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Source: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1935), pp. 157-171

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/608108>

Accessed: 26-05-2016 16:56 UTC

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# Nādir Shāh's Campaigns in 'Omān, 1737-1744

By LAURENCE LOCKHART

MĪRZĀ MAHDĪ, the biographer of Nādir Shāh, gives but little information on the subject of the Iranian campaigns in 'Omān during the period 1737 to 1744, probably because 'Omān was, relatively speaking, merely a secondary theatre of war and because Nādir did not go there in person. Fasā'ī, in his *Fārsnāma-yi-Nāṣirī*, also devotes but little space to the subject, notwithstanding the fact that Muḥammad Taqī Khān Shīrāzī, the Beglarbegi of Fārs, played a prominent part in the campaigns.

Arabic and European sources, on the other hand, provide a considerable amount of data. Of the contemporary authorities, the most important are the records of the representatives of the East India Company in the Persian Gulf; these records have not, so far as I am aware, yet been utilized at all by anyone who has written an account of the campaigns. J. Otter, who was stationed at Baṣra for part of the period, makes some reference to the expeditions in his *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*,<sup>1</sup> but his information is neither very full nor very accurate; of decidedly more value is Carsten Niebuhr's account of the geography and history of 'Omān in his *Beschreibung von Arabien*,<sup>2</sup> but Niebuhr was not, strictly speaking, a contemporary.

In 1856 appeared Charles Guillain's<sup>3</sup> *Documents sur l'Histoire, la Géographie et le Commerce de l'Afrique Orientale*, in which, in the section relating to the 'Omānī connection with East Africa, some valuable information is given; this information is derived mainly from the Arabic manuscript of a certain Shaikh Abu Sulaimān Muḥammad ibn Amīr ibn Rashīd. In the same year, No. xxiv of the *Bombay Government Selections* was published, which contained, *inter alia*, Captain Robert Taylor's "Extracts from Brief Notes containing Historical and other Information respecting the Province of 'Oman" and Francis Warden's "Brief Notes relating to the Province of 'Oman"; neither of these writers gives any data of value respecting

<sup>1</sup> Published in Paris in 1748.

<sup>2</sup> The references to this work which are given below are to the Copenhagen edition of 1772.

<sup>3</sup> Guillain, a French naval officer, visited Zanzibar in 1846.

the 'Omān campaigns, but some of Captain Taylor's geographical notes on Khor Fakkān and Julfār (Rasu'l-Khaima) are of interest.

The principal work in English on this subject is *The History of the Imāms and Seyyids of 'Omān*", which the Rev. G. P. Badger translated from the Arabic of Salīl ibn Razīq; this work was published by the Hakluyt Society in 1871. Salīl ibn Razīq gives in great detail the history of the Iranian operations in 'Omān, but his statements must be accepted with reserve, because he was much addicted to exaggeration; moreover, but little reliance can be placed upon his chronology.

Of more recent writers, mention may be made of:—

(1) Lieut.-Colonel E. C. Ross, whose "Outlines of the History of 'Oman from 1728-1883" was included in his *Report on the Administration of the Persian Gulf Residency and Muscat Political Agency*, 1882-3; this article is based on Salīl ibn Razīq's history.

(2) Colonel S. B. Miles, whose book, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, was published in 1919; as regards the Iranian campaign, Colonel Miles relates nothing which is not in Badger's translation of Salīl ibn Razīq.

