

British Travel-Writing on Oman: Orientalism Reappraised

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Introduction

Throughout history Oman enjoyed a particular significance among its neighbours of the Arabian Peninsula. One of the factors that played a vital role is its geographical situation. Oman used to occupy most of the eastern part of Arabia extending from Hadramut to Qatar. Flanked by the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, Oman was known as a 'seafaring nation'. Between Mesopotamia, the coasts of India and the east of Africa, Oman has played a principle role in the maritime world for more than five thousand years. Taking benefit of their place, the natives of Oman were great transporters of Indian goods to the West, effectively controlling trade and excluding all others from the Indian Ocean, navigating their ships between India and the Euphrates. This trade was unknown before the civilization of Babylon and Egypt had begun, because the objects imported to them were those of luxury, acceptable to a sophisticated people. Oman, as a chief emporium of goods between the East and the West, was visited often by Phoenicians and other merchants, who loaded their caravans with goods brought by the Omani vessels.¹ Oman is also characterized by its geographical diversity. Its long and beautiful littoral, the green mountains of Dhofar, the barren plateaus of the Interior, and the huge sands of the Ruba al-Khali – all formed one of the most diverse geographical regions in the Arabian Peninsula.

In addition to its strategic geographical location, historical features were another factor in the importance of Oman. Recent archaeological discoveries have clearly shown that the oldest settlements in Oman go back to the 3rd millennium BC. Shell middens clustered in the west coast of Ras al-Hamra, numerous stone tombs of the Wadi al-

1 See Samuel B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf* (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1994), pp.11–13. For Oman's importance as a maritime power in the past, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see: Ministry of Information and Culture, *Oman, a Seafaring Nation* (Muscat, 1979).

Jizi, towers and pottery of Bat, reed boats and the Harappan painted jar discovered in Ras al-Jinz have demonstrated the prehistory of Oman.² Archaeological studies also suggest that Oman in that era was known as Magan, an empire flourished along the Batinah coast, exploiting the rich veins of copper found in the mountains around Sohar. Its boats used to anchor at Dilmun, the ancient name of Bahrain, and at Mesopotamia carrying copper which the Sumerians and later the Babylonians needed to adorn their temples. ‘Magan boats’ also used to sail to the Indus Valley laden with other valuable goods: jewellery, copper tools, sesame oil, woven fabric, wood, and bronze statues.³

The third factor is the political aspect. From the dawn of Islam until the present, Oman has been an independent political entity. In the eighth century, after the death of Uthman bin Affan, the fourth Caliph of Islam, Oman witnessed a major event in its history, namely the importation from Basra of a particular understanding of Islam called Ibadism. The Ibadies rejected the prevailing ideas that the leadership should be restricted to the clan of the Prophet. Instead, they believed that the head of the community should be the person best suited to this duty by virtue of his religious knowledge and military skill, regardless of his tribe or race. Accepting and defending Ibadism, Oman maintained its independence from all the powers of Caliphs in Baghdad;

- 2 For more details about these archaeological discoveries, see: Silvio Durante and Maurizio Tosi, ‘The Aceramic Shell Middens of Ra’s al-Hamra: a Preliminary Note’, *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 3, part. 2 (1977), 137–162, Karen Frifelt, ‘Further Evidence of the Third Millennium BC Town at Bat in Oman’, *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 7 (1985), 89–104, Serge Cleuziou and Maurizio Tosi, ‘Ra’s al-Jinz and the Prehistoric Coastal Cultures of the Ja’alan’, *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 11 (2000), 19–73, and Tome Vosmer, ‘Model of a Third Millennium BC Reed Boat Based on Evidence from Ra’s al-Jinz’, *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 11 (2000), 149–152.
- 3 On the era of Magan, see: John Hansman, ‘A ‘Periplus’ of Magan and Meluhha’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 36, no. 3 (1973), 554–587, Thierry Berthoud and Serge Cleuziou, ‘Framing Communities of the Oman Peninsula and the Copper of Makkan’, *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 6, part. 2 (1983), 239–246, Gerd Weisgerber, ‘Copper Production during the Third Millennium BC in Oman and the Question of Makkan’, *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 6, part. 2 (1983), 269–276, and Daniel T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), I, pp.93–150.

they tried to impose their authority several times, but always in vain.⁴ During the nineteenth century, Oman culminated its power and was in control of an extensive empire. This empire included Oman, parts of Persia, parts of Asia, the Eastern coast of Africa and some islands in the Red Sea.⁵

