

REVIEW 2020

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY



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HM Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

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THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY



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FROM THE EDITOR

This has been a strange year! The major event of course was the death of our Patron, Sultan Qaboos, and the accession of Sultan Haitham. We mourn the one and celebrate the other, and include articles about both. COVID-19 is the other major factor. The Society Review is a magazine of record about our year – the lectures, reports on activities for which we awarded grants, our members and our organisation – all of which have been severely affected. This year's Review shows how admirably our staff and board have coped, working from home, to substitute for the lack of physical activity – lectures not given, activities postponed, grants not spent. We trust you will enjoy reading it all. The Chairman's Overview provides the scene-setter, and reminds us of the odd AGM which had the Trust Secretary and his wife as the physically present duo, the Chairman in his study, a panel of Trustees and Vice-Presidents on Zoom and 30 members somewhere in the ether. Thank you for attending – we hope to see you next July in Sackville Street for the AGM!

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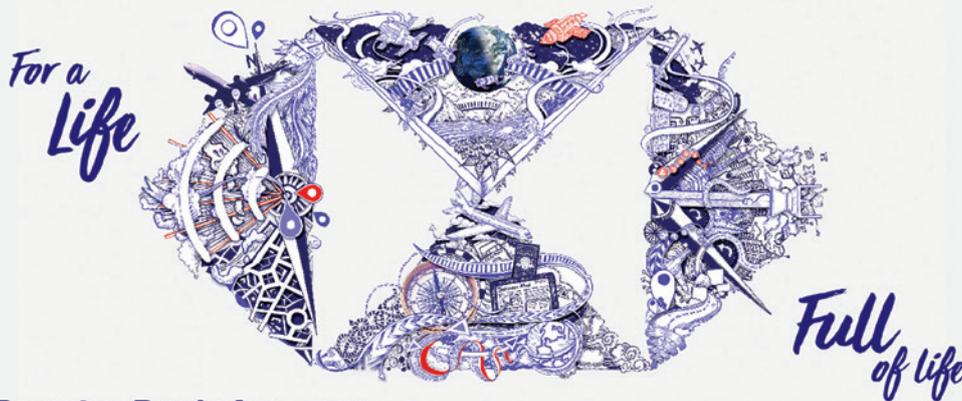
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HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK AL SAID KCVO

ARTICLE BY RICHARD MUIR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said succeeded his late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said in January.

The succession was in accordance with the Basic Law. On the death of Sultan Qaboos the Royal Family Council met and decided to ask the Defence Council to open his will. This happened immediately and in front of the television cameras. Sultan Qaboos' letter recommending His Highness Sayyid Haitham bin Tarik Al Said as successor was read out and shown to the public – the letter is now on display in the National Museum in Muscat.

Later the same morning, after the funeral of the late Sultan, His Majesty Sultan Haitham took the oath of office at the Oman Council in front of the Royal Family Council, the Defence Council, the Cabinet and members of both parliamentary houses. In his inaugural speech, after praising his predecessor's charismatic leadership and many achievements Sultan Haitham committed himself to preserve the many gains Sultan Qaboos had made and to build upon them both domestically and in foreign policy, the fundamentals of which he reaffirmed: peaceful co-existence with other nations,



good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for countries' sovereignty and for international cooperation.

Over the three days of condolences for Sultan Qaboos Sultan Haitham received delegations from Oman's friends and allies around the world including, on the first day in a demonstration of the particularly close British ties, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and the Chief of Defence Staff; the Foreign Secretary later visited in March.

Sultan Haitham was born in 1954, the son of Sayyid Tarik bin Taimur Al Said, the first cousin of Sultan Qaboos and Prime Minister between 1970 and 1972. Sayyid Haitham studied at Pembroke College, Oxford under Sir Geoffrey Arthur (who before retirement from the Diplomatic Service had served as the last Political Resident in the Gulf) and graduated from the Oxford Foreign Service Programme in 1979.

Sayyid Haitham was Undersecretary for Political Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1986 to 1994 before being appointed Secretary General of the Ministry with ministerial rank. In 2002 he was appointed Minister of Heritage and Culture and served in that role until his accession to the throne. As Minister he oversaw, among other cultural projects, the creation of the National Museum, opened in 2016 and now the Sultanate's flagship cultural institution.



Sayyid Haitham with four Ambassadors.

His Majesty is well known to many members of the Society for his close and informed interest in the bilateral relationship.



HRH Sayyid Haitham bin Tarik Al Said presents Richard Muir (then Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society) with the Order of Na'aman (1st Class).

Sayyid Haitham was active on many other fronts. In the early 1980s he became the first head of the Oman Football Association and subsequently maintained his interest in sport; successive British Ambassadors remember his captancy of a distinguished amateur Omani cricket team that took on a British community team each year. In 2003 he chaired the national census committee. In 2016 he was appointed chairman of the committee overseeing the 'Vision 2040' project, the key to the Sultanate's future economic development. He frequently welcomed senior visitors on behalf of Sultan Qaboos including in 2016 TRHs The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall.

Sayyid Haitham also had experience of business and in 2003 became Patron of the Oman British Friendship Association (OBFA); in that capacity he led OBFA's annual business delegations to the UK for events held jointly with the Oman British Business Council to promote trade and investment between the two countries.

These brought him regularly to the Society's headquarters in Sackville Street. His Majesty is consequently well known to many members of the Society for his close and informed interest in the bilateral relationship. ■



Sayyid Haitham addresses the Oman British Friendship Association and the Oman British Business Council at 34 Sackville Street.



The Anglo-Omani Society in 2020

CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW

REPORT GIVEN BY SOCIETY CHAIRMAN, STUART LAING, AT THE AGM

We have heard the word 'unprecedented' a number of times in the last few months, but I make no apology for repeating it now.

Never before have we been driven to holding the Society's AGM by a virtual method, with only two real people – our Secretary and his wife – in the room where the meeting was technically held, and with all other participating members in their homes or elsewhere. I thank all who made these unusual efforts to attend, and I regretted that I was not able to hear the loud applause with which I'm sure my report to the AGM – similar to this in in all but very minor respects – would have been greeted!

More seriously, I do hope that all of our members remain in good health. We have all suffered, to varying degrees, by the Covid-19 lockdown; for some of us the inconveniences have been minor, for others the problems have been more grave. As restrictions are lifted, I hope that all

members will emerge with renewed optimism about the future of both the UK and Oman – while realising that that future will not be the 'normal' of the past, but a new 'normal' in many respects.

The second half of the year under review has of course been radically impacted by the constraints imposed as a result of Covid-19. Before these constraints took effect, Society activities continued with their usual energy, while at the same time undergoing important changes. The main single event during that period was, of course, the death of HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said in January, which affected all of us deeply. Institutionally, the Society was deeply saddened by the passing of a remarkable national leader, one who had contributed substantially and continuously to the friendship between Oman and the

UK, and a Ruler who had been a major benefactor both to the Society itself and to a number of British and other organisations. At the individual level, some of us had been privileged to know His late Majesty personally, and had come to admire his extraordinary characteristics of wisdom, generosity and kindness. We have sent our greetings to HM Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and we now give our warmest good wishes to him for the success of his reign, as well as our hopes for good outcomes for the Omani people as they face the challenges of the changed circumstances post-Covid-19.

We record also with sadness the death of Dr Noel Guckian, formerly Chairman of the Society and also a former Ambassador in Muscat. He was a widower, having sadly lost his wife Lorna a few years ago. We send our sincere condolences to their children.

Although now it seems a different world, I should like to recall the Society's events of autumn 2019. We enjoyed an excellent annual lunch in October, and we were delighted to welcome Dr Abdullah al-Harrasi, Head of Oman Radio and Television, and the Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP as our Omani and British guests of honour respectively. 120 members and their guests enjoyed a fine meal, and the opportunity to meet up again with old friends. Our thanks go to Geoffrey Brindle

for stepping in to oversee the arrangements for the lunch, held once again in the RAF Club.

Our lecture programme resumed in the autumn, and we began, on an experimental basis, to hold some of our lectures at lunch time. This was in response to requests received from some members, who encountered transportation problems – for example the slowness and scarcity of late evening trains – in attending lectures in the evening. Attendance at these lunch-time lectures varied. Were it not for the suspension of lectures in 34 Sackville Street as a result of Covid-19, we would probably have continued the experiment a little longer, to see if a pattern would be established. As it is, as restrictions on gatherings are gradually lifted, we shall have to take a radical new look at our lecture programme. Our lectures have in the past been a very successful part of our activities, but I suspect that in an age of social distancing we are going to have to develop new ways of bringing together the skills and experience of our lecturers and the enthusiasm of our members to hear them.

The Society's other activities continued with customary energy. These included the scheme for giving young students on their gap year before university the opportunity to work as assistant teachers in the Sultan's School in Muscat, the language training

programme for students of Arabic to study at the institute at Manah near Nizwa, and the various activities of the New Generation Group (NGG). We particularly value the need to look forward as well as to the past, and to spread mutual understanding of our two countries among the up-and-coming members of our communities. I extend special thanks to our Trustees Ollie Blake and Ma'an al-Rawahi for their efforts with the NGG, and to Lissie Simpson whom a few months ago we welcomed on to the Board of Trustees. Lissie has worked hard for the New Generation Group for some years, particularly in organising the exchange visits of NGG delegations. Through the year the Trustees have been keen to integrate the NGG into the mainstream of the Society, in order to avoid any arbitrary distinction between our 'mature' and our younger members, and also from a belief that senior members enjoy participating in events organised under NGG auspices, and indeed vice versa.

Autumn of last year also saw a couple of innovations. We were grateful to Matthew Wright, a British Loan Service Officer in Oman, for organising in September a talk and reception in Salalah, the first time the Society has had an event in Dhofar. We also supported an exhibition of artwork created by Violet Astor, entitled 'Wild



Under the Companies Act, Covid Rules and the Society's Constitution, there had to be two members together to form the meeting - and that was our Secretary and his wife at home: (Alan and Susan Milne screenshot).



Oman', in Muscat in November. The Trustees have considered whether to build a stronger presence in Oman itself, and concluded that we should remain in essence a London-based society, while we do not exclude future events in Oman if opportunities present themselves. In any case, there is already in Oman the Oman-Britain Friendship Association, OBFA, to which I shall return in a few minutes.

The other innovation was to hold two events outside London, to add to our usual support for Omani students' events at British universities. One was a very successful photograph exhibition held in the Archers' Hall in Edinburgh, in October, the first time the Society has operated north of the Border. The other was when a small group of Society staff and members were guests at the HQ of Aston Martin, to see a Formula 1 car to be driven by the Omani driver Ahmed al-Harhi. All power to Omani petrol-heads! While maintaining our London base, as I have just said, I hope that we shall be able in future to stage events elsewhere in the UK, responding to requests from some of our members outside the capital.

Our grants programme continued to be a central plank in our platform. Through it we have supported a wide range of projects, many of them related to natural history research. We are particularly proud to support, through the grants programme, an annual lecture at the Royal Geographical Society on an Omani theme – the 2019 lecture being on the Oman Botanic Gardens. As you would expect, not all grant-winners

have been able to spend their allocation so far this year, but I should still like to encourage people to bid for money for activities which contribute to our charitable objectives

Before I move on from 2019, I must mention our website. Last year I reported that we were on the verge of completing a total overhaul of our website, with consequential changes for our system of registering and paying for membership, booking places for lectures, and so on. I am delighted to report now that the new website, ao-soc.org, was launched in November, and members – over 700 in fact – have responded well to the requests to move over to the new Direct Debit system for paying subscriptions. If you haven't registered your membership online, or if you know a fellow-member who hasn't, please do so, since otherwise we can't communicate with you electronically – and you'll miss these lovely online activities that we now offer!

Everything of course changed in March. Our gap year students had to come home, the lecture programme was put on hold, and plans that we were developing for a photo exhibition to mark 50 years since the 'Renaissance' of 1970 have also had to be placed for the moment on a back shelf. However, Trustees and the Society's staff were determined that the Society itself should not go into cold storage. We have moved swiftly into the world of Zoom, Teams, and other uses of the internet and online platforms. When lockdown began, we had already started Arabic language courses in 34 Sackville Street, and these have flourished in the Zoom configuration, in fact

with student numbers, and the choice of courses, growing significantly. We have held two webinars under NGG auspices, and two others on political/economic themes. We have introduced podcast interviews, and the online 'Insight' articles, as well as the OBBC's 'Spotlight' items. As a new activity which can both be easily managed online and will help us – we hope – engage further with young people interested in Oman, we have arranged an essay competition for sixth-form pupils, in partnership with the online publication Arab Digest.

The close relationship between the Society and the business-oriented Oman-Britain Business Council, the OBBC, and its counterpart the Oman-Britain Friendship Association, OBFA, based in Muscat, has been strengthened during the past year. A joint seminar took place in July followed by a reception at 34 Sackville Street which was attended by His Highness, now His Majesty, Sayyid Haitham bin Tarik. We have introduced a system which automatically links corporate membership of the Society with membership of the OBBC, and we are in contact with leading members of OBFA in order to ensure that future activities in the Oman-Britain business sector respond effectively to the needs of young entrepreneurs in the changed circumstances which the private sector will face post-Covid-19.

More generally, as we think about what will be the new 'normal', Trustees are still considering how the future will look for our Society. I suspect it will be some time –

probably only when an effective vaccine is demonstrated and in widespread use – before it will be possible to resume lectures, Arabic classes in 34 Sackville Street, and similar gatherings. Even when we do, perhaps fewer members will want to attend. Probably we shall have to introduce hybrid methods of operation, combining online 'virtual' attendance with actual, though distanced, presence. Travel to and from Oman is likely to be more difficult and more expensive, and this will have implications for our gap year and Arabic students' programmes, and for those researchers who apply for assistance from our grant programme. We shall keep members informed as we reach conclusions for the next steps as government rules and guidance develop.

Our Trustees and staff have seen several personnel changes during the year. After a number of years' service, Louise Hosking retired from the Board at the end of last October. A Trustee since 2013, Louise had been managing the lecture programme for five years, and had done so with great success – witness both the long list of distinguished and interesting lecturers, and the full room in 34 Sackville Street on most of those occasions. At the end of today's AGM we shall say goodbye – from the Board, but not I hope from membership of the Society – to Richard Owens, Ian Kendrick and Matthew Foster. Matt has been a Trustee since 2017. He helped set up the Oman Britain Business Council, and has taken care of its link with the Society. His company has now taken him to work in Qatar. We thank him for his contribution. Ian Kendrick will I am sure be known to many, perhaps all of you, having been a Trustee since 2011, and a major contributor to the Society's activities, including the organisation of lectures and events from 2012 to 2014, and the Society's

library. We particularly thank him now, since he has just completed a history of the Society, which will be published as an Annex to this year's Review, of which he was also formerly editor, and has embarked on a programme for digitising our library collection. As for Richard Owens, it is hard to find words of adequate appreciation. He was a founder-member of the Society, when it started in 1976, having first come to Oman in 1973. He lived in Oman for about ten years from 1985, and rejoined the Society's Committee when he returned to London in 1996; and he has been on the Committee, and then the Board of Trustees, ever since. He was Hon Secretary from 1998 till 2008, making him the longest-serving Hon Sec. And this was at a time when the Society had no paid employees, so all the activities were organised by Officers. In addition to arranging major events, including those attended by royalty, Richard supervised significant developments in the Society, including the move to our present HQ in Sackville Street, the start of the website, the registration as a company, the start of the annual Review, the creation of the NGG, and the growth of the annual lunches. He also played a major rôle in 2013-15, when the Society operated with a Management Committee following the unexpected resignation of the then Chairman. In recent years his work as chairman of the Grants Sub-Committee has been invaluable. Richard, we salute you and we thank you.

In anticipation of these departures, we have recruited four new members on to the Board of Trustees: Scott Dickson, Jane Kinninmont, Debbie Martin and Lissie Simpson. I pay tribute to all our Trustees, each of whom actively supervises a particular portfolio of the Society's operations.

And I pay tribute too to our loyal and hard-working staff, in particular for the way that they have adapted to the current circumstances of working from home and handling the Society's new online presence. I know I should not pick out individual skills, but how I appreciate Nick's calm efficiency, and Dina's dulcet tones as she introduces the week's podcast! Nick joined us last October, and instantly, it seems, found his feet in managing the office. Dina has been in the office a few months longer, and her competence – primarily with the NGG, but now in all spheres – is much appreciated. Backing them up have been Clara Bamberger, Events Officer from February till September last year, and a number of interns: Callum Printsmith, Zahra Beg, Hamza al-Lamki and Sarika Breeze (the latter two still with us), whose contribution has also been very valuable. Our thanks go to them all.

This report has been longer than usual, mainly because we have unusual circumstances to deal with. I thank you for your patience. For many of us the future is uncertain. But I am confident that the Society has the resilience to meet present challenges. I wish you all good health and happiness. ■

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY GRATEFULLY
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2020 ANNUAL LUNCHEON

The annual luncheon which was due to take place on 18 September has been cancelled because of the continuing restrictions on such social events. This was due to take place at the Cavalry and Guards Club in Piccadilly; the move next door from the RAF Club was to take advantage of a larger function room following the sell-out last year and the expectation of demand for places in a significant anniversary year. The annual luncheon is an important occasion as it enables senior Omani and British Government and private individuals to meet in a relaxed atmosphere, members to meet the Board and staff and – perhaps best of all – enables young members from both nations to meet very senior people from the other country to their mutual benefit.

SOCIETY TRUSTEES: AVE ATQUE VALE

A quarter of the board of Trustees of the Society changed over the past year. We welcome the newcomers, brief biographies and pictures of whom appear here, and say farewell – but not goodbye – to Richard Owens, Ian Kendrick, Louise Hosking and Matt Foster.

The retiring trustees have given long and valuable service, spending impressive amounts of time, talent and effort, which is deeply appreciated by the trustee body including the vice-presidents, and we feel sure by the membership. Their pictures appear elsewhere in the Review, alongside articles on their particular responsibilities.

Two notable collective changes are a considerable drop in the average age of trustees and a real shift in the

gender balance towards the feminine! A further change is from trustees who spent years in the Sultanate, grew to love it and its people, and joined the Society on return, to the new trustees who have gained their own commitment by a variety of means. We regard this as a real measure of our success in achieving one of the Society's main objectives of increasing the knowledge, understanding and friendship of British nationals for the Sultanate.



LISSIE SIMPSON

Elisabeth is a Relationship Manager in the Private and Business Banking team at Cynergy Bank, where she looks after the financial affairs of high net-worth clients. She graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a 1st class Masters Degree in Islamic Studies. Prior to her current position, Elisabeth was a Client Banking Manager in the Middle East team at Coutts & Co. Elisabeth heads up the New Generation Group UK and has been involved with The Anglo-Omani Society since 2014.



DEBBIE MARTIN

Debbie is a freelance film-maker and first travelled to Oman in 2006 when she was sent on assignment for 'Blue Peter'. She immediately fell in love with the country and has subsequently returned on several occasions. She has since gone on to learn Arabic (a work in progress!) and that first visit to Oman inspired a lasting love of the region.

She makes programmes for BBC Television, and has travelled, studied and filmed in many countries. But of all the places she has visited – Oman remains one of her favourites.



SCOTT DICKSON

Scott is a commercial and infrastructure lawyer by background. He studied law at Glasgow and St John's College, Oxford, stood for parliament in the 1997 general election for the Conservatives in Scotland, taught international private law at Edinburgh and then practised as a lawyer in Edinburgh and the city of London. He is currently a project director in the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) in the UK Government, based in London. When Scott was a partner in a City law firm he specialised in project finance and infrastructure in the UK and the Middle East – and fell in love with Oman when he advised the Government of the Sultanate of Oman on its power and water projects.

JANE KINNINMONT

Jane Kinninmont is the Head of Programmes at The Elders in 2018, focussing on conflict countries and regions. Previously she was senior research fellow and deputy head of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Policy Research Institute Chatham House, where she developed and led projects on issues including the dynamics of change in Gulf countries, the political economy of the Arab uprisings, post-invasion Iraq, the politics of sectarianism, and trends in regional geopolitics in an increasingly multipolar world. Before that, she worked as a political analyst and economic forecaster specialising in the Middle East and Africa, with roles including Associate Director for MEA at the Economist Group, Senior Editor/Economist at the Economist Intelligence Unit, and Managing Editor for MEA at Business Monitor International.

Jane has provided strategic advice for a wide variety of governments and companies, and has written for The Economist, FT, Guardian, Prospect, Newsweek, BBC and many others. She has a BA from Oxford University and an MSc from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

Jane is also a published poet and in another life she would like to write novels. She has two lovely daughters.



MANAGER'S MESSAGE ABOUT PODCASTS

The first series of the Anglo-Omani Society podcasts ended in July and the next series will begin in September. Thank you to all of our listeners, we've loved sharing such topical, momentous and inspiring conversations with you and we can't wait to bring you more in the Autumn! This series included conversations about Ultra Marathon Runner Eoin Keith, the Life of Sultan Qaboos, Observations on Omani-Yemeni Relations, Omani Gastronomy, Wildlife, Conservation & Art with Violet Astor, Mental Health in Oman, Mark Evans' Reflections on Quarantine, the Life of Dr Jayakar, Omani Fashion, Entrepreneurs in Oman, Growing Conservation, Becoming Omani, Agritecture & Sustainable Farming, Sir Ranulph Fiennes' Time in SAF & Quest for the Lost City and being an Expat in MENA.

If you've missed any episodes, head to Apple, Spotify and Google Podcasts to tune in – and don't forget to leave us a review!

COVID-19: CRISIS OR OPPORTUNITY?

ARTICLE BY NICK SMITH, SOCIETY MANAGER

In line with government regulations, the office team enacted a working from home policy in late March and we had to postpone all of our physical events at the Society.

However, as they say, *'in crisis, there is opportunity'* and we have wholeheartedly embraced this philosophy.

The pandemic has resulted in an unparalleled digital transformation: Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Webinars have crept into the vernacular and even the technophobes amongst us have become fluent in the new digital world in which we have found ourselves.

As a Society dedicated to promoting bilateral exchange between our two great countries, it has presented a phenomenal opportunity to bridge the geography between us. Muscat to London, once an eight-hour flight, is now at the click of a button. Our living rooms are now lecture theatres, conference halls and boardrooms. As a Society, our Members have always been our lifeblood and in our first 'COVID-19' brainstorm, we asked ourselves the question *'How do we project a virtual Sackville Street to Muttrah, the Home Counties and the Highlands?'*

Firstly, we migrated our Arabic Language School from London to Zoom. Three physical classes a week soon became eight on-line courses, 30 students to nearly 100, with students dialling in from Bristol to Cork to Germany.

We kicked off a Podcast series, available on all platforms, interviewing a host of fascinating characters from fashion designers to venture capitalists, chefs and explorers. We hit our first milestone, the 1000th download, in early May.

Webinars, both from AOS and NGG, respectively led by Society Vice-President Richard Muir and Head of NGG Oman Alghaith Al Harthy, have all had capacity audiences with esteemed panellists from both Oman and the UK. Rising above the noise, we have hosted deep dives into Oman's domestic policy in a low oil price world, regional geopolitics and innovation in the energy sector to name just a few.

We launched a new Insight series – essentially a Review article each week. We've had articles from members of the Majlis, Royal Opera House musicians and anthropologists. Our next series will focus on *'Omani Adventurers and Sports Stars'* and I can guarantee it'll reawaken the post-pandemic wanderlust in all our readers.

Some examples of our Insight articles can be found over the next few pages. Please do sign up to the new website. We have an active weekly calendar of invitations, new content and Press digests straight to your inbox and we don't want you to miss out.

We kicked off a Podcast series, available on all platforms, interviewing a host of fascinating characters from fashion designers to venture capitalists, chefs and explorers. We hit our first milestone, the 1000th download, in early May.

Nick Smith

THE OMAN COUNCIL: HOW A VISIONARY LEADER INSTITUTIONALISED THE SHURA TRADITION

ARTICLE BY WAHEB AL SAADI

A SENIOR STAFFER AT THE SHURA COUNCIL (THE ELECTED HOUSE OF THE OMANI PARLIAMENT – THE OMAN COUNCIL).

The Society assisted him and colleagues to attend last year's Workshop for overseas parliamentarians at Wroxton College sponsored by the International Parliamentary Union and Hull University. Waheb writes here in his personal capacity.

This article shows how Sultan Qaboos developed the Omani parliament over his reign, rooting it in the long Omani tradition of Shura and drawing on wider democratic practice. The article calls for the development on the same lines of a better, more flexible and more responsive Omani parliamentary system. These ideas make a valuable contribution to the exchanges between the Oman Council and the Westminster parliament, which will hopefully resume before too long.

Parliamentary systems differ worldwide; practice and institutions vary according to the type of state, the structure of the society and its social composition. Oman

has a long tradition of interaction with other civilisations. Its location and resources have given it historical importance. This grew with Oman's expanding role in the Gulf region, its involvement with Africa and connections to the far reaches of Asia and the West. All this has contributed to the richness of Omani culture and Omanis' characteristic openness to others. It reflects Oman's legacy of traditions and customs based on Islam and on Shari'ah, which govern Omanis' behaviour and how they deal with each other.

This is the background to the development of the Omani parliamentary

system through the vision of the late Sultan Qaboos. It drew both on the nation's historic experience over the centuries and on its Islamic heritage to form a uniquely Omani parliamentary system based on the concept of "Shura".

What is the meaning and origin of "Shura", and what are its practices? Sultan Qaboos gave this a great deal of thought. There has been much debate in the West about the meaning of democracy. "Shura" can be seen as a parallel form of democracy in the Islamic world.

Both systems consider how the "people" can participate in the dialogue about the greater good of the state and at the same time prevent abuse of power and preserve rights and freedoms. "Shura" reflects the consultative principle present in Islam since the time of the Prophet, authenticated by the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunna (Aiena, 2014).

"So, [O Muhammad], pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]". (Ali'Imran, 159)



“And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend.” (Ash’Shuraa, 38)

Even if not systematically organized, the original concept of “Shura” ranked high in the activities of the first four caliphs of the “Rasheedun” Caliphate (Aiena, 2014). It formed a key element in the decision-making process and was based on free and public discussion.

Differences between “Shura” and democracy lie not only in the Islamic origins of “Shura”, but also in its practices which derive from the societies in which it evolved.

The Qur’an does not prescribe particular methods for carrying out consultation or for decision taking, nor does it prescribe any other aspect of these processes. Consequently in every age and in every country scholars have scope to work out the best solutions to meet the requirements of particular forms of rule.

Contemporary scholars have added three corollaries to the shura principle (Aiena, 2014):

Firstly, *Shura is a mandatory form of rule.*

Secondly, *Shura refers to the community as a whole and not a section thereof; women and other communities must be included.*

Thirdly, *Shura reposes on the rule of the majority, since it is evident that under the Prophet and the Right-guided caliphs the decisions were based on the opinions of “the overwhelming majority”.*

So, how does this introduction relate to our topic? Oman, the Sultanate, is part of the Islamic world, with a rich history of connections with the Arab world, Asia and Africa as well as with the West. Its Islamic nature is emphasized in its constitution, “The Basic Law of State” (Articles 1 and 2). This reflects the Omani people’s beliefs and practices, based on the teachings of Islam and the Shari’ah, and on the concept and values of “Shura”. Historically this has underlain their public deeds, such as the appointment of their leader (the Imam), as well as private acts, such as marriage.

But the creation of a democratic system which goes beyond customs and tradition, and is to be cast in binding legislation,

Sultan Qaboos, having come to the throne in 1970, built over the next 50 years the new and modern state of Oman. The idea of “Shura” was in his mind from the outset.

means institutionalising the “Shura” process. This requires a solid foundation of popular understanding to ensure healthy growth of the concept and its practices. Democracy “is not attained simply by making institutional changes; rather its success and survival depends on the values and beliefs of ordinary citizens” (Alsoudi, 2003).

Sultan Qaboos, having come to the throne in 1970, built over the next 50 years the new and modern state of Oman. The idea of “Shura” was in his mind from the outset. He shaped it as part of his vision of a modern state, drawing on his own ideas, thoughts, and experience. It can be seen developing during his famous annual tours all over Oman as he sought the ideal institutional structure for the country to be set out and implemented in law.

From the earliest days he used the terms “Shura”, and “Shura Council”. In an interview in 1971 with Al-Ahram newspaper he said:

“I will be the happiest person when the country’s situation allows the formation of the Shura Council... Our country, definitely, needs a Shura Council at the core of a “Shura-based system”; and this Council, in my view, should include representatives of the people, and it should be able to discuss all matters”.

But the preoccupation in the early 1970s was the need to bring stability, as the Sultan explained in the same interview. Stability was necessary for the development of the state’s governance and infrastructure to the point where they would support the emergence of democratic institutions. Stability was also

necessary to the creation through education and the media of a receptivity among the population to the concept of “Shura”.

The Sultan from the outset was thinking about and planning for the formation of an election-based institution for the representation of the people, the “Shura Council”. But he did not rush his plans. Too early an adoption of constitutional or parliamentary initiatives or reliance on foreign parliamentary and constitutional experts before Omanis were themselves ready to play a responsible part could have set the whole process back.

Sultan Qaboos understood from his deep personal experience the difficulties which Omani society confronted on the ground: poor infrastructure, health and education systems, and political movements of rebels and radical communists.

The state was struggling and had yet to secure the recognition of other states in the region. In addition, Omani society was seeing the light of freedom and moving towards such limited rights as outdoor lighting, entering Muscat (the capital) freely at night, and travelling between the “Wilayats” of Oman. Society was not yet ready to embrace living under the law in its modern sense.

I think all this shows that the Sultan understood the process of “modernization” as explained by Danial Lerner’s theory about the passing of traditional society in a series of stages and changed practices. It must take account of Lerner’s argument that “modernity is primarily a state of mind: expectation of progress, propensity to growth, readiness to adapt oneself to change” and that nations need to develop sets of “social processes - secularization, urbanization, industrialization, popular participation - by which this state of mind [comes] to prevail” (Lerner, 1968).

In the interview with Al Ahram in 1971 Sultan Qaboos said:

“I believe the constitution must be drawn up and based on experience. ... We cannot build the constitution based on the assumption that we live in a country, where one group of its people lives with the mentality of the twentieth century, and another lives with the mentality of the eighteenth century. And our experience during the coming stage will create for us the



appropriate atmosphere and the right basis for preparing and forming the constitution.

“It may be easy to issue a royal decree to establish the “Shura Council” tomorrow, but do you think it is possible to form the Shura Council in the way to which we aspire, under the current conditions of our people?”

Definitely: No! Therefore, I am seeking – first – to provide the atmosphere, which permits the formation of the righteous person, so that the outcomes of the election of the Shura Council is healthy, and the formation of the righteous person will only be achieved – as I mentioned with the scientific renaissance, which can provide us with the required numbers of competencies.”

As he said, it is important to take account of the capacity of the people, their readiness for change and the individual level of culture in society. It was not the Sultan’s intention just to take procedures and practices from other countries and to seek to implant them in Oman, rather it was to benefit from the experience of other countries.

A decade later, in 1981, came the first stage of implementation when the national Consultative Council was established by Royal Decree 81/1981. This was an advisory body which would give the government its views on economic and

A further decade passed as the State developed and the Sultan continued his policy of engaging citizens in formulating and reviewing national policy and legislation.

social development issues. The Council was formed of 45 members appointed by royal decree. They were drawn from the public sector, civil society, the private sector, and included representatives of the separate regions. Three years later the membership was increased to 55.

A further decade passed as the State developed and the Sultan continued his policy of engaging citizens in formulating and reviewing national policy and legislation. The membership of the Council was adjusted to reflect the new administrative regions. In 1991 a further

Royal Decree 94 / 1991 established a “Shura Council” with new responsibilities broadening its role in the legislative and political direction of the country. The Shura Council was given powers to review social and economic laws before their promulgation as well as to participate in the preparation of successive five year development plans. It began to review public services and utilities, welfare and social services, and to make recommendations for their improvement, developing a relationship with the government and its representatives – ministries, government agencies and public bodies. The Shura Council had 59 members with representation from each governorate. Women became eligible for election with two women elected in 1994 and two in 1997.

Following the promulgation in 1996 of the Omani constitution in Royal Decree 101/1996 “The Basic Law of State” a further Royal Decree 86/1997 established a second parliamentary chamber, the State Council. The aim was to “broaden the base of participation, in a way that benefits from the expertise of scholars and specialists, and contributes to the implementation of a comprehensive development strategy and service to the public good”. A further Royal

Decree then formally inaugurated the full Oman Council, a two chamber parliament with the elected Shura Council and the new Council of State whose members were appointed by Royal Decree for each five year session.

The relationship between the houses and their separate procedures and powers are set out in the 1997 Royal Decrees. Those of the Shura Council are essentially the same as set out in the 1991 legislation but with some new responsibilities for the Council and its Chairman and provisions for working jointly with the State Council.

As we have seen, the Omani parliamentary experience has evolved steadily over the years. This approach was reflected in the response of the Omani authorities to sudden new developments throughout the Arab world at the beginning of the second decade of the 2000s. Several measures, set out in Royal Decree 99/2011, contained amendments to the Basic Law with new provisions relating to the Oman Council in general, and to the Shura Council, the elected chamber, in particular.

The Royal Decree began with this introductory paragraph: "Believing in the importance of developing the Shura march in the country in the interest of the state and its citizens, and affirming the importance of participation by all members of society in the comprehensive development process, in line with what is needed to bring about its goals..."

This Decree sparked a new era for both chambers and especially for the Shura Council. The topics discussed, the parliamentary tools used in the exercise of parliamentary oversight of government actions, as well as the process of legislation and members' interaction with the people all contributed to the evolution of the Oman Council. It is now a decade since the last amendment to the Basic Law and it is clear that given all the experience that has accumulated of the advantages and disadvantages of the system it is time for a further review. This could open the way to a more effective parliamentary system, but still based on the Omani form of "Shura" which is already seen around the world as a proven democratic process led by Oman.

Not only was framing the constitutional framework and procedures for the Oman

Council important to Sultan Qaboos, but so too was instilling a culture of debate. He sought to ensure acceptance of the Council's authority as an integral part of the Shura-based State. To these ends he used his inaugural speech at each successive parliamentary session to set out themes for parliamentary debate as well as the foundations and principles on which this was to be based. Over the years he outlined a number of specific themes:

1. The need for a philosophy and set of values for the Shura process based on the customs, traditions and practices of Omani society.
2. The need to draw on aspects of Shura and its political application as experienced over Oman's long history.
3. Human development as a pillar of development.
4. The importance of the principles and tenets of the Sultanate's foreign policy.
5. The importance of the national role played by the Sultan's armed forces.
6. The importance of the role of the private sector in development.
7. The main features of the successive five-year development plans with a focus on vital sectors such as education.
8. A focus on the roles of specific sections of society, in particular women and youth.
9. The principles and values of the renaissance and the importance of expanding popular participation.

The Sultanate has a rich history of customs, traditions, and authentic practices which created a unique society and set of institutions. These were developed by people believing in the importance of taking full account of the Omani tradition while at the same time benefiting from the experience of Oman's allies and more widely from that of other societies.

