

# **The Anglo-Omani Action over the Slave Trade: 1873-1903**

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## **The Treaty of 1873 with the Sultan of Muscat**

### **i. Sir Bartle Frere's Mission to Muscat**

The most notable feature in the Anglo-Omani relationship during the year 1873 was the question of the slave trade with Muscat and Zanzibar, the subject of the mission of Sir Bartle Frere. Sir Bartle was appointed by Her Majesty's Government, as special emissary to Sultan Turki for the purpose of negotiating a more effective Treaty for the suppression of the trade in his dominions. He was accompanied in that mission by Colonel Lewis Pelly, and arrived in Muscat from Zanzibar on board H.M.S. *Enchantress* on 12th of April 1873; the two were received with warm welcome by the Sultan himself who immediately presented all necessity for the success of this undertaking. The British representatives wasted no time in entering into negotiations with the Sultan, who promptly concluded his views in agreement with the British envoy, by the signing this Treaty on 14th April 1873, only two days after their arrival.<sup>1</sup>

The Treaty no doubt showed the Sultan's desire to achieve more effective action than previous engagements entered into with the British had achieved, either his own or his predecessors', for continuing the obstruction to the traffic which would gradually lead to complete abolition of the trade in future. This agreement with the United Kingdom Government obliged both parties and their heirs or successors to respect its provisions.

In accordance with this the five Articles which the Treaty contained were entirely concentrated on the end to the import of slaves from the coast of East Africa and Islands into the Sultan of Muscat's territories and possessions, whether

those slaves were destined for transport from one part of the Sultan's dominion to another, or using his land for passing them to foreign dominions. Anyone found involved in this traffic would be liable to detention and condemnation by all Naval Officers and Agents, and all slaves entering the Sultan's dominions should be freed.<sup>2</sup> Under the obligation of the Articles the Sultan had to take the responsibility for the entire closure of the slave markets in his country, and to devote much of his power to liberating slaves and protecting them to the extent of his ability, with a severe punishment for those who might try to return them to slavery.<sup>3</sup> On June 5th 1873, a similar Treaty was concluded with the Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Barghash b. Said.<sup>4</sup> Certainly these two Treaties opened the way for a new phase in the history of the anti-slavery campaign in both Muscat and Zanzibar, and offered the British a great opportunity in these areas to cooperate with them effectively, using a lawful obligation upon these Governments to focus in detail on the traffic from now onwards. The British also found it easy to oppose the local people who continued to trade in slaves, and were encouraged to undertake large scale action at any time and without the approval of Muscat or Zanzibar.

***ii. The British reaction to the results of the Treaty***

On 2nd October 1874, the British Political Agent at Muscat S.B. Miles reported to the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Derby, informing him that the treaties entered into with the Sultan of Muscat and Zanzibar, for the purpose of an effective suppression of the slave-trade, had so far shown a satisfactory result, and that during the season of the trade no importation of African slaves to the dominions of the Sultan of Muscat had taken place.<sup>5</sup> However, the Report mentioned that towards the end of the year 1874, a vessel carrying from eight to ten slaves left Muscat secretly for one of the Persian Gulf ports; the confirmation of that news was not available despite all the efforts that had been made to obtain it.<sup>6</sup> During the trading season H.M.S. *Rifleman* and *Philomel* which were part of the Royal Navy presence along with *Briton*, *Magpie* and *Nimble* which were patrolling the entrance of the Oman Gulf near Ras al-Hadd, had boarded many of the Omani dhows

but no capture had been made.<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously H.M.S. Daphne was watching along the southern coast of Arabia, and had boarded a great number of dhows, but also no capture of slaves had been mentioned. Political Agent Miles was personally involved in searching for slaves in these areas, and started his inquiries along the Omani Coast, from al-Ashkharah to Sohar and some other Omani ports. He was absolutely confident that the importation of East African slaves to the Sultan of Muscat's dominions for the time being had completely ceased; the Sultan had confirmed to the Agent in private communication that the traffic had been forced to stop.<sup>8</sup>

In relation with this matter the Secretary to the Government of India, George D. Argyll, instructed the Political and Secret Department to present the Viceroy with information on Sultan Turki's cooperation with the British authorities regarding the suppression of the traffic in his dominions.<sup>9</sup> By now the Sultan of Muscat was certainly the main person in the region who could be relied on and whose relations with the British could present real obstacles that could help to prevent the traffic in the region. Sultan Turki himself was completely in favour of the policy of suppression, which mainly kept his prestige with the British outstanding, and the subsidy of Zanzibar was now paid by the British without any interruption.

Sayyid Turki's engagement of 1873 with the British had also brought their closer cooperation to assist him to achieve his interests in the country, especially during the time of the attack on Muscat by the rebels of the interior of Oman.

At all events the fact was that the export of slaves to Oman and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula had operated through many different channels, but British and the Omani success in stopping the trade had been extremely thorough compared to the previous occasion when the traffic flourished during the first half of the nineteenth century. Part of the trade which was reaching Muscat at this stage was carried on by Turkish traders, who became involved in importing and exporting slaves under their colours to the Sultan's dominion and

elsewhere at the time of the Anglo-Omani activities against the traffic.