We are told by Samuel Miles that the first European to set foot on Oman was Nearchus, the admiral of Alexander the Great, in 326 BC. When passing along the north coast of Oman, Nearchus discovered 'Cape Maceta', or the Cape of Musandum, and heard from the pilot of a 'great Omani emporium', which probably was Sohar. The information that Nearchus collected about this area led Alexander to order him to circumnavigate Arabia, but this dream went down with the death of Alexander in Babylon.⁶ The next European traveller who visited Oman was Marco Polo, the famous Italian traveller, in 1272. He described the most permanent cities of the country at that time: Hormuz, Dhufar and Qalhat. He found Hormuz 'very beautiful' and 'eminently commercial'. Dhufar had a 'good port' whose most important exports were Arabian horses and frankincense, and Qalhat was distinguished by its harbour, which was a stopping port for many trading ships from India. Marco Polo does not provide us with information about the people of Oman or their manners and customs. The few pages he devotes to the country are mainly concerned with its trade and climate.⁷ Between Marco Polo and until the Portuguese

4 For the history of Ibadiism and its role in shaping the history of Oman, see John C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

5 Xavier Billecocq, *Oman: Twenty-Five Centuries of Travel Writing* (Relations Internationales, 1994), p.17.

6 Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, p.8. After Alexander's death, Nearchus wrote a book on his expeditions, known as *The Periplus of the Erythraean*. This work was lost, but the Greek author Arrian of Nicomedia quoted passages from it in his book *Indica*. The account of Nearchus' adventures is told by an Englishman, Dr. William Vincent, in his work *The Voyage of Nearchus from the Indus to the Euphrates* (London: [no.pub], 1797). 'Book IV' of this work is related to the 'Gulph of Persia' and includes Nearchus's voyage along the Omani coast.

7 See *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. by William Marsden (London: J. M. Dent, 1946), pp.63–69 and pp.404–407.

occupation of Oman in the sixteenth century, little new was learned about the country in Europe. In 1507, Afonso Dalboquerque, known as the Portuguese Mars, led his fleet to conquer the Omani shores, capturing the strategic cities of Hormuz, Qalhat, and Muscat. In his *Commentaries*, he told the West about the wealth of Hormuz, asserting that 'the world is a ring, and the jewel in it is Ormuz'. He found Muscat, before he destroyed it, a 'very elegant town, with fine houses'.⁸ Although his biography is more concerned with the Portuguese military expeditions and conquests of Africa, India, Oman, and the 'Persian Gulf', he shed significant light on the geography and commerce of the coastal area of Oman in the sixteenth century.⁹ The Portuguese remained in Oman for a hundred and fifty years, until they were expelled by the Omanis in 1650.¹⁰ The fall of their dominance led other European powers, notably the British, Dutch and French, to extend their interests in the area, so that European knowledge of Oman became gradually more and more. However, the British liaison with Oman, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as we shall see later, was closer than any other European country. The development of Omani-British relations led to an increasing number of British travellers who visited Oman and wrote about its people, geography, history and culture.

The ultimate goal of this study is to explore the images of Oman developed within British travel writing from 1800 to 1970. In British travellers' representations, I locate Oman as a place, a people and a culture. Precisely, I am interested in looking at their attitudes, both positive and negative, to every aspect of life in Oman. I also hope to

8 See *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque*, trans. by Walter De Gray Birch, 4 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1884), I, p.80, and IV, p.186.

9 For the importance of the Portuguese archives and sources to the Omani history, see C. F. Beckingham, 'Some Notes on the Portuguese in Oman', *The Journal of Oman Studies*, 6, part 1 (1983), 13–19.

10 It must be mentioned here that the Portuguese' occupation of Oman was limited to the littoral area only; the Interior remained free of their dominance. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the *Commentaries* are devoid of information about the natives of Inner Oman. For the history of the Portuguese in Oman, see Ahmed Hamoud al-Maamiry, *Omani-Portuguese History* (New Delhi: Lancers, 1982).

contribute to the literary criticism of Western travel literature on the Middle East with a new perspective. Unlike Edward Said and his advocates, who homogenise Western discourse on the Middle East, in my project I propose that British travel writing on Oman is much more heterogeneous, ambiguous and discontinuous. My thesis argues that British travel writing on Oman is neither homogenously biased nor impartial, but implies a mixture of diverse attitudes, depending on many factors such as the travellers' background, motive of visit, length of stay, time of visit, and kind of people encountered.

The scholarship of Western travel literature on the Middle East is polarized by two trends, the historical and the theoretical. The former is almost a documentary approach, in which the lion's share of the work involves summarising the traveller's life, the time of the journey, the names of the places travelled through, the peoples met, and the course of the journey.¹¹ The latter is concerned with textual analysis of discourse. Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), travel literature has been used in different epistemological realms to deconstruct Western discourse and unveil the methods the Europeans have used to see and picture 'other' races in the East. Said, and many of his followers, consider Western travel writing on the Middle East as a not 'historically innocent' source, and, thus, they criticise Western travellers as being 'imperialists' and 'racists'.¹² Since the 1980s and with the ad-

11 Noteworthy examples of this approach are: David George Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia: A Record of the Development of Western Knowledge Concerning the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1904); Reginald Hugh Kiernan, *The Unveiling of Arabia: The Story of Arabian Travel and Discovery*, (London: Harrap, 1937); Robin Fedden, *English Travellers in the Near East* (London: Longmans, 1958); Zahra Freeth and H. V. F Winstone, *Explorers of Arabia: From Renaissance to Victorian Era* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978); Peter Brent, *Far Arabia: Explorers of Myth*, (London: Quartett Books, 1979); Robin Bidwell, *Travellers in Arabia* (Reading: Grant Publishing, 1994); Andrew Taylor, *Travelling the Sands: Sagas of Exploration in the Arabian Peninsula* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 1997).

