



DURHAM MIDDLE EAST PAPERS

THE GULF BEYOND THE 'ARCHETYPAL':

EXPLORING INTERCONNECTIONS AS WELL AS DISTINCTIVENESS

A return journey from the UAE to Oman¹

James Page

Durham Middle East Paper No. 98

DURHAM MIDDLE EAST PAPERS

INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

THE GULF BEYOND THE 'ARCHETYPAL':

EXPLORING INTERCONNECTIONS AS WELL AS DISTINCTIVENESS

A return journey from the UAE to Oman¹

James Page

James Page is an Honorary Fellow, School of Government and International Affairs, University of Durham, UK, where he is currently completing his PhD.

Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

Durham University

Al-Qasimi Building

Elvet Hill Road

Durham

DH1 3TU

Tel: +44 (0)191 3345680

Durham Middle East Papers No. 98

ISSN 1476-4830

September 2019

The Durham Middle East Papers series covers all aspects of the economy, politics, social science, history, literature and languages of the Middle East. Authors are invited to submit papers to the Editorial Board for consideration for publication.

The views expressed in this paper are the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher or IMEIS. All Rights Reserved. This paper cannot be photocopied or reproduced without prior permission.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (IMEIS), within the School of Government & International Affairs, is a Social Science-focused academic institute of excellence, research-led in ethos, with a track-record of internationally acclaimed research outputs across all sub-areas of its activity. Success in this respect obtains largely from the interdisciplinary nature of the Institute's activities and the fruitful interaction of political economists, political scientists, historians and Islamicists, as well as with colleagues from Anthropology, Arabic, Archaeology, Geography, Business – all linked together by their collective focus on the study of the Middle East and the Muslim world in the widest sense.

ABOUT THE PAPERS

Established in the early 1970s the multidisciplinary series includes topics on all aspects of the social sciences and arts in the Middle East, written by leading and emerging scholars in their respective fields.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Professor Anoush Ehteshami

Exofficio member

Professor of International Relations
in the School of Government and
International Affairs

Dr Colin Turner

Reader in Islamic Thought in
the School of Government and
International Affairs

Professor Clive Jones

Professor of Regional Security in
the School of Government and
International Affairs, Durham
University

Dr Carly Beckerman

Art editor

Assistant Professor in the
International Relations of the Middle
East in the School of Government and
International Affairs

Dr May Darwich

Assistant Professor in the
International Relations of the Middle
East in the School of Government and
International Affairs

ADVISORY BOARD

Professor Rory Miller

Georgetown University, Doha

Professor James Piscatori

Australian National University

Professor Beverly Milton-Edwards

Queen's University, Belfast

Sir Harold Walker, KCMG

Member, Luce Foundation

Mr Richard Muir, CMG

Chair, Luce Committee

INTRODUCTION

Claims of an ‘archetypal’ ‘Gulf State’, or ‘the’ ‘archetypal’ ‘Gulf State’ appear to be growing. This article asserts that this has implications for understanding such states, past, current and future in terms of international relations broadly conceived. Furthermore, although such claims are immediately satisfying in view of current and readily identifiable trends, upon closer examination – such as in the case of the UAE and also in comparison with Oman – they prove difficult to substantiate as well as sustain. Nonetheless, exploration of such claims can and does reveal important continuities, change and distinctiveness through which

**“CLAIMS OF AN
‘ARCHETYPAL’ ‘GULF
STATE’, OR ‘THE’
‘ARCHETYPAL’ ‘GULF
STATE’ APPEAR TO
BE GROWING...”**

hydrocarbon reserves (and as compared with the UAE). This is done via the aforementioned claim aspects and prominent claims pertinent to this area, which are subsequently explored. The latter specifically relate to claims of what is an ‘authentic’ ‘Gulf State’ and what is ‘old Arabia’, which are also employed as heuristics in order to shed further light on significant political, economic and cultural matters in the region with particular focus on Oman. Historically limited access to Oman and limited literature on this increasingly important intersection of issues provides key rationales for this enquiry and approach.

This article proceeds in three main parts, firstly, ‘archetypal’ ‘Gulf State’ claims are examined demonstrating the usefulness of interrogating such claims, and in consequence revealing the contrasting or even juxtaposed case of Oman in comparison to claims about the UAE. Secondly, the case of Oman is further examined detailing commonalities, interconnections and distinctiveness among claims of ‘archetypal’ ‘Gulf States’ and in comparison with the UAE (with which it has close links). Subsequently, Oman’s increasing significance in the region and ‘Globally’/ internationally is set out, as

is the increasing pressure for it to economically diversify, with economic and political implications. Tourism features prominently in such diversification efforts, dimensions of which are explored with prominent claims considered prior to and during a return journey from the UAE to Oman. Other related international relations issues are also considered concomitantly, as appropriate. In conclusion, it’s found that the circumstances, situation and issues involved are more complex than prominent claims or related theory provide for. Yet, these also raise significant questions about issues of current and prospective importance to the Gulf – and Oman in particular – as Gulf States experience continuities, change, and challenges in a rapidly changing region.

‘Archetypal’ ‘Gulf State Claims

The UAE sees prominent claims by some that it constitutes an ‘archetypal’, and perhaps ‘the’ ‘archetypal’, ‘Gulf State’ with regard to the economic social and political hubs located, supported and developed by it, which stand out in the region.^{2 3 4} Such claims see considerable, if not predominant, focus upon largely urban aspects where many hub-related activities are evident, for example, in high profile initiatives,⁵ events,⁶ visits,⁷ and facilities in the metropolises of ‘Global’ Dubai and the capital Abu Dhabi.^{8 9} Whilst apparently increasingly distant from oil and gas (hydrocarbons), income derived from these remains highly important to the UAE, underpinning its economic and

**“...THESE ALSO
RAISE SIGNIFICANT
QUESTIONS ABOUT
ISSUES OF CURRENT
AND PROSPECTIVE
IMPORTANCE TO
THE GULF...”**

political rise,¹⁰ and to which these hubs are inextricably linked. Indeed, this places the aforementioned ‘archetypal’ claims in important context, as wealth derived from hydrocarbons has often been cited as a ‘typical feature’¹¹ of Gulf States, for whom a substantial proportion of their nominal GDP comes from these sources.¹² More significantly, and amid the aforementioned ‘archetypal’ claims, the UAE of all Gulf States, is arguably one of the least likely to experience a dramatic change in wealth derived from hydrocarbons in the coming couple of decades, yet it also does not have the largest such reserves.¹³ This is even as it very publicly endeavours to: diversify economically; alter its economic and political posture; and, develop its place in the region and more broadly, as well impressions of it.^{14 15} As such, it becomes evident that ‘archetypal’ ‘Gulf State’ claims regarding the UAE may be substantially challenged on such grounds, and upon closer examination an ‘archetypal’ ‘Gulf State’ appears less, or even far from clear-cut. Yet, such claims also indicate and draw out aspects, developments and issues of interest among and between Gulf States and others. With closer scrutiny these can also help to reveal past and current relationships, change as well as continuities, in a rapidly changing region. Further, these may also do so regarding those in the future, such as in view of the aspirations and efforts involved.¹⁶

Oman: Commonalities, Interconnections Distinctiveness among ‘Archetypal’ Gulf State Claims

In this regard, interesting examples need not be looked far for; the neighbouring Gulf State Oman sees considerable contrast – even juxtaposition – to ‘archetypal’ claims regarding the UAE, but sees growing interest, for instance in its provision of diplomatic facility culminating in the Iranian nuclear deal.¹⁷ Indeed, it is far less ‘prominent’ than the UAE in many respects,¹⁸ however, less well known may be that the UAE was formed (in 1971-2) from a number of the ‘Trucial Oman’ States¹⁹ separated by treaty from Oman, indicative of close links between them.²⁰ Distinctively, Oman is the oldest independent state in the Arab world, with the considerable prestige, status, and leadership this connotes in a region where (absolute) monarchies predominate. Indeed, such monarchies are also an oft-cited ‘typical feature’ Gulf States.²¹ In further contrast to the UAE (and most but not all Gulf States), Oman possesses very low estimated hydrocarbon reserves, with an estimated 15.2 and 20.6 years oil and gas production remaining (as compared with the UAE’s, 68.1 and 98.2 years, respectively).²² Although rapid political and economic change has occurred in past decades, and especially recent years in a somewhat restive region²³ (and the wider Middle East):²⁴ less public emphasis on hydrocarbons²⁵ does not except that they remain of major importance to Gulf States currently and for the foreseeable future.²⁶ It is in this regard that Oman’s situation perhaps most immediately stands out, and moreover with interrogation of the

aforementioned ‘archetypal’ claims and their implications. For Oman, although not as prominent in the region as the UAE has become, and despite considerable challenges, is a locus of relative calm, discretion, and particular capacities in the Gulf.²⁷ It is also uniquely quite literally situated at the forefront of major economic (and associated political) developments in the region. This is given that it uniquely adjoins four increasingly critical geo-political²⁸ and geo-strategic²⁹ stretches of water, namely: the Gulf;³⁰ the Gulf of Oman; the Arabian Sea; and, the Indian Ocean.³¹ As such uniqueness suggests it is the only ‘Gulf State’ to have direct and unimpeded access to each and all of these waters.

The significance of Oman’s situation is usefully identifiable in: the Gulf carrying approximately thirty-five per cent of the world’s daily seaborne exports of oil; the Gulf of Oman offering the only entrance from the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean into the Gulf³²; the Arabian Sea involving some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, linking India with the Middle East, and Africa; and, Oman being proximate to states on the littoral of the Indian Ocean possessing approximately one-third of the world’s population, a quarter of its landmass, and approximately forty per cent of the world’s oil and gas reserves.³³ These indicators and statistics point towards the continuing predominance of oil and gas in global energy consumption – especially oil

in the world’s transportation systems –³⁴ and the on-going importance of hydrocarbons to the world’s economic activity, investment, and growth.³⁵ The Gulf and Oman thus have influential situations in international relations broadly conceived, and as economic and trade-related matters are often referred to in the context of the global³⁶ and of ‘globalization’.³⁷ Indeed, in terms of international trade (increasingly referred to in recent decades as ‘global’):³⁸ “[e]nergy imports from the Middle East, resources from Africa, and trade with Europe must transit the Indian Ocean in order to reach China”;³⁹ an area that Oman has direct access to. Oman is also situated uniquely among Gulf States at important chokepoints regarding the former,⁴⁰ at strategic points⁴¹ regarding the transport of resources from Africa, and also the latter.⁴² In comparative terms, while the UAE does have access to the Indian Ocean, via portions of its territory located on this coast, these are much more limited in size and facility than those of Oman and are not on the Arabian Sea, but are on the Gulf of Oman. Unlike Oman, the UAE does not have territory astride the Straits of Hormuz. (See map below.)

To place this and its implications in appropriate perspective, including with regard to continuities and change, context is necessary here. Perhaps most importantly, China was established as the leading trading partner of all eight Gulf states taken together by 2016, if not in 2013,⁴³

and is ranked as number one in world trade for exported merchandise (2016) (and number 2 in the world for imported merchandise) by the WTO;⁴⁴ GCC-China trade has increased from a little less than USD 10 billion in 2000 to USD 114 billion in 2016, and the Middle East is now arguably China's most important economic region outside of the Asia-Pacific;⁴⁵ Furthermore, OBOR, CPEC, and the 'Maritime Silk Route' that China is deploying have profound economic and inextricably political dimensions, in view of their scope and scale, affecting the Gulf, the Indian Ocean region, and beyond, including in geopolitical and geostrategic terms.⁴⁷ These see substantial involvement in and by Oman, including in the former Omani territory, port (and hinterland) of Gwadar, Pakistan (that was historically a part of Oman), that is part of CPEC and CCWAEAC, and links with OBOR and the 'Maritime Silk Route'.^{48 49} Thus, Oman, and the Gulf region look set for further change as trading relationships deeply alter and develop. As preliminary indications show, these relationships are not limited to the economic sphere, and may usher in significant political change. For example, GCC states continue to be purchasers of major economic (and political) importance for the West, notably of arms (predominantly the US, UK, and France in that order),^{50 51} while these countries provide a 'security umbrella' to Gulf States.⁵² However, significant (and some controversial) arms purchases from China have

recently taken place,⁵³ 'despite' its 'economic diplomacy' approach that does not 'focus' on political issues.⁵⁴ This will be an interesting area to follow as some continuities often regarded as typical of Gulf States see challenges and even marked change, potentially differentially among and between Gulf States, given the implications of states' interests and rivalries.⁵⁵ Moreover, given Oman's rapidly diminishing hydrocarbon reserves, increasing foreign security interests in it,⁵⁶ and concerns about leadership succession.⁵⁷

Pressures for Gulf States to diversify economically and especially Oman (and also Bahrain) have seen many plans and initiatives instituted over several decades, including 'national visions'.⁵⁸ Whilst in the case of Oman it's unlikely that non-hydrocarbon sources of income will rise sufficiently rapidly to equal or approximate the anticipated reductions in such income in the short to medium-term, Oman's economic diversification programme ('Tanfeedh'), established in early 2016, has a strong focus upon and sets much store in tourism. (Five sectors are stated in the Tanfeedh as key to achieving the aim of reducing Oman's dependence on hydrocarbon revenues – manufacturing, transportation and logistics, fisheries, mining, and tourism).⁵⁹ Tourism can also be considered one of the three leading elements of this diversification effort (along with logistics, and manufacturing) as per the Tanfeedh programme plan. However, the economic and

political significance of employment opportunities mark tourism out from these, as well as room for expansion.⁶⁰ Indeed, Tanfeedh has set the target of attracting more than 5 million international visitors to Oman annually, from just over 3 million in 2016, while also endeavouring to raise the tourism sector's contribution to the Sultanate's GDP from 2.8% in 2016⁶¹ to 6% (and according to Oman's Ministry of Tourism in late 2018, the target is now 10 %).⁶² Considerable comment has occurred recently in business and industry circles underlining the importance of tourism to Oman's economy as hydrocarbons run out, and even with a surge in oil and gas income last year. Importantly, this also aligns with the Government of Oman's earmarking, so far.⁶³ (Notably, the UAE is also increasing economic diversification efforts into tourism, although financial pressures on it to do so are nowhere near as economically acute).⁶⁴ Partly in consequence of growing international interest in the region and Oman, reports have circulated about Oman's attractiveness as a location to visit, complementary and consistent with its reputation for relative calm. It's key diplomatic role in the wider region and Middle East (for example it's enabling of and brokering substantial political agreements (or 'deals') related to Iran and Yemen) has also served to underline this in view of concerns about safety among some potential tourists.⁶⁵ Aspects of attraction frequently articulated are

Oman's striking natural environment, its extraordinary bio-diversity,⁶⁶ and well-preserved historical sites and cultural traditions.^{67 68} Given the intersection of issues here that are all pertinent to understanding 'archetypal' claims, including commonalities and distinctions amid continuities and change in the region, journeying to Oman from the UAE is perhaps a natural step, duly informed and sensitively so. Moreover, this is so for those interested in the range of international affairs, history, culture, and environment, which co-inform and hold the prospect of providing novel as well as meaningful insights regarding such matters.

From the UAE to Oman: Setting Out upon a Journey

Crucially in terms of background and towards enquiry, Oman, compared with the UAE⁶⁹ (and to most, if not all, other states in the region), has been less readily accessible to outsiders/foreigners for much of its history (for a range of reasons).⁷⁰ Its statehood since circa 1970 has proven rather stable and un-dramatic (in 1970 Sultan Qaboos acceded to the throne, albeit eventfully by overthrowing his father), and as alluded to above, its Foreign Policy has been characterised as "independence, pragmatism, and moderation".⁷¹ These have also meant, however, that Oman sees different claims and increasing curiosity, including regarding areas of growing economic, cultural, and broader international relations salience. Not unusual examples of claims



Map: Oman and the Gulf Region⁷⁵

include: Oman: ‘is the only country in the region that is both accessible and authentic’;⁷² offers “a genuine taste of old Arabia and an oasis of traditional culture amidst frantically modernizing Gulf states”⁷³ “is the last authentic Gulf State” (according to an affable diplomat). These are quite heady claims! Yet, it might well be asked, what is ‘authentic’ and what is ‘genuine old Arabia’? Moreover, is the implied paradox of accessibility and modernization in relation to ‘authenticity’ in the region quite so stark? For surely: the UAE also has tradition(s), historical sites and practices, too – even amid and among rapid economic modernization and development and despite emphases in

some claims of ‘archetype’ explored above.⁷⁴ These rather interesting questions inform and will serve as an ongoing set of discussions towards understanding not only Oman, but also the UAE, and the wider region and related relevant issues, past, present and future.