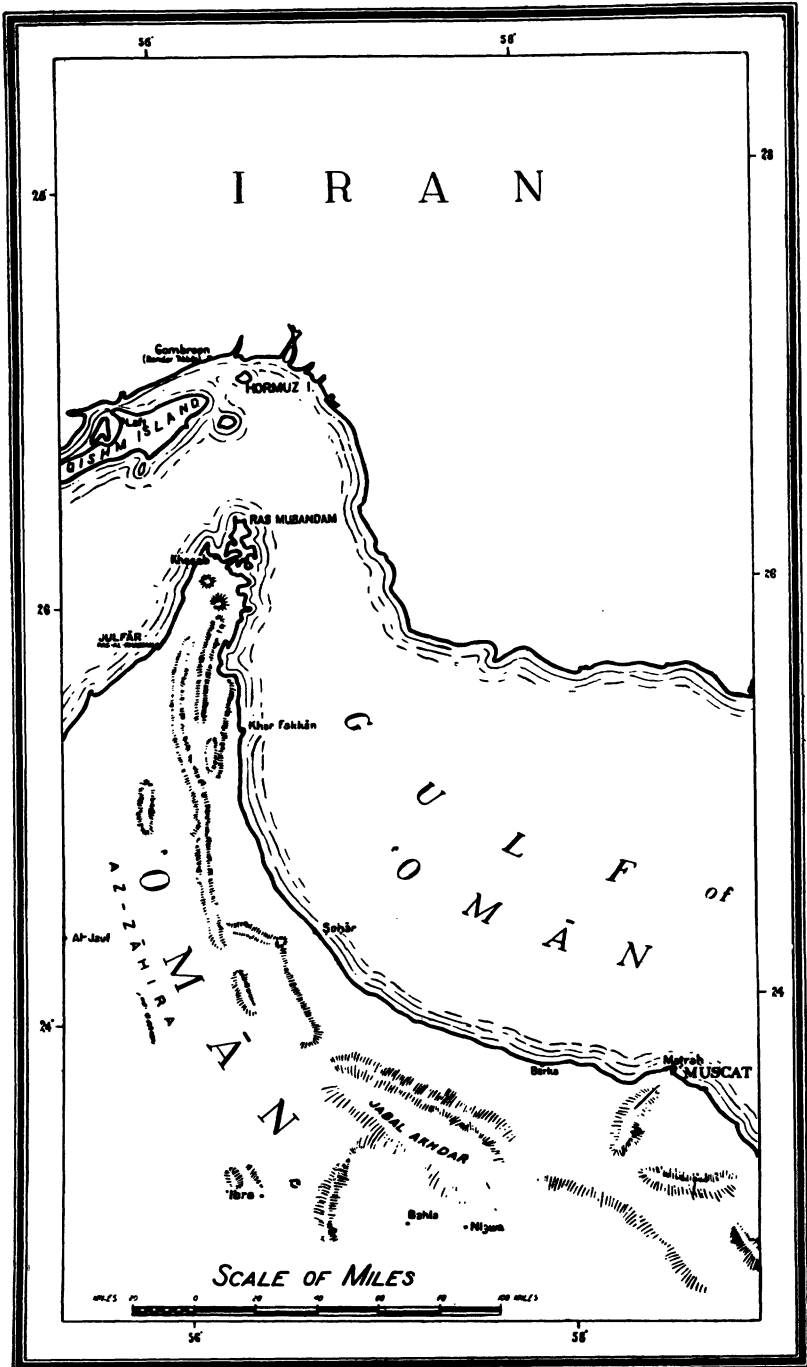
(3) Clement Huart, in his *Histoire des Arabes*, gives a brief outline of the 'Omān campaigns, but his account is merely a paraphrase of Salīl ibn Razīq.

(4) A. Grohmann makes a brief reference to these campaigns in his article "Maskat" in volume iii of the *Encyclopædia of Islam*. He appears to have relied mainly on Salīl ibn Razīq, and his chronology consequently needs revision.

(5) R. Said-Ruete. Though this writer's special study is the Al-Bu Sa'īd Dynasty,<sup>1</sup> he has also written of the immediately preceding period in 'Omān, and gives in detail the story of how Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd rose to power. He has made a careful study of the authorities available, with the exception of the records of the East India Company (of the existence of which he does not seem to have been aware).

It is the purpose of the present writer to attempt to correlate the information contained in the records of the East India Company's representatives with the data given by Salīl ibn Razīq, Otter, Niebuhr, Guillaïn, and certain other authorities.

<sup>1</sup> See his *Said Bin Sultan, 1791-1856*, London 1929, and *The Al-bu-Said Dynasty in Arabia and East Africa* in the *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, vol. xvi, part iv.



In the reign of the gentle, but incapable, Shāh Sultān Ḥusain (1694–1722), Iranian prestige and influence in the Persian Gulf suffered greatly, while there was a corresponding growth in the power of the Arab tribes inhabiting the coastal strips on both sides of the Gulf.

The Arabs of Muscat, under the Imām Sultān ibn Saif II (1711–1718) had a powerful fleet,<sup>1</sup> with the aid of which they made, in 1717 or the following year,<sup>2</sup> a successful descent upon the Baḥrain Islands; these islands had, for nearly a century formed part of the Iranian Empire. The ‘Omānī Arabs do not appear to have remained long in Baḥrain which, on their departure, passed into the hands of Shaikh Jabbāra, the chief of the powerful Huwala Arabs. Though nominally an Iranian subject, Shaikh Jabbāra was, to all intents and purposes, independent of the weak Government at Iṣfahān.

When Nādir Shāh assumed control of the Government of Irān,<sup>3</sup> the state of affairs which he found prevailing in the Persian Gulf proved intolerable to him. He took active measures to reduce the coastal Arabs to submission, but this task, as he soon found to his cost, could never be completed until he had a fleet of his own. Nādir set about the formation of his fleet by effecting the purchase (more often by forced sale than not) of several vessels from the English and Dutch East India Companies.

The first venture of the nascent fleet was an unsuccessful attempt to capture Baḥra in May, 1735.<sup>4</sup> In the following year, however, Laṭīf Khān, the Iranian Daria-Begi, or Admiral, succeeded in wresting Baḥrain from the Huwala Arabs, when the redoubtable Shaikh Jabbāra was absent on a pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>5</sup>

Having obtained the upper hand over the Huwalas, Nādir, apparently at the suggestion of his Admiral, Laṭīf Khān, determined

<sup>1</sup> Captain Alexander Hamilton, in his work, *A New Account of the East Indies*, Edinburgh, 1727, vol. i, p. 74, gives interesting particulars of the formidable fleet which the Imām of ‘Omān possessed in 1715.

