

The Makran-Baluch-African Network in Zanzibar and East Africa during the XIXth Century

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the western Indian Ocean during the XIXth Century there were not just one, but people from many regions, merchandise and slave routes. They were generally divided in two main monsoon directions: one from East Africa and the Red Sea to Arabia, to India and to South East Asia, and the other in the opposite direction; consequently, slaves were not only black Africans, but also Asians.¹ African slaves were imported in great numbers annually from East Africa to Oman, travelling on Arab *dhow*s (*sanbuq*). Around the first half of the XIXth Century there was an extensive commerce of slaves from Ras Assir (“The Cape of Slaves”) and Pemba, and many African people were bought with cloth and dates on Zanzibar and Pemba Islands, enslaved, and transported to the Arabian Peninsula where they were mainly engaged in fishing pearls in the Persian/Arab Gulf.² Slaves also became lords of African “reigns”, as they were considered to be more loyal than anybody else within their clans and tribes. In this

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² From now on the Persian/Arab Gulf will be referred to as the Gulf.

regard, Omanis used to recruit mercenary troops also from the Baluch tribes, who developed a long-lived military tradition, representing a real element of power within Omani areas of influence in East sub-Saharan Africa.

This article examines the role played by the Makrani-Baluch tribes during the XIXth Century's sub-Saharan East African apogee with the Omanis, and their influence on the social, political and economic level giving special attention to slavery.

Introduction

In the Indian Ocean religious elements, such as Hinduism in India, Buddhism in the Malaysian-Indonesian Archipelago, and the spread of Islam through short as well as long-distance trade routes, strongly influenced, and in many cases, modified the concept and use of slavery. The social, political and economic functions of slaves were generally: a) domestic-patriarchal, b) productive-agricultural (bonded labour directed into intensive wet-crop agriculture); c) military-administrative. Within the Islamic world, armies of slave-soldiers came from Central Asia, mainly Turkish peoples from the Caucasus and from the Steppes till their islamization; while domestic slaves came chiefly from the coastal strip of East Africa.

Methodology

This article evaluates the cultural synthesis of different local realities through fieldwork and, at the same time, integrates this with the archival and bibliographical research that lies at the basis of the work itself. In this respect, the new historical perspective which tends to the relations between the coasts, islands and interior of the continents no longer a state of incommunicability, isolation and stasis but rather an intense and dynamic movement of peoples, goods and ideas – with marked effects on local societies – is also to be considered an extremely valid tool in providing a more complete and up to date interpretation of events. It is well known that studies in the history of the western Indian Ocean can no longer be considered merely as hagiographic reconstructions, but must take into consideration a number of historical-political-institutional aspects. These include: the presence of different ethnic, social and religious groups together with the affirmation of Arab-Omani domination between the end of the XVIIIth and start of the XIXth Century; the fundamental influence of the Indian mercantile and other Asian communities; the impact with the Swahili populations of the East African coast and the sub-Saharan areas. All of these factors must, naturally, also be considered in relation to links with Europe.

Slavery in the Western Indian Ocean

Oman occupies the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula and is located between latitudes 16° 40' and 26° 20' north and longitudes 51° 50' and 59° 40' east. The coastline extends 1,700km from the Strait of Hormuz in the north, to the borders of Yemen in the south and overlooks the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The total land area is approximately 309,500 square kilometres and it is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. Oman's territory has a varied topography, consisting of plains, deserts, mountain ranges and oases. The rock matter is predominantly sedimentary and is rich in metallic mineral deposits, such as copper, chromite and gold. The two main mountain ranges are the Hajar range, running from Musandam to Ras al Hadd; and the Qara range in Dhofar, which attracts the light monsoon rains during the mid-summer months. Around 82% of Oman consists of desert. Most conurbations arise on the coast. There are many caverns in Oman and the country is home to one of the largest caves in the world, Teyq Cave, which is 250 metres in depth, 300 million metres in size. It is thought that the cave was formed as a result of several chambers collapsing due to erosion. There are several islands located in Oman's waters, the largest of which is Masirah in the southeast which is accessed by sea. The climate differs from one area to another. It is hot and humid in the coastal areas in summer; while it is hot and dry in the interior with the exception of the higher mountains, which enjoy a moderate climate throughout the year. Rainfall is generally light and irregular; although heavy rains and thunderstorms can cause severe flooding. In the south, the Dhofar region has a moderate climate and the pattern of rainfall is more predictable with heavy monsoon rains occurring regularly between May and September. Average temperatures for the north of Oman are 32 to 48°C. from May to September; 26 to 36°C from October to April. Due to the monsoon season, June to September, Dhofar in the south of the country maintains a fairly steady year-round temperature of around 30 to 35°C. The average rainfall in Muscat is 75mm. In the Jebel al Akhdar region, the average rainfall can be from 250mm to 400mm. The monsoon season in Dhofar can bring rainfall of between 100 and 400mm.

From the descriptions of travel accounts by Europeans during the XIXth Century, the picturesque bay of Muscat was a semicircle, enclosed by the mountains and with rocks dropping down to the sea on which fortifications had been built to watch out for keeping a lookout for enemies. The town was surrounded by hills and rung round with walls and, with a green valley beyond the shore, it was a pleasant place. The hinterland of Muscat is so mountainous that, in the XIXth Century, it

could only be reached on camel or donkey-back. Just outside the town, the coast is mainly desert, hilly and desolate.

African slaves were imported in great numbers annually from East Africa to Oman, travelling on Arab *dhow*s (*sanbuq*). In the first half of the XIXth Century there was an extensive commerce of slaves from Ras Assir “The Cape of Slaves” and Pemba, and many African people were bought with cloth and dates on Zanzibar and Pemba Islands, enslaved, and transported to the Arabian Peninsula where they were mainly engaged in pearl fishing in the Gulf. They were forced to dive forty times a day or more and their mortality was high.