The physical route taken to Oman, perhaps fittingly, is as though following the modern state formation of the UAE. This involves travelling from the UAE’s capital, Abu Dhabi, to Al Ain, where there is a major border crossing (and through which most trade passes between the two countries).⁷⁶ It is a journey of coast to interior, retracing the steps of the ‘Founder of the Nation’, HH the late Sheikh Zayed, who was born in Al Ain, and came to rule the UAE from Abu Dhabi when it and its capital were established on 2 December 1971. Al Ain is also the ‘home’ of the UAE’s ruling family, and further back in time, the site of an ancient settlement of great importance, as well as to some of the most influential tribes of what is now the UAE and Oman.⁷⁷ Notably, the Burami Oasis, of which Al Ain is a part on the UAE side of the border, was the scene of a major international crisis in the 1950s that came to define both states in due course, and key aspects of relations with neighbours, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (and the UK and US).⁷⁸ In contrast to Al Ain’s interior location, the starting point of Abu Dhabi is coastally situated on the waters of the Gulf. In the latter,

azure-coloured coastline meets shimmering skyscrapers, fringed by light-beige dusted plains, while in the former, occasionally fast shifting sands happen upon verdant oases and rocky outcrops. Each has long been linked to the other through ancient human practices of seasonal travel and social and economic activities.⁷⁹



Abu Dhabi from Al Minna Marina

From Abu Dhabi to Al Ain via the modern motorway means passing through settlements of varying size, scale, and scope that eventually give way to wafting red-hued sand dunes, stretching without apparent effort toward the vast the skies. (They are also of the kind that featured in recent Star Wars film, which was filmed nearby).⁸⁰ Along more watered parts

of the route, occasional date palm plantations line the road, offering shade and an easier complexion on the eye. Not long ago, travel between the two cities took days, and now takes some two hours, or possibly less.⁸¹

In the vicinity of Al Ain, yet well outside its centre, gardens proudly reclaim the desert. In their proximity



Motorway from Abu Dhabi not far from Al Ain – Dunes moving nearby

they are almost oblivious to their mutual antagonisms, which appear to revolve around dust and moisture. Displays of seasonal flowers mingle in the median with neat arrangements of palms and desert trees such as the acacia, sidr, and the national tree, the Ghaf.⁸² Amenities in Al Ain are among the finest in the UAE (and reflecting on experience of visiting all of the Emirates). The Al Ain Museum (which I first went round as a boy, and that left a positive impression), is a good example, as is the more recently established and found Al Qattara centre (see photo below),⁸³ where one of the most renowned Islamic calligraphers, Mohammed Mandi, amazingly happened to be in residence at the time.⁸⁴ More broadly, Al Ain possesses several oases (Al Qattara, Al Hili, Al Jimi, Al Muatared and Al Ain), with their myriad irrigation systems, flora and fauna eliciting a sensation of tranquility: ‘modern life’, its stresses and strains, seem far away thereabouts. These oases indispose urban areas that are themselves punctuated and ringed by various forts, castles, palaces, residential compounds and commercial buildings in a great range of styles, and vintages. Although varied as such, they are – as whole – less contrasting or ‘clashing’ with one another as compared to some other locations, such as in Dubai, and therefore furnish a particularly coherent impression and of historical development in the UAE.⁸⁵

On the UAE side of the border, at Hili (that is in many ways a part of the city of Al Ain), exceptional archaeological sites dating from 2000BC/BCE are on display in a Public Park. The latter dates from the early part of the UAE’s establishment.⁸⁶ This also constitutes an integral element of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.⁸⁷ Meantime, in the distance, mountains of jagged peaks and their mottled surfaces glint in the passing of the sun’s rays, which happen to be in Oman, and therefore beckon. After a robust late lunch at a local



A Traditional Gathering, Al Qattara Arts and Cultural Centre, Al Ain, UAE

restaurant, and as time was passing rapidly (dusk not being far distant), the border crossing point is sought. The designated crossing lies a relatively short way out of the city, and by chance camels are receiving enthusiastic exercise from their riders along the way, forming a kind of accompanying procession; it is as though an escort sees us off to the next stage of our journey. The closed area along the borderline they are running in is replete with Bedouin-style tents; a picturesque touch, but sadly (although understandably) no photography was allowed in this zone.

Crossing at the first stage of the border point is smooth, with almost no queue – it’s well away from the weekend when, according to various reports, traffic not infrequently results in ponderous, time-consuming waits. Drawing away from the UAE border-post and checks, the mountain folds, by now close around, envelop,

restaurant, and as time was passing rapidly (dusk not being far distant), the border crossing point is sought. The designated crossing lies a relatively short way out of the city, and by chance camels are receiving enthusiastic exercise from their riders along the way, forming a kind of accompanying procession; it is as though an escort sees us off to the next stage of our journey. The closed area along the borderline they are running in is replete with Bedouin-style tents; a picturesque touch, but sadly (although understandably) no photography was allowed in this zone.

serving as a kind of landfall from earlier sands. Indents and pockets invisible from the plain are suddenly revealed; their hidden shades and intensively cultivated worlds are far away from either the urban bustle or dry expanse of dunes. They also give an immediate impression as to quite how active agricultural activity is on the Omani side of the border.

At the formal border crossing, the Royal Oman Police gesture and eventually explain (in English) that the Omani border-post some distance away requires our attendance: the necessary administration must be completed there. Failure to obtain the necessary passport stamps would cause difficulties upon departure, if not before, (something some colleagues had also forewarned). Whilst clarifying where to go, it’s confirmed the distance is some 30km, and near a small settlement. Quite miraculously, this is found without much ado; Al Jizza is a lonely spot, and

not a place one relishes a stay for the night. Inside, a large central waiting area was empty, except for a French family, who were swiftly gestured to a marble-topped counter. The tourist booth is unfortunately unstaffed, but there were some useful brochures on offer, a few of which are in great piles. Extracting only one seems mean. One of the most difficult items to find, however, is a good map – either before or during travelling in Oman. We are without GPS...

Striking out into the interior of Oman, past the initial range of mountains along the border and Al Jizza, leads to ‘pastures new’: dramatic mountain ranges; sudden patches of intensive cultivation; expansive, narrow wadis riven with seemingly impossibly angular outcrops; and, later, plains painted with shades of yellows, khakis, and greys lit under a pastel-blue sky. Indeed, among the plains, and altogether different from the UAE side, is the presence of periodic patches of many-hued greens – shrubs and tufts of growth – rising out from under an otherwise arid-looking, stone-laden earth.

When looking more closely, it’s evident much life here abounds, despite initial impressions of barrenness: settlements of a wide variety of sizes and styles pattern the horizon, substantial sections of which can be gazed at intently for a time without seeing anyone. When villages are visited, the presence of people soon emerges, although sometimes very slowly, but there is also often gentle friendliness and a sincere air of welcome. Of all the physical features, Omani doors in particular cannot fail to impress, what with their domestic proudness, occasional splendor and unashamed ebullience. The variety is quite astounding.

After taking ‘the scenic route’, arrival at the place for the night fittingly occurred at dusk. Reconciling the map with the local signage and (lack of) easily referenced physical features has meant some ‘interesting’ detours, but also a now urgent desire for dinner. Among the mountains, a coziness and sense of ‘security’ abounds, but there is also loneliness through relative isolation of open spaces, compounded by unfamiliarity. The hotel –really more a guesthouse – is deftly perched above a mountain wadi and narrow defiles that lead almost covertly to it. A local gathering and celebration is underway; men from the area dressed in traditional clothing are sitting neatly in a customary circle, discussing matters, enjoying tea, and coffee tout ensemble. Their dinner follows in the traditional manner, as thankfully does ours. The rhythm of washing, sharing food and drink goes through its convivial motions and satisfying effects. The quietude among the rugged terrain marks an end to a long day of travel across countries, and so it seems, also eras.

After taking ‘the scenic route’, arrival at the place for the night fittingly occurred



Oman, Al Buraimi area



Omani Steel Compound Door

at dusk. Reconciling the map with the local signage and (lack of) easily referenced physical features has meant some 'interesting' detours, but also a now urgent desire for dinner. Among the mountains, a coziness and sense of 'security' abounds, but there is also loneliness through relative isolation of open spaces, compounded by unfamiliarity. The hotel –really more a guesthouse – is deftly perched above a mountain wadi and narrow defiles that lead almost covertly to it. A local gathering and celebration is underway; men from the area dressed in traditional clothing are sitting neatly in a customary circle, discussing matters, enjoying tea, and coffee tout ensemble. Their dinner follows in the traditional manner, as thankfully does ours. The rhythm of washing, sharing food and drink goes through its convivial motions and satisfying effects. The quietude among the rugged terrain marks an end to a long day of travel across countries, and so it seems, also eras.

The start is early the following morning (though rest had at first taken a fair share of it). In a bid to reach the coast and capital, a further foray through the mountains is energetically required. Through the wadis, criss-crossing jagged folds, and craggy strands of mountain ranges, is the knife-like motorway; its shiny newness unapologetically emphasized in the stark light of day. In a surprisingly short time signs for the capital appear, yet it's well over a several of hundred kilometers distant.

Aspirations are high, or landmarks are few...Meanwhile, vast rock formations begin to change in colour as the sun makes its daily migration across the sky. Such changes are also an indication of the geology's 'hidden' qualities; since antiquity copper has been mined in and among the area, resulting in interconnections stretching deep into the middle and near east, and their peoples, cultures, and civilizations.

Distinctive copper axes (Jerz) made from copper from this area are a unique part of Omani cultural practices to this day, including a customary male dance. The Musandam Peninsula, not far to the North, is particularly famous for these. Notably, Arab geographers have characterised the Musandam peninsula as the head (Ru'us Al Jabal) of Oman, analogous to human anatomy⁸⁸ (the segway from axes being utterly coincidental!). The region currently being travelled through, with its rich copper deposits, is proximate to the Al Hajar mountains (the 'spine' of the country), and comprises part of the 'back' of the Oman (the stretch of these mountains to Al Buraimi where we crossed the border from the UAE). Before long, the 'underbelly' will be reached on the fertile coastal plain, and thankfully lunch.

Quite suddenly, the plain opens up before us; distinctive falaj (irrigation channels that can be over and/or under-ground as part of what can be a very sophisticated system, and



'Copper' Highway towards Muscat

in numerous cases dating to antiquity)⁸⁹ on either side motorway. Their presence is more readily apparent and locally extensive than those seen in the UAE, so far. Their state of preservation and associated use in Oman (particularly in the interior, quite high in the mountains) is renowned, and not only to see, but also, curiously, to listen to: from the gentle flowing of waters to the bird-song amongst flora they precipitate. Speaking with locals, it's apparent that difficult decisions have, with increasing frequency, to be made about what to do with the land upon which the falaj are situated, sometimes in generational contexts; the juxtaposition of new buildings and traditional agrarian practices, can lead to tensions and a series of compromises that affect the landscape, impressions, as well as quotidian practices. Modern structures, particularly shopping centre-type developments, are now 'cropping up' near the highways; including in areas where falaj are still predominant. This seems to be illustrative of the concomitant pressures of tradition and 'development' that increasingly occur.

Soon reached is the city of Sohar. It's the capital of the northern governorate

(wilayat) of Al Batinah, and its largest urban area (and the 5th most populous settlement in Oman). Sohar is the reputed birthplace of Sinbad the sailor, who is not 'merely' a figure of past lore, but has been subject of far more; for example, as a figure with to investigate and explore the history, culture and a range of interrelations Oman has with other countries, including through trade. Several decades earlier, at a time when tourism in Oman was not practicably possible due to restrictions on entry, the explorer and historian Tim Severin researched and recreated some of Sinbad's voyages. As a central figure in some versions of the Arabian Nights, Sinbad is of considerable fame and interest, including to the Sultan of Oman. So much so, the Sultan, HH Qaboos, was a major enthusiast of Severin's project, without whose support it would not have been possible. Having met Tim Severin as a young boy (when he was involved in a later expedition), I'm naturally interested in the subject matter. It's heartening to see that Severin and his crew's endeavours continue to be renowned in Oman, decades since, and boat that was built in Oman and sailed from there to China via India now sits in Muscat: at the Al Bustan Palace roundabout.^{90 91}

The old part of Sohar has a compactness that makes for a charming



Sohar Souq

introduction to a number of Oman's strengths, namely the preponderance and preservation of ancient castles and forts, souqs, and other sites amid dramatic scenery. Sohar has much to offer in this regard, and within a short walking distance (or easy driving distance in the heat!), there is a galleried souq, a large castle, an old mosque, and a white-sandy beach and lagoon. The large castle is impressive, it's walls look thick enough to repel most things that one could think of. There is also a good deal of information about it, even immediately outside the entrance. The view from its steps is majestic: it looks out over pristine sands, inviting waters of multiple blue-hues, framed by languid palms. Stately, and immaculately whitewashed government buildings are a short way down the street in front of the castle, including the Governor's house. The office inside the latter is can only be dreamt of. For all its tranquility, access to the area from the main motorway runs through more modern developments, mostly constructed of concrete, and comprised of many different stores. Thankfully they are all low-rise rather than tall and 'over-bearing'.

Departing Sohar, Muscat is the next destination along the motorway heading further south. Numerous castles, forts, and fortresses line the coast along the route, many of which could be visited; it is a fortified structure enthusiast's heaven. However, tiredness has by now begun to tell and detours into

the mountainous interior conjured with earlier in the day seem set to be a good excuse for another visit to Oman. Adding to the sense of fatigue, on top of the heat, is the paper map being used (rather than GPS/electronic navigation system). Its billowing folds have become tiring mountains, and fine details increasingly and literally disarm. The realization that the road signposting really is for the locally initiated rather than the occasional visitor adds to a desire to hold off from ad hoc forays and adventures.

Drawing into Muscat, and admittedly after some 'unilateral breaks' (to the apparent envy of the person driving), one is greeted by a long, elegant procession of lights, lanes, and incremental islands with sculptured forms. This is the kind of infrastructure associated with a government that is keen to impress, and with its bold communications taking pride of place in the country's development. It's a refreshing change from pot-holed English environs. Even more practically speaking, it's also made for a swifter and smoother than anticipated entry to capital, Muscat.

The urban edges of Muscat see a gradual shift in the outskirts – a low-rise expanse that hugs the coast to that becoming increasingly 'marked' by the signs of signature brands and facets of 'high-mass consumption': neon-billboards, shopping centres, and luxury car dealerships. Occasional 'oases' of

steel and glass structure (more often seen in some neighbouring states' big cities) become increasingly frequent, yet these stay low on the horizon; not towering as in numerous other Gulf state cities. This may not come as a surprise, as rules in Oman have (unusually by regional 'norms') limited the height of buildings.⁹² Nonetheless, it's welcome relief and makes for a fine prospect. Strikingly, the application of Islamic motifs and features on buildings in Muscat, often deftly interpreted and incorporated, is delightfully elegant, but also reassuring. The absence of 'competing' structures of height also means there are clear continuities in form to the city, inviting (further) exploration.

It's soon clear that 'Muscat' on the motorway signage refers to 'Old Muscat', which is in fact located further around the coast. Thus, the 'city centre' is much closer than thought (and as the signs indicate)... Fortunately, the map has since returned under control, and thanks to the gentle spread of the city there is ample time in which to configure a route. The thought of 'Old Muscat' is enticing, but, alas, we are staying in a residential area of the main part of Muscat. One of the luxury hotels it isn't (which many foreigners frequent, partly out of reasons of availability). Notably, backpacker facilities are not often available in Oman, (and don't look set to be for a variety of reasons from local interest to climate). Remarkably, one of the leading luxury resorts was

built for a GCC Summit (in 1985) and subsequently converted (the Al Bustan Palace Hotel), of which Tim Severin's Sinbad Voyage vessel has a prime view!⁹³

Passing the airport area near our accommodation are signs informing of the opening of the new international terminal. It's expected by some that it will increase capacity to 12 million passengers per annum (1.2 million passengers were recorded in 2017), and three further phases will increase this capacity to 24, 36 and 48 million passengers per annum, respectively.⁹⁴ It's to be a key part of the Oman's economic diversification programme ('Tanfeedh'), with a strong focus on tourism.⁹⁵ Consequently, direct flights from and to several countries are commencing, adding to a greater sense of accessibility and related travel appeal. The implications of this are various, not all of which bring me unbridled joy.

The beach near the accommodation stayed at for several consecutive nights surpasses hopes; it's very much a place locals go to walk and unwind after a long day. Over the coming evenings, at the end of enjoyably extended and tiring days, it's to be keenly swum in, though with a few caveats. The beach and its waters are shared with wildlife that proves surprisingly active and largely unperturbed by human presence: schools of jumping fish among and between swimmers; birds of prey diving and catching supper in immediate proximity;

“...AS WE'RE
NOT SURE
WHERE OR WHEN
LUNCH WILL BE
OBTAINED, IT'S
ALL THE MORE
WELCOME...”

and, a large hammerhead shark gently thrashing on the surface as it pursues a school of fish apparently on its menu. It's blissful obliviousness to the spectators on the beach and in the water, such as myself, is an admirable example of 'preservation', but that one has intimate limits.