Generally the situation regarding the suppression was considerably more encouraging, and the decrease of the trade in the Sultan's of Muscat's dominions seemed to be an achievable task. During the year 1875, the British Political Agent at Muscat was quite optimistic as to the result of the Sultan's action against the matter. In October of that year Miles sent his report to India, confirming that the suppression of the import of East African slaves to the Sultan's territories had shown very outstanding results. The number which had been imported had not exceed 45 slaves.<sup>10</sup> fortunately only one dhow of the four accused of being involved in the issue in 1875 belonged to the Sultan's subjects, the rest were from the Trucial Coast of Oman. Those three dhows were found to have obtained French flags and papers, and because of the non-appearance of the British man-of-war in the Gulf of Oman during that year, no capture took place.<sup>11</sup> As the coast of Oman was under considerable surveillance by the British cruisers, the trade would remain heavily affected, with the exception of those cargoes which could manage to escape captured.

Miles believed that it was very difficult to demolish this trade in the region by one action, when the Arab traders made every possible effort to avoid restrictions by using French and Turkish colours.<sup>12</sup> The British greatly resented activities carried out under French protection, which had badly damaged Anglo-French relations in this area. However, the British activities in this regard had been effective in Omani waters. They had been vigorous active in any action which would help to reduce the traffic and liberate those who were found to be involved in cases of slavery after the 1873 Treaty with Sayyid Turki.

### ***iii. Sultan Turki's action against slavery***

The British and the Sultan always appeared to be in close understanding regarding the matter, and he had responded positively to any British request. In December 1876, the Sultan's favourable attitude was reflected again when some slaves escaped from their master in the interior, and sought refuge in Gwader, the Sultan's dominion. The Sultan immediately considered the

meaning of the Articles related to this case of the 1873 Treaty, which offered his protection to liberated slaves and a heavy punishment to those who tried to return them to slavery.<sup>13</sup> On 22nd December 1876, the Agent received another letter from the Sultan in which he confirmed the freedom of those liberated slaves, and their safety, and that any attempt by those who might return them to slavery would certainly be exposed to a severe punishment.<sup>14</sup> On 24 November 1876, Miles reported a similar case to the Earl of Derby in which he informed him that Francis S. Clayton, the Captain of H.M.S. *Rifleman*, had captured the Baghlah *Sahalah* in possession of a French flag and papers, with a slave on board who was forced to say before the French Consul at Zanzibar that he was one of the crew of the Baghlah.<sup>15</sup> After investigation of the case the slave was sold at Zanzibar, and brought to Matrah in Oman, and the Agent soon liberated him from his new slaver.<sup>16</sup> The case was considered as a violation of the provisions of the 1873 engagement. Sultan Turki was in agreement with the Agent's view, and responded authoritatively to his request to punish both the seller and the purchaser of that slave, who were imprisoned by the Sultan in the fort of al-Jalali in Muscat.<sup>17</sup> The Sultan's action in resolving many of the slave cases in his territories was one of the most important points which brought the British closer to the Sultan and his country.<sup>18</sup>

The British surveillance over the entry of slaves to Muscat and the Gulf of Oman had a positive result in increasing confidence in their performance in stopping the traffic in slavery in Oman but the situation was not always under their control, especially during the absence of British ships in the territorial waters of Oman.

Slaves continued to be shipped into Oman when there was an opportunity. In 1876, one cargo of 80 Abyssinian slaves was reported landed in Oman, having escaped the observation of the British ships. Sultan Turki was unable to free all these people or to punish the slavers, as he could not manage to find them. Consequently H.M.S. *Rifleman* resumed a search in suspicious places near Khor al-Hajar and Ras al-Hadd a few Kilometres east of Sur which had been for some time without proper inspection.<sup>19</sup> However, the following year marked no known landing of slaves in Oman, and the British steamer *Rokeby* managed to rescue some Abyssinians imported by one of the people of Muscat, who was punished by the Sultan.<sup>20</sup> The result was entirely successful and

the trade appears to have died out with the passage of time. It was a fact that during the period from 1876-84, there was an outstanding success in British and the Sultan's action against the importation of slaves from the East African coast to Omani territory, which was confirmed with the decrease in numbers of slaves sold within the Sultan's dominions. Sultan Turki on the other hand had shown his determination to suppress the traffic with strong help from the British for his efforts, which they appreciated, and they assured to him their beneficial attitude towards the policy of prohibition.

### **The revival of the traffic to Oman**

From the previous description of the slave trade between Oman and East Africa, it will be seen that a good outcome of the suppression was entirely dependent upon the British search and control of the vessels passing in these waters from Zanzibar to Muscat. Sultan Turki's loyalty to the policy of destroying the traffic in slavery made him content to secure a friendly British attitude to his Government. His agreement in declaring illegal all import of slaves into his territories, which was granted in return for full payment of the Zanzibar subsidy by the British, also encouraged the Sultan to maintain the policy against the matter.

