan's Armed Forces until 1977 when different unit and services badges were introduced, designed, or at the very least, approved, by the Sultan himself⁴⁴. These Royal Arms or National Emblems continued to feature in all Armed Forces cap badges and were used in many other badges. The National Emblem of crossed *khanjars* was later surmounted by a crown and used for directly 'royal' entities, such as on the cap or rank badges of all the Sultan's uniformed forces including the Royal Guard of Oman, Royal Yacht Squadron, Royal Army of Oman, Royal Air Force of Oman, Royal Navy of Oman, the Sultan's Special Forces, Royal Oman Police and the Royal Flight. This National Emblem and the various service cap badges and medals were familiar to most Omanis, including those in the interior of the country, from where serving soldiers and policemen were often recruited.

The evolution of medals in Oman mirrored the diversification in the Armed Forces.

The first medals in Oman emerged as a result of the Jebel Akhdar campaign in 1958/59. It was a Campaign Medal and was directly modelled on the British style of campaign medals⁴⁵. In 1960 a Gallantry Medal was inaugurated and in 1965 a General Service Medal was instituted. But it was not until after the accession of Sultan Qaboos that this tradition of creating ceremonial awards was given real expression. Immediately after coming to power, Sultan Qaboos commissioned the Accession Medal and Order of Oman. This was followed by the Order of Renaissance⁴⁶ or Unity Medal, the Endurance Medal commemorating the end of the Dhofar War as well as a series of Anniversary and National Day medals to commemorate the 1980 anniversary of the Sultan's accession on 23rd July 1970 and later the National Days of 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005. In 1976 an overall 'order of wear' was agreed by the Sultan encompassing the Orders and Medals to the Armed Forces. This was a simple list spanning five different categories. The more recent order of precedence (1995) produced by the Palace Office encompasses 26 different categories⁴⁷.

As the offices of government became established and the National Day celebrations came to be expected and regarded as 'traditional', Sultan Qaboos searched for a more ceremonial and monarchic emblem to symbolically draw the Al-Said dynasty closer to with the elements of the modern state of Oman. In 1977 Sultan Qaboos requested from John Kendall of Charles Kendall and Partners, some drawing or sketches for a royal or sultanic crown from which he might select a standard pattern for all future requirements⁴⁸. John Kendall commissioned J.R. Gaunt and Sons in Birmingham to carry out this request and in August of 1977 two sketches by one of the company's commercial illustrators, a Ms. Garner, were sent to Muscat for Sultan Qaboos to review⁴⁹. These sketches were based on the St. Edward's Crown. The Sultan selected one which was then integrated into the emblems and decorations of all his uniformed units, armed forces, and special service units. This newly adopted crown symbolizing the power of the national sovereign enveloped and surrounded the earlier imagery of the young ruling monarch

(insert figures A and B here. Caption: stylized rendition of the Sultanic crown).

Meeting and Uniting the Omani People

For Sultan Qaboos, the north of the country was new territory and its people were unfamiliar to him. From the earliest days of his rule, he made regular efforts to meet with people in Muscat and elsewhere. It was not unusual to find him inspecting, without warning, a ministry office building early in the day to see which employees were on time and busy, reprimanding those caught doing nothing or reading the newspapers. He also took to viewing new development projects at night when no one was around⁵⁰. In these early years, Sultan Qaboos frequently made short trips into the interior of the country to visit schools, government offices and to meet with the people. In 1977 he made his first full crossing of the country from Salalah to Muscat on a tour of several weeks accompanied by units of the Royal Guard and the Royal Flight. He camped out in the desert and had set up at each campsite an elaborate circular tent for receiving foreign and national guests, as well as local petitioners. At first, these annual trips had an open and spontaneous quality to them. Omanis from all walks of life could approach these campsites and request an audience with the Sultan. Unlike the rulers of the other Gulf States, Sultan Qaboos did not have a tradition of a weekly *majlis* (an open forum) where men came forward with their requests, complaints and petitions. These convoys