The result is the creation of Omani institutions with democratic characteristics

but close to the Shura tradition. Today we need to continue to look to the Shura heritage while working to update our parliamentary institutions and practices. That requires a deep and comprehensive understanding of Oman's history and society so that we can develop a better, more flexible and more responsive parliamentary system.

It is also important to the process that we continue to compare our Shura system with parliamentary systems elsewhere that share the same Islamic principles, although they may differ in practice and procedure. We should also draw on the long and complex historic process which saw the development and institutionalisation of the concept of democracy.

Perhaps ultimately the future of our Shura institution will lie in the concept encapsulated by P. G. Thomas in 2009: "creating a more meaningful dialogue in the parliament, will depend more on changes to the intersecting cultures of the legislature, government and the public service than on organisational and procedural reforms to any of those institutions".

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MUSIC IN OMAN: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRACTICES

ARTICLE BY RAHMA AL KALBANI

There is no doubt that music was and remains an important element in Omani life, as a social practice and even as a diplomatic tool.

Classical music is rarely associated with Oman unless it is Arab music, and most musical arts are related to some form of dance and expressive movements, which are in harmony with the reason for this musical art.

Music has always expressed an Omani individual's joys and sorrows, home and travels, health and illness, and life and death. This explains the tremendous amount of Omani traditional music documented by the national project for preserving the Omani musical heritage. In this article, we offer a brief historical overview of the development of interest in Omani music at both the institutional and attention levels, and then we review a traditional Omani piece of music: the art of the "Al-Mawlid."

Oman possesses a musical heritage linked to its historical legacy, as many of the pieces of music that are known today have Omani roots, but they were formed through cultural contact with different

civilizations around the world. The government has preserved Oman's musical heritage through numerous national projects, government programmes (including education), and community initiatives. In addition to this, the community contributes to preserving Omani music through practice in social life or academic study, as well as working in the music field.

The first established musical band in Oman was in 1972 in Muscat, and a second was established in Salalah the following year. These were military musical bands and their members were mainly Omani boys between 14 and 16 years old. Then the formation of military bands progressed to include all the military sectors, so there were bands for the Royal Army, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy, the Royal Guard, and the Royal Oman Police. The last two sectors' musical bands are among the best in the world.



Formation of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra in 1985, the prominent opening of the Royal Opera House in 2010 and the opening of the House of Musical Arts in 2019, are among some of the initiatives undertaken in Oman.

In 1983, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said ordered the implementation of the traditional Omani musical heritage preservation project. Before this, Oman's traditional music was only preserved orally by its practitioners, so it was an important and dynamic project which continued until 1984. It was followed by the organising of the International Symposium of Omani Traditional Music in 1985. The importance of that symposium lies in introducing the Omani traditional music after its documentation. In the same year, the Oman Centre for Traditional Music established as a research reference, and a platform for national initiatives in the field of Omani traditional music.

Western music has been paid special attention in Oman for two reasons: the personal attachment of His Majesty the Sultan, and the role of music in building bridges of peace, cooperation, and in

welcoming others. There have been many initiatives in this regard, such as the formation of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra in 1985, the prominent opening of the Royal Opera House in 2010, and then the opening of the House of Musical Arts in 2019. The interest in Arab music was already wide-spread in Oman, and interrelated with the interest in Omani and Western music, as Arab music is an extension of cultural contact and common heritage. This can be noted in many musical compositions played by the Omani bands.

The establishment of these institutions and musical bands would not be nearly as significant without the presence of practitioners, who hold recognised degrees in practising music of all kinds. After a period of time, when practising music became widely accepted by Arabs and foreigners, Omanis started practising music. Music was then included in schools'

basic education curricula, and another leap was taken in the field of music when the Department of Music and Musical Sciences started its academic programme at Sultan Qaboos University in September 2008.

Community initiatives also had an important role, most notably the recognition of Oman Oud Hobbyist Association. Furthermore, the recent formation of the Ministry of Arts in 2019 is a sign of the completion of the musical institutional practice in Oman.

However, an important factor in the present and the future of music in Oman remains the audience, especially the Omani audience. In 2016, I conducted my Master's degree on the audience of Western classical music in Oman. The aim was to identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the Omani audience, and to be acquainted with the presence of the traditional Omani musical heritage in performances at one of the largest theatres in the Arab world, Oman's Royal Opera House. I was motivated to pursue this research because this particular field suffers from a severe shortage of research, if not neglect, by those studying the sociology of music.

Juma Al-Shidi is one of the Omani specialists and key researchers in Omani traditional Music. In January 2014 he wrote an article in the "Al-Watan" newspaper



The performance of “El-Haw’wimah” is sometimes accompanied by a tambourine percussion (a rhythmic instrument) at the beginning or end.

about “the art of Al-Mawlid”, a religious ritual and an art. The art of “Al-Mawlid” consists of repeating phrases that mention Allah and the prophetic praise in commemorating the noble Prophet’s birthday. “Al-Mawlid” means “the birth”, which was originally held to celebrate the birth of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The most famous in Oman is “Mawlid al-Hawamah” or “Arabian Mawlid”, as they call it to differentiate it from other types such as “al-Barzanji”, “al-Bahrani”, and “al-Badie”, which are names given to a specific type of religious folk art, usually spread in the north of Al-Batinah in Oman.

In “Mawlid al-Hawamah”, the group that performs this type of “Mawlid” is called a “circle” and consists of:

- the caliph: the head of the circle
- the caliph’s deputy: his representative in his absence
- “Al-Shawawsh”: informs the members of the “circle” about the place and the time of conducting “Al-Mawlid” and other related matters
- “El-Haw’wimah”: men who perform the movement.

The “Mawlid” art is performed as follows: two rows of men sit opposite each other and are “the readers” and “El-Haw’wimah”. During the performance, everyone in the readers’ row stands on their knees and leans on their sticks, swaying their bodies and heads right, left and forward, and they sit after singing each of the two verses of poetry. As for the movement of “El-Haw’wimah”, it is an overlapping and interconnected movement.

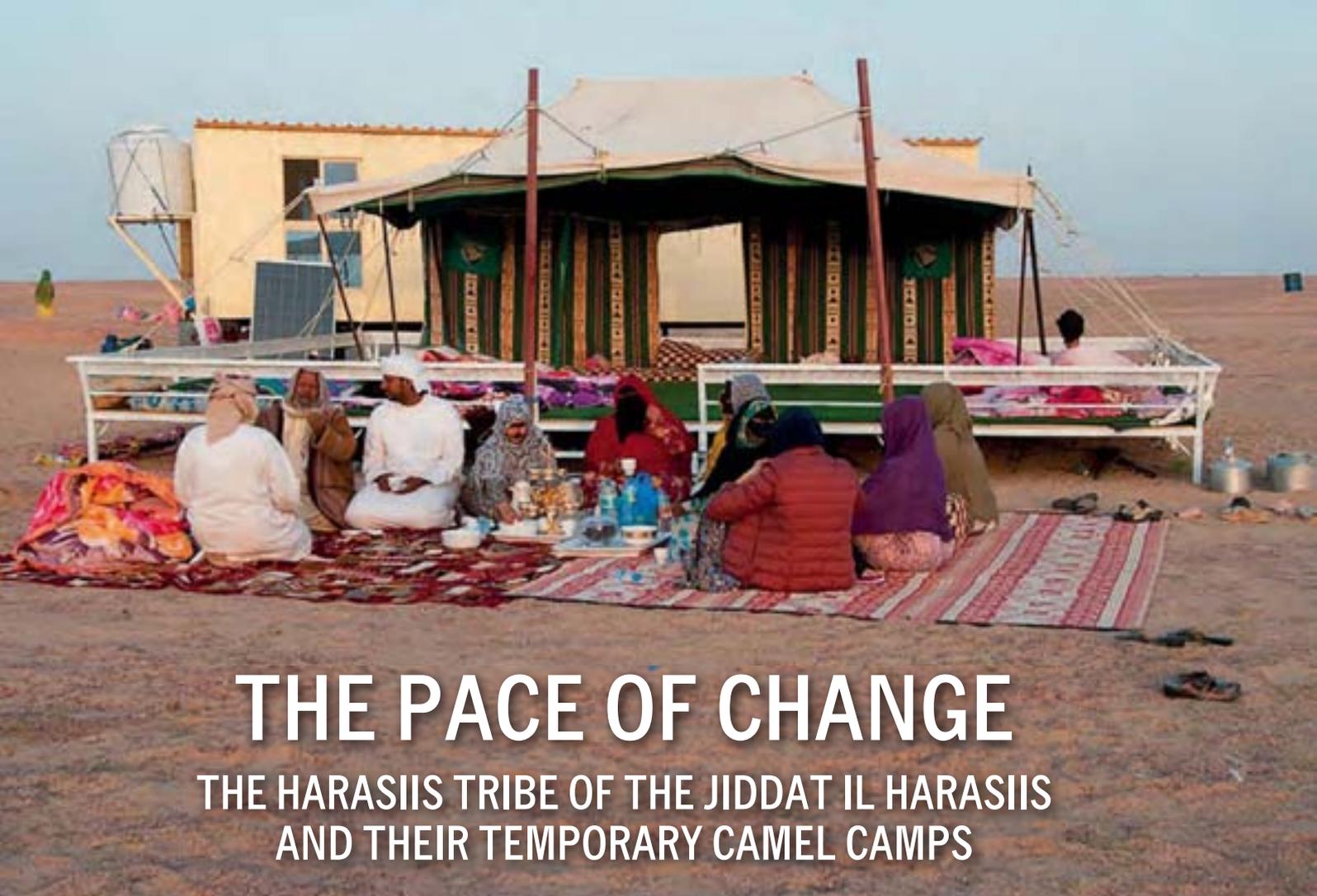
Each person wraps their left arm round the back and waist of the person sitting to his left, and the performers conduct a mixture of movements, such as swaying to the right and left, forward and backward, then prostrating, waving their hands, and hitting the ground or their chest and clapping. The performance of “El-Haw’wimah” is sometimes accompanied by a tambourine percussion (a rhythmic instrument) at the beginning or end.

In terms of the poems that are performed as part of this art, they are diverse, and include passages such as:

slu ealaa khayr al’anami, muhamad
min midarin ma nah waraq alhamam
ealaa ghusun alshajar ya min hawah
‘aqam fi mahjati waistaqara etfaan
ealaa almustaham bikum halif alsahr
damaei kafid alghamam min faqad
bahi algharar min fireih kalzalam
wawajjah kalqamar

على الحمار ورق نوح ما مضر من محرم الأمان غير على صلوا
على عطفاً واستقر موجتي في أقام مواد من يا الشرحر غصون
فقد من الغدار لندفيض درعي السرحل ي ف بلكم المرستام
لكالقدر ووجه لكالظلام فترعه من الخزر باوي

Discussing what has been accomplished in the field of music in Oman is easy now, but things haven’t always been this way. In a conservative Islamic country, talking about music, without even practising it, faced many difficulties. However, successes were achieved due to the efforts of those involved in the field in creating a musical base, audiences, and researchers interested in developing and expanding musical participation in the social life of Oman.



THE PACE OF CHANGE

THE HARASIIS TRIBE OF THE JIDDAT IL HARASIIS AND THEIR TEMPORARY CAMEL CAMPS

BY PROFESSOR DAWN CHATTY

The Harasiis tribe is a camel and goat herding community of about 5,000 occupying the central desert of Oman, the Jiddat il Harasiis, a name formally given to this territory after some contestation and arbitration by Bertram Thomas between them and another tribe in the 1930s.

I have been working with the Harasiis tribe of Oman since 1978 when I first came across them on a medical mission across Oman's central desert to locate some lapsed TB patients from the Salalah hospital in Dhofar. One patient was clearly from the Harasiis tribe and my companions, the doctor in charge of rural health services in Salalah and his wife, had invited me to join them. Somewhere near Wadi bu Mudhabi we came across his family who were all preparing to attend a wedding. I previously worked with herding societies in the semi-arid lands of Syria and Lebanon but had never experienced an aridity and vast emptiness as here in the Jiddat.

A year later I was back, but this time heading a United Nations project to extend government services (health, education

and welfare) to the inhabitants of the Jiddat il Harasiis. With the close cooperation of the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour and the support of the Sultan's Armed Forces (for 'Iron Rations', transport and seconded SRN nurse-midwives), as well as the Petroleum Development Oman operations room for communications, I began my work with the Harasiis tribe.

Over two years, my team of five – three Omani and two American Peace Corps workers – were able to establish mobile health care, support a four-bedded mini hospital, set up a weekly boarding school for boys and a day school for girls, establish a branch of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour at the Haima Tribal Centre, as well as a veterinary service. By 1984 I was able to hand over this project to my Omani counterparts, but I had become hooked. I continued to visit the Jiddat and the families I had come to know so well year in and year out. And so, I was able to observe changes, and adaptations, some were expected and others not.

Early in my work I had noted that all

Harasiis households had vehicles and used them to move their families, possessions, and herds from one camping site to another maybe three or four times a year. Over time I realised that some households began to move less – generally between a fixed place in one of the government social housing compounds at Haima, with enclosures for their goats and a temporary camp where most of the camel herds were kept. I realise that individuals were actually moving around a lot – but in a more predictable fashion – between house and camp. I stopped calling them 'nomadic' and instead referred to them as mobile herders.

Although the camel had lost some of its functionality, it was still highly prized for racing and for its milk (these as well as the goats are basically 'nanny' herds), and most families aimed to have herds of about 25 camels with five-six lactating at all times. The problem nowadays was access to the milk. And that required constant to-ing and fro-ing between these mobile camel camps ('azbah (pl. 'azab), and their homes in compounds near schools and other government services.

My last trip to al Wusta was in 2018. I had telephoned ahead using WhatsApp – every Harasiis has a smart phone – to tell them I was in the country and heading out to Haima to visit them. What time did I think I would arrive, they asked? Knowing it was generally a five-six hour drive from Muscat, I suggested a time around mid-day. Three hours into my drive and well past the Adam turnoff, they called again and told me to come to their ‘azbah’. “Where is that now?” I asked. My host said “Just go to Qarn al Alam and then turn right on the dirt track and continue until you see a petrol pump. There will be a car waiting for you there to bring you to us.” With some trepidation, I did as I was told and reached the ‘azbah’ of my host without incident.

What a surprise awaited me. In the past, a temporary camp was just that; some tarpaulin thrown over a tree or some fencing erected around some posts, a canvas tent perhaps. But here, in 2018, it consisted of a tented open raised platform, the seating area of which was covered in



artificial grass, and behind several portacabins with solar panels and generators for sleeping, and storing food and utensils. Adjacent to these units were several lactating camels and their young, contained within a wire fencing enclosure. As it was a weekend, there were many family

members present as well as numerous guests. The tented platform was full of men, boys, women and girls. This was a family outing reconnecting everyone to their desert, and their camels. ■

*** Special thanks and credit to Jaanika Vider for her photography.**



SELL-OUT FOR THE SOCIETY ANNUAL LUNCH



The Society annual lunch at the RAF Club, at which Dr Abdullah Al-Harrasi was the guest of honour, was a sell-out in October, with members who applied late being unable to be given a place in the crowded dining room.



The event was, as usual, hosted by the Society Chairman, Stuart Laing, and the Omani Ambassador, HE Abdulaziz Al-Hinai. There were many senior and distinguished guests, including ambassadors from several Gulf countries, members of the Houses of Lords and Commons, General Sir John Lorimer, the Government's Senior Defence Advisor for the Middle East, and numerous members including students and other young people.

Dr Abdullah, Chairman of the Public Authority for Radio and TV in the Sultanate, introduced his speech by referring to his long-standing links with the United



Alan Milne, Nigel Winsor, Dina Macki and Violet Astor.



Kingdom, where he studied for his PhD, and then handed over to Issa Sayyid Al Shibani, from the Oman Embassy, who read out Dr Abdullah's speech because the minister was suffering from a throat condition.

The speech gave a compelling outline of the organisation and success of the radio and television channels in Oman, as well as social media, in spreading ideas of peace, understanding and tolerance, as well as preserving and promoting the nation's cultural heritage and identity.

He emphasised links with Britain, and on the Society stated: "The broad spectrum of its activities go beyond politics and economy and other official relations in general, to include spheres of life that are as important like tourism, education, literature, music and spreading intercultural communication."

This was a theme echoed by Sir Alan Duncan, who referred to the huge amount of work on the UK-Oman Comprehensive Treaty, on which he himself had worked in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The relationship for the past 50 years had been mainly based on defence and security, but is now firmly based for the future covering the widest field of friendship. The Anglo-Omani Society is mentioned in the Agreement – a signal honour for our Society. ■



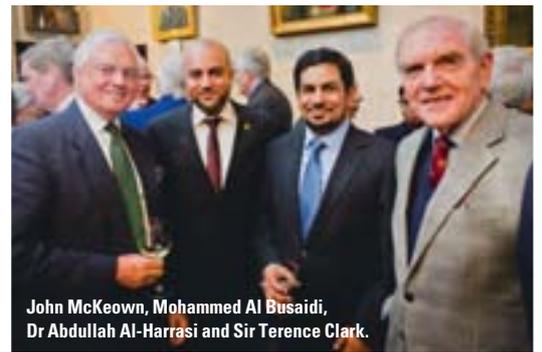
HE Abdulaziz Al-Hinai (Omani Ambassador), HE Dr Abdullah Al-Harrasi, Stuart Laing (Society Chairman), Sir Alan Duncan, HE Khalid Duwaisan, Kuwaiti Ambassador and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.



HE Dr Abdullah Al-Harrasi



Buthaina al Jabri, Amail Al Balushi and Alex Browne.



John McKeown, Mohammed Al Busaidi, Dr Abdullah Al-Harrasi and Sir Terence Clark.



ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY EVENT IN SALALAH

ARTICLE BY MATT WRIGHT

I had assumed that the Society's extensive activities in Muscat would be replicated in the South when I was posted to Salalah as the Officer in Command of the British Loan Service team in Dhofar in December 2018.

Alas, due to the passage of time and the small expatriate community now residing in Dhofar, it seemed that the AOS's events had passed into abeyance. I felt that something really should be done to correct this state of affairs.

Thankfully, and despite being based 8,000km South East of Sackville Street, I managed to convince the Society's trustees to allow me to arrange an event on their behalf. Ably assisted by Sheikh Ma'an Al-Rawahi in Muscat, we managed to deliver an event that achieved our aims: namely, to raise the Society's profile in Dhofar, to appeal to a wider audience, and to create an opportunity for Dhofaris and Britons to get to know one another.



HMA welcomes HE Abdullah Al-Ibrahim.



Major Matt Wright, Welsh Guards, was the first British Serviceman to attend the Omani Command and Staff

College in Beit Al-Falaj, Muscat, and now commands the British Loan Service Team in Salalah. Another Oman connection is that his wife's uncle, Major General Jeremy Phipps, was the Senior British Loan Service Officer in the Sultanate 1993-1996. He read Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies at Durham University before completing a Masters in International Relations of the Middle East. He was Assistant Equerry to The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall 2015-2017.



HE greets Dhofari guests.

ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY EVENT IN SALALAH



Dhofari dancers, generously provided by the Ministry of Tourism.

AOS members from Muscat.



Sheikh Ma'an presenting Hussein Al-Batahari with a commemorative gift.

Just as the khareef was fading from the Qara Mountains in September, Hussain Huthaith Al-Batahari, the Chairman of the Dhofar Chamber of Commerce, gave a fascinating speech at the Anantara Hotel on commercial development in the Governorate. His Excellency Abdullah Al-Ibrahim, Adviser at the Governor's Office, kindly agreed to attend as the Guest of Honour alongside approximately 80 other guests from across Dhofari society. The British Ambassador, His Excellency Hamish Cowell, was amongst the group who came south from Muscat to support the event.

After the lecture, the guests enjoyed a canapé reception overlooking the Indian Ocean where we were fortunate enough, thanks to the Ministry of Tourism's generosity, to be serenaded by traditional music and watch Dhofari dancing.

My final observation is that there was a

real sense of pleasure and thankfulness amongst the Dhofari guests that the Society had sought to expand its reach outside of Muscat. My sense is that there is

appetite across Oman's governorates for the Society's engagement and that this represents an opportunity for the Society's future growth. ■



Matt with Dhofari friends.

OMANI STUDENTS' EXHIBITION IN GLASGOW

ARTICLE BY YASSIM AL LAWATI

Explore Oman 3 was held in the University of Strathclyde. The exhibition, the third of its kind, was organised by the Omani Students Society in Glasgow (OSSG), and sponsored by the Anglo-Omani Society.

The exhibition was opened by the principal of the University of Strathclyde, Sir Jim McDonald. The main aim was to define the rich identity and unique culture of the Sultanate, as well as providing an insight to useful information about the country.

Several sections were presented in the exhibition, starting with general background topics such as Oman's location, capital, religion and currency. One section concentrated on the life of the Omani citizen in the pre-Renaissance era.

A special corner was devoted to the achievements of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the future vision of Oman's present ruler, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Other sections included corners detailing the prominent presence of tourism in Oman, inspirational Omani characters and Omani culture and general traditions. The last section represented Omani hospitality, where Arabian coffee and Omani sweet (Halwa) were presented to the visitors.

In addition, the exhibition encompassed a section about Omani-British relationship over the years. The Anglo-Omani Society was keen on participating to introduce the rich history of relations between Oman and the United Kingdom.

Sir Jim McDonald reported that he was pleased to attend and take part in opening this exhibition, adding statements such as



The exhibition was opened by the principal of the University of Strathclyde, Sir Jim McDonald.



“everyday is a new learning day for students”. He has learned a lot about Oman. He concluded his speech by granting his sincere wishes to all the Omani students that study or live in Glasgow, and urged them to continue their hard work and dedication. ■



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SENIOR OMANI JOURNALISTS PRESS FORUM AT THE SOCIETY

A group of senior Press and media members of the Omani Journalist Association visited the UK for a high level visit last Winter, and the Society hosted one of their two major events at 34 Sackville Street, attended by the Omani Ambassador, Abdulaziz Al Hinai.

Panellists from The Thomson Foundation led animated discussions on how UK media navigated editorial pressures from sponsors, advertisers, regulators and other stakeholders – a fundamental aspect of a free Press and a most important topic for journalists everywhere.

Chris Birkett, a BBC consultant, Dr Zahera Harb, senior lecturer at City University, Wissam Al Sayegh, of BBC Arabic, formed the panel, presented the background, answered questions and joined in the wide-ranging discussions. After the formal forum, a networking reception was held so that the Omani visitors could continue talks with London

based journalists and others including Society trustees.

The event, televised in Oman and the first of its kind in the UK, was a fitting culmination to the visit of the 40 Omani journalists to the UK. The overall visit was coordinated by the Omani Information Attache in London, Mohamed Albusaidi.

The other main event of the visit was a day conference at the Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford (director Prof Eugene Rogan), and this included participation by the The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and the Omani-British Press Forum. ■



AOS LECTURE PROGRAMME

ARTICLE BY JANE KINNINMONT. RESPONSIBLE TRUSTEE

As a result of COVID-19, the lecture programme has been significantly disrupted. Decisions on the 2020/2021 lecture programme will have to be made in line with Government advice.

We will explore the feasibility of moving to a webinar format for lectures that are deemed suitable to be presented digitally: this certainly proved successful for recent webinars on foreign policy with Omani scholars, chaired by Richard Muir... though we did miss the cut and thrust of such events with a live audience.

The following events were in our original programme for the first half of 2020. The lecture programme will be moved online from September and we will look to rearrange those lectures which had to be postponed.

- Bob Bewley: Aerial survey for Archaeology in Oman and the Middle East.
 - Harriet Nash: Traditional Management of Falaj Irrigation Systems.
 - Andrew Spalton: Steppe Eagles of Dhofar – 21st Century Challenge and Opportunity.
 - John McHugo: title to be decided.
- Other possible lectures which are being considered and/or negotiated include the following:
- Judy Aldrick, Sir Ali bin Salim and the Making of Mombasa.

- Dr Abdulla Baabood, Former Director Centre of Gulf Studies Qatar University.
- Grand Mufti Kahlan al-Kharusi.
- Sir Gerald Acher, Chairman of Brooklands Museum Trust.
- Henry Pearson, Cyber Security Lead, UK Government.

So there is plenty to look forward forward to! In conclusion, I should like to thank Louise Hosking, and to recognise her contribution especially in terms of bringing in more Omani voices. I will strive to carry forward her good work. ■

DATE	SPEAKER	TITLE	STATUS
19 March 2020	Violet Astor	Wild Oman – A Work-shop	Postponed. Podcast published
2 April 2020	Jeremy Jones	Working title 'Sultan Qaboos and the Renaissance'	By podcast. Transcript publication
4 April 2020	Dina Macki	Omani Supper Club	Postponed
16 April 2020	Shahina Ghazanfar	Plants of Oman – a journey completed	Postponed
14 May 2020	Jokha Al Harthi/ Marilyn Booth	Celestial Bodies	Postponed
18 June 2020	Jane Bickmore Jaffa MBE	Spreading the Love of Reading to Children in Oman	Postponed
16 July 2020	David Bennett	Working title 'East of Suez; British Defence at Duqm'	Postponed

SAF Association Lecture

Because any future event is subject to doubt, the card distributed with this Review will cover only to the end of 2020. Confirmation will be made on the website, and members will be circulated so they can book in. Members without web access should telephone for the latest details and any changes..

We have been exploring more speakers who can comment on the economy and on Oman's Vision 2040, which is one of the main priorities for the country this year, and we are hoping the following will feature in the coming programme, as we already had tentative agreement:

- John Edwards: Hiking in the Hajar mountains.



LOUISE HOSKING

Louise served as an AOS trustee from 2013 to 2019 during which time she looked after the Society's lecture programme and served on its grants committee. She had spent two and a half very happy years living with her young family in Oman in the late 1990s, touched by the generosity and hospitality of its people, inspired by the beauty of its landscape and fascinated by the ways in which the Sultanate was negotiating its development. As a trustee she relished the opportunity she was given to invite a wide range of speakers to bring their perspectives on Oman to the Society's members. Fascinated as a child by her parents' stories of living in Cairo, Louise studied Modern Arabic at Durham University and subsequently worked in organisations involved with the Arab and Muslim worlds. Whilst a trustee, she was the Executive Officer of SOAS's London Middle East Institute and obtained an MA in Arts Policy and Management at London University. She currently works at the British Institute of Persian Studies and has recently become Secretary of the British-Yemeni Society.

THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME

BY RICHARD OWENS

During the last financial year the Society made grants in line with the Charity's objects totalling £163,000.

Of these the greatest emphasis was placed on supporting UK students undertaking academic courses and training in Oman, and Omani students studying in the UK – 52% of grant funds were used for such educational purposes. 19% of funding was allocated to conservation, archaeology, natural history and literature projects and 17% supported promotion of cultural and heritage exchanges with Oman. Reports on their projects from a number of successful applicants are included in the Review.

In order to make the award of a grant more streamlined, the Society's new website makes applications easier and quicker. By using the website (www.ao-soc.org) and clicking on Grant Application on the home page, this will open the application procedure. A straightforward form can be filled in and the application submitted on-line.

All grant applications are co-ordinated by the Society's Manager and passed to the Grants Sub-committee at least two weeks before a Trustees' Board meeting. The Committee, consisting of Martyn Bishop, Elizabeth Simpson and a further trustee to replace me this year, assesses applications primarily against the objects of the Society, financial soundness and the benefits to Oman and the UK. The committee's recommendations are forwarded to the Trustees for consideration and action.

The Covid19 situation and resulting economic problems have had an impact on



grant requests with prospective applicants unsure as to whether they would be able to undertake their projects. The Society appreciates this difficulty but encourages potential applicants to consider the future when there is likely to be an increased demand for training and educational projects that can benefit both Oman and

the UK. If applicants have a query about the structure of their applications, they may contact the Society's Manager who will be able to give guidance on the format. The Society welcomes applications from UK and Omani individuals and organisations and looks forward to offering sustained financial support in the future. ■

RICHARD OWENS



Richard joined the international trading company, Inchcape, in 1964 after graduating from Cambridge University, working throughout the Gulf. His association with Oman started in 1973 when he worked in the Muscat office. During a subsequent posting to the company's head office in London, Richard became a Founder Member of the Anglo-Omani Society in 1976. After a further posting to Muscat in 1978 and then to Kuwait and Abu Dhabi, he returned to Oman in 1986 and remained until his retirement from Inchcape in 1996. On returning to the UK, Richard was invited to join the Society's Board of Trustees and served as Honorary Secretary from 1998 until 2010. He retired from the Board earlier this year after 24 years' service.

THE GAP YEAR SCHEME



The advantages of the Gap Year Scheme work both ways. For UK students it gives them Omani knowledge and experience, and for Omanis introduces them to bright British students.

**BY NIGEL KNOCKER,
SOCIETY VICE-PRESIDENT
WHO LEADS ON THE GYS**



Four go to Sultan’s School in Muscat from January to April and four from September to December. There are excellent reports by students of their experiences in the 2018 Review, which also explained the basics of the scheme and the selection process (which are also on the Society website).

The Gap Year Scheme started in 2002, and to date has had 119 applicants of which about 100 were successful. Those that have not succeeded are for a variety of reasons such as applicants withdrawing or we deciding that they are not suitable. The team that selects applicants now are myself, Richard Owens and Dina Macki. Debbie Martin will replace Richard who is retiring. In the early days we were lucky to also have Pat Alston and Isabelle Habib at varying times depending on availability.

How do applicants hear about the scheme? There are a variety of ways such as the Society website, word of mouth from previous students (often the best), talks to schools and interest shown by others in conversation. I have spoken to numerous school assemblies such as Dulwich College, St Paul’s and a state school in Dorchester. The private sector produces more applicants and the parents are generally supportive. We are keen to attract more from the State sector – some students are keen but if Mum and Dad are not then it is not a starter.

Recently we have made use of Zoom to interview applicants, successfully. An example was Richard in Sackville Street,

myself at home, one in Spain and one in China! The latter was a bit variable but good enough for us to accept her.

The staff at the school have been wonderful at looking after the students. Sean and Laura Griffin have done this with the full support of others. Nothing is too much trouble. We keep a close eye on the students by email. Some of the many advantages have been the follow up because of their experiences, for example one has been accepted by the FCO because he had learned Arabic and knew of that part of the world. Generally, the alumni have been helped in their future studies and careers, and maintained close contact with the Society.

All groups are different, but there is no doubt that the Gap Year Scheme has done much to enhance Anglo-Omani relations and has been one of the principle activities of the Society.

The future of the scheme may be uncertain at the moment and may not start again until 2021. Let us hope that it does!

The two articles which follow are from the groups since the last Society Review, and they certainly show the joy and value of taking part.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE...

BY ELLA JACKSON

It is hard to believe that we were in Oman for only three months! Thanks to the Anglo-Omani Society, four of us had the chance to work at The Sultan's School and experience Omani culture by living in Muscat and exploring the landscape on adventures to wadis, mountains and the desert.

Days at The Sultan's School were spent helping out in English, PE, Maths and reading lessons with a whole range of year groups. We also embarked on school trips including to the fire station, the Opera house, a date exhibition and even Dominos

Pizza! Afternoons were spent participating in after-school activities such as the school band and choir. Anna even conducted the school choir in a concert at the Kempinski hotel during the "young minds" forum hosted by Her Highness Sayyida Basma Al Said.

Much of our time at TSS was spent with the boarders (the scholars) who are a group of 53 boys from years 6 to 13, all from small villages outside Muscat. A particular highlight was baking with the year 6 scholars – we made all sorts of sweet treats such as French toast, cakes and

cookies, and despite the slight cupcake explosion in the oven, the taste was not compromised! Through extra activities like this and the guided reading in study hall, we saw a real progress in the boys' English which was especially rewarding.

Being so involved in the boarding house allowed us to get to know the scholars individually and hear all about their lives outside of Muscat which was fascinating. Thanks must go to Bill and Nerina for creating such a fun and welcoming atmosphere in the boarding house with a real sense of community.





Our immersive experience in Oman was enhanced by our Arabic lessons twice a week. Although these were at times quite challenging, we were excited to practise our newly-learnt Arabic with the boarders at the school. The course proved very useful especially for Ella and Anna who will read Arabic at university, providing a valuable head start.

The flexibility that we were given at the weekends and the school holidays to explore outside Muscat in our hire car gave us such an authentic view of life in Oman and the diverse environments to which tourists wouldn't normally be exposed. A huge characteristic of Oman's landscape is the wadis. Sean decided to throw us into the deep end on only our second weekend of living in Oman by taking us to Wadi Arbaeen. This was a tough physical challenge as we walked and swam through pools of water for five hours; however, the stunning wadi was a great opportunity for us all to get to know one another better, having only been in Oman for a week.

The next wadi we encountered was the much easier Wadi Shab. This came as a relief as we spent the previous night camping on Finns beach, so little sleep was had. Camping on the tranquil beach away from the fast-paced life in Muscat was unforgettable: we cooked our supper over firelight and were woken by the lapping waves – it was great to jump straight into

the sea as soon as we woke up. The following evening we ventured out to Ras al Jinz to have a guided tour of the turtles laying their eggs on the beach. It was fascinating to learn that turtles return to the beach that they were born on to lay their eggs.

Thanks to Oman's rich history and landscape, there was still plenty to visit in November. On the National Day holiday we experienced a whistle-stop tour of Omani villages and ruins, led by Sean and Laura, including the 400 year-old, towering mud-houses of Al Hamra and Misfat, a village carved into the foothills of Jebel Shams. The day culminated with a rest at the summit of Jebel Shams, where we were able to catch our breath while admiring the sunset over the imposing mountains and deep canyons. We owe a huge amount of thanks to our personal Omani tour guides Sean and Laura, who kindly gave up their weekends to show us all that Oman has to offer.

In true Omani style an equally incredible adventure was brought about through spontaneity. Having got word of a camel race the night before, the four of us jumped into our car and drove to Ibra accompanied by Bill and Nerina. Despite arriving as the only tourists, the welcoming Omani spectators beckoned us up to get a good view. It was amazing to see the camels sprint and the tricks of the riders, as one man rode two camels at once.

Following the camel race, others led their Arabic horses, dressed in jewelled bridles, galloping down the track. The camaraderie of the event was reiterated to us when one horse owner, on hearing that Flo was a keen rider, insisted that we ride his horses. We felt extremely lucky to be able to watch the event, and so to partake in it ourselves was incredibly special.

We are hugely grateful to the AOS for providing us with this unique chance which has gifted us with lifelong memories, in addition to Sean and Laura who were our main points of contact at the school, and Bill and Nerina, the boarding parents.

Ella Jackson will read French and Arabic at Exeter University in 2020; Flo Evans-Thomas will read Economics and Social Sciences at Manchester University in 2020; Anna Draperi will read Arabic and Social Anthropology at SOAS in 2020; Saoirse McGilligan graduated with a degree in Classics from UCL in 2019.



One horse owner, on hearing that Flo was a keen rider, insisted that we ride his horses.

...INSPIRING EXPERIENCE!

BY EZME HOLLICK



This January, Stella Benatar, Zosia Hazel and Ezme Hollick – all on gap years and preparing to start university in September to study Psychology, History and International Relations respectively – and Naadirah Vali – a recent Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies graduate – travelled to Oman to take part in the AOS Gap Year Scheme at The Sultan’s School (TSS). For most of us, it was our first time in the Middle East and an experience which would leave us fascinated by the Omani way of life.