Slaves also became lords of African “reigns”, as they were considered by their masters to be more loyal than anybody else within their clans and tribes. In this regard, Omani Arabs used to recruit mercenary troops also from the Baluch tribes, who developed a long-lived military tradition, representing one of the real elements of power within Omani areas of influence in East sub-Saharan Africa.

This paper examines the role played by the Makrani-Baluch tribes during XIXth Century’s sub-Saharan East African apogee with the Arabs from Oman, and their influence on the social, political and economic level with special attention to slavery.

It is important to emphasize that the Islamic Arab world’s perception of slavery as an economic and power policy was entirely different from that of the Christian West which had undersigned the Holy Alliance and strove for abolition. In Islamic society, unlike many others, slavery was not prohibited. It even finds precise dispositions in its support in the Koran: the equality of all men before God implies clear duties also in regard to slaves, but not the suppression of slavery itself, even though it is severely forbidden to reduce another Muslim to the state of slavery. In terms of rights, no political or religious function may be performed by a slave, but owners may delegate to slaves any responsibility or task related to the exercise of their authority. Thus, the slaves of important individuals enjoyed a privileged status and could often attain higher positions of power than free men, the cases of slaves themselves becoming princes not being entirely exceptional, either. In the context of Islam, slavery is a highly-structured concept, regulated down to the smaller detail by the civil and criminal codes. As a result, it is difficult to pass judgement on the moral or physical condition of slaves in the Islamic African world as compared to those in other societies. Conditions obviously varied, and there were certainly those who attempted to escape, but there is no doubt that this institution lay at the very foundation of the entire Islamic society of the cosmopolitan commercial empire ‘founded’ on the seas by an Omani Sultan: Saiyid Sa’id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa’id

(1806-1856). Moreover, as we have noted, it was inevitable that there would have to be a clash with the Christian West, as represented by Great Britain, over this question.³

From the Islamic religious point of view slaves are considered persons, but being subject to their masters they are not fully responsible, and they are at the same time a thing.⁴ Slavery can originate through birth or through captivity, if a non-Muslim who is protected neither by treaty nor by a safe conduct falls into the hands of the Muslims. Slaves can get married: the male slave may marry up to two female slaves; the female slave may also marry a free man who is not her owner, and the male slave a free woman who is not his owner. The marriage of the slave requires the permission of the owner; he can also give the slave in marriage against his or her will. The permission implies that the master becomes responsible with the person (*rakaba*) of the slave, for the pecuniary obligations that derive from the marriage, nuptial gifts and maintenance. Minor slaves are not to be separated from their near relatives, and in particular their parents, in sale. The children of a female slave follow the status of their mother, except that the children of the concubine, whom the owner has recognised as his own (*umm walad*), and this was the case of the numerous sons of the Omani Sultans during the XIXth Century, is free with all the rights of children from a marriage with a free woman. And this rule has had the most profound influence on the development of Islamic society. The Islamic law of slavery is patriarchal and belongs more to the law of family than to the law of property. Apart from domestic slaves, Islamic law takes notice of trading slaves who possess a considerable liberty of action, but hardly of working slaves kept for exploiting agricultural and industrial enterprises.

On Swahili coast slavery was mainly characterised as an open and very much absorptive system, although during the XIXth Century the majority of slaves from the interior such as Unyanyembe and the Great Lakes region were destined to cultivations, and consequently totally

³ On the history of slavery in Islamic African societies, amongst the many, see Lovejoy, *The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion under Slavery*; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*; Lovejoy, *Africans in Bondage: Studies in slavery and the slave trade in honour of Philip D. Curtin*; Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya*; Pouwels & Levtzion (Eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa*; see the papers presented at the Conference on Slavery, Islam, and Diaspora, H. Tubman Resource Centre on the African Diaspora, Department of History, York University, Toronto, Canada, 24-26 October, 2003 where it was considered that comprehensive study on slavery was needed.

⁴ Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, p. 127; Sheriff, "The Twilight of Slavery in the Persian Gulf". pp. 23-37

excluded from any chance of paternalistic generosity from their masters. The search for a better life on Zanzibar and on the Swahili coast was tempted by slaves in many ways: those who were outside the master's household worked in the master's *mashamba* – from the French *champ*, or field, that is the plantations⁵ – and were expected to take care of their subsistence, cultivating a small plot of the *mashamba*; the more privileged cultivated by themselves a small piece of land, paying an annual or monthly tribute to their master.⁶

Vibanuna were hired slaves, mainly in urban centres; they were extremely poor, but in some cases joined Hadrami Arab's caravans and succeeded in modifying their humiliating conditions of life. The trading slaves, *mafundi*, craftsmen, reached a decent level of dignity, but they remained under strict control of their master, and 'illegal' or personal initiatives were severely punished.

In Africa slaves were thought of as less than human and, even when they embraced Islam – Sunni and never Ibadi as only the Arabs of Oman – were thought of as being less than Muslims.

The burning question of slavery went hand in hand with another and no less relevant factor.⁷ In the sub-Saharan East African regions, and in the eastern Mediterranean, there was no local 'peasant class' that could be employed on the new cultivations which European demand had induced rich landowners to introduce and which were proving to be both extremely successful and profitable (sugarcane, rice, copal, vanilla, pepper, cardamom, nutmeg and, especially on Zanzibar, cloves). Consequently, the use of slaves for tilling the land and other heavy labour on the plantations had become a question of routine; in other words, when England undertook her crusade against slavery, it was precisely this most miserable section of society which constituted the economic foundations of the entire region.

We also agree with Barendse that trade and tribe relationships between Swahili coast and Makran littoral during the second half of the XIXth Century were pre-existing to the power of the Al Bu Sa'id of Oman, and highly influenced by the role of Indian – both Hindu and Muslim – merchant communities all over the region of the western Indian Ocean, who became extremely rich and powerful.⁸

⁵ Lodhi, *Oriental Influences in Swahili. A Study in Language and Culture Contacts*, pp. 46-47.

⁶ Glassman, *Feasts and Riot, Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*, pp. 79-114.