through the country became instruments for keeping in touch with local people and for measuring the public mood and sentiment. Tribal leaders and commoners, old and young, could and did approach the Sultan on these occasions to air their grievances, present requests, or give their felicitations.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s these annual trips, sometimes as long as 4 or 6 weeks duration, became important rituals marking the transformation of the young monarch into the mature sovereign of the state⁵¹. Although the actual camp residence of the Sultan on these tours was kept simple, the accompanying security and service provisions gradually became more elaborate. When the camps were some distance from the Capital, visiting dignitaries were transported to the Sultan's camp by helicopters of the Royal Flight. The Sultan used to take as many ministers with him as possible. Others ministers were summoned to these Royal camps by the Sultan after hearing local complaints or in order to put them into the line of fire when a particular disgruntlement was highlighted. Nearly each of these annual convoys would camp for a week or more on the edge of the rose-coloured sand dunes of the Empty Quarter in the Haylet il-Harashif of the Jiddat il-Harasiis. This remote campsite 500 kilometres from Muscat and Salalah put the Sultan in the middle of tribal homelands and gave these communities special access to the Sultan's court. Instead of an annual trip to Salalah by the tribal leaders to receive gifts for their allegiance, the tribes were 'hosting' the Sultan. Ironically, unlike the tribally-based Gulf States, where the royal courts had become urban-based and fixed, the Royal Court of the Sultan was developing a mobile dimension. Here, under the reign of Qaboos, the leader of the nation came to the tribal interior and camped in their midst, demonstrating his accessibility while cementing their sense of loyalty and nurturing their allegiance.

For the Harasiis tribe and other marginal and remote communities in the interior these annual tours and week-long national day celebrations established and consolidated the sense of obligation and the duties of the tribal community to the sovereign. Their emerging sense of 'Omaniness' was built upon, and enhanced by, these invented and ceremonial acts which took on the appearance of long-held traditions. By the mid-1980s and onwards, Harasiis speech was peppered by references to the Sultan and the debt owed to him by the people of Oman - including the tribes of the interior. All discussion of programmes, services and anticipated development was prefaced with the expression 'thanks to His Majesty the Sultan'. And although an element of this speech was due to the formality of the language, the sentiment, in large measure, was sincere. The "Why does the Sultan want to do this" of a decade earlier, was now replaced by the acceptance and recognition of their place in the order of things in Oman. These communities knew they had access to their Sultan. He regularly visited and camped out among them. Their interests were addressed on these occasions and many problems actually solved. This contact between the subject and ruler, coupled with the elaboration and invention of ceremonies and rituals of monarchy that had developed over the previous two decades contributed significantly to the consolidation of the perception of the Sultan, by the various tribal peoples in the interior of the country, as ruler of Muscat and Oman, the sovereign of a state which encompassed Dhofar as well as the north of the country.

Only in the last decade has tradition and ceremonial started to become overgrown, intricate and incapable of flexibility. The renaissance has moved into a baroque stage which by its formality and tortured protocol is gradually cutting people off from real access to the ruler and placing him on a pinnacle of power and authority. From an assured recognition of the whereabouts of the Sultan between two palaces in the north and the south of the country

or else on convoy to meet the people, has developed a complex pattern of movement between numerous palaces and frequent road convoys and ‘desert encampments’. In recent years the Sultan has taken to moving on convoy and camping in the interior of the country for at least four months of the year, the rest of the time is spent in one of his near dozen or more residences spread out around the country⁵². Even his palace compound in Muscat – once a discrete part of a traditional Muslim town - has sprawled over the entire town obliterating much of the old city including the traditional suq (market) and many of the former homes of British political advisers, the British and American Embassies, as well as homes once belonging to his uncles, nieces and nephews. This baroque growth, the creation of vast open spaces for royal displays, national day events and armed forces ceremonial activities (parades, tattoos, and celebrations with fireworks exploding from ramparts) has transformed a place once of much charm into a set location for the execution of the Sultan’s newly created royal traditions. These public spaces, then, have become fields of performance, appearances, images and displays reproducing the power relations and authority of the Sultan⁵³.

The association of ceremonial with actual authority and power is becoming less certain, and the cult of the person of the Sultan is increasingly supporting the further elaboration of rituals. The ‘Meet the People’ convoys now number more than 500 vehicles and when camped resemble massive caravan parks. More significantly, it is no longer possible for the local Omani to gain access to the Sultan directly. The once privileged tribesmen of the interior desert are also unable now to directly access the Sultan. They, like all others, must make a written request of the *wali* or local governor. If it is approved, the petitioner is then permitted entry to a ‘large *majlis* tent’ where a Ministry of Interior representative holds audience.

