

# The Nabhānīs: A Sketch for Understanding

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## Abstract

The Nabhānī State first appeared in Oman in the 6th/12th century and lasted till the 11th/17th century. During this period the fall of Baghdad, which occurred in 656/1258, led to a number of radical political and cultural changes in the Gulf region, and the aim of the present study is to re-evaluate the conclusions of the (2002) study against a wider background. In doing so it will firstly re-evaluate the original and modern sources dealing with that period. Secondly, it will take a broader look at the political and regional situation at that time and its impact on the course of Oman's historical development – in other words, it will consider Omani history within a regional context. Thirdly, it will look for the roots of that state and relate it more accurately to Oman's historical chronology and regional context.

## Keywords

Nabhānid – Oman – history of medieval Persian/Arab Gulf – Ibādīs – Hormuz kingdom

## 1 Introduction

Studying the Nabhānī dynasty in Oman (13th-17th century CE) has proved problematic for researchers, mainly for two reasons: firstly, a dearth of written historical records means that it has not been possible to identify the sequence of events and chronological history during the Nabhānī era with any clarity. Indeed, the prime source of information available to researchers on that state's political life is still the poetry written during that period. Secondly, there are a plethora of coincidental historical events during that same period following the fall of Baghdad in 1258, which led to a radical change in the shipping routes between the Gulf and the Red Sea. One factor that affected the shipping routes

was the emergence of numerous emirates and of the Kingdom of Hormuz before the Safavid era. This was followed by the European voyages of exploration and the Portuguese occupation of the Omani coast, which began in 1507. All these events produced a range of conflicting views among historians – a situation that was further complicated by the fact that the Portuguese documents on Oman during the 16th century include no reference whatsoever to the Nabhānīs. A brief glance at the books that have been written about the Nabhānī state will reveal four different lines of approach:

- 1 – A “general historical approach” to the Nabhānīs as a ruling dynasty. While this approach is generally common to all historians writing about that period, gaps soon begin to appear in the chronology of Oman’s history during that era. Accordingly, the only way historians have been able to tackle the subject is by examining its different elements in isolation from each other. This was what both Ibn Ruzayq and de Zambaur did. The latter wrote a study on the line of succession of some of the Nabhānī Sultans, attempting to produce a complete, or quasi-complete, picture of the historical chronology of Oman between the 12th and 16th centuries.<sup>1</sup> However, it soon becomes apparent that what they actually created was a mosaic-like “composite” of different bits and pieces rather than a true picture, with the result that some researchers have found it difficult to understand where the different historical events fit in relation to each other. Bosworth’s response to the problem was to ignore that period in its entirety, as if it had never existed, while others have described it as “Oman’s Dark Ages” or a lacuna in the Omani history.<sup>2</sup>
- 2 – A “piecemeal approach” involving the study of specific aspects or historical events to the exclusion of others. Here researchers have often focused their attention on the poetry, architecture, etc. of the relevant period.<sup>3</sup>
- 3 – A “parallel approach” which treats the Sultans and Imams separately. This is found particularly in the writings of Nūr al-Dīn al-Sālimī (d. 1914), who distinguishes between the *mutaqaddimūn* (“early”) Nabhānīs and the *muta’ahhirūn* (“late”) Nabhānīs – a distinction which has proved very

1 Ibn Ruzayq 1977: 247. Translated by Badger 1871; Ibn Ruzayq 2008: III, 456. See also Ibn Ruzayq’s works in Custer 2017: I, 226-231; von Zambaur 1927: 127; al-Izkawī 1984. The *Kašf al-ġumma* was edited by Klein 1938. See also al-‘Ubaydlī 1985: chap. 36: *fi dīkr al-mulūk al-muta’ahhirīn min al-Nabāhina wa- ġayrihim ilā zuhūr al-imām Našir b. Muršid raḥimahu ‘llāh*, 329-344. In this paper I will use Ross’ translation of the *Kašf al-ġumma*.

2 Bosworth 1996. The description of Oman’s dark age by Wilkinson 1987: 225.

3 al-Ḥārītī 1990; Zāyid 1995; al-Ḥārītī 2004; al-Šarġī 2003; al-Naboodah 1997: 181-195; al-Manāšīr 2009; al-Maḥrazī 2014, Bint Ḥāṭir 2015; al-Ḥaġarī 2006; Būḥaġġām 2004: 101-116.

useful for understanding the history of Nabhānī rule.<sup>4</sup> He was followed by Muḥammad al-Sālimī (d. 1985), who wrote about the history of the “late” Nabhānīs in his book *Nahḍat al-a‘yān* (Resurgence of the People of Substance).<sup>5</sup> Then in his biographical studies on Oman’s ‘ulamā’ (religious scholars) in the volumes 2 and 3 of his book *Ithāf al-a‘yān* (Portraits of the People of Substance), Sayf b. Ḥamūd al-Battāšī (d. 1999) offered a new angle on that period through a series of thumbnail sketches of its leading ‘ulamā’.<sup>6</sup>

- 4 – Finally, Abdulrahman al-Salimi took a fresh look at the subject concluding that the “late” Nabhānī state was a decentralised state, and therefore that its overall structure could only be understood as a whole through an examination of its individual component parts.<sup>7</sup>

This study will try to resolve these problems by offering some additional conclusions and observations to those made in our previous study in 2002, while examining the subject from a wide range of hitherto unexplored angles. These new angles may well prove useful to future researchers while at the same time providing us with the guidelines we need for our own purposes. Briefly, these new angles may be summarised as follows:

### 1.1 *The Conflict among the ‘ulamā’ after the Third Imamate in Oman*

The third imamate – which began with the imām Rāšid bin Sa‘īd (r. in 445/1058), who defeated the Makramid (r. 390-442/945-1055), backed by the Buyid – lasted for around a century and a half.<sup>8</sup> Its last imāms in the 6th/12th century were Mūsā b. Abī al-Ma‘ālī, Muḥammad b. Ḥanbaš and Muḥammad b. Ġassān.<sup>9</sup> After they died, a schism occurred between the ‘ulamā’, as a result of which Oman became fragmented into separate regions. This was something Omanis had never anticipated, particularly the Ibādī ‘ulamā’, whose concept of politics did not allow for such a possibility. Subsequently, the rift between the Rustāq group and the Nizwā group came to a head. At the same time, two highly significant strands emerged which were to have a major effect on the lives of the Omani population in a way that they had never experienced during previous historical eras. These two strands – poetry and architecture – spread

4 al-Sālimī, ‘A. 2005: I, 247.