⁷ On the lively debate on the question of slavery, amongst many, see Heuman, *Slavery, The Slave Trade, and Abolition*, in Winks (Ed.), *Historiography, The Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 315-326.

⁸ Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century*.

Therefore, within this framework, the Makran-Baluch presence along the Swahili coast, apparently was closely related to their military and mercenary role within the tribes of Oman, further on developing in trading in East Africa, but this is an interesting hypothesis which requires further research.

From the end of the XVIIIth Century, and for all of the XIXth, it was precisely these tribes of pillaging warriors who protected, hid, supported and faithfully defended the Al Bu Sa'id of Oman, thanks also to the tribal structure and clan-family relationships of their society which, traditionally nomadic, could count on both 'Makran', on the today's Iranian and Pakistani coasts, and 'peninsular' and 'continental' solidarity. From the accounts of travellers, explorers and British officials of the time – as well as from Archive documents sources – we see emerge among other Baluch tribes in Africa the Hot, the Rind and the Nousherwani.⁹

The Baluch tribes from Makran, a very tough people, very skilled in the use of weaponry, adaptable to climate change and environmental conditions, were pushed from the extreme misery of their country towards Persia and towards the coasts of Arabia. Here, they offered themselves as soldiers, sailors and bodyguards for a salary that, though even modest, could represent the difference between life and death for themselves and their families. During the XIXth Century the condition of life of these people was so hard that the British explorer Sykes wrote: "*they are adscripti glebae and in miserable conditions, nominally receiving a third of the crop . . . only enough to keep body and soul together*".¹⁰ During the XVIIIth and XIXth Centuries the Baluch were known to British agents as 'ferocious freebooters', and they protected and hid the 'Arabs' of Oman in their desolate lands; they were mainly employed on the dhows of the Muscat rulers, or sent on military expeditions in the Omani deserts.¹¹

Zanzibar is an archipelago made up of Zanzibar and Pemba Islands, and several islets. It is located in the Indian Ocean, about 25 miles from the today's Tanzanian coast, and 6° south of the equator. Zanzibar Island (known locally as *Unguja*, but as Zanzibar internationally) is 60 miles long and 20 miles wide, occupying a total area of approximately 650 square miles. At that time the island of Zanzibar was administered by governors representing Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id and exercised all power on his behalf. The military support which furnished these representatives with absolute authority over the island and its affairs,

⁹ Miles, *Notes on the Tribes of Oman by L.C.S.B. Miles*, p. 94.

¹⁰ Sykes, *Ten Thousands Miles in Persia*, p. 108.

¹¹ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 89.

consisted of special troops of proven trustworthiness, that is to say, the Baluch corps closely tied to the Al Bu Sa'id by fundamentally economic agreements. The local governors also had the support of the local, autochthonous Swahili aristocracy, mainly merchants. These came under the *mwinyi mkuu*, subdivided into *diwan*, *jumbe*, *wazee*; and were tied to the Omani elite by mutual interests in the exploitation of the resources offered by the island and the eastern shores of Africa.¹² This mercantile empire, with Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id moved its economic and political centre of gravity to Zanzibar, making control of the neighbouring islands and the nearby African coast one of the cornerstones of its vast system of interests. Many years later, the English explorer Richard Burton, would claim that: "If you play the flute in Zanzibar it will sound as far as the Great Lakes".¹³ Without a shadow of a doubt, European rivalry in the Gulf and the western waters of the Indian Ocean from the start of the XIXth Century on, combined with related upheavals in power and strategy, had a decisive impact also on the deviation of the maritime routes followed by this immense commercial traffic mainly based on human flesh.

Clearly, however, the ability and modernity of Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id in exploiting such political contingencies was also to carry a certain weight.

Within this framework of trade, commerce, bargaining, conflict and struggle for the control of trade in this or that valuable merchandise, the island of Zanzibar inserted itself with the dynamism of its officials, merchants, cunning adventurers and slaves. Turning once again to the question of slavery, we must remember how the very backbone of Zanzibar's economy at this sensitive stage in its rise was formed precisely by slaves, the key element in both the local economy and the immense wealth of its merchants.

These, therefore, were the foundations on which Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id and the Indian mercantile communities built their great commercial emporium in the face of inevitable conflict with the English in the Gulf over the question of piracy.

The contrast is self-evident between the two, profoundly different ways of perceiving objectives and strategies. On the one hand, we have an 'Arab' merchant prince and his traditional court of advisers, warriors, merchants and slaves and, on the other, we have Great Britain which,

¹² Glassman, *The Bondsman's new clothes: the contradictory consciousness of slave resistance on the Swahili Coast*, pp. 277-312.

¹³ A claim that has been interpreted in many conflicting ways. Nicolini, *Makran, Oman and Zanzibar: Three Terminal Cultural Corridor in the western Indian Ocean (1799-1856)*.

greatly influenced by marked public pressure, decides to launch a crusade against the slave trade and traders. In other words, an undertaking which has the aim of tearing up from the roots the real economic foundations of the entire western Indian Ocean region and of revolutionising both the traditional mechanisms of local power and traditional culture itself. We thus have a conflict between the force of superior technology and military power of the Europeans and the cunning and ambivalence of the merchant prince of Muscat and Zanzibar, Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id, conscious though he was of his own military weakness. Since 1800, when Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id received the model of a 74-gun ship as a present from the visiting British envoy, Major-General John Malcolm (1769-1833), from the start he recognised the importance of cultivating British friendship. And this was a relationship valued too by Britain.¹⁴

In sub-Saharan East Africa during the XIXth Century, it was believed that slavery, if we go beyond the mere capture of human beings, was also caused by the tribes of the interior accumulating debts to the slaving merchants of the coast, as well as by the recurrent periods of drought suffered along the Mrima coast, sometimes along that part facing the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. In alternating phases, therefore, the populations 'decided' to travel to Zanzibar and there sell themselves into slavery.¹⁵

The slave trade practised along the East African shores had certain principal characteristics: the slaves did not come from areas of Swahili cultural influence, and were called *mshenzi* (pl. *washenzi*), that is to say, barbarians, uncivilised. They were not Muslims, as were all free Swahili within the domains of the Omani Arabs, and were the property of their owners, slavery being regulated by the principles of Koranic law.