The ideal of accessibility by a ruling monarch who moves around the country to meet his people has been undermined by the sheer numbers of people who now follow the convoys in an effort to reach out to the Sultan. Today, the police barricades are too deep, and the number desiring a hearing too great to be accommodated. The eagerly anticipated annual convoy of the early decades for meeting the people of Oman and supported by near-continuous live media coverage, has now become a set of carefully planned and choreographed road trips with hundreds of vehicles. Contemporary media coverage makes much use of archival footage of earlier trips.

Ever more frequently now, the Sultan sends out his ministers to hear his people’s grievances and to take up the topics the community wishes to discuss. More often than not, these grievances are filtered and little of the substance of these urgent matters or complaints reach the Sultan’s ears. Protocol and ritual elaborated and choreographed for one end, the socialization or inculcation of a value system and perceptions revolving around the notion of a single and coherent state or Sultanate of Oman seem to have become means unto themselves – the maintenance and continuity of the offices of the Royal Court. As Geertz has suggested before, such ceremonials and spectacles are not merely representations of state power, but become instances of that power⁵⁴.

As the new traditions and ceremonials elaborated around the rule of Sultan Qaboos take on more formality and are increasingly rigidly interpreted by the supporting bureaucracy of the Royal Court, the very measures set up to unite the population and give legitimacy to a young ‘untested’ monarch are beginning to alienate and drive away the least-connected and marginal elements of the population⁵⁵. The same Harasiis people who so enthusiastically welcomed the Sultan as their ruler in the 1980s and 1990s and adopted clear expressions and behaviours of national identity are now being driven away by both the barriers to access as

well as the decreasing cultural resonance of the more recent ceremonials and displays surrounding the Omani Royal Court. The seeming disappearance of the Sultan behind police barricades and the mile-long convoys coupled with the fanciful architecture, the elaborate flyovers, landscaping and other trappings related to the modern Omani state has meant that for some, especially the marginal tribal nationals discussed earlier, the patriarchal father figure has become too remote and culturally distant⁵⁶.

Among the Harasiis tribe this has meant that other traditions, more in keeping with their own customs, are resurfacing and gaining prominence. The demand for respect for their mobility, regard for their land use and water rights, and equality of status among men are being expressed outright. This has driven some families to move their primary households cross the Omani border into the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - often leaving satellite camps of herds of camels and goats behind in the care of hired Baluchi and Indian imported herders. There, the UAE rulers have built several new 'towns' to house these and other nomadic tribesmen emigrating from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other points north. Housed in free, well-planned and widely spaced low-lying bungalows which suit their lifestyles, these mobile pastoral peoples receive subsidies for their livestock; and their access to local health and education services is not marked by discriminatory or patronizing practices. One recent Harasiis arrival told me, "Here no one treats you like dirt. You are respected and your requests for assistance are not regarded as begging. But still the Jiddat is better, because without all our people together, our children will soon lose their Harsuusi language"⁵⁷. Where once these Harasiis families did not know why the Sultan of Oman would want to immunize their children, they are now acutely aware that they have been prevented from approaching him with petitions or grievances. It is as though the Sultan - in the distances which have been created by the elaboration of rituals - can now longer be their tribal paterfamilias. These observations derive, not from ignorance of their surroundings as may have been the case in the recent past, but rather from sophisticated observation of contemporary conditions⁵⁸. Their temporary or permanent migration to these new 'towns' has been noted by the Omani Royal Court⁵⁹.

Conclusion

Traditions and ceremonies have always been invented, elaborated and refined to meet the needs of those in power or to support perceptions of social cohesion, group membership as well as to legitimize particular relations of authority. The invented ceremonies and traditions of the British monarchy are particularly exemplary of this process in their growing splendour, popularity and public appeal. Although originally elaborated to mark the power of the sovereign particularly in its development and display in Victorian India, these ceremonials eventually took on a life of their own. The awarding of medals and ceremonials, the creation of grand traditions and other ritualistic aggrandizements came to be possible only because of growing royal weakness. In Great Britain, it can be argued that enhanced ceremonials were made possible as the power of the monarchy was exchanged for the popularity of the reigning sovereign. The less power retained in the hands of the monarch, the more the rituals and ceremonials around the royal household took on a life of their own defining and unifying a perception of national identity. So too in Oman, the traditions multiplying and growing becoming more elaborate and fanciful year after year incorporating celebratory military parades, decorations and tattoos, national orchestral pieces, camel races, and laser light shows.