However, by the middle of the 1880s, the situation turned against the British and the Sultan's desires, and showed a noticeable increase of the slave trade from Africa to the Sultan's dominions, following the removal of H.M.S *London* from the Zanzibar coast in the year 1884.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly the Political Agent in Muscat reported in May 1884, that he had learned that an attempt would be made to export many slave cargoes from the East African coast, to the Sultan of Muscat's dominions.<sup>22</sup> Sultan Turki had reacted very effectively regarding the matter, and issued a new anti-slavery proclamation in the country and its territories in June 1884 warning those who wished to be involved in it and confirming the continuation of the prohibition of the traffic on his lands. In October of the same year, the Sultan addressed letters to all the Trucial Coast Shaikhs, in which he urged them to stop all kinds of slavery, and asked them to catch all slaves brought to their dominions by his subjects, and arrest the people who were involved in it with severe punishment.<sup>23</sup> The Government of India were fully satisfied with the Sultan's actions in this matter, and this friendly attitude forced them to respect his

administration of the country and consider him a very important figure to share with them the responsibility for watching the movement of the traffic in these areas.<sup>24</sup>

In January 1885 the communications between the Political Agent at Muscat, the Political Residency in the Gulf and the Government of India towards the matter indicated the great British determination to fulfil their ongoing task to stop the slave traffic. On 18th January 1885 the British Resident in the Gulf, Lt. Col. E.C. Ross, wrote to the Secretary to the Government of India confirming that the most powerful way to check and affect slave-running between the coasts of Africa and northern Arabia would not be affected without the appearance of British cruisers on the African Coast. However, the stationing of H.M. Naval Units on the Arabian Coast, or on the Persian Coast, could only be expected to catch a small number out of the total number of slaves running, since that number was large.<sup>25</sup> Experience showed that the disappearance of the man-of-war from the East African coast had encouraged slave-running from these areas to Arabia, as we have seen as a result of the departure of the *London* in 1884; Ross had concluded that his views coincided with those of the Political Agent at Muscat, that some vessels-of-war should be stationed at some points in the Gulf of Oman.

*i. The British resumption of their activity*

Consequently the services of these ships were required to search these waters during the appropriate time, and H.M.S. *Osprey* took its position off the Ras al-Hadd area as replacement for H.M.S. *Ranger* which served there until 17th September 1885.<sup>26</sup> The stationing of British cruisers in the Gulf of Oman then appeared to be desirable.

On 27th September and 12th October 1885, Lt. Col. Miles, the Political Agent and Consul at Muscat, communicated with the Political Resident in the Gulf and confirmed the successful capture of slaves by the deployment of the British cruisers off the Sultan's territorial coast, from Ras al-Hadd to Ras Madrasah during the monsoon season.<sup>27</sup> On 24th November of the same year the Political Agent indicated in another letter to the British Resident that the operation for the suppression of the slave trade by Captain R.N. Dowding of H.M.S. *Osprey* had been terminated on 24th of October, and H.M.S. *Philomel* had arrived in Muscat

on 25th October, 1885 as replacement.<sup>28</sup> The Agent at Muscat also informed the Resident about the arrangement of the British ships there, at the disposal of Captain Dowding. The deployment had been made of three vessels, the *Reindeer* to watch the Batinah coast, running to Jask, the *Ranger* off Ras al-Hadd, while *Osprey*, being the largest vessel, should cruise along the South coast of Arabia from Ras al-Hadd to Ras Madrasah. The Agent described Dowding's plan as a wise one, even if there were a number of dhows which could have escaped boarding and search.<sup>29</sup>

The result of these operations was the capture of a dhow with 73 slaves on board near Ras Madrasah by H.M.S. *Osprey*; its crew was condemned for slavery in the Vice-Admiralty Court in Muscat.<sup>30</sup> On 23rd November 1885 a fishing boat was caught by H.M.S. *Ranger*; off the Sur Coast with nine slaves on board, and the fishing boat and two of the slavers were condemned.<sup>31</sup> The Commander of the *Osprey*, Captain Dowding, wrote to the Political Resident in the Gulf from Basra on 11th November 1885 confirming that only four dhows came over from Africa during the period between 31st August and 24th October 1885. The Commander added the following:

*"After two seasons experience acquired on this Coast slave cruising, I beg to state that in my opinion the most effective method of dealing a blow to the Slave Trade is by re-establishment of the Sultan's power at Sur, which at present remains merely nominal. The strategic situation of Sur as an absolutely necessary resort for slaves, on account of the wind, the seagoing qualities of its dhows, fresh water, and the Bedouins predatory character on the Coast, make it, in my opinion, a more important spot to render impracticable for slaves than even Muscat itself. Many seasons pass now without any interference at this part by Her Majesty's Ships and as no local pressure is brought to bear, the risk of capture remains at present insufficient to deter a continuation of the trade".*<sup>32</sup>

It was a fact that the Suris were heavily involved in this matter, though not all slaves shipped from East Africa to Arabia were taken to Sur or Muscat, as there were the Hadhrami vessels from Mukalla and the Persian Gulf ports which regularly visited the port of Zanzibar and carried away slave cargoes for sale not only within their territories, but in some ports of Arabia, even Muscat



itself.<sup>33</sup> The traffic in slavery was the issue of the century in the Indian Ocean, and the trade revived very quickly when the control over the traffic became weak for any reason.