The slaves formed a separate caste. There were *watumwa wajinga*, not yet assimilated into the coastal populations, the *wakulia*, transported as children to Zanzibar, and, in this category, also the *wazalia* (pl. of *mzalia*), those generations born on the coast and fully acculturated into coastal Islamic culture.

Those enjoying more privileged conditions were, naturally, the domestic slaves. Their relationship with their owners was more that of a member of the family than one of submission and they were called *udugu yangu*, my brother, and the women *suria*, concubines of their owners or nannies. As they were often entrusted with manual labour, household slaves

¹⁴ Davies, *The Blood-Red Arab Flag. An Investigation into Qasimi Piracy 1797-1820*, p. 55.

¹⁵ Akinola, *Slavery and Slave Revolts in the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 215-228.

thus became *msimamizi*, guardians, *nokoa*, *kadamu*, first or second head slaves in the spice and coconut plantations on Zanzibar and along the coasts. Others had the task of leading caravans towards the interior. The slave of the *mashamba* hoed the fields, sieved copal and carried the merchandise to the ports. They could also be assigned a piece of land with which to support themselves, working there on Thursdays and Fridays, the two days of rest. They were also permitted, on payment of a tax, to get married.¹⁶

The demand for slaves came, primarily, from the various parts of the Arabian Peninsula, where the cultivation of date palms called for a continuous supply of labour, but also from western India, where they were employed in local oases and on sugarcane and tea plantations from Central Asia, where cotton was beginning to be grown, as well as from various regions of the Ottoman Empire and from the American continent. African slaves were also used as domestic help or in craftwork in rich families and at the Arab courts. The demand was especially high for young women and girls to serve in the home. Slaves destined for the courts were given special training in entertaining important guests with their singing and dancing.

Another speciality was that of the eunuchs, held in particular esteem especially in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ These were mutilated without any regard being shown for hygiene, a fact reflected in the survival rate for those transported from Africa of only one in ten. According to Islamic law, mutilation is forbidden inside the *dar al-Islam*, therefore, only slaves were mutilated, with some exemptions in Central Asia and in Persia. The eunuchs were highly priced, three times more than a slave, and reached high ranks within Islamic societies. The eunuchs were *harim* guardians, as well as guardians of everything sacred, like the Holy Places, such as Mecca. They retained great prestige and richness; black castrated slaves were powerful figures in the Ottoman Empire and eunuchs were highly respected within the whole of *dar al-Islam* being very close to Muslim sovereigns.¹⁸

Great Britain was the first nation to undertake an international campaign with humanitarian goals. There remained, however, a weighty and

¹⁶ Clarence-Smith, *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century: An Overview*; Martin, Ryan, *A Quantitative Assessment of the Arab Slave Trade of East Africa, 1770-1896*; Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa*; Alpers, *The East African Slave Trade*; Gray & Birmingham, *Pre-Colonial African Trade: Essays on Trade in Central and Eastern Africa before 1900*; Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Traders*.

¹⁷ Clarence-Smith, *Slavery and Islam*, pp. 22 onwards; Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*.

¹⁸ Vercellin, *Tra veli e turbanti. Rituali sociali e vita privata nei mondi dell'Islam*, pp. 186-191.

complex knot to unravel. How could they combat slavery and, at the same time, ally themselves with the most famous and powerful protectors of the slave traders, such as Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id who, in their turn, obtained their greatest profits precisely from this trade in human flesh?

It was around this crucial question that relations during the XIXth Century between the Omani Arab Sultan, the East India Company and Britain revolved, a problem which animated lively political debate also within the various forces in play.

The slave trade, therefore, represented a highly destabilising elements for British policy, not only on the political but also on a social and economic level. To this was added the imposing humanitarian pressure brought to bear by public opinion in Britain which forced the Government to take decisive action with the specific aim of putting an end to such trade.¹⁹

Connections between Seaboard Communities

During the XIXth Century, the growing effectiveness of British measures aimed at abolition caused a reduction in the availability of African slaves. This lack was, however, partly compensated for by Asiatic slaves, as shown by the commerce in Asian people from the coast of Baluchistan destined to be sold in the squares of Arabia during the first decades of the XXth Century.²⁰ And this was one of the alternative, and little studied, slave routes in the western Indian Ocean.

At this point it is useful to indicate another, important factor which played a part in the impressive economic-commercial growth of Zanzibar, as well as the labyrinth of suspicion, diffidence, envy, misunderstanding and open conflict between Britain and Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id of Oman. And here we come to that delicate and precious material which had been exported throughout the Orient since time immemorial: ivory.²¹

Since the II Century B.C., ivory had been exported from east Africa to the Mediterranean. From the VIIth Century A.D., India and China

¹⁹ See the extensive archival documentation contained in *Thomas Clarkson Papers e Liverpool Papers*, The British Library, London. McCaskie, *Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 665-689.

²⁰ H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office – Essential Records, Baluchistan Archives, *Complaint about existence of Slavery in Baluchistan, from Capt. P. Cox, Consul and Political Agent, Maskat to Lieut. Col. C. A. Kemball, Agg. Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 17th September, 1901*, Political, 5-2/57. Nicolini & Redaelli, *Quetta: history and Archives. Note of a Survey of the Archives of Quetta*, pp. 401-414.

²¹ Ylvisaker, *The Ivory Trade in the Lamu Area 1600-1870*.

emerged as the main markets for African ivory. Superior to Asian ivory in quality, consistency and colour, African ivory had followed the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean until the end of the XVIIIth Century, departing from Mozambique. New fiscal burdens and taxes, however, imposed by the Portuguese at the start of the XIXth Century and termed 'suicidal' by Sheriff,²² together with the mercantile ascendancy of France and Great Britain in the Indian Ocean, caused a shift in the ivory trade. The ports of Mozambique having been progressively abandoned, the dealing and sale of this precious material would henceforth be conducted on the island of Zanzibar.

