

The Evolution of British Influence in the Trucial States Until 1945

Before embarking on reviewing British influence in the Trucial States until 1945, I must provide the reader with a general view of the Emirates in geographic, natural and population terms, and briefly review the emergence of the Emirates and their historical roots.

The Emirates: History and Population

The United Arab Emirates (the present political entity of the Emirates) is located in the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered in the north and northwest by the waters of the Arabian Gulf, by Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the west, by the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also in the south, and by the Gulf of Oman and the Sultanate of Oman in the east. Its total area is 83,600 km².

Its coasts overlooking the southern coast of the Arabian Gulf extend nearly 644 km from the base of Qatar peninsula to Musandam tip in the east. On this coast lie the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Qiwain and Ras al- Khaimah while the coast of the 7th Emirate, Fujairah, extends on the coast of the Gulf of Oman for 90 kilometers. The Emirates lies in the area between latitudes 22 and 26.5 degrees north and longitudes 51 and 56.5 degrees east of Greenwich; i.e. it lies within the hot desert region where rain is scanty and the temperature is high reaching 47° C. This has resulted in minute agricultural and animal production, and consequently little population proportional to its area.

The relief features are diverse in the Emirates although its area is mostly desert covered by sand dunes. There are coastal lands where we find the major cities in addition to mountainous areas in the Emirates of Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah and the city of Al Ain, which is affiliated to Abu Dhabi. There are also some agricultural lands distributed over Al Ain, the Emirates of Ras Al Kaimah and Fujairah, and Al Dhaid Municipality, which is affiliated to the Emirate of Sharjah. Finally, there are the islands, whose number is around 200 islands the most famous of them are Sir Bani Yas, Delma, Umm Al Nar, Das, Greater Tunb, Smaller Tunb and Abu Mosa (the three UAE islands occupied by Iran).

Before the discovery of oil, the Emirates society included dissimilar groups of human elements, which were significantly affected by the diversity of relief feature. The population of the Emirates was divided into:

- Bedouins dwelling in the desert: they rely for their livelihoods on grazing and moving from place to place. The most important groups dwell in Liwa oasis in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The groups living in Al Ain in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi are somewhat similar to those living in Liwa. Other oases include Al Dhaid oasis in Sharjah.

- Urban dwellers in coastal cities: their lives depend on the sea; most of the vocations they have practiced were maritime ones such as diving, pearling and pearls trade, fishing, and shipbuilding.
- Dwellers of green plains: these are concentrated in the coastal plain called Al Shimailiya coast, which extends from Fujairiah to Dibba town and overlooks the Gulf of Oman, in addition to some parts of Ras Al Khaimah. They are similar to urban dwellers and work in agriculture.
- Mountaineers: the most famous of these are the Shohoooh tribes dwelling in the area of mountaintops and Ras Musandam; they are distinguished from other groups by mountainous features peculiar to them.
- Islanders: these live on islands such as Delma, Sir Bani Yas, Sir Bou Na'eer, Abu Mosa and other islands. Their lives center primarily round the sea.
- Arab groups moving between the Arabian and Persian coasts; these are Arabs who have left their homeland on the Emirates coast or the rest of the coast of the Arabian Gulf and moved to the Persian Gulf, where they founded towns, villages and Arabian Emirates, moving between the Arabian and Persian coasts.

The population of the Emirates relates genealogically to old Arab origins; the greatest majority of them is linked to two large-scale migrations into the region, which occurred before the Christian Era. The first came from the heart of the Arabia; those involved in this migration were known as Nizaris. The second came to the region around 120 BC following the collapse of the Marib Dam; the migrants came from southwest Arabia and were known as Qahtanis. From these two migrations descended Yemeni and Nizari tribes; in their turn these tribes divided into sub-tribes and clans taking the names of famous Sheikhs and leaders and the regions they dwelt in. The result was hundreds of tribal names, which constituted in their totality the people of the Emirates.

The social, political and cultural organization of the Emirates society had for a pillar the unity of the tribe. Each Emirate has a diverse group of tribes having a complex organization and its members pride themselves in belonging to it. By the passage of time, these tribes spread in different regions in the Emirates and were incorporated into each other.⁹ The most important of these tribes by region of concentration are:

- Abu Dhabi: Bani Yas (Al Bu Falah, Mazouris, Sudan, Al Bou Mihair, Hawamil, Qibaisat, Al Marr, Rumaithat), Manasir, and Al 'Awamir.
- Dubai: Al Bou Filasa - Al Maktoums descend from this tribe- Sudan, and Al Marr.
- Sharjah: Al-Qawasim, Mazouris, Al Bou Na'im, Bani Katab, Al Ali, Naqabis, Shawamis, and Tinaij.

- Ras Al Khaimah: Al-Qawasim, Sudan, Al Ali, Al Marr, Mazrouis, Al Bou Na'im, Al Za'ab, Shohool, Al Haboos.
- Ajman: Al Bou Na'im, Sudan, Al Bou Mihair.
- Umm Al Quwain: Al Ali
- Fujairah: Sharqis.