On 7th December 1885 the British Political Agent at Muscat wrote to the British Resident to bear again regarding the issue of Captain Dowding's suggestion to bring more action against the trade. The Agent accordingly clarified that carrying out operations against the slave trade on the importing Arabian coast would not be a better plan than on the exporting coast of Africa. He added many other aspects which would be unhelpful in assessing the suppression of the trade, if they were to adopt the suggestion of Captain Dowding.<sup>34</sup> On 19th December 1885 the Resident in the Gulf wrote to the Agent at Muscat, confirming his preference for Miles's opinion and recommending his suggestion, and stated that it would be inexpedient to exercise interference in the Sultan's territories with the purpose of dealing a blow to the slave trade.<sup>35</sup> The Government of India had realised, as it appeared from experience, that their activities against the traffic would be more usefully concentrated off the East African Coast. They gave orders accordingly, and four Royal Navy Ships, *Reindeer*, *Woodlark*, *Kingfisher*, and *Sphinx*, to be engaged from April 1886 in operations against the traffic in these waters.<sup>36</sup> The result of their activities during the year 1886 was that about 200 dhows were boarded for inspection; however, only one was found carrying 21 slaves, and no number reaching Oman was known during that year.<sup>37</sup> Undoubtedly these operations by the British Navy created a reasonable threat to the vessels of the slavers, who were successfully prosecuted for their activity, but some of those traders remained active since a small number of slaves appear to have been landed on the Omani coast from dhows that managed to elude the search cruisers, and no capture took place during the years 1887-88.<sup>38</sup>

#### ***ii. The decree of the Sultan of Zanzibar***

ncy gave reliable information about the continuity of consignments of slaves from the East African coast to Arabia as well as to Oman, when some of those who landed in Oman sought freedom with the British Agent in Muscat.<sup>39</sup> Though the traffic continued, the number of slaves was considerably smaller, and action against it was absolutely a shared task between the British and the Governments of those subjects who were involved in it. In

August 1890 the Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Ali b. Said, became more active in suppressing the trade in his dominions, when he issued a decree for more action against slavery, to be obeyed by all of his subjects within his dominions from the published date. In fact the legal trade in slavery came to an end in Zanzibar only in 1897, and the prohibition of slavery on the mainland of East Africa became effective in 1907.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, whether a promulgation of that kind of decree could be passed in Oman or not, the answer was presented in a memorandum by Colonel Mockler, in February 1891, who stated many reasons for the inability of Sultan Faisal to establish a similar decree, as he was ruler of a country with large warlike tribes to whom the issuing of such a decree was not acceptable, and they still considered this trade as normal. The provisions of any such decree could not be easily enforced by him, but it would probably have the effect of raising a strong resentment against him and creating great difficulties throughout the country, which might cost him his position as Sultan, while the Sultan of Zanzibar was now under a British protectorate.<sup>41</sup> The stipulations of such a decree could not be enforced without large-scale influence on the part of the British Government, and any such declaration would be very dangerous to the Sultan. It was unfair to press it on him without any confirmation of help against the consequences. The Government of India appeared entirely in agreement with his views.<sup>42</sup> Under these circumstances the Sultan had declined to issue a similar decree, and preferred to adhere in this respect to the provisions of the 1873 engagement, which prohibited dealing in slavery in general, and would cause no harm to the Sultan's position in the country.

The British Political Resident in the Gulf and the Agent in Muscat were both in agreement with these views.<sup>43</sup> The activities of slave trading continued, and Omani cooperation against the traffic implied acceptance of the British concept that slavery was a wrong and an immoral custom and it must be destroyed. For people who had been involved in it a change in their behaviour was still far from reality. The situation of the trade during the last decade of the nineteenth century, underwent a change which was entirely based on British appearances on its sea routes. The trade also developed another method from this time onwards, when it was practised on slaves kidnapped from the coast opposite

Mekran and some other ports on the Persian Gulf.<sup>44</sup> The British men-of-war effectively dealt with the capture of slave dhows trading with the East African Coast, though the difficulties passed by these vessels flying the French colours made some of the British operations useless. Somehow substantial British operations at sea forced the traders to be very aware of their moves and to realise the danger of these adventures, which mostly ended in a great disappointment for them. In consequence the traffic was under severe pressure, and the transmission of slaves by sea from East Africa was compel unknown in Oman during the first two years of the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> The most important incident in this connection appeared with the capture of Muscat subjects in Mozambique with a large number of slaves in 1902.

#### **The incident of 1902 in Mozambique**

In dealing with the issue of the suppression, of the slave-Trade it became clear that the matter had given the Omani and the British Government a great many difficulties. It was very hard and sometimes impossible for them to interfere in the internal affairs of independent States, and to exercise a principal action against the traffic without arousing the hostility of powerful vested interests supported by a united public opinion. The slavers who escaped the British cruisers' inspection or the Agents' watch did not surrender. During the time of non-appearance of the Royal Navy ships, when they were stationed elsewhere instead of on the sea-routes of the slavers during the slave running seasons, no dhow captures took place in the previous two years. The survival of the traffic was confirmed by the incident of 1902 at Mozambique, which was considered the largest move in slavery by the Omani people during the twentieth century, and which arose with the disappearance of the British men-of-war that encouraged people to resume their activities.