Thinking back to our arrival in Muscat, having gingerly approached one another in Dubai Airport, it’s strange to remember a time when things now so familiar once felt so foreign. We arrived in Oman at a delicate time, given the recent passing of

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. There was a sense of great mourning in the country for the loss of such an exceptionally wise and respected leader, so we are especially grateful for such a kind welcome.

It’s a testament to the warm hospitality we received that the days of getting lost around the school and forgetting names seem so distant. We soon fell into a routine of starting our day with the chaos of year one PE, being randomly stopped in the corridor as the scholars tested our Arabic, and trying to anticipate when the canteen would provide our favorite chai karak.

Sean and Laura Griffin generously welcomed and supported us as we settled in. Sean wasted no time in giving us his whirlwind tour of Muscat. We had flown overnight but Sean’s unique method for

recovering from jet lag was, “just don’t stop walking, that way you can’t fall asleep.” Benefiting from his wealth of knowledge of the great Omani outdoors, we wandered through old and new Muscat, constantly awakened by the refreshing diversity of its architecture.

As we settled into school timetables, our time with the scholars became one of the most rewarding aspects of our work. The simplest of conversations soon led to fascinating revelations about the differences between our own lives and those of students from rural Oman. The scholars also experienced an exciting transition from their former residence to the new, state-of-the-art boarding house, and it was lovely to see them settled in before we left.



Bill and Nerina Corder fostered a welcoming atmosphere in the boarding house, and we soon established friendly relationships with the scholars and grew to love their cheekiness, and their energy and enthusiasm never failed to keep us entertained. We also quickly learnt how to stop them from playing marbles instead of walking to lessons each morning, and that promising to play a round of “ninja” was effective in getting them to finish homework in the evenings!

It was wonderful to see the progression in PE as students worked tirelessly in preparation for Sports Day. Despite the heat, the students all worked brilliantly in their teams. On the second day we were able to watch some of the scholars who we had come to know win events, which was especially rewarding.

Our first weekend in Oman was spent in Wahiba Sands. The golden sea of sand and otherworldly views amazed all four of us. We spent the afternoon scrambling up dunes and meeting beautiful camels. One of them, who was later introduced to us as ‘Boj Boj’, deserves a special mention for being so wonderfully patient while we took countless pictures of him!

On another of our weekend trips with Sean and Laura, we camped on Finns beach near Wadi Shab, which was stunning. White sand, clear blue water, and gorgeous Omani sun overhead – we couldn’t ask for more. After sitting around the fire with our barbecue-filled bellies, a group of Omanis pulled in to camp beside us, and insisted that we join them in their midnight feast.

In true warmhearted Omani style, they fed us the freshest watermelon and an endless supply of the delicious meat as we sat under the stars, listened to Omani music and learned traditional dance. The following morning, we visited Wadi Shab – a stunning valley with a hidden waterfall at its end – more impressive than we had ever imagined.

Travelling to Wakan with our Omani friends was memorable, and seeing the famous blossoms and luscious greenery at the end of our hike was especially beautiful. After a gruelling midday hike, we took advantage of Omani hospitality and hitchhiked back down the mountain. Some of our loveliest experiences were when we were invited into peoples’ homes and offered delicious Omani dates and endless cups of coffee.

From teaching sweet year one children how to throw bean bags, to discussing English literature with bright-eyed year eight students, it was lovely being included in lessons so wholeheartedly – not to mention the surprise hugs we’d receive from students in the corridor! We are tremendously grateful to all the teachers who encouraged us to join trips to the Opera House, Nakhla Spring, Muscat Aquarium, and Wadi Fanja for the International Award expedition.

On our final day, we went to Muttrah Souk and tried to make the most of our last stroll through old Muscat, practicing our Arabic skills and bargaining with shop owners. For lunch we headed to LuLu, bought picnic foods and relaxed on the picture-perfect Azaiba beach under the warm Omani sun. Our day ended with jet skiing while watching a glorious sunset.

Two months flew by, leaving us all feeling we were not ready to leave Oman and its rich culture, and we are already planning our return! The more we visited, made friends with locals and delved into Omani history, it became clear that it would be impossible ever to finish exploring Oman’s cultural treasures.

We extend our thanks to the society for their generosity, and the staff and pupils at TSS for their support and friendship. This inspiring experience left us with many unforgettable memories and lifelong friendships, as well as a gratuitous amount of dates, frankincense and oud which we will cherish forever. ■



THRIVING ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME – 100 AOS GRADUATES

ARTICLE BY ELISABETH KENDALL, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME SUPERVISOR AND TRUSTEE OF THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

The Society's Arabic Language Scheme at 'Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers' continues to thrive, and 2019 marked its tenth anniversary!

Ten British students were selected from among dozens of hopeful candidates representing a broad spectrum of institutions, including the Universities of Leeds, Cambridge, St Andrews, SOAS, Durham, Oxford and Newcastle.

The course is now almost twice as long as it was when it began, and last summer saw it stretch out over eight glorious sunny weeks between June and August in Manah, just outside Nizwah in Oman's Dakhiliyya province.

Since we launched the scheme back in 2010, we have 'graduated' precisely 100 alumni. Many of these young women and men have gone on to pursue high-flying careers in which they carry with them fond memories of Oman and a warm appreciation of its welcoming people, respectful traditions, stunning landscapes, and unique place in history.

This is certainly a cause for celebration

and a terrific achievement that would not have been possible without the dedicated staff at Sultan Qaboos College, and the generous support and facilitation of the Diwan of the Royal Court of Oman and the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My warmest thanks go to them for continuing to make this valuable scheme possible.

Students selected 2019 (and university)

Anna Hall (Leeds)

Jacob Bruchez (Cambridge)

Ahmed Youssouf (St Andrews)

Eleanor Thomas (SOAS)

Talia Berriman (Durham)

Julia Katarina (independent, musician)

Francesca Speed (Newcastle)

Sara Allan (Durham)

John Shinkwin (Oxford)

Patrick Wilcock (SOAS)



ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME...

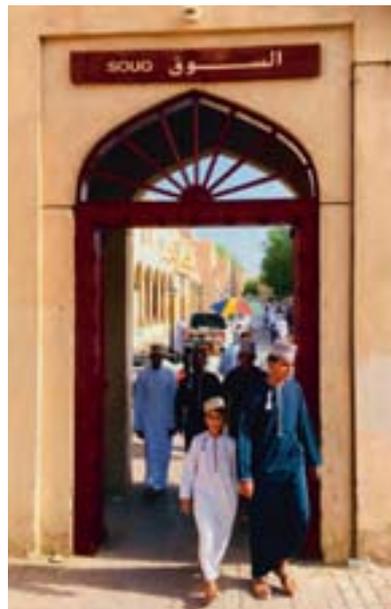


ARTICLE BY FRANCESCA SPEED, PHD CANDIDATE, NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL

I was lucky enough to get one of the scholarships from the Anglo-Omani Society to study Arabic in Oman for two months during Summer 2019. This once-in-a-lifetime trip gave me the opportunity to discover Omani culture and history and develop my Arabic language skills. I am very grateful for this fantastic experience and encourage other Arabic learners to apply for the scholarship.

Some highlights from my time in Oman:

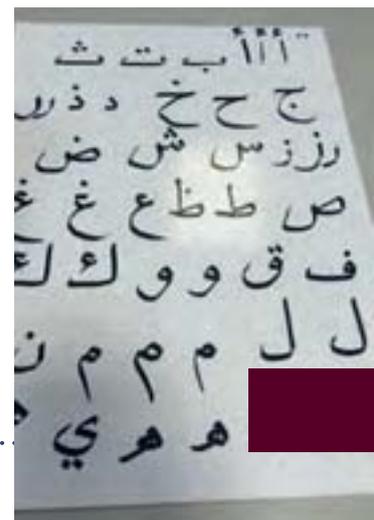
- I met like-minded people. We shared ideas, language tips and many discussions over the dinner table.
- We discovered a beautiful country. The friendly team at the college organised fantastic trips each weekend. From the mountains, desert, coast and cities to the small villages, historical forts, and places of natural beauty; we met different people, saw all terrains and many different animals.
- We visited the Souq. My knowledge of Oud and dates definitely improved!
- I loved the ornate decorative doors – there were many!
- We met weekly with local language buddies. We could practise what we had learnt in class and perfect our speaking abilities. We discussed many different topics and discovered cultures together. We were lucky enough to get invited to a family wedding.



- The study programme was intense with daily homework and exercises. We covered different topics and worked on all four disciplines during the 2 months (reading, writing, speaking and listening). The programme was well organised, the class size was perfect, not too big or small, allowing each student time to follow and contribute.
- The teachers were committed, enthusiastic and knowledgeable. I started as an advanced beginner and felt that I came home with a strong intermediate level of Arabic that I have been able to

put to good use both professionally and personally! We had various additional sessions throughout the programme, a highlight being the calligraphy workshop!

- The trip was an unforgettable experience of discovery, learning and self-development. The overall highlight of this trip was the story I told as part of our final oral exam in the last week. We each had to deliver a ten-minute presentation in Arabic in front of the class. I drew on everything we had learnt and wrote a story about the class, using the grammar and case endings learnt whilst mentioning funny anecdotes from the group's adventures. I'm not a natural public speaker so this was a challenge in itself and I tried to emulate the poetic intonation employed by accomplished Arabic writers that we had listened to and studied throughout the programme. I got some laughs but more importantly there is a sense of achievement I feel now when I watch the video of me telling the story that continues to fuel my desire to learn and use Arabic.



AT MANAH LEARNING ARABIC

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers lies at the edge of a desert, on the far side of the Jebel Akhdar mountain range and, to all intents and purposes, it feels like it's on the edge of the world.



Despite this and several other factors, it is one of the warmest and most pleasant places in a famously hospitable country and a near-perfect place to attempt to get a bearing on the local language.

The college exists in three states: the classrooms, the lodgings and the exterior.

The classrooms are in what is best described as a warehouse, hidden behind the administrative building for the College. There are seven individual classrooms, a computer lab, a library, the office (into which the staff would escape) and a large cafeteria, which was frequently used for workshops.

All of this was clustered in a U shape around a space reminiscent of a small aircraft hangar, covered by a great tin canopy; and populated by chairs, tables, an unplugged fan and anyone arriving late for class. I took the first semester at the College from September to December 2019

which encompassed Oman's National Day, and with it a wave of nationalism and goodwill. And so I came to understand why this space, as well as every other one, was gracefully watched over by regal portraits of Sultan Qaboos.

The second state in which the college exists is the Bayd ad'diyafah, or boarding house (rough translation). In there, the experience of student life was radically different, with the strict separation of male and female students.

The house itself was divided in two, with separate wings provided for the students' sleeping and laundry facilities, as well as two separate gyms. I was told early on that the facilities in both wings were identical, but they turned out to be a little different in quite important ways. The female wing has an elevator leading to the upper floors and the men's gym has more and better equipment. Despite ironclad separation



ARTICLE BY WILL BUTLER



between the accommodation wings, the students socialised in the entrance hall which served as a study hall, recreation zone, debate centre, music hall and catwalk as the situation required.

There is a gourmet restaurant within the Bait which is staffed by a wonderfully pleasant and talented crew of chefs and waiters, who through arcane means routinely spun great food out of interesting ingredients. How the “fresh” fish got over the Jebel Aqdar is anyone’s guess.

The college’s third state was that of excursions. There was not a stone unturned by us in the surrounding area, and every place we visited was bounding with hospitality. Whether it was exploring the old town of Manah, trips to the mountains or the houses of teachers’ relatives or other places of interest, the college made a real effort to ensure that we became well-travelled and got a true sense of the local area. We had ample chances to practise the language. Even in our free time, there was great opportunity to travel by the school bus or taxi. I, and other students, made several trips to a local stable, to discover the hard way that Arab horses are quite feisty, and the saddles don’t have stirrups. We also made frequent trips to the local shopping malls in Nizwa and beyond. All of this could be organised within an hour’s notice by simply talking to one of the Bayd’s staff or one’s language partner.

By way of education, we had both classes and conversation. The classes took place each morning from Sunday to Thursday, the conversation taking place every second afternoon for two hours, or

whenever one’s language partner turned up. The language partners were a great group of people from the local area. Each of them was interesting to talk to, and their help was invaluable. Often, they would organise activities of their own, setting up traditional Omani style group meals, inviting us to their houses for tea and rifle shooting, as well as helping us haggle with tailors over the price of dish-dashes.

The teaching we received in the classroom each morning was excellent. The teachers were experienced and taught deftly with great skill. Ustatha Latifa deserves particular commendation for her patience while teaching myself in particular. We came to find that all the teachers were excellent people and genuinely enjoyed teaching the language, an attitude which greatly helped in our learning and fostered high morale and a light atmosphere about the college. All of this ultimately served to make the scholarship a really pleasant experience, and a highly effective one too.

While I can’t speak for all of my cohorts at the college, the class in which I found myself was made up of an eclectic mix from across the world. Russians, Vietnamese, Czechs, Italians, Poles and Danes all filled the halls. Despite minor language barriers, the common interest in Arabic among the students fostered a good dynamic of study which inevitably gave way to friendship. I’m not sure if the national diversity within our group helped in this regard, but it certainly made our group activities more interesting, chiefly on the college’s Cultural Day.

The Cultural Day was a day of

celebration; a miniature world’s fair conducted by the students. It was great to see the next generation of diplomats and scholars (and some Russian models) in fancy dress; and the day included some diverse and interesting presentations and performances, public speaking in English or Arabic (according to one’s preference) and cooking. I learned two important things that day. First, that being recruited into a Polish dancing troupe is not the worst fate in the world, and secondly that fish and chips, while a cornerstone of English culture, will always suffer when placed next to an Italian’s offering (not that I wasn’t trying).

Together as a group, we took part in many activities. We visited the vast library of Sultan Qaboos which sits mysteriously well-fortified, not far from Manah, out in the desert. We were frequently visited by Omani scholars and artisans, who endeavoured to teach us about local crafts, culture and history; through one such visit, we were introduced to Oman’s vibrant storytelling tradition and were much entertained by theirs and by our different folk tales, explained in halting Arabic of course.

Similarly, we were introduced by our language partners to the highly favoured Omani pastime of dressing foreigners in local dress and having them perform pantomimes. This took place several times and reached its apotheosis with an elaborately choreographed wedding ceremony.

We, the men, took up our minuscule axes and walking sticks to form a parade which, with great shouting and rapturous



It can hardly be said enough that the college is a fantastic place to learn the language and a splendid opportunity to learn as much by practice as by being taught.

unique little place in the middle of nowhere were both hysterical and highly memorable.

It can hardly be said enough that the college is a fantastic place to learn the language and a splendid opportunity to learn as much by practice as by being taught. From patient locals to outstanding teachers, the learning experience in Manah is incomparable.

William St John Butler attended the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers in Manah between September and December 2019 as a gap year student. He was previously at Winchester College and is going to read History at Exeter University. William lives between the UK and Muscat. ■

applause from our partners, guided the husband to the throne. The ladies didn't so much walk in as skip, lead-in by the tallest among them who balanced a large clock looking ornament on her head with grand ceremony. Incense was burned, music played loudly as an ornate chest was awkwardly brought forth bearing gifts by nervous students, and the loving couple had their feet washed together.

A recording of the 'wedding' exists on the college's Instagram, feel free to watch

it, and you may then participate in the still ongoing debate as to whether it was a real wedding or not. If it was a binding ceremony, then our dashing Czech groom and his blushing Italian bride have only Austria between them and marital bliss.

Suffice to say that studying at the Sultan Qaboos College in Manah was an immensely enjoyable experience. The teaching was top notch, the students in both semesters were excellent company, and the situations which developed in that



THE NEW GENERATION GROUP: WHAT'S NEXT?

ARTICLE BY ELISABETH SIMPSON

The New Generation Group (NGG) has grown and developed under the leadership of UK Chairman Ollie Blake and Oman Chairman Sheikh Ma'an Al Rawahi since its inauguration in 2012.

Their desire to create a programme geared towards a younger audience has resulted in the launch of one of the Society's flagship events – the annual delegation.

We've also seen the introduction of regular events in Oman, countless young Omanis hosted by the Society in London and Society staff travelling up and down the country participating in National Day celebrations with Omani student societies. All this activity has had the desired effect of raising our profile with Omani and British youth.

Originally launched with its own events programme and website, the focus on the younger generation has now been brought into the fold as part of the fabric of the main Society. The NGG has built on the heritage of the Society to forge a new direction for its future generations, expanding and enhancing the scope of Society events and activities. Recognising the need to continue generating new ideas and initiatives, in 2019 Ollie and Ma'an appointed me to head up NGG operations in London, and Alghith Al Harthi in Oman.

Lissie and Alghith with Society member Nick Durrans.



SO WHAT ROLE SHOULD THE NEW GENERATION GROUP PLAY NOW?

The Society has long acted as the centre of excellence for British-Omani relations, led by senior friends of Oman who have spent a large part of their lives in the Sultanate. Year after year they deliver an enviable programme of events spanning academia, history, politics and economics. The Omani British Business Council (OBBC) and the Omani British Friendship Association (OBFA) serve to promote economic and commercial ties. So where does the NGG fit in? I like to think of it as the Society's fun younger brother or sister. At times more light-hearted in tone, but with an ambitious and serious commitment to fulfilling the values and aims of the Society.

AOS objectives include a commitment to advance the education of the public on all aspects of Oman and the UK, to improve understanding and promote a lasting friendship. 'All aspects' is certainly a wide brief, so the scope of NGG activities needn't be limited. However, the NGG can naturally complement its sister and parent organisations by promoting culture, language exchange, sport and the arts. In fact, the first NGG event in London hosted Oman's famous rally driver Ahmed Al Harthy, thereby setting the tone for future activities. Since then, the NGG has showcased Omani fashion designers, photography and even culinary delights!

These events have acted as a medium through which the NGG highlights what is important to our students and young professionals; it must be responsive to its members, offering variety and a forum to explore fresh ideas. The annual delegations are a well-designed vehicle to build on this in a professional setting and remain fundamental to the purpose of the NGG to bring together future leaders from Oman and the UK in working groups and friendship.

AND WHAT IF WE CAN'T MEET?

2020 marked major events for both Oman and the UK, with the succession of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik Al Said and the UK leaving the European Union. Since then, the global pandemic has disrupted our lives, our businesses, our plans and ambitions. Every individual and every organisation is grappling with this new environment and the funding constraints that risk limiting our growth.

So, we must adapt. The planned 2020 NGG delegation in Oman has been postponed, at a time when the meeting and collaboration of young British and Omani minds has never been so important. Instead, the NGG is using technology to bring our members together. Alghith Al Harthi heads up the NGG initiatives in Oman with the support of a team of active young Omanis. He has led the way, hosting

This year we will increase our outreach on social media to offer exposure and experience to talented young British and Omani individuals

the first NGG webinar in May 2020 featuring Dr Sultan Al Kalbani, an Omani Doctor working in the UK who discussed his personal and professional battle with Covid-19. All available on catch up! This event is a model example of what the NGG should be doing – responding to the concerns and interests of the British and Omani youth and providing a platform for these subjects to be discussed.

This year we will increase our outreach on social media to offer exposure and experience to talented young British and Omani individuals, through competitions and podcasts. Our 'new normal' presents an opportunity for entrepreneurs and artists to innovate and get creative. We are here to sponsor that journey. By working with our partners in Oman and the UK, we will reach a wider audience and continue nurturing those close links and friendships which are so valued. We look forward to showcasing those who rise to the challenge! ■



OMAN'S NATURAL HERITAGE LECTURE 2019

THE FLORA OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



The prestigious 4th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society, London, focused on Oman's botanical heritage as witnessed by the field botanists and horticulturalists designing and developing the new Oman Botanic Garden.

This rare flower, chosen to promote the evening lecture, is the endemic *Trichodesma cinereum* collected and photographed by Dr Annette Patzelt. This is now propagated alongside Oman's flora at the new Oman Botanic Garden.

ARTICLE BY
DR LAILA AL HARTHY,
DR KHALID AL FARSI,
DR ANNETTE PATZELT
AND NIGEL WINSER

The lecture was given by **Dr Laila Al Harthy**, **Dr Khalid Al Farsi** and **Dr Annette Patzelt** from the Oman Botanic Garden, Diwan of Royal Court, Sultanate of Oman, in association with the London Embassy of Oman, the Anglo-Omani Society, the UK Geographical Magazine and the London Speaker Bureau.

HE Hussein Ali Abdulatif, Diwan of Royal Court, HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, the

Omani Ambassador in London, Eng. Omar Al Kathiri and Dr Saif Al Shaqsi were welcomed to the Society by Nigel Winser, Dr Roderic Dutton, Mr Sean Nelson, Professor Joe Smith, the Director of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), and Brigadier John McKeown, Vice-Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society, and met the speakers from the Oman Botanic Garden (OBG).

OMAN'S NATURAL HERITAGE LECTURE 2019



HE Hussein Ali Abdulatif, Diwan of Royal Court and HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai with the OBG speakers before the 4th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society. Right to left: Dr Khalid Al Farsi, Dr Laila Al Harthy, Eng. Omar Al Kathiri, HE Hussein Ali Abdulatif, HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, Dr Saif Al Shaqsi, Dr Annette Patzelt and Eng Khalifa Al Hijji. (PHOTO BY MARTIN HARTLEY)

Nigel Winser welcomed the large audience and thanked the distinguished guests from Oman. He began the evening by giving the apologies of Prince Michael of Kent, who sadly was unable to attend, and read out the following letter from Kensington Palace.

"It is with great regret that I am unable to join you tonight at the Royal Geographical Society for the 4th Oman Natural Heritage Annual Lecture. I know I will be missing an important update by our Omani colleagues about the diverse and beautiful Flora of the Sultanate of Oman and the establishment of the new Oman Botanic Garden.

"I have fond memories of being introduced to the distinctive flora of Oman's Sharqiya Sands as a member of the Royal Geographical Society survey in 1986/87 and so I am particularly sad not to have a chance to meet the Omani scientists, who will be with you tonight.

"I recall the informative and enjoyable marine presentations given at the 2017 Oman Natural Heritage Lecture and I know tonight, you will hear equally exciting stories about the pioneering work by the Diwan of Royal Court to safeguard the future of Oman's botanical heritage.

"I wish you, Dr Roderic Dutton and your distinguished colleagues from Oman, a most enjoyable and successful evening".

HE Hussein Ali Abdulatif said how pleased he was to have the opportunity to say a few words about the important work

of the OBG and to thank those involved in organising this year's Oman Natural Heritage Lecture. He emphasised the close and valued links between Oman and British scientists and the growing importance of collaborative projects to safeguard the world's natural resources. His Excellency reminded those present that the OBG was the brainchild of **His Majesty Qaboos bin Said**, the late Sultan, and said how much he was looking forward to hearing from the speakers.

Dr Annette Patzelt, Science Director of the Oman Botanic Garden, then introduced the history and development of the OBG, speaking about the early days of exploring

the country to collect plant material and scientific information to build up the garden's plant collection.

Dr Annette outlined the necessary strategic steps required to build up the garden from scratch, including recruitment and development of the staff, setting up protocols and procedures for operational aspects, and developing an institutional structure working closely with the designers on aspects of design and operation. Dr Annette captured the enormity of the project for the world and the role of the Gardens not only in Oman, but for the global goal to look after the planet's plants.



HE Hussein Ali Abdulatif, Diwan of Royal Court, gives the opening address. (PHOTO NICO WILLS)



The OBG has been designed to celebrate the country's botanic diversity. The design, led by Arup alongside Grimshaw and Haley Sharpe Design, collaboratively worked to deliver the engineering, landscape design, architectural and interpretive design. (IMAGE COURTESY OF ARUP & GRIMSHAW)

THE SEEDS OF CHANGE: FIELDWORK AND RESEARCH BY THE OMAN BOTANIC GARDEN

Dr Laila Al Harthy, Senior Botanist at the OBG and the University of Oxford, then spoke about Oman's unique flora. Oman is a centre of plant diversity in the Arabian Peninsula, with 15.8% of the flora being range restricted (Patzelt, 2014). With this vast diversity of the country's flora and the idea of the people-plants heritage celebration, Sultan Qaboos instructed the construction of the OBG, now under construction in Muscat. The vision is that "the Oman Botanic Garden as a new world-class botanic garden conserves the unique botanical and ethnobotanical heritage of Oman and to ensure that the flora, heritage and ecosystems of Oman are valued by all". The garden is the first of its kind in representing the entire native flora of the country, and it will be the largest in the Arabian Peninsula and among the largest in the world.

The garden will be the first to grow only native plants of the country. Very few Omani native plants have been in propagation before the OBG project. Therefore, development of such a garden, from scratch, gave the OBG staff the chance to explore the entire country habitats to collect plant materials and

document data about the diverse native flora.

Hundreds of field trips were organised to collect seeds, cuttings and even whole plants when required. A team of enthusiastic field scientists was formed from the early stages to collect plant materials from all over the country. The team is confronted by many challenges in the field. Heat and desert climate of many locations increase the risk of heat strokes, the physical challenge of walking or climbing for long distances and suffering minor injuries and fatigue are some of the hazards during fieldwork. Being able to deal professionally with any emergency and ensuring safety in the field were among early lessons and skills which were acquired. The skills and botanical knowledge achieved from these field trips is immeasurable and could not be achieved without being in the field.

Growing the plant materials that the field team brings from the field is no less challenging. Propagation and cultivation of these plants require learning about the original habitats of each species and, for example, how these plants will respond to the new growing environment and climate in the garden nursery. Therefore, the living collection team worked through many of the failure and success stories of cultivation, which eventually ended up with a skilled team that can grow any plant species. The overall plant collection in the

garden includes the living collection in the nursery, seeds in the seed bank and voucher's collection to be preserved in the OBG herbarium.

The garden will act as a significant plant research centre in Oman and the Middle East. It is currently conducting researches in botanical and horticultural fields. The current research areas include the flora and vegetation data collection, seed propagation, plants cultivation, pests and diseases, ethnobotany and in the future the garden will expand its research field to include areas such as plant genetics research. The plant data collection and documentation throughout all stages of the garden work is significant in filling the gap of botanical knowledge of the country. The work of the OBG will form a principal role in the global strategy for biodiversity conservation like the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Dr Laila explained further. "As a field scientist working with OBG, I have the opportunity and the privilege to be part of amazing young Omani scientists who, together, started and continuously build our knowledge about Omani flora and vegetation. Our work in the garden gained a great and respectful reputation on the global scientific community that enabled us to initiate much collaboration with different research bodies around the globe".

Dr Laila Al Harthy during a survey to the highest elevation, of about 2,200 metres, in the Eastern Hajar Mountains, which took three days of walking in the harsh and dry environment of these mountains. Many seed collection field trips were carried out to cover the many different habitats within Oman to ensure the collection of the entire native flora of the country can be displayed at the new Oman Botanic Garden in the future.



THE OMAN BOTANIC GARDEN LIVING COLLECTION – BRINGING HABITAT TO LIFE

Dr Khalid Al Farsi, Senior Horticulturalist at the OBG, introduced his work at the Gardens. The flora of the Arabian Peninsula is poorly represented in botanical gardens around the world. The ambitious Oman project aspires to change that representation significantly by cultivating and showcasing the native plants of Oman. Currently the living collection's main functions are to propagate and cultivate plants for planting in the garden's habitat and amenity spaces. Currently, all the plants are in the nursery where they are being grown until the garden is prepared for final planting.

Growing such a diverse range of plants, most of which are new to cultivation, is an enormous challenge. Over the last 15 years, the OBG team has developed protocols and systems for plant propagation, potting, plant handling, irrigation, pruning and pest and disease management. For example, OBG intends to implement a pesticide-free management strategy to control pests and diseases within the collection. This involves the use of natural predators or parasites to mitigate the effect of pests and diseases.

The second main function at OBG nursery is to develop a comprehensive

ex-situ collection of Oman's native plants for conservation, research and education. The Living Collection team has successfully succeeded in cultivating several endemic, rare and threatened plant species of the country. For example, an endemic *Dionysia mira* (pictured) is a globally endangered species.

Conservation at OBG is not only focused on *ex-situ* strategies, but *in-situ* conservation also plays a key role. As part of OBG's *in-situ* initiatives the team established 'a plant rescue project' whereby mature trees and large shrubs were translocated from sites

being destroyed for road construction. Hundreds of mature plants such as *Dracaena serrulata* (Arabian Dragon Tree) and *Boswellia sacra* (Frankincense) were rescued and brought to the garden where they currently thrive, awaiting planting in the core garden. *In-situ* conservation is further utilised through the germination of seed and establishment of native trees in their natural habitats. This is exemplified in the study of regeneration and establishment of Juniper trees in the high-altitude mountains of northern Oman.



Dr Laila Al Harthy and Dr Khalid Al Farsi with other OBG team members during a field trip to rescue and translocate some of the rare and endemic plant species from one of the newly oil developed sites in the Central desert of Oman, which required, in addition to the plant collection, recording the basic climate and habitat data and also collection of soil samples for further analysis that will assist in growing the plants successfully back in the Botanic Garden nursery.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS CHAIRED BY DR ANNETTE PATZELT

Dr Annette Patzelt then asked Laila and Khalid onto the stage to answer questions about their work and the future of the Garden. Many questions were asked about the Garden, international collaboration with other Gardens, such as the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. Many expressed an interest to visit the Garden once it is open to the public and international tourists in a couple of years' time. Both Laila and Khalid were asked about their respective work – Laila's hard work in the field in tough conditions and Khalid's horticultural work, with the Garden's pioneering propagation techniques being developed by the staff, often by trial and error. The audience enjoyed the responses from the speakers and valued learning more about the strong collaborative nature of the work at the Gardens, by a growing team of botanical and horticultural experts in the Sultanate.

Professor Wilkin acknowledged the incredible success of the Garden and the

important conservation role they have already provided to protect and propagate the rich flora of Oman. Paul also mentioned the high standard of research and conservation work being undertaken by Botanic Gardens worldwide and applauded the achievement of the OBG in such a short time. Paul ended by saying that His Majesty's vision for the Garden, first mooted 40 years ago, is not only in safe hands and providing an important

conservation legacy for Oman's unique and diverse Flora, but also a centre of excellence in the Middle East for those committed to protecting the precious diversity of the world's plants and habitats. Many generations will visit the Garden and will be inspired to do all they can to protect the endemic flowers, shrubs and trees found in the diverse terrain of Oman. This bodes well for the future of the Sultanate's unique botanical heritage. ■



Dr Annette Patzelt, Dr Laila Al Harthy and Dr Khalid Al Farsi answering questions after their talks. This 'questions and answers' session ended with loud applause from the 400 guests attending the lecture. A vote of thanks was given by Professor Paul Wilkin, Head of Natural Capital and Plant Health, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. (PHOTO BY MARTIN HARTLEY)



The Oman Botanic Garden speakers with the Oman Volunteer Group in the UK 2019 just before the lecture at the Royal Geographical Society, London together with representatives of the Oman Embassy (London), the Anglo Omani-Society, the London Speaker Bureau, Earthwatch Europe, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh and the Oman National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation. (PHOTO BY MARTIN HARTLEY)

OBBC TECHNOLOGY FOCUS

ARTICLE BY OLLIE BLAKE
VICE-CHAIRMAN OMANI BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL

The OBBC theme for 2020 is technology, innovation and entrepreneurship. Technology is at the heart of Oman's strategy to develop an innovative economy built on a highly skilled, digitally fluent and dynamic young labour force.

The Sultanate is well-placed to act as a Middle Eastern technology epicentre due to the rapid growth of high-speed broadband, early 5G rollout, a high-density network of telecommunications cables and its unique political neutrality in the region. All these factors are encouraging a burgeoning start-up environment supported by both the government and private sector.

As part of our initiative to showcase Oman as a future regional tech hub, we launched a new series called *'Spotlight On'*, shining a light on the human stories behind Oman's commercial successes. There is no shortage of Omanis pioneering creative tech solutions to tackle regional and global challenges. It has been a privilege to play just a small part in showcasing the passion, drive and energy of young Omanis driving the transformation of Oman's economy.

Whether deploying cutting edge drone technology and Artificial Intelligence to automate date farming, creating digital aquaculture solutions or revolutionising online payment platforms, Oman is blazing

the way as an innovation pathfinder in the region. Just three articles follow from the wide selection on the website – log on to see them!

We published our first Quarterly Bulletin in June titled *'Technology, Innovation and COVID-19'* with articles from: Ali Kaisar, MD of the venture capital firm Hambro Perks, Azzan Al Busaidi, CEO of Ithraa, and Charlie Sammut, Political Counsellor at the British Embassy in Muscat. It is available for download as a PDF on the OBBC website page.

Our next quarterly theme is focussed on sustainability and green technologies in the energy sector and we hope to bring to you more great insights into Oman's position at the nexus of energy, technological and environmental integration.

As the AOS trustee responsible for our OBBC link, I'd like to say a particular thank you to Nick, Dina and Sarika for their hard work in pivoting our plans online so quickly and efficiently. We have had some fantastic corporate feedback and our membership continues to grow.



MATT FOSTER

Matt Foster was Vice-Chairman of the OBBC, but has handed over on moving to Qatar as CEO of BSL, BAE Systems joint venture company in Doha. BSL provides specialist manpower support to customers in Qatar, including academic technical training manpower. Matt was General Manager, BAE Systems Oman, between 2014 and 2016, providing support to customers across Land, Sea, Air and Cyber. Upon returning to the UK, he took up a two-year secondment as Executive Director – Strategy at the UK Defence Solutions Centre, and was then Business Development and Strategy Director for BAE Systems Land UK business. Matt is married with three young daughters.



CANOPY

‘FROM DEATH THREATS TO TOMATOES’

A frightening Somaliland experience inspired Chris Rothera’s new business in Oman

Before dawn on 25 January 2018. Berbera, Somaliland. My security team bundle me into a car. We set off at speed on a 100 mile drive across the desert to the nearest international airport, at Hargeisa. Minutes after we arrive, I breathe a sigh of pure relief as the 737 leaves the ground. I’m alive. I’m on my way home.

But as I flew out of Hargeisa that day, I felt huge excitement as well as relief. I knew that I had struck on a great business idea. I had already known that high quality fruit and vegetables could be grown in the desert in climate-controlled greenhouses. The big insight from my Somaliland experience was that, with a new design approach, those greenhouses could be built for much less money than anyone thought. Low capital cost was the golden key that had eluded others and I now knew that it was achievable.

I had spent much of the previous year in Somaliland building two proof-of-concept greenhouses. My brief had been to bring together three well-established technologies – reverse osmosis desalination, solar PV power and evaporative cooling – in an off-grid greenhouse, and to grow high quality fruit and vegetables in the harshest of environments without using any fresh water, just seawater and sunlight. But I had to do this at the lowest capital cost possible.



Just a few months after that flight from Hargeisa, with my brother, David, also an engineer, I founded Canopy Farms Limited. Our aim: to grow high quality fruit and vegetables cheaply and sustainably in arid regions of the world and to displace high-priced imports in domestic food supply chains.

The greenhouses were built and they worked. We grew great tasting, great looking crops. But, although we had secured all the required permissions, local pastoralists didn't like what we were doing. They saw it as a threat to their traditional way of life. Their response was intimidation and, ultimately, death threats to me as the leader of the project. I had to get out of Somaliland – in a hurry!