<sup>2</sup> The exact date is uncertain.

<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, it is not correct to refer to him as “Nādir” until his accession in 1736. He was originally known as Nadr or Nadhr Quli Beg; in 1726 Ṭahmāsp Shāh gave him the title of Ṭahmāsp Quli Khān, which he held until he became Regent in 1732, when he was known officially as Wakilu’-d-Daula and Nā’ibu’s-Salṭana.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed description of this attack on Baḥra is given by Martin French, the representative of the East India Company in that town, in an interesting letter which he wrote to the London office of his Company on the 5th/16th June, 1735; this letter is contained in volume xv of the *Factory Records of Persia and the Persian Gulf*, in the India Office.

<sup>5</sup> See Mirzā Maḥdī’s *Tā’rikh-i-Nādirī*, Bombay, 1849, p. 172, and p. 113 of *At-Tuhfatu’n-Nabhāniyya fi Tā’rikhi’l-Jazīrati’l-‘Arabiyya* (Cairo, 1929–1930), by Muḥammad ibnu’sh-Shaikh Khalifa.

to carry out a more ambitious project, namely the conquest of 'Omān. Nādir doubtless felt that, until Muscat and the other ports on the Arabian coast were in his hands, he could not hope to establish and maintain Iranian supremacy in the Gulf.

Fortunately for Nādir, events in 'Omān took, in 1736, an unexpectedly favourable turn. The licentious ways of the Imām Saif ibn Sultān having aroused the fierce resentment of the more rigidly orthodox of his subjects, a serious revolt broke out in 1736. Saif tried in vain to stem the growing tide of opposition by importing mercenaries from Makrān.<sup>1</sup> Faced with defeat and deposition, Saif, in despair, turned to Nādir Shāh for aid. Although already in the throes of preparation for his onslaught on the Ghilza'i Afghans, Nādir was quick to seize his opportunity. He sent prompt orders to Muḥammad Taqī Khān Shirāzī, the Beglarbegi of Fārs, to equip a fleet and landing force, and to go to 'Omān ostensibly to help the hard-pressed Imām but in reality to take possession of his country. When, in January, 1737, a report of Nādir's intention to send an expeditionary force to 'Omān reached the Agent of the East India Company at Gombroon, he informed the London office that he hoped that the Shāh was not intending to deceive the Imām and seize his country; he feared that the attempt would be unsuccessful and that it would merely result in the Imām taking retaliatory measures.<sup>2</sup>

On the 3rd/14th March, 1737, the Iranian fleet arrived at Gombroon from Bushire, under the command of Laṭīf Khān, "who hoists his flag, being a white ground with a red Persian Sword in the middle."<sup>3</sup> The fleet consisted of four ships, two "grabs",<sup>4</sup> and some smaller vessels.

Laṭīf Khān's flagship, the *Fath-i-Shāh*, had formerly been known as the *Cowan*; the Iranians had purchased her from the East India Company in the previous December. Another of his large vessels, the *Northumberland*, had also been British; she had been acquired by

<sup>1</sup> See p. 132 of the Rev. G. P. Badger's translation of Salīl ibn Raziq's history.

<sup>2</sup> See the letter from the Agent of the East India Company at Gombroon to London, dated the 28th January/8th February, 1737; this letter is in vol. xv of the *Factory Records, Persia and the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Gombroon to London, dated 6th/17th May, 1737, in vol. xv of the *Factory Records*.

<sup>4</sup> An English corruption of the Arabic word *ghurāb*, which means ordinarily a "crow", but which was also used to denote a type of vessel much in use by the Arabs. Olaf Torén, in his book, *A Voyage to Surat, China, etc.* (London, 1771), p. 205, describes a "grab" as a two- or three-masted vessel, rigged in the European manner, with a low and sharp prow, like that of a galley.

forced sale at Bushire nearly a year before.<sup>1</sup> The captain (named Cook) and the mate of a British vessel, who had entered the Iranian service, each commanded an Iranian ship. The crews consisted entirely of Huwalas and other Arabs from the Gulf Coast.

Having embarked 5,000 men and 1,500 horses, the fleet sailed from Gombroon on the 1st/12th April<sup>2</sup> and reached Khor Fakkān, 74 miles south of Ras Musandam, four days later.<sup>3</sup> Laṭīf Khān landed some of his Iranian troops at Khor Fakkān and then sailed back northwards, rounded Ras Musandam, and anchored in the harbour of Julfār; Laṭīf Khān here met the Imām Saif ibn Sulṭān who, it is said, made the Admiral a present of 2,000 tomans (some £4,400).<sup>4</sup> After receiving the submission of Shaikh Rāma, the chief of the local (Huwala) Arabs, and leaving a garrison in Julfār, Laṭīf Khān and his forces, accompanied by Saif and his adherents, marched inland to meet Bal'arab ibn Ḥimyar Al-Ya'riba who, although a relative of the Imām's, was the leader of the opposing faction. Bal'arab, for his part, was advancing northwards from Nizwa. A battle took place at Falju's-Samīnī, near Biraimi, which resulted in a decisive victory for the allies,<sup>5</sup> who thereupon occupied successively Al-Jauf and 'Ibra.<sup>6</sup> The advance was not continued, however, because dissension had broken out between Laṭīf Khān and the Imām; it appears that the former was already acting as though the Iranians had conquered the whole country, and was not disposed to treat Saif with any deference.<sup>7</sup> In consequence, the alliance between the Imām and the Iranians was, for a time, dissolved; in July Laṭīf Khān returned to Gombroon, where the town was illuminated and feasts were held in his honour.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This vessel did not, apparently, belong to the East India Company.