Rising the following morning, the plan is to visit the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the largest mosque in the country and the holder of several world records, such as the largest chandelier (made by the German-Italian company, FAUSTIG), and the second-largest hand-knotted carpet (handcrafted by women in Iran and second only to the HH Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, UAE!). Many positive reviews of the site, both 'formal' and 'informal', have indeed been expressed. Our Omani host bolstered these over breakfast, kindly increasing our naïve enthusiasm. Breakfast is comprised of qawah (Arabic coffee, in this case with semi-roasted beans and crushed cardamom), local fruit and yoghurt, and as we're not sure where or when lunch will be obtained, it's all the more welcome.

Eventually the operative entry gate is found from the carpark at the Grand Mosque among a shading of trees.

Although quite a recent construction and inaugurated on 4 May 2001 (in time for the 30



Grand Mosque, Muscat, Oman – from the carpark

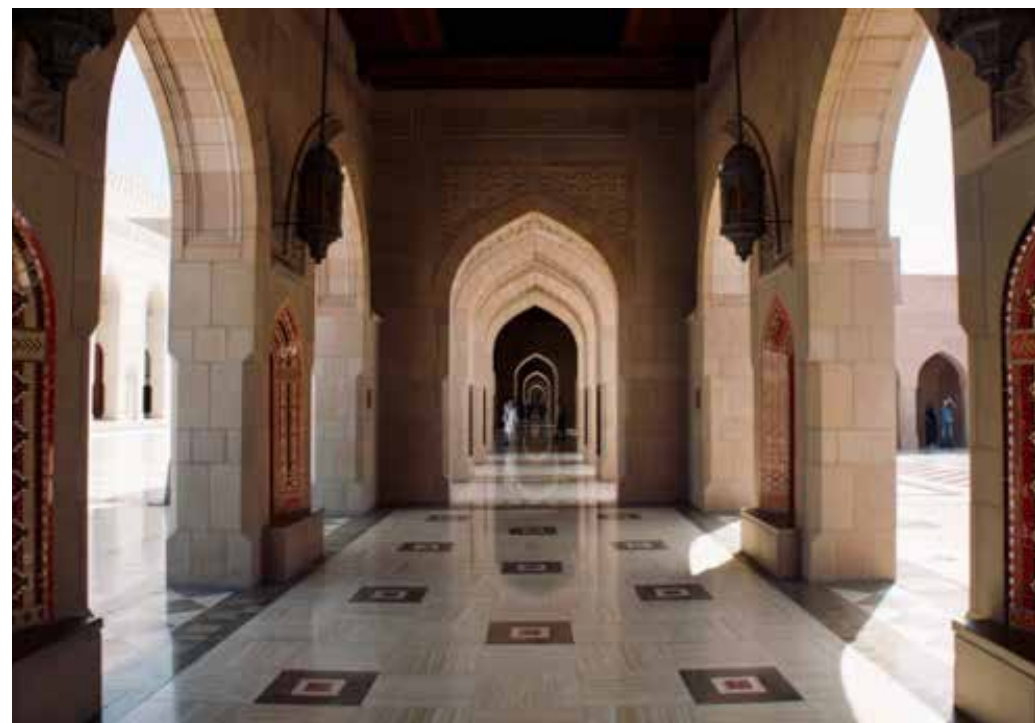


The Grand Mosque, Muscat, Oman

anniversary of HH Sultan Qaboos' reign), the mosque has the feel of one of greater antiquity. The quality of craftsmanship is deeply impressive, and visible at numerous levels: from the cut of the stone, to the exquisiteness of the carving on the doors inside (and out). The stone inlay-work found is beautifully proportioned, remarkably neatly executed, and in some examples gloriously colourful. Regarding the latter, the featuring of designs and motifs associated with particular regions and tribes of Oman in the

porticos (riwaq) provide a sensational example. Moreover, they resonate with it being a national mosque, incorporating as it does, cultural symbols from parts of the Sultanate and its people(s). Visiting the Grand Mosque in Muscat feels much more similar to visiting one in Afghanistan, as compared with those in the UAE, possibly owing to some of the artistic influences, decorations and also use of colour.

A little down the coast from Muscat is the famous souq and port of Muttrah.



Riwaq (Porticos) with designs from Omani Tribes at the Grand Mosque, Muscat, Oman



One of the largest Chandeliers on the world, inside the Grand Mosque, Muscat, Oman

This takes us closer to old Muscat, geographically, politically, and in overall atmosphere. The trip from the main part of Muscat reveals quite how rugged and 'remote' the area is. Historically, this has helped it to be largely secure and secured often when wanted, but it has also attracted

external interests and forces, such as those of the Portuguese in the 1500s, citing an early example in the modern period that has left its mark in the form of castles and other features and experiences.

In the foreground of Muttrah is the main port that not long ago had

Right: A majestic minaret, Grand Mosque, Muscat, Oman





Muttrah waterfront, Oman

industrial shipping removed, in order to focus on tourist related vessels; cruise ships currently arrive and depart with regularity. Closer still sit two of the Sultan's handsome fleet. Along the waterfront, ancient historical trading links with China are recalled with the recent erection of a few two-fish sculptures, pagodas, and balustrades that possess distinctive Chinese designs. The fish motif in Chinese mythology refers to abundance and affluence – the spoken word is a homophone for these. It's also a sign of rank to enter the royal court, and signifies marriage and the birth of many children.⁹⁶ These can each and all be understood to allude to the re-kindling of

(ancient) relations between Oman and China, and the intensification of their maritime trading and political links. Nonetheless, it also raises several questions regarding the more particular symbolism and meaning in context, for example: whose court is being entered into? Is it Oman's given the geographical location, or is it as a gateway to the Chinese court now? This is a key harbour in Oman, Duqm, is being built with enormous Chinese investment raising not dissimilar questions, despite perhaps less attractive adornments there.

Such swift intensification of political and economic links can be understood



Chinese Sculpture, Balustrading and Motifs along Muttrah seafront, Oman

in the context of China's very ambitious maritime and OBOR endeavour.⁹⁷ This seeks to make use of Oman's geo-political situation, but also its heritage, status, and political position as a 'bridge' (including very importantly, diplomatically) in the Gulf region. It is also despite of and in relation to growing political and economic tensions in the region.^{98 99} China has extended its position as the largest export partner for Oman, with a substantial increase in a very short space of time.¹⁰⁰ The recent appearance of shiny, new, and glassy modern buildings along the highway to Muscat from Al Buraimi – particularly between Sohar and Muscat – is indicative of increasing Chinese influence: the style of such buildings is similar to those in modern cities there, and many of the items sold in many of these – the equivalent of pound-shops in the UK – are cheap imported items that often originate in China.

The souq is at the 'heart' of Muttrah. Exploring its myriad passages, particularly those further from the main 'trunk, establish it's hand in glove with a residential area. Organic, neither delineated nor pre-planned, its sprawl adds to the excitement and sensation of discovery, eventually figuring as a microcosm that happens to have curated time, not only of commodities and curiosities. It's so beguiling that I mistake the entrance to a residential area



Frankincense and other specialties available



A residential area adjoining Muttrah Souq



Residential area adjoining the Muttrah Souq

for an entrance to the souq. A bemused watchman politely turns me away. There are even small forts behind parts of the souq's 'main portion', which provide confident neighbours to small townhouses constructed in the local vernacular.

Along the seafront, near the official entrance to the souq, are 'antique', well preserved merchant houses. These, too, continue to be lived in by local families, and their novel architectural composition and features vividly illustrate the trading links with other parts of the world, most obviously the Middle East, India, east Africa, and beyond; an airy worldliness permeates space and structures. Large balconies look out over the harbor that I imagine are ideal for a morning coffee or reflections upon the day at dusk.



Old Merchant's Houses, Muttrah, Oman



Old Merchant's Houses, Muttrah, Oman



A coffee table in the reception area of the Bait Al Baranda Museum, Muttrah, Oman

The Bait Al Baranda museum, a little further round the waterfront and on a main corner, recounts the story of Oman through the intimate atmosphere of a large and splendid abode. Bait Al Baranda is itself a part of the fabric of the very history it seeks to communicate, for it was originally a distinctive Portuguese house. Interestingly, it was home to the American Mission to Oman in the early 1930s, and subsequently the British Council (the UK Government's international cultural and educational institution) in the 1970s. Its conversation into a museum was completed in 2006.¹⁰¹

The antique furniture at reception connotes the genteel ambience of an earlier age, and brings together an appreciation of crafts, aesthetics and functionality. The politeness of the young gentleman at reception evokes the ease of a bygone era. Of the exhibits inside, it is the models of seagoing vessels through Oman's

ages that are the most breathtaking, and could likely result in the desire to purchase an example. I do eventually find out that some are for sale... The display also shows how influential Oman has been historically in ancient navigation, trade and exploration. For example, Omani navigators figured out the seasonal change in winds and currents and sailed accordingly, and navigation by the stars has long been practiced.

Lunch is one of the most enjoyable of the entire visit so far; the view from Bait Al Luban is unparalleled, and is coupled with beautifully presented home-cooked food (and the kind of home one would, for food-sake, it might be wished to stay in for sometime). The provision of a glass of myrrh water at the start of the meal is a new experience that although possibly decadent, is also delicious. From the street Bait Al Luban is easy to miss: the entrance is around the side of a bank. But it also means it's away from a large 'group' of cruise ship passengers patronising the souk en masse.

By the time we return there later, they have returned to their epic cruise ship (the next day it had departed, presumably with none continuing to roam). Other diners have come from the city centre to the restaurant, too, including quite a large gathering of diplomats from various countries, seated with representatives of the Omani government. It's a quite typical working lunch: seniors at the

**“VIBRANT
BOUGAINVILLEA WITH
THEIR WILD FRONDS
AND VIVID MAGENTA
BLOOMS GENTLY
COEXIST WITH PRISTINE
AND IMMACULATELY
DRESSED WHITE STONE
BUILDINGS...”**

main table and +1s at to the side, nearby. All seem to be enjoying their food, and apparently amicable conversation.¹⁰²

Further around the coast, in the next sizable bay, is Old Muscat. Its beauty that takes one aback, as does its sleepy serenity. Vibrant bougainvillea with their wild fronds and vivid magenta blooms gently coexist with pristine and immaculately dressed white stone buildings. Each of the buildings has beautiful fittings that subtly decorate them in Islamic style, which I interpret as distinctively Omani. As with the Grand Mosque, high quality crafting is a hallmark: balanced proportions, and understatedness occur in careful combination with the structures in which they are set. The uncompromisingly high degree of detail and individuality amplify a quiet confidence and purposeful harmony.

Although the Omani-French Museum is, at the time, closed, a new and larger museum opened not very long ago: on the 30th July 2016: the National Museum of Oman.^{103 104} To much relief, the museum building is sympathetic to the surrounding architecture and locale. A large and state-of-the-art facility, extensive holdings are carefully displayed within. There is an air of expectancy and poise among the various parts of the building and its staff; evidently



Buildings in the Government Area of Old Muscat, Oman

much thought has gone into how individual items and particular collections are curated. The restraint of some sections is reminiscent of special exhibitions at the British Museum, while there the use of lighting is more varied. Contemporariness of design also shows: a glass lift and a chic coffee bar can happily be found in an atrium. The quite seamless incorporation of crescented galleries is perhaps my favourite feature, together with grotto-like lighting. The intimacy is evocative of the preciousness of the holdings.

The main atrium on the ground floor has Oman's maritime history as quite literally central: the recreation of an old vessel forms the main centerpiece. Thematic collections are exhibited in the museum with a satisfying degree of detail: from arms and armour, just off the central atrium, to fine local jewelry, too. In an extraordinarily large glass case on the ground floor, the dress



National Museum of Oman, Old Muscat



(l-r) Jerz, and variations in female traditional dress (in the case)

and specific accoutrements of different tribes of the interior and coast are respectively and neatly displayed; attire from the mountains to the plains are juxtaposed tastefully, intimating a surprising degree of variation or variations between them, as well as some shared features, too. The most immediately clear difference between the vestments is the use of colour, corresponding to the local dyestuffs, among other things. Cover from the elements and in keeping with religious practices presents an obvious commonality.

The axes from Musandam are in evidence, too, in relation to which the development of ancient trade-links throughout the Middle East is explained. Trade, as a theme, permeates much of the museum as it does Oman's history. Oman's ties with East Africa and its empire there (e.g. Zanzibar) are recorded in examples including old wedding chests (mandoos), that are themselves comprised of traded hardwoods and festooned with particular piercings and fittings decorating and decorated with specific motifs. The examples in the museum are particularly fine, and after viewing them I've decided to take an interest in mandoos; I'm increasingly convinced at least one is required... One of the most impressive items on display in the museum, and of great size, is an enormous pair of wooden doors. These open insight into the importance of the East India Company in Oman's modern political, cultural, and economic history, and international relations.



*Teak wood and Brass Doors, with the UK Royal Coat of Arms c. 1714 AD/CE
Crafted in Surat, India (Mughal Empire)
Doors to ash-Shibak Fort, Ibra, Oman*

Oman's history of contact with countries outside of the region is a dimension of detail that would make for a fascinating addition, or set of additions, to the museum's displays as they currently stand. Presently, there is very little on the role of several European countries in Oman's history (and vice-versa), which would well befit and benefit the museum with further critical insights, as well as its visitors.

Very detailed focus among the collections pertains to trade, however, this is rendered in a quite unexpected way in addition to larger trade-related items: ancient funeral monuments and burial practices. Several of these are unique, and draw together threads of human relationships and communities reaching into the heart of the Middle East. Later in the journey, several of these are visited in quite spectacular settings. Meantime, nearby, a set of photos and information sections detail frankincense, its cultivation and trade detailing its importance.

Frankincense is certainly worth close attention, and the museum successfully inspires this. Curiously, frankincense comes from trees of the genus *Boswellia*, (their resin) with the finest from those in a small area in the south of Oman.¹⁰⁵ The importance of frankincense in ancient times was so great that it's thought a city and kingdom of enormous wealth located in the south of Oman and Yemen was built



Frankincense Trade Routes, as displayed at the National Museum of Oman

partly on its trade. It reputedly rose to legendary status, eventually falling spectacularly, with some historians considering it to refer to Ophir in the Old Testament of the Bible.¹⁰⁶ Even the Greeks and Romans, distant from their heartlands, aspired to come and command its trade and cultivation in Oman and southern Yemen.¹⁰⁷ Today, frankincense is part of bakhoor (a scented blend of natural ingredients, typically wood chips soaked in fragrant oils combined with resins,

essential oils, and other wood), and is increasingly employed in beauty products and perfumes (though expensive). It also remains a part of some church services (including funeral rites in some traditions),¹⁰⁸ and other religions' ritual practices.



Looking towards Al Alam Palace, Old Muscat, Oman

Al Alam (‘the flag’) Palace is opposite the main entrance of the National Museum, down a long avenue with much parade potential (and use). In 1972, it was rebuilt, and a good deal of it was constructed over the site of the former British embassy, where there had been the stump of a flagpole among the grounds, hence its name. Reportedly, any slave who made it into the grounds and touched the flagpole was granted freedom (Oman had been active in the slave trade in East Africa), and it is therefore probably a reference to the UK’s anti-slavery efforts in the area conducted by Royal Navy and the East India Company. As HH Sultan Qaboos reputedly prefers a quieter residence near Seeb, Al Alam palace is mostly used for ceremonial events, but still bears a homely aspect with its cosy sections of garden.

Further round, to the left of the main gates, is the seaward section of the Palace. At the foot of these gates are the great forts of Mirani and Jalali, built by the Portuguese in the 16th century. These continue to be used by the Omani military, some of whose soldiers are standing sentry, but do well to not look bored, possibly as the view is quite so good. A sense of how geography helps define a state, its institutions, and political situation – ranging from the seat of power to strong maritime links through centuries – is palpable and vividly displayed here. Old Muscat brings home important elements of continuities in Oman’s geo-political significance, both those that are both deep-rooted and more contemporary. Political stability is an integral (and invaluable) part of these. I can think of few government quarters that evoke such an ambiance.