Over the last 20 years, new technology has brought continuous improvement to the growing of fruit and vegetables in arid regions using climate-controlled greenhouses. For example, there is an innovative greenhouse operator in the UAE

making extensive use of "Internet-of-things" monitoring and control equipment. Another in Australia claims to supply 15% of the domestic market for tomatoes from its 20 hectare facility in near-desert, close to Adelaide.

But these existing operations, using state-of-the-art greenhouses, have required such large capital investments that it is difficult to see how they could ever give investors good returns or scale-up on a global basis. Their greenhouses and supporting infrastructure are just too expensive.

What I learned in Somaliland was that there is a way to grow high quality fruit and

vegetables sustainably in an arid environment, at a low unit cost, using just seawater and solar power, with only a comparatively modest capital investment. A way to be highly profitable, taking into account all the costs – including the initial investment.

Just a few months after that flight from Hargeisa, with my brother, David, also an engineer, I founded Canopy Farms Limited. Our aim: to grow high quality fruit and vegetables cheaply and sustainably in arid regions of the world and to displace high-priced imports in domestic food supply chains. But we aim to do this at a sufficiently low capital cost that investor returns should be high. And our secret for achieving this: adapting a greenhouse design approach between the cheap-as-possible Somaliland model and the highly expensive solutions of others in this field.

We have chosen Oman as our launch territory. For its ideal meteorological conditions but also for its stability and strong pro-business environment.

We will soon be building our R&D facility on the Omani coast. That will be followed by the first 10 hectare commercial facility, producing between 2,100 and 2,500 tonnes of high quality, fresh fruit and vegetables every year – to be enjoyed by shoppers in Omani supermarkets.

Not only do we think Canopy will be a great and highly profitable business, expanding in time beyond Oman to arid regions around the globe. Not only will Omani consumers love our produce, but we will be helping Oman and its government with key social and economic objectives. Food security. Water security. Green energy adoption. Import substitution. Creating high quality, local jobs. Contributing to GDP.

Also, in this year when Covid-19 has taught us all the fragility of global supply chains, local food production is moving up the agenda. By accident rather than design, Canopy finds itself very much in line with the global imperative to source locally.

As I left behind the death threats that day in 2018, it was with huge relief. Now, as I look forward, I know that all I learned about sustainable greenhouses in Somaliland will be put to good use as Canopy grows its exciting new business in Oman.



TAMNET

‘THAT OUTLET ISN’T WORKING!’

BY SALEH AL TAMAMI

Somehow everyone knew my name and *I was that guy* who was handling *that service*. My phone rings loudly. “Saleh, we’re in the middle of a war room, get in here! We need access to your systems!” said the hyper-driven telco executive. “War room?” I asked myself. What seemed as a pool of sharks, dolphins and jelly fish, suddenly had mines and torpedoes?

Frantically I walk into a glass walled room with white boards for walls on one side, filled with diagrams and doctor’s-prescription-like hand writing. With a sweaty puffed face, to say the least, I smile to a room of anxious “solutions architects”, “product owners” and “customer segment experts”.

Of course, my laptop was running low on battery. They needed access to my systems ASAP. As I frantically hook up the charger to the electricity port underneath the board room table, I check to see if my laptop is charging, but lo and behold, it isn’t. They need access to my systems. A sweat drop hits my mouse pad.



“That outlet isn’t working,” the product owner says. “see the sticker that says “not working?”. They all laugh. I die a little inside. Change outlets. Power on, let’s go.

NEW ENVIRONMENTS ARE SCARY AT FIRST

This was my first, and largest project, as a major telecom operator in Oman. With relatively little experience in super large scale (bloated), super-fast (slow) super technical (bureaucratic) technology environments, and with little handover from my partner (who just had a baby), I dove in head first, bleeding, from a shark’s first nibble and thirst for flesh.

After the war room, I walked through the floors of what can only be described as a live jungle matrix of screens and bad back postures, and my first impressions were; “this is unnecessarily complicated. I am in the belly of the beast, but this is excitingly intimidating”.

As the days, weeks and months went by, I got to meet, and learnt from, the humans driving this convoluted beast of servers, switches, mobile phones and white boards, and most importantly, the customers they bleed and stay up at night for. Least to say, I empathised and fell in love with it all. A tear drop now splashes on my mouse pad.

I ran Oman’s first and largest telco fintech service, managing between the service provider and their telco operator partner. Least to stay this engagement had lots of successes and hard lessons learnt. Many realisations and “aha!” moments. But my largest key take away was this:

This can be done better and smarter.

This does not only apply to the service I managed (and I am very grateful for the opportunity to be “that guy handling that

service”), but it applies more generally. Integrating and creating any service within a telco environment, especially for a fintech application, should be much easier, faster, leaner.

This problem is not one that I came across for the first time, nor was it exclusive to my experience. Almost everyone accepts that this is a challenge, and sadly, many accept that it's a reality. It was almost a reason to justify the industry, and the large costs (and prices) attached to delivering large scale IT solutions and services.

Little did I know, that there was already an industry dedicated to how this exact problem should be looked at.

THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

In the natural world, ecosystems are defined as a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. In technology, an analogy couldn’t be better applied. But are the organisms operating as a community within their environment? Seldom is that true.

Tech solutions are developed in different code bases and languages. And when tech systems need to speak to each other, they need to find a common language, or one dominates the other. The translators in technology are APIs (Application Programming Interfaces).

Most importantly, it is the will and genuine desire, to work and leverage each other’s strengths as organisms, while recognising each other’s weaknesses, to better operate in a global business environment. Ecosystem building is the true embodiment of leadership, because you empower and give an opportunity, for other leaders within the ecosystem, to lead in their own right.



Today, my company TAMNET is not only building an ecosystem – with telecom operator partners mind you – that give technicals and non-technicals the tools and platform for innovators to create (and monetise) their own services and integrations in a fraction of minutes, leveraging telco communication assets. For more context on communication platforms as a service, check out tamnet.io/insights

But TAMNET today is going beyond, by empowering organisms such as telcos, financial institutions and enterprises in the ecosystem, to embed machine learning powered processes and AI to their tool set. By unearthing value from their data, such enterprises can streamline internal processes, or help to better profile their customers for credit risk management purposes.

Oman is doubling down on its quest for seamless digital integrations and ecosystem building, lead by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s implementation of vision 2040. I would like to think we are playing a small part in it.

I often remember that electricity socket that didn’t work, and the laughter that filled the air. I picked another socket and shared access to my systems. Power on, let’s go.

To learn more head to
[Tamnet.io](https://tamnet.io)



WAKAN TECH

DRONES AND AI; SMART TECHNOLOGY TO AUTOMATE FARMING JOBS

ARTICLE BY MALIK AL-TOUBI



E. Younis Al Siyabi

What is the difference between entrepreneurship and business? In 2017, my partner Younis Al-Siyabi and I graduated from the University of Kentucky holding a Bachelor of Science in Engineering. Spending six years in the USA hadn't only given us our Engineering Degrees, but also the opportunity to learn from another culture, expand our horizons and explore careers.



E. Malik Al Toubi

We started to dig around the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the drone world, exploring the idea of merging them together. Younis and I decided to go to Newton Abbot in the UK to further our knowledge in the drone sector – actually, we were the first Omanis to be awarded the commercial drone pilots license approved by the UK Civil Aviation Authority.

- Pesticide spray to fight desert locusts
- Crops health monitoring
- Agriculture census
- Aerial mapping for topography surveys and vegetation analysis
- Irrigation – identification of the field soil and field dryness

DRONES AND AI

Drones are actually considered as unmanned aircraft systems. They can be self-flying drones depending on the task. AI, in terms of machine learning and detection algorithms, is how you automate the entire process without human interference. AI can also be integrated for real-time image processing. For example, the AI powered drone captures and processes the data in real-time and sends back an immediate report.

Examples of drone use in agriculture include:

- Date palm tree pollination
- Targeted pesticide spray for all types of crops

I clearly remember that we asked ourselves the question: what is next after graduation?

The world is changing towards technology - that's why we switched focus from engineering to tech. However, to succeed in the fourth industrial revolution, you have to have the mindset of an entrepreneur, not just a businessman. It's not just about making money. We want to create a sustainable business; one that people will know, trust and respect. We have every intention of making a positive contribution. Indeed, our vision is to pass on the business to the next generation. The point is to create a company that is meaningful, an enterprise that will endure.





Bydar in Oman means 'the farmer', and we named our robot by that because it can do almost everything a farmer does and can assist with every farming activity.

That's when Wakan Tech was launched in 2019.

We understand Oman's agriculture and its issues, challenges and opportunities. Our mission is to bring the best of global agri-tech to Oman; helping local farmers enhance crop productivity, cultivation and profitability. Moreover, we wanted to make sure that our products and services reach whoever needs them.

It's not always easy for a start-up to gain consumer trust, but we were confident about who we wanted to target, what problems our products and services could solve and why clients would want to buy from us. This approach helped us gain traction and brought in customers; folk who recognised the true value of what we do. We haven't looked back. And that's what makes someone not only a businessman, but a successful entrepreneur.

Wakan Tech meets a need that isn't otherwise met in the market. We are currently creating a brand new Robot called Bydar that is going to help to replace the farmers' tasks. We provide a set of truly unique products and services. For example, we're the first company to carry out aerial date palm pollination as well as spray pesticides using AI powered drones.

BYDAR

Bydar in Oman means 'the farmer', and we named our robot that because it can do almost everything a farmer does and can assist with every farming activity. We started by first tasking the drone to perform the harvesting of dates by using artificial intelligence in image processing. The harvesting comes in different timelines and can be set to take action on more than 50% as shown in the picture below. The

robot is currently in the process of doing more than that. It's a ground actor that collects data and autonomously performs most of the farming tasks.

Don't start a business because you've got an interesting idea. Instead, start a business because you've spotted a problem that needs solving. On a personal note, being an entrepreneur has been a remarkable experience. We are constantly growing, learning and developing. That's a great feeling. Our ambition is to be the leader in Oman's agri-tech sector, solving problems faced by local farmers. Doing our part to help Oman diversify. Long-term, we're determined to be a force to be reckoned with.

To learn more visit www.wakantech.om

www.ao-soc.org



The new Anglo-Omani Society website launched last November and, if you have not already done so, please do visit the new website!

It offers a plethora of features to enhance our membership offering including:

- Straightforward event booking and payments
- Access to Society news, Insight articles, Spotlight On articles, Podcast transcripts, downloadable Annual Reviews, OBBC quarterly reports, New Generation Group brochures, recorded Webinars and Podcasts
- Information on Society activities including the new Arabic Language courses in London, the Arabic Language Scheme scholarships in Oman, Gap Year Scheme and Internships
- Grant application form
- A simple individual and corporate membership application portal
- The full library catalogue

As a result of new data laws and because the Society's database is populated with some out of date information, we have had to ask all existing members to sign up for membership once again by way of an online form – a process that should take no more than five minutes.

We are sorry for this inconvenience, but it should be a fast and easy process which will allow us to secure accurate information about our membership. We will of course give any assistance necessary to members who do not have customary access online.

With the launch of the new website, the Society asks that members pay annual subscriptions online via Direct Debit or by Credit / Bank Card payments. This can be

administered easily through the new member's portal on the website. If paying by direct debit, the payment will appear on your bank statement as "GoCardless".

Members will also be able to use the portal to see the data that the AOS keeps on record, which helps us to ensure transparency in line with GDPR regulations. The new system enables Omani members to pay using bank cards from the Sultanate, making membership much more accessible for them.

This is an important change to the annual subscription payment process. Historically, AOS membership payments have been made by Standing Order (SO), which has led to anomalies including difficulty in reconciling individual payments with the payee member, incorrect amounts, and payments being received from former (even, in some cases, deceased) members' bank accounts.

Please note that Standing Order are an agreement between members and their bank to pay the Society a fee on 1 April each year, and unfortunately, we cannot cancel it on behalf of the member. Therefore, if you are an AOS member and have a Standing Order set up to pay your subscription please contact your bank to cancel it before that date in order to avoid a duplication of payment.

When you sign up to the new website, you will receive all electronic communication from the Society including;

- Weekly Press digests on Thursdays
- Information on upcoming events including Webinars
- First look at all our new content. ■

WILD OMAN

AN ART EXHIBITION CELEBRATING OMAN'S UNIQUE WILDLIFE

ARTICLE BY VIOLET ASTOR

Oman's diversity of habitat reveals some of the most spectacular and unique species on the planet. This artists' paradise attracted the attention of wildlife conservation artist, Violet Astor, who visited Oman over the period of a year in search of the Sultanates striking fauna.



PHOTOGRAPH BY NATALYA CHAGRIN

Violet held a very successful exhibition of her work to celebrate the natural heritage under the patronage of HH Sayyida Dr. Mona Fahad Al Said, welcomed by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture in support of the Environment Society of Oman. Her planned evening for Society members in London was the first casualty of COVID-19.

As a conservation artist, I travel to the most remote corners of the world to draw the natural fauna characteristic to that country with the aim of raising local and international awareness and funding to support their survival. I have traipsed the wildest corners of India, Papua New Guinea, Tasmania and Kalimantan to find their native wildlife but there was something particularly special and exciting

when the idea of visiting Oman was first presented to me.

It was a wonderful surprise to discover that the Sultanate's vast range of landscapes provides a fascinating natural haven of inspiration. A country bursting with steep mountain escarpments to climb, crystal-clear waters to dive into and empty deserts to gain perspective; it also holds some of the world's most wild and wonderful species.



My yearlong project started in Salalah, where I joined an Anglo-Omani Society supported project tagging Steppe Eagles. It was such an honour to join the team from the Office for the Conservation of Environment and other biologists, who were capturing and fitting this critically endangered species with satellite transmitters to record their behaviour and flight patterns. It was a humbling, and at times unsettling, experience to look into the eyes of a powerful wild raptor. Yet, the reality of the Steppe Eagles vulnerability was never more present being surrounded by a team of scientists frantically



The ribbon-cutting ceremony at the exhibition opening: Sayyida Tania Shabib Al Said, Violet Astor, Sayyida Dr Mona Fahd Al Said and Salim Muhammed Al-Mahruqi – the Undersecretary for Heritage Affairs.



Oman's skies, mountains, deserts and oceans including the charismatic tool-using Egyptian Vulture, the comical Arabian Tahr and Oman's elegant Unicorn of the Desert – the Arabian Oryx.

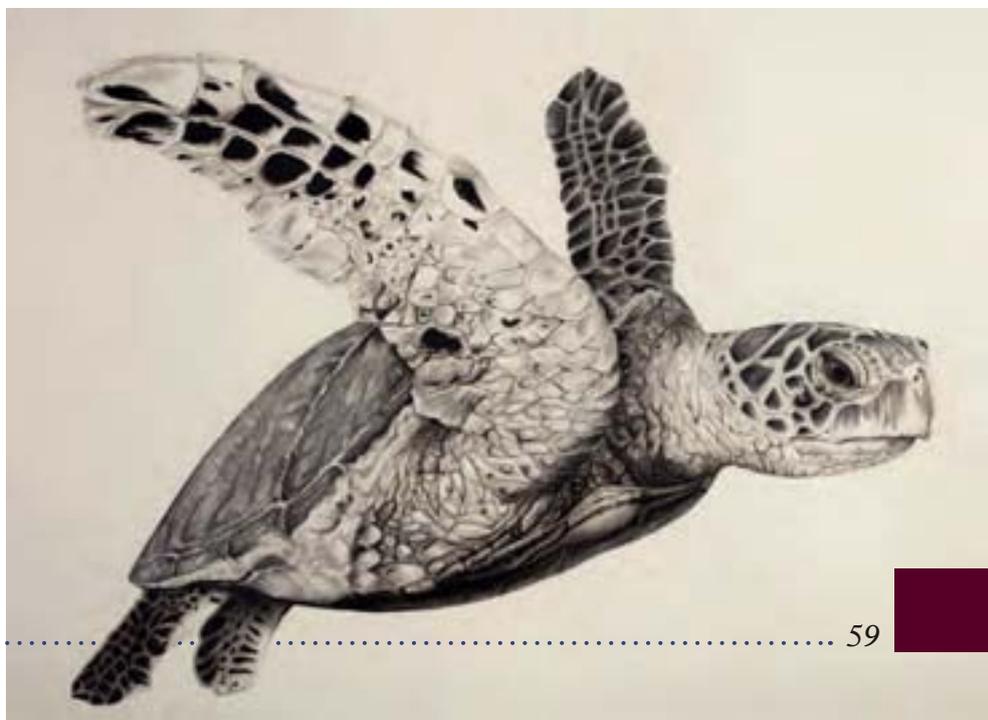
Their survival is in the balance and they may not be around long enough for future generations to enjoy. In the case of the uniquely non-migratory Arabian Sea Humpback Whale, with under 100 individuals left off the coastal waters of Oman, their survival is essential in the maintenance of the ocean's ecosystem. My desire is to immortalise these incredible creatures, to make them accessible for future generations, and immediately to build a connection between them and Omanis today.

In developing these artworks, my ambition became to engage national and global interest in Oman's natural heritage.

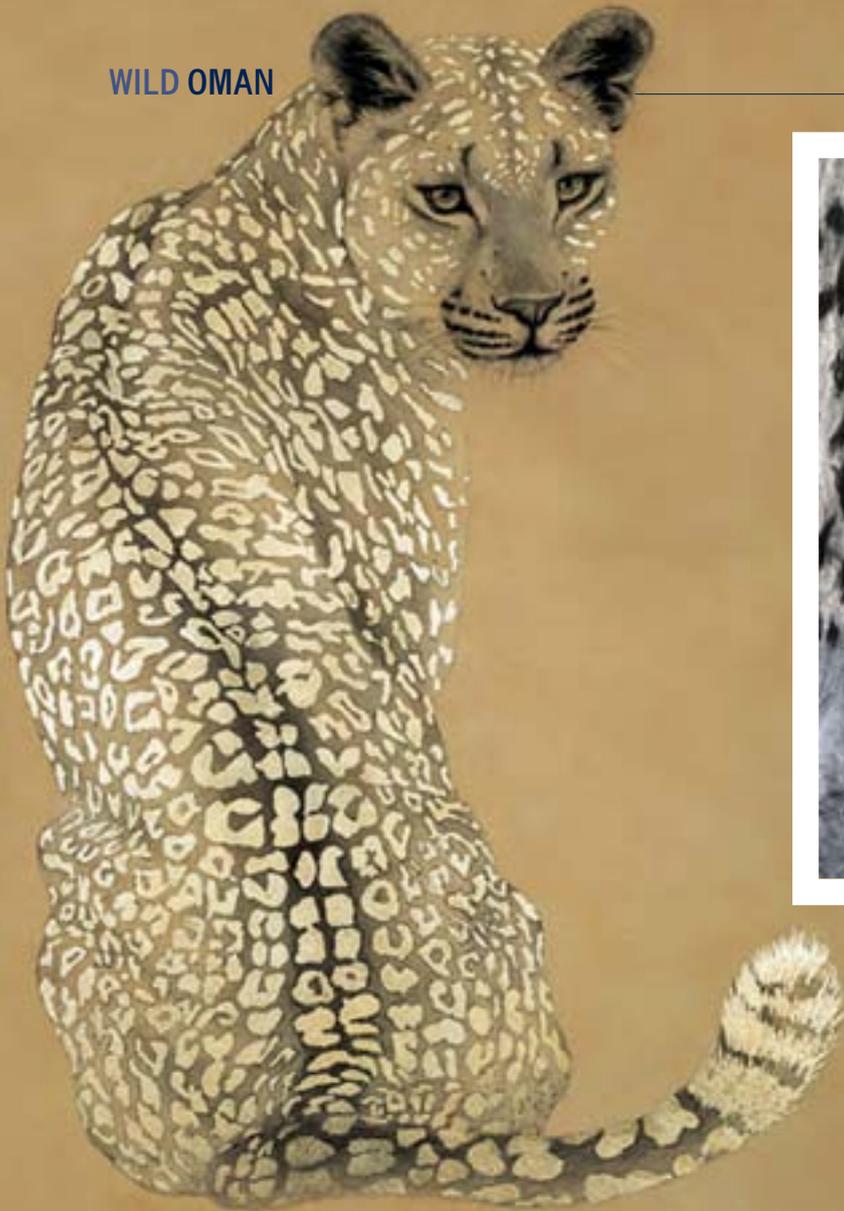
measuring, taking blood and tagging in an effort to save them.

My part in this endeavour was to study the intricate detail of their feathers and the sheer power and stretch of their wingspan in order to bring the species to life through my artwork. My hope was to rouse enough awe to motivate public interest and action into protecting the natural environment and all those species living within it.

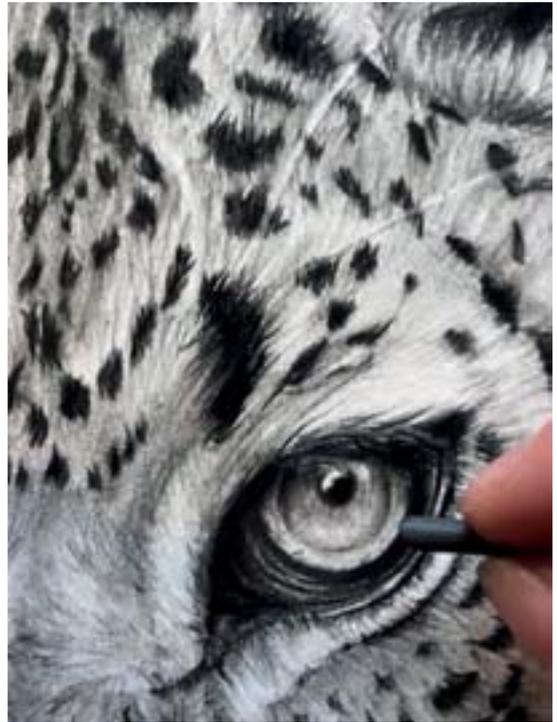
My artistic inspiration was fuelled by Oman's large diversity of unique and increasingly endangered wildlife. I arrived home full of creativity and spent nine months working day and night in my art studio in the British countryside producing a collection of intricate charcoal drawings. The artworks captured species from



WILD OMAN



Arabian Leopard in gold leaf donated to the Environment Society of Oman for auction, with proceeds to ESO's Raptor Project.



For the artwork itself, I used soil collected from the Dhofar mountain range and charcoal created in my own fireplace.

With the sponsorship of Land Rover and a grant from the Anglo-Omani Society, I was able to join forces with the Environment Society of Oman and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture to hold the exhibition at the Sayyid Faisal Bin Ali's Museum. The exhibition was opened by HH Dr. Sayyida Mona and was a fusion of Omani and British culture coming together in celebration of Oman's rich and beautiful wildlife.

One unique piece of artwork, of an Arabian Leopard in gold leaf, was donated to the Environment Society of Oman. This artwork was sold in a silent auction during the evening, with the proceeds going towards funding ESO's Raptor Project. Excitingly, the show attracted the attention of Oman's media, which further supported the aim to engage the wider Omani

audience in a celebration of its natural heritage, as well as the more sobering facts about the need to support its survival.

Keeping the protection of the environment at the core of everything I do. I made sure to use sustainable and natural materials in not only the creation of the work but everything surrounding the exhibition – from lighting the exhibition venue with candlelight, to using Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) paper for all print advertising material.

For the artwork itself, I used soil collected from the Dhofar mountain range and charcoal created in my own fireplace. The art paper used was recycled from coffee cups, which I chose to raise awareness about the 16 billion disposable cups that are wasted each year. Annually, the manufacture of this single-use item is

responsible for the consumption of 6.5 million trees, four billion gallons of water and enough energy to power 54,000 homes. My hope is to model to others the creative ways that we can support the environment.

Reaching communities that would not regularly engage with this topic by hosting public lectures was one of my top priorities and one of the aspects I enjoyed most. As I watched a stream of young Omani children flood into the Natural History Museum to hear me talk about Omani wildlife and conservation, I gained a real sense of why this endeavour was so important to not only Oman's natural heritage but also to the future generations of Oman.

The series of detailed and inspirational student-initiated environmental assignments created after the talk portrayed a sense of pride in learning about Omani wildlife and a deeply rooted sense of responsibility and passion for conservation. This left me with the feeling that this project has exceeded all expectations and managed to bring so many people together in support of the natural world. ■



FIND OUT MORE AT www.wwtw.org.uk

THE WALK OF OMAN

WOUNDED VETERANS' ARDUOUS TREK

The Military Charity Walking With The Wounded, in partnership with the Sultan's Armed Forces and generous support from the Royal Office of HM Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, is launching The Walk of Oman paying homage to the legendary travels Wilfred Thesiger took across the Arabian Peninsula in the 1940s.

Starting on 20 November – COVID-19 permitting – the arduous trek will also take the team across part of the Empty Quarter, the world's largest sand desert, before bringing the expedition to a close on Oman's Armed Forces Day.

A team of ex-service personnel, all of whom have physical or cognitive injuries, will endure hunger, thirst and extreme temperatures to highlight the extraordinary courage and determination of the men and women who have been wounded while serving their countries and to draw attention to the support needed in their transition to civilian life. A rigorous selection process has been underway to test both the physical and mental strength of participants before preparing for this extraordinary challenge.

Due to the hostile conditions and the nature of the injuries involved, the expedition teams will be followed by a

support team, which will be on hand in case of emergencies. Trekking around 20km to 22km per day, the team will endure temperatures as high as 35 deg C as they pull their custom-built cart, weighing in excess of 300kg, across the unforgiving Omani desert. The expedition patron, the Duke of Sussex, speaking about the initiative, said: "Facing searing temperatures and pulling a cart that weighs more than three times their own bodyweight, these veterans will need to summon incredible physical & mental strength."

The Omani Ambassador in London, HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, commented: "The partnership of the Sultanate of Oman with WWTW is a manifestation of the deeply rooted relationship that the Sultanate enjoys with the United Kingdom at various spheres and outstandingly between the Armed Forces of the two countries."

Ed Parker, CEO of Walking With The Wounded (WWTW), added: “The charity has tackled the North and South Poles, walked the length of Britain and crossed the USA. The Oman Expedition creates a new challenge and sense of adventure. We are honoured to be walking across the Omani desert, a country so closely aligned in many areas with the UK, particularly with our military. The desert and intense heat of the Middle East is one environment we have not yet faced.

“Oman was chosen because of the very close ties between our two nations. The UK supported His Majesty Sultan Qaboos during the Dhofar Conflict and the UK and Omani military continue to train closely with one another today.

“Our aims, as before, are to raise and maintain awareness of the challenges

many face in the wider military community. The funds raised will support WWTW’s existing programmes – supporting those ex-service men and women who have struggled since they left the Armed Forces”

KEY FACTS:

- There are 1,875 ex-servicemen and women supported by Walking With The Wounded in 2018 thanks to fundraisers
- Walking With The Wounded (WWTW) is a charity established to support the employment aspirations and vocational outcomes of wounded, injured and sick servicemen and women, those who have been physically, mentally and socially disadvantaged by their service.

■ WWTW recognises the inherent skills of armed service personnel and wants to compliment these qualities, as well as provide support to transfer their skills into the civilian workplace. The charity offers assistance through its programmes to those vulnerable veterans who have been physically, mentally or socially disadvantaged by their service and assist them in gaining independence through new long-term careers outside the military. This includes providing support to homeless veterans and veterans in the Criminal Justice System; areas which are too often ignored.

■ The outcome? Sustainable employment and independence for them and their families. ■

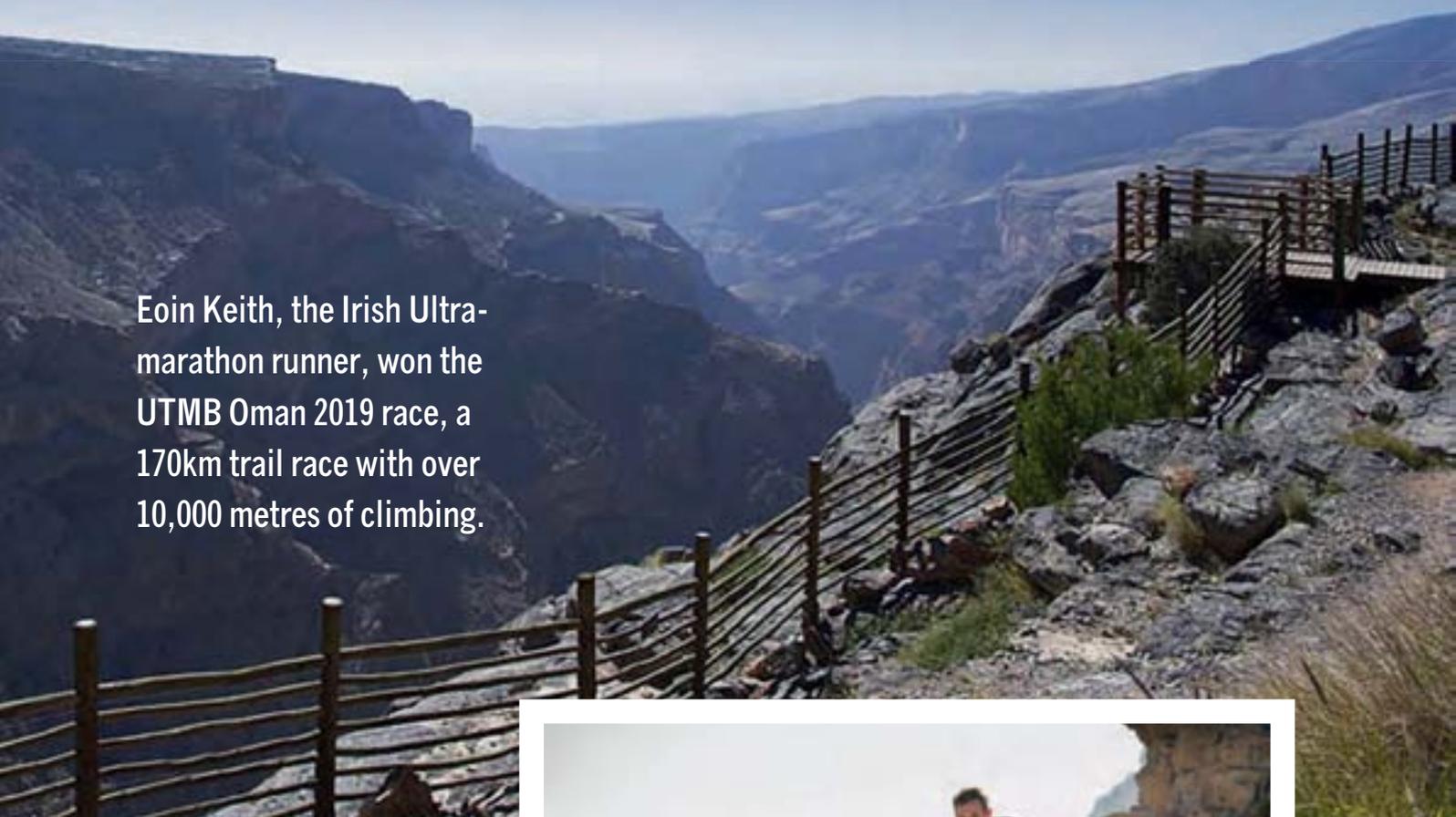


AHMAD AL-HARTHY’S NEW RACING CAR

Anglo-Omani Society representatives were invited to Aston Martin’s Lagonda HQ to witness the unveiling of Ahmad Al-Harthy’s new racing car to be used in the British GT Championships this year alongside his British team-mate Jonny Adam. They were joined by David King, the President of Aston Martin Racing. Ahmad, born in August 1981 in Muscat, is Oman’s top racing driver and one of the Sultanate’s leading international sportsmen. He won the 2012 Porsche Carrera Cup Great Britain Pro-Am 1 Championship and in 2017 became the Blancpain Endurance Cup Pro-Am Champion along with Jonny.

THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST RACE ULTRA-RUNNING IN OMAN

Eoin Keith, the Irish Ultra-marathon runner, won the UTMB Oman 2019 race, a 170km trail race with over 10,000 metres of climbing.



Runners follow the route up the iconic Jebel Al Akhdar before crossing the plateau and climbing to the summit of Jebel Hatt. The final climb takes participants on a breath-taking trail to the highest peak on the Arabian peninsula, Jebel Shams. From a summit of 3,000m, runners descend to the finish line at Al Hamra.

The UTMB is named after the Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc, a race trail of a similar length, which goes in a loop round Mont Blanc through France, Italy and Switzerland.

The UTMB Oman race has no equal; runners are immersed in the natural beauty of Oman's dramatic interior, taking them through deep wadis, high ridges, ancient villages and green mountains, running under clear, starlit skies and the hot Arabian sun. The runners' journey leads



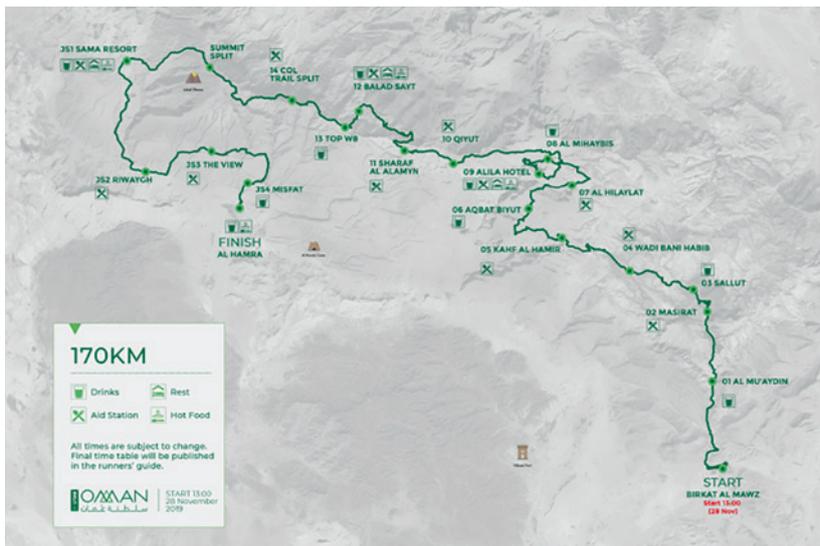
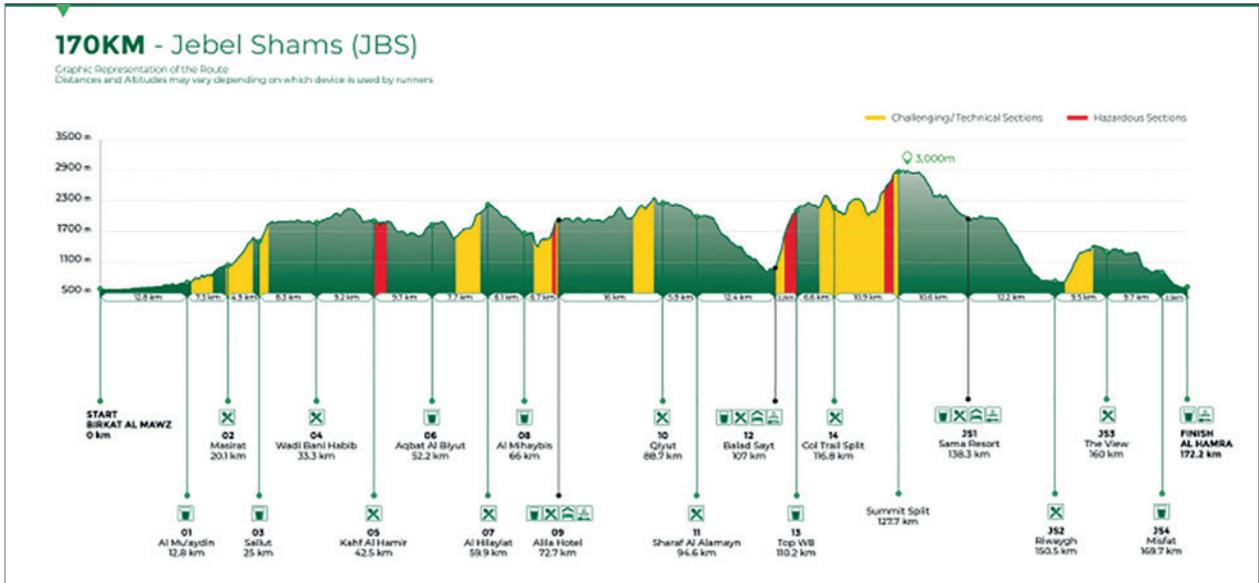
them off the beaten tourist tracks, allowing them to explore the Sultanate's hidden gems that are located deep within its rugged, untouched landscapes, endowed with natural springs and falajs.