<sup>2</sup> See the Gombroon letter to London of the 6th/17th May, to which reference has already been made. See also J. A. Saldanha's *Selections from State Papers, Bombay, regarding the East India Company's connection with the Persian Gulf with a summary of events, 1600-1800*, Calcutta, 1908, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Guillain, in vol. i, p. 529, of his *Documents*, gives (on the authority of Shaikh Abu Sulaimān) the date of the arrival of this force at Khor Fakkān as the 14th Dhu'l-Hijja, 1149 (16th April, 1737); Sabil ibn Raziq gives the date as the 17th Dhu'l-Hijja (see Badger, p. 138); as Shaikh Abu Sulaimān's chronology is far more accurate than that of Sabil, I have adopted the former's date, which, moreover, fits in better with the date of departure of the fleet as given by the Gombroon Diary.

<sup>4</sup> See the entry, dated 15th/26th May, in the diary of the Agent-in-Council of the East India Company at Gombroon, in vol. iv of the *Factory Records*.

<sup>5</sup> See Guillain (again on the authority of Shaikh Abu Sulaimān), vol. i, p. 529, and Badger, p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> Sabil says (see Badger, pp. 141 and 142) that the Iranians behaved in a most barbarous manner to the inhabitants of 'Ibra.

<sup>7</sup> Guillain, vol. i, p. 529.

<sup>8</sup> Gombroon Diary, 21st July/1st August, 1737.

Taqī Khān, the Beglarbegi of Fārs, who had previously arrived at Gombroon, took over the supreme command from Laṭīf Khān, and by his parsimony caused much discontent amongst the seamen. Being unpaid and half-starved, the seamen complained bitterly to the Admiral, who promised to redress their grievances as soon as the Beglarbegi departed. Operations were not resumed during the summer and autumn, and in November the Iranian fleet underwent repairs and refitting at Gombroon. It appears that at about this time Nādir Shāh<sup>1</sup> sent the Beglarbegi peremptory orders to prosecute the 'Omān campaign with vigour, and upbraided him for not leading the expeditionary force in person in the previous April.

Spurred to action by his sovereign's censure, Taqī Khān proceeded to commandeer all the English and Dutch trankeys at Gombroon, and importuned both the Companies for the loan of a large vessel to supplement his fleet. By means of a heavy bribe, the Agent of the English Company managed to avoid lending him a ship which was already loaded with goods and on the point of sailing for India.<sup>2</sup> The Beglarbegi then concentrated on the Dutch, with whom he had a violent quarrel; it is not, apparently, recorded whether in the end he obtained one of their ships.<sup>3</sup>

In January, 1738, Taqī Khān, in company with Laṭīf Khān and the Khān of Lār, sailed for Julfār with some 6,000 men. In the following month word was received at Gombroon that "the Beglerbeggy, who imagined that He should cajole the Imaum into his Power and by that means make himself Master of Muscatt, has quarrelled with Lettif Cawn for advising the King of this Enterprise, in which he begins to fear he shall meet with no great success, being himself no Soldier . . ." <sup>4</sup> The Beglarbegi and Admiral, nevertheless, smoothed over their differences for a time, and joined forces with the Imām, whose lack of success against his rebellious subjects had forced him once more to seek the aid of the Iranians. In March, 1738, the combined forces again defeated Bal'arab ibn Ḥimyar and occupied the towns of Bahla and Nizwa<sup>5</sup>; they then advanced to Muscat,

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Gombroon to London, dated 15th/26th December, 1737 (in vol. xv of *Factory Records*).

<sup>2</sup> Gombroon Diary, 14th/25th December, 1737.

<sup>3</sup> I have had no opportunity of consulting the records of the Dutch East India Company.

<sup>4</sup> Gombroon Diary, 2nd/13th February, 1738.