In the middle of February 1902, information was received by the District Governor of Mozambique from a Portuguese explorer, Paes d'Almeida, that several Arab vessels had entered into their protectorate for the purpose of catching slaves.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly the Governor-General of Mozambique established an operation by 180 men, who proceeded to the place where these slavers had landed. The two parties entered into a severe conflict in which two Suri dhows were captured, another two were burnt and a number of the Arabs were killed in the battle.<sup>47</sup> On 6th March

further news reached the Portuguese authorities that another slaving party had landed somewhere near the previous place, and the authorities wasted no time in authorising the Portuguese cruiser *San Raphael* to enter the port of Samouco in Mozambique. On the 9th another sudden fight took place against the Suris, in which the Portuguese captured a slaving fleet of 12 dhows and liberated about 725 slaves sold to them by the local Agent, and the Shaikh of Samouco, Mapuito Muno, and imprisoned about 150 of the Arabs who were Omani subjects.<sup>48</sup>

***i. The reaction to the incident in Oman***

This news reached Muscat while the Political Agent Major P. Z. Cox was on tour in the interior of Oman accompanied by Rashid b. Uzaiz, the Sultan's representative. In March 1902, Sultan Faisal sent his delegation with a letter to Zizwa, where the Agent was at that time, informing him about the incident.<sup>49</sup>

The incident sufficiently proved to the Agent the continuation of the traffic in slavery by the Omanis, which seemed to be carried out by organised groups of the Sultan's subjects from Sur and the Batinah coast, who were considered as the distributing slavers in the area. Meanwhile news of this incident reached Sur causing great sorrow and shock, and the relatives of the captives urgently communicated with the Sultan asking him for his help in this matter while the captives themselves wrote to their families describing their situation.

The position of the captives was seriously affected by the bad treatment of their captors. On 29th April 1902 one of these captives wrote to his father, describing the situation and the captives' feelings~ He informed him that the Portuguese had looted all the property belonging to the captives and burnt their boats, and the natives of the port of Samouco had assisted the captives, while there was no way of escape either by land or sea, and all those people, about 120 men, were now kept as prisoners by the Portuguese authorities in Mozambique.<sup>50</sup>

In continuing to raise this question, Abdullah b. Abdul Rahman Assanani a native of Sur who had two sons in captivity, wrote again on 15th August 1902 to Sultan Faisal b. Turki, begging the Sultan's assistance in this problem. He requested the Sultan's action, and urged him to find a possible solution, or any way which could help to release the prisoners, by asking the

British Political Agent at Muscat, Major P.Z. Cox, to offer some support in this problem.<sup>51</sup> Sultan Faisal accordingly communicated the situation to the Agent, who instantly addressed the Government of India with the Sultan's request in the matter.<sup>52</sup>

The Arabs among the Sultan's subjects who were now under Portuguese detention had been found guilty of involvement in slavery, and were divided into two parties. One group were those who had been captured at Samouco Bay on 9th March 1902, by the Portuguese Cruisers *San Raphael*, *Libral* and *Chaimite*. The second were those who had been captured on board the dhow *Fath Assalam* which had been anchored a short distance from the post of the Commandant of the district of Momma, and had been accused of being engaged in dealing in slavery. No slaves, however, were said to have been found on board this craft.<sup>53</sup> The crew were immediately brought to trial, and on 18th May 1902 were sentenced to 17 years transportation and sent to Angola; their dhow was destroyed, as were those which had been captured at Somouco Bay, by order of the authorities in Mozambique.<sup>54</sup> Of the 114 persons who were captured in March 1902, eleven had managed to escape before the trial, and the rest of the prisoners reached Mozambique for trial on 11th March 1902. On 7th September 1903 they were brought to trial and sentenced to 25 years transportation, the finding of the Court being confirmed on the 3rd October of the same year.<sup>55</sup>

The Political Agent and Consul was in a position to supply the Government of India with confidential information about the issue and the attitude of Muscat's Government towards the matter. The Agent had been forwarding any necessary news on the subject of the continuation of the illicit trade in African slaves by the Sultan's subjects at Sur and the Batinah coast.

#### ***ii. The British attitude towards the incident***

On August 29th 1902 Major Cox sent a confidential report to the British Political Resident in the Gulf Lt. Col. C. A. Kernball, referring to the participation of the Sultan's subjects in this prohibited trade. In his report the Agent mentioned that the trade in Oman had been flourishing and there was no practical reduction in the annual consignments of people being shipped from East Africa to Sur and its near neighbours, while the markets in Arabia and the Persian Gulf ports were awaiting their supply of

human trade.<sup>56</sup> The Agent had based his certainty on strong grounds, since the number of slaves who presented themselves to the Consul requesting him for freedom showed no sign of decrease. He also confirmed that his views on this allegation were based upon the recent incident between the Sultan's subjects and the Portuguese cruisers in Mozambique, as a fresh indication supporting his contention that the reputation of the people of Sur at this time was against his desire.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time the Sultan of Muscat's attitude towards the traffic in slaves was completely hostile, and he loyally strove to fulfil his obligations in the matter, in genuine cooperation with the British Consul at Muscat, and in the grant of freedom papers wherever possible to those who applied for them at the Agency.<sup>58</sup> However, Sultan Faisal was unable to take strong action against the continuation of the traffic in his dominions in general, as it would involve him in powerful confrontation with his people who had already caused him many troubles related to this issue among others.<sup>59</sup> Sultan Faisal had not intervened as he knew that most of these activities were being carried out under the protection of the French colours, so he preferred at this stage to leave the whole issue of the traffic under British consideration, and not to involve himself in trouble with the French without British political commitment. In fact the Sultan then realised that his relations with the British would be seriously affected if he did not find a reasonable solution with the French Government.<sup>60</sup>