The course has been hailed by National Geographic as the 'world's toughest adventure race' and is undoubtedly one of

the toughest and most technically challenging in the world.

Eoin Keith won the race in a spectacular time of 36 hours and 4 minutes – a herculean performance. We had the privilege of hearing his story at Sackville Street where he told us about the race, his epic battle with the Omani favourite

WORLD'S TOUGHEST RACE



Hamden Al Khatri and what motivates him to compete in a sport that pushes every runner to their mental and physical limit.

The UTMB Oman race is a collaboration between the prestigious Chamonix-based race organisers of UTMB and Oman Sail in an effort to showcase Oman as a world leading adventure sport destination. The course is mapped out with 22,000 coloured markers but it is the wilderness, sheer drops and hairpins turns – many navigated with a head torch in the dark – that means it is on the bucket list of the best ultra-runners in the world.

The 2019 series consisted of 170km, 130km and 50km courses and saw more than 2,000 athletes, both elite internationals and local runners, competing from 69 countries.

Eoin remarked, “It was so technical,

possibly the most technical race I’ve ever done. There was a long 1,000m descent which you normally would expect to make tons of time on but we were so slow. It makes it easier to keep going mentally because it’s so technical that you need to concentrate pretty much the entire time. There’s no real let up mentally and it was intense racing all the way. But very enjoyable, Oman is a gorgeous country and the mountains are truly spectacular.”

David Graham, the former CEO of Oman Sail, was instrumental in bringing the race to Oman and he sees it as an incredible opportunity to grow the sport in Oman. “It was also wonderful to see the number of Omanis who embraced the event. More than half of the nearly 2,000 people who took part were from Oman which shows

how well the UTMB brand resonates with this country.”

UTMB co-founder Michel Polletti, who also completed the race, added that, “When we created OMAN by UTMB® with Oman Sail we knew one of the main objectives would be to get Omani people involved but to have such a result after just one year is great. This is a great race and will not only help many people to discover trail running but also for people all over the world to discover this incredible country.”

Hamden Al Khatri finished second in the race and will have his eyes set on the top prize this year. He represents the new generation of Omani ultra-runners making their names on the world stage. Oman is an ultra-runners paradise and we have no doubt that, as a result of Oman UTMB, the future is very bright for home grown Omani athletes.

Eoin’s description of the long trail through the day and night hours, up steep climbs some of which needed safety harnesses, down precipitous slopes, and through every kind of country, was truly epic, but sadly too long to include in the Review – his blog is 35,000 words long. However, a few paragraphs from the start and the end of the race may give a flavour.

“...We were in the shade of the entrance of the old fort in Birkat Al Mouz, time to step into the full power of the a-little-past-midday sun. With about one minute to go it dawned on me that I wasn’t wearing my desert hat, and that I really should be. So I did a quick shuffle of getting my backpack off, hat out

WORLD'S TOUGHEST RACE



surprising number of spectators around, given it was 1am. After getting my cuts and grazes cleaned up by the medical staff (it looked much worse than it felt), Helen and myself took the offer of a lift back to our hotel where I finally could crash out and sleep.

"I should have retired on the spot, as that result will be very hard to beat, considering I'm not getting any younger. But that would be sensible and logical. As it turns out the next edition of the race will have 50km, 100km and 150km distances. So it looks like my time for the 170km race could be locked in as the record forever!" ■

"With a gunshot we were off. Similarly to last year there was a stampede out, with quite a few runners heading off like they were in an 800 metre race."

and on my head, and backpack back on and correctly adjusted.

"With a gunshot we were off. Similarly to last year there was a stampede out, with quite a few runners heading off like they were in an 800 metre race. I lurched myself slowly into action, building up to my steady pace. Going off too fast today would be double jeopardy. We had 170km with 10,000m of climbing to go, and it was hot and sunny.

"The race started with a loop out and back through Birkat village, the banana and date plantations and their irrigation channels. Then we turned and headed for the mountains. Very soon we were off road and running on a rough track along the dry river bed of the wadi. This snaked its way tracking a valley between the ever higher hills and cliffs on either side..."

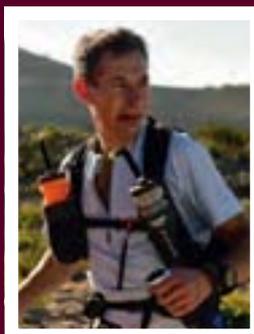
"... From just after the last aid station at Misfat, the sound of Eoin Flynn, the race announcer, could be heard drifting up from the PA system. The lights of the town were visibly closer much more rapidly than had been the case last year. Now I was starting to get excited again. I was really going to do this! Time to start embracing the fact that I was going to win the UTMB Oman.

"Popping off the end of the trail brought an end to descending. About five minutes of dirt road running on the outskirts of Al Hamra took me into the actual roads of the town. One or two turns later I could see the fort in front of me where I knew the finish line was located. Approaching the entrance to the fort two 135km runners were about to head in. They saw me coming, and very graciously stopped to let me pass so I would have the finish line to myself.

"Helen (my wife who had competed in the 50km race) was there to see me finish, which made it even better again. There were a



EOIN KEITH



Eoin is an ultra-marathon runner with an astonishing record of success in winning some of the most gruelling races in the world. An Irishman in his 50s, IT analyst at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, he is modest and quietly spoken, but with compelling stories to tell. At the inaugural British Northern Traverse race, the 300km 'Wainwright route' from the west coast to the east through the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors, Keith did it in only 51 hours and 37 minutes, finishing an astonishing five hours ahead of England's John Knapp in second place.

ANOTHER YEAR OF GROWTH FOR OUTWARD BOUND OMAN

ARTICLE BY MARK EVANS & NADIA MAQBOOL

Mark Evans reports on another busy year of progress for OBO, with royal visits, delivering the first courses for Omani young people experiencing mental wellbeing issues and the opening of a second national training centre and headquarters.

An idea born in Moray at Gordonstoun School, that took root in Aberdovey on the west coast of Wales, is clearly flourishing in Oman. With seed funding from Dentons, Shell and Sheikh Suhail Bahwan, and from small beginnings operating out of a tiny donated office in Madinat Qaboos, with equipment stored in a 40ft container in the Ghala industrial area, things have evolved rapidly for Outward Bound in Oman.

From being the first Outward Bound operation in any Arabic speaking nation, success in Oman has acted as a catalyst for similar operations to start up in both the UAE and more recently Bahrain, where His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Al Khalifa, son of the Crown Prince, has been appointed as the Patron of the embryonic Outward

Bound Bahrain – which is, like the UAE, being mentored by Outward Bound Oman.

OBO now employs 34 full time staff, and since starting in May 2009 has helped shape the lives of nearly 16,000 people through challenging outdoor courses in the desert or the mountains.

One fortunate group found themselves with a special guest dropping in to meet them three days into their course in the spectacular Wadi Arbeieen. Eighteen unemployed job seekers on a course supported by HSBC Oman had the opportunity to spend an hour with HRH The Duke of Cambridge, who helicoptered in from Muscat, and then drove on rough tracks to the roadhead from where, after a typical Omani welcome in an outdoor

HRH The Duke of Cambridge spent an afternoon with a group of young Omani job seekers at Wadi Arbeieen.



The Duke sat with groups and discussed issues of employment and employability, before getting involved in the successful construction of a self-supporting bridge, much to the delight of all.



A quote from HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said greets visitors at the centre.

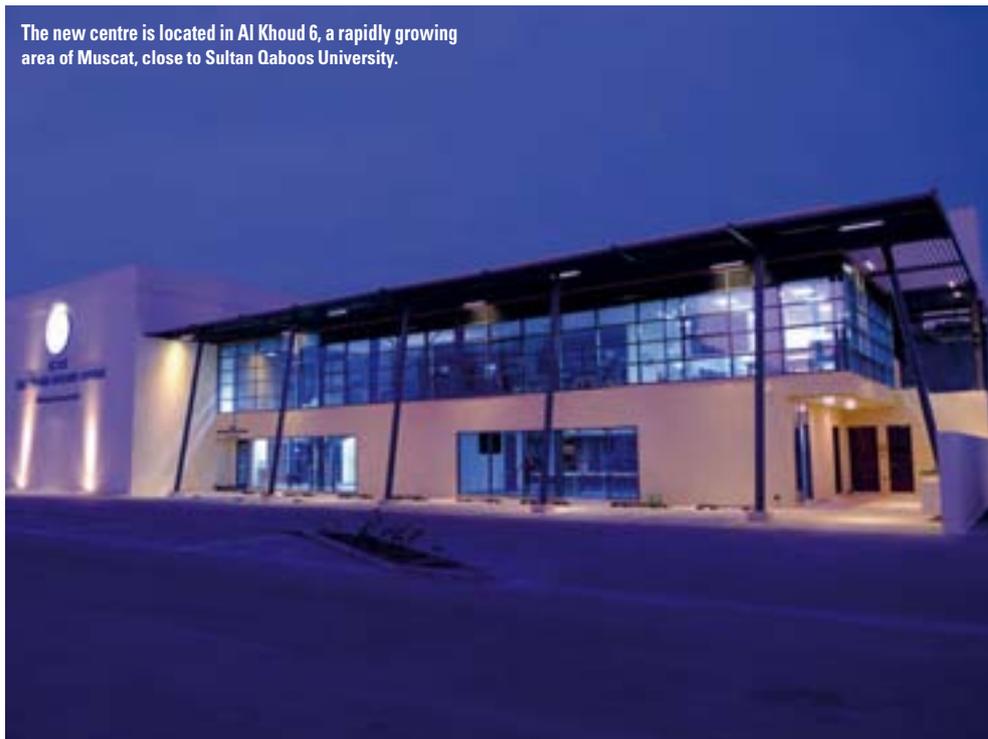
The Duke of Cambridge celebrates a job well done in Wadi Arbeeen.



majlis he walked to meet the team as they prepared for the penultimate challenge of their four day course, which was to construct a self-supporting bridge. The Duke sat with groups and discussed issues of employment and employability, before getting involved in the (thankfully) successful construction, much to the delight of all, including His Royal Highness.

Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said formally opened OBO's first national training centre in the Sharqiya Sands in March 2018, and with much hard work and the generosity of His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed Bin Said Bin Saif Al Kalbani, Minister of Social Development, a second training centre has recently opened in Al

The new centre is located in Al Khoud 6, a rapidly growing area of Muscat, close to Sultan Qaboos University.



OUTWARD BOUND OMAN



Khoud 6 in Muscat on a site located close to Sultan Qaboos University.

The centre serves as an administrative headquarters and central equipment stores, as well as an urban training facility, boasting two fully equipped indoor training rooms, a 60-person lecture theatre and indoor climbing wall.

Like the desert centre, the new facility was designed by Muscat based design consultancy 23 Degrees North; Nadia Maqbool, Architect and Founding Partner, describes some of the thinking behind the eye-catching design. *“The Outward-Bound HQ is embedded within the vibrant urban community of Al Khoud 6 in Muscat. The building has already sparked the imagination and curiosity of its neighbours who see it as a magnet for community activity.*

“Inspired by the courtyard typology and the memories of learning and playing under the sky and trees, the building revolves around a central shaded courtyard where the OBO community can get together in an accessible comfortable outdoor environment designed for both informal and formal activities. Arranged around the courtyard are the administrative, training and ancillary spaces. They all enjoy direct views of the community and easy access to the courtyard. The OBO HQ reinforces the belief that the inner ‘courtyard’, cannot function without the structure and resources around it, conversely these very structures and resources cannot thrive without being in the inner heart of the courtyard”.

One of the first courses being delivered at the new centre was for young Omanis

experiencing challenges with anxiety and depression. The success of these courses was built on a visit to Scotland last year by OBO Learning and Adventure Manager Sokayna El Haddad. Supported by a grant from the Anglo-Omani Society, Sokayna was able to spend a week working with the UK charity The Wilderness Foundation, whose stated mission is to harness the power of the wilderness to transform vulnerable lives and empower people to conserve nature.

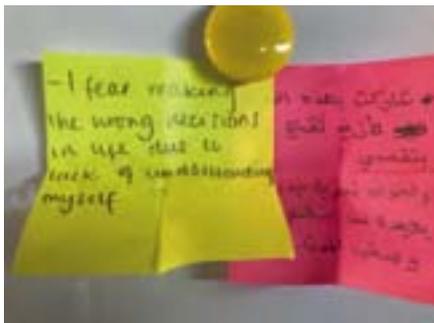
The foundation does some outstanding work with young people in the UK experiencing mental wellbeing issues, and Sokayna was able to shadow a group on a course on Loch Lomond, the learning from which enabled us to design and roll out the first course for young Omanis experiencing similar challenges, at our Desert Centre.

The course was generously supported by BAE Systems in Oman, an organisation that has won several UK awards for its innovative approach to mental wellbeing at the workplace, and has now been adapted further to run indoors and be more accessible to more young people in and around Muscat.

If the past year has been busy, the coming one seems likely to be no less so. Thanks to the generosity of The Ministry of Oil and Gas Social Development Committee, funding has been provided to construct a third training centre. Located at nearly 8,000ft altitude on Jebel Akdhar, on land provided by The Ministry of Education, this centre will have the capacity to operate all year round, and will enable Outward Bound Oman to work with even greater numbers of young people, ensuring that young Omanis have the skills, attitude and ethics to help make Vision 2040 a reality. ■



The OBO Muscat Centre has transformed the ability of OB to run more accessible, urban courses and sharing challenges on our mental wellbeing courses for Omani youth.



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CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND DIVERSITY IN OMAN

ARTICLE BY MAIMUNA AL SULAIMANI

We can proudly say that the Sultanate is one of the first countries in the MENA region to adopt the concept and code of corporate governance since 2002, first by the Central Bank of Oman, followed and replaced by the code of governance issued by CMA in 2003.



I thank the Anglo-Omani Society for giving me an engaging platform to present the features and the highlights of the diversity in corporate governance in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman in its own way can be proud of its outstanding performance of top ranking companies (*see illustration*) with a lone women leader right on top, which is self explanatory in the diversity of corporate governance in the country.

A period of Renaissance

Oman has come a long way in the last 17 odd years, including the establishment of the Oman Centre of Corporate Governance which was established by a Royal Decree (30/2015) in 2015. The centre is dedicated to establish sound governance and sustainability, and is committed to the dissemination and application of best practices in these two fields and is recognised body on Corporate Governance and Sustainability.

We can say that corporate governance in Oman has undergone a period of renaissance in the year 2016. The code has been adapted, continuously evolving over the years and has been updated and modernised in a new code 2016. This new Code is indeed a momentous milestone, because it is a first in the Omani corporate history to adapt a unified code agreed in consultation and a general consensus with

the corporate sector, Capital Market Authority (CMA), researchers, a unique open-to-all consultation with all parties to review. This opened a gate of opportunity to participate in the modernisation and adaptation of the Code, which is currently final and formally accepted by the industry. This was applauded by all as a progressive step to diversification of the code by involving all parties to participate and engage.

The new Code is also an initiative by the concerned Omani authorities to ensure better regulation and administration of public companies, while creating an improved stimulus to attract better foreign investment.

If I have to rate the process of the regulatory journey, I can simply say that Oman is on the threshold of a very promising positive curve upwards. Yet, I would also state that Oman is also a progressive and ongoing nation on work mode, in terms of the work culture, its implementation, accountability processes and also on the transparent appointment, review and replacements of the directors.

If we look at the reports, Omani companies and sectors have done quite a modest job in their sections of annual reports by publishing a chapter on corporate governance.

However it is worth mentioning that one of the milestone achievements of the new code is the introduction of the practice of

TOP 20 RANKINGS

SHAREHOLDERS EQUITY (OMR)

1	Bank Muscat	1,798m
2	Omantel	548m
3	Bank Dhofar	543m
4	National Bank of Oman	421m
5	HSBC Bank Oman	320m

BY REVENUE (OMR) AND GROWTH FROM 2017

1	Omantel	2,186m	190.80%
2	Oman Oil Marketing	625m	22.08%
3	Bank Muscat	622m	7.17%
4	Shell Oman marketing	529m	13.54%
5	Al Maha Petroleum Products	488m	13.19%

BY PROFIT (OMR) AND GROWTH FROM 2017

1	Omantel	209m	109.36%
2	Bank Muscat	180m	1.59%
3	NBO	51m	14.95%
4	Bank Dhofar	50m	5.57%
5	OMINVEST	46m	34.36%

GROWTH OF PROFIT FROM 2017

1	Galfar	134.03%
2	Renaissance	123.54%
3	Omantel	109.36%
4	HSBC	64.08%
5	Oman Cables	55.41%

MARKET CAPITALISATION ON 31 MARCH 2019 (OMR)

1	Bank Muscat	1,185m
2	Oman TelecomCo SAOG	459m
3	Bank Dhofar SAOG	400m
4	Oman Qatari Telecom (OORE-DOO)	328m
5	National Bank of Oman SAOG	285m

PROFIT AS % OF EQUITY

1	Omantel	38.14%
2	OMINVEST	25.33%
3	Shell	24.05%
4	Renaissance	21.19%
5	Oman Flour	20.92%

EARNINGS PER SHARE GROWTH

1	Galfar	131.25%
2	Renaissance	105.54%
3	OMINVEST	76.92%
4	HSBC	60.00%
5	Al Jazeera Steel	42.11%

SHARE PRICE GROWTH

1	Renaissance	23.91%
2	Ooredoo	7.98%
3	Galfar	6.67%
4	Bank Muscat	4.06%

DIVIDEND YIELD

1	NBO	8.79%
2	Bank Muscat	8.54%
3	Ooredoo	7.92%
4	HSBC	7.82%
5	Al Maha Petroleum	7.51%

A balanced and seasoned board of directors and stakeholders is the most crucial factor in a sound and growing corporate market.

making certain Key Performance Indicators (KPI) mandatory for the appointment of directors by a neutral independent agency and reviewing the directors performances during the regular Annual General Meetings. This practice is very significant to ensure the positive and active performance of the directors appointed with all due diligence and transparency. Many more miles to the journey, still...

Though there are many goals that can be achieved through the exercise of the modernised code of governance in the local market, there is no doubt that the governance code and principles will certainly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of management and the development of human and financial resources for the corporate sector at large, paving way to a sound economy and local market.

Diversity in Inclusion

A balanced and seasoned board of directors and stakeholders is the most crucial factor in a sound and growing corporate market. The diversity in gender, qualifications, age, nationality, and experience of the stakeholders and directors of board of different companies that constitutes a listed company or an organisation reflects diverse progress in the performance of those companies. The inclusion of diversity enhances the total outcome of governance of the sector in general.

Sustainable and Balanced Stakeholders' Interests

Corporate governance is conventionally thought of as the way in which enterprises are guided and restricted with an aim to uphold the accountability, fairness, transparency, assurance, leadership and stakeholder management in the industry.

In simple terms it can also be defined as the framework of rules and procedures by which the decisions in the corporate sector are made, held accountable and sustainable. The code is significant and crucial with the diversification of the economy today.

One of the strongest pillars of corporate governance will be custom-made specialised diversity that will allow the market to adapt easily to the widely acceptable practices of governance and most importantly to develop a tailor-made Omani model that will reflect a sound corporate sphere of activity and diversity.

Oman's Vision 2040 is Governance

Industry players will know that the lack of corporate governance will lead to

bankruptcy delays and unwanted penalties that derail us and take longer to correct, which will once again reverse the growth trend. One of the key pillars of Oman's Vision 2040 is Governance, to lead to better consumer/investor confidence, transparency, accountability, and foreign investment.

With the New Commercial Companies Law in 2019, Oman has triggered major changes to its legal framework with an aim to continue to comply with international standards, particularly to encourage bylaws for Limited Liability Companies, including adaptation of International Financial Reporting Standards and Corporate Governance Principles. These laws are designed to promote business in the Sultanate, and are in line with Oman's Vision 2040.

Top Ranking Woman Power

While I am not taking any particular examples, it will be worth mentioning with pride that the top five ranking corporate recorded in the field are spearheaded by women management

executives and stakeholders. So in all fair means, I would not be wrong in hoping to follow the lead and inject more female power into the sector for top rankings.

The Journey Continues

Oman still strides forward in its journey towards progressive acceptance of the corporate governance code.

Recently the draft of corporate governance principles for state owned enterprise companies was issued in April 2020 by Capital Market Authority for consultation. We expect this to advance in the coming months. The inclusions of women are trendsetting, while the restructuring of a mentionable number of state-owned enterprises areas also in the offing. ■

Maimuna Al-Sulaimani is a commission member of the Omani Human Rights Commission, Supreme Court Lawyer and a Media personality in Oman. She was the guest speaker at the Society in October 2019, where she gave a presentation on Diversity in Corporate Governance in the Sultanate and featured 20 Top Listed/ranked companies of Oman in 2019.



Maimuna with the Review editor.

OMANI WOMEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY

ARTICLE BY DEENA AL ASFOOR

The rights and status of women in the Arab world remain controversial.

Many in the West view Arab women as shy, inhibited and submissive, and the laws and cultures as biased and indifferent. In this article, I shall give examples of Omani women who, arguably, might have shaped the history of Oman. After that, I shall discuss some indicators of women status, and the legal foundation upon which they could exercise their rights as active contributors in the nation's development.

In 2007, His late Majesty, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said addressed the Shura Council: "We call on Omani women everywhere, in the village and the city, in urban areas and in the countryside, in the plains and in the mountains to contribute to economic and social development with their individual abilities, skills, expertise, and positions in society. The homeland needs all citizens to continue the march towards progress, stability, and prosperity. We call on Omani women from this podium to shoulder their vital part in the society, and we are convinced they will respond".

His late HM was a visionary who ranked high the role of women in development, which might have been shaped partly by precedents of women who contributed to politics and society. Here, I share three examples from different historical eras.

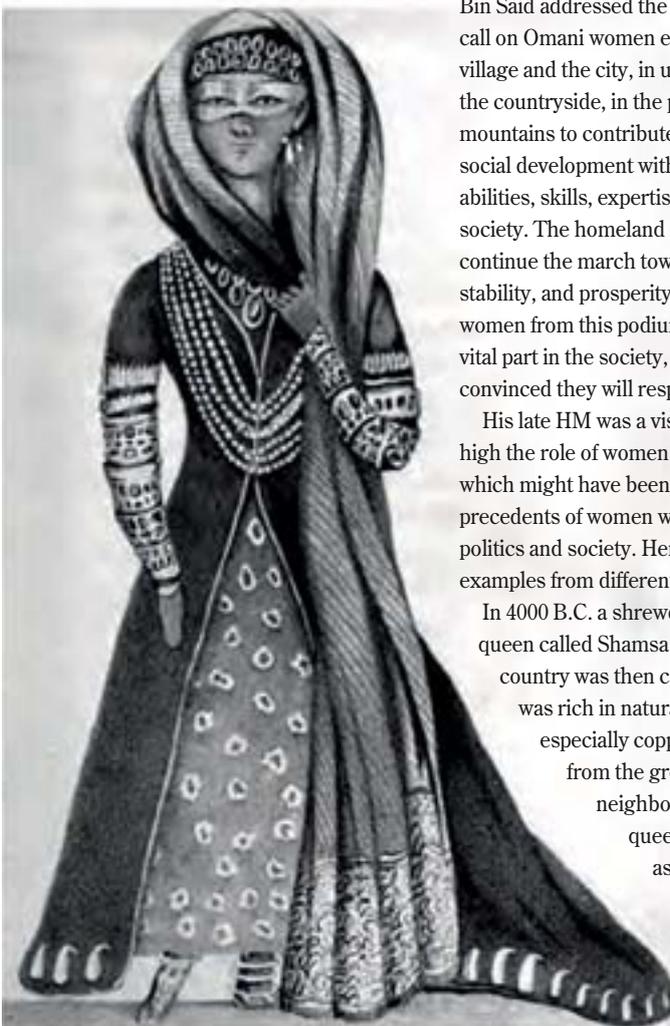
In 4000 B.C. a shrewd and powerful queen called Shamsa ruled Oman. This country was then called Majan, and was rich in natural resources especially copper. To rescue her from the greedy eyes of neighbouring sovereigns, queen Shamsa sought assistance from Sargon, the Akkadian ruler, conquered and won the war against Farris. Some scholars contested this

story; however, I argue that such a reference to women, whether accurate or not, signifies the status of women at that time.

Recent history witnessed the rise of some very brave Omani women. At the dawn of Al Said reign, Sayyida Moza, daughter of Ahmed Bin Said, founder of the Al Said dynasty, was a remarkable woman. Following the death of the fourth Al Said Sovereign "Sultan Bin Ahmed", Moza served as a guardian to her son-in-law Said Bin Sultan. Her brothers Saif and Qais did not like that, to the extent that they forced a siege on the old city of Muscat where she lived. Moza, Said Bin Sultan and their supporters were trapped with no food or ammunition inside the city walls.

Moza and her entourage feared famine and defeat. The brave lady, however, did not surrender and showed remarkable leadership. Firstly, she dressed in male clothes, pretended to be one of her opponents and went ahead to bribe the soldiers. Her purpose was to test the loyalty of her soldiers and to Moza's relief, they turned down the bribe adamantly. After that, Sayyida Moza ordered all the nails, small stones, and anything made of iron or silver to be gathered. She moulded these into gun powder and bullets, fought and won the war from behind the walls of old Muscat. Moza maintained her status as a guardian until 1832 when she died, and Sayyid Said Bin Sultan assumed power.

After the death of his aunt and guardian, Said Bin Sultan remained in power until 1856 at which time he conquered and occupied the African city of Zanzibar. Upon his death, his son, Sayyid Majid Bin Said was appointed the Sultan of Zanzibar. In the palace of Sayyid Majid, lived a powerful young princess who defied all traditions and rules. Sayyida Salma, known for being a strong willed, independent thinker,



The Sultaness of Muscat

“He who subjects a woman to a verbal offence or an act of indecent behaviour, or invades the privacy of women is punished by a prison time between one month and one year, and a fine of 100-300 OMR”.

eloped with a German businessman Rudolph Heinrich Ruete. While Mr. Ruete sold his assets in Zanzibar, Sayyid Majid turned a blind eye and the couple were able to travel to Germany with no major obstacles.

Sayyida Salma, publicly known as Emily

Ruete, wrote a book about her life in Zanzibar, which is considered the first documentation of the Arab life in that era. Her book: “Memoirs of an Arabian princess from Zanzibar” painted a vivid picture of her life in Zanzibar, the social structure and feuds in the palace, and remains one of the

most important woman’s biographies in recent history.

The basic law (1996) states “All individuals are equal before the law, and they have equal rights and responsibilities, there shall be no discrimination based on gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, or social status”. Omani law refers to the individual, and this applies to women and men equally unless stated otherwise. One of the most important issues that women face globally is violence. Omani law protects women from marital and family abuse, In Article 266 of the penal law: “He who subjects a woman to a verbal offence or an act of indecent behaviour, or invades the privacy of women is punished by a prison time between one month and one year, and a fine of 100-300 OMR”. Women were also highly considered in child law as it grants women the right to health services and fully paid leave before and after delivery.

The controversial nationality law allows women to pass Omani citizenship if she is divorced, widowed and the whereabouts of the father is unknown, provided that the marriage is based on previous approval from the government, the child had been living in Oman for at least 10 years, and of proven good conduct. This law had been contested by groups of activists as it denies children of known fathers Omani citizenship and the privileges that come with it, including free health, education, and social assistance.

The personal status law enforces the right of a women to financial and legal independence. For example, unlike some other countries in the Arab world, the social status or guardian’s approval is not a requirement for any financial or legal transaction, women can travel on



The right to marry was also not forgotten. According to Islam, the father or guardian of a woman is responsible for marrying her in front of the Sheikh, after her consent.

their own, and protection of physical and emotional harm is granted by law. On the other hand, the wife has the right to alimony whether married or divorced, even if she is financially well off. With regards to divorce, women have the right to divorce, and if the partner refuses, she can seek Khula, which is forced removal of marriage in exchange for her financial rights.

The right to marry was also not forgotten. According to Islam, the father or guardian of a woman is responsible for marrying her in front of the Sheikh, after her consent. Many families, for whatever reason, forced unwanted marriages, but in 2010 an amendment to the personal law stated that women could appeal to the supreme court if they feel they were denied marriage to a suitable candidate. Following that, many marriages took place in courts of law, meanwhile families showed more resilience to societal changes.

OMANI WOMEN IN STATISTICS

The World Economic Forum produces a periodic report in which the gender gap in countries of the world is ranked on a scale of 0-1. The index is composed of four sub-indices: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. In 2020, Oman ranked 144 out of 153 countries, and had a score of 0.602 indicating poor gender gap. In the individual scores, Oman ranked worst in political empowerment in which the score was 0.021 and the rank was 150, followed by economic participation in which Oman

scored 0.431 and ranked 143. Health and education were identified as areas with lesser gender gap. In those Oman scored 0.977, 0.979 and ranked 45 and 79 for health and education respectively.

These findings can be seen from the percentage of women with leadership roles in the private sector. For example, Kemp et al. (2014) found that only 4.2% of senior company leaders were women, and only 7.4% of board members in the private sector were women compared to 3.5% in the public sector. On the other hand, evidence shows that Omani women lack motivation, and may be entrapped in their own stereotypical gender role.

An additional factor may be society rejection of the progressive role of women. This was apparent in the last Shura council election in which only two out of 87 members were women in 2019. Considering that at least 13 women nominated themselves to the Majlis, this signifies a lack of societal acceptance of women in senior and political roles.

In summary, Omani women have an opportunity to conquer the world. The legal and administrative environment is supportive, but the societal norms and values are variable and could be a hindrance. Moreover, women themselves have a limited view of what they can achieve, and perhaps social and economic programmes should be put in place to push the gender equality agenda forward. ■

DEENA AL ASFOOR

Deena Al Asfoor has recently successfully completed assessment for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at St Catherine's College, Oxford. Her thesis is on Population Health. She is an adviser for the Ministry of Health in Oman. In her lecture at Sackville Street on 'The State of Women in Oman: Past, Present and Future', she looked at key Omani women in politics and history, their current status and changing roles and how this will impact the country's future. Her central message is that, despite cultural challenges, more Omani women should be proactive and take advantage of Oman's education and economic environment.



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THE LAND OF FRANKINCENSE

The Society hosted Ali Alkathiri, Director of the Museum of the Land of Frankincense in Salalah, in December. He has been working since 2004 for the Office of the Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, Diwan of the Royal Court.



He gave a fascinating lecture on the origins of the Frankincense trade by exploring frankincense through a historical lens from the Dhofar region. His lecture looked at trade routes by land and sea around the world and their different uses including religion and medicine. Ali also focused on different historical sites in Dhofar including Al-Baleed, Khor Rori/Sumhuram, Wadi Dawkah (Natural Park of Frankincense Trees) and Wubar which have been linked to the frankincense trade.

Now that UNESCO has listed them as world heritage sites, we hope that more people will carry out more research in this fascinating field, and we thank Ali

Alkathiri for coming to the Society to give us an eye-opening lecture!

The Dhofar littoral on the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean was known for many centuries as the Frankincense Coast, and the fragrant resin was the main source of wealth for the Governorate in ancient times. Dhofar historically was the Oman's great gateway to the trade routes of the Indian Ocean and to the crossroads of Southern Arabia's caravan routes. Even now, the traces of the old trans-Arabia routes are discernible across the deserts and mountains, tracks, camp sites and villages, some part buried in the sands of time.

Frankincense from Dhofar was recorded at the court of Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt in 1500 BC. She was the daughter, sister and wife of a king, and regarded as one of the most successful pharaohs, reigning longer than any other woman of an indigenous Egyptian dynasty. A drawing of a ship docked at Sumhuram, ancient city of Dhofar, can be seen in a temple in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor.

Ali described Al Baleed, which is a

combination of open air archaeological site and the Museum of the Frankincense land. The museum focusses on two major themes: the rich historical and archaeological heritage of Dhofar; and the remarkable maritime tradition of the region and the Sultanate generally. The historical room includes artefacts excavated at Al Baleed as well as other ancient sites including Sumhuram. There are superb models of Omani boats from 3000BC to current times.

Khor Rori/Sumhuram was founded as a fortified settlement two thousand years ago, probably in part motivated by the need to control the production of the valuable commodity of frankincense, and this city is identified as the major port of the time. Excavations have revealed the ground plan of the large city and identified maritime links as far away as India and the Mediterranean.

Wadi Dawkah is a stoney, semi desert valley 40kms North of Salalah, and contains several square kilometres of natural frankincense bushes, which can be viewed from a visitors' platform. Wubar is the fourth site recognised by UNESCO as world heritage in the Land of Frankincense. This is two hours' drive North of Salalah, and is another rich and important archaeological site, often referred to as the Lost City of Ubar. It is seen as a major place on the frankincense trade routes to the North and West.

The whole story of frankincense and ancient Dhofar, and the economic value then, is now a strong attraction in Oman's growing tourist trade, which will be of increasing importance in diversification of the economy in years to come. Tourists are arriving in increasing numbers from all over the world to enjoy the glorious coast, spectacular mountains, benevolent climate – and the land of Frankincense. We were glad to hear of it from Ali. ■

THE MARIA THERESA DOLLAR

ARTICLE BY CLARA SEMPLE

Clara Semple, author of 'A Silver Legend: The Story of the Maria Theresa Thaler' visited the Society to discuss one of the most remarkable and distinctive coins ever known, the beautiful silver thaler or dollar first minted in 1741.

While it is true that the Maria Theresa Thaler was and still is better known in Oman than in many other countries in which it circulated, it was nevertheless a truly international coin and acted as a medium of exchange in many countries in Africa and the Middle East without a currency of their own, where it became an economic necessity.

My interest, some might say obsession, with this beautiful and distinctive coin began when I was living in the Sudan where it had once been currency. I glimpsed it lurking in dusty showcases, its glorious patina obscured by the grime of the years. I felt sure it had an interesting

story to tell of travels and encounters and was disappointed that the silversmiths had little idea of its history despite the fact that they found it useful for melting down to rework as jewellery or simply to be adapted and worn as an amulet or part of a necklace.