5 al-Sālimī, M. 1961.

6 Custer 2017: I, 123-124.

7 al-Salimi 2002: 259-268; Wilkinson tried to give an overview of early Nabhānīs in chapter 6 of Wilkinson 2010.

8 al-Salimi 2005: 247-253; al-Salimi 2008: 181-188; Bivar - Stern 1958: 147-156.

9 Wilkinson 2010: 395.

across the region through the influence of the Buyids, who imposed the Širāz culture upon the areas under their rule, leaving an impact which lasted for several centuries.<sup>10</sup> Where architecture was concerned, this effect was particularly apparent in the new decorated *mihrābs* and ornamental engravings, while the new literary style was exemplified by poets such as Miḥyār al-Daylamī and Abzūn/Ibzūn al-Maḡūsī. Consequently, new poetical forms and styles began to emerge in Oman.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.2 *Širāz and Baḥrayn*

When two great powers appeared on either side of the Gulf – Širāz, which was the base of the Buyids and al-Aḥsāʾ, the stronghold of the Carmathians – this led to clashes and political conflicts which extended from northern Oman to Baghdad.<sup>12</sup> These in turn produced a series of unexpected alliances. Širāz imposed a new Persian cultural hegemony on the region, and after the demise of the Buyid in Širāz at the hands of the Seljuks, a *mawlā* (protégé) of the Seljuks by the name of Sanqar b. Mawdūd seized control of the Fars region and established the Salgurid – or Khorezm šāh – dynasty which continued to rule until 1264.<sup>13</sup> The major event mentioned in Omani historical sources about the Širāzī, was a military campaign led by the Emir Faḥr al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn al-Dāyīʾa with his brother in 674/1275-6 and they were able to reach Bahlā and then Nizwā, which was under siege for over four months. The Nabḥānī Sultan ʿUmar b. Nabḥān defeated them and Ibn al-Dāyīʾa died. A year later in 675/1276 the northern tribes of Oman, al-Ḥaddān allied with the tribe of Awlād al-Rayīs/Riyāysa, who dominated the eastern Musandam, rode into Nizwā and destroyed a part of the city. However, the Sultan ʿUmar b. Nabḥān came later and crushed them and they were never restored since then.<sup>14</sup>

In al-Aḥsāʾ/Baḥrayn the Carmathians were able to dominate their side of the Gulf both politically and economically after the region had become marginalised, and their influence continued even after their fall at the hands of the ʿUyūnids (1067-1253) and, subsequently, during the rule of the ʿUsfūrīds (1252-1417) under ʿUsfūr b. Rāšid.<sup>15</sup> These rulers combined forces with the then Kingdom of Hormuz to extend their power over Baḥrayn and Qatif. Their influence continued to expand until the arrival of the Banū ʿAmir b. Ṣaṣaʿah tribes

10 al-Salimi - Gaube - Korn 2008: 106-117.

11 al-Salimi 2009: 373-382; al-Salimi 2005: 247-253.

12 Bosworth 1996: 154; Kennedy 2015: on Carmathians see 162-200; on Buyids 183-211; al-Sālimī, ʿA. 2005: I, 369; al-Sālimī, M. 1961: 78; Ibn Ruzayq 1977: 274.

13 Fiorani Piacentini 2005: 195-206; Fiorani Piacentini 2013: 143-185.

14 al-Sālimī, ʿA. 2005: I, 369; al-Sālimī, M. 1961: 78; Ibn Ruzayq 1977: 274.

15 al-ʿAmmārī 1985; al-Ḥumaydān 1981: 211-240; al-Mallā 2002.

led by Zāmil b. Ḥusayn b. Ġabr, chief of the Banū Ġabr, who established the Banū Ġabr state (1417-1521). With the migration of the 'Amir b. Sa'sa'ah tribes from Nağd to the shores of the Gulf the resulting hotchpotch of competing influences led to renewed clashes, following which the Banū 'Abdul Qays tribes came to dominate the region for centuries. Most of them were Shiite and had controlled the coast of al-Aḥsā' since the pre-Islamic era.<sup>16</sup>

However, the arrival of the immigrant Banū 'Amir tribes brought about a fundamental change in the tribal composition of Eastern Arabia, and their gradual expansion towards the east brought them into contact with the Omani tribes, who provided them with support in their confrontation with their rivals, so that the tribal alliances with the Nabhānīs came to represent a new force.<sup>17</sup> The Banū Ġabr were Maliki Sunnis. The successive waves of migration led to a gradual break-up of the old tribal alliances which had been dominated in Oman by the Azd 'Imrān and Banū Sāmāh, where the civil war eroded the alliance between the Banū Sāmāh and Ḥaddān against the 'Atik and other Azd tribes.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3 *The Role of Qays (Qīš)/Hormuz*

The Banū 'Amāra, who were descendants of al-Ġulandā b. Karkar (of the Banū Sulayma b. Mālik b. Fahm of Azd), dominated the trade at the entrance to the Gulf, where they diverted some of the trade through Kerman, Sijistan, Khurasan and Central Asia. Wilkinson attempted to restructure the image of Banū Sulayma especially as the coastal region was known as Sayf banī 'Ummāra.<sup>19</sup> According to Arab geographers, they continued to control the islands there between the 3rd and 6th/9th and 12th centuries, though in the 4th/10th century they came into conflict with the Buyid when 'Adūd al-Dawla captured some of their islands at the entrance to the Gulf. However, they later regained control and played the leading role in the tribal alliances. When the port of Sirāf was severely damaged by an earthquake in 367/977, Qays (Qīš)/Huzu islands quickly began to compete with Sohar (Ṣuḥār), while exploiting Siraf's difficulties.<sup>20</sup> In the 6th/12th century Ibn Aṭīr wrote that in the year 495/1100 an emir expanded his territory along the borders of the Gulf and to the south of it towards Qalhāt, which replaced the port of Sohar after the latter had been destroyed.<sup>21</sup>

16 Ḥalīl 2006.