Other non-Arab groups, which came from the Indian sub-continent, Persia and the African coast, lived among these tribes.

Owing to the desert nature of the region and the scarcity of natural resources before the discovery of oil, the dwellers of different elements took to the sea, which constituted the essential source of their livelihoods. They engaged in pearling, shipbuilding, maritime transport, trade with India, East Africa and other places, fishing, farming, and some handicrafts.

The Emirates: Emergence and Roots

Ambiguity shrouds the history of the region on which present-day Emirates is based. Most studies dealing with the history of the Emirates usually begin by the period after the mid 18th century; ¹³ but undoubtedly this region had witnessed the rise of ancient civilizations. The discovered antiquities of the region show images of early attempts to build ships, work on trade navigation in particular, and pearling. There are many references to several trade posts in the Emirates in the writings of geographers and travelers in the Middle Ages such as Gulfar, Khor Fakan, Kalba and others. The region was also famous for brass industry in ancient times; stoves for brass fusion were found in Al-Haili town, which is affiliated to Abu Dhabi. Excavations attested to the fact that Umm Al Nar island was a port for exporting this metal to the lands of Sumer and Assyria and the civilizations surrounding the region.

When Islam dawned in Arabia, the region of present day Oman and the Emirates were one region known as Al Ghabraa or Al Ghobaira. The Prophet sent 'Amr ibn al-'As to its people, who embraced Islam voluntarily. When the Umayyad Caliphate was established and the sedition of the Kharijites occurred, Oman was a safe haven to the Kharijites from the brutality of the Umayyads. The fact that it was distant from the center of the Umayyad Caliphate helped in this. This was the cause of the concentration of the Ibadhi doctrine in Oman up to today. After the foundation of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Gulf became a vital waterway, which linked it to the Byzantine Empire, on the one hand, and the East, on the other.

The Gulf region, through different historical phases, was affected by its distinguished geographical location which constitutes a link between the East and West, a passage to India and the Far East, and an inlet to Iraq and the Levant. Moreover, it is rich in natural harbors, which were, and continue to be, refuges to war and trade ships. In the era of modern history,

the Gulf route has been the most important commercial and global route. It, therefore, led to rivalry between different powers to control it and monopolize the markets of India, Southeast Asia and the African coast. The Gulf people, in addition to Mamluks in North Africa, succeeded in monopolizing the transport of the products of this region to the coasts of the Mediterranean. When Portugal discovered the Cape of Good Hope route in the late 15th century, it decided to eliminate the ancient trade routes, including the Gulf route, to focus trade between the East and West on the discovered new routes.

In order to make this dream come true, Portugal succeeded in establishing its control over India in the year 1500 and appointing a deputy to its King there. Hence, it sent a large maritime expedition in 1507 to control the inlets of the Arabian Gulf. The expedition managed to occupy large areas of Oman and the coast of the present day Emirates, Hormuz, in addition to Bahrain, Al-Qatif and other areas.

However, the Colonialist Empire of Portugal did not hold sway for long. It carried the seeds of its collapse inside it. In the second half of the 16th century, revolt broke out against it in various colonies. It received a fatal stroke when the al-Ya'aribah state emerged in 1624 in Oman. It managed to liquidate the posts of Portuguese presence in the Gulf and the coasts of East Africa.

The liberation of the Gulf from the Portuguese caused new moves of the tribes in eastern Arabia and Oman. Stability reigned in the region after a period of turbulence and anarchy. Arabian tribes began their migration from the hinterland to the coasts, resuming their old maritime activity in navigation, trade, and pearling. On the coast of Oman, two new powers emerged in the mid 18th century exploiting the state of anarchy, which swept Oman following the decline of the al-Ya'aribah state. Persia dominated some regions of Oman and seditions and inner fighting spread. This inner fighting ended with the rise of Al Bou Said under the leadership of Ahmed bin Said, the *Wali* (Governor) of Sohar, in the mid 18th century. He engaged himself in driving Persians out of Oman and securing the internal situation in Oman, thus giving these two powers room to gradually achieving independence from Oman.

The first power was a maritime one, constituted of an alliance of a group of tribes led by al-Qawasim. They turned Ras al- Khaimah into headquarters and their influence extended to include many islands and harbors on the Arabian and Persian coasts such as Linjah, Shinas, Qasham and other areas. They penetrated as far as the southern coasts of Arabia overlooking the Red Sea.

The second power was also composed of a tribal alliance called the Bani Yas Alliance under the leadership of Al Bu Falah, who were the forebears of Al Nahyan, the rulers of Abu Dhabi Emirate. They turned Al Zafra into their headquarters and their influence extended along the coast stretching from Dubai to khor al-'Adaïd and southern Qatar. In 1761 water was

discovered in Abu Dhabi island driving Bani Yas to settle there and increase the population of the island.