Starting from the second decade of the XIXth Century, Europe entered the ivory market with its considerable demands. The splendid, shining African ivory, pure white and strong but at the same time easily worked, was increasingly sought after in the west for luxury items such as elegant elements of personal toilette, billiard balls, piano keys, elaborate jewels, fans, cutlery and clothing accessories. In that particular atmosphere of a *fin de siècle* Europe increasingly fascinated by all things Chinese or exotic, ivory was a must. This is made crystal clear by the fact that British imports of ivory rose from 280 tons in 1840 to 800 in 1875.

The economy of the East African interior thus witnessed an immense growth in the demand for *pagazi*, free men recruited from among the African tribes allied between each other (mainly Yao and Nyamwezi), and for slave porters.²³ Women with small children were obliged by 'Arab' slave traders and Baluch soldiers and bodyguards to abandon their offspring in order to continue transporting elephant tusks.

A complex exchange network soon developed between the interior and the coast, leading to the introduction of rice cultivation in the interior in those areas under Arab dominion such as Tabora, Nyangwe, in modern-day northern Congo, and in nearby Kasongo.

Later, thanks to the entrepreneurial ability of Tippu Tip, the greatest and most powerful slave trader of the XIXth Century,²⁴ the borders of what had been identified by the English as the Ottoman Empire,

²² Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873*, p. 81.

²³ Rockel, "A Nation of Porters: the Nyamwezi and the Labour Market in Nineteenth-Century Tanzania", pp. 173-195.

²⁴ At the end of the XIXth Century, Hamed bin Muhammad Al Murjebi, nicknamed Tippu Tip, owned 7 *mashamba* and 10,000 slaves in Africa, a capital worth approximately 50,000 Maria Theresa thalers in total. Farrant, *Tippu Tip and the East African Slave Trade*. Tippu Tip's family has not died out, the last descendant of this great XIXth Century slave and ivory trader was a doctor in Muscat, Oman in 1993.

pushed further to the north-west into modern-day Rwanda and Burundi. At that time, “their movement was like a snowball”.²⁵

Another wealthy protagonist in this chapter of Zanzibar’s history, Jairam Sewji, also profited greatly from this opening up to western markets. A member of the Topan family, who was the richest and most influential merchant in Zanzibar, personally financed almost all of the caravan traffic, accepting responsibility for all the risks and eventual losses this entailed. Throughout the first half of the XIX Century, Jairam Topan represented the financial and political kingpin of all activity occurring on Zanzibar (around the year 1840, for example, he had four hundred slaves in his personal service). As such, it was with him that Europeans and Arabs had to deal. A somewhat singular political-financial phenomenon thus came into being, in the figure of Jairam Topan who concentrated Arab, Asian and European interests in his own hands, conducting as though with a baton the ancient, admirable and sophisticated system of commercial currents, connections and links of the western Indian Ocean.²⁶

A further factor, and no less important than ivory, was the extraordinary and revolutionary expansion of clove cultivation on the island of Zanzibar. The creation of a new niche for agricultural exploitation on Zanzibar and Pemba was destined to transform the twin islands into a true commercial empire. According to English publications of the time, at the end of the eighteenth Century the introduction of cloves (*Eugenia caryophyllata*, of the *Myrtaceae*, Myrtle family) altered completely the perceptions of the economic and commercial potential not, take note, in the eyes of the Europeans but in those of Saiyid Sa’id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa’id and his Indian *protégés*.

Since the II Century B.C. envoys from Java at the Han court of China had sucked cloves to sweeten their heavy garlic breath during audiences with the emperor. Clove plants, originating in the Moluccas, were first exploited by the Dutch who grasped the commercial value of this precious, perfumed spice which also possessed medicinal properties. Around the year 1770, the French merchant, Pierre Poivre, succeeded in obtaining a few seeds with which to start a cultivation on the Mascarene Islands. It was, therefore, the French who, at the start of the XIXth Century, introduced cloves onto the island of Zanzibar.

²⁵ Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*, p. 60.

²⁶ Nicolini, *A Glimpse to Indian Merchant Communities in Zanzibar during 1800: the Topan Family through British Archival Sources*, paper presented to the International Conference TADIA/UNESCO, The African Diaspora in Asia, Goa, January, 2006.

These initial attempts proved successful, the environment being perfectly suited to this cultivation which eventually led to Zanzibar being the primary producer of cloves in the world. From available English accounts, it appears that Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id decided to invest his wealth and energy in a project of this kind. Such a move required both courage and faith, as the plants take from seven to eight years to reach maturity and produce the first blooms, and ten years for the first crop. As budding does not occur at regular periods and the buds themselves must be removed before flowering, harvesting occurs in three phases, between August and December. This requires numerous and skilled labour, especially as the plantations also need to be weeded in continuation.²⁷

We must also bear in mind the fact that the cultivation of cloves was very similar to that of dates practised in Arabia and understood to perfection by the Arabs, who proceeded to acquire land on Zanzibar, mainly by expropriation to the coast of the Swahili. The management of land on Zanzibar was organised in three different categories: *wanda*, natural scrubland; *kiambo*, areas suitable for building upon; *msitu*, rural areas and lands surrounding villages. The legalised expropriation practised by the Arabs and a somewhat questionable interpretation of the juridical institution of usufruct often led to Swahili lands effectively being confiscated.

The *mashamba* of the Sultan of Zanzibar, initially concentrated around Mntoni and Kizimbani, gradually grew to include Bumwini, Bububu and Chiwini. In 1835, Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id possessed as many as forty-five *mashamba* on the island.

Clove 'fever', with its high profit on initial expenditure, produced a real 'Arab' landowning aristocracy, continually financed by the Indian mercantile communities, that slowly replaced the old Swahili aristocracy. This did not, however, cause any kind of rupture, thanks to the dexterity of the Indian exponents who gradually involved the local African elite by delegating to them certain tasks and responsibilities, thus making them active participants in this major Indian Ocean business.