The Sultan remains the national figure of unity, elaborated out of the wealth of invented ceremonials and created traditions. The cult of personality around the person of the Sultan remains a popular one but the supporting rituals are ossifying and losing the element of purpose in underpinning a sense of social cohesion and unity in Oman. As the Sultan has consolidated his hold on Oman, the ceremonials and rituals which he created have lost the sense of being accompaniments of his power. Instead, the Sultan is becoming distant and inviolate; the over-elaborated trappings of power no longer serve to unite, but now instead set him apart and isolate him from his people. The increasing remoteness of the Sultan and his apparent ‘disappearance’ behind the walls of his many palaces is a reminder, a throwback to the days of his father’s reign. For many Omanis this is an awkward link with the past. But for the increasingly marginalized nomads, this loss of contact is acutely felt. A few have voted with their feet and moved out of his orbit of influence. For all the new ceremonies and traditions, military pomp and ingenious media presentation of the Sultan’s meetings with his people, the general withdrawal of the person of the Sultan from the public is generally recognized and regretted. Perhaps still holding some remnant attitude of gratitude for the rapid social and economic improvements in their lives, most – but not all - the people of Oman recognize their ‘Omaniness’ and passively accept the barriers to contact which these rituals and ceremonies now create.

Footnotes

¹ Excerpt from *Field Notebook I* May, 1980 at the commencement of anthropological research to support a United Nations Development Programme project in the Jiddat il-Harasiis, Oman between 1981-1985. I continued a longitudinal study of the Harasiis tribe until 1994.

² David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: the British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c.1820-1977” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101-164.

³ Elaborated rituals are generally taken to mean a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, 1

⁴ Hobsbawn and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 211-262.

⁶ Bernard Cohen, “Representing Authority in Victorian India” in Hobsbawn and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 165-210.

⁷ M. Elaine Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality and Sacrifices* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson,

1969); Abdellah Hammoudi,” “Sainteté, pouvoir, et société: Tamgroutx aux XVII and XVIII siècles”, *Annales économies, sociétés, civilisation* 35 (1980) 615-649.

⁸ Dale Eickelman and Armando Salvatore, “The Public Sphere and Muslim Identities” in *Arch.europ.sociol.*, XLIII, I (2002), 92-115.

⁹ Linda Layne, *Home and Homeland: the Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Joseph Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Andrew Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Crystal, in her study of Kuwait and Qatar details the way the rulers transformed their families into core institutions of the state by investing them with powerful, executive positions (Jill Crystal, *Oil and politics in the Gulf: Rulers and merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹¹ Eickelman, in his study of Oman’s first modern state consultative council, only touches upon the developing “absolutist view that the monarch is the state” (Dale Eickelman, “Kings and People: Oman’s State Consultative Council” in *The Middle East Journal*, Vol 38 (1984) 51.

¹² A full ethnography of the Harasiis tribe can be found in Dawn Chatty, *Mobile Pastoralists: Development Planning and Social Change in Oman*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

¹³ The Ibadi sect of Islam had its origins in Basra at the end of the 7th century when opposition emerged to the transfer of leadership from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad, to the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus.

¹⁴ Until late in 18th century, Oman was ruled by an Ibadi Imam and the state was called an Imamate. However in 1792, Sultan bin Ahmad was recognized as the secular ruler of Muscat (and the coastal areas), while his brother, Said was allowed to keep the office of Imam in the interior of the country (see John Wilkinson, “The Origins of the Omani State”, in Derek Hopwood, ed., *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1972, 73-4).

¹⁵ John Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia: a Study of the Aflaj of Oman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

¹⁶ John Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). 296-297.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁸ They withdrew in 1955.

¹⁹ Many Omanis came to believe that the Sultan had died in an assassination attempt and that the British only claimed that he was alive so as to keep control over the promising oil revenues (Eickelman, “Kings and People”, 54).

²⁰ Peterson, *Oman’s Insurgencies*, 102.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

²² Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, 200-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 214.

²⁴ Educated and skilled Omanis, who had migrated to Zanzibar and East Africa to escape the oppression of the former Sultan’s reign, returned in large numbers. By 1975, between 8,000 and 10,000 ‘Zanzibari Omanis had entered the country (Madawi Al-Rasheed, “Transnational Connections and National Identity: Zanzibari Omanis in Muscat” in Paul Dresch and James Piscatori, eds., *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2005, 101).