17 Abū 'Ezzah 1995: 1-13.

18 Wilkinson 2010: 10-11, 47, 92.

19 Wilkinson 2010: 404.

20 Fiorani Piacentini 2000: 177-188; Williamson 1973: 52-68.

21 Wilkinson 2010: 403-404.

#### 1.4 *The Military States and Their Systems*

By the beginning of the 7th/13th century we come across an important new development in the structure of the Islamic state which we might call the “military monarchy”. “Military” ruling families first appeared on the scene during the Crusades with the rise of the Ayyubids and subsequently the Mameluke state; they were an “extension” of the Seljuks, whom the Mamelukes ultimately replaced in the 7th/13th century. Here we can see parallels with the Nabhānī state in three respects:

- 1 – A parallel power structure within the state.
- 2 – Different allegiances within the state suggesting that it had a decentralised structure.
- 3 – Similarities in the decision-making process. However, although not everything that was true of the Mamelukes applied to all the dynasties at that time, there were many similarities with, for example, the Rasulids in Yemen and the Turkish states in Iran before the Safavids came to power. The significant factor here is that there was a change in the way power was exercised within the “Islamic structure” at that time.

#### 1.5 *The Expansion of Nabhānī's Trade in the Indian Ocean*

We do not intend to go into detail regarding the trade scene in the Indian Ocean during this period. That is really the province of the maritime historians.<sup>22</sup> However, although it is certain that maritime trade brought about great changes between the 12th and 16th centuries CE, what concerns us here is the fact that the last of the Nabhānī Sultans of the first period went and founded the city of Pate in East Africa, while another branch of the Nabhānī family was established from the descendants of Sulṭān Sulyamān b. Sulaymān b. al-Muẓaffar.

The remains of old Pate town cover an area of about 27 hectares. It must have been an impressive settlement. The ruins of not less than ten mosques are recorded.<sup>23</sup> Only one of these might predate the 18th century. The houses are built of stone. Many old walls are partially integrated into new buildings. In the “Chronicle of Pate”, one of the Nabhānī, Sulaymān b. Sulaymān b. Muẓaffar al-Nabhānī, is mentioned as the founder of the Nabhānī dynasty of Pate. According to this tradition, he had come from Oman to Pate in 1203. The reason for his coming to Pate given there was that he had been defeated by the Yaʿrubī in Oman. Since we know that the Yaʿrubī came to power in Oman much later (1624-1741), this founding legend is a-historical. The interesting fact is that, according to the Chronicle, Sulaymān married the daughter of an Arab ruler of

<sup>22</sup> Lowick 1974: 319-333.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson 1978; Kirkman 1964: 54-64.

Pate. This may be true, and the Arab ruler of Pate might have been of Omani origin too, perhaps one of the Ġulandā, who had emigrated from Oman to East Africa in the early Islamic period, or a descendent of another Omani leader or tribe who had to leave Oman in a later period.

It is more than probable that the Nabhānī already had contacts with the East Coast of Africa after they came to power in Oman. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that this Sulaymān b. Sulaymān was a Nabhānī who had come to East Africa before the downfall of the Nabhānī in Oman, and who might have married into the ruling family of the town. Reliable chronological data is rare. Therefore any attempt to bring a certain degree of clarity into the chronology of the rulers of Pate starts with conjectures based on the Chronicle.

Pate is not mentioned by the early Arabic geographers or historians, and even the famous traveller Ibn Baṭṭūta (1304-1377) does not mention the town or the island in the 14th century. It is not until the 16th century that Pate is mentioned in Portuguese sources. Beginning in this period, the rise of Pate is demonstrated by written sources, including the “Chronicle of Pate”,<sup>24</sup> as well as by archaeological evidence. In 1966 Chittick<sup>25</sup> surveyed in Pate and excavated seven test pits. Shards collected in Pate, prove a certain wealth in the city of the 16th century, and a possible connection with Oman via the so-called “Bahlā”-ware, a pottery type which might have originated in the 14th/15th century and was common in Oman until very recently.

To sum up, if this line of descent is correct, some scholars – according to Neville Chittick – have traced it back to before the beginning of the 13th century CE. Moreover, Wilkinson has taken a close look at the subject in his studies of al-Qalhātī’s *al-Sīra al-Kilwīyya* – which shows that a turning point was reached in Omani-African relations during that phase of the Nabhānī period, when the sea trade routes expanded along the shores of the Indian Ocean.<sup>26</sup>

## 2 The Emergence of the Nabhānīs

Researchers on the Nabhānīs generally start by looking at what the poetry anthologies from that time have to say. These are the primary sources, since they are contemporaneous and most of the poets enjoyed a close relationship with the Nabhānī Sultans. Indeed, all the information on that era is taken from the anthologies of poets like al-Satālī, al-Nabhānī or al-Kiḍāwī, or poetry by other

24 Chittick 1969: 375-391.

25 Chittick 1967: 55-63.

26 Wilkinson 1981: 272-305; Wilkinson 1989.

contemporaries like Aḥmad b. Mağīd.<sup>27</sup> Historians divide the Nabhānī era into two periods:

- 1 – The first period – known as the *mutaqaddimūn* (“early”) Nabhānīs – begins as they emerge from obscurity towards the close of the time of conflict between the Ibādī Imāms in Oman and ends with Muḥammad b. Ḥanbaš (d. 557/1162) and Mūsā b. Abī ’l-Ma’ālī (6th/12th).<sup>28</sup> The schisms between the Imāms convey the impression that they declined to a level lower than that of *imāmat al-zuhūr* (literally “imamate at proclamation level”), so they were at either the *difā’* (“Defence”) or *širā’* (“Sacrifice of one’s life”) level.
- 2 – The second period known as the *muta’ahḥirūn* (“later”) Nabhānīs – lasted from 906/1500 to 1034/1624.<sup>29</sup>

Nearly all Omani historians follow the system established by Ibn Ruzayq when he recounted the genealogy of the Al-Busaīdī dynasty (r. 1743-Present). In his book *al-Faṭḥ al-Mubīn* (*The Clear Victory*), Ibn Ruzayq claims that the Nabhānīs are descendants of the ‘Atik branch of Azd. He also mentions them in *al-Šaḥīfa al-Qaḥṭāniyya* (*The Qaḥṭānī Page*).<sup>30</sup> Omani historians are virtually unanimous about this. They also agree that the Nabhānīs are not the same as the Nabhānīs who live in the A’ālī high district of Wādī Samā’il in the interior Oman, since the latter are from Tay tribe while the Nabhānīs are from the ‘Atik branch of Azd, and are recognized as hailing from Dibā.