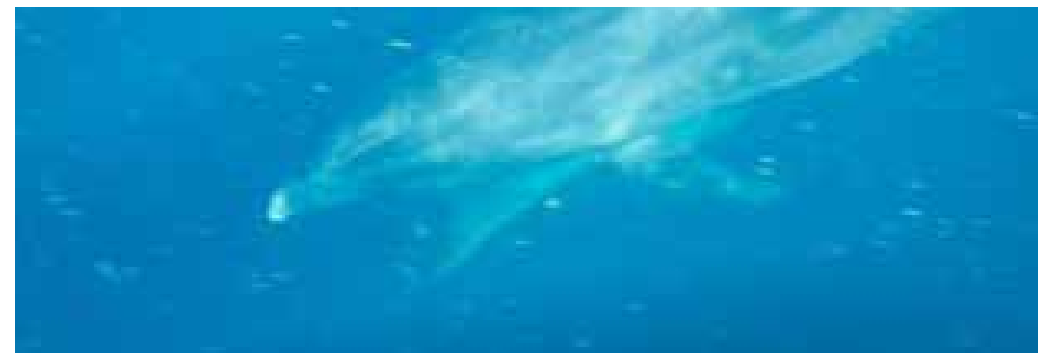
Viewing this area from the sea the following day helped to give a further sense of the importance of the location: its discretion, defenceability, and picturesqueness. The area and buildings are unpretentious, with mountains



Old Muscat, Forts, and Palace, from the seaward side



(l-r) Al Jilali and Al Mirani Forts, Old Muscat, Oman



Curious dolphins off Muscat, Oman

and sea dramatically conjoined to effect a spectacular and rather effortless combination. Here, I sense a point of difference with archetypal 'visions' of 'modern Gulf states'.

It's of an evening at the opera house that at night 'comes to life'; not only in its interior performances, but also with its exterior lighting playing upon the smooth, sleek, neat cut-stone supporting curvaceous domes. The Opera House structure incorporates the meeting of a European cultural tradition, and the finest of Omani architectural aesthetics, decorative arts and crafts. This, to my knowledge, is an unparalleled institution, whose extraordinary conceptual and creative confidence is more than matched by the quality of its execution. Elegant grandeur admits fine craft, which is thankfully also reflected in the performance by the national orchestra. The bringing of the European tradition of Opera to Oman and its people by HH Sultan Qaboos is reportedly a great success, both for visitors and Omanis. It's also an unprecedented cultural initiative in the region.



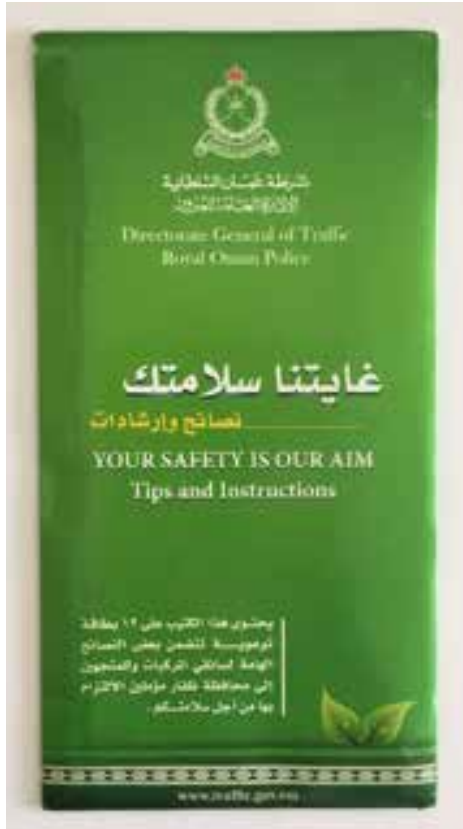
Royal Opera House, Muscat, Oman in moonlight



Interior Foyer, Royal Opera House, Muscat, Oman



Interior, Royal Opera House, Muscat, Oman



The Driving Packet

There is a dress code, and ban on photography during performances at the opera. The latter is clearly enforced. The intimacy of the setting and subject matter mean it does not feel intrusive that it is. However, one usher believes for some reason that I've tried to take a photo during an orchestral movement; his light torchlight 'jabs' me, and one can sense a collective intake of breath in surrounding operagoers. I haven't, and now feel part of a school-time parody, as it truly was the man in front (whose iphone gave the game away), but it's useless to protest; I'd be even more unpopular. Members of the audience are composed of persons from the international community resident Oman, numerous Omanis, and some visitors (aka 'tourists'), such as ourselves. The seats are very comfortable, and at the interval the atmosphere is accommodating and quite relaxed; spontaneous conversations draw to a close as the performance's resumption is called. It seems no one remembers the torchlit judgment from earlier, and I feel less guilt even though I'm innocent.

Gazing up at the glorious ceiling in the foyer helps me forget embarrassment, and my mind wanders to thoughts of the Arabian nights; but how would Sinbad fare at the opera?

After a further day in Muscat, it was time to re-enter the interior: destination Nizwa. Not long ago, this was the capital of Oman, i.e. when the country was the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, (a situation that changed in c.1970). Nizwa is therefore an especially well-established political, religious, cultural, and economic centre; so much so, it has, in modern times, also been a centre of uprising (e.g., 1957-1959), one which the UK supported the Sultan in quelling.¹⁰⁹ Located approximately 140km from Muscat, the drive is supposed to take approximately two hours. Alas, it ended up taking much longer, but

thankfully enjoyably so, for on the way a detour was elected (by choice rather than by accident): Jebel Akhdar, or the Green Mountain, which reaches approximately 2,980 metres in elevation.

A police checkpoint is in force at the foot and main entry to the Jebel, and has to be negotiated first. Officers of the Royal Omani Police closely look over the vehicle, request passports, and ask cursory questions about where we come from, and where we plan to go... It's a little tense, and I feel that any answer given may be 'incorrect'. On a sudden, a green envelope with documents inside appears at the window in an officer's hand, accompanied by oral instructions that the 4-WD setting of the vehicle must be engaged on the way up and on the way down from the Jebel. I suppose we don't look too suspicious, after all.

Shortly after departing the checkpoint (to some relief (!)), it's not long in being demonstrated as to why we were sternly briefed: an astonishingly steep road opens up ahead, our bodies are pressed firmly against the seats. This confirms that 'taking off' would not have been a good idea, but at least there's a good chance to enjoy some literally breathtaking views on the way up. The reasons for such security at the Jebel appear to be multiple as we draw further up the range: the mountain and road are very steep, and there would be a temptation for some in less than serviceable vehicles to

attempt it, which would be potentially dangerous not only for them, but also those coming up or down the Jebel. In periods of rain and humidity the road is reputedly especially slippery, and it is the descent that seems to pose the most problems given its steepness and the incidence and frequency of twisting sections. In addition, Jebel Akhdar occupies a strategic position that dominates the surrounding area and routes into the interior of the country, an interior that used to be autonomous. Not so long ago, events of great significance for the state and statehood occurred on the Jebel, i.e. in the 1950s when there was a rebellion by the last Imam of Oman proper, Ghalib bin Ali Al Hinai, (supported by Saudi Arabia) centred in nearby Nizwa (our destination) against Sultan Said bin Taimur (the current Sultan of Oman's late father). In this, the UK supported Sultan Taimur and the rebellion was eventually put down. I'm glad this was sometime ago. The scaling of the Jebel at night was an important part of the earlier effort, which was an astounding operation.^{110 111} It feels to be in a 4WD, let alone on foot.

The climb is longer than anticipated, however, the view over the canyon from the village of Al Aqr makes it more than worth the long haul. Al Aqr is accessed sensitively for it continues to be inhabited, and follows customary ways of life. In addition, it's shortly before the harvesting of the annual rose crop from which fragrance would be extracted and income earned.



View from Al Aqr village, Jebel Akhdar area, Oman

The aroma is beguiling, pungent, and bold. Among the fragrant rose bushes are traditional falaj for water management and irrigation, which employ specially selected stones as sluices, and mud-walled channels; so often plastic and concrete are used in falaj seen elsewhere in the Gulf region, and with a very few exceptions. Thus, it's a delight to see falaj in a more 'natural' working form and with such spectacular accompanying views and aromas.

Descending the Jebel later in the afternoon means returning the way we have ascended, 4WD gearing engaged. 'Ramps' 'missed' on the way up are revealed, confirming safety measures, but also more dangers than realized before!

Nizwa is nestled at the meeting of several valleys and wadis; it possesses a very distinctive appearance and sensibility. A walled city, souq and castle-come-citadel, there can be



Roses and afalaj, Al Aqr village, Oman



Safety Ramp, Jebel Akhdar, Oman



Panoramic photo from Nizwa Fort

little boredom here. Having read up on it beforehand, I'm aware that not very long ago famous adventurers, such as Wilfrid Theisiger, were unable to drop by due to the antipathy towards Christians and non-Muslims in the area (a fact also noted in the Nizwa Fort Museum),¹¹² although some foreigners had visited earlier, such as Perry Fogg in c. 1874.¹¹³ Much has changed since, nonetheless it retains its deep religious heritage, and traditions that are now warmly accessible to respectful visitors. The latter includes the Alazi and Alayalah dances, which are performed in the city, and that were recently included in the UNESCO Cultural Heritage List.¹¹⁴



Traditional Alayalah Dance performed at Nizwa, Oman



Nizwa Fish Souq, Oman

Much of the large and extensive souq for which Nizwa is famous was renovated in the 1990s (and more tastefully than some other examples). That stated, the east souq retains an historical charm compared with other souqs, of which there are several. A number of older Omani gentlemen, in time-capsule surroundings, continue to trade in the east souq (and by which there are signs for no photographs to be taken). Nizwa is famous in Oman and the Gulf for its metalwork in silver, copper, bronze, or gold. A coffee pot (dallah) made here is highly prized, as are traditional knives (a Khanjar), which are part of the national dress and are featured in the national emblem and flag. A collection of older photographs from the 1980s and 1990s, and between restorations of Nizwa can be found here: [http://](http://omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d642.html)

omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d642.html.

Behind the fort and souqs is a residential area comprised of old mud buildings, little forts, and afalaj that are therefore the middle of the 'city'. This area possesses a 'stillness' apart from the other sections of the city, and one cannot but hope further renovation occurs of a sympathetic nature, which retains, maintains and strengthens the local cultural fabric. Positive signs of this are encouragingly evident; a well-renovated guest-house looks busy, and various doors have been redone using old skills and design. Views from this area of the city towards the mountains are amongst the most striking in the city; it could be a most popular place in several years.



Small Fort in a residential area, Nizwa, Oman

The preservation and restoration of forts and castles has been a major undertaking by the government of the Sultanate of Oman since the 1980s.¹¹⁵ The scope and scale of this exceeds similar such efforts in the region, according to literature, and my experience. The dedication and results are impressive, to say the least, and inform an integral part of the cultural experience in the country, as well as heritage. As Salma Damluji asserts in her book *The Architecture of Oman*:

*The forts and castles of Oman represent the most obvious feature in traditional Omani architecture. Crowning cities, and commanding the entrances to towns, they continue to have a dominant presence in the urban landscape.*¹¹⁶

It may also be noted that they are cultural features of the landscape that have endured, while others, such as, residences, and souqs, have more often been replaced and rebuilt – not infrequently in new architectural styles and in ‘novel’ forms. This raises some questions about how coherence can be achieved, and the

distinctiveness of Oman preserved.

The first castle to be fully restored under the aegis of government efforts is Jabreen Castle, which is not far from Nizwa. It dates from 1670 AD/BCE, and its construction was supervised by Al Immam Bil Arab bin Sultan Al Y'aribi, who is buried within the castle in a crypt, and can be visited, too. As claimed by several guides, the restoration, attention to detail, and range of features of Jabreen are very fine, and indeed the finest found on our visit. (Excellent details of the castle can be found here.¹¹⁷) While ambling about upon entry, we are approached by three local men, one of whom turns out to be the first and ‘original’ guide of the Castle, his companion is a translator, and another following behind with a bulky-looking technical device, the cameraman. The



Nizwa, inside the city walls



Nizwa, outside the city walls

guide explains that they are making a film about the castle in English translation, and would like for visitors to feature in it. It's hard to say no, and they seem very earnest and engaging. Consequently, a detailed explanation of the history, associated events, and unique features of the castle are revealed while filming and between the numerous 'takes'. All that is required is some modest patience, to the bemusement of some other visitors, particularly when re-recordings are taking place. But this makes the experience all the more human and 'less museum-like'. In all, it turns out to be raucous fun: the original guide speaks excellent English and is enjoying such facility in the company of a native speaker, however, he is supposed to be speaking in Arabic to be translated

by the designated translator, which is the purpose of the enterprise. All the while, the cameraman is learning on the job, to the momentary frustration or pique of the other two. Nonetheless, the commitment of the translator, the perseverance of the cameraman, and the dedication of the guide are unstintingly endearing. Without a doubt it's a place to be recommend for many reasons: from the view from the top, to the painted ceilings, not to forget the date store below (the crypt is unusual and also worth a look, too, and not overly creepy). The furniture and old 'household' items are superior to those visited elsewhere in similar structures in the country (and other Gulf states so far). This, without a doubt, enhances the experience; it feels as though it's still lived in, and that were welcome 'houseguests'.



Jabreen Castle, Oman



Nizwa, outside the city walls



Filming, Jabreen Castle, Oman



Interiors, Jabreen Castle, Oman



An inner courtyard, Jabreen Castle, Oman



View from the top of Jabreen Castle, Oman

Next to Bahla, situated approximately 40 km from Nizwa, with one of Oman's oldest forts, dating from the 13th century.¹¹⁸ The fort, or perhaps more appositely fortress, was built by the local Banu Nabhan tribe that ruled the area between the mid-12th and 15th centuries. It is one of four

historic fortresses located at the foot of the Jebel Akhdar, and is Oman's only UNESCO-listed fort. A mere 25 years were spent renovating it.¹¹⁹ The ruins of walls are visible around and inside Bahla, which once extended for approximately 12 km. It does not come not as a surprise to hear that



Bahla Fort, Oman



Bahla Fort interior, Oman

with such fortifications Bahla was once the capital. The lady issuing tickets at the entrance is perched several body-lengths above. I think she secretly enjoys her elevated position, but has the good grace to offer a kind welcome rather than martial instructions (let's face it, it must be tempting with some tourists).

Bahla Fort is in fact a complex, and 'not only a fort' comprised of three elements: the fort; the long wall; and a citadel oasis that these defend(ed). Although under the towering gaze of Jebel Akhdar in the distance, Bahla fort is picturesquely sited on small hill, which has provided archaeological remains dating back c. 5,000 years, including from the Sassanids (pre-Islamic Persian Empire dating from 224 AD/CE to 651 AD/CE).¹²⁰ Therefore, again, evidence of the historical connections, cultural associations and links that defy easy categorisations of 'old Arabia' are present.



New doors in the Bahla Souq area, Oman

Valeri, among others, argues that forts such as Bahla have become national symbols, for they appear on Omani postage stamps, banknotes, and postcards in the country. This is a fair observation, although they are not the official symbols of Oman (for example, the Khanjar rather than a fort or castle appears on official symbolic devices such as the Royal crest and flag). The assertion that forts such as Bahla are called “rebuilt” so as to “cut off their connection to the past and silence their testimony to the younger generations”¹²¹ does not resonate with my experience at least.

For instance, the term “renovate(d)” with reference to this fort, and others, is stated in oral presentations by official staff, and in official written material (rather than ‘rebuilt’, as alleged). There are also numerous Omanis visiting of various generations also see photos above).

Further, historical, material such as that in written form clearly referencing earlier periods (including those before the current ruler) is readily available, too.

Pottery making is an ancient tradition in Bahla, where a peculiar method continues to be used, which involves stamping on the constituent mud in the wadi bed, though sadly the practice is fading.¹²² Jihal jugs naturally cool water and the area around them, and are among the items produced in Bahla, as they have been since pre-history.¹²³ The souq across from the main entrance of the Fort has several available and I regret not purchasing a few, yet perhaps it’s also a reason to return. The souq is an example that has not (so far) been systematically renovated, and as done at Nizwa. Bahla souq is more of a working place than a tourist spit, but there are signs that a few buildings are being adapted in order to present a more traditional impression, for example, with mud exterior finishing, recently produced Arab-style lamps, and doors in wood, cut and carved with motifs common in Oman.¹²⁴

From Nizwa, a 400-hundred year old town called Al Hamra can be found in its hinterlands. It is on the northern side of the Hajar mountain range of Jebel Akhdar among several oases. With its Sheikh, Al Hamra was the traditional political center of the region for hundreds of years, and a market place for goods from and into the Wadi Bani Awf catchment area.¹²⁵ Today, it is considered by some to be the most “authentic and unspoilt village in Oman.”¹²⁶ A distinction it holds from some other settlements in Oman is its growth largely from agricultural production rather than from trade,¹²⁷ and it happens to have some of the oldest preserved houses in Oman. Quite a number of these are of two stories or more, built of hand-made mud brick; I’m intrigued as to how they will look, and what it will be like there now.