12 In Chapter one, I offer an extensive discussion of the Orientalist debate. I would mention, here, that Said's influence upon students of travel writing on the Middle East is increasingly manifest. Several theses and dissertations written in British, American, and Canadian universities after *Orientalism's* publication have taken up Said's approach. For example, consider these works: Wissal Issa,

vent of postcolonial theory in the 1990s, this trend has culminated in a situation in which criticism of travel writing has become obsessed by absolute binaries such as 'West' and 'East', 'European' and 'Other', 'colonizer' and 'colonized', 'us' and 'them', etc.

I employ in my thesis an amalgam of three approaches; documentary, descriptive, and analytical. Because most of the texts under discussion have not been studied in any context, I find it necessary to devote space to the traveller's background, bibliographical notes of his works, and a résumé of his journeys in Oman. Also, the reader will see that I devote much space to several quotations from British travelogues. This descriptive approach is needed for tracing, as much as possible, British representations of Oman throughout the period determined in this study, while the analytical approach is employed for challenging Said's project.

In order to follow changes in travellers' attitudes and images from a generation to another, I treat their texts chronologically. Moreover, I situate the travellers' attitudes within their historical context because I argue that considering the time when the texts were produced is a crucial element for understanding them. Within this methodology, I accept, for example, various British travellers' criticisms of the 'backwardness' of Oman during the reign of Said bin Taymur from 1932 to 1970, because this regime did its utmost to isolate Oman from the outside world, preventing Omani people from exposure to many basics of life. However, I reject their sweeping generalizations that all the inhabitants of Sahil Oman were 'pirates' during the last decades of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth

'Aspects of Orientalism: Four English Writers – Burton, Blunt, Flecker and T. E. Lawrence' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Reading University, 1986); Naimi, M. N, 'T. E. Lawrence and the Orientalist Tradition' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Essex, 1991); Donald Paul Nurse, 'An Amateur Barbarian: The Life and Career of Sir Richard Francis Burton, 1821–1890' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 1999); Abdul Mawjoud Rageh Dardary, 'Cultural Alterity, Euro-centrism, and Islamism: Travel Literature and the Construction of Misr/Egypt' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2000); Melissa Lee Miller, 'The Imperial Feminine: Victorian Women Travelers in Late Nineteenth-Century Egypt' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, 2000).

century, while they give a cold shoulder to those European privateers and corsairs who infested the Indian Ocean at that time, as we shall see later in chapter two.

This study opens by reviewing literary criticism of Western travel writing on the Middle East. Chapter one aims to achieve two main things: first, to present several images of the East and its peoples as perceived within Western travel writings from different points of view. This requires reviewing the most relevant studies that have been concerned with representations of the East and, particularly, the Middle East in the narratives of Western travellers. This will enable the present study to compare some representations of Oman in British travel writing with such images of other areas in the Middle East. Second, and most significantly, this chapter aims to discuss the Orientalist debate over Western travel literature about the Middle East, in order to defend the chosen perspective of the present study. To reach these two objectives, I will divide the relevant studies of the subject into three categories. The first category is represented by Edward Said and his advocates such as Rana Kabbani and Mohammed AL-Taha (Said and Saidians) in works such as: *Orientalism* (1978), *Imperial Fictions* (1986) and *The Orient and Three Victorian Travellers* (1989). The second category is represented by those who took up the challenge of Said's perspective (Anti-Saidians). I have chosen for this trend two works: Syrine Chafic Hout's *Viewing Europe from the out Side* (1994) and Kathryn Ann Sampson's *The Romantic Literary Pilgrimage to the Orient* (1999). The third category is represented by those who embraced a middle way between Said and his opponents (Middle-of-the-road). The chosen works of this group are: Mohamed Javadi's *Iran Under Western Eyes* (1984), Van de Bilt's *Proximity And Distance* (1985), and John Spencer Dixon's *Representations of the East in English and French Travel Writing 1798–1882* (1991). These studies will be reviewed chronologically in each category, and then each category will be followed by a discussion of its perspectives.¹³

13 The criteria for choosing these studies are twofold. Firstly, they are concerned, at different levels, with European travel writing, fictitious and real, on the Middle East. The concept of Orientalism has been applied to poetry, fine art, history