<sup>5</sup> According to Saḷīl ibn Razīq (*Badger*, p. 142), the Iranians captured Bahla on the 14th March and Nizwa eight days later; the news reached Gombroon on the 8th/19th April, when celebrations were held in honour of the occasion. See also



which they occupied without difficulty, but the Iranians were unable to secure possession of the eastern and western ports (known respectively as Jalālī and Marānī),<sup>1</sup> although they are said to have besieged them for five weeks.<sup>2</sup> Soon after the occupation of the town of Muscat, Taqī Khān quarrelled with the Imām Saif, with the result that the latter withdrew with his fleet to Barka, whence he proceeded into the interior and entered into negotiations with his rival, Bal‘arab ibn Ḥimyar. Bal‘arab not only agreed to renounce all claim to the Imāmate, but promised to assist Saif against the Iranians.<sup>3</sup>

As Taqī Khān was unable to capture the Muscat forts, he raised the siege of them on the 25th May, 1738, and went with his army to Barka where, as at Muscat, the forts successfully resisted him. Here dissensions once more broke out between Taqī Khān and Laṭīf Khān, in consequence of which the former poisoned the luckless Admiral.<sup>4</sup> It seems that Taqī Khān was then reduced to great straits, and that he was compelled to retreat to Julfār.<sup>5</sup> He was able, however, to detach a portion of his force to besiege the town of Ṣoḥār; meanwhile, disaster had overtaken the Iranian garrison at Bahla, which was besieged and forced to surrender after the majority had been killed.<sup>6</sup> Later the Iranians besieging Ṣoḥār were forced to give up their investment of that place and to retire to Julfār.

Whilst the Iranians in ‘Omān were sustaining these reverses, dissatisfaction was rapidly increasing amongst the personnel of their fleet, owing to lack of pay and insufficient rations; in consequence, many of the men deserted, and those who remained were in no mood loyally to fight for the Iranians. The natural result was that the Huwala Arabs and the ‘Omānis regained the command of the Gulf, and piracy became rife. Supplies for the Iranian garrison at Julfār

Guillain, vol. i, p. 529. When Wellsted was at Nizwa in November, 1835, he went over the fort there which, he said (see his *Travels in Arabia*, London, 1838, p. 121), “in the estimation of all the surrounding country, is impregnable”. He found in the fort “a few old guns . . . one bearing the name of Imām Saaf, and another that of Kouli Khan, the Persian General who took Maskat” (*sic*). The Iranian gun may have borne Nadi’s former title of Ṭahmāsp Qulī Khān.

<sup>1</sup> These forts which were built by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, were also known as the Qal‘atu’sh-Sharqīyya and the Qal‘atu’l-Gharbiyya respectively; A. W. Stiffe gives a description of them in an article in the *Geographical Journal*, vol. x, 1897, pp. 609–612. See also Curzon’s *Persia*, vol. ii, p. 440.

<sup>2</sup> Badger, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Gombroon Diary, 26th June/7th July, 1738.

<sup>5</sup> Gombroon Diary, 13th/24th July, 1738.

<sup>6</sup> Badger, p. 144.

had, for a time, to be conveyed across the Gulf by English vessels. In August, 1738, the East India Company's galley *Rose* was captured by two Arab "grabs", and the officers and men were threatened with death if they carried any more provisions for the Iranians.<sup>1</sup> Almost simultaneously the Arabs descended in force upon Basidu, on Qishm Island, plundered the town, and slaughtered all the Iranians there. Bad news was also received in Gombroon from Bahrain, where, it was reported, the Arabs were besieging the Iranians in the castle.<sup>2</sup> Later in the year the Arabs, as usual, fell out amongst themselves, and were in consequence much weakened, and in January, 1739, the Iranian fleet defeated the Arabs, whose Admiral was killed by an explosion.<sup>3</sup>

In March, 1739, Taqī Khān returned to Gombroon armed with full powers to carry on the war against the Arabs and with "positive orders to level Muscatt to the ground".<sup>4</sup> No operations could, however, be carried out in 'Omān because, in the first place, Taqī Khān was called away from Gombroon before he could sail, in order to suppress a revolt in the Kūhgilū country,<sup>5</sup> and, later in the year, when that revolt had been quelled, he received orders from Nādir to proceed with his land and sea forces to Sind.<sup>6</sup> The disastrous ending of this expedition resulted in Nādir summoning Taqī Khān to Nādirābād to account for his conduct.<sup>7</sup>

For the next two years nothing could be accomplished on the Arabian shore, beyond retaining a precarious hold on Julfār. A serious mutiny in the Iranian navy in August, 1740, ended in the vessels being taken away by their crews, some going to the Arabian shore and others to the island of Qais, which was held by the Huwala Arabs.<sup>8</sup> It was not until early in 1742 that the Iranians obtained the mastery over the mutineers and rebel Arabs, some more large vessels having by then been obtained from Surat, through the East India Company. The

<sup>1</sup> Gombroon Diary, 26th July/6th August.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Gombroon to London, dated 31st March/11th April, 1739 (in vol. xv of the *Factory Records*).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Gombroon to London, dated 15th/26th May, it was stated: "We shall be glad if this or some other Accident prevents his (the Peglarbegi's) return to carry on the Expedition against Muscatt which must quite ruin this miserable place."

<sup>6</sup> *Tā'rikh-i-Nādirī*, p. 211; see also Otter, vol. ii, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Gombroon Diary, 5th/16th April, 1739, "the greatest want of Conduct imaginable appeared in this expedition." See also the *Tā'rikh-i-Nādirī*, p. 214, in which, however, but little information is given of this expedition.