Al Hamra, the Sheikh’s House in the foreground



Coffee being roasted and ground in the traditional manner in Bait al Safa, Al Hamra, Oman

The museum Bait Al Safa in Al Hamra village is quite magnificent, this used to be the home of the Sheikh, Zahran bin Mohammed Al Abri, who was head of the Al Abri tribe, a part of which has inhabited this area. I don't think there is anything very similar to this museum in Oman (or the UAE for that matter). As well as a tour of the house, and the chance to see a home of such size and complexity, local women provide demonstrations of various customary activities. These include: the grinding of corn and making of bread; and, the roasting and grinding (pounding) of coffee beans. So much is done indoors. No photos of the faces of the ladies are permitted, and they cover their heads

just in case as a matter of habit. Khawa (Arabic coffee) is warmly offered by the person in charge of the museum, after having been shown around and each room has been presented. This is all gratefully received, and a lengthy discussion ensues regarding the house, museum, and village and how these were and have changed including in recent decades. Afterwards, exploring the old village area further, the falaj is seen running under buildings forming part of their structure (and vice-versa). Gazing across the village, which is really more like a town in respect of its size, one hopes that there will be further renovations and restorations, were appropriate, and as a number of



An Old House in Al Hamra, next to afalaj



Afalaj as part of Al Hamra village, Oman

old houses are literally falling apart. Most attractive would very definitely be if traditional skills, materials and techniques were to be employed (unlike in some other renovations in the Gulf), and also designs. It would also be far-sighted as for example speaking with other tourist folk it is this that many find outstanding about Oman in the region, and a major draw. Expectations are high, and a 'make do' approach would disappoint.

Jebel Shams is also in the vicinity of Al Hamra. Not unlike Jebel Akhdar, it's a long way up into the mountains, requiring travel between spurs and jutting folds. We make our way, admiring the view on the way out, and carefully keeping 'on track' and 'turn'. In parts, it's single file with some very steep drops. Military installations dot the way presumably as the mountain range dominates the plain below. Further up, it's possible to see different sides of mountains previously viewed from Jebel Akhdar some days earlier, thereby re-entering the world above the plains away from any coast. At the top, several viewing areas along a series of plateaus open out. Meantime, tour groups congregate in their 4WD vehicles, disgorging their occasionally crumpled cargoes, which subsequently limber up to be greeted by wild goats followed by beckoning local Bedouin ladies selling their handicrafts. Sheer falls keep some away from the viewing edge nearly all

of which are unmarked and unfenced. Looking down takes confidence, a strong stomach, not to mention sure-footedness. On one side of the canyon below



Al Hamra village, and beyond, note the underlying rock plateau these houses are built on



Bedouin Handicrafts made of local goat wool, which resemble amulets



Right: Jebel Shams, from a viewing plateau

“...NO PHOTOS ARE ALLOWED OF THE LOCAL BEDOUIN LADIES...”

a path is visible; it winds through portions of cultivation cleaving to and in places through rock. It is a testament to human ingenuity and determination.

After taking a fill of the vista, keenness to look at the handicrafts overcomes both the view and a sensation of restricted movement. No photos are allowed of the local Bedouin ladies, but that does not detract from the realization that at least a few items will make excellent gifts, and if not, uses can be found for them! It's a pleasure to support local livelihoods and ways of life that could all too easily disappear if not fully appreciated, including through 'trade'.

The next and last major site in Oman (on this visit) is arguably the most impressive, and quite literally on multiple levels. However, descent from Jebel Shams must come first that thankfully negotiated nimbly, despite growing traffic coming up – the hazard of an early rise! Finding Al Ayn takes perseverance, and as navigation (without GPS) is not in the slightest bit easy in the area, at times the prospect looks as though it might slip through our hands. At a critical stage, when I'm almost ready to relent, a car and occupants are spotted who are familiar from earlier in the trip. It comes to mind that if in this area they are likely also looking for Al Ayn, too: a glance at the map and a rechecking of the guide confirms there is not



The UNESCO World Heritage Site at Al Ayn, Oman



Al Ayn - among the burial 'hives', with Jebel Misht in the background

a lot else in the vicinity they might be seeking out. Stopping the vehicle near theirs, and risking embarrassment or reproach, they generously inform what is sought can be found through a rocky track, which follows a falaj via a break in a fence, on the other side of a large wadi. It's more than worth the clamber, although we are nervous not to trespass. We make our way cautiously across the rocky wadi-bed, and up the shale-like hillock.

Al Ayn, and two other sites (Bat and al-Khutm) form the most complete collection of settlements and necropolises in the world from the 3rd millennium B.C./BCE. Their historical (cultural and aesthetic) importance cannot be overstated. Unique to al-Ayn and Bat are the remains of ancient quarries from which the building materials were obtained, and also reveal how they were constructed, as well as the techniques used. This is a rare chance to do some true 'time travel' among spectacular surroundings.



Al Ain in perspective



Camels and company heading towards Al Ain (UAE) from Oman

Attesting to the importance of Oman in the ancient world, and areas associated with these burial sites and their development, are cuneiform texts from ancient Mesopotamia (Iraq). Dating from the same period as these sites (the end of the 3rd millennium B.C.), they state the country of Magan (Oman) was then the principal extraction centre of copper, which was subsequently exported to Mesopotamia to the northwest, and possibly all the way to the Indus Valley in the east. This very site was connected to these routes and locations, but also the people, items, ideas and stories that were exchanged in the mists of time. The ethereal atmosphere around the mounds stimulates the imagination, but I can't really decide if it's a place of joy or sadness, or quite what combination of each. Certainly, the atmosphere could be cut with a chisel, but one's soon overcome with the necessity of consciously staying upright among the many loose shards of stone, which brings me fast back to earth. While oddly I'd love to stay longer, Al Ain and Abu Dhabi have to be reached later today, further underscoring of the many links between times, places, and states in the region, despite more obvious differences.



Al Maqta Bridge, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Conclusion

With such adventure 'completed', it may be asked what then of the questions of 'archetype', 'authenticity' and 'genuine old Arabia'? Not excepting the desire to explore further, including those areas either impossible or impracticable to be enquired into so far, there is certainly some interesting material with which to tackle these, and at least some of their more significant implications.

Travelling from the UAE to Oman, it can be said, reveals that claims of an (or the) 'archetypal' 'Gulf State', while thought provoking and indicative of particular impressions as well as aspirations, on closer examination prove difficult to clearly substantiate in context. Although such claims are arguably of limited usefulness, they do provide useful starting points and 'heuristics' with which to initiate enquiry and reveal more about interrelations among and between Gulf States, and others. This is perhaps particularly in view of rapid change in the region that can contribute to such claims, but can also have quite different implications, as found in the case of Oman, including in comparative terms. Whilst particular uniqueness of a kind may be claimed in terms of an archetype, and more particularly an (or the) 'archetypal' 'Gulf State', commonalities between them, such as with the neighbouring states of the UAE and Oman, can be seen to be more numerous and co-informing than otherwise

perhaps realised or admitted. Indeed as has been found and explored above to some degree and extent. Notably, should only limited features of an archetype be perceived and 'valued', such as under a more limited conceptualisation of 'hub' status, it remains that Oman can also be regarded as possessing important regional political and economic hubs, although distinct character from those of the UAE's. For instance, Oman's diplomatic efforts in the region, and its connections with OBOR, as well as wider geopolitical and geostrategic considerations and implications pointed to above. The matter of leadership here in relation to 'archetypal' status is also important, given Oman is the oldest state in the Arab world, with the related political significance this connotes. Thus, archetypal status as apparently claimed by some for the UAE arguably appears to be increasingly difficult to sustain in these regards and respects, as well as carefully rationalise more substantively. The statuses of an international financial and regional trading/commercial centre are clearer points of the UAE's claimed 'archetypal' qualities and status, but also see distinctions as compared with Oman, a fellow Gulf state and immediate neighbour. Moreover, in a complex political environment with multifarious political structures, actors, interests, and histories,¹²⁸ prominence (including such claims) may not provide immediate clarity, but perhaps also obscure understanding unless carefully

interrogated. Similarly, the GCC/Gulf States see important developments that means Robins' account of them as 'milieu states' may benefit from further developments to draw out evident complexities and the importance of this region.

As regards 'authenticity', including in relation to the increasing importance of tourism for Oman and the UAE as part of diversification efforts, despite its apparent clarity (and popular usage) it is a quite emotive term the precise meaning of which is not always clear. The topics and subject matter involved perhaps exacerbate this. On the one hand, an 'authentic Gulf State' could be said to overlook variations among and between such states, and, on the other hand it might seek to refer, implicitly or explicitly, to particular set of criteria, e.g., how 'original' particular institutions are. What 'original' is, however, is yet another matter of debate. Original as in untouched, or, original as in restored sympathetically in small or large part sees a potentially large divergences. This is for instance in the case of structures such as forts and castles, which are so important to Oman's history and heritage (with multiple dimensions from those related to statehood, to tourist attractions/attractiveness).. Indeed, if such forts are renovated, the question therefore arises in a similar vein: have customary building practices and designs been employed? If so, how, and so forth, and so on, and would it still be original, or invested

with a different character and deeper meaning, as Valeri seems to assert, and to what extent(s) and why? Perhaps by investing and supporting customary practices, heritage, people, objects and artefacts, it may help to preserve not only them and their 'originality', i.e. 'authenticity', but also bring new meaning and understanding, as well as contributing to diversification efforts provided the appeal of these to visitors, and arguably domestic constituencies, too. However, this appears unlikely to change the not infrequent use of the term 'authentic' to mean something that is somehow true to itself, rather than of a kind regarding which quite different parameters are involved.

Overall, and perhaps most powerfully, exploration 'in the field' with reference to literature, people, and places, may be seen to demonstrate that 'old Arabia' is far more multifaceted and complex in reality than a simple use of such a concept implies or really enables. While possibly initially difficult to accept, this may also be – and become – a source of well-grounded inspiration and encouragement. Not least when 'what is' is sought, and concepts are challenged, tested, and analysed rather carefully in region undergoing rapid changes, but which demonstrates determination to preserve continuities it values. Quite what or which continuities may remain part of the region, given the immense economic and political pressures upon it in a quite short period of time (such as China's deepening interest and influence) presents a fascinating question or set of questions. Moreover, there can be little doubt that the Gulf is a fascinating and complex region, with ancient as well as modern interconnections between and among its states, and increasingly to the rest of the world.

Many thanks to: K for her patience and much else; to all those who provided suggestions and as tips before as well as during the journey; and, the many kindnesses received along the way.

APPENDIX

COMPARATIVE REFERENCE DATA: UAE AND OMAN

Size/Area:

Country	UAE	Oman
Size, Km ² (approx.)	82,880 ^{129 130}	309, 500 ¹³¹

Population:

Country	UAE	Oman
Population in millions (est 2019)	10.749 2.1498 UAE nationals (est.) ¹³²	4.394 2.040 Omani nationals ¹³³

GDP:

Country	UAE	Oman
GDP	455.587 ¹³⁴	86.525 ¹³⁵

GDP Per Capita:

Country	UAE	Oman
GDP per capita USD (est. 2019)	42, 384.41 ¹³⁶	19,689.99 ¹³⁷

Hydrocarbon Share of Nominal GDP:

UAE: 29.5% (UAE Government 2017 Statistic)¹³⁸

Oman: 30.1% (Central Bank of Oman in the latest Annual Report (2017))¹³⁹

Total government revenues in GCC States are especially dependent on oil, by some estimates ranging between 80 and 90 per cent,¹⁴⁰ and using similar (if not the same data) Oman is situated at the upper end of this range of GCC States, with oil revenue comprising 85.55 per cent of total government revenues in the period 2012 to 2015.¹⁴¹

Oil Reserves/Production:

According to the BP proven oil reserves / production ratio, Oman has the lowest, i.e. the least number of years of oil production estimated to remain (15.2 years) in comparison with other GCC states, excluding Bahrain.¹⁴² The same estimates calculate the UAE has 68.1 years remaining oil production. Oman can therefore be seen to rank 5th out of the 6 GCC states in terms of oil reserves at current levels of production, and the UAE second.¹⁴³

Gas Reserves/Production:

According to the BP proven gas reserves / production ratio, Oman has 20.6 years of production remaining from its reserves at the current levels of production. In other words, Oman's natural gas reserves are estimated to be exhausted in 2039.¹⁴⁴ In comparison with other Gulf States, and as with this statistic for oil, Oman again ranks 5th out of the 6 GCC states, i.e. it is estimated to exhaust its natural gas reserves the second-soonest (after Bahrain in est. 10.3 years).¹⁴⁵ The UAE ranks second last, i.e. has the second longest period before its reserves are estimated as exhausted (i.e. 98.2 years, in comparison to Qatar's 141.8 years)

Government type:

UAE, Federation of absolute monarchies

Oman, Absolute monarchy

Other Notable Points:

- GCC: UAE and Oman are members.¹⁴⁶
- OPEC: UAE is a member. Oman is not.¹⁴⁷
- Religion: Most Muslims in the UAE, and the ruling family, are Sunni. In Oman, these are Ibadi.