My quest to discover this story took me to many countries as well as archives and libraries. During a 'reign' of 200 years this fascinating coin with its effigy of a well-endowed Empress, had become known and trusted by many in remote parts of Africa and Arabia. It was called by many names and epithets (*abu tayr, abu reesh, Levantinethaler, la Grosse Madame* to name but a few). In this article it is referred to as MTT – *Maria Theresa thaler*.

The Empress Maria Theresa was the daughter of Charles VI, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary and Bohemia. Upon his death in 1740 she became, at the age of 23, the first female Hapsburg to become head of the vast unwieldy Empire, a daunting inheritance for one so young. She rose to the challenge and proved herself to be a clear-minded and humane ruler. It didn't take her long to get to grips with the bankrupt treasury, and she astutely appointed the best of advisors.

Meanwhile, her handsome coin was sent off towards the Red Sea where it became increasingly popular as a trade coin (along with the Spanish Dollar and others) and proved particularly important for the purchase of coffee beans from Yemen which had to be paid for in cash. Silver coins of all sorts circulated but none was so much sought after as this solid silver coin known as a *Thaler* (a generic name for a large silver coin) after the valley of St Joachimsthal in Bohemia which first provided the silver bullion. The local nobility on whose land the silver mines were found were given permission to strike coins from it. The German *Thaler* of course gives us the word *dollar*.



On the death of the Empress in 1780, her coin continued to be restruck by popular demand from the Levantine traders who realised that a change of image might not be acceptable.

In Oman, Yemen, Sudan, Ethiopia and many other countries, silver was an integral part of the wedding dowry that was collected by the bride for her wedding day and which duly became her private form of savings, a sort of portable bank. It was understood she could use this sum during her married life and furthermore do with it as she pleased. She might even sell it when she was in need. It was therefore in a bride's interest to accumulate as much as she could for her future financial security.

While sometimes a piece of jewellery was created with an MTT embedded in the

design, the coin with its high grade silver content was also melted down (to the dismay of later collectors) and reworked as a traditional item of jewellery.

On the death of the Empress in 1780, her coin continued to be restruck by popular demand from the Levantine traders who realised that a change of image might not be acceptable. They feared that coins with the image of the Empress's son, Josef II, might be considered counterfeit. Known as the '1780 Restrikes' these coins were struck in several of the different mints in the Empire and further afield. They thus cause

confusion as the inclusion of that date suggests that they were minted in 1780; but more often they are of more recent origin.

In the 19th century copies of the MTT were even produced in the mints of London and Birmingham, as well as Paris, Brussels, Rome and Bombay. The weight was carefully maintained as was the iconography. However, over the years small differences (mostly unintentional) appeared. This has excited the interest of numismatists who with painstaking study can usually tell which mint that particular coin might originate from.

The MTT is still being minted today at the State Mint in Vienna despite its no longer being used as currency. Nowadays, it is mostly ordered by collectors directly from the Mint who consider it a numismatic curiosity and a part of history. Nearly 400 million have been minted throughout the world since 1740. The silver for modern minting now comes from the Far East. ■



Because of the reliability of the MTT's weight, it has been used even in recent times to weigh jewellery.

OMANI-YEMENI RELATIONS IN THE PAST CENTURY

ARTICLE BY HELEN LACKNER

Up to the 1960s, Oman dealt with two Yemeni states, which shared different characteristics at different times: Oman and the Imamate of Yemen were ruled by autocrats, Imams Yahya and Ahmed in Sana'a (1918-1962), and Said bin Taimur in Oman (1932-1970).

They shared the concern to retain independence which led them to stay isolated from the outside world commercially as well as politically. Oman employed British and Baluchi military to avoid the emergence of a national military which might challenge him; by contrast the Yemeni imams sent men for training in Iraq and Egypt, men who later spearheaded the 1962 revolution which established the republic.

Aden and the Protectorates (until 1967) shared with Oman a close military involvement with the UK. The rulers of both Oman and Yemen faced significant armed opposition: in the 1950s, the Jabal Akhdar revolt against the Sultan was suppressed with help from the British, who returned to Southern Oman in the late 1960s to fight the



People's Front for the Liberation of Oman. They were also deployed in the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), as well as Aden and the Protectorates. In southern Oman and Aden, the enemies were leftist liberation movements connected with the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN). While in recent decades Oman has benefited from peace, unfortunately the same cannot be said about Yemen.

Common Characteristics and Features

Oman and Yemen share certain geographic features: both have fertile coastal plains which benefit from monsoon rains falling mostly on their mountainous hinterlands, which also have impressive escarpments suitable as hideouts for dissidents. They have similar settlement patterns with small mountain-top safe villages whose traditional economies were based on livestock herding and subsistence crops such as sorghum. Their coasts are wealthy in fish, with currents and monsoon facilitating trade with Asia and Africa.

These complemented the attraction of Muslim pilgrimage centres on the routes to Mecca and Medina, encouraging trade and pilgrimage income. Over centuries, the incense trade also brought income and fame to both countries. Many of these nowadays are little more than memories or tourist attractions.

The second half of the twentieth century transformed their economies, through their own oil production and relations with wealthy oil exporting neighbours. However the difference here is notable: Oman produces about 900 000 b/d for a population of just over 5 million while Yemen, with a population of 30 million, produced 400 000b/d at its peak in 2002, dropping to about 125 000b/d by 2010. This has significantly different implications for both potential and development.

Another difference: although in the past the two main Islamic sects of Yemen, the Shi'a Zaydis and the Shafi'i Sunnis, mostly lived in harmony and the rise of fundamentalism there is recent, Oman has uniquely in the region been successful in avoiding religiously based conflict thanks to Ibadism which has protected its people from the sectarian divides found elsewhere.

Relations Between the Sultanate and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY)

The PDRY, which succeeded Aden and the Protectorates, existed between 1967 and 1990. It was the only socialist state in the Arab world, closely aligned with the Soviet Union, ensuring hostility with the conservative Sultanate and other neighbours. This was intense during its first decade as the PDRY actively supported the revolutionary People's Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLOAG including the Arabian Gulf up to 1972, PFLO thereafter), a revolutionary movement whose ambition was to overthrow the sultanate through a socialist revolution.

The PFLO was defeated by 1976 primarily due to two factors: the 'hearts and minds' policies introduced by Sultan Qaboos after he came to power in 1970 and provided modern services such as education and medical provision; and the military involvement on his side of the Shah of Iran's military alongside the British and Jordanians. Relations between the two states remained tense until 1982 when the PDRY put an end to the PFLO radio broadcasts and diplomatic relations were established. That year Oman provided the country with emergency aid after destructive floods.

Oman avoided involvement in the PDRY's internal internecine conflicts, particularly in 1986, despite renewed military and minor border clashes in 1987, the year ambassadors were exchanged. In a sign of improvements, PDRY president

Hayder al Attas visited Muscat and signed trade agreements in 1988. An important asphalt road linking the two countries was completed on the Omani side of the border in 1989 and on the Yemeni side in 2000, completing the road network from Aden. It was financed by Oman and built by a Yemeni-Omani contractor,

Yemeni Unification and the Republic of Yemen's Relations with Oman

The two Yemeni states unified into the Republic of Yemen in 1990. Its relations with Oman have been good and Oman has tried to help Yemen's development but has mainly been involved in attempts to appease further internecine struggles. Among the achievements of bilateral relations were the border agreement in 1992, followed in December 2003 by a maritime border agreement. In 1999 the Mazyuna free zone was established on the Omani side of the border in anticipation of the completion of the road which would facilitate transport from the Gulf to the heart of Yemen and be a boost to trade and manufacture.

In 1993 Sultan Qaboos made a well-received state visit to Sana'a, but unfortunately failed in his attempt to prevent a final breakdown in relations between President Saleh and his southern Vice-President Ali Salem Al Beedh. Oman supported unity in the 1994 Yemeni civil war, but also gave asylum and nationality to Al Beedh provided he stayed out of politics, revoked in 2009 when he took up the leadership of the separatist Hirak movement.



Current situation: Impact of the War

With the outbreak of the Yemeni war in 2015, Oman was the only GCC state which refused to join the Saudi-led coalition demonstrating its political independence, an important aspect of its international policies. Instead Oman has worked to negotiate a peaceful solution. A Huthi negotiating team is based in Muscat: the closure of Sana'a airport since 2016 makes Muscat the only place where the Huthis can easily meet international interlocutors. Moreover, Oman's long-standing good relations with Iran strengthen the Huthis' positive perception of Omani mediation. Oman has also facilitated and secured the release of hostages held in Yemen.

Oman has maintained good relations with Iran throughout the decades from the period of the Shah and continued since the Islamic revolution. While not directly connected to Yemen, Oman's role in mediating the early negotiations leading to the Iranian/international nuclear deal in 2015 give it a special importance for both the USA and Saudi Arabia.

The Omani state, its citizens and charitable groups provide humanitarian aid to Yemenis, hosting them and paying for their medical treatment. This follows a policy which started with the establishment of a weekly clinic on the Yemeni side of the border for local citizens. However, the Omanis are controlling the border carefully and do not allow large numbers of Yemenis to cross as refugees while facilitating transit of Yemenis via Oman to other destinations.

The Saudi-led coalition has accused Oman of being a conduit for Iranian weapons to the Huthi movement. Although smuggling has been an issue, there are good reasons to question them: firstly, the protective fences constructed to prevent infiltration during the war against the PFLO are still largely in place. Secondly, much of what arrives in Yemen comes by sea, outside Omani state control; and thirdly anything that reaches eastern Yemen has to travel through numerous check points over hundreds of kms of territory controlled by the Saudi-supported government. Finally the Saudi military have been in control of both border points and the main port on the Yemeni side of the border since 2018.



status as mediator and resist pressures from Oman's wealthy neighbours. It will be difficult for Sultan Haytham to persist with these policies, given the economic pressures. For Yemen, it is extremely important that he should succeed, as Oman's political mediation capacity is unique in addition to Muscat being the place

All this suggests that the accusations may be intended as anti-Omani propaganda rather than genuine concerns.

where the Huthis can effectively engage with the outside world.

Once the war ends, Oman and Yemen could form a significant bloc within the GCC, should Oman's support for Yemen's inclusion in the GCC succeed and the GCC organisation survive its current crisis. Such an outcome would benefit the peninsula as a whole. Yemen and Oman can complement each other in tourism, trade, fisheries and niche agriculture among others. It is in the interest of both Oman and Yemen to develop social and economic policies that respond to the needs of their populations rather than the geopolitical priorities of their two major neighbours, the UAE and SA. ■

Future Developments

This year has ended the 50 year long rule of Sultan Qaboos, now succeeded by Sultan Haytham at a difficult time for both Oman and Yemen. The former is under considerable financial pressure, worsened by the Covid-19 crisis and the fall in oil prices. The latter is still in the grip of a war which shows little sign of solution.

Oman's history of independence and neutrality in local and other conflicts enabled Qaboos to achieve international

HELEN LACKNER



Helen addressed a full house when she lectured at the Society earlier this year. She followed earlier speakers on the subject of Omani-Yemeni relations including Fred Halliday (1999) and Noel Brehony (2012).

She is a writer, academic and researcher working on the Middle East and Yemen in particular. She has spent four decades researching Yemen, working in-country for 15 years. She is a Research Associate at SOAS, was the 2016 Sir William Luce Fellow at Durham University and is a Visiting

Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. The editor of Journal of the British-Yemeni Society, she is a regular contributor to Oxford Analytica's briefs and open Democracy. Her publications include Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State and Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition (editor).

THE DIVERSITY OF OMANI GENES

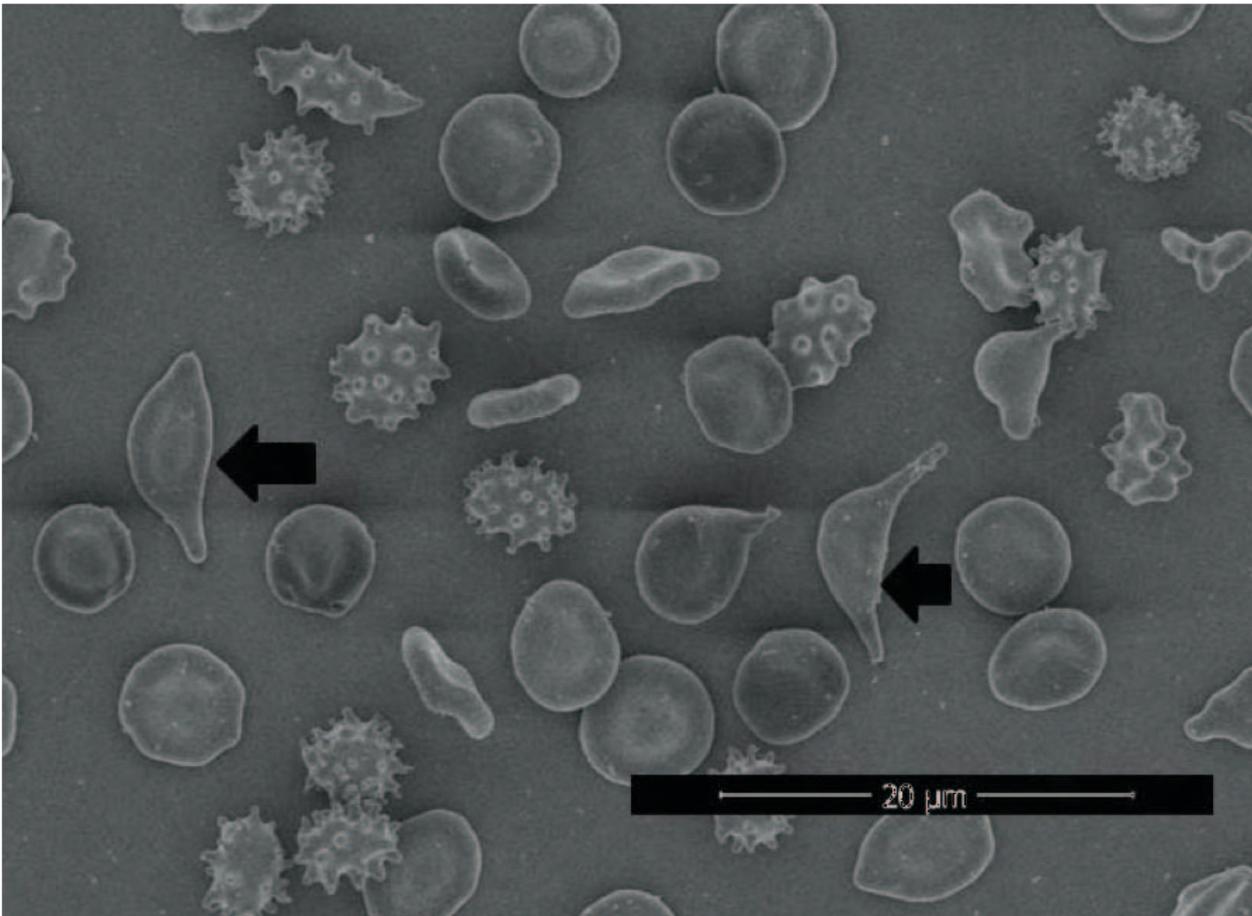
ARTICLE BY DR HALIMA AL BALUSHI

Dr Halima al Balushi is the Blood Transfusion Senior Specialist at the Royal Hospital and completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge on 'Omani Red Blood Cell Diseases', in a landmark study that revealed a genetic anomaly in Omani sickle cells. Her pioneering work will not only identify diseased blood cells but will be instrumental in developing new treatment methods. With large medical research investment in the Sultanate, and the interest of His Majesty in scientific research, Oman has established itself as a regional leader in the medical research field. Here is a synopsis of her talk at the Society.

Arab countries cover two continents stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean, and they share the same culture, history, traditions and religion. Their genetic background, however, is significantly diverse, as their origin is a mix of south west Asia, Africa and Europe.

Oman was a powerful empire in the late 17th century and by the 19th century the Omani empire borders extended to Iran and Pakistan in the north and central Somalia to Cape Delgado in southern Mozambique along the south east African coast to the south. Historically, Oman was





the principal trading port of the Arabian Gulf region. Its high trade activities resulted in the complex mix of social and ethnic backgrounds found in the Omani people today.

In the commonly accepted scientific classification of potential genetic blood disorders, 45% of the Omani population are $-\alpha/-\alpha$ gene carriers, 44% $-\alpha/\alpha\alpha$, and 11% of the population are $\alpha\alpha/\alpha\alpha$. Around 10% of Omani nationals carry the gene for HbS (hepatitis B surface antigen) and 2-3% carry the gene for β -thalassaemia (a blood disorder that reduces the production of haemoglobin, the iron-containing protein in red blood cells). The other abnormality that is common in Oman is G6PD (glucose-6-phosphatase deficiency, in which red blood cells break down in some circumstances) which is found in 28% of males and 12% of females.

Omanis are known to have the highest frequency of α thalassaemia and G6PD reported so far in any race. It is thought that Malaria is the evolutionary driving force behind sickle cell disease,

thalassaemia and other erythrocyte (red blood cells which contain the pigment haemoglobin) defects. Zanzibar, Iran, Pakistan and part of Arabian Peninsula are classified as Malaria endemic countries by WHO. Thalassaemia is common in Iran and Pakistan, G6PD is common in the Arabian Peninsula and sickle cell disease is common in Africa.

The complex of these genes has created rare mutations that are found only in Oman. In 1989 Langdown and co-workers from Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge reported that when carrying out routine blood tests on an Omani man, genetic analysis showed a second mutation in addition to the usual sickle cell mutation, which they named sickle cell Oman. Only 70 people in Oman are known to have this rare mutation, though it is spreading as it only requires one parent to pass it to the offspring.

The date and place of origin of the sickle cell Oman mutation is a puzzle; a study suggested that all sickle cell mutations are of African origin, and clustering, group

migration and travel resulted in spread of the disease creating different types. This may have also been the case for the origin of the sickle cell Oman mutation, as it was mentioned previously that the Omani empire was associated with migration from East Africa. A considerable number of Omanis migrated from East Africa to Oman and since from Oman to other parts of the Arabian Peninsula and India. However, the date at which the HbS-Oman mutation arose is still unknown. According to the patients interviewed the mutation is less than 100 years old and arose in Zanzibar although no cases of sickle cell Oman have been described there.

Considerable effort has been paid to control genetic blood disorder in Oman. In 1995 a pre-marital counselling program was established at the Royal Hospital, and in 1999 the national programme for control of genetic blood disorders was started. All regional laboratories were equipped with advanced machines, and a central cytogenetic centre has been established in the Royal Hospital. ■



HE Talal Al-Rahbi, Deputy Secretary General of the SCP and Dr David Halpern, CEO of BIT, sign the contract.

BIT and SCP are working together to develop and embed behavioural insights capacity within Oman. Behavioural insights are an inductive approach to policy making that combines insights from psychology, cognitive science and social science with empirically-tested results to discover how humans make choices. The BIO's overarching objectives are to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public policy through the use of behavioural insights, make public services more effective and easier to use and enable the Omani population to make better decisions for themselves.

The BIO will be established in two phases. The first will involve defining the BIO's scope, developing its vision, mission and objectives. BIT's staff will deliver training for the core BIO staff to develop their expertise in applying BIT's project methodology and devising behavioural solutions. BIT and the SCP will work with Ministries across the Omani government to identify policy challenges suited to a behavioural approach. The second phase of the



Dr Fatma Al Hajri, Head of Nudge Unit at SCP, with Dr Halpern.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS CONTRACT SIGNING IN LONDON

The Anglo-Omani Society welcomed representatives from the Supreme Council for Planning (SCP) and the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT – a development born from the British Cabinet Office) on 29 November 2019 to sign a contract for the first Behavioural Insights Office (BIO) in Oman in the presence of the Omani Ambassador, HE Abdulaziz Al-Hinai.

collaboration will focus on developing behavioural solutions and designing trials to tackle the identified policy challenges.

This collaboration is an exciting step for both Oman and BIT. The 2019 NGG Delegation in Oxford focused on the impact behavioural science can have on public policy through a Nudge Unit (see article in the Society Review 2019). The Omani delegates from public and private sector organisations are now well positioned to act as advocates of the Sultanate's new policy capability. ■

THE SALUKI'S UNIQUE ROLE IN MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURE

BY SIR TERENCE CLARK, FORMER AMBASSADOR TO OMAN, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY AND AUTHOR OF 'THE SALUKIS IN MY LIFE: HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE, FROM THE ARAB WORLD TO CHINA', see the 2018 Review. www.saluqi.net

The average traveller to the Middle East may never see a Saluki – or *Salūqī* – to give it its proper Arabic pronunciation. They tend to be guarded from covetous eyes or thieving hands, but it is a hound bred principally for coursing gazelle and hare over open terrain and comes in two varieties – the smooth or short-haired and the feathered or long-haired.



So, what makes a mere dog so special, especially in a Middle Eastern context? History shows the Saluki is no ordinary dog. Indeed, it should never be referred to in Arabic as Kalb but only as *Salūqī* or '*al-Hurr*', 'the free or noble one'. It has enjoyed an exceptional position in Middle Eastern societies for millennia, and not for nothing was it sometimes called Companion of Kings, as it was often portrayed in the company of rulers, e.g. accompanying Tutankhamun in the hunt. Its history goes back into the cradle of civilisation in Mesopotamia, the Land of Two Rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. Early hunter-gatherers became settled

farmers here and we find some of the earliest evidence of the emergence of a hunting hound resembling the breed we know today as the Saluki.

Like all breeds of dog, the Saluki derives from the wolf, probably the smaller Arabian wolf than the European grey wolf. Its domestication and development of a distinct breed of hunting hound took thousands of years but by the late fifth millennium BC it is clear from a skull excavated from a well in the great archaeological mound at Tepe Gawra near Mosul in Iraq that a Saluki-type dog was already established. From Eridu in southern Iraq, reputed to be the oldest city



Tutankhamun's Painted Box, showing him hunting with Salukis, by permission of the Griffith Institute, Oxford.

of ancient Sumer, a skeleton described by British archaeologists as “probably of a Saluki-type dog” was excavated from a grave of a young boy dating to early in the fourth millennium. British archaeologists also excavated at Tell Brak in NE Syria the complete skeleton of a dog dating from c. 2,500 BC, which an expert at the Natural History Museum described as “certainly of greyhound build”. A comparison of the bones with those of one of the first Salukis to be imported to the UK from Egypt in 1895, whose skeleton has been preserved at the Natural History Museum, Tring, revealed striking similarities.

The earliest representation of a Saluki in art appears in a faded wall painting from the Halaf period c.5800 BC at Catal Huyuk in SE Turkey. Rather clearer are images from seal impressions in sun-dried clay from the Chalcolithic period c. 5000 BC which were described by the British excavators at Tell Arpachiya near Mosul as of “some kind of coursing dog, perhaps a greyhound”. About 300 similar seals and seal impressions at Tepe Gawra near Mosul show many hounds in hunting scenes and the excavators commented:

“The animals depicted are rarely of any domesticated variety, except for the commonly represented Saluki”. Similar seals and seal impressions have been found at other sites in the area. From a 4th millennium cemetery at Susa in Khuzistan, Iran come painted pottery pieces, described by the excavators as the oldest representations of the Saluki type of hunting hound.

A small copper figurine excavated at Tell Aqraqab east of Baghdad dating from the Sumerian period of c. 3600 BC clearly shows a Saluki with lop ears. By this time, people had long since lost the need to hunt purely for subsistence as agriculture and animal husbandry were well developed. Their frequent portrayal in art forms suggest that apart from their use in hunting, dogs may have been important in social interaction through gifts, dowries, bribes, tribute and sacrifice. In short, well-bred hunting dogs could have facilitated and participated in many different types of social interaction – much as they still do today. For example, I heard stories in Syria illustrating the extraordinary value of the Saluki whereby one hunter was ready to

exchange a water pump and a horse for one, while another even offered his daughter for one; and it was common to gift puppies to high-placed officials or shaikhs to curry favour.

In 2011 the Saudis claimed an amazing archaeological discovery at al-Maqar near the Wadi al-Dawasir, where among other things beautifully shaped stone artefacts of a horse's head, complete with bridle, a falcon and a Saluki's head were uncovered and dated to about 7,000 BC. These were later displayed in an exhibition about the horse sponsored by Saudi Arabia at the British Museum, entitled ‘From Arabia to Ascot’. Experts have been cautious in appraising these highly symbolic finds for Saudi Arabia, not least because it would mean rewriting the history books on the origins of both the domesticated horse and the Saluki and, indeed, of falconry, all of which have well-evidenced origins outside the Arabian Peninsula at later dates. More recently the Saudis have redesignated the Saluki head as that of a horse.

In Ancient Egypt, the walls of tombs as well as artefacts from the third millennium onwards are often decorated with Salukis,

some of them named. Sometimes hounds are shown being delivered as tribute from the Land of Punt, a mythical country south of Egypt, possibly extending into South Arabia, which might suggest that the Saluki was an import. However, it is only from the Egyptians that we have examples of mummified dogs to give more tangible evidence of how the early Saluki might have looked.

In the Levant and on Cyprus, artefacts showing Salukis from the second millennium have been found. The Ancient Greeks certainly used fast coursing hounds for hunting and Arrian, the chronicler of Alexander the Great, in the 4th century AD gives a fine description of them that would fit a Saluki. Moreover it is possible that it is to Seleucus I Nicator, one of Alexander's generals and his eventual successor, who founded the Seleucid Empire in 305 BC, which at one time stretched over much of the Middle East, with its capital at Seleucia in Mesopotamia, that we owe the word Saluki, for Seleucid translated into Arabic became *Salūqi*. The Romans were equally fond of hunting with Salukis and represented them often in mosaics from the Middle East and North Africa.

The Saluki record is then carried on by the pre-Islamic poets of the Arabian Peninsula. Poetry has always been an important part of Arabic culture. The very word for poet – *sha'ir* – was held to be a person with supernatural knowledge, a wizard in league with spirits and enjoying magical powers. At that time, poetry was in the form of the *qasidah* or ode with strict rules of composition that were meant to be recited. Some of the best have survived in a collection known in English as *The seven golden odes of pagan Arabia*, known also as *The Moallakat*. Legend has it that in the sixth century, in the period known as the *Jahiliyah* or Ignorance before the coming of Islam, there was an annual fair held at 'Ukaz near Mecca, where poets met in rivalry and recited their best compositions, the most successful of which were written down (some sources say on fine Egyptian linen in letters of gold) and affixed to the door of the Ka'ba in Mecca. *'Moallakat'* is a transliteration of the Arabic word for 'suspended' or 'hung'. This colourful story is generally dismissed by both Arab and Western commentators as improbable, not least because there is no reference to such an event in the Qur'an or in ancient histories of Mecca.

Whatever the explanation, the seven odes represent some of the finest descriptions of Bedouin life of the period, particularly the natural wonders of the desert: such as in Labid ibn Rabi'a's rhapsody on a female oryx, likened to a pearl shining white in the night, which first loses her calf to wolves, while sleeping among the sand-dunes through a night of incessant rain, and then, as she searches desperately for it, she is pursued by hunters, who let loose after her their two "lop-eared hounds", which, when they catch up with her, she dispatches one after the other with her spear-like horns. In this ode, the hunters' hounds are merely described as 'lop-eared' and it may be questioned whether they were necessarily Salukis; but it was a common stylistic device of poets of the time to use metonymy, the omission of the noun and substitution of a characteristic adjective or descriptive phrase, and 'lop-eared' was identified with Salukis. Moreover, as such hounds were the great favourite of hunters among the poets and the only breed known to have been used by the Bedouin for hunting in the desert, it might have been seen as superfluous to cite repeatedly the



Saluki puppy by the camp fire in Wadi Rum, Jordan.

THE SALUKI'S UNIQUE ROLE

breed by name. Another poet of roughly the same period in the late 6th century, al-Muzarrid ibn Dirar al-Dhubyani, leaves no doubt about the breed when in a long *qasidah* he refers specifically to *banat saluqiyyain* [daughters of two Salukis].

The classic saga-like *qasidah* remained popular over the following centuries but by the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty as caliphs ruling from Damascus in 661-750, a new specific genre of hunting poetry or *tardiyyah*, as it was called, began to appear, though it only reached its full flowering under the Abbasid caliphs, ruling from Baghdad in 749-1258, especially from the prolific pen of Hasan bin Hani, known as Abu Nuwas, who died in c. 814. His poetry ranged widely and he was particularly known for his inspired verses on love and wine. However, the hunting hound clearly held pride of place, as no fewer than 27 of his 55 poems of the chase describe hunting with hounds. As with the pre-Islamic *qasidah*, in none of his poems does he employ the word Saluki as such but comes closest in a fine poem, which reflects the traditional view of Arab geographers and lexicographers that the *Saluqi* came originally from a place called Saluq near Ta'izz in modern Yemen rather than the Seleucid Empire, though Saluq was in a mountainous area unsuited to the Saluki. He wrote:

*I will sing the praises of a hound
who cannot be outstripped, of perfect
conformation, he courses over all
types of terrain.*

*He was brought by kings from Saluq,
as if on a long flexible leash.*

In the chaos of the collapse of the Byzantine and Persian Empires in the 7-8th centuries AD, when the Arabs burst out of the Arabian Peninsula to conquer the surrounding region and eventually wider from North Africa to China, it is clear the conquerors took their Salukis with them not only from contemporary evidence but also from descriptions of them appearing in hunting treatises that have survived across the region, notably in al-Hayawan [On Animals], the encyclopaedic work of the great 9th century Abbasid historian al-Jahiz. The Saluki also appeared more graphically and increasingly in art forms.

For example, the vault over the entrance to the Umayyad hunting palace at Qusayr 'Amra east of Amman in Jordan, attributed to the Caliph Walid I from c. 715 AD, is covered with a vast mural of a pack of Salukis chasing onager or wild ass into a circle of nets in which the reputed figure of the Caliph is shown spearing them, despite the Islamic prohibition on the representation of living forms.

So, it is clear that despite the injunction on Muslims not to handle dogs, which are generally regarded as *Najis* or 'unclean', unless ritually cleansing themselves afterwards, from the start of Islam an exception was made for the Saluki. Grounds for this may be found in the Qur'an and the Hadith, the sayings attributed to the Prophet. Thus, in Sura V – Al-Maidah [The Table], Muslims are specifically allowed to eat the meat of prey caught by "trained hounds", which has obviously not been ritually slaughtered by having its throat cut. In the Hadith, this permission is qualified by the proviso that the Basmallah [In the name of God] has been said before the hounds are released. At the time of the Prophet in the Hijaz the only trained hounds used for hunting such prey were Salukis. There was a brief time when the Prophet issued an order that all dogs should be slaughtered to prevent rabies, especially black dogs with orange pips over their eyes. But the order was soon modified to exclude useful hunting, herding and guarding dogs. So the Saluki continued to enjoy its privileged position and, as today, it was allowed inside the

Bedouin tent and its companionship was enjoyed without inhibition. As Abu Nuwas wrote:

*I will sing the praises of a hound whose
owners' good fortune is assured by his
tremendous efforts.*

*All the good things they have come from him;
all the assistance they have comes from him.*

*His master is always like a slave to him; at
night he brings him nearest to his bed.*

*If he is uncovered, his master puts on him
his own coat.*

He has a blaze and his legs are white.

*His excellent conformation is pleasing to the
eye; also the receding corners of his mouth
and his long muzzle.*

*Gazelles are really in trouble when he is
hunting; he relishes his hard-running
attacks on them,*

*Hunting them down, twenty [of them],
in his headlong course!*

What a fine hound you are, without equal!

Despite the devastation wreaked upon the Abbasid Empire by the Mongols in the 13th century, the Saluki survived and frequently appears in art forms from Persia, Ottoman Turkey, Mughal India and China, maintaining its special status as the hunting companion of the nobility. It seems also to have been carried to Europe, possibly initially by returning Crusaders, and it often appears in major works of art, particularly from some of the great Italian masters such as Veronese (1528-88). Even Queen Victoria had one from Turkey, which was painted by Landseer in 1840.

Saluki illustrating the Dog Star from a medieval copy of *Kitab al-Hayawan* by al-Jahiz.



Traditions die hard, but across the region in the last 60-70 years or so major upheavals such as revolutions, wars, migrations and the settlement of the nomads have profoundly affected the old way of life and the Saluki did not come through unscathed. Even as recently as the 1980s, when I first became involved with Salukis in Iraq, they were regarded as a treasure to be strictly protected and given, never sold, only to assured owners. The sudden increase in oil wealth of the Gulf states changed that and opened up a market for Salukis.

Fresh impetus to the commercialization of the breed came 10 years or so ago from the development of a new form of sport in the Gulf – Saluki racing. It had been tried first in the mid-1990s in al-Ain, Abu Dhabi but was not a success on an oval track in a stadium. However they then tried a different, more natural approach by adapting a straight section of a couple of kilometers of a camel racetrack. At the start a live gazelle is presented to the hounds to fire up their enthusiasm. It is discreetly replaced with a stuffed gazelle suspended from a boom mounted on a pickup. The vehicle is driven parallel with the course and the hounds pursue the

Certainly the sport has revived great interest in this aspect of the Arabs' cultural heritage and it often forms part of the festivals that some Gulf rulers support to keep their history and traditions alive in the public memory.

stuffed creature over distances of up to 2.5 km. The events are attended by crowds of mainly young people and the winning owners are often handsomely rewarded. Some of the young shaikhs now maintain huge racing establishments to be compared with the kennels of the Abbasid rulers.

Oman is not immune from this development, even though the indigenous Saluki, for which Oman was once famed, became almost extinct after 1976, when a ban on hunting was introduced. There was a bit of a revival in the early 1990s and I

heard recently that some enthusiasts in the Sohar area were taking their Salukis into the UAE for racing. Some purists in the West decry this new sport which they believe will lead to a demand for a sprinter rather than all-round hunter, but such views ignore the fact that in its traditional role the Saluki has always pursued the gazelle more or less in a straight line, very much as on the track. Certainly the sport has revived great interest in this aspect of the Arabs' cultural heritage and it often forms part of the festivals that some Gulf rulers support to keep their history and traditions alive in the public memory.

There is a down side to all this. The demand from young enthusiasts for ready-made hunting Salukis, as they are often too impatient to go through the process of breeding their own hounds, far outstrips their availability in the Gulf and as a result agents comb the more northerly parts of the region for top-class runners. This has encouraged the growth of puppy farms on the one hand and an increase in abandoned hounds that do not make the grade on the other. However, it is clear that the Saluki has once again adapted to a changing world and has managed to retain its elevated status in many parts of the region. ■



Saluki racing in Abu Dhabi.

GLIMPSES OF OMAN

First place awarded to Majid Al Farsi.



EDINBURGH PHOTO EXHIBITION



ARTICLE BY NICHOLAS SMITH

This was the inaugural Society foray into Scotland. The Exhibition showcased the photographic talents of Omani students studying in the UK which are, unequivocally, found in abundance.

The photographs captured how young Omanis view their country, ranging from the visually stunning landscapes of Musandam to the historic fort at Nizwa and the awe-inspiring scenery of the

Al-Hajar mountains. However, the exhibition also told the story of Oman; the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, old and new, harmoniously existing together in a country that

seamlessly celebrates its past and embraces its future.