<sup>8</sup> There are numerous entries in the Gombroon Diary respecting this mutiny and its consequences.

mutineers, for their part, had suffered a serious loss when two of their vessels were driven ashore in a gale.

Events in 'Omān now once more favoured Iranian intervention. Saif ibn Sulṭān had again estranged many of his subjects by his mode of living and his disregard for the precepts of the Qu'rān, and in February, 1742, his opponents broke into open revolt. On the 16th of that month they were strong enough to secure his deposition and to bring about the election of his cousin Sulṭān ibn Murshīd.<sup>1</sup> Saif, as before, turned to the Iranians for aid, and Taqī Khān sent a favourable reply.

The Huwala Arabs, who had not submitted to the Iranians, ranged themselves on the side of Sulṭān ibn Murshīd and his supporters, but the Julfār garrison marched out and in April decisively defeated the Arabs at Khasab, killing Shaikh Rāma and taking over 500 prisoners.<sup>2</sup> The Julfār garrison was strongly reinforced in June, but it was not until the following November that Kalb 'Alī Khān,<sup>3</sup> Nādir's brother-in-law, who had been appointed Sardār of the Garmsīrāt, or Commander-in-Chief of the Hot Countries, crossed over to the Arabian shore. He was followed three weeks later by Taqī Khān himself.<sup>4</sup> At this time the Iranian fleet was strengthened by the arrival of four new ships from Surat; later it received a further increase in strength when Saif handed over two vessels to his allies; further, another vessel was obtained from the French, by a forced sale.<sup>5</sup>

The Beglarbegi, on meeting Saif ibn Sulṭān at Julfār, concluded a treaty with the ex-Imām whereby he undertook to restore him to the Imāmate on condition that he (Saif) would then recognize the

<sup>1</sup> Shaikh Abu Sulaimān (see Guillain, vol. i, p. 535) gives this date as the 10th Khu'l-Hijja, 1154, the equivalent of the 16th February, 1742. Saif ibn Raziq is obviously wrong in saying (see Badger, p. 145) that this event took place in A.H. 1151 (A.D. 1738-9). It is clear from the Gombroon Diary that the revolution took place in 1742, because the Agent received a letter at the beginning of April in that year from the Beglarbegi asking for ships to take troops across to Arabia to assist Saif ibn Sulṭān, "who has been driven out by rebels."

<sup>2</sup> Gombroon Diary, 19th/30th April, Otter, vol. ii, p. 169. Taqī Khān, on hearing of this victory, sent an order to Gombroon for 1,000 tomans to be raised from the local *Banians*, which sum was to be given to the Julfār troops as a bonus. The *Banians* were so dissatisfied at this high-handed measure that they threatened to leave Gombroon (Gombroon Diary, 23rd July/3rd August).

<sup>3</sup> Kalb 'Alī Khān's father was Bābā 'Alī Beg, of Abīvard, one of whose daughters was Nādir's first wife and was the mother of Riḍā Qulī Mirzā; after the death of this wife, Nādir married another daughter of Bābā 'Alī Beg's, Gauhar Shād by name, who was the mother of Naṣru'llah Mirzā and Imām Qulī Mirzā.

<sup>4</sup> Gombroon Diary, 20th November/1st December.

<sup>5</sup> For particulars of the sale of this French vessel, see Otter, vol. ii, pp. 166-8.

suzerainty of Irān.<sup>1</sup> The allies then advanced against Sulṭān ibn Murshīd and his adherents.

While Kalb 'Alī Khān, with a portion of the Iranian troops, laid siege to Ṣoḥār, Taqī Khān and Saif ibn Sulṭān proceeded by sea to Muscat, which was held by partisans of the ex-Imām. On landing, Taqī Khān found, to his annoyance, that although his men were allowed to wander freely about the town, they were denied access to the Jalālī and Marānī forts. Taqī Khān, however, was a resourceful man, and he had, it appears, expected some such behaviour on the part of Saif ibn Sulṭān. Knowing the ex-Imām's addiction to drink, Taqī Khān had, it is said,<sup>2</sup> brought a cask of Shīrāz wine in his flagship. When Saif invited Taqī Khān and some of his officers to a banquet in the Marānī fort, the Beglarbegi presented his host with the cask of wine, with the result that Saif, as well as his principal officers, became completely drunk. While Saif and his officers were lying insensible, Taqī Khān obtained possession of the fort without difficulty or bloodshed. There still remained the other fort before the Beglarbegi could claim that Muscat was completely in his power. Taqī Khān thereupon stole Saif's seal and affixed it to an order which he had written, in the ex-Imām's name, to the Commander of the Jalālī fort, charging him to admit the Iranian troops. The Arab commander, believing, as was natural, that Saif himself had written the order and affixed his seal to it, opened the gates to Taqī Khān. When Saif ibn Sulṭān recovered his senses he found, to his dismay, that his allies were masters of Muscat.<sup>3</sup>

It being useless to attempt to oust the Iranians from the forts, Saif decided to continue his alliance with them until the overthrow of the Imām Sulṭān ibn Murshīd could be accomplished.