When Nūr al-Dīn al-Sālīmī (d. 1914) embarked upon the task of separating the Nabhānī Sultans from the Imāms, this helped create a much clearer picture of that period.<sup>31</sup> Non-Omani sources include the *Travels* of Ibn Baṭṭūta, who wrote about his visits to Oman during that time. However, despite the importance of his observations, al-Sālīmī doubts that he ever actually reached Oman’s interior – a view endorsed by John Wilkinson who believes that although he reached the country’s coastal regions (he was certainly in Qalhāt), what he wrote about the interior of Oman and his meeting with the Nabhānī Sultan in Nizwā was mere hearsay based on reports from members of the general pub-

27 al-‘Alawī 2010; al-‘Ānī 1993; Būḥağğām 2004: 101-116; al-Danğāwī 1990; al-Ḥağārī 2006; al-Kīdāwī 2013. Mūsā b. Ḥusayn b. Šawwāl al-Ḥusaynī al-Kīdāwī is also known as Maḥallī, Mūsā b. Ḥusayn b. Šawwāl see *GAL S. II*, 568. Br. Mus., Or. 6560. See also al-Baṭṭāšī 1998: 1, 480-485, which deals with the Nabhānī king Abū Sālīm Nabhān b. ‘Abī ’l-Ma’ālī Kahlān b. Nabhān b. ‘Umar b. Nabhān. See also al-Nabhānī 1965; al-Sitālī 1964.

28 al-Sālīmī, ‘A. 2005: 1, 355.

29 al-‘Āmirī 2009.

30 Ibn Ruzayq 1977: 247.

31 al-Sālīmī, ‘A. 2005: 1, 370; for the contemporary historians see al-Ḥārītī 2004; Bint Ḥātīr 2015: 51-63.

lic while he was on the coast. This is most likely to be the case, considering the fact that it would have taken considerably longer to make such a journey than Ibn Baṭṭūta suggests.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Ibn Baṭṭūta includes no descriptions of his alleged journey between Qalhāt and Nizwā – in either direction – or the towns and other places he would have passed through on his route. Marco Polo (d. 1324) visited Qalhāt and recorded some of his impressions of it, as did the Chinese admiral Zheng He (1371-1431) who visited the town.<sup>33</sup>

The Nabhānīs were originally part of the Azd tribes' second wave of migration to Oman. Azd is the name of two historic Arab tribes who came to prominence after the collapse of the Ma'rib Dam. The first migrated from the uplands of 'Asīr and were known as "Azd al-Surāt", while the second, who lived in Oman, were known as "Azd 'Umān". The first Azd migration to Oman was led by Mālik b. Fahm after the Ma'rib events. However, historical sources do not mention the reasons for another wave, when a group of individuals from Azd Šanū'a abandoned their homeland in Surāt and the Ḥiḡāz and crossed the desert of Arabia towards the end of the first century BC and headed for Oman, where they settled in Dibā in the north of the country.<sup>34</sup>

According to old written records of Oman's tribal genealogies, the Nabhānīs are from the 'Atīk branch of Azd.<sup>35</sup> After Mālik b. Fahm successive waves of Azd tribes migrated and settled in Northern Oman.<sup>36</sup> This is why genealogists class the Azd genealogy in Oman under three separate headings according to which migration brought them to the country:

The first group are the tribal branches descended from Mālik b. Fahm, while the second trace their descent from Naṣr b. Zahrān and are known as Azd Šanū'a (al-Yaḥmad, al-Ḥaddān, al-Ma'āwil). The last group are descended from 'Imrān b. 'Umar b. Mazīqiyā, who was the forefather of al-Aswad, and are known as al 'Atīk and al-Ḥaḡr.<sup>37</sup>

While we have cited our sources of information in the above paragraphs, few precise details are actually available about the specific locations settled by the individual tribes in their new homeland. If we turn to the Omani sources we will find – to quote *Kašf al-ǧumma* – that "the first Azd individuals to immigrate to Oman after Mālik b. Fahm were 'Imrān b. 'Umar b. 'Amir Mā' al-Samā' and his two sons, al-Ḥaḡr and al-Aswad.<sup>38</sup> The latter was the ancestor of the

32 al-Sālimī, 'A. 2005: I, 369; see also the comments in the footnotes of Wilkinson 1989.

33 Kauz 2013: 57-65.

34 al-Izkawī 1984: 7.

35 al-'Awtābī 1984: II, 117.

36 al-Izkawī 1984: 7.

37 *EI*<sup>2</sup>: Azd.

38 al-Izkawī: 7.

‘Atik branch of Azd.<sup>39</sup> They set up their tents along the north-western strip of Oman and settled in the Dibā area beside the sea opposite the Persian ports, near some settlements of another Arab tribe – the Ḥaddān.

The first settlement in Dibā goes some way towards explaining how the ‘Atik tribe came to become incorporated into other Arab tribes, and this in turn indicates that the Omanis came together as a people within the framework of the traditional Arab tribal system, which provided them with the basic elements of their general political system. During the first stage of the early Arab migration to Oman they tended to settle on the edge of the desert on the western side of the mountains. The only high areas they penetrated were at the far end of the mountain ranges, where some tribal settlements developed along the southern and northern migration routes, with the result that some other groups found themselves driven towards – and then into – the mountain *wādīs*.

Essentially, there were no territorial conflicts between the early settlers (i.e. the first Azd immigrants) and the new arrivals (Azd Šanū’a) who settled in the mountain pastures. This would suggest that there was nothing to prevent them from becoming merged into a common tribal political system, while questions regarding the leadership of the group would have been resolved by a straight power struggle between any likely contenders.<sup>40</sup>

However, such struggles were not settled without the intervention of neighbouring forces. In the 3rd century CE the Sasanian King Ardašir invaded Oman and this led to a vicious war with the local Arab population. Subsequently, the Persians shared their rule with the Arab inhabitants with the result that the Ğulandā family ruled the Arab tribes in the interior and mountain areas of the country while the Persians ruled the coastal cities, ports and most of the agricultural areas on the plains.<sup>41</sup>

The chiefs of the Arab tribes were happy to unite under the political leadership of the Ğulandās, thus creating a form of state structure based upon a system of tribal alliances. Consequently, the tribes enjoyed stable leadership in the settlements in the mountain, coastal and desert areas where they lived, in which they controlled the water resources. At the same time, in this situation the Ma’walis – a *batn* (clan) of the Ğulandās – were able to dominate the alliances and set up their capital in Sohar, while the ‘Atik established themselves in Dibā. Thus led to a struggle for supremacy between the two trading maritime outlets in the south east of the Arabian Peninsula (i.e. Dibā and Sohar).