On the coasts of the continent, on the contrary, society experienced significant changes due to the massive influx of slaves from the interior and of Arabs and Asians from abroad (Tabora – a key site on the commercial route towards the heart of the continent – practically became an 'Arab' town with a considerable Baluch presence). Thus, profound differences developed between the cultural identities of the islands, on

²⁷ The cultivation of cloves on Pemba was less successful than on Zanzibar due to a cyclone which destroyed most of the plants in the first decades of the XIXth Century. Bennett, *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar*, pp. 28-29.

the one hand, and the continent on the other, where, from the third decade of the XIXth Century onwards, the opening up of caravan routes wrought a true revolution in economic, military, social and cultural terms.

This agricultural turning-point rapidly undermined the traditional order, and the plantations and slaves needed to cultivate them led to the phenomenon known as 'clove fever'.

Naturally, hand in hand with the growth of the plantations went an ever-increasing demand for slaves. In 1811, of the 15,000 slaves that arrived on Zanzibar, 7,000 were destined for labour on the *mashamba*.²⁸ By 1822 the plants had grown to a height of roughly four and a half metres.

This 'clove fever', therefore, pushed the annual number of new slaves up from 6,000 at the start of the Century to 20,000 in the second half, and it was the clove plantations which would prove vital to Zanzibar's economic growth. Profits, in fact, rose phenomenally from 4,600 Maria Theresa thalers in 1834 to 25,000 in 1840.²⁹ For Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id, it was a triumph.

Britain viewed the cultivation and exportation of tropical agricultural produce with an extremely favourable eye insofar as this could represent for oriental leaders a valid economic alternative to the slave trade. The increasing number of clove plantations on Zanzibar, however, also necessitated a notable increase in the labour force. High mortality rates on the *mashamba* meant that almost the entire workforce had to be replaced every four years which, as we have seen, created enormous problems and far-reaching changes within East African society. The confiscation of the more fertile Swahili lands, the overwhelming influx of slaves and limited numbers of the Hadimu and Tumbatu tribes present on the island resulted in these latter being relegated to the very margins of society. In addition, the arrival of Arabs, Indians and Baluch drawn by this new and profitable market further exacerbated the situation in the eyes of the English (in 1819 there were 214 Indians resident on the island).

²⁸ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: Roots of British Domination*, p. 128.

²⁹ Clara Semple, The Society for Arabian Studies, London, affirmed that, since 1763, testimonies of German Crowns minted in Austria came from Yemen and, even earlier, from Jedda; many coins were sent on from Arabia to India during the XIXth Century. The silver content of the thalers was kept constant at 833.3/1000, therefore it was considered very reliable, unlike the Spanish dollar which was debased, although it had a higher silver content. Also the Maria Theresa thaler could not be 'clipped' because it had an elaborate edge inscription and this made it very popular – spreading throughout the western Indian Ocean even reaching Central Asian bazaars – and people soon began to trust it. Semple, *Silver Legend, The Story of the Maria Theresa Thaler*.

Maritime city-state of the Swahili coast had always been sustained by intimate interaction with the non-Muslims of their rural hinterlands, and this contributed also to the consolidation of the coastal identity.³⁰

During the first half of the XIXth Century the demand for ivory came mostly from western India. The Omani Arabs exploited the old slave trade routes to the interior bringing new people to the coast of East Africa with Elephant tusks. The Mrima was the major source of ivory's export for Zanzibar economy. The imports of cloths from India were given by the 'Arabs' as presents to main African chiefs of the interior and this represented a clear sign of prestige and superiority within their tribes, although agriculture remained for long periods the primary source of the Swahili coast, long before the booming introduction of commerce. Salted and smoked fish became an important item of trade: Zanzibar and Pemba islands soon developed the production of fish to provide the porters to the interior and for the very profitable exchange with ivory. Also copal resin's demand grew during this period and was produced in Bagamoyo area and bought by the Indian traders, as well as mangrove poles for vessels to be taken to Arabia and to the Gulf.

There were three major sets of slave and ivory trade routes to the interior often safeguarded by Baluch corps: 1) the 'southern' route from southern ports such as Kilwa to Lake Nyasa and the highlands of the south western interior where the Nyamwezi carried tusks and other goods; 2) the 'central' ivory route from Bagamoyo in west and northwest directions, where the caravan trade became progressively monopolised by the Omani Arabs and by the Indian merchants; 3) the 'northern' route, the Masai route from Mombasa and Malindi towards Kilimanjaro where the Mijikenda were ivory hunters together with the Kamba. The Saadani caravan route did not develop an Arab merchant community, while the Pangani route led to the foundation of Ujiji around 1840 and passed through the Bondei hills and along the foot of Usambara and Pare mountains, well watered and preferred by travellers from other towns of the northern Mrima; large quantities of ivory, *pembe*, of soft and high quality, came from Pare and the Rift valley, and this route became the second in importance after Bagamoyo. The Taveta trading station never became dominated by coastal Muslims, as it was too dangerous.

The Nyamwezi caravan labour was cheaper than slave porters, and was seen as a way to proving manhood as initiation for young men. Caravans arrived usually in September and porters announced their approach by blowing horns and beating drums.

³⁰ Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, pp. 33 on.

Mercenary Groups and Power Politics in the Western Indian Ocean

Another important item destined to change deeply the hinterland power balances was represented by firearms: during the first half of the XIXth Century matchlocks began to appear in the hands of Omani mercenary troops, who, imported them from the Ottoman Empire and from Europe.³¹ The Shirazi, the Swahili important families, gradually 'lost' their power and were pulled apart by the Al Bu Sa'id within the growing trade of Zanzibar, although they retained control of the northern caravan trade but the great wealth soon passed into 'Arabs' and 'Indian' hands. As the central route was the most controlled by Arabs, Tabora, near the heart of Unyamwezi, as we have seen above, became an 'Arab' town together with Ujiji. Here Baluch soldiers settled, intermarried, and soon became influencing figures. The impact of the Al Bu Sa'id political power and of the Baluch military power in Zanzibar on the African hinterland was therefore destined to influencing the lives of East African men and women; considerable modifications underwent in traditional elite patterns of power relationships where client-patronage perspectives never were to be the same, and where new actors were destined to emerging on the new western Indian Ocean scenario in its connections with the East African hinterland. In this regard, the ivory trade became a means of travel, adventure and wealth offering a way to modifying the status within the coastal communities. Everybody could share this ambition, but at the same time new tensions were introduced between Swahili rich families, struggling to preserve their precarious domination, and the demand of the 'parvenus' on whose support they relied.³²

Although Great Britain in 1815, represented by Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822) had convinced the European powers to sign the agreement for abolition of the slave trade, the Arabs felt themselves in no way bound to respect its terms, and least of all Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id.