END NOTES

- 1 This journey was undertaken during Easter 2018, i.e. end-March, early April 2018.
- 2 For a similar characterization that draws out attributes and patterns identifiable as 'archetypal' see, e.g.: 'United Arab Emirates country profile.' BBC, 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703998>; EIU (2019). 'United Arab Emirates'. Available at: <http://country.eiu.com/united-arab-emirates#>; Bertelsmann Foundation (2018). 'UAE Country Report', Bertelsmann Transformation Index. Available at: <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/are/>. Indicatively, high per-capita wealth* is emphasized in these, as is: the UAE as a major center of world finance, and trading in the Middle East/region; diversification, including into tourism; and political stability. * The IMF estimates the UAE's GDP per capita as USD 42,384.41 in 2019 – the highest out of current GCC (non-suspended) GCC members and second only to Qatar among its usual GCC membership, see, e.g.: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2018/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2016&ey=2023&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&pr1.x=70&pr1>.
- 3 Notably 'archetype' is applied to the UAE (and KSA) with specific reference to their wealth and donor behaviour (and as a substantial feature of Gulf States), by Barakat, Sultan & Zyck, Steven, C. (2012). 'Trends in Gulf state assistance to crisis-affected contexts'. In: David Held & Kristian Ulrichsen (eds.) *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order*. London: Routledge. p. 326.
- 4 A significant and interesting discussion of 'milieu states' that pertains to the GCC, and the significance of archetypal states as part of this is provided by Robins, Philip (2014) "'Cusp" states in international relations - in praise of anomalies against the 'milieu'. In: Marc Herzog & Philip Robins (eds.) *The Role, Position and Agency of Cusp States in International Relations*. London: Routledge, pp.1-25. This includes examples of the attribute(s) of an archetypal milieu state, i.e. Egypt as the archetypal milieu state in the Arab world (population size, spatial centrality, and from the perspective of regional diplomacy). Although Robins refers to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as comprised of a 'milieu' of "small and micro states" (ibid, pp. 9-10) the examples provided of archetypal states indicate that the UAE could now be considered to be an archetypal state consistent with these, in terms of leadership in a number of substantial areas, such as finance, tourism, and trade as noted above. Political leadership including foreign policy is also notable in this regard including its ambitious development and efforts to take on a regional and extra-regional leadership role. Regarding this, see, e.g.: Reuters (2018). 'Commentary: Ambitious UAE flexes military muscle', 27 August 2018. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-shama-uae-commentary/commentary-ambitious-uae-flexes-military-muscle-idUSKCN1LC1EC>. This is also consistent with, and in addition to other possible 'archetypal attributes' of a political, economic, and social character stated above.
- 5 In addition to political and economic initiatives and activates, also 'landmark' statements, such as the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa in Dubai, UAE. See, e.g.: The National (2018). 'The world's tallest buildings - in pictures', The National, 4 June 2018. Available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/the-world-s-tallest-buildings-in-pictures-1.736704>
- 6 For example: commercial and trade events and exhibitions; sports events, e.g., the Abu Dhabi Golf Championship; the Omega Dubai Desert Classic (incepted when the European Tour visited the Middle East for the first time in 1989 and the first tournament in the European Tour's history to be played in either the Middle East or Asia); the ATP and WTA Tour Dubai Tennis Championships; the Mubadala World Tennis Championship.
- 7 Regarding the rise of Dubai as an international economic and tourist hub, see, e.g.: Davidson, Christopher M. (2005). 'The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival', Boulder, CO: Lynne Renner Publishers. Also for example, state and non-state political and economic leaders, and also celebrities. E.g. see: The National (2016). Charles and Camilla on state visit to UAE - in pictures. The National 6 November 2016. Available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/charles-and-camilla-on-state-visit-to-uae-in-pictures-1.173520>; The National (2018). China's President Xi Jinping arrives in Abu Dhabi for a 'new phase of co-operation' - The National 16 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/government/china-s-president-xi-jinping-arrives-in-abu-dhabi-for-a-new-phase-of-co-operation-1.752180>; regarding celebrities, see, e.g.: WhatsOn (2018). Snapped: Celebrities spotted in the UAE this week. What'sOn, 19 November 2018. Available at: <http://whatson.ae/dubai/2018/11/all-the-celebrities-spotted-in-dubai-and-abu-dhabi-this-week/>
- 8 E.g.: The International Association Meetings Market estimated that in 2017 the UAE had the highest number of meetings in the Middle East, and had the largest number of visitors for meetings in the Middle East (ranking 39th in the world by this latter measure as compared with other countries) ICCA (2018). *ICCA Statistics Report Country & City Rankings Public Abstract*, pp. 70 and 20. Available at: <https://www.iccaworld.org/knowledge/benefit.cfm?benefitid=4036>. Notably, 2020 is scheduled to take place in Dubai.
- 9 E.g., Abu Dhabi is host to a number of major international entities, such as: IRENA, see, e.g.: Luomi, Mari (2009). 'Abu Dhabi's Alternative Energy Initiatives: Seizing Climate Change Opportunities'. *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Winter 2009, pp. 102-117. Available at <https://www.mepec.org/abu-dhabis-alternative-energy-initiatives-seizing-climate-change-opportunities>; and: <https://www.irena.org>
- 10 See, e.g.: Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates (2017). *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policy-Making*. London: Routledge; Davidson, Christopher, M. (2009). *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*. New York: Columbia University. Currently, the UAE is the largest oil producer in the Gulf apart from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, see: EIA (2017).
- 11 This includes by Robins (2014), p.10. Numerous examples exist, e.g.: Stratfor (2015). 'How the Gulf Built Its Wealth', 13 July 2015. Available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/how-gulf-built-its-wealth>; Hertog, Steffen (2016). 'The oil-driven nation-building of the Gulf states after World War II.' In: J. E., Peterson (ed.) *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic pp. 323-352. Ulrichsen, Kristian, Coates (2017a). 'Economic Diversification In Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States', James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University. July 2017. Available at: https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/a4c7078d/CES-pub-QLC_GCC-061317.pdf
- 12 Total government revenues in GCC States are especially dependent on oil, by some estimates ranging between 80 and 90 per cent, see e.g.: The Economist (2016). 'Oil and the Gulf States: After the Party, 26 March 2016. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/03/23/after-the-party>. IMF data referred to is indicatively referred to in other parts of the Economist article. Notably, in more recent IMF data of this type, only percentage changes are provided in data, and 2017 and 2018 data is projected. Therefore, this earlier data continues to be referenced. For the former see: IMF (2016). 'Diversifying Government Revenue in the GCC: Next Steps.' IMF. GCC Tax Policy Paper. October 2016, p. 28. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2016/10/2616.pdf>. For the latter, see: IMF (2017a). 'The Economic Outlook and Policy Challenges in the GCC Countries'. IMF. GCC Surveillance Paper. December 2017. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/~media/Files/Publications/PP/2017/pp121417gcc-outlook-and-policy-challenges.ashx>
- 13 China, Southeast Asia, and South Asia comprising a markedly increasing share of world/Global GDP. Gulf States and GCC members are providing substantial and growing energy requirements for these economies, in particular (but not limited to) China and India. Also see: Ulrichsen (2017a). Moreover, although the UAE is pursuing diversification, it holds large oil and gas reserves, including by comparative GCC measures. Others have far lower reserves, but KSA has larger oil reserves, and Qatar higher Gas reserves. See Annex 1.
- 14 See references above. As Nonneman has argued, and in terms of a theoretical framework, Gulf monarchies engage 'globally' to increase their domestic and regional position. Nonneman, Gerd (2005). 'Determinants and Patterns of Saudi Foreign Policy: "Omnibalancing" and "Relative Autonomy" in Multiple Environments.' In: *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. Paul Aarts & Gerd Nonneman (eds.). London: Hurst, p. 316. Although these efforts may presentationally further 'embed' Gulf States in the international system under the aegis of 'Globalisation' in ways that indicate apparent 'success' (with notions of 'modernity', and providing a platform such as for advocacy largely for Gulf leadership and elites in 'Global' fora). Also see: Kinninmont, Jane (2015). 'Future Trends in the Gulf.' Chatham House Report. February 2015, p. 63-5. Available at: http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field_file/document/20150218FutureTrendsGCCKinninmont.pdf. , Notable questions exist around the political and economic influence these confer and yield, e.g. Saudi Arabia's complicated relations that developed in the G20 recently as it sought to influence 'global' architecture, as noted by Legrenzi Matteo & Lawson Fred H., (2017). 'The changing role of the Gulf in the international political economy'. *Global Change, Peace & Security* 29:2, 189-199, pp. 193-4.
- 15 For examples of Gulf 'Global' profiling, including as backed by, e.g. UAE national policy, see, e.g.: Mahroum, Sami & Chan, Kai, L. (2016) 'Need to look deeper into UAE's global rankings'. *GulfNews*. 23 September 2016; Nagraj, Aarti (2017). 'Dubai tops GCC in global cities ranking' *Gulf News*. 13 February 2017. Available at: <http://gulfbusiness.com/dubai-tops-gcc-in-global-cities-ranking/>; *Gulf Today* (2018) UAE ranks 1st in 11 global indices' *The Gulf Today*. 9 February 2018. Available at: <http://gulftoday.ae/portal/c8746b1d-b817-46f9-aad8-85eee5dbdd6d.aspx>
- 16 See references above, including immediately above.
- 17 E.g., the Iran Nuclear Deal, see, e.g.: Schmierer, Richard J. (2015). *The Sultanate of Oman and The Iran nuclear deal*. *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXII, No. 4, Winter 2015, pp. 113-120. Notably, Robins (2014), p.9, notes the existence of an archetypal milieu state from a regional diplomacy perspective (with reference to Egypt in the Arab world).
- 18 Including in terms of the aforementioned archetypal claims, their aspects, foci and activities. Notably, Oman has also been concerned with Global rankings, including indexes using UN agency data, and are published by the government online and include a worldwide, Arab and GCC relative rankings: <http://globalstanding.ncsi.gov.om>. This appears to be less a matter of 'competitiveness' than of 'standing' as compared with the UAE,

- which the latter more prominently presents it as under the aegis of the 'Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority': <http://fcsa.gov.ae/en-us/Pages/UAE-RANKINGS.aspx>. Also the UAE-government presented rankings see more measures than Oman's comparable presentation.
- 19 Sheikhdoms situated along the Trucial Coast.
- 20 Zadhan R.S. (1978). *The Trucial States in 1919: Rule by Tradition*. In: *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 21 While the UAE was formed from States that were British Protectorates, Oman was never a British Protectorate and remained an independent state. Worrall usefully traces the Oman-UK relationship over time, and finds: "any study of the patterns of interaction demonstrates a series of British engagements to defend the Sultanate system of rule." Worrall, James (2015). "Transitioning in and out of COIN Efficiency, legitimacy, and power in Oman". In: Robert, Johnson & Timothy Clack (eds.) *At the End of Military Intervention: Historical, Theoretical and Applied Approaches to Transition, Handover and Withdrawal*. Oxford: OUP, p. 154. See references above as for hydrocarbons as a typical feature of Gulf States regarding that of monarchies also being such a typical feature.
- 22 See Annex 1.
- 23 I.e., The Gulf, and with increasing interconnectedness with other parts of the world. See, e.g.: Ehteshami, Anoushiravan (2013). *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf: Political Economy, War and Revolution*. Routledge; and, Ulrichsen, Christian C. (2018). *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*. Oxford: OUP.
- 24 See, e.g.: as expressed in Gordon's somewhat dramatically and also defensively titled article in *Politico*: Gordon, Philip (2015). 'The Middle East is falling apart America isn't to blame. There's no easy fix.' *Forum. POLITICO*. 4th June 2015. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/america-not-to-blame-for-middle-east-falling-apart-118611>
- 25 Economically, e.g.: the 2008 Financial Crisis and the role of Gulf States in increasing liquidity, see, e.g.: Ulrichsen, Christian Coates (2010). 'The GCC States and the Shifting Balance of Global Power', Occasional Paper No. 6, Center for International and Regional Studies Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. Available at: <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/558292/CIRSOccasionalPaper6KristianCoatesUlrichsen2010.pdf>; oil price shifts and resultant income changes, e.g., see: Ben-Ami, Shlomo (2015). 'The Gulf states' oil price challenge', *World Economic Forum*, 6 January 2016. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/01/the-gulf-states-oil-price-challenge/>; and, El-Katri, Laura (2016). 'Vulnerability, Resilience, and Reform: The Gcc And The Oil Price Crisis 2014–2016', Columbia Center on Global Energy Policy. December 2016. Available at: <https://energypolicy.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/Vulnerability,%20Resilience,%20and%20Reform%3A%20The%20GCC%20and%20the%20Oil%20Price%20Crisis%202014-2016.pdf>. Politically, e.g.: the Arab Spring, Sadiki, Larbi (2015) *The Impact of the Arab Spring on the Gulf Cooperation Council*, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 17:3, 305-320; Qatar Crisis, see, e.g.: Tharoor, Ishaan (2017). 'The Persian Gulf crisis over Qatar, explained'. *Washington Post*. *World Views Analysis*. 6 June 2017; increasing tensions with Iran, see, e.g.: Wakil, Sanam (2018). 'Iran and the GCC Hedging, Pragmatism and Opportunism', Chatham House Research Paper, September 2018. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2018-09-13-iran-gcc-vakil.pdf>; the war in Yemen, e.g. see: Schuster, Kathleen (2018). 'Yemen's war explained in 4 key points' *Middle East| News and analysis of events in the Arab world | DW | 10.08.2018*; and, the formation of the Saudi-Emerati Coordination Council, see, e.g.: Spencer, Richard (2018). 'Saudi and UAE princes shatter dream of Gulf Arab unity'. *The Times*. 8 June 2018. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/saudi-and-uae-princes-shatter-dream-of-gulf-arab-unity-8fcrvrk5k>; *The National* (2018). 'Saudi-Emirati Co-ordination Council: all you need to know The Crown Princes of Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi met to outline 44 key joint strategic initiatives'. 7th June 2018. Available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/saudi-emirati-co-ordination-council-all-you-need-to-know-1.737773>
- 26 See above regarding GDP derivation from hydrocarbons. See Ulrichsen (2017a) regarding challenges to diversification.
- 27 See, e.g.: Barrett, Roby (2015). 'Oman's Balancing Act in the Yemen Conflict.' *The Middle East Institute*. 17 June 2015. Available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/omans-balancing-act-yemen-conflict>; and, Goldsmith, Leon (2018). *The Return of the King*, le courrier du maghreb et de l orient Final Edition. Available at: <https://lecourrierdumaghrebtedelorient.info/oman/the-return-of-the-king/>
- 28 Geopolitics as a concept can be defined variously, and historically contentiously (e.g. Mamadouh, Virginie & Dijkink, Gertjan (2006). 'Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse', *Geopolitics*, 11:3, 349-366.) Here it is employed quite generally and with focus, given the subject matter, on matters of national interest and foreign policy in consideration of the geographical, including geographical factors – although not necessarily of a 'realist' persuasion as it has been prominently in the relatively recent past, such as famously by Kissinger. As Mamadouh & Dijkink imply, the framing of 'national interest' is to an important extent a matter of perception (regarding framing see e.g. Goffman, Erving (1974). *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper & Row). Agnew's observation of framing the geopolitical in historical context is pertinent (and in addition here among other aspects of informing context). Agnew, John (2004). 'Is 'Geopolitics' a Word that Should be Endowed only with the Meaning it Acquired in the Early Twentieth Century?,' *Progress in Human Geography* 28, 5 (2004) pp. 634–637.
- 29 The term 'geostrategic' is used here quite broadly, and as a heuristic to draw attention to the importance of a geographical area in terms of the focus of states' foreign policy, political, diplomatic and military activity and efforts towards and/or within it. A possible distinction between the geopolitical and geostrategic is the latter is not necessarily motivated by geographic or geopolitical factors but may be informed by them. For instance, a state may project influence and/or power to a location as a result of interest groups, ideological reasons, or at the behest of its leader. (For a similar not wholly the same distinction see, e.g.: Grygiel, Jakub J. (2006). *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 23.
- 30 The body of water referred to is referred to by some as the Arabian Gulf, and has historically and most commonly been known as the Persian Gulf. Other local and variant names are also used.
- 31 Notably, in 2000 the International Hydrographic Organization included the northern marginal seas as part of the Indian Ocean, such as the Arabian Sea, and delimited the Southern Ocean separately, thereby removing waters south of 60°S from the Indian Ocean. UN Doc (1953). *Limits of Oceans and Seas*. International Hydrographic Organization, Special Publication N°23. 1953. UN Doc (2002). *The Indian Ocean and its sub-divisions*. International Hydrographic Organization, Special Publication N°23. 2002.
- 32 Persian/Arabian Gulf.
- 33 E.g. See: APCSS (2003) *India and the Emerging Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean Region*. Conference Summary: http://apcss.org/core/Conference/CR_ES/030819-21ES.htm. Statistics and informed estimates of such figures, shares, and proportions vary, nonetheless, these are indicative of the importance of the region in geopolitical and geo strategic terms.
- 34 Oil and gas account for more than fifty per cent of global energy consumption and comprised nearly 70 percent of total investment in energy supply from 2000-2015. The world's transportation systems, and as such national economies, depend almost entirely on supplies of oil. For relevant data, see the following: (regarding energy consumption, Figure ES-2) US Energy Information Agency, *International Energy Outlook 2016*: http://www.eia.gov/outlooks/ieo/exec_summ.cfm; (regarding investment) International Energy Agency *World Energy Outlook 2016*, Executive Summary, p. 2. Available at: <https://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/WorldEnergyOutlook2016ExecutiveSummaryEnglish.pdf>. As referred to in: O'Sullivan, Meghan, Overland, Indra, and Sandalow, David (2017). 'The Geopolitics of Renewable Energy'. Harvard Kennedy School of Government Faculty Research Working Paper Series. June 2017. Available at: <https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/getFile.aspx?id=1554>
- 35 See e.g.: Yatchew, Adonis (2014). 'Economics of energy, big ideas for the non-economist', *Energy Research & Social Science*, Vol. 1, pp. 74–82, as quoted in Overland, Indra (2016). 'Energy- The missing link in globalization.' *Energy Research & Social Science* Vol. 14, pp. 122–130. In terms of projections to changes to such predominance see e.g. O'Sullivan et al (2016).
- 36 E.g. Davies, Charles E. (ed.) (1992). *Global Interests in the Arab Gulf*. Exeter: Exeter University Press.
- 37 E.g. Held, David & Ulrichsen, Kristian (eds.) (2012). *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order*. London: Routledge; DW (2012). 'Gulf States a hypermodern part of the global economy.' *Deutsche Welle*. 6th April 2012. Available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/gulf-states-a-hypermodern-part-of-the-global-economy/a-15856551>
- 38 E.g. see Overland (2016). esp. pp. 123-4. The interchangeable use of the terms 'global' and 'world' is particularly notable with reference to energy related matters, for example as in Energy Information Agency (EIA) reports, e.g.: EIA (2018). 'Annual Energy Outlook 2018 – with projections 2050.'. #AEO2018. U.S. Energy Information Administration. 6 February 2018. Available at: <https://www.eia.gov/outlooks/aeo/pdf/AEO2018.pdf>
- 39 Ward, Jonathan, D.T. (2017). 'The Emerging Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean Region.' *East West Center Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 386. 28 June 2017. Available at: <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb386.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=36149>
- 40 I.e. the straits of Hormuz where the Gulf and Gulf of Oman meet, and proximate to the Gulf of Aden. Chokepoint(s) is a term that appears in the literature regarding the Gulf and oil transit, e.g.: Qasen, Islam, Yasin (2015). *Oil and Security Policies: Saudi Arabia, 1950-2012*. Leiden: Brill, p. 34; EIA (2017). 'Three important oil trade chokepoints are located around the Arabian Peninsula'. U.S. Energy Information Administration. 4 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32352>. In the latter, chokepoints are usefully defined and characterised as: 'narrow channels along widely used global sea routes, and they are critical to global energy security. The inability of oil to transit a major chokepoint, even temporarily, can lead to substantial supply delays and higher shipping costs, resulting in higher world energy prices. Although most chokepoints can be circumvented through the use of other routes that add significantly to transit time, there are no practical alternatives in some cases.' Ibid. Notably, as observed in the *New York Times Magazine* of 1987: *The Oxford English Dictionary* to this day has no citations in its files for this term [chokepoint(s)], even though the 1976 edition of the unabridged Merriam-Webster's *Third New International* carries the entry, defined as the railroading "throat" and the more familiar "bottleneck." Safire, William (1987). 'ON LANGUAGE; Gimme A Breakpoint' *The New York Times Magazine*., 5th July 1987, p. 5. Available at: <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1987/07/05/148087.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article/or/https://www.nytimes.com/1987/07/05/magazine/on-language-gimme-a-breakpoint.html>. According to