39 al-‘Awtabī 1984: II, 117.

40 Wilkinson 1975: 97-99.

41 Wilkinson 1973: 40-51.

In Sohar the Ğulandā chief ‘Abdul ‘Izz launched an attack from his stronghold on the inhabitants of the coast (the *Ahl al-‘abāb*), who had settled in the Gulf during the era of Persian rule.<sup>42</sup>

After that the Arab tribes of ‘Atīk and Awlād Šams (who were Ğulandās) formed an alliance, they captured the coastal ports and this gave them control of the maritime trade in the Gulf. One could perhaps say that this development was only to be expected, since any rising political power in Oman would feel naturally drawn to dominate the Gulf trade, and Wilkinson makes it clear that tribe, maritime trade and imamate are the three main elements that have shaped Oman’s culture and history.

There were two major factors behind the expansion of trade in the Gulf at that time. The first of these was the relationship between the Arabian Peninsula and Persia and the role of each in controlling the Gulf’s sea trade. Secondly, the tribal groupings that inhabited the interior and the mountains united and this gave a boost to the trade between the interior and Sohar and Dibā. It is possible that the Ma‘wālīs did not lead this movement, but were pushed into it by the Ḥaddān – one of the neighbouring tribes – since they seem to have been the first to settle in the mountain areas of al-Sirr and Yanqul (Ĝabal al-Ḥaddān) and Tuwām (Buraymī). The port of Dibā thrived during the pre-Islamic period; it was described as the ancient capital of Oman, or, alternatively, as one of the markets and ports controlled by the Arabs rather than the Sasanians.<sup>43</sup> It would appear that where the port of Sohar was concerned the Persians and Ğulandās reached a truce under which they agreed to divide its tax revenues and share in its government.

Ibn Ḥabīb adds that the taxes from the markets of Sohar and Dibā went to the Ğulandīs – the rulers of Oman. Here we should note the significance of Ibn Ḥabīb’s report in two respects. Firstly, he insists that there was a link with China in the centuries before Islam; though the evidence for such a link is extremely scanty, he notes that Dibā was a market in which all the Arab traders met their counterparts from China, India and Sind. Secondly, he shows that it was because Dibā was an Arab port – not a Persian port – that the Ğulandās were the beneficiaries of its tolls and taxes.<sup>44</sup>

42 Wilkinson 1975: 97-99.

43 Yāqūt 1936-1938: II, 435; Abū Ğa‘far 1942: 265.

44 Abū Ğa‘far 1942: 265.

### 3 The Transition from Tribalism to State Authority

The power and authority of Islam gave the local tribes an opportunity to rid themselves of the domination of Persia, which was mainly centred on the coastal regions, and enabled Dibā to reap the benefits of the maritime trade in the Gulf, so that it became a port of major importance for the Omanis and the Persians were forced to leave. This had a pronounced impact on the Arabs, who now had to decide on the nature of their future relationship with the Persians, whose rule over them had come to an end. The Arabs now took possession of the territory which had previously been settled by the Persians, and this presented the Ğulandās with the opportunity to extend their domination over the other Arab tribes.

While there are different versions of how precisely the Omanis came to embrace Islam, it would be very hard to claim with any certainty that al-Ğulandā b. al-Mustakbir's two sons – Kings Ğayfar and 'Abd – accepted the Faith as a result of 'Amr b. al-Āṣ's mission in 8-10/630-632. However, the important thing for us as far as we are concerned is that it happened during the years prior to the death of the Prophet. At the same time, we should also bear in mind that another significant event was the "wars of apostasy" (*ridda*) that broke out in some parts of Arabia after the death of the Prophet. These occurred basically because of disagreement over the payment of the *zakāt* to al-Madīna.

In Oman, Dibā played an important role in the war when they resisted Laqīt b. Mālik al-ʿAtīk, commander of the army that had been sent from al-Madīna. The Ğulandās responded to the situation with great caution and, while they did not agree with Dibā's decision, they did not force the town to adopt a contrary position. Consequently, the ʿAtīk branch of Azd found itself alone in facing the Islamic army which had come to collect the *zakāt*.

Each of the three accounts of the subsequent events has provided later historians with their source material for what happened at the Battle of Dibā, despite the fact that all three versions "evolved" over the course of nearly a century following the battle itself. According to the first version – which we can find in some Omani historical works, including the epistles of Ḥalaf b. Ziyād al-Bahrānī (d. 130/740) and Abū Qaḥtān Ḥālid b. Qaḥtān (d. early 4th/10th century), as well as *al-Ansāb* by al-ʿAwtabī (d. 6th/12th century) and *Tuhfa* by al-Sālīmī (d. 1332/1914) – the war was caused by a mere misunderstanding between the two sides and was not the result of apostasy on the part of the people of Dibā.

The second and third versions are to be found in old historical narratives, most of them taken from al-Wāqidī (b. 130/748) or al-Ṭabarī (b. 221/839). According to these versions, there was an uprising of the ʿAtīk in Dibā and the

subsequent Islamic attack upon them led them to abandon their properties in Dibā and migrate gradually to Oman's interior regions. However, while this was the most important political event in the 'Atik's history and marked their debut on the Omani political scene, it is certain that some of the 'Atik's descendants (including the Muḥallabis) migrated to Basra in Iraq, thereby expanding the reach of that tribe and its sub-branches.

The question may be asked: What form did this migration to Oman's interior take? Over the course of a century and a half it had been the main political dynamic as far as the Ġulandis and Yaḥmadis were concerned. However, the 'Atik were only just beginning to rise to prominence and play an active role in Oman's political life; indeed, most of the imāms during Oman's first imamate period were from the Yaḥmad tribes, with the exception of Imām 'Abd al-Mālik b. Ḥumayd (207-226/823-841), who was from the 'Atik.<sup>45</sup>

Until the end of the 3rd/9th century, and during the Omani Civil War, when the chief of the 'Atik tribe was al-Ṣalt b. al-Nazar b. Minhāl, the 'Atik joined forces with the Yaḥmadis in supporting Imām 'Azzān b. Tamīm. Later, al-Ṣalt and his sons al-Minhāl and Ġassān were killed in the Battle of al-Rawḍah (280/885). Al-Ṣalt was known as "al-Hiḡārī" after al-Hiḡār a town in the north east of the Bāṭina region.