While Britain continued on its anti-slavery crusade, motivated by the more pragmatic purpose of weakening the growing mercantile fortune of the Omani Arabs and other oriental leaders – without foreseeing the enormous wealth that would result from the agricultural conversion introduced by Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id on Zanzibar – France,

³¹ Nicolini, *The Traffic of Arms and Ammunitions in the Gulf and in the Western Indian Ocean between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century*, paper presented to the International Conference 'The Global Gulf', Exeter University, Exeter, July 2006.

³² Glassman, *Feasts and Riots*, p. 78.

showing fewer scruples, took advantage of the situation to recapture some of its positions.

To the English, Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id never allowed a chance to slip by to indulge in double-crossing. On the one hand he reassured the English, and on the other he courted the French with a view to them possibly supporting him against enemy Arab tribes on the islands of Mafia and Kilwa and in Mombasa.

The combination of these ideal conditions for the slave trade, furnished by the 'Arabs' in East Africa, was exploited to the full by French merchants. Under the Treaty of Paris in 1815, French had regained sovereignty over the island of Bourbon.³³ The French explorer, Guillain, commented that: "*rappports intimes qui continuaient d'exister entre l'Arabie et la côte orientale d'Afrique, où nous avons le commerce des esclaves avait lieu de temp immémorial*".³⁴

A synergy thus developed between Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id and France of common interest in finding new ports and commercial bases. However, after taking the potential purchase of Zanzibar and Pemba into consideration, Paris instead turned its attention towards Madagascar.³⁵ Given the by now unrivalled supremacy of the Royal Navy, backed also by the Bombay Marine in the western stretches of the Indian Ocean, and the defeats inflicted on the pirates of the Gulf, France did not really have any other choice.³⁶

In 1817, Lord Hastings (1754-1826), the Governor General of Bengal from 1813 to 1823, proposed strengthening Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id and supporting his power policy in East Africa.

The choice made by the Anglo-Indian Government was without doubt influenced by the difficulties caused in that period by the continual raids

³³ The Treaty of Paris, 20 November 1815, provided for the restitution of the island of Bourbon. Complete text in De Martens, *Nouveau Recueil de Traités de l'Europe, Traité de Paix du 20 Nov. 1815 avec les Conventions Spéciales*, pp. 682 onwards.

³⁴ Guillain, *Documents sur l'Histoire, La Géographie et le Commerce de l'Afrique Orientale*, p. 162.

³⁵ Mosca, *Il più bell'enigma del mondo: il popolamento dell'isola del Madagascar. Alcune riflessioni in merito*.

³⁶ On 23 March 1819 the Government of Bourbon stipulated a secret Treaty with the Sultan of Kilwa, under the terms of which French would provide military support to the Sultan in exchange for support in retaking Pemba, Zanzibar and the island of Mafia from Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id for which the French would recognise the authority of the Sultan of Kilwa over the island of Pemba. This treaty was to remain only in French hands to prevent the Sultan from showing it to the English, but it never, in fact, came into effect. The *Ministère de la Maison du Roi* feared British naval superiority and, as a result of further political complications in Europe, the French decided not to place their relations with the increasingly important Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id at stake.

of pirates in 'oriental' waters, by the commercial and political instability afflicting the entire region and, lastly, by the presence of the French who continued to represent a threat to Great Britain.

From a study of English documents it can clearly be seen how the fickleness and political digressions of Saiyid Sa'id bin Sultan Al Bu Sa'id were a constant cause for alarm among the British. They were perceived as constituting yet another element of insecurity in a region which was by this time the object of great interest and importance. Since a determined line had to be adopted, Hastings' decision represented a firm stance in favour of Al Bu Sa'id Sultan as a political point of reference for Britain, also in relation to those regions of East Africa in which the Omani Arab dynasty exercised an indirect form of control.

Throughout the XIXth Century the shame and humiliation of slavery in sub-Saharan East Africa had been imposed and exploited by numerous social groups for many lucrative purposes mainly originated from southern Arabia and western India. Amongst the many, the role played by the Baluch mercenaries coming from the southern coast of South-Central Asia, was identified initially within the Omani Arab elite. The Makrani-Baluch came to East Africa as soldiers, warriors, and body guards of the Arab leading dynasties. Later on during the XIXth Century, we presume, the Baluch, called *bulushi* in Kiswahili, took gradually knowledge of lands and people, intermarried with African women, and became traders themselves. The presence of Asians in East Africa, often identified by the available literature on the subject primarily with Indians, was therefore much more fragmented and diversified, due to the exercise of power within Arab societies of the time, and to the richness of the western shores of the Indian Ocean.

On the other side of the coasts of the western Indian Ocean, that is on South-Central Asian shores, slavery was practiced with similar patterns.