- a search of the Oxford English Dictionary online, the term 'chokepoint' is still unlisted. However, the English Oxford Living Dictionaries do list the term, noting it as a noun, being North American, and defining it as: "A point of congestion or blockage. "the tunnel is a choke point at rush hour". Oxford dictionaries (2018). British and World English definition of: chokepoint: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/choke_point
- 41 The term 'strategic points' is used with regard to geographical points that notably provide for political, economic, and in particular military capabilities and their possible and actual use. The Omani port of Duqm is noteworthy in this context and that of China's 'two-ocean strategy' and rivalry with India. See e.g.: Lal, Neeta (2018). 'India, China Jockey for Influence in Oman.' *Asia Sentinel*. 21 February 2018. Available at: <https://www.asiasentinel.com/politics/india-china-jockey-influence-oman/>; Lawson, Fred, H. (2018). 'China-Oman relations: the Indian Ocean dilemma.' *China Policy Institute: Analysis*. University of Nottingham. 2 May 2018. Available at: <https://cpianalysis.org/2018/05/02/prc-oman-relations-and-the-indian-ocean-security-dilemma/>
- 42 E.g. Oman's unimpeded access to the Indian Ocean, its ports, and agreements to provide naval facilities to the Chinese, and Indians, e.g. see: Pant, Harsh, V. (2017). 'India Challenges China's Intentions on One Belt, One Road Initiative: Without Multilateral cooperation, plans for China's ambitious One Belt, One Road initiative risk opposition'. *YaleGlobal Online*. Yale University. 22 June 2017. Available at: <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/india-challenges-chinas-intentions-one-belt-one-road-initiative>
- 43 See: Niblock, Tim (2017). 'China's Emergence as the Gulf's Leading Trade Partner: Developing Opportunities and Possible Constraints for the Gulf Cooperation Council'. In: Lars Erslev Andersen Anoush Ehteshami Mamtimyn Sunuodula Yang Jiang (eds.) 'ONE BELT, ONE ROAD' AND CHINA'S WESTWARD PIVOT Past, Present and Future'. Conference Report. DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies. November 2017, pp. 17-26, esp. pp. 19-21, 26. Available at: http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/1258174/Durham_OBOR_Conference_Report.pdf
- 44 Including intra-EU trade, and number 3 in the world excluding intra-EU trade (all 2016).
- 45 WTO (n.d.) World Trade Profile: China: http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfiles/CN_e.htm. This is the latest WTO data available.
- 46 As noted in Fulton (2017). Op. cit. and citing IMF data i.e. 'Direction of Trade by Partners.' (n.d.). Although Fulton makes the more expansive claim that 'outside the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East is becoming China's most important region' (not just economically), this involves several elements, qualities and aspects such as of the political and strategic and of related calculations. With this considered, and for clarity, the economic focus noted above is done so as a current feature rather than emergent.
- 47 Regarding OBOR, CPEC and the 'Maritime Silk Route', see e.g.: Ferdinand, Peter (2016). Westward ho—the China dream and 'one belt, one road'- Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping. *International Affairs*. Jul 2016 Vol. 92 Issue 4 pp 941–957, esp. 949–957. Anon (2017). 'China's "One Belt, One Road" Initiative: An ESCAP Report.' *Population and Development Review*, 43(3), pp. 583–587. In general and with reference to the Indian Ocean area and 'Maritime Silk Route', see e.g.: Pant (2017); Panneerselvam, Prakash (2018). 'Maritime Component of China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): India–China Competition in the Arabian Sea', *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, 13:2, pp. 37–49; esp. pp. 22–26. Regarding CPEC, and also OBOR regarding energy related issues, see: Kugelman, Michael (2018). 'The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Energy Geopolitics in Asia', *Asia Dispatches*. Blog Post. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. 9 January 2018. Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-and-energy-geopolitics-asia>. Regarding CPEC, see: Markey, Daniel (2017). 'Why The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Will Worsen Tensions In Southern Asia', *War on the Rocks*. Blog Post. Special Series - Southern (Dis) comfort. 28 September 2017. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/why-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-will-worsen-tensions-in-south-asia/>. See also other blog posts in the series, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/category/special-series/southern-discomfort/>. In terms of CCWAC and in relation to OBOR, but also CPEC, with specific focus on GCC states, see: Fulton, Jonathan (2017). 'The G.C.C. Countries and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Curbing Their Enthusiasm?' *Middle East Institute*. 17 October 2017. Available at: <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/gcc-countries-and-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative> Regarding Oman's attempts to balance China and India and related reactions see, e.g.: Lawson (2018).
- 48 As Fulton (2017), states: 'Of the five existing [OBOR] economic corridors, two feature the Persian Gulf as an endpoint: the CCWAEC, which connects China to Iran, and the CPEC, which ends in Gwadar Port, formerly an Omani territory,' located a relatively short distance (including in military-strategic terms regarding the presence of the Chinese military port at Gwadar, which reached full operational capability in 2008) of approximately 400 nautical miles (approx. 600 nautical kilometers). Also, regarding Oman in particular: The Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has used the southern Omani port of Salalah as its primary logistical facility in the region from c. 2008; substantial and comprehensive Chinese investment in the major Omani ports of Duqm, and Suhar abound, and China is the largest international investor in the former; Oman is one of the founder-members of the China-sponsored Asian Infrastructure Bank; from c. 2013, approx. two-thirds of Oman's total exports of oil and natural gas were to China (this sector being the most economically important to Oman and its GDP); the rising volume, share, and importance of Chinese imported products in Oman. All of these can be considered as part of the trajectory, ostensibly under the aegis of, and integrated under, the OBOR, CPEC and CCWAEC initiatives, see, e.g.: Freeman Jr, Chas, W. (2016). 'The Maritime Dimension of "One Belt, One Road" in Strategic Perspective.' Remarks to a Center for Naval Analysis Workshop with the Rajaratnam School of International Studies. Middle East Policy Council. June 2016.: <https://www.mepc.org/speeches/maritime-dimension-one-belt-one-road-strategic-perspective>; Lawson (2018); Niblock (2017); Fulton (2017). As regards specific tensions with India, see, e.g.: Pant (2017).
- 49 Food (in-) security in the GCC worthy of especial note in respect of: context, attributes, including of the geopolitical and geostrategic, and military aspects and dimensions and their implications in the region, nationally and internationally. The place of Oman is particularly significant given its situation on the Straits of Hormuz, and as, e.g.: [T]he [GCC] region is dependent on clear access to the Suez Canal and the Straits of Hormuz to receive the vast majority of its food. In total, 81% of grains imported into the GCC economic bloc pass through the Suez Canal. Any disruptions here, or with Iran and the Strait of Hormuz, could have a major impact on food imports to the Gulf region.' Moreover, supply is a major factor for food security in the Gulf, as the events of c. 2008 demonstrated. *Oxford Business Group* (2016). 'Oman and GCC nations focus on food security' *The Report: Oman 2016*: <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/analysis/focus-food-security-gcc-nations-are-working-improve-logistics-and-supply-chains-well-secure-farmland>
- 50 The Middle East has seen a doubling of arms imports during the last 10 years, and accounted for 32 per cent of global arms imports between 2013–17. SIPRI (2018). 'Asia and the Middle East lead rising trend in arms imports, US exports grow significantly, says SIPRI.' *SIPRI News and Events*. 12 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/news/press-release/2018/asia-and-middle-east-lead-rising-trend-arms-imports-us-exports-grow-significantly-says-sipri> Saudi Arabia is noted by SIPRI as the world's second largest arms importer between 2013–17 with 61 per cent of these imports coming from the US, and 23 per cent from the UK. Wezeman, Pieter D.; Aleurant, Aude; Kuimova, Alexandra; Tian, Nan; and, Wezeman Siemon T. (2018). 'Trends In International Arms Transfers 2017'. *SIPRI Fact Sheet*. March 2018 P.11.. Available at: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf. According to SIPRI data: Egypt was the third largest importer of arms in the world and second in the Middle East in the same period, (after Saudi Arabia); the UAE was the fourth largest in the world, and third largest importer of arms in the Middle East in this period. Notably, according to the same data and for this period, Oman was the 16th largest importer of arms in the world, with most arms coming from the UK (38 per cent), followed by those from the US (28 percent), and Norway (7.9 per cent). Also, Qatar was the 20th largest importer of arms in the world in this period, according to SIPRI (Wezeman et al. (2018). Op cit., SIPRI (2018). Op. cit.), but has initiated some large deals since, see, e.g.: Economist (2018). 'For the Gulf states, diplomacy involves buying weapons they don't need - Jets, but no pilots'. 1 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/03/01/for-the-gulf-states-diplomacy-involves-buying-weapons-they-dont-need>. For a quite recent and useful analysis of historical background and trends in arms sales, including from a foreign policy perspective, by the US to the Middle East, including the Gulf, see: Clayton, Thomas (2017). 'Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy'. *Congressional Research Service*. 11 October 2017. Available at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44984.pdf>
- 51 Regarding Russia growing arms deals in the Middle East region, see, e.g.: Borshchevskaya, Anna (2017). 'The Tactical Side of Russia's Arms Sales to the Middle East'. *The Jamestown Foundation*. 20 December, 2017. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-side-russias-arms-sales-middle-east/>. Regarding Russian arms deals in the Gulf, see: Freer, Courtney (2018). 'GCC and Russia beyond Syria'. *Gulf International Forum*. 21 February 2018. Available at: <https://gulff.com/gcc-and-russia-beyond-syria/>. Russian arms deals in the Middle East in historical perspective including expansion in / diversification into the Gulf, see: Barmin, Yury (2018). 'Russian Arms Diplomacy in the Middle East'. *Al Sharq Forum*. 5 February 2018. Available at: <http://www.sharqforum.org/2018/02/05/russian-arms-diplomacy-in-the-middle-east/>.
- 52 Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates (2015). *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-oil Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Esp. pp. 45, 68, 80.
- 53 As to China's growing arms deals in the region, see: Clayton (2017). Op. cit.. In terms of cutting edge military technologies and arms such as UAVs/Drones, China has made important inroads in the Gulf, partly as a result of US export restrictions. Nonetheless, these technologies and arms are of major importance in conflicts such as Yemen, e.g. see: Shaif, Rawan & Watling, Jack (2018). 'How the UAE's Chinese-Made Drone Is Changing the War in Yemen.' *Exclusive*. *Foreign Policy*. 27 April 2018. [Online.] Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/27/drone-wars-how-the-uaes-chinese-made-drone-is-changing-the-war-in-yemen>; Weinberger, Sharon (2018). 'China Has Already Won the Drone Wars: Chinese companies are proving that America is not first in the UAV export market. Can Trump roll that back?'. *Dispatch*. *Foreign Policy*. 10 May 2018. Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/10/china-trump-middle-east-drone-wars/>. Indeed, during King Salman's state visit to Beijing in March 2017, he signed a series of agreements worth USD60 bn, including to construct a Chinese factory in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to manufacture military UAVs/drones, see, e.g.: *Middle East Eye* (2017). 'China's Saudi drone factory compensates for US ban'. *Middle East Eye*. 29 March 2017. Available at: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/china-build-factory-saudi-arabia-fill-drone-shortage-1200657135>; Armstrong, Ian (2017). 'What's Behind China's Big New Drone Deal?' *The Diplomat*. 20 April 2017.
- 54 E.g. see: Sun Degang & Zoubir Yahia H. (2015). 'China's Economic Diplomacy Towards the Arab Countries: Challenges Ahead?' *Journal of Contemporary China*, 24, No. 5, pp.907-908. Regarding the economic issues increasingly being regarded by China's leadership as a matter of national security, with important political and strategic implications, see: Heath, Timothy R.(2016). 'China's Evolving Approach to Economic Diplomacy'. *Asia Policy*, Number 22 (July 2016), pp. 157–91.
- 55 Growing US concerns about China are an obvious case in point with implications for the Gulf and Oman.