Later, the 'Atik in collaboration with the Bedouin of Bilād al-Sirr supported the 'Abbasids in ousting Imām Muḥammad b. Yazīd at the end of the 3rd/9th century.<sup>46</sup> The reports on the event could indicate that by then the 'Atik had migrated through the *wādīs* of the Bāṭina from Dibā to Bilād al-Sirr and established small settlements during the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries in the areas between the coast and the interior. However, they made Bahlā their base during these population movements, and Wilkinson was correct in his observation that ancient Omani books refer to Bahlā as "al-'Atik" and that sometimes the two names are seen as synonymous.<sup>47</sup> Bahlā and Bilād al-Sirr also supported Yūsūf b. Waḡīh against the Imām Rāšid b. al-Walīd, and the ruling Waḡīhid in Oman.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Wilkinson believes that the Makramid (r. 390-442/945-1055) were transferred from al-'Atik.<sup>49</sup> If this is correct then it will be a remarkable development in the early stage of the tribal influence which culminated in the leadership of the Nabhānī.

45 Wilkinson 1987: 205.

46 al-Sālimī, 'A. 2005: I, 173.

47 Wilkinson 1987: 206.

48 al-Sālimī, 'A. 2005: I, 280; al-Salimi 2009: 373-382; al-Salimi 2005: 247-253.

49 Wilkinson 2010: 402.

In the 5th/11th century Oman found itself under more or less a feudal system since there was no central authority ruling over the whole country. According to Omani historians: “The Imams ruled in some regions and the tribal chiefs ruled in other regions”.<sup>50</sup>

This situation provided an opportunity for the Nabhānīs (who are from ‘Atīk) to assume the leadership of the tribes in Oman’s interior regions and Bilād al-Sirr. This meant that they had tribal sheikhs in every area of the country from Ḍank to Nizwā and Samā’il, and even as far as the east coast, where they made Qalhāt their harbour.<sup>51</sup>

However, we have no indication that they were active in Sohar; all we know is that the King of Hormuz continued to control the judiciary in Sohar in the 10th/16th century.<sup>52</sup> It is in fact probable that the Nabhānīs were not interested in ruling Sohar due to the fact that the sea routes in the Indian Ocean had changed during the Middle Ages, particularly during the 4th and 5th/10th and 11th centuries. Another factor behind Sohar’s decline was a series of natural disasters and earthquakes which devastated that great Arab port.<sup>53</sup>

If we want to find out the reasons behind the rise of the Nabhānī state, our basic source – and perhaps the main source of information about the early history of the Nabhānī dynasty – is al-Satālī’s *Dīwān* (Anthology). The poems in this anthology (and the people it praises) are the prime source for any student intending to write about early Nabhānī history. Here however, the paucity of independent information has been a problem. In our assessment of our own copy of the *Dīwān* we have concluded that it is not possible to judge the reliability or otherwise of al-Satālī’s poems, in view of the fact that they deal with events covering a period of over a century, from (447-559/1060-1172).<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, we have concluded from our examination of the *Dīwān*, including his reports of his conversations with the Nabhānīs, that he regarded them as kings. However, he did not specify any particular royal family as ruling at that time, and he also mentioned that there were several kings in power at the same time.

In our research into the rise of the Nabhānī state we should single out Nabhān b. ‘Uṭmān for special attention. Our previous studies indicate that this man was the founder of the state and the different branches of the Nabhānī families started their ramifications from him. Some years ago Sayf al-Battāšī (d. 1998) suggested that Abū ‘Abdallāh Nabhān b. ‘Uṭmān was a significant

50 al-Sālimī ‘A. 2005: I, 245.

51 Costa 2002: 55-70.

52 Badger 1871: xx.

53 Wilkinson 1973: 40-51.

54 al-Sitālī 1964: 261-273.

player in the rise of the Nabhānī state. He enjoyed a reputation as a scholar and *faqīh* (expert in Islamic jurisprudence) and was one of the *Ahl al-ḥall wa'l-'aqd* (“people who loosen and bind” – i.e. those qualified to appoint or depose a Caliph) at the end of the 3rd/9th century. In Omani works of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) he is referred to as “al-Ā'raġ” (“the lame one”). He is also known as the forefather of the Nabhānī clan of Banū Mu‘ammar, who to this day lives at the north of Nizwā. However, al-Battāšī states that he does not know anything about Nabhān b. ‘Uṭmān’s ancestry or which tribe he belonged to. This is despite his assertion that he – i.e. Nabhān b. ‘Uṭmān – was the forefather of the Banī Mu‘ammar.<sup>55</sup> I have also come across a manuscript of the book *Bayān al-šar‘*, which contains reports on the events in Nizwā during the early 6th/12th century including the Banū Mu‘ammar family’s rule, as well as information about some of their leading figures such as Abū ‘l-Ḥasan b. Abī ‘l-Mu‘ammar, Abū ‘Abdallāh b. Abī ‘l-Mu‘ammar and Nabhān b. Abī ‘l-Mu‘ammar. There was also another figure of Nabhānīd who was mentioned in the Omani literature as a king, scholar and a poet Abū Sālim Nabhān b. Abī ‘l-Ma‘ālī Kahlān b. Nabhān b. ‘Umar b. Nabhān (c. 7th/13th c.). Some of his writings have been preserved.<sup>56</sup>

However, a careful review of our previous studies will reveal that there were actually two Nabhānī families with different genealogies. They will also show two people with the same name – Abū ‘l-Ḥasan Ḍuhl – both of whom al-Satālī describes as “the Sultan”. In fact, if we look closely at the history of the Nabhānī kings and emirs (*sayyids*), we will find that there are actually three families with different genealogies despite the fact that they are all called “al Nabhānī”. However, all three seem to be descended from Nabhān b. ‘Uṭmān b. Aḥmad.