The Society welcomed 80 guests to the opulent Archer's Hall, Club House of the Royal Company of Archers, the Sovereign's bodyguard in Scotland. We were very fortunate to have the Royal Camel Corps piping the guests into the Exhibition; a sight at odds with our drenched yet stoic guests as they battled the inclement Scottish weather. The Royal Camel Corps with their Pipers and Drummers are not only the finest Camel Corps in the Arab World but stand as a testament to His Majesty's affection for Scotland; a love borne out of his posting to The Cameronians as a Junior Officer after commissioning from the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. The evening would have been a far lesser affair without them.



The event provided a rare opportunity to reconnect with our Scottish members to whom our events in London are just that bit too far away and we were grateful to have so many Omani students in attendance. Ollie Blake, Chairman of the New Generation Group, captured the sentiment of the room when he underlined the importance of fostering and nurturing the UK links with Omani students who have studied here. Coincidentally, two of our esteemed guests, Issa Al Shibani, the First Secretary at the Embassy and Humaid Al Zahree, Royal Camel Corps Commander, both completed their university education in Scotland and relished the opportunity to return to a familiar home.

The Scottish-Omani friendship is deep rooted and diverse; the event brought together the full spectrum of affiliation from the military, education, trade, arts and academia. The 51st Infantry Brigade, headquartered in Edinburgh, represents the interface between the British Army and the Sultan's Armed Forces, with serving



Second place awarded to Tasnim Al Siyadi.

The Scottish-Omani friendship is deep rooted and diverse; the event brought together the full spectrum of affiliation from the military, education, trade, arts and academia.

Omani officers posted as staff officers in Brigade Headquarters. Links like these not only pay homage to many years of friendship but also, importantly, ensure continued prosperity in tomorrow's world.

There is every intention in the New Year to expand our reach outside London and it is an opportunity which will not be missed.

Our hearty congratulations go to Majid Al Farsi who was unanimously awarded 1st place, Tasnim Al Siyadi awarded 2nd place and Mohammed Al Sarimi awarded 3rd place. ■

THE CULTURAL RENAISSANCE OF OMAN

ARTICLE BY IAN KENDRICK

In 1970 the musical cultural life of Oman was very simple and very traditional. It had changed little for several centuries and the main features were the singing of traditional songs, frequently with dancing, to mark social events such as eids, marriages and harvests.

Sultan Sa'id bin Tamour did not want Omani music to change as a result of foreign influence and made it illegal to listen to or import music, including from neighbouring Arab countries.

When Sultan Qaboos assumed power and started organising the transformation of Oman, the cultural heritage and its future new development was not forgotten. In the first five years of what became known as the Renaissance, a professional group of folklore dancers and singers and a military band were formed for the Royal Palace, with another military band for the Royal Oman Police.

After years of Oman's international isolation, the new ruler wanted VIP visitors to be impressed by being welcomed to the Sultanate by a smart Guard of Honour and by hearing their national anthem being played correctly and tunefully. The first visitor to be formally welcomed in this way was Jordan's King Hussein in 1975.

Also in 1975, the two bands combined with visiting British military bands to provide the musical accompaniment for the first Oman Tattoo. However, in 1980, there were more Omani military and bagpipe bands including a mounted band and this enabled that year's Oman Tattoo to be accompanied by 100% Omani musicians. The bagpipes were especially welcome as they were popular in the Middle East before they spread to Europe.

In 1984 Sultan Qaboos tasked a group of photographers, film makers and a recording team to travel throughout Oman collecting a record of all traditional music and dancing throughout the Sultanate. On completion, all the recorded material became the archives of the newly-formed Oman Centre for Traditional Music, now part of the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture.

In time for the 1985 Oman Tattoo, all the services had bands with bagpipe sections,





female mounted musicians. These extra numbers resulted in a second Guinness Book of Records certificate, this time for 2000 band musicians performing a marching display for 20 minutes. Neither of these records has yet been matched or beaten by any other country in the world.

The importance of cultural development was confirmed last year by the formation of the Sultanate's new Ministry of Arts. Omani musicians and dancers continue to project a good image of the Sultanate at festivals and concerts in countries around the world, and are now also an attraction for the growing tourist trade in Oman. ■

some of them mounted on horses, and the Royal Oman Police had a band mounted on camels. 1985 also saw the formation of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra to appear in the new Oman Auditorium. A school of art was formed to teach young Omanis to paint, and an instrument repair workshop for all the music groups had been established.

From this time Oman's cultural world has continued to expand with more groups, school bands and orchestras, an Opera House, museums and numerous societies and organisations. A Department of Music and Musical Sciences was established in The Sultan Qaboos University and in 2019 came the formation of the Sultanate's new Ministry of Arts.

In 1995, Oman gained a Guinness Book of Records certificate for 1,000 band musicians performing a marching display for 20 minutes. Following this, a number of female bands were formed including

IAN KENDRICK



Wing Commander Ian Kendrick is a retired RAF Director of Music who spent 20 years in Oman developing the Air Force band. The original 50 Omani teenagers, with no initial knowledge of music, developed into a band of 200 including a concert band, corps of drums, fanfare team, two bagpipe bands, traditional Omani music group, traditional Omani dance group and an Arabic pop group. It regularly travels abroad and has been to Britain many times. It was the first Omani band to release a CD of Arabic band and bagpipe music, and later a CD of Western concert music. With his wife, Marion, he organised and conducted a series of nine *World of Music* charity concerts in aid of Omani handicapped children. Ian is a published author including two books about the bands, orchestras and traditional music of Oman which were both read and approved by HM Sultan Qaboos before publication. Ian has lectured internationally from Sweden to Japan on his specialist subjects of band history and Arabic music, and for a number of years wrote and presented radio programmes of band music. His off-duty interests in Oman included expeditions, scuba diving, sailing and paragliding. Since retiring, his official history of RAF music has been published by the MoD. He retires as a trustee of the Society this year, but is continuing work on history of the AOS. He is a former editor of the Review.

GASTRONOMY OF OMAN – OMAN’S BEST KEPT SECRET!

ARTICLE BY DINA MACKI (DINE WITH DINA)

Oman’s best kept secret. I think that’s what we say about everything Oman has to offer. However, the cuisine is truly incredible to discover.



Many people won’t know that Oman has a rich food culture that isn’t just made up of the familiar Shawarma and Kebab dishes often associated with the Arab World.

From the early 16th Century, Omani cuisine began to develop outside the traditional rice, bread and boiled or grilled meat meals. When the Portuguese invaded in 1506, they brought distinct Mediterranean influences. Brief colonisations by Ottoman Turks and Persians also left unique contributions to Omani cuisine and produce.

Oman’s maritime history has been the source of the unparalleled diversity of Omani food. After the overthrow of the Portuguese by the Ya’aruba Dynasty in 1624, Oman established a sea-trading network with the south of Iran, India, Pakistan, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Mombasa and most importantly, Zanzibar. Even

today, Zanzibar holds the most relevance to Oman and their food – it is integral to the identity of Omani cuisine.

So, what ingredients truly make up the Omani Palette?

Oman is rich in spices. While most of the Levantine region is rich in crops and legumes, Oman has only minimal areas of sub-tropic conditions suitable for arable farming. Exceptions include places such as Jebel Akhdar and Salalah and therefore their traditional meals are noticeably different from other areas of Oman.

Indian trade introduced Oman to warm spices such as chillies, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric and coriander while Zanzibar was the global epicentre for farming cloves. Cloves are still common in Omani cooking and especially in their Baharat (spice)



blend used for Omani Shuwa. The influence of Zanzibar also introduced coconut into daily meals, though this is more of a coastal feature. The people of Zanzibar were known amongst East Africans as the 'Coconut People' or in Swahili 'Watu wa Naazi'. It almost acted as a substitute for water and is used for bases of bread, stews, sweet dishes and soups.

The influence of Pakistan and India is still dominant especially with Oman's large number of expat and labourers who have been in Oman for decades. There isn't a corner in Muscat you can turn without finding a small shop run by a local Pakistani making tiny Samosas, Kachori (Spicy Potato Balls) and Paratha Bread. I promise they're places you'll find Omanis flocking to. I say it's the sweat dripping down their face from their labour in 30-degree heat for long hours that makes the food taste so good: perhaps a slightly unpleasant thought, but you must admit that it really is food made with love and passion.



Coastal areas of Oman have truly benefited most from the variety of food sources. Famously known for Hamour (brown spotted reef cod, however in Oman also a type of commonly found white fish), Oman also has incredible tuna, lobster, king fish and, unexpectedly, shark. Shark is a delicacy not eaten by all and especially not by the Shia'a community as it is known as a 'Haram' fish to eat. While both sides of my family are Shia'a, I must secretly admit that a famous side salad for rice known as Qasha'a, which consists of 40 day dried salted shark, cucumber, lots of onions, tomatoes and filled with lemon, is absolutely wonderful!

So, what are Oman's most important and well-known dishes?

I find this question hard to summarise as how do we distinguish between a Zanzibari and Lawati/Indian/Pakistani dish? They have all become one as the people have become one.

If I had to summarise some truly Omani dishes, I would say first and foremost: Shuwa, 'grilled meat' in Arabic, a traditional dish cooked on special occasions such as Eid, where a whole goat, sheep or even camel is cooked in an underground oven (Tanoor) in a special spice blend for 24-48 hours and then eaten on the second or third day of Eid.

The second dish I would say is Qabooli rice, usually paired with grilled, boiled or fried meat (my favourite is when the meat is cooked in Tamarind). The rice itself is a

true homage to the Silk Road as it is cooked in dried limes, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, bay leaves and Baharat.

Finally, I would say Raghla Bread, thinner than paper and lighter than a feather. You really haven't had an Omani breakfast if you haven't had this. The technique is one which the new generation is yet to master – we still turn to grandmothers and old ladies from villages to make. The technique involves working with a paste-like dough in your hand that is wiped over a hot skillet pan. Honestly the most challenging bread to make but, oh so perfect when paired with cream cheese and Omani honey with a side of Karak Chai.

Despite the influence Oman has gained from its history of trade, its most prized possession across the whole country, making up 80% of fruit production and 50% of food production, is dates. There is nothing as sweet as an Omani date and it is the product we truly cherish above all else. An Arabian legend has it that if a family has a date palm in their home, they will never go without food.

'The Million Date Palm Plantation Project' by Dr Saif Al Shaqsi, gifted by the late Sultan Qaboos, to ensure Oman would always have food security should the country face hardship is a perfect example of how entwined dates are with the very fabric of Oman. It is estimated that the plantation could grow 96,000 tonnes per annum.

I could talk forever about Oman's rich food culture, but I encourage you to visit and discover it for yourself. While you really do have to travel to Oman to taste the





food, I have embarked on my own journey, known as Dine with Dina (dinewithdina.co.uk), a platform I use to showcase our incredible gastronomy and ultimately make Omani food the next best cuisine in the world.

Dine with Dina has gained a considerable following on social media (Instagram – @dinewithdina) leading to people all over the world learning about Oman. My most recognisable offerings have been my London based Supper Clubs which take place every couple of months in pop-up kitchens where I create a three course meal, showcasing the best dishes inspired by different parts of

Oman's food history. My guests leave with a new found desire for Oman, ensuring that my goal is always being reached.

While COVID-19 had its own intentions for us this year, a Supper Club I had planned with the Anglo-Omani Society was unfortunately cancelled. I was so excited to bring all our members back down memory lane and to allow the smell and taste of authentic Omani dishes to fill the room with incredible memories of their time spent there. Hopefully post pandemic we will have more to celebrate and an Omani Supper Club will be fitting for the purpose! ■

OMANI DATE BREAD (KHOUBZ MARDHOUF):

Makes: 22 Small or 10 Large

Ingredients:

525g Plain Flour or Chapati Flour (plus extra for dusting)
200-250ml of Warm Coconut Milk
200g (Roughly 20 Dates) Dates
1 TSP Salt
3 TBSP Hot Ghee or Hot Vegetable Oil if you want them Vegan
200g Warm Ghee (For Rolling & Frying)

Method:

1. De-pit your dates and add them to 200ml of warm coconut milk. Using your hands massage (macerate) them into the milk until they have completely broken down and you are left with a caramel coloured milk with flecks of dates.
2. In a large bowl or stand mixer, combine the flour, date-coconut milk mixture, salt & ghee. Leave the extra 50ml of coconut milk as you may not need it, but if your dough isn't binding then add it in slowly.
3. Mix the ingredients by hand or on a low speed in your mixer until it all comes together in a ball. Then knead for 15-20 minutes by hand or 10 minutes on medium speed in your mixer.
4. Your dough should be soft and smooth. Cover the bowl with cling film and leave to rest for 30 minutes - 1 hour.
5. Divide your dough into 12 balls (if you want large breads) or 22 (if you want smaller ones). Taking one ball at a time, roll out as thin as possible, ideally trying to keep them square, but don't worry too much.
6. If you are struggling to roll them out thin, place a bit of warm ghee on your surface and on the dough and it should help to spread.
7. Once you have spread it out as thinly as possible (ideally till you can almost see through to the surface), drip two teaspoons of warm ghee onto the dough. Using your hands spread it all around, making sure there are no dry parts.
8. We now want to fold it into a small square. Take the right side and fold it into the middle. Then take the left side and fold it into the middle and top of the right side, so you are left with a rectangle.
9. Then take the bottom of the rectangle and fold into the middle, followed by folding the top into the middle. Flip over and you should be left with a neat square. Place on a plate, cover with cling film or a cloth and repeat this with all the rest of the balls.
10. Once you have rolled and folded them into squares, begin again doing the exact same process. You don't need to roll them out as thin as the first time, but they do need to be big enough to fold. Roll out your squares, keeping the shape, and refolding to create extra layers.
11. Repeat with all of your squares and then leave to rest for at least 30 minutes.
12. Heat a non stick frying pan on medium - high heat.
13. Take one dough square and roll it out, keeping the square shape, till it is about a coin thick. Place in your frying pan and take a teaspoon of hot ghee and spread it round the edge of the dough.
14. Allow the bread to fry slightly so you can pick it up and flip it over, and then take some more ghee and put around the edges of the other side.
15. Press down on the edges so they begin to fry well – we want them to be slightly crunchier with a softer middle which is why you put ghee there first.
16. Flip over the bread and put some ghee all over, then flip again and also spread a bit of ghee all over.
17. Using your spatula press down on the bread, and rotate it in the pan at the same time, to make sure that it browns evenly on all sides. Flip it over to do the same thing. If they are browning too quickly, reduce the heat in case it cooks too fast on the outside.
18. Once you are happy that they are fully browned and cooked through, place on a plate and repeat with the rest!

OMANI SHUWA (IN THE OVEN):

Serves: 8

Preparation and cooking time: Marinating: 12-24 hours, Cooking: 5-6 hours

Ingredients

- 1 Leg of Lamb or 1 Sheep Shoulder
- 4 TBSP White Vinegar
- 2 TBSP Red Vinegar
- 2 Fresh Limes (or Omani Lemons)
- 1 TBSP Black Lemon Powder
- 1 TBSP Salt
- 3 TBSP of Garlic Paste or 10 Cloves (Mashed)
- 2 TBSP Ginger Paste
- 100ml of Vegetable Oil
- 60g / 5 TBSP Baharat
- 2 TBSP Chilli Powder
- 4 Banana Leaves*

**(I buy from Amazon, however don't worry if you can't get them)*

Baharat spice mix*

- 2 TBSP Black Peppercorns
- 1 TBSP Coriander Seeds
- 1 Cinnamon Stick
- 1 TBSP Cloves
- 2 TBSP Cumin Seeds
- 5 Cardamom Pods
- 1 TBSP Nutmeg Powder
- 2 TBSP Chilli Flakes

**Alternatively, if you can obtain it: 60g of pre-made, shop-bought Baharat mix*

Making the Baharat

- In a frying pan, combine all the spices and dry fry on medium to high heat, till it begins to smoke and you can smell a strong aroma.
- Ensure you keep stirring the spices. Do not leave on the heat on for too long as the spices can burn easily and you'll be left with a bitter taste.
- Place the mixture in a blender and blitz until you have a fine powder.

Marinating the Meat

- Combine the baharat mix with the vinegar, limes, salt, garlic, ginger, chilli and oil.
- Mix them together well until you have formed a loose paste (I use a pestle and mortar)
- Place your meat inside a roasting tray that is covered in foil or with two layers of banana leaves.
- Using a knife, cut small slits all over the meat to allow the marinade to get inside.
- Pour the marinade over and massage with your hands into all the creases, folds and cuts of the meat.
- Don't worry if you have excess marinade left over. Just pour it all over.



- To finish, pull the foil (or banana leaves) from the bottom and wrap it over the meat so it is sealed like a parcel. If you are using leaves, use the extra two to wrap round again ensuring it is sealed, then take some foil and create an outer casing ensuring there are no holes in it.
- Marinate in the fridge for at least 12 hours.

Cooking the Shuwa

- Take the meat from the fridge and allow it to reach room temperature.
 - Heat the oven to 200°C.
 - Once you place your meat into the oven reduce the temperature to 150°C.
 - Cook for approximately 5 hours.
 - Do not open the foil till after the time is up, trust the process.
- Smoking the Shuwa**
- Just before the five hours has come to an end, take two pieces of charcoal and burn them on your hob to heat them up.
 - Place them in a small piece of foil, but don't close them up.
 - Open the oven and make a slight slit in the foil of your meat and place the charcoal on top.
 - Close the oven and allow it to cook for a further 30 minutes.
 - This creates the same smoke effect you achieve in the underground fire pits in Oman!

THE ROYAL CAMEL CORPS AND AL ARDHAH RUNNING

BY AMMAR ABDULLAH MARKWANI

In close collaboration with Omani camel owners and their invaluable experience with camels, the Royal Camel Corps has taken the task of preserving and fostering the camel as a “cultural asset” along with other responsibilities related to the care, nutrition, health, training, and taming of camels belonging to the Royal Camel Corps.

To implement and keep pace with His Majesty’s directives, the Royal Camel Corps has adopted the following objectives:

- Accurate recording of the camels’ ancestry and other details.
- Encouragement of camel sports within the Sultanate through national camel

races and monitoring local, regional and international changes that take place in the field of camel sport.

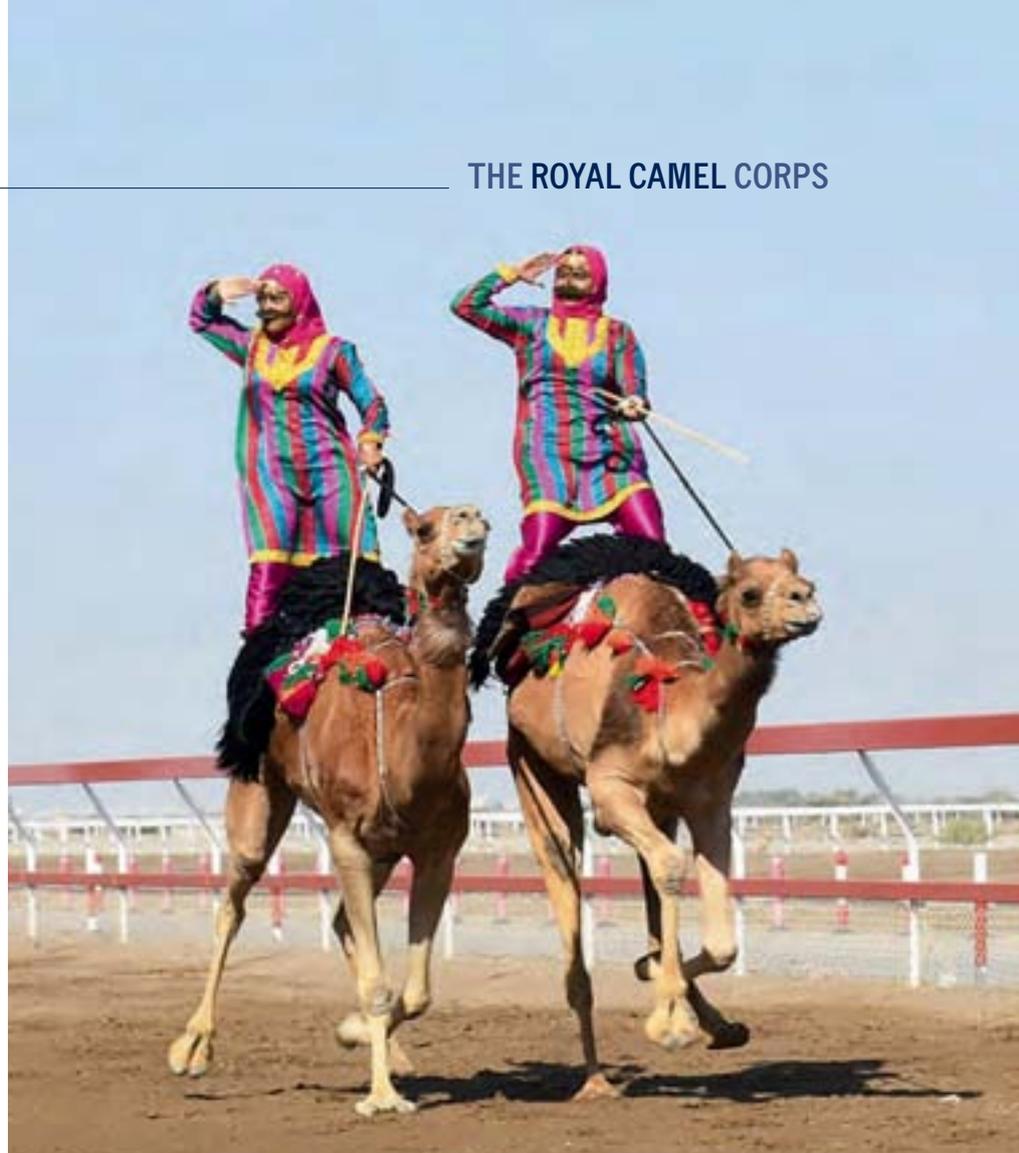
- Adopting modern methods of reproductive biotechnologies in breeding programmes to improve the Omani breeds of camel, and provision of camels of superior genetic merit.



Oman's traditional racing event, the horse and camel Ardha, was awarded Intangible Cultural Heritage status by UNESCO in 2018. On occasions such as national and social events, AL Ardha has an honoured place among the traditional arts.

Al Hashma running is one of the basic elements of races in Oman on different occasions. This is a race of two camels running together for short distances in a way that neither of them exceeds the other.

In Al Ardha running, many groups of Omani ancestry camels and Albatineiah camels, which are unique in their beauty and pedigree - descendants of beauty, shapes and colours - have participated. Each rider tries to obtain new marks of enthusiasm and excellence throughout the movements and tight holds of Qazal and



The Royal Camel Corps has developed and opened the doors for young women to participate in this activity.

khatam. Riders sometimes try to gather hands together, which is one of the high skills that needs great experience.

Previously, Al Ardha was limited to men. However, the Royal Camel Corps has developed and opened the doors for young women to participate in this activity. The Royal Court Affairs represented by the Royal Camel Corps sought to develop this activity in order to be one of the activities in the annual National Camel Races Festival.

So many camel owners have participated in this activity, and so many interested people wish to attend, that the events now have to take place over several days. This is a great success story. ■

THE RISE OF DUQM SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE



ARTICLE BY
CALLUM PRINTSMITH



Society interns are given the opportunity to visit the Sultanate to research and write up a topic of interest. This is by Callum Printsmith, who now works in the UK Department for International Trade as a Middle East Policy Advisor, focusing specifically on the GCC

To the naked eye the nascent city of Duqm may appear arid and uninspiring. Still in the early stages of development to becoming a fully-fledged international port and urban metropolis, the landscape is barren, bleak and vast. The geographical size of Duqm is

breathtaking: larger than Singapore and Bahrain combined. At face value this landscape does not effectively reflect the Omani government's ambitious vision for it to become the economic growth pole of the Sultanate, if not the entire Gulf region.

Duqm's proximity to the markets of Asia and coastal Africa makes it an attractive investment and logistics location, supplemented by first-rate infrastructure, maritime port facilities and ship repair yard. A favourable investment and regulatory regime underpins its appeal. This greenfield mega-project has the capacity to make monumental progress in diversifying the economy from oil and gas, on which it has relied too heavily in recent decades. The gradual influx of people is spreading wealth across the Sultanate to the previously neglected Al Wusta region on the Eastern coast, and helping to solve the chronic youth unemployment problem. All of this taken together reveals Duqm's revolutionary potential.

Roughly 330 miles south from Muscat, the desert boomtown has already been productive in reshaping and rejuvenating the Omani economy, and once it reaches its full capacity in an estimated 15 years, it has the potential to unlock Oman's potential as a regional – if not global – powerhouse.

Attacks of oil vessels by Iranian forces near the Strait of Hormuz have perturbed the international shipping industry.

GEOSTRATEGIC LOCATION

Attacks of oil vessels by Iranian forces near the Strait of Hormuz have perturbed the international shipping industry, with companies operating ships on high alert and ordering their vessels to transit the Strait in daylight hours at high speed. The substantially increased risk has led to insurance premiums hikes. Shipping companies are looking for safer locations, and Duqm offers the best solution – hundreds of kilometres away from the danger zone. GCC countries and shipping companies can ensure their exports and cargo are safe, which will in turn decrease the cost of insurance.

Duqm is also promoting itself as a

location for partners to set up naval and military assets. The dry dock has already had business from several military allies of the Sultanate, including the UK and the USA, the latter of which is using the port for the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln. This action reduces the vulnerability Omanis may feel by drawing closer to military allies, whilst also functioning as a profitable enterprise. By doing so, Duqm is being strategically used as a tool for strengthening its military ties, establishing itself as a repair base and station for large vessels, and giving Oman's external partners a stake in their stability.

The growth of Duqm as a major port for shipping the Gulf's oil to global markets



would raise Oman's profile and further empower the Sultanate in the global geopolitical order whilst also assisting its transition to a post-oil era due to its ship repair and logistics functions. Hence, Duqm could serve Oman's economy monumentally both in the current oil-dominated energy market and beyond.

DIVERSIFICATION

Diversifying the economy away from hydrocarbons has been a core element of Oman's economic development plans for some years now, and has been given added impetus by declining oil prices and the Vision 2040 plan. The ninth five-year diversification plan, Tanfeedh ('implementation'), in 2016, had a focus on five sectors: manufacturing, logistics, tourism, fisheries and mining.

These sectors have been selected to be key foundations of Duqm's economy, and all have seen an in investment from the government and abroad. One lucrative industry is mineral mining, which has become one of the Sultanate's biggest markets. The Special Economic Zone

A more liberalised economic environment could spark private industry, create new types of jobs and attract foreign investment.

provides mining, ore concentration, blending and other basic processing activities, whilst the port exports the final products internationally. Duqm is a prime location for 'pit to port' mining, as accessibility to the port and connectivity to the mining fields means transportation and processing costs are low.

Similarly, the Omani government is pushing to make Duqm globally competitive in tourism. SEZAD has undertaken initiatives to promote tourism investments, including a 'tourism zone' infrastructurally

ready for investment and signing agreements with luxury hotel chains.

A more liberalised economic environment could spark private industry, create new types of jobs and attract foreign investment. SEZAD have already seen reasonable success, having signed major deals with several interested countries. Projects underway already represent an investment of several billion dollars, and the result could be an economic bonanza for Duqm, creating a sustainable environment for moving the country away from its dependence on oil and gas.

EXPANDING OMAN'S WEALTH

The rise of Duqm signals a movement away from the traditional focus on the North and South. Around 70% of the country's population resides within a 150-mile-long coastal strip in the north near Muscat. The government now sees hundreds of miles of Eastern coastline as full of economic potential. The idea is that the various projects will act in symbiosis,

المخطط الرئيسي للمنطقة الاقتصادية الخاصة بالذقم Master Plan Special Economic Zone at Duqm





starting with the SEZ and Port, working together to stimulate the economy and generate revenue. Traffic at the port will drive demand for industries in the SEZ; these industries create the need for housing for employees and investors; this new population will need entertainment, schools, shops and healthcare. Duqm is not envisaged as a project with an operational life of decades, but one that extends and expands over the next centuries.

The anchor projects to attract workers and the unemployed are seen as creating meaningful jobs to boost productivity and unlock economic potential. A clear example is the Duqm Refinery project, a joint venture between Oman Oil Company and Kuwait Petroleum. This will be the biggest oil refinery in the Middle East, producing 230,000 barrels a day. Experts expect such ventures will have a ripple effect through the creation of between 60,000 and 200,000 meaningful and profitable jobs in the next 20 years. Oman has been plagued with the problems of persistently high unemployment and a job crisis among its youth for years, and Duqm is set to play a significant role in tackling this issue.

BLUE COLLAR WORKFORCE WELFARE

Duqm is setting an example for the country, if not the whole region, through

As the winner of multiple awards, Renaissance Village Duqm has set a new standard for workforce welfare across the Gulf.

its progressive approach to its blue collar migrant population without compromising its internationally competitive costs. Gulf countries face criticism vis-a-vis the living conditions of their migrant workers. Addressing this issue, Stephen Thomas OBE – CEO of Oman’s leading facilities management company Renaissance – set about establishing a world-class site in Duqm to house the large blue collar workforce.

As the winner of multiple awards, Renaissance Village Duqm has set a new standard for workforce welfare across the Gulf. The site’s benefits include an Olympic swimming pool, multiple gymnasiums, on-site healthcare facilities, television and game rooms, canteens and bars. There is no difference in terms of utility standards for the lower workforces and the senior executives, which Stephen gives as a reason for high levels of productivity and health among Duqm’s workers.

CONCLUSION

- Duqm is making a bid to reinvigorate the national economy towards diversification and tackle Oman’s longstanding dependence on the hydrocarbon sector.
- Duqm is set to support the spread of Oman’s wealth away from the two poles of Muscat and Salalah and towards the previously neglected Al Wusta central region.
- The Special Economic Zone could galvanise youth employment in Oman, and incentivise young Omanis towards the private sector.
- As a new Gulf transit hub for trade, commercial activity and naval assets, Duqm will have economic and geostrategic implications for the Sultanate, leading to closer ties between Oman and its partners whilst driving economic growth.
- Duqm’s progressive approach to the welfare of its blue collar workers sets an example for the Gulf, and makes the location an attractive destination for ethical investors. ■

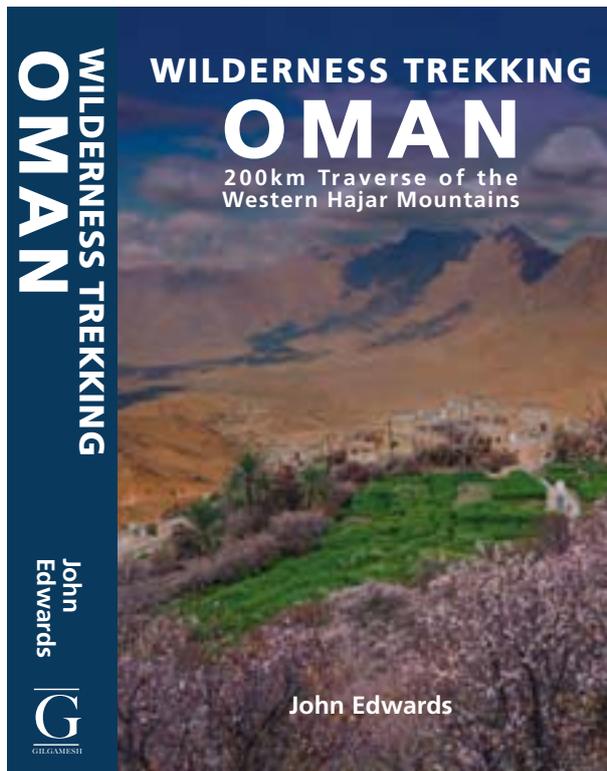
BOOK REVIEWS

WILDERNESS TREKKING OMAN

200km Traverse of the Western Hajar Mountains

By John Edwards, 2020. Gilgamesh Publishing, £17.50.

A review by JMCK



The mountains, deserts, plains and coasts of Oman, with traces of past times overlaid on them like a palimpsest, have long exercised a fascination for British people living and working in the Sultanate.

John Edwards spent most of the Winters during the 15 years that he and his family lived in Muscat exploring the Hajar mountains to the West and East of their home, and his ambition in his new book is to resurrect the historic trading routes connecting the mountain villages. His hope is to enable walking tourists to help sustain an emerging hospitality industry based on using some of the ancient village houses – thus bringing some tourist income which could save buildings which might otherwise fall into ruin.

The traverse of the Western Hajar Mountains is not for the faint-hearted, nor is it for the inexperienced. It follows the spine of the mountains, reaching high peaks and descending into remote waterless wadis. It is mostly unmarked and clearly requires competence, good mapping, GPS possession and familiarity, stamina, good equipment – and preferably a copy of this book.

The trek takes 16 days, and the description of each includes maps, photographs, full description, sleeping possibilities (including some nights under the stars) and some alternatives. As the author rightly claims, the book describes “where to go, what to carry, where to sleep and, most importantly, where to find drinking water.”

The photographs are lavish, illustrating the descriptions of features both natural and man-made, from geological formations to human developments over the centuries such as farming terraces, the falaj and irrigation systems, ancient tombs, rock art and crafts, dwellings and storehouses, paths and steps.

The author also provides a good guide to the history of the mountains and the farming and semi-nomadic pastoralist peoples, their culture and customs, and the respect due to them in their mountain fastnesses. This is sensitively done, with appropriate introduction to the social norms which should be expected and accepted.

He undertook his mountain experiences with Omani friends, which has added enormously to the richness of his narrative, and he wishes to reciprocate these benefits. As he explained in a message: “Hiking tourism, like all tourism, is expected to shrink to be more local rather than international as a result of this pandemic. This means my book ought to be available in Arabic. My friends in Oman are starting with a translation of my website which covers the four introductory chapters. These chapters will be enough for a local walker to plan a walking holiday.”

The book is well worth a place in the collection of anyone interested in the Sultanate, even if they are not intending to undertake the rugged trek across the mountains. Furthermore, as the author has agreed to give a presentation at Sackville Street when we are free to hold public events again, Society members should be able to have signed copies! ■

DIplomacy ARABIC

Essential Middle Eastern Vocabularies series

By Kendall, E and Mohamed, Y A. 2020. Edinburgh: EUP, £12.99.

A review by Stuart Laing

Elisabeth Kendall, a Trustee of the Society, is editor of the Edinburgh University Press series *Essential Middle Eastern Vocabularies* and also the co-author of this volume, the sixth in the series and the fifth offering an Arabic vocabulary. The series is aimed at undergraduate and postgraduate students of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, non-native professionals and native Arabic speakers wishing to improve their English in Politics and International Relations.

The publishers tell me that *Diplomacy Arabic* has received a fair bit of interest as a prescribed textbook to accompany advanced Arabic courses. Certainly it is a useful volume. It contains ten sections covering different fields of the areas of language that a diplomat might use, for example 'Protocol', '[International] Organisations', 'Negotiations', 'Civil Society and Human Rights'. In each of these there is a good, almost comprehensive, selection of the vocabulary that a practitioner would need to call on.