The Political Agent encouraged the Sultan to persevere in keeping a strong influence over his subjects at Sur, and respecting his obligations to the British' Government to bring this trade under control, as was their desire. As a result, the direct communication between the Government of India and the Political Agent at Muscat in this regard had shown the Sultan that the Consul's advice was not a personal opinion on the part of the Political Agent, but it was the British Government's wishes which he would be ill-advised to ignore.<sup>61</sup> Despite the British feeling that the Sultan unable and disinclined to take direct action against the Suri people, and compel them to comply with the regulation of ceasing the traffic in slaves, they responded positively to his request to follow up the situation of his captive subjects in Mozambique and exercised some effort to release them.<sup>62</sup> The communication between Muscat and the Government of India,

and the Foreign Office in London and the British Consul at Lisbon, gave great attention towards the matter.

On 4th May 1903 the Political Agent and Consul at Muscat forwarded a copy of a letter, dated 17th March 1903, received by him from the British Vice-Consul at Mozambique on the subject of the capture of the Sultan's subjects. The Agent added that the list of the slavers which the Vice-Consul enclosed showed that all the men were the Sultan's subjects, and most of them were natives of Sur.<sup>63</sup> With reference to this news the Political Agent suggested to the British Government, who approved his suggestion, that if there were be any possibility of transporting the captive men to Muscat, it would be in a British man-of-war and they should be formally handed over to the Sultan.<sup>64</sup> This problem gave great trouble to the British Government, and placed them in a position in which they acted against their policy towards the suppression of the Slave Trade, merely to confirm to the Sultan their interest in remaining on good terms with him. They found this situation very embarrassing when trying to exercise any real pressure upon the Portuguese Authorities to release the Sultan's subjects, or to send them to Muscat.

### *iii. The Sultan's unsuccessful request*

Though the British were unsuccessful in their efforts in this matter, the Sultan anxiously followed the situation through the British Agency at Muscat, as it seemed that he was looking for information whether the British were still maintaining their efforts on the issue or had ceased. On June 1st 1903 the Sultan wrote to the British Agent, asking him for news about the captives' difficulties and their release, and the possibility of bringing them home on board a British vessel.<sup>65</sup> On 19th November 1903 Sultan Faisal discussed the problem with the Viceroy-General of India, Lord Curzon, in a private meeting during Curzon's visit to Oman.<sup>66</sup> The Sultan asked for mercy to be shown to the Suri captives in Mozambique, who now faced a long sentence in the south east of Africa away from their families, which seemed very harsh. The Sultan mentioned that most of them were ill and that about 30 men had already died in Mozambique hospitals, and it would be better for the rest to be killed than to be kept in prison. The Viceroy did not wish to discuss this issue and told the Sultan that the case was one of slave raiding of the worst type, and it would be hopeless to move at present.<sup>67</sup>

The Sultan requested resolution of the matter, and British assistance was given in raising the issue of the transportation of the Sultan's subjects, but the situation was now under Portuguese control, while the British remained only mediators .

The fact the Foreign Office in London itself became involved in this matter directly, and instructed His Majesty's Consulate at Beira to obtain the necessary information for a report on the capture, trial, and sentencing on the Omani captives.<sup>68</sup> The British Consul in Lisbon was also instructed by the Foreign Office on 25th October 1902 regarding the problem. In that communication the Consul sent the information required, concerning the number of raiders killed and captured by the Portuguese Naval Division off the Mozambique Coast, and all information available from the Portuguese Foreign Office, such as the names of the captives and those killed in both incidents of 1902.<sup>69</sup> He confirmed that at Moma Bay, 17 Arabs were captured, two of whom died at the military hospital of Mozambique, and one was released on 14th September 1903.<sup>70</sup> At Samouco Bay, 106 persons were captured, 11 of whom then died in the hospital, and two were liberated on 9th March 1903; about 55 were killed in the fight at Somouco Bay.<sup>71</sup>

The British could do nothing to liberate all of the Sultan's raiders, and in July 1904, Major Cox informed the Sultan that the rest of his subjects in Mozambique had had their sentences confirmed by the portuguese Court at 25 years imprisonment, which was derived from the provisions of Article No.162 of the Portuguese Penal Code.<sup>72</sup> Sultan Faisal received this news with calmness, and thanked the Agent for the British efforts.<sup>73</sup>

The importation of East African slaves to Oman still continued, with re-exportation to many other ports on the Gulf by the Omanis and other people in the region. Sir Rennell Rodd, the British Consul-General at Zanzibar, estimated that no less than one-third of the dhows carrying human cargoes from Africa sailed under the protection of French colours and papers, though the Sultan of Zanzibar strictly warned his subjects against using them.<sup>74</sup> This traffic by the Suris proceeded from the early 1840s, and appeared as a big problem during the last decade of the 19th century which placed great pressure on the Anglo-French relationship. This led to an international crisis between the two



countries during the early years of the twentieth century. The issue was very serious, and important enough to draw Britain and France close to conflict in Oman.