- However, there remains little explicit and dedicated address of the case of Oman in this respect.
- 56 See above, particularly regarding naval basing and faculties.
- 57 See, e.g.: Valeri, Marc (2015). 'Simmering Unrest And Succession Challenges In Oman' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/omani_spring.pdf; Asia Times (2019). 'Sultan's succession looms large in southern Oman', 5 March 2019. Available at: <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/03/article/sultans-succession-looks-large-in-southern-oman>; Henderson, Simon (2017). 'The Omani Succession Envelope, Please', Foreign Policy, 3 April 2017. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/03/the-omani-succession-envelope-please/>
- 58 See, e.g.: Ulrichsen, Kristian, Coates (2016).; Ulrichsen (2017a).esp. p. 6.
- 59 See: <http://tanfeedh.gov.om>. Tourism contributes approx.. 2.9 % to Oman's GDP, compared with approx. 12.1% for the UAE. See e.g.: Oman Observer (2019). 'Tourism sector's contribution to GDP 2.9% in 2018', 19 February 2019: <http://www.omanobserver.om/tourism-sectors-contribution-to-gdp-2-9-in-2018/>; UAE Government (2018). 'Travel & Tourism', 15 July 2018: <https://www.government.ae/en/information-and-services/visiting-and-exploring-the-uae/travel-and-tourism>
- 60 Tanfeedh, p. 64, and pp. 60-64; Arabian Industry (2018). 'Tourism to have a big role in Oman's diversification drive'. 27 December 2018. Available at: <https://www.arabianindustry.com/hospitality/news/2018/dec/27/tourism-seen-driving-oman-economic-reforms-6017817/>
- 61 Tourism reportedly comprised 3.2% of Oman's GDP in 2017, see: Times of Oman (2018). '2019 is Oman's year of tourism', 30 December 2018. Available at: <https://timesofoman.com/article/671942/Oman/2019-is-Omans-year-of-tourism>
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 See, e.g.: Arabian Industry (2018). 'Tourism to have a big role in Oman's diversification drive'. 27 December 2018. Available at: <https://www.arabianindustry.com/hospitality/news/2018/dec/27/tourism-seen-driving-oman-economic-reforms-6017817/>
- 64 See, e.g.: <https://www.government.ae/en/about-the-uae/economy>; <https://www.uaecabinet.ae/en/details/news/tourism-critical-to-uaes-economic-diversification-drive>; ADCC (2018). 'Tourism and the private sector in Abu Dhabi', October 2018.; regarding acuteness, see, e.g.: Ulrichsen (2017a); IMF (2018). 'IMF Staff Concludes 2018 Article IV Visit to Oman'. IMF Press Release. 19 April 2018. Notably compare to: MF (2019). '2018 Article IV Consultation—Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement By The Executive Director For The United Arab Emirates', IMF Country Report No. 19/35, January 2019.
- 65 E.g., the Iran Nuclear Deal, see, e.g.: Schmierer, Richard J. (2015). The Sultanate of Oman and The Iran nuclear deal. Middle East Policy, Vol. XXII, No. 4, Winter 2015, pp. 113-120. Regarding safety salience, much literature exists regarding the impact of 9/11. More recently, regarding Oman's attractiveness in this regard, see, e.g., Times of Oman (2016). 'Oman can leverage 'safe' image to attract more tourists', 24 January 2019. Available at: <https://timesofoman.com/article/76093>. Also, discussions with interlocutors.
- 66 See, e.g.: Stephenson, Marcus L. Al-Hamarnah, Ala (2017). International Tourism Development and the Gulf Cooperation Council States - Challenges and Opportunities. Abingdon - Routledge.
- 67 E.g., see: Gugolz, Alessandro (1996). The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Sultanate of Oman. International Journal of Cultural Property, 5(02):291-309; Hegazy, Soheir M. (2015). 'Cultural Sustainability between Traditional and Contemporary Omani Residences – A Comparative Case Study', European Journal of Sustainable Development (2015), 4, 2, 185-194
- 68 See, e.g.: <https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-tips/travel-trends/fastest-growing-tourist-destinations-in-world>; <https://omaninfo.om/english/module.php?module=topics-showtopic&CatID=35&ID=5277>
- 69 For some possibly useful comparative reference data and points in respect of the UAE and Oman, see Annex 1.
- 70 Reasons that could be cited include: historical, cultural, and political, but also economic. Indicatively, Oman has modernized cautiously, and generally comparatively more slowly than many other states in the region. This partly results from the intersection of: historical, political and cultural practices and continuities; leadership change arising amid externally-backed insurgency and internal difficulties (1970s), and consequent continuity of rule (Sultan Qaboos, who succeeded his father in 1970 after a palace coup, is the longest-serving ruler in the Arab world, and the third-longest serving Monarch in the world); and, economic considerations and opportunities, e.g., Oman has not had the same size petroleum and gas reserves as some other Gulf states. Notably, up until the 1980s, persons were generally not allowed into Oman without a No Objection Certificate (NOC), obtainable only through an Omani sponsor. Thus, tourist visits were as such not allowed.
- 71 Lefebvre, Jeffrey (2010). 'Oman's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century', Middle East Policy V. 17, I. 1, 99-114, p. 99.
- 72 Insight Guides Oman & the UAE (2015) Introduction. (Italics my emphasis.)
- 73 Rough Guide to Oman (2011): <https://www.roughguides.com/shop/rough-guide-oman/>
- 74 Examples of these can be seen, e.g.: <https://visitabudhabi.ae/en/explore/culture.and.heritage/arabian.hospitality.aspx>; <https://visitabudhabi.ae/en/explore/culture.and.heritage.aspx>; and, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/travel/make-the-experience-authentic-visitors-will-come>
- 75 From: <http://www.maps-of-the-world.net/maps/maps-of-asia/maps-of-oman/detailed-political-map-of-oman-with-relief.jpg>
- 76 Discussion with interlocutors.
- 77 Heard-Bey, Frauke (2017). Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, and the Gulf Region : fifty years of transformation. Berlin, Germany: Gerlach Press.
- 78 Regarding this crisis, see, The ibtauris blog (2013) 'Bedouins, Boundaries and the Buraimi Oasis. How the futures of the UAE and OMAN were determined during the 20th century.' Blog entry. 22 August 2013. Available at: <https://theibtaurisblog.com/2013/08/22/bedouins-boundaries-and-the-buraimi-oasis/>
- 79 Heard-Bey, Frauke (2017). Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, and the Gulf Region: fifty years of transformation. Berlin, Germany: Gerlach Press.
- 80 Further details available here: <https://visitabudhabi.ae/en/see.and.do/experiences/films.in.abu.dhabi/star.wars.the.force.awakens.aspx>
- 81 See, e.g.: Al Fahim, Abduljalil Muhammed (1998). Rags to Riches: A story of Abu Dhabi. London: London Centre for Arab Studies.
- 82 Which is also the official symbol of the UAE's 'Year of Tolerance' (2019). See, e.g.: Arabian Business (2019). 'Ghaf tree chosen as the logo for UAE's 'Year of Tolerance'', 8 February 2019. Available at: <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/culture-society/412865-ghaf-tree-chosen-as-the-logo-for-uaes-year-of-tolerance>
- 83 Al Qattara Centre for culture: <https://abudhabiculture.ae/en/experience/culture-centres/al-qattara-arts-centre>
- 84 See, e.g.: Sebugwaawo, Ismail (2018) 'Mohammed Mandi: Take 'note' of this top Emirati calligrapher'. Khaleej Times. 30 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/lifestyle/art-culture/mohammed-mandi-take-note-of-this-top-emirati-calligrapher>
- 85 Regarding an excellent exhibition, on at the time of writing, related to the architecture of the UAE, see: Transformations: The Emirati National House, curated by Dr. Yasser Elsheshtawy, the UAE's National Exhibition from the Venice Biennale's 15th International Architecture Exhibition in 2016, as at Warehouse 421, Abu Dhabi: <https://www.warehouse421.ae/en/exhibitions/>
- 86 Hili Archaeological Park: <https://visitabudhabi.ae/en/see.and.do/attractions.and.landmarks/cultural.attractions/hili.archaeological.garden.aspx>
- 87 UNESCO (n.d.) Cultural Sites of Al Ain (Haft, Hili, Bidaa Bint Saud and Oases Areas). [Online.] Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1343>
- 88 E.g. see: Walsh, Tony & Darke, Diana (2017) Oman. Bradt Guides 4th Ed. Chalfont St Peter, UK: Bradt, p. 4.
- 89 Notably, UNESCO listed Afalaj in Oman can be found here, together with interesting details: <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1207.pdf>
- 90 <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1980/12/01/Modern-Sinbad-on-Oman-to-China-voyage/6132344494800/>
- 91 Some photographs of the voyage can be found here: <http://pro.magnumphotos.com/Catalogue/Peter-Marlow/1980/OMAN-%27Sinbad-Voyage%27-NN119904.html> . Severin's account of the voyage can be found here: http://www.timseverin.net/books_sindbad_voyage.html; footage of setting off on the voyage can be seen here, courtesy of the AP archive as part of a series of videos regarding the journey: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cqppg69viC4>
- 92 E.g.: Oman Observer (2017) 'New regulations for building permits'. Oman Observer Newspaper 21 January 2017. Available at: <http://www.omanobserver.om/new-regulations-building-permits/>
- 93 See, e.g.: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/oman/muscat/hotels/al-bustan-palace/a/poi-sle/1044668/361117>
- 94 See: <https://www.bechtel.com/projects/oman-airport-expansion-muscat/>
- 95 See: <http://tanfeedh.gov.om>. Tourism contributes approx.. 2.9 % to Oman's GDP, compared with approx. 12.1% for the UAE. See e.g.: Oman Observer (2019). 'Tourism sector's contribution to GDP 2.9% in 2018', 19 February 2019: <http://www.omanobserver.om/tourism-sectors-contribution-to-gdp-2-9-in-2018/>; UAE Government (2018). 'Travel & Tourism', 15 July 2018: <https://www.government.ae/en/information-and-services/visiting-and-exploring-the-uae/travel-and-tourism>
- 96 See, e.g.: https://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Chinese_symbols_1109.pdf
- 97 Regarding OBOR see, e.g.: Andersen, Lars Erslev; Ehteshami, Anoush; Sunuodula, Mamtimyn; Jiang, Yang (2017) 'ONE BELT, ONE ROAD' AND CHINA'S WESTWARD PIVOT: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE of China's Silk Road in Central, Western and Southern Asian regions. Conference report. DIIS & Durham University. 1 December 2017. Available at: http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/1258174/Durham_OBOR_Conference_Report.pdf
- 98 <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/what-the-gulf-states-think-of-one-belt-one-road/>. Regarding Oman's role in the region, see briefly, for example: Buck, Stephen (n.d.) Book Review: Oman, Culture and Diplomacy. Middle East Policy Council. Available at: <https://www.mepec.org/oman-culture-and-diplomacy>. Notably, the pluralism argument seems possibly the most apt, rather than that of cosmopolitanism.
- 99 A notable perspective regarding these is by Hanson: 'The Persian Gulf is now mostly a strategic concern of Iran and its archrival Gulf monarchies selling their oil to China and Europe, neither of which so far has the naval power to protect the precarious fonts of its energy interests.' Hanson, Victor Davis (2018) 'The Post-War Order Is Over'. National Review. 29 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/05/post-war-order-over-not-caused-by-trump-foreign-policy/>. This arguably increases the salience of the role(s) Oman has, can take and effect in the context of rising tensions and its rather exceptional ability to convene discussions between these actors, as it has done, including, for instance, regarding the Iran Nuclear issue.
- 100 E.g. from comprising 30% of imports in 2011 to over 43% in 2015. See, e.g.: <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/omn/>; <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountrySnapshot/en/OMN> and <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/OMN/Year/2011/Summary>

- 101 Ameerudheen, T.A. (2015) 'Man of the museum: Oman's Bait Al Baranda director'.Times of Oman. 20 August 2015.Available at: <http://timesofoman.com/article/65945>
- 102 <http://www.baitalluban.com>
- 103 Hasan, Deeba (2016) '#OmanPride: National Museum of Oman all set to open'. Times of Oman. 26 July 2016. Available at: <http://timesofoman.com/article/88765>
- 104 <https://www.facebook.com/nationalmuseumoman/> ; https://omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/home/experiences/culture/museums/lut/p/a/04_Sj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAFGjzOltvc1dg40MzAz8fZzMDTyDQz0Mg92djC0sTPQLsh0VATQrLx4/
- 105 Royal Botanical Gardens Kew (n.d.) 'Bosweilla sacra' Plants of the World online, Kew Science. Available at: <http://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:127065-1>
- 106 E.g. see: Agius, Dionisius A. (2005) Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: People of the Dhow. London: Routledge. P.92; Searle, Pauline (n.d.) Dawn Over Oman. Routledge Library Editions. Society of the Middle East. London: Routledge, p. 92; Encyclopaedia Britannica (n.d.) Dhofar. [Online.] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Dhofar>
- 107 Regarding Frankincense, see, e.g.: Middle East Institute (n.d) The Story of Frankincense <http://www.mei.edu/sqcc/frankincense>
- 108 E.g. see: The Anglican catholic Church (n.d.) Incense in Church. Available at: <http://www.anglican catholic.org/incense-in-church?class=greenlink>
- 109 See above, and also Peterson, J.E. (2007) Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy. London: Saqi Books. Esp. Ch. 2.
- 110 An interesting account of visiting the Jebel is available here: <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/middle-east/oman-green-shoots-in-the-uncharted-mountains-9434369.html>
- 111 Regarding the 'Jebel Akhdar War', see e.g.: Bauer, Patricia (2018) Jebel Akhdar War. Britannica.com: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jebel-Akhdar-War>; Townsend, John (1977). Oman: The Making of a Modern State. New York: Croom Helm. p. 64; Dye, Peter (2008) The Jebel Akhdar War: The Royal Air Force in Oman. Air Power Review. Centre for Air Power Studies. ISSN 1463-6298 Volume 11, Number 3, Winter 2008. Pp. 18-33. Available at: <http://www.airpowerstudies.co.uk/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/aprvol11no3.pdf>. Regarding the scaling of the Jebel at night, see: De la Billière, Peter Edgar Delacour (1994) Looking for Trouble: SAS to Gulf Command : the Autobiography. London: Harper Collins.
- 112 See, e.g.: <http://www.nizwafort.com> ; and, https://omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/details/lut/p/a/04_Sj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAFGjzOltvc1dg40MzAz8Tc0NDTyDAwINvF19DN0DzPULsh0VAek2Ufo/?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/mot/english_lib/mot/experience/culture/castle/nizwa-castle
- 113 See: <http://omanisilver.com/contents/en-us/d578.html>
- 114 I.e. the Alazi, Alayalah and Taghrodah dances. See, e.g.: <http://www.omanobserver.om/the-joy-of-dance/> ; and, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/oman-OM?info=elements-on-the-lists>
- 115 Most such fortifications have been restored by the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Culture, with and some managed by the Omani Ministry of Tourism.
- 116 Damluji, S.S. (1998). The Architecture of Oman. Garnet Publishing: Reading, UK.
- 117 <https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/middle-east/oman/western-hajar/jabrin/>
- 118 UNESCO (n.d.) Bahla Fort. World Heritage List. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/433>
- 119 UNESCO (1995) State of Conservation, Bahla Fort. World Heritage List. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/2020>
- 120 Regarding Oman, including Bahla, in this context, see: Allen Jr, C.H. (1987). Oman: the Modernization of the Sultanate. Kent, UK: Croom Helm, pp. 24-25.
- 121 Valeri Marc (2007). State-Building, Liberalization from Above and Political Legitimacy in the Sultanate of Oman. In Oliver Schlumberger (Ed.) Debating Arab Authoritarianism. Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 143-158. p. 146
- 122 Kola, A.B. (2013) Oman's dwindling heritage of pottery. Arab News. 26 June 2013. Available at: <http://www.arabnews.com/news/456198>
- 123 Oman Observer (2017) 'the tenacity of mineral-rich clay', Oman Observer. 17 June 2017. Available at: <http://www.omanobserver.om/beyond-decor-tenacity-mineral-rich-clay/>
- 124 Regarding this, and although there are similarities with wooden doors in some other Gulf states and even with works done in India for them in relation to trade routes, Omani carved wooden doors also have distinctive features, e.g.: details of the owner/householder; stylized motif usage particularly in detail and richness. See: Hawker, R (2008) Traditional Architecture of the Arabian Gulf: Building on Desert Tides Southampton, UK: WIT Press. pp. 93-95. A detailed comparative study of such doors in Oman and the region would be welcome.
- 125 Ribbeck, E., F. Dahmalf. A. Gangier and H. Gal/be 1999: Al Hamre, die Rote. - Zenith: Zeitschrift fur den Orient 1999/2: 34-37 in Nagieb M., Siebert S., Luedeling E., Buerkert A., Häser J. (2004): Settlement history of mountain oasis in northern Oman – evidence from land-use and archaeological studies. Die Erde 135: 81-106.
- 126 Ministry of Tourism Oman (N.D.) Sultanate of Oman Tourist Guide p.16. Available at: https://www.tourismoman.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Sultanate_of_Oman_Tourist-Guide.pdf
- 127 Nagieb M., Siebert S., Luedeling E., Buerkert A., Häser J. (2004): Settlement history of mountain oasis in northern Oman – evidence from land-use and archaeological studies. Die Erde 135: 81-106, p. 104.
- 128 Albeit with considerable commonalities, but also differences and distinctions, including those that are emerging
- 129 See, e.g.: <https://www.protocol.dubai.ae/UAE-Dubai/About-the-United-Arab-Emirates>
- 130 Others provide a different figure 83, 600 Km2, e.g.: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ae.html>
- 131 See, e.g.: 'The Government of Oman: https://www.mofa.gov.om/?page_id=9299&lang=en; others provide the same figure, e.g.: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mu.html>
- 132 I.e. an est. 8.5992 million are expatriates. This is in line with the last census findings and as a basis of estimates and approximates, see, e.g.: Gulf News (2016). 'UAE population and statistical trends', 17 November 2016. Available at: <https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/uae-population-and-statistical-trends-1.1931464>
- 133 According to the Omani National Centre for Statistics and Information In February 2019. See, e.g.: Arabian Business (2019). 'Oman News/ Omanisation leads to further drop in expat numbers', 27 February 2019. Available at: <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/414169-omanisation-results-in-further-drop-in-expat-numbers>
- 134 Gross domestic product, current prices (U.S. dollars). Values are based upon GDP in national currency converted to U.S. dollars using market exchange rates (yearly average). Exchange rate projections are provided by country economists for the group of other emerging market and developing countries. Exchanges rates for advanced economies are established in the WEO assumptions for each WEO exercise. Expenditure-based GDP is total final expenditures at purchasers' prices (including the f.o.b. value of exports of goods and services), less the f.o.b. value of imports of goods and services. [SNA 1993]
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 Data from WEO October 2018 Database. Gross domestic product per capita, current prices (U.S. dollars) GDP is expressed in current U.S. dollars per person. Data are derived by first converting GDP in national currency to U.S. dollars and then dividing it by total population.
- 137 Ibid.
- 138 See, e.g.: UAE Government (2019). 'Economy', 10 February 2019. Available at: <https://www.government.ae/en/about-the-uae/economy>
- 139 See, e.g.: Times of Oman (2018). 'Oman's economy witnessing a transformation', 11 August 2018. Available at: <https://timesofoman.com/article/139624>
- 140 E.g.: The Economist (2016). 'Oil and the Gulf States: After the Party. 26 March 2016. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/03/23/after-the-party>
- 141 This is IMF data, which is notably referred to in other parts of the Economist article 'Oil and the Gulf States'. In more recent IMF data, only percentage changes are provided in data, and 2017 and 2018 data is projected. Therefore, this earlier data continues to be referenced. For the former see: IMF (2016). 'Diversifying Government Revenue in the GCC: Next Steps.' IMF. GCC Tax Policy Paper. October 2016, p. 28. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2016/102616.pdf>. For the latter, see: IMF (2017a). 'The Economic Outlook and Policy Challenges in the GCC Countries'. IMF. GCC Surveillance Paper. December 2017. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/~media/Files/Publications/PP/2017/pp121417gcc-outlook-and-policy-challenges.ashx>
- 142 BP (2018). 'Statistical Review of World Energy', p. 12. Available at: <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/en/corporate/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2018-full-report.pdf> According to the BP R/P Ratio assessment, other Gulf states have the following number of years of oil production from their oil reserves remaining in descending order: Kuwait, 91.9 years; UAE, 68.1 years; Saudi Arabia, 61.0 years; Qatar, 36.1 years.
- 143 The GCC states being (in alphabetical order): Bahrain (the Kingdom of); Kuwait (the Kingdom of); Oman (the Sultanate of); Qatar; Saudi Arabia (the Kingdom of); United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- 144 Ibid. p. 26.
- 145 Ibid. According to the BP R/P Ratio assessment, other Gulf states have the following number of years of natural gas production from their natural gas reserves remaining in descending order: Kuwait, 97.6 years; UAE, 98.2 years; Saudi Arabia, 72.1 years; Qatar, 141.8 years; Bahrain, 10.3.
- 146 See: <http://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/AboutGCC/MemberStates/Pages/Home.aspx>
- 147 See: https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/25.htm. Oman the largest Oil and Gas producer in the Middle East that is not an OPEC member.