²⁵ Fred Halliday, for example, described Said as ‘one of the nastiest rules the world has seen for a long time... Under the guise of respecting Ibadhism a savage regime was upheld. Said’s rule prevented Omanis from leaving the country; discouraged education and health services, and kept from the population a whole series of objects, including medicines, radios, spectacles, trousers, cigarettes and books (Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans*. London: Saqi Books, 1974, p 275). Such analyses permitted the advisors of the new sultan to present Qaboos as the champion of his people “come to rescue them from the tyranny of his father” (*Ibid.*, p 289).

Such perceptions, however, ignored the skills Said displayed in re-integrating the northern Omani interior into the Sultanate as well as the development planning he had already approved for the country (see Barbara Wace, ‘Master Plan for Muscat and Oman’, *Geographical Magazine*, September 1969).

²⁶ Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, 85.

²⁷ Charles Kendall and Partners was founded in 1946 and three years later negotiated a contract with the Sultan to take on professional buying and recruitment for the Sultan.

²⁸ Reginald Brett was responsible for the overall planning of every great state pageant from the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria to the funeral of Edward VII (Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual”, 135).

²⁹ Interview, John Kendall, London, August 2001.

³⁰ A few British expatriates who had served Sultan Said were kept in positions of power as ‘advisors’ to the new Sultan on matters related to information, the environment, and national security.

³¹ In Oman, these included al-Alam Palace, Seeb Palace, Bayt al-Barka, Sayq House, Izz House, and Sur House in the north with al-Husn Palace, Rabat Palace and the Ma’murah Compound in the south. His overseas residences included numerous properties in the UK as well as in Garmish Partenkirchen in Bavaria, Germany.

³² Eickelman, “Kings and People, 51. For similar measures in Qatar also see Crystal, 162.

³³ Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999, 2).

34. After the failed attempt to secede in the 1950s, the last Ibadi Imam went into exile and the spiritual leadership of the community was left in limbo.

35. These projects were strikingly similar to the 1920s efforts of the Trans-Jordanian Emir Abdullah to impose his presence on his new capital, Amman through two major construction projects: the main ‘Umari mosque (later al-Husayni al-Kabir) and the Raghdan Palace (Eugene Rogan, “The Making of a Capital: Amman 1918-1928” in Jean Hannoyer and Seteney Shami, eds., *Amman: The City and Its Society* (Beirut: Centre d’Études et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain, 1996) 102.

³⁶ July 23rd was not completed discarded; it came to be recognized as a minor holiday and is known as ‘Renaissance Day’, a further testimony to the contribution of Qaboos to his country.

³⁷ The 20th year national Day Celebrations were magnificent by any standard – and undoubtedly expensive to mount. Succeeding National Day celebrations were less theatrical suggesting that the country was entering either a more mature stage in its political development or a period of austerity related to oil prices.

³⁸ Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: the Bedouin in the Modern World* (New York: Vantage Press, 1986).

³⁹ Sulayman Khalaf, “Camel Racing in the Gulf: Notes on the Evolution of a Traditional Cultural Sport” in *Anthropos*, 94 (1999) 85-106.

50. The Royal Guard had its origins in the Oman Gendarmerie. It then became His Majesty’s Body Guard, then the Royal Guard Squadron and in 1975, the Royal Guard Regiment responsible for the security of His Majesty, security of His Majesty’s guests, and the protection of the Royal property (Ashley R. Tinson, *Orders and Medals of the Sultanate of Oman* [London: Spinks and Son, Limited, 1995] 11). In the 1990s it became known as the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO).

41. In 1974, the Royal Guard officer, Abdul Alim, was sent to the United Kingdom. During this visit he watched the Household Cavalry and the London Scottish Regiment Household Division take part in the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace. The combination of protection and public duties of these units had a significant impact on him which he translated into created, borrowed and reworked Royal Guard staging of public ceremonial activities associated with the Sultan and the Royal Court.

42. In 1985 Sultan Qaboos asked the Commander of the Royal Guard to create a national symphony orchestra made up entirely of Omani youth. The Oman Symphony Orchestra made its first public performance in the Oman Auditorium on 1st July 1987.

⁴³ This emblem of crossed *khanjars* predates Qaboos' reign. It may have dated back to the reign of Taymur bin Faysal if not Faysal bin Turki. Personal communications, John Peterson, August, 2006.

44. From 1975, Roger Linford in close collaboration with Spinks and Sons Limited was regularly commissioned to create cap and rank badges and medals. The latter included the Accession Medal and Order of Oman, the Order of Renaissance, the Order of Al Said, the Unity Medal, the As-Sumood [Endurance] Medal, the General Service Medal, Qaboos Police Medal, as well as the Oman Peace Medal (see Tinson, *Orders and Medals* for more detail). Interview, Roger Linford, Buckinghamshire, June, 2001.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

46. There was an earlier Order of Oman dating back to about 1900 which was a family order, the Order of Al-Said. This was reintroduced by Sultan Qaboos in time for his State visit to the United Kingdom in 1982. This order was worn by Queen Elizabeth during the visit (Ibid., 22).

47. Ibid., 26. There are also 30th and 35th Anniversary medals.

48. The tradition of kingship or monarchy does not have a long history in Middle East, first being introduced in 1921 in the British-mandated territories of Iraq and later that decade when Saudi Arabia was declared a kingdom. The Emirate of Trans-Jordan (1921-1946) was transformed into the Kingdom of Trans-Jordan in 1946 and then became the Kingdom of Jordan in 1949. The Saudi monarchy does not use a crown as a symbol of the state. Only the Jordanian monarchy does and it too is based on the St. Edward's Crown.

⁴⁹ Interview, John Kendall, London, August 2001.

50. King Abdullah of Jordan was reported to have made similar kinds of inspections of government offices, hospitals and clinics throughout Jordan in the first few years after coming

to office.

⁵¹ During these years, the Sultan's convoy visited just about all parts of the country including the Sharqiyya, Buraymi, as well as the Musandam which he reached by Royal Yacht.

⁵² Sultan Qaboos generally spends one month each year on convoy and interior encampment during the Muslim *Eid il-Fitr* holiday and a second month during the *Eid al-Adha* holiday marking the end of the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Then another two months are spent moving between the north and south of the country each year.

⁵³ See Alev Çinar, *Modernity, Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 33-52.

⁵⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in 19th century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 120.

⁵⁵ Nearly forty years after the introduction of mass education, 80% of Oman's population currently has basic literacy skills; the young generation has near-universal literacy and is able to communicate in 'modern standard' Arabic. One outcome of this laudable development achievement is that state sanctioned and directed discussion [generally on sectarian issues and politics] is now frequently subverted by the use of text, mobile phones and internet communications. Although the monarchy is certainly not endangered, mass education and modern media have combined to create among the younger generation new knowledge and awareness of alternatives to state dogma and doctrine (see Dale Eickelman, 'Kings and People: Information and Authority in *Oman, Qatar and the Persian Gulf*, Joseph Kechichian, ed., London, Palgrave, 2001, 193-209; for further discussion on education, youth and 'reinvented' political tradition see Marc Valeri, *Le sultanat d'Oman: Une revolution en trompe-l'oeil*, Paris, Karthala, 2007).

⁵⁶ For many, the new grand mosque commissioned and paid for by the Sultan no longer has the spirit of Ibadi asceticism and simplicity. It is more like a show piece in keeping with the new baroque traditions of contemporary Oman.

⁵⁷ The Harasiis tribe, numbering about 4,000, people speaks Harsuusi, one of six South Arabian languages still spoken in Oman. The other languages are Shehri, Jebali, Batahiri, Mahri, Socotri (See T.M. Johnstone, *Harsusi Lexicon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). The reference to the Harsuusi language in this interview is a reflection of the tribally heterogeneous and thus Arabic-speaking base of these new towns. For further discussion of Harasiis concerns over the transmission of the Harsuusi language see my chapter, 'Boarding Schools for Mobile People: the Harasiis in the Sultanate of Oman', *The Education of Nomadic Peoples: Current Issues, Future Prospects*, Caroline Dyer, ed., Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2002, 212-230.

⁵⁸ During my interviews with these tribal families living in the United Arab Emirates in February 2006, I was constantly interrupted by individual Harasiis and asked to comment on the scandal surrounding the Danish cartoons of Mohammed which had just broken in the international press a few days earlier.

⁵⁹ In the past decade, some 200 households from a number of pastoral tribes in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman have moved to the United Arab Emirates. It was reported that Sultan Qaboos sent his Minister of the Royal Court to the Emirates to demand that these people be returned to Oman. To date, none of them have (interview with tribal family heads, Wogan, Abu Dhabi, February 2006).