### **Footnotes**

1. Parliamentary Papers. Slave Trade. vol. lxii, 1874. C. 887.
2. Article No.4 in this Treaty stated that Natives of Indian States under British protection shall, from and after a date to be fixed, and hence after fixed, be prohibited from possessing slaves, and in the meanwhile from acquiring any fresh slaves. This Article's instructions towards the Indian British Natives clearly informed those of East African residence and those residing in Oman that they could not preserve their activities through the dominion of the Sultan of Oman, and legally would face condemnation and punishment. Records of Oman 1867-1947. vol. Vi p.401; See also the Parliamentary papers. "Slave Trade." vol. lxii 1874. C. 887
3. Parliamentary Papers. "Slave Trade". vol. lxii 1874. C. 887.
4. Parliamentary Papers. "Slave Trade". Report from the Political Agent S. B. Miles to the Earl of Derby. Dated Muscat, 2nd October 1875. no. 91. vol. lxxi 1875.
5. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency, and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1874- 75, vol. I, pp. 5-6.
6. Parliamentary Papers. "Slave Trade". vol. lxxi. 1875; See also the Report of the PRPG, and MPA for the year 1873-74. vol. i p. 2.
7. By now the Sultan's relations with the British were very friendly as the latter eased the payment of the Zanzibar subsidy to him which from now onwards was paid regularly by them. Accordingly an absolute understanding between the Sultan and the Government of India reached a very advanced position, which marked the period of the Sultan's reign. The attitude to slavery was seriously affected by his strong involvement with the British who remained very sensitive on this question. The cessation of the trade on Omani soil had been confirmed, though it survived, one way or another, specially under the protection of French colours. On 9th January 1874 the Secretary to the Government of India stated to the Governor-General that the suppression of the slave-trade in Oman had strictly succeeded, but it had at some time been practices under! the Turkish flag. I. O. R. L/P&S/5/569. Letter to the Governor-General In Council. Dated 9th January. 1874; Martineau, J., The life and Correspondence of Sir Bartle Frere. vol. ii London; 1895 pp.100-103; Parliamentary Papers. "Slave Trade". Report of the Select Committee, no. 91. vol. lxxi 1875.
8. I. O. R. L/P&S/5/595. Secret Letter to the Governor-General in Council. Dated, 8th April 1873.
9. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Residency, and Muscat Political Agency, for the year 1875-76. vol. i, p.77.
10. Saldanha, Précis on Slave Trade. Simla; 1906 pp.35-36.
11. Ibid. p.36.
12. I. O. R. R/15/6/9. Letter from 8.8. Sayyid Turki b. Said Sultan of Muscat to the British Political Agent. Dated Muscat, 14th Dhal-Qadah 1293 (December 1876); See also I. O. R. R/15/6/9. Letter from the British Political Agent at

Muscat, Lt. Col. S.B. Miles, to H.H. the Sultan of Muscat. Dated Muscat, 20th December 1876.

13. I. O. R. R/15/6/9. Letter from H.H. Sayyid Turki b. Said Sultan of Muscat, to the British Political Agent and Consul at Muscat, S.B. Miles. Dated Muscat, 22nd December 1876.

14. Parliamentary Papers. "Slave Trade". Letter from Captain F. S. Clayton to the Political Agent at Muscat, Lt. Col. Miles. Dated, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1876. vol. lxxvii., November 1878. C. 2139.

15. Parliamentary Papers see the same volume. Letter from S. B. Miles, the PAM, to the Foreign Secretary the Earl of Derby. Dated, 24th November. 1876. C. 2139.

16. Ibid. See the same letter.

17. Lorimer, 1915, vol. i, p. 522

18. Administration Report of the PRPG and Muscat Political Agency, for the year 1876-77. vol. I p.78.

19. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Residency and Muscat Political Agency, for the year 1877-78. vol. i p. 129.

20. Saldanha, Précis on Slave Trade. p. 37. J

21. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1884-85. vol. iii p. 9; Saldanha, Précis on Slave Trade..p. 37; Lorimer, 1915, vol. i p. 2502.

22. Administration Report for the year 1884-85. p. 10.

23. Ibid. p. 10.

24. Saldanha, Précis on Slave Trade. p. 38.

25. F. O. 84/1707. Letter from the Captain of H.M.S. "Ranger" to the Political Agent at Muscat. Dated 15th September 1885.

26. F. O. 84/1707. Letters from Lt. Col. S.B. Miles, the Political Agent at Muscat, to Col. E. C. Ross, (PRPG). Dated Muscat, 27th September . and 12th October . 1885.

27. F. O. 84/1707. Letter from the PAM S. B. Miles to the PRPG Col. E.C. Ross. Dated Muscat. 24th November, 1885.

28. F. O. 84/1707. see the same letter

29. F. O. 84/17,07. the same letter. See also the Administration Report of the Persian Gulf and Muscat for the year 1885-86. vol. iii p. 9.