It is my belief that these families developed separately in three main areas. The first was descended from ‘Umar b. Ḍuhl b. Nabhān b. ‘Uṭmān. They ruled Nizwā, Bahlā and parts of the Ḍāhira region and were commonly known as the Nabhānī kings. The second ruled Samā’il, while the third were descended from Ya‘rub b. ‘Umar and ruled the northern part of the Ḥaġar range and settled in Rustāq and Naḥl. This third family’s descendants were later known as the Ya‘ariba and ruled Oman from 1033/1624 to 1153/1741. This is confirmed by reports showing that Imām Nāšir b. Muršid was able to unite the country at the beginning of the 11th/17th century, while his paternal cousins ruled Rustāq, Naḥl and the surrounding areas as well as the northern part of the Ḥaġar range.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the ‘Umayris, who lived in Samā’il, also claimed Nabhānīd descent but never claimed that they were “Sultans”, though they may have had the title of “Sayyid”, which is the equivalent in rank to “Emir”.

55 al-Battāšī 1996: 1, 138.

56 al-Battāšī 1996: 1, 480-485; Custer 2017: 1, 400.

57 al-Izakawī 1984: 46-47; al-Sālimī, ‘A. 2005: 11, 7.

The fragmented nature of the leadership produced a sort of quasi-regional rivalry and a decentralised form of government in which there was constant conflict between the dominant tribal powers and their supporters. The result was that the allegiance felt by the different conflicting parties towards their respective tribes was reinforced. In this situation the major tribes in Oman retained their status, while ceding the overall powers of government to the Nabhānīs, who exercised their rule on a quasi-decentralised basis. Consequently, historians have found it difficult to identify the “central Sultan” who enjoyed “universal allegiance”.

On the other hand, the history of the ruling Imāms during Oman’s first imamate is known in some detail and historians have been able to trace the history of that period without difficulty, because those Imāms were able to establish a central government with a capital and a state with clearly defined borders and powers. Nonetheless, we also find the names of large numbers of other Imāms featuring in the history books about whom nothing else is known. Moreover, a considerable amount of information is known not only about the events during that era but also about the eminent *‘ulamā’* (religious scholars) who were their contemporaries.

I believe the claim that the history of Oman consists of no more than books of *fiqh* and lists of names is based on the fact that most historians of Islamic history were scholars of jurisprudence (*fuqahā’*). To put this into a broader context, we can say that the historians of the Ḥiḡāz and Yemen were indeed *fuqahā’* and, moreover, that no history as we understand it was written about any region in the western part of the Gulf until the early 20th century. In my view, history is actually written in order to confirm, assert and record a particular vision or point of view, yet this notion is something alien to Omanis because they never experienced that “sense of difference” which necessitates it and they already had a strong sense of their own identity.

One important lesson we learn from history is that a central government creates a state of peace and stability in the political, economic and intellectual fields. Consequently, if we compare the “early” and “late” Nabhānī eras, we will find that the “early” Nabhānīs were unable to establish a central government, while the “later” Nabhānīs were a clearly recognizable dynasty.

#### 4 Struggling for the authority in Oman: Imamate versus Monarchy

We can see from the previous chapters how the conflict between the Nabhānīs and the Yaḥmādis led to a radical change in tribal leadership in Oman. Historians have recorded some events which show how power shifted from the

Yaḥmad tribes to the 'Atik branch of Azd (the Nabhānīs), thus demonstrating how a family was able to take over the leadership of a tribe and how that tribe was able to dominate other tribes through a system of alliances, which enabled it to boost the strength of its leadership in accordance with the extent and reach of those alliances.

To understand the Nabhānī family's rise to power in Oman we first need to understand the tribal system and how the balance of power changed after the Arabs settled in the south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula. In Oman the tribal chiefs were ranked (from the lowest to the highest) as *Rashīd*, then *Šayḥ*, then, finally *Tamīmah*. The *Tamīmahs* would meet and form alliances with other tribes in which the alliance would be headed by the most powerful. The leadership's orientation would be either tribal/political or tribal/religious. All these elements would then come under an overall leader called *Za'īm al-Qabā'il al-Akbar* ("The Paramount Chief of the Tribes"). A person with this status would be able to lead and control the other tribes and compel them to submit to his rule on the basis of the alliance between them. He would be virtually a "Sheikh over the Sheikhs".<sup>58</sup>

To see how this change took place in the tribal leadership system, it would help if we were to follow the sequence of events in the order in which they occurred.

The second imamate was established in Oman by two Imāms, Rāšid b. Sa'īd and al-Ḥalīl b. Šādān at the beginning of the 5th/11th century. However, the Yaḥmadīs had become more powerful and were able to influence the choice of Imām, their particular preference being the family of Imām al-Šalt b. Mālik, who was deposed from the imamate in 275/880. However, the Yaḥmad rule was not an absolute monarchy, although they governed in much the same style as the princes did under the feudal system. In the following paragraphs we intend to show how authority passed between the tribal leaderships in Oman.

Firstly, the election of Imām Muḥammad b. Abī Ġassān followed the death of Ḥardala b. Sama'a and his brother Ġabr in 549/1154, when he tried to extend his rule over the whole of the Bāṭina region. Imām Muḥammad b. Abī Ġassān shared the imamate with Imām Muḥammad b. Ḥanbaš, who died in 557/1162. Subsequently, Imām Muḥammad b. Abī Ġassān came into conflict with the Nabhānī Sultan al-Muršid b. al-Muršid b. Falāḥ, the Ruler of Sohar, and this conflict gave the tribes the opportunity to support the Imām in his struggle against the Nabhānīs, particularly in the Bāṭina region.<sup>59</sup> According to the *Sīrat al-Barara* by Abū Bakr al-Kindī, the author of *al-Mušannaḥ* (d. 570/1162), Imām

58 Carter 1982: 12.

59 Ibn al-Nazar 1966: 7. See also al-Sālimī 2016: 85-100.

Muḥammad Abī Ghassān also received a pledge of support from the *‘ulamā’* of the Rustāq School. Al-Kindī wrote this after the Imām had defeated the people of the Nizwā district of Sa‘āl, when he (al-Kindī) rejected the opinion of his Sheikh Aḥmad b. Sālīh because of his opposition to the Imām.

In this situation Sulṭān al-Muršid b. al-Muršid received support from the Bāṭina tribes as well as from the ‘Abd al-Qays tribes in the region of al-Ḥasā, and they were able to occupy the town of Sīb (or “Dimā” as it was known in earlier times). They then occupied the town of Naḥl and a clash took place between the Imām and the Nabhānīs in the village of al-Ḥawḍ at the entrance to Wādī Samā’il, in which the Nabhānīs were defeated. Based on his reading of the epistle statement, al-Sālīmī concludes that al-Kindī knew nothing about this.