All this time the siege of Ṣoḥār had been in progress; the defence was carried on with great vigour and ability by the Governor, Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd by name, who, as will be seen below, later founded the Al-Bu Sa'īd dynasty.

Taqī Khān and Saif ibn Sulṭān advanced against Sulṭān ibn

<sup>1</sup> Guillain, vol. i, p. 536; Otter, vol. ii, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr's *Beschreibung von Arabien*, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> Niebuhr's *Beschreibung von Arabien*, pp. 300 and 301. Guillain (vol. i, p. 537) gives a slightly different version. The Agent of the East India Company at Gombroon received word from the Iranian Government on the 18th February/1st March, 1743, that the Beglarbegi had captured Muscat. Doubts whether Taqī Khān had taken Muscat by orthodox methods were held, for the Agent added that it was supposed that the place had been taken "by dealing underhandedly with the Imaum's slaves to deliver him the Forts".

Murshīd, who was then marching to the relief of Ṣoḥār. It appears that Sulṭān ibn Murshīd succeeded in making his way through the lines of the besiegers and in joining Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd. The Imām was, however, killed almost immediately after, when leading a sortie.<sup>1</sup> Saif ibn Sulṭān was, it is said, much affected by the death of Sulṭān ibn Murshīd; overcome with remorse for his conduct, which had brought so much trouble upon his country, Saif abandoned his Iranian allies and retired to Rastāq, where he died not long afterwards.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding the death of Sulṭān ibn Murshīd, Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd continued to resist bravely. In March the hopes of the besieged were raised by a serious reverse which the Iranians sustained. Two thousand of their men, when returning laden with booty from a marauding expedition, camped in a valley for the night. No proper guards were set, and an Arab force was therefore able to take them by surprise; only a few wounded men escaped to tell Kalb ʿAlī Khān of the disaster.<sup>3</sup>

Some five weeks later reports reached Gombroon of a further and even more serious reverse, but these were later contradicted.<sup>4</sup>

By July Aḥmad found his supplies were nearly exhausted, and, as he had no hope of relief, he deemed it expedient to capitulate on honourable terms to his powerful opponents. Ṣoḥār thus passed into the hands of the Iranians, but it had held out for seven or eight months and had cost the lives of 3,000 of their men.<sup>5</sup>

Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd proved himself as capable a diplomat as he was a fighter, and managed to ingratiate himself with Taqī Khān to such an extent that he not only got himself confirmed as Governor of Ṣoḥār, but also secured his appointment as Governor of Barka.<sup>6</sup>

It is stated in the Gombroon Diary that 3,500 recruits were to be sent over to Arabia to replace those men who had fallen at Ṣoḥār and elsewhere, "the King having ordered that when they were Masters of the Sea Shore to march inland, and it is supposed his Designs

<sup>1</sup> Guillain, vol. i, p. 538. Some uncertainty exists as to whether Sulṭān ibn Murshīd was killed in this manner or whether he perished when trying to force his way into Ṣoḥār through the Iranian lines. Salīl ibn Razīq's story of this fighting seems to be most inaccurate.

<sup>2</sup> Guillain, vol. i, p. 538; Salīl ibn Razīq (Badger), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Gombroon Diary, 2nd/13th April, 1743.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8th/19th May. It was probably this rumour which misled Otter and caused him to state that the Iranians had had to raise the siege (vol. ii, p. 181). It is to be noted that Otter left Baṣra on his return journey to France on the 9th/20th May, 1743.

<sup>5</sup> Gombroon Diary, 21st July/1st August.

<sup>6</sup> Niebuhr's *Beschreibung*, p. 301; Guillain, vol. i, p. 538. Salīl ibn Razīq (Badger), pp. 149 and 150.

are to conquer the whole Country, but while he is doing this he is destroying his Own, and Nothing but Misery, Tyranny, and Oppression are to be seen or heard in these Parts, the People being daily tax'd that before Time is given for collecting one Another is laid on." <sup>1</sup>

In the meantime war had broken out at last between Iran and Turkey. Nevertheless, Nādir did not abandon his designs on 'Omān, and, except for the withdrawal of some of his fleet from Ṣoḥār in August, 1743,<sup>2</sup> he took no steps to reduce his forces in Arabia in order to strengthen his army in Mesopotamia.

For some time past there had been serious friction in 'Omān between Taqī Khān and Kalb 'Alī Khān, and each sent to Nādir accusations against the other. The consequence was that Nādir issued orders for the recall of Kalb 'Alī and appointed Muḥammad Ḥusain Khān Qirqlū as Sardār in his place.<sup>3</sup> It appears that the Shāh soon afterwards also ordered the Beglarbegi to return.<sup>4</sup>

The new Sardār reached Gombroon in October and left at once for Ṣoḥār via Julfār. Early in December, Taqī Khān, followed a few days later by Kalb 'Alī, arrived at Gombroon. A month later the Beglarbegi revolted, and left the coast for Shiraz; before leaving, he ordered Kalb 'Alī to be strangled and had his body thrown down a well because the ex-Sardār had refused to join in the revolt.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that Taqī Khān's ultimate success in capturing Muscat served to turn his head.<sup>6</sup> He thought that, with his influence in Fārs and (as he wrongly imagined) the control of the fleet in his hands, he could defy Nādir; such a belief, as he found to his cost, was mistaken. It is beyond the scope of this article to describe Taqī Khān's rebellion; all that is relevant in connection with it is that it effectively diverted Nādir's attention from 'Omān for a time. Then, when the revolt was

<sup>1</sup> Gombroon Diary, 21st July/1st August.