30. Ibid. See the same letter and the same Report. p. 9.

31. F. O. 84/1707. Letter from Commander H. W. Dowding, senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf; to Col. E.C. Ross, the British PRPG and Consul-General for Fars. Dated Basra, 11th November 1885.

32. Kelly 1968 p.413-14.

33. F. O. 84/1707. Letter from Lt. Col. S. B. Miles, the Political Agent and Consul at Muscat, to Col. E. C. Ross, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf and Consul-General for Fars. Dated Muscat, 7th December 1885.

34. F. O. 84/1707. Letter from Col. E. C. Ross the PRPG and Consul- General for Fars, to the Secretary to the Government of India, H. M. Durand. Dated Bushire, 19th December 1885.

35. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency, and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1886-87. vol. iii pp.9-10

36. Ibid. p. 10.

37. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1887-88. vol. iii p.14.
38. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Residency and Muscat Political Agency For the year 1889-90. vol. iii p. 21.
39. Saldanha, J. A. Précis on Slave Trade. pp. 44-45; See also Ingham, K., Short History of East Africa. London; 1962, p. 174; Russell, 1935, pp. 218-19.
40. Saldanha, J. A., Précis on Slave Trade. pp.45-46.
41. Ibid. p.46.
42. Ibid. p. 46.
43. Lorimer, 1915, vol. i. pp.2002-03.
44. Administration Reports of the Persian Gulf Residency and Muscat Political Agency, for the years 1899-1902. vol. v, 1899-1905.
45. F. O. 54/34. Report on the capture, trial, and sentence of certain Muscat Slavers by the Portuguese authorities at Mozambique.
46. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Residency and Muscat Political Agency, for the year 1902-03. vol. v. p.14.
47. F. O. 54/34. Report on the capture, trial, and sentence of certain Muscat Slavers by the Portuguese authorities at Mozambique; See also The Administration Report. vol. v, p. 14.
48. Cox, Sir P. "Some Excursions in Oman". G.J. vol. lxvi, no. 3. (1925), p.215; See also Graves, P., The life of Sir Percy Cox. London; 1945, p. 83.
49. He also named some of those captives, as the two sons of Abdullah b. Abdul Rahman Assanani, Mubarak and Nasir, Salih b. Abdullah, son of Salim b. Abdul Aziz, Muhammed b. Hamad, the son of Zaberi, the son of Shaikhhan, Mohammed b. Said al-Armashi, Yusuf b. Ali b. Abdullah, and many of men of the Janabah, the Bani-bu-Ali, and the Awamir and others from the Batinah Coast and Ras- al-Hadd. F. O. 54/34. Letter from Said b. Salih b. Ali al-Amri to his father Salih b. Ali. Dated Mozambique, 29th April 1902.
50. F. O. 54/34. Letter from Abdullah b. Abdul Rahman Assanani to H. H. Sultan Faisal b. Turki. Dated Sur, 15th August, 1902.
51. F. O. 54/34. Letters from the Political Agent and Consul at Muscat, Major P. 2. Cox, to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Dept. Dated Muscat, June and August 30th 1902.
52. F. O. 54/34. Report on the capture, trial, and sentences of certain Muscat Slavers by the Portuguese Authorities at Mozambique.
53. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report.
54. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report.
55. F. O. 54/34. Report from Major P. Z Cox, Consul and Political Agent at Muscat, to Lt. Col. C. A. Kemball, the PRPG. Dated Muscat, 29th August 1902.
56. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report.
57. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report
58. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report.
59. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report.
60. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report
61. F.O. 54/34. Telegram from the Secretary to the Government of India to the Political Agent and Consul at Muscat, Major Cox. Dated 3rd May 1903; See also the Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for the year 1904-05. vol. v, p. 18.

62. F. O. 54/34. Letter from the PAM, P.Z. Cox to the Secretary to the Government of India. Dated Muscat, 4th May, 1903.
63. F. O. 54/34. See the same letter.
64. F. O. 54/34. Letter from Sayyid Faisal b. Turki, the Sultan of Muscat, to the Political Agent and Consul at Muscat, Major P.Z. Cox. Dated Muscat, 1st June, 1903.
65. Mss. No.12593. Enclosure 7 to 15. Private interview between His Excellency the Viceroy and Sayyid Faisal b. Turki Sultan of Muscat, 19th November/ 1903. /
66. Mss. No.12593. See the same Enclosure.
67. F. O. 54/34. Letter from His Britannic Majesty's Consulate at Beira, to the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Office, London. Dated Beira (Mozambique), 7th October 1903.
68. F. O. 54/34. Report from the British Consulate at Lisbon to the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Office, London. Dated Lisbon, 1st November 1903.
69. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report.
70. F. O. 54/34. See the same Report.
71. Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency, for the year 1904-05. vol. v. p. 18; See also F. O. 54/34, letter from H. B. M. Consulate at Beira to the Foreign Office in London. Dated Beira, 7th October 1903.
72. (Records of the Government of India, vol. v. p.18)
73. (Records of the Government of India, vol. v. p.18)
74. Beachey, 1976, p. 238; See also Harris, J. E., *The African Presence in Asia*. Evanston; 1971, p. 60.

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