This would indeed be surprising in view of the hostilities which had taken place from time to time since the 5th/11th century between the Omani rulers and the settled tribes in what was known in ancient times as the region of Baḥrayn, whose allegiance was to the Nabhānī Sultans. This conflict was evident for all to see during the imamate of both Rāšid b. Sa‘id and ‘Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb al-Ḥarūšī and may have been the result of the influential bilateral tribal alliances in al-Aḥsā’ and Oman.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, the election of Imām al-Ḥalīl b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad b. Ḥalīl b. Šādān al-Ḥarūšī/al-Yaḥmadī to the Imamate at the end of the 6th/12th century and his seizure of Nizwā and Rustāq from the Nabhānīs.<sup>61</sup> In this conflict tribal loyalties were divided as a result of the relentless rivalry between the Yaḥmad and the ‘Atīk.

Thirdly, the tribe of Banū Rawāḥa in Samā’il were allied with the Nabhānīs and supported Sulṭān Sulaymān b. Sulaymān al-Nabhānī against the Imamate of ‘Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb al-Ḥarūšī in 885/1480, thus bringing to an end the era of the First Imamate. However, a year later al-Ḥarūšī was re-elected as Imām and Sulṭān Sulaymān and the Banū Rawāḥa were defeated.<sup>62</sup> Shortly after this Sultan Sulaymān b. Sulaymān regained power following the death of Imām ‘Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb al-Ḥarūšī and took possession of the Ḥarūšīd possessions in Bahlā. He subsequently defeated them on al-Ġabal al-Aḥḍar and the Ḥarūšīd Sheikhs fled to the town of Bawšar and al-‘Aliyā’ in Wādī Banī Ḥarūš.<sup>63</sup> This ended the Yaḥmadī tribes’ power in the interior, a situation that was to

60 al-Sālīmī, ‘A. 2005: 1/, 212; Abū ‘Ezzah 1995: 1-13.

61 al-Sālīmī, ‘A. 2005: 1, 246.

62 al-Sālīmī, ‘A. 2005: 1, 259, 263.

63 al-Nabhānī 1965: 15.

continue for nearly three centuries until they rose again in a different form through a different series of tribal alliances.

After their state came to an end and the Yaʿrubis appeared on the scene, the Nabhānīs succeeded in regaining their power under the leadership of Muḥammad b. al-Ṣalt during the first era of the Yaʿrubī state and established their emirate in al-Ġabal al-Aḥḍar. During this time – in the early 11th century/17th century – the Nabhānīs abandoned the Banū Rawāḥa in favour of the Banū Riyām, thereby becoming the head of tribes *Tamīma* of the Banū Riyām and Emirs of al-Ġabal al-Aḥḍar – a situation that was to continue until 1956.<sup>64</sup>

When studying the Nabhānīs, researchers suffer from the misconception that they were a single family that ruled Oman, and it is because of this that they tend to accuse Omani historians of being influenced by their religious Caliphates and the Ibādī ideology. In fact, though, it is clear that the first of the dominant tribes were the Azdis of Mālik b. Fahm, then the Ġulandānis, then the Yaḥmad branch of Azd, then the ʿAtik branch of Azd, and that this in turn led to the emergence of a number of separate Nabhānī families. These changes in tribal dominance began when the Yaḥmad tribes challenged the Ġulandānis; then it was the turn of the ʿAtik, and this led to the rise of the Nabhānīs, who have continued as chiefs of the ʿAtik to this day.

At the beginning of the 11th century/17th century the Nabhānī star began to fade under a new central leadership when the Ibādī *ʿulamāʾ* succeeded in electing Nāṣir b. Muršid in 1624. This marked the end of an era in Oman's history and ushered in the Yaʿrubī era and the beginning of Oman's modern history.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this study has revealed a broader historical picture of the north-western region of the Indian Ocean, as well as a somewhat piecemeal view of the contacts and relationships in the Gulf region and the Arabian Sea as far as the coast of Africa. This in turn has allowed a clearer picture to emerge of Omani and regional history after the Mongols conquered Mesopotamia in the 7th/13th century – a time when the central role of the Abbasid State as the fulcrum of the Islamic State came to an end and the relationship was broken between the centre and the peripheral regions of the Muslim world. Consequently, the study has shown that the peripheral regions developed their own political relationships and new regional powers began to appear.

64 al-Sālimī, M. 1961: 86.

Finally, the face of the region changed fundamentally with the rising competition between the big global powers and the arrival of the Portuguese in the 10th/16th century.

This paper is rather like a “concave mirror” in the sense that it has tried to pull together all the different pieces and attract them towards the centre and, ultimately, achieve a better understanding of the Nabhānī State that ruled Oman for nearly five centuries – a period that has proved such a challenge to students and researchers. Sometimes it has been referred to as the “Dark Ages”, while at others it has either been seen as a “gap in history” or ignored altogether. This could well be due to the prevailing “piecemeal view” of Omani history and the shallowness of the historical sources available, so that consequently every student or researcher is faced with a scrappy historical picture with no chronological sequence.

Consequently, it would be fair to say that this paper is at present incomplete or unfinished. At the same time, however, it provides a new starting point for students and researchers today and gives them material to enable them to draw their own conclusions. It also throws light on a number of obscure, hitherto undiscovered areas, which can now be linked to present a clearer picture of the Gulf region and the Arabian Sea after the fall of Baghdad, as well as changes in the region’s shipping lanes, relations between the states of the region (including tribal and military, Mameluke and hereditary states), and the different types of systems of government in the states of the Islamic world.

In its approach to the obscure beginnings of the Nabhānī State, the paper explains the concept of a tribal state as opposed to an institution-based state or a hereditary monarchy. It also examines every case individually so that the composition of each state can be understood as well as its relations with its neighbours. Our initial hypotheses have helped us understand the different stages of Oman’s historical development and Oman’s domestic relationships – i.e. intertribal and tribal alliances, relations with the Ibāḍī religious authorities and the role of the imamates within the state system. In doing so, the paper analyses the individual aspects of these three elements in order to produce a clearer picture of the Nabhānī State in Oman in its historical context.

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