



Omani Diplomacy and Maritime Trade in the Indian Ocean World, 1792-1856



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Research Question

To what extent did Omani diplomacy create favorable economic and political conditions for the Omani Empire?

Background

From the late 18th century, the Omani state began to expand its political and economic power in the Indian Ocean world. Omani merchants sought to compete with the encroaching European powers, especially the British, in order to solidify their economic positions. Furthermore, the Omani state, ruled by the Albusaidi family, turned to diplomacy as a means of creating favorable economic conditions for their merchants with the ultimate goal of strengthening their political fortunes.



شكل (*) الإمبراطورية العمانية في عهد السيد سعيد بن سلطان

Methods

This research uses treaties, trade deals, and correspondence between Omani and foreign officials as key primary sources for understanding the diplomatic behaviors of the Omani state. Then, figures related to economic activity, such as income from port fees and import duties, will be evaluated alongside the treaties to determine how effective they were in creating favorable economic conditions. Additionally, travelogues from British and Italian merchants will be used to further understand the general economic conditions in Muscat and Zanzibar throughout this period.

Case Study

In 1833, Edmund Roberts, an American merchant, approached Sayyid Said bin Sultan (r. 1807-1856) to request lower export duties for ivory. Sultan agreed to this on the condition that the US government signed a treaty of friendship and navigation with Oman. The resulting treaty was mutually beneficial economically and gave the Omani state more leverage in dealing with other Western powers.

A TREATY OF AMITY AND COMMERCE

Sept. 21, 1833. Proclamation of the President of the U. S. Jan. 24, 1835.

Between the United States of America and his Majesty Sayed Syyed Bin, Sultan of Muscat, and his dependencies :

ARTICLE 1. There shall be a perpetual peace between the United States of America and Sayed Syyed Bin, Sultan, and his dependencies.

ART. 2. The citizens of the United States shall have free liberty to enter all the ports of his Majesty Sayed Syyed Bin, Sultan, with their cargoes, of whatever kind the said cargoes may consist; and they shall have liberty to sell the same to any of the subjects of the Sultan, or others who may wish to buy the same, or to barter the same for any produce or manufactures of the Kingdom, or other articles that may be found there. No price shall be fixed by the Sultan, or his officers, on the articles to be sold by the merchants of the United States, or the

Conclusions

In general, the diplomatic activities of the Omani Empire resulted in more favorable economic conditions for merchants and, by extension, more favorable political conditions for the Omani state. However, these favorable conditions unravelled upon the death of Said bin Sultan in 1856 due to treaties made with the British. Furthermore, diplomacy effectively strengthened Oman's economic and political position in the Indian Ocean world in the short run; however, it failed in the long run.



Port of Zanzibar, 1875, from Qatar Digital Archives

Key Sources

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