One might quibble with some of the detail (the term 'embassy chancellor' has not been in use for many years; I am doubtful about *masā'in* for *démarche*; *board* should have been included under *hay'a*; and perhaps there are others), but overall the authors have done an excellent job in covering the ground. The user will find that the index (English only) does not include all the words in the vocabulary sections – presumably because this is a vocabulary (or series of vocabularies), not a dictionary. The student who one day will be engaged in negotiations, or discussions of human rights or conflict resolution, or whatever, will want to have mastered the vocabulary in the relevant section of this book.

The selection provides generous slices of words used in the formal and ceremonial side of diplomacy, giving the non-diplomat the impression that embassies are preoccupied with questions of protocol, etiquette, planned table seating, diplomatic immunity etc., and that a diplomat's time is taken up with formal negotiations and treaties. These things do occur, of course; and even now our relations with the US are clouded by an egregious case of a claim for diplomatic immunity. But diplomats' lives and official duties are (thank heavens) conducted nowadays at a much less formal level. My wife has reminded me that in Kuwait her invitations to royal family weddings were usually received by text message, not by stiff invitation card! The next edition of this *Vocabulary* might contain more of the humdrum everyday business of diplomacy: for example, sections on trade and investment promotion, and on visa and consular affairs would be

useful, since ambassadors and their staff spend much time and energy advancing their nation's commercial interests or explaining (at least in the case of the UK) the tortuous policies determining how to apply for and how to be granted an entry visa, or working for the release of a national who has run into trouble with the local authorities.

Diplomacy Arabic is well set out, with clear type-setting and useful Arabic vovelling to help the intermediate student, all well explained in the introduction. The 'Resources' page which can be accessed on the Edinburgh University Press web-site allows you to hear the whole vocabulary read with admirably clear pronunciation. Elisabeth Kendall, Yehia Mohamed, and the EUP are to be congratulated on the production. Its small format adds to its convenience, and the early-career diplomat would do well to slip it into pocket or handbag. ■



SOLDIER IN THE SAND

A Personal History of the Modern Middle East

By Simon Mayall, 2020. Pen & Sword, £25.

A review by John McKeown

As so often when Britons have served in Oman, the Sultanate has entered deep into General Mayall's soul. He commanded a squadron of the Sultan's Armed Forces Armoured Regiment from 1985 to 1987, and describes this time as "one of the most satisfying periods of my career, indeed of my life."

His secondment from the British Army to SAF included participation in the first Exercise Saif Sareeya. He devotes a chapter to his tour, and observes that he became the last British officer directly commanding Omanis in the field as Omani officers increasingly grew in experience and took over more command positions. He sums up the British-Omani relationship as "...a mutual 'love affair', and strong personal and professional bonds had been formed."

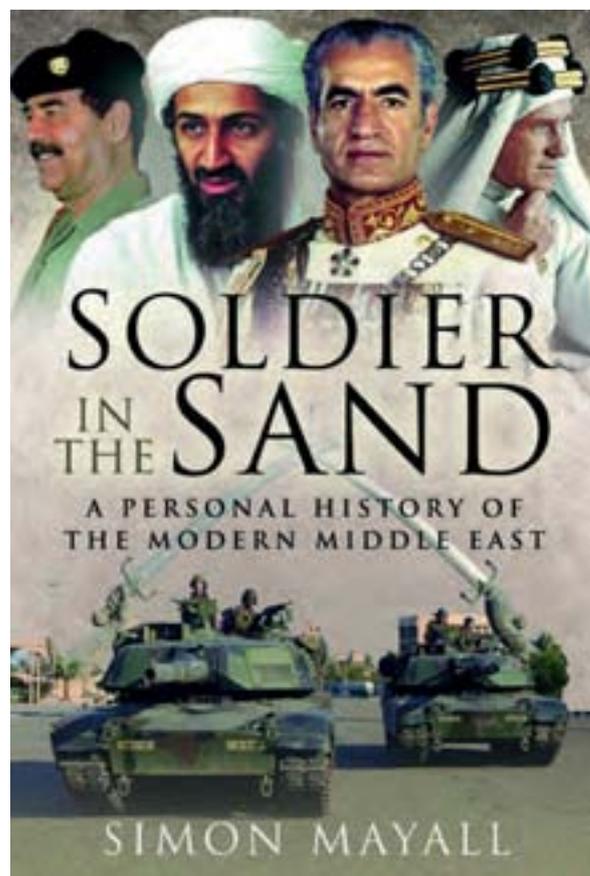
Lieutenant-General Sir Simon Mayall was appointed in 2011 to be first Defence Senior Advisor Middle East, a key military-diplomatic role which was intended to re-energize British relations in the Gulf and in the wider Middle East after some years of comparative neglect. His 40-year military career and academic studies fitted him uniquely for this role.

He has known the Middle East since childhood, living in Aden when his father was there with the Royal Air Force in 1959/early 1960s, and then served extensively in the region in progressively more senior positions. After his secondment to SAF for three years as a young acting major, he was operations officer in 1st (UK) Division in the liberation of Kuwait, commanded a mechanised brigade in Oman on Exercise Saif Sareeya 2 in 2001, served as the Deputy Coalition Commander in Baghdad, and was the British Government's Security Envoy to Iraq. Additionally, he was responsible for helping to establish the new Royal Navy base in Bahrain, where one of the streets is named after him.

He also served in operational roles in Kosovo, Cyprus, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland. His staff tours in the Ministry of Defence included a tour as Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments) when Marshall of the Royal Air Force Lord (Jock) Stirrup was CDS. He was Military Assistant to General Sir John Waters when the latter was Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

General Mayall holds degrees from Balliol College, Oxford, and King's College, London (where his thesis was Jihad and the Clash between Civilisation, a study of the conflicts within Islam), and also studied on a Defence Fellowship at St Antony's, Oxford, during which he wrote a book on Turkish Security Policy. He was knighted in 2014 and was awarded the US Legion of Merit for his service in Iraq.

The book therefore covers an unusually rich and interesting career, but it is also much more than an autobiography of a



soldier, because his deep knowledge and understanding of the Middle East is used to give a comprehensive account of the diverse and important factors in this turbulent region, and beyond: Islam, social and geo-political realities, history, attitudes, relationships and conflict, "inflamed by external sponsors, that routine hallmark of Middle East politics."

There are chapters on several of these themes, and also detailed overall explanation of the background to each of the places and posts in which he served, which are invariably enlightening and intelligent. This makes for a satisfying rounded account throughout.

Soldier in the Sand is a readable, comprehensive account of the region by a writer with wide experience in relevant demanding situations, personal relationships and friendships with many of the leading figures, and both detailed knowledge and deep understanding of the area, its people and the British involvement.

This is a wonderful book. I had to review it using a loose print-out of its pages from the publishers because the COVID19 closure caused delay in completion and production. I am looking forward to my copy of the book when published, complete with pictures, maps and an index. ■

THE CLANDESTINE LIVES OF COLONEL DAVID SMILEY

Code Name 'Grin'

By Clive Jones, 2019. Edinburgh: EUP, £85
(Paperback forthcoming £24.99)

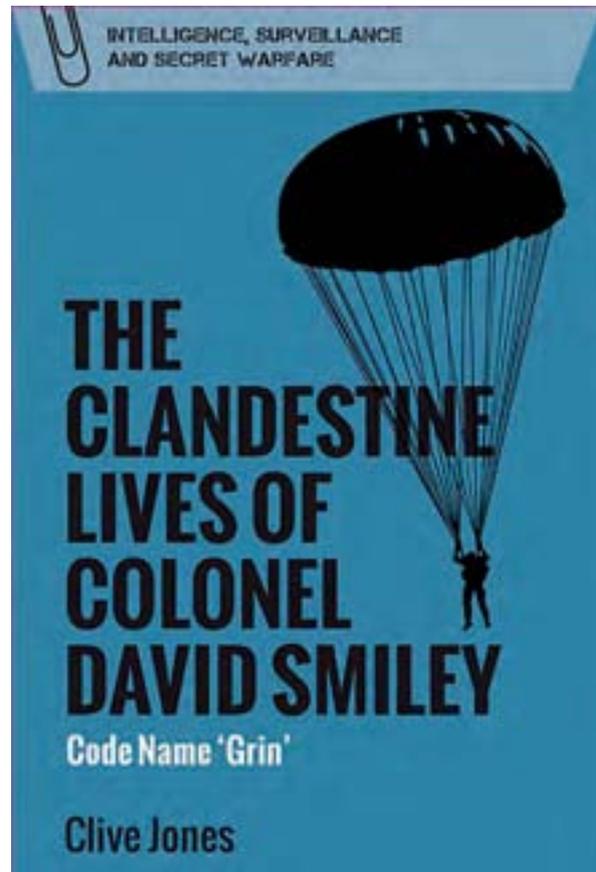
A Review by Noel Brehony

Anglo-Omani members will know of David Smiley from his command of the Sultan's Armed Forces (1958-1961) during which he inspired the daring attack on rebel forces in the Jebel Akhdar. Later, he was a key figure in the clandestine operation instigated by Smiley's friends Julian Amery and Billy McLean to support Royalist forces in Yemen against the Republican army and its Egyptian allies following the overthrow of the Imam in 1962. Professor Jones vividly shows how Smiley's past career both as a regular army officer and a guerrilla fighter made him indispensable to the success of his ventures in Oman and Yemen.

This book has been years in the making. Jones held a series of interviews with Smiley before his death in 2009 at the age of 92 and has conducted a thorough examination of the papers of Smiley and many of those who worked with him and consulted a wide range of other sources. Though Smiley himself wrote about his career notably *Arabian Assignment* (London 1975) and *Irregular Regular* (Norwich 1984) Professor Jones has written what will be the definitive biography of this extraordinary soldier.

David de Crespigny Smiley had a successful conventional military career – he commanded the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues) and was Escort to Queen Elizabeth at her coronation in 1953 – but was at heart an “irregular-regular”, a term that “captured his own sense of pride as a professional soldier with the satisfaction he derived from his skill as a guerrilla” in Albania for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in World War II.

Smiley was born into a privileged and well-connected family but was always a strong advocate of meritocracy, judging regular soldiers and irregulars on their ability and integrity. After early military postings in Palestine, Abyssinia and then in North Africa he became one of Britain's first Commandos. An encounter with an old friend Billy McLean in Cairo led to the SOE which sent him to Albania to work with partisans against Italian and German occupiers. There he learned how to motivate guerrillas to forget past divisions and different visions for the future to fight a common enemy. The close friendship between Smiley, Julian Amery and Bill McLean was forged in Albania. All shared a deep sense of patriotism and conservative values; both McLean and Amery later became conservative MPs. Known as the “three musketeers” they were quite different characters, but each respected the skills and strengths of the other and made up for each other's weaknesses. Smiley invariably left the politics and diplomacy to his friends and focused on what he was good at and enjoyed: the details of military operations from planning to



logistics to battle. He knew how to instil a fighting spirit and the tactical improvisation required in unconventional warfare.

Smiley was soon back in Albania after the end of World War II, this time working for MI6 (SOE was disbanded 1946). In between he married Moyra Tweedie – “Moy” (who was working for the BBC World Service). The Albanian operation – CONSENSUS – was a disaster. Smiley and many others blamed the Soviet spy inside MI6, Kim Philby, for betraying the Albanians, but Clive Jones assesses it had more to do with poor operational security. Smiley returned to command The Blues followed by a posting in Sweden as Military Attaché. Just as he was planning to leave the army, he received a phone call from Amery, who now had become Minister of War, that took him to Oman.

Amery had profound concerns about the situation in the latter years of Sultan Said and threat posed by Imam Ghalib supported by two major tribes in the inaccessible Jebel Akhdar. Ghalib who was backed by President Nasser of Egypt, then at the zenith of his power as the leader of Arab nationalism, and of Saudi Arabia, still smarting from its humiliation over the Buraimi Oasis. Amery concluded that urgent action was necessary to reorganise the armed forces under the command of an officer – and there was only one British serving officer who had been a successful

guerrilla and knew how to organise and lead less experienced troops. Smiley had the task of dealing with an under-manned and under-equipped military with virtually no intelligence support, poor quality British contract officers and a testy relationship with the Sultan's (British) Military Secretary – none of which was helped by a Sultan who was reluctant to spend on modernising his military or his country. Smiley with Amery's support got what was needed from Britain to take back control of the Jebel Akhdar including the deployment of the SAS in an operation that Professor Jones regards as the apogee of Smiley's career. A grateful Sultan thanked him "winning the war for me" – with a coffee pot! Before leaving Oman, Smiley let Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, know of his hopes for the Sultan's son who was then at Sandhurst.

Smiley finally left the army in 1961 after turning down Command of the three SAS regiments because this was not at what he felt to be the appropriate rank of Brigadier. In May 1963, McLean, invited him to visit Yemen, initially to assess what was needed to help the Royalists. He became an influential figure in an extraordinary clandestine operation involving Saudi money, Israeli support (which had to be arranged without the knowledge of the Saudis) and the deployment of small groups of British and French mercenaries. It helped turn the war in Yemen in favour of the Royalists and compelled up to 60,000 Egyptian soldiers to defend themselves and less able to threaten Saudi Arabia. The Three musketeers (Amery was now Minister of Aviation) with the support of cabinet ministers and network of contacts in London and Aden wanted to reduce the Egyptian capacity to assist the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) in their campaign to end British rule in South Yemen (then known as South Arabia). Smiley played an indispensable role through long visits to Yemen where he had to endure the most arduous conditions whilst using all the skills he had acquired in his early life. As had happened in Albania and Oman he became disillusioned by differences over policy and personalities but, most of all, by the decision of the Labour government following in 1966 to abandon South Arabia. That led him to conclude that it had been "rather a wasted effort". However, that is not the judgment of the Joint Intelligence Committee in London which assessed that the operation had achieved results that were out of all proportion to the resources invested.

Smiley emerges as an uncomplicated patriot and an exceptionally brave man who in Amery's words "liked his friends, disliked his enemies but was otherwise more interested in things than men." Others have found him to be not very reflective – a doer rather than strategic thinker, who was completely honest and spoke truth to power, no matter what the consequences to his career. This brilliant and highly readable biography portrays a man, who despite his modesty, achieved so much, not least in Oman a country he frequently visited in his later years. ■

2020 REVIEW ONLINE

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www.ao-soc.org



THE OMANI 'ALL AGES' MUSEUM

The Review 2017 magazine included an article about a new museum that would tell the story of Oman from Pre-history to the present day with special emphasis on the Renaissance of the Sultanate. The importance of the project was emphasised when the first stone of the new and ultra-modern building near Nizwa was laid by HM Sultan Qaboos in July 2015. In the beginning, it was called the 'Across Ages' Museum, but this was later changed to 'All Ages'.

In 2016, Omani citizens were asked to present any artefacts of cultural and natural heritage to the Museum for display and the archives, then in 2017 this request was extended to members of the Society. It was pleasing to see that a number of Society members offered a variety of items plus film and photographs, with some of the items being quite valuable.

The new Museum was due to open at the end of this year but, not surprisingly, with COVID19 and the lockdown, plus the economic situation caused by the collapse in oil prices, we do not have more information on progress. We will keep the membership informed.

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DR NOEL GUCKIAN CVO OBE IRSM

AN OBITUARY BY JEREMY JONES

Noel Guckian, who died on 7 December 2019, was a much loved British Ambassador in Muscat. He was prepared to pursue what he thought was right, sometimes disconcerting Whitehall in the process. Along with his wife Lorna, who died in 2012, he will be sorely missed.

Noel Joseph Guckian was one of four brothers, born into an expatriate Irish family in Rome in 1955. His father was an official in the Food and Agriculture Organisation there. At his funeral, his brother Damian spoke eloquently of happy family holidays in Ireland. After Notre Dame International School in Rome he took a first degree in history at Ulster University and a Ph.D. at Aberystwyth. He then began a 32 year career in HM Diplomatic Service. He first joined as an academic, as member of the research cadre, and throughout his diplomatic career he maintained a deep interest in the culture and history of the Middle East which underpinned his independent mindedness on policy throughout.

He then served in six countries in the Middle East and North Africa (twice in both Oman and Libya); and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria and Northern Iraq/ Kurdistan as well as Paris. He was Consul General in Kirkuk in the immediate aftermath of the Iraq war. This was dangerous and difficult work for which he was awarded the Iraq Reconstruction Service Medal. He was also awarded CVO (2012) and OBE (2001).

He served in Libya as Head of the Interests Section then Chargé d’Affaires then Deputy Head of Mission at a tricky time as Britain inched towards reestablishing diplomatic relations, on ice for a decade after Lockerbie.

But it is for his time in Oman that he will be most remembered. He and Lorna developed a particularly good rapport with Sultan Qaboos which he never trumpeted but which gave him excellent insights. He also masterminded a hugely successful visit by Her Majesty the Queen in 2010. And as well as serving an unusually long tour as Ambassador (2005-2011) he also served as a valued Deputy Head of Mission to Richard Muir in the 1990s. This probably made him the longest serving British diplomat in Muscat of modern times. And it showed. His knowledge of the society and of the family networks was unparalleled, not since Malcolm Dennison retired in the early 1990s had there been a Brit in Muscat who knew so much. Longstanding members of the British business community there, when asked about the relative merits of the British Ambassadors over recent decades, are prone to say that so and so might be better at handling Whitehall, or so and so wrote eloquent reports, but, when it came to understanding the Omanis, Noel was by far the best.



On leaving HM Diplomatic Service Noel consulted widely and returned to his academic beginnings. He was a Visiting Fellow at Durham University and a mentor to many students. He also served a short stint as Chair of the Society and later as Chair of the British Yemeni Society.

But perhaps his biggest passion was Mas Michel, the family home near Nimes in the South of France, which he had nurtured with Lorna for many years. They bought it from Lawrence Durrell, including his old books, manuscripts and writing desk and its enchanting olive grove on the hill next to the cottage. During the picking season, Noel would muster volunteers and, in keeping with French rural custom, made generous

compensation in wine and food.

The loss of Lorna in 2012 was a very heavy blow. At his funeral, his son Euan was touchingly direct, saying that it was a blow from which his father never recovered. During this period, he found great comfort from his children, Anna, Julia, Freya and Euan. Anna and Julia moved from university into the world of work, and he beamed as they thrived. The youngest Freya has just finished school and would have run the London Marathon this year had not COVID intervened.

Reflecting on his time in Muscat, he was completely his own man. I remember a first meeting with him in Muscat in 2005 when he appeared at the Intercon in shorts and sandals with a very small Freya in tow.

But this was not just style, it was a matter of substance. Perhaps the moment at which he most boldly embraced controversy was when Oman's decision to buy Typhoon aircraft was under discussion. Several billion was involved and large numbers of British jobs. But candidly he believed it was not in Oman's best interests and he was prepared to say so. As his remarks trickled back to Whitehall there was unsurprisingly quite some consternation. He was a brave man, prepared to take risks and do what he thought right, even at considerable personal cost.

He is survived by his four children, his three brothers Damian, Gabriel and Paul, and a large extended family. ■

HEALTH INSURANCE COMPULSORY FOR TOURISTS

Oman's Ministry of Tourism (MoT) has issued guidelines and preventive measures to tour and travel operators in the Sultanate, and guidelines for visitors, in preparation for the slow return of tourism to the country. The following industry-specific measures must be followed by tour and travel providers to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among tour groups:

- Travel and tour offices must ensure travellers from outside Oman have a medical certificate or permit issued by the relevant authorities.
- For travel and tour bookings, it will be mandatory for all tourists to have health insurance before their reservation can be completed.
- As much as possible, bookings should be made online and paper documents and cash transactions avoided.
- Travel providers must organise tours and excursions in small groups of no more than 16 people at a time, with social distancing measures in place.

THE MOT HAS ISSUED GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS UPON ARRIVAL AND CHECK-IN TO HOTELS:

- Guests should adhere to social distancing and avoid mixing in common areas during arrival, check-in and check-out. At the check-in desk, separate pens must be used for each guest, and they should be directed to complete registration online for their customer profile.
- Arrival times of tour groups must be logged/registered, and they must be directed to a clean waiting area with temporary seating and water bottles. Attention must be given to the number of people in the reception area to avoid over-crowding and adhere to social distancing.
- Contact details of all guests must be logged upon arrival, and drivers of tour vehicles must be provided with digital thermometers to check the temperature of guests.
- During meal service, guests should adhere to social distancing in restaurants, and a la carte service should be offered instead of buffet.

Tour and travel offices and visitors are also expected to adhere to all other precautionary health and safety measures as advised by Oman's Supreme Committee for COVID-19.

SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID AL SAID GCMG, GCVO, GBE

AN OBITUARY BY SIR TERENCE CLARK

Until his death on 10 January 2020, Sultan Qaboos was the longest reigning ruler in the Arab world and the 14th in line of the Al Bu Said dynasty, founded in 1744.



An absolute monarch, he succeeded his father, Sultan Said bin Taimur Al Said, in a palace coup on 23 July 1970 and immediately embarked on a development programme to transform the country, whose name he changed symbolically from Muscat and Oman to the Sultanate of Oman to demonstrate the political unity of its constituent parts.

He was faced by a huge task, with most of his people lacking the basic amenities of contemporary life, while a civil war raged in Dhofar and a civil insurrection had also begun in June 1970 in northern Oman. To meet these challenges, he disposed of only moderate financial resources from oil exports begun in 1967; and his preparation

for leadership had been deliberately frustrated by his father.

Sayyid Qaboos was born on 18 November 1940 in Salalah as the only son of Sultan Said bin Taimur and Shaikha Mazoon bint Ahmad al-Mashani from Taqa in Dhofar. His parents preferred to live in Salalah, where he was raised and was educated at primary and secondary level, apart from a short period spent in Pune in India. In 1956, at the age of 16, he was sent to be privately coached by a British academic, Philip Roman, who, with his wife Laura, provided pre-university tuition in a family ambience at their home in Felsham near Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk.

In September 1960, aged 20, he entered

Marne Company in New College at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, Berkshire, from where he graduated in August 1962 and served for a period with the 1st Battalion of the Camerons, stationed in Minden, with the British Army of the Rhine. He later studied local government through visits and short attachments to civic institutions in Warwick and Bedford. He rounded off his education by embarking on a world tour, accompanied by Major Leslie Chauncy, who had been the British Consul-General in Muscat from 1949 to 1958 before becoming Personal Adviser to the Sultan in 1960.

On returning home towards the end of 1964, Sayyid Qaboos was kept largely isolated in Salalah by his father and not allowed to take on any responsible duties or even to become acquainted with the rest of Oman. By 1970, Sayyid Qaboos had reached the conclusion that to end this intolerable situation the only way was to overthrow his father and to assume power.

He began plotting with a small number of Omani and British sympathisers in Salalah and, through a discreet intermediary, with others in Muscat; and the stage was set. The timing of the coup was probably prompted by an attack on 12 June on Izki and Nizwa by forces of the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Gulf, which threatened a more general uprising. On 23 July, Sayyid Qaboos informed Lt Col Turnill, the seconded British Commanding Officer of the Desert Regiment based in Dhofar, of his intentions and sought his support, which was given after consultation with Brig. Graham, the seconded British Commander of the Sultan's Armed Forces. Sayyid Qaboos' supporters from the al-Hosni tribe within the Sultan's guard secured the Palace and allowed in another group of supporters, backed by a party from the Desert Regiment. After accidentally wounding himself, Sultan Said surrendered, signed his abdication and was flown via Bahrain into exile in London, where he remained until he died in October 1972.

On 26 July, the new Sultan made a brief announcement about his father's inability to control affairs, the sworn allegiance to him of the royal family and armed forces



Presentation of Credentials by Donald Hawley, the first Ambassador (of any Country) to the Sultanate in July 1971. Sir Donald was later the founding Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society.

and his dedication to the speedy establishment of a modern government. A few days later, Sultan Qaboos made his first ever visit to Muscat to an enthusiastic popular reception. A new administration was quickly formed under the premiership of his uncle, Sayyid Tariq bin Taimur, who returned from living abroad.

Sultan Qaboos set about ending Oman's isolation in the world and spent much of 1971 visiting other Arab heads of state and attending Arab and international forums. He also made visits to London, Paris, Tehran and Washington. Oman joined the Arab League, the United Nations and other international organisations and opened diplomatic relations with many states.

At home, Sultan Qaboos did away with many of the anachronistic and petty restrictions on daily life. In place of the

Indian Rupee and the Maria Theresa thaler, he immediately introduced a new currency – the Rial Saidi, which was itself replaced in 1973 by the Rial Omani. He rapidly accelerated the programme of infrastructural projects, including a new airport at Seeb and a new sea port in Matrah, which had been slowly begun under his father.

He laid particular emphasis on civil development in Dhofar, where he sought to win over the rebels through Civil Action Teams, which dug wells and set up shops, health centres and schools, as well as through organising them into local irregular units, called "firqas". He also declared an amnesty with incentives, which had the effect of attracting back people with the skills that were needed for the rapidly expanding administration. He

further welcomed those Zanzibaris of Omani origin who had fled mainly to the Gulf from Zanzibar after the revolution there in 1964, many of whom also had skills in short supply.

Managing the frenetic pace of all this activity led to strains in the relationship between the Sultan and his prime minister, who had different opinions on the role of monarchy. The Sultan wished to retain many of the traditional prerogatives of his position, while Sayyid Tariq favoured the institution of a constitutional monarchy. Matters came to a head in late 1971 and as a result Sayyid Tariq submitted his resignation in December, but remained as an adviser and international representative. The Sultan assumed the premiership himself, together with the portfolios of foreign affairs and defence, albeit with deputies administering these departments, and was Governor of the Central Bank. He or his Personal Representative presided over the Council of Ministers as the highest executive authority.



In parallel with this action on the civil front, by 1972 Sultan Qaboos began the rapid expansion of his armed forces to 10,000 men, with the addition of appropriate modern weaponry. With these extra forces and capability and further military support from Britain as well as from Iran and Jordan from 1972, the Sultan's Armed Forces began slowly to take back critical positions occupied by the rebels in Dhofar and on 11 December 1975 the Sultan was able to announce that the war was over.

His preoccupation with the war had meant that he could not devote all the attention that relations with his fellow rulers in the Gulf required. However, after 1975 Oman actively sought closer ties with its neighbours. Cooperation between them was made all the more necessary with the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war in 1980, which led to the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) the following year, though alone among them Oman continued to maintain relations with both sides, thereby underlining the policy of neutrality and dialogue that it has steadfastly observed under Sultan Qaboos.

Over the following decades, these credentials enabled him to play a unique role as a mediator in regional disputes. He helped to defuse the Bahrain-Qatar dispute over the Hawar Islands and the Fasht Al-Dibal reef in 1986. He worked diligently, albeit unsuccessfully in the end, to bring the Iraqi and Iranian leaders around the negotiating table in 1987, offering a meeting between them in Muscat. After hosting the GCC summit in Muscat in 1989, Sultan Qaboos moved quickly to further improve relations with Saudi Arabia and Yemen by signing with them agreements to settle long-standing disputed frontiers; and consistently played thereafter a

mediatory role in Yemen's ongoing troubles. Even after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Oman continued to maintain relations with Iraq, while providing armed forces and support to the Coalition against it. It remained a reliable intermediary with Iran in regional and international disputes. At the GCC summit in 1991, Sultan Qaboos was elected to head the Higher Security Commission with the task of forming a combined defence force of 100,000 men; but it proved impossible to reach unanimity.

Also within the GCC, Sultan Qaboos took the initiative to develop relations with Israel, resulting in December 1994 in the visit of Prime Minister Rabin and the opening of an Israeli trade office in Muscat and he repeated the gesture in October 2018 by hosting Prime Minister Netanyahu. Along with Kuwait among the GCC states, Oman did not join in the boycott of Qatar initiated by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 2017.

By the time of his silver jubilee in 1995, Sultan Qaboos had also made significant progress in institutional building in Oman. While continuing to make an annual tour with some of his ministers to meet the people in an open forum, he also established in 1981 the State Consultative Council, with 55 appointed members, which evolved in 1991 into the Consultative Council, with 59 members selected from those nominated by the people of each governorate, having wide ranging powers to examine issues and to question Ministers. From 1994, women were permitted to take part in the selection of members and to stand for election.

In 1996, Sultan Qaboos decreed the Basic Law, which is considered as Oman's constitution. It established a bicameral legislature of the State Council appointed by the Sultan in addition to the elected Consultative Council. Since 2002, all citizens over 21 years can vote. The last elections were in 2019, when 85 members were elected from 61 constituencies. The rate of progress, particularly on freedom of expression, did not however satisfy everyone and in mid-1994 a seditious plot was uncovered, which had Islamist overtones. Sultan Qaboos appealed to the people not to allow alien ideas masquerading as beneficial promises to



jeopardise Oman's security and stability; and the situation remained calm until the repercussions of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 again led to an outburst of public dissatisfaction, with demonstrations largely by young people concerned mainly about unemployment.

Sultan Qaboos responded by immediately cancelling a planned visit to India. He ordered a government reshuffle, an improvement in basic wages in the private sector, and an increase in student grants; and later in the year amended the Basic Law to give the State Council some additional powers. Most significantly he pledged the creation of 50,000 new jobs, an ambitious target, given Oman's limited natural resources and the considerable efforts that had already been made in the context of Vision 2020, a programme launched after oil prices fell below \$10 per barrel in 1998 to establish an oil independent economy.

A visionary and perfectionist, Sultan Qaboos was determined from the beginning to retain Oman's individual character and identity. Thus he decreed



that the people should keep to their traditional style of clothing and not only preserve Oman's historic monuments but also ensure that all new building should conform to a uniform style. Although Ibadhi mosques are generally small and simple, Muscat had a need for a mosque that could accommodate a large religious gathering. Sultan Qaboos ordered therefore the construction of a grand mosque to be known as the Sultan Qaboos

Grand Mosque, capable of holding 20,000 worshippers. After over six years of painstaking work, it was opened in May 2001.

With an eye to protecting Oman's wildlife, he banned all forms of hunting as early as 1976 and encouraged the preservation of some of Oman's threatened species, such as the oryx. From his education in Britain, he had developed a deep love of music and set out to create



HM Sultan Qaboos received the Duke of Cambridge just a few weeks before he died.

from scratch first a military band that within a few years was playing at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo and then the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, which gave its first performance in 1987. In 2001 he ordered the construction of the magnificent Royal Oman Opera House, which opened to great acclaim in 2011.

Following the huge expansion of schooling across Oman, Sultan Qaboos initiated a plan in 1980 to establish the first university in Oman, which as Sultan Qaboos University admitted its first students in 1986. Since then, universities or colleges have been opened in most towns. A generous philanthropist he endowed with funds numerous organizations and institutions, not least the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. As Patron of the Anglo-Omani Society, he was particularly supportive and endowed it with funds to establish permanent premises in London.

Throughout his long life, Sultan Qaboos retained a particular affection for Britain and the relationship between him and successive British governments remained close. He was a key partner for Britain and the West in the security of the Gulf region and modelled his defence and security forces on British systems and practices. He welcomed large tri-service British exercises in Oman in 1986, 1999 and 2018 to test Britain's ability to deploy large-scale forces in the region and after the last exercise they are able to do so from a permanent training base established in the new port of Duqm.

The defence and security relationship was further consolidated when, at the end of February 2019, a Joint Defence Agreement was signed. This was followed a

few months later, in May, by the signature of a Comprehensive Agreement on Enduring Friendship and Bilateral Cooperation, seeking to enhance the relationship in the field of international affairs, the economy, culture and education. In the latter regard, the Anglo-Omani Society and the New Generation Group were specifically mentioned.

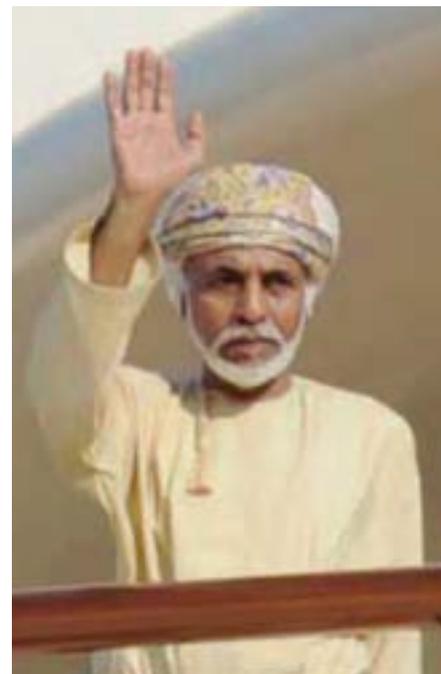
His personal relations with the British royal family were strong. The Queen made a state visit to Oman in 1979, which he returned in 1982. The Queen made another state visit to Oman in 2010. He retained property in Britain and made many private visits. Prince Charles and other members of the royal family often visited Oman.

Sultan Qaboos married in March 1976 his first cousin Kamila (née Nawwal), the daughter of his uncle Sayyid Tariq and Sayyida Shawana bint Nasir Al Said, but they divorced three years later and there was no issue. The question of a successor became more acute in 2015 when he was diagnosed with cancer and began a long period of treatment. He had always been reluctant to name a successor to avoid a focus for internal intrigue and outside meddling but laid down in his Basic Law of 1996 a process to be enacted when the throne should fall vacant: first the Ruling Family Council should meet within three days and, if they could not reach consensus on a successor, the Defence Council together with the Chairman of the State Council, the Chairman of the Consultative Council and the Chairman of the Supreme Court, plus his two senior deputies, should meet and agree Sultan Qaboos' own nomination, which

he had already deposited in a sealed envelope. Sultan Qaboos said in a press interview in 1997 that he had in fact written down two names in descending order of preference and put them in two sealed envelopes deposited in different parts of the country, presumably in Muscat and Salalah.

In the event, members of the ruling family met and decided immediately to ask the expanded Defence Council, as prescribed in the Basic Law, to instate the person nominated by Sultan Qaboos. The Defence Council duly met in the presence of the Ruling Family Council, the envelope was opened on live television and the nomination of Qaboos's cousin, Sayyid Haitham bin Tarik Al Said, the former Minister of Culture and National Heritage was read out.

Sultan Qaboos was laid to rest later that morning and immediately afterwards Sultan Haitham was sworn in at the Oman Council building in front of both houses, the Ruling Family Council and the Defence Council. In his speech, Sultan Haitham declared that he would follow the course and policies of the late Sultan. Sultan Qaboos was laid to rest later that day. The next day, a high-level delegation, including the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and the Chief of the General Staff, was among the first to convey condolences to the new Sultan. ■



**OMANI BRITISH
FRIENDSHIP
ASSOCIATION**



**جمعية الصداقة
العمانية
البريطانية**

The Oman British Friendship Association (“OBFA”) is based in Oman. It was formed in 1991 to celebrate and build on the long-standing close relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and United Kingdom and to promote bilateral trade, partnerships and investment between the two countries.

OBFA is headed by a Chairman and a Secretary-General who are supported by seven elected Board members. These members are from companies strongly associated with Britain. Each year it holds a number of conferences dealing with issues of interest to both countries. In the Summer there is usually a conference in the UK and a reception at the Anglo-Omani Society which creates a powerful occasion for business and diplomatic leaders from both countries to get together.

OBFA’s UK counterpart, the Oman British Business Council, a much newer organisation, was formed in the UK in 2018 and aims to enhance the British companies understanding about the opportunities of British companies in Oman.

To learn more and become a member please visit <http://obfaoman.com>