During the second half of the XIXth Century, more precisely in 1874, a group belonging to the tribe of the Rind from eastern Baluchistan bought domestic slaves at Gwadar;³⁷ they came from the coasts of East Africa. This gave rise to a conflict of interests between the Rind and the representative (*Na'ib*) of the *Khan* of Kalat in *Kej* (today's Turbat, capital of Makran); a conflict which ended in bloodshed and saw the death of four members of the "blue-blooded tribe" of Baluchistan. Sir Robert G. Sandeman (1835-1892), the Deputy-Commissioner of Dera Ghazi Khan, affirmed that the death of four members of the Rind tribe had nothing to do with the slave trade at Gwadar. Sandeman, as described

³⁷ H.S.A. – B.A. A.G.G. OFFICE Records, File 292/1874 Misc., *Slavery in Baluchistan. The Gazetteer of Baluchistan (Makran)*, Quetta, 1906 (repr. 1986), pp. 98-101.

by biographers of the time was very charismatic and ambitious, understood the psychology of intertribal relations much better than his Political Agents, his representatives, as, in his opinion, they were not able to identify the real causes of tribe conflicts between the members of the Baluchistan groups.³⁸ In this regard he reminded: “*domestic slavery is a time-honoured institution in Baluchistan as in other eastern countries, and much of the land is cultivated by slave labour . . . at the same time it must be remembered that many of the ideas attaching to the word “slavery”, which are so repellent to civilized minds, are absent from the manners of the Baluch tribes*”.³⁹ This affirmation by Sandeman could be interpreted in different ways: for example as eurocentrist and full of contempt for local populations. Nevertheless, the following elements suggested different interpretations of the “justification” of slavery in Asia within a wider scenario: the strategic importance of Baluchistan within Anglo-Russian rivalry; the second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80); the recent construction of the telegraph line which connected Calcutta to London (*Indo-European Telegraph Line*) after the political consequences of the Great Mutiny in India of 1857; the growing importance of the North West Frontier of British India; the need for definition of the borders between Persia and the Khanate of Kalat which begun with the Commission directed by Sir Frederic Goldsmid in 1870 and ended with the sign of an Agreement in Teheran on 24 September in 1872.⁴⁰

In 1877 Sandeman became the Agent to the Governor General and Chief Commissioner of Baluchistan. During the first years of the XXth Century, the British measures adopted against the slave trade contributed to diminishing the number of slaves from East Africa; to this reduction corresponded a new slave trade of Baluch origin, as testified by the trade in Asians coming from the coast of Baluchistan directed to Arabia to be sold in Arab markets during the first decades of the XXth Century.⁴¹ As clear proof, on 20 May 1903 the responsible Agent of Jask area sent a telegram to the Director of the Persian Gulf section in Karachi saying that: “*a great number of them are brought to these places from the Kej district . . .*

³⁸ Piacentini & Redaelli (Eds.), *Baluchistan: Terra Incognita. A new methodological approach combining archaeological, historical, anthropological and architectural studies*.

³⁹ H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office – Essential Records, *From the A.G.G. to the Secretary to the Government of India*, Foreign Department, Quetta, 25 March, 1884, Report n. 942; Selections from the Records of the Government of India. Foreign Department, No. CCXI, First Administration Report of the Baluchistan Agency, Calcutta, 1886, p. 290.

⁴⁰ Piacentini, *Notes on the Definition of the Western Borders of British India in Sistan and Baluchistan in the 19th Century*, pp. 189-203.

⁴¹ H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office – Essential Records, *Complaint about existence of Slavery in Baluchistan, from Capt. P. Cox, Consul and Political Agent, Maskat to Lieut. Col. C. A. Kemball, Agg. Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 17th September, 1901*, Political 5-2/57.

not only Africans but low caste Baluchis are now being sold by petty headmen".⁴² The poorest among the Baluch were sold as slaves, and the cause was the following: "the reason there is such a demand for slaves from these parts, is that the trade from the African Coast has been effectually stopped, and Baluchistan is the only place now open to them".⁴³ The Baluch were collected within the district of *Kej* and sent as slaves also in Persian territory.⁴⁴ Baluch slave women had their heads totally razed, then covered with quicklime, so that their hair could not grow, rendering them perfectly unrecognizable to their own tribes, and forbidding them coming back to their places of origin.

Conclusion

To conclude, the role of Baluch mercenary groups within the slave trade in sub-Saharan East Africa was represented by a specific ethnic group who was enslaved in South-Central Asia by other groups in a much more powerful position; and this was a continuous process of shame and humiliation of weak and desperate people in this maritime part of the world, and a process of different perceptions held by various powers between the land and the seaboard areas.

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Abbreviations

A.G.G. : Agent to the Governor-General
 B.A. : Baluchistan Archives, Quetta, Pakistan
 C.O.Q.D.A. : Commissioner of Quetta Archives, Pakistan
 H.S.A. : Home Secretariat Archives, Quetta, Pakistan
 H.S.A. – B.A. A.G.G. OFFICE Records, File 292/1874 Misc., *Slavery in Baluchistan. The Gazetteer of Baluchistan (Makran)*, Quetta, 1906 (repr. 1986), pp. 98-101.
 H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office – Essential Records, Baluchistan Archives, *Complaint about existence of Slavery in Baluchistan, from Capt. P. Cox, Consul and*

⁴² H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office Confidential, 1903-1905, File 23, n. 1510, *Traffic in Slaves from Kej to Persia, from the Ass. Superintendent Jask Sub-Division to the Director, Persian Gulf Section, Karachi, Telegram dated 20th May, 1903.*

⁴³ H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office Confidential, 1903-1905, File 23, n. 1510, *Traffic in Slaves from Kej to Persia, from the Ass. Superintendent Jask Sub-Division to the Director, Persian Gulf Section, Karachi, Extract of a Letter n. 11 dated 28th March, 1904.*

⁴⁴ H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office Confidential, 1903-1905, *Traffic in Slaves from Kej to Persia, from Russell, Under Sec. to the Gov. of India to the A.G.G. Quetta, 1903*, File 23, n. 1510.

Political Agent, Maskat to Lieut. Col. C. A. Kemball, Agg. Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 17th September, 1901, Political, 5-2/57.

H.S.A. – A.G.G. Office – Essential Records, *From the A.G.G. to the Secretary to the Government of India*, Foreign Department, Quetta, 25 March, 1884, Report n. 942; Selections from the Records of the Government of India. Foreign Department, No. CCXI, First Administration Report of the Baluchistan Agency, Calcutta, 1886, p. 290.

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