<sup>2</sup> Gombroon Diary, 24th August/4th September, 1743. Nādir's object was to strengthen his fleet at Bushire which was then being organized for an attack upon Baṣra in conjunction with land forces. The vessels from Ṣoḥār must have arrived too late to participate in the united operations, in which the Iranian navy seems to have played but little part.

<sup>3</sup> Autobiography of Mīrzā Muḥammad Shirāzī, p. 16. (Professor Sa'īd Naficy, of Tehran, possesses a MS. of this autobiography, of which he has very kindly sent me a typewritten copy.) See also the *Tā'rikh-i-Nādirī*, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Tā'rikh-i-Nādirī*, p. 249. There are numerous entries in the Gombroon Diary between September, 1743, and January, 1744, regarding the suspicious conduct of Taqī Khān; his recall was reported in Gombroon early in September.

<sup>5</sup> Gombroon Diary, 30th December, 1743/10th January, 1744. See also *Fārsnāma*, p. 194.

<sup>6</sup> Niebuhr's *Beschreibung*, p. 301.

suppressed, Nādir became engrossed with the Turkish war and had no energy or resources to spare for side ventures. In consequence, the Iranian garrisons in 'Omān, though not withdrawn, were not reinforced.

The astute Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd was not slow to profit by these developments.

One of the conditions of Aḥmad's settlement with Taqī Khān was that the former should pay tribute regularly to the Iranian authorities at Muscat. After the departure of Taqī Khān, however, Aḥmad failed to make the payment of tribute on the appointed date, alleging that he had no means of sending the money to Muscat. The consequence was that the Iranian commanders at Muscat ran short of funds and were unable to pay their troops, many of whom deserted.<sup>1</sup> Aḥmad's next step was to invite the Iranian commanders to Barka, on the pretext of conferring with them as to the manner in which the tribute could be paid. The Iranian commanders, accompanied by only a small escort, went to Barka, where Aḥmad seized them; he then proceeded to Muscat and called upon the Iranian garrison to surrender, offering them money if they yielded of their own free will, with the alternative of imprisonment if they did not. The Iranians, bereft of their leaders, short of provisions and money, and having no hope of succour from Iran, freely surrendered for the most part. Aḥmad, it is said, put some of the Iranians to death, but allowed the others to return to their own country.<sup>2</sup>

In this way Aḥmad became master of the coast from Ṣoḥār to Muscat; before long he extended his sway over the whole of 'Omān with the exception of Julfār, which the Iranians managed to retain for some years.<sup>3</sup>

Having delivered his country from the invaders, Aḥmad claimed his reward; on summoning the chief Qāḍī of 'Omān, he had no difficulty in persuading the latter to arrange for his election to the Imāmate. This election is said to have taken place in the latter part of 1744.<sup>4</sup>

So far as Iran was concerned the 'Omān campaigns had proved a costly failure; many men were killed in action, but many more died

<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr's *Beschreibung*, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr's *Beschreibung*, p. 303. See also Gullain, vol. i, p. 540, and Salil ibn Raziq (Badger, pp. 153 and 154). Salil's account of Aḥmad's treachery to the Iranians and his subsequent massacre of them seems much exaggerated.

<sup>3</sup> Entries in the Gombroon Diary show that, as late as 1748, ships carrying men and provisions were being sent over to Julfār from time to time.

<sup>4</sup> Guillaïn, vol. i, p. 542; Otto Kersten's "Tabellarisch Uebersicht der Geschichte Ostafrikas" (in Baron von der Decken's *Reisen in Ost-Afrika*, Leipzig, 1879), p. 18.

of starvation and disease ; it is probable that the total casualties amounted to some 20,000 men. This heavy sacrifice brought no advantage whatever to Iran ; for 'Omān, too, the campaigns occasioned much loss and suffering, but they led in the end to the supersession of the decadent Ya'riba dynasty by that of the Al-bu Sa'īds, which rules Muscat to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

The reason for Nādir's failure in 'Omān was his giving the supreme command to Taqī Khān, who was corrupt as an administrator and inefficient as a military leader. Had he appointed instead some commander of proved military capacity and integrity, like Ṭahmāsp Khān Jalāyir, there is no doubt that 'Omān would have been quickly conquered and at a far lower cost in human lives.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Said-Ruete, in his article "The Al-bu-Said Dynasty in Arabia and East Africa" (*Journal of the Central Asian Society*, vol. xvi, part iv, p. 419), points out that as the Ya'riba Dynasty attained power by expelling the Portuguese, so the Al-bu-Sa'īd attained it by driving out the Iranians.