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The history of Oman in Brazil

Conquests, lootings and disputes marked Portugal's relations with the Gulf country in the 16th, 17th and 18th century. Documents brought to Brazil by the Portuguese royal family, in 1808, shed light on that period.

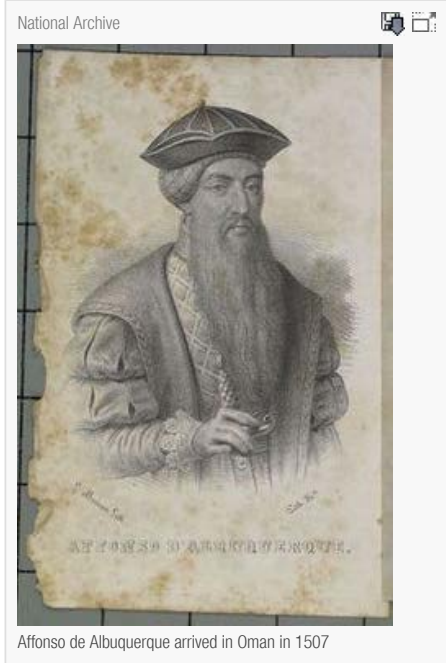
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Rio de Janeiro and Salvador – As a result of the Portuguese royal family's trip to Brazil in 1808, several documents on Portugal's foreign relations and its overseas conquests were left back in Brazilian land, then a colony. This has brought to light some of the stories of Portugal's run-ins with countries far removed from Brazil, like Oman, in the Middle East, which was also under Portuguese rule in the 16th and 17th centuries, and had struggles with Portugal in Africa up until the 18th century.

Some of those stories, told in letters, rare works and maps, are kept in the collection of the National Archive in Rio de Janeiro, and were disclosed on occasion of the visit of a delegation from the Omani National Records and Archive Authority, on August 27th, accompanied by a reporter from ANBA.

There are no continuous records of the Portuguese rule in Oman, but the documents found in Brazil tell interesting stories, like the arrival of Portuguese explorer Dom Affonso de Albuquerque to Ormuz, in 1507. It marked the beginning of Portugal's domination of what is now the Omani territory.

"They invade, they take everything and they loot. The spoils of war are lucrative. Most of the men who carried out these conquests were mercenaries, so they would go to war in exchange for positions, money or goods. They would loot, and then one would be appointed province governor, and another would secure a prominent position when they returned to Portugal," explains Renata Vale, a researcher with the National Archive.



There was a fierce battle in the Port of Curiate and the conquest of Oman's current capital Muscat was bloody, according to the records. The Portuguese forged ahead conquering cities until they made the then-Kingdom of Ormuz into a domain of Portugal's. "There is a very precious document. It states that gold, silver and silk were found, that ivory was stolen, that musk was robbed. These were very precious items, luxury products which were made in the East and had high commercial value, especially in Europe," says the researcher.







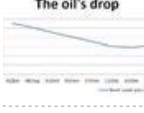


The documentation in the National Archive also includes an account of quarrels between the Portuguese and the Omani in Africa. "Amidst the hand-written documentation, we have found a few documents on Mozambique, including a very interesting piece, a letter from the governor of Rio de Janeiro to Brazil's vice-king mentioning a fleet of ships that was supposed to bring a bevy of products in from Mozambique. At a certain point it mentions that the route is very troublesome to complete because the 'barbarians,' as they called the Omanis, had invaded the Mombasa region and taken charge of it. The region was at war, therefore the ships were unable to carry the goods, they could not leave port, or they were looted on the way," says Vale.

This letter, by Luiz Vahya Monteiro and Vasco Fernandes César de Meneses, date from 1732, but the struggles between the Portuguese and the Omani for Mombasa harked back to 1655, when Oman started sending expeditions to the territory, which was then under Portugal's rule. Portugal and Oman fought for Mombasa until 1729, when the Arabs drove away the Portuguese for once, making it harder for them to sail across the region.

"There are other documents requesting for troops to be sent in, as well as food, clothes and arms, because they (the Portuguese) were in a furious war to try and regain the Mombasa territory from the Omanis and they were losing, because they were very poorly stocked," says the researcher.

In addition to the letters and accounts of struggles between the Portuguese and the Omani, Rio's National Archive collection keeps ancient maps

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portraying the navigation routes of Portuguese explorers, and the name of their conquistadors.

The collection of the National Library, another site visited by the Omani delegation in Rio, on the 28th, includes a map of Muscat from 1610, showing Portugal's conquests in the region.

Literate slaves

The Public Archive of the State of Bahia, in Salvador, which the mission also visited, on the 29th, harbours yet another type of rare document. It makes no reference to Oman, but it shows a bit of the profile of Muslim slaves who took part in the Malê Revolt, in 1835.

The revolt was organized by black slaves who followed Islam, then known as Malês. Their goal was to free all Muslim slaves in Salvador. The records that have been kept of the revolt feature excerpts from the Koran, written in Arabic, which the slaves kept in their pockets for protection.

Called amulets by historians, the papers show that the rebellious Muslim slaves were literate and possessed good knowledge of technology.

The amulets may not have helped the Malês in their revolt, but today they comprise a previous 6,000-page collection left behind by the Muslim slaves.

***Translated by Gabriel Pomeranclum**



Koran excerpts were used as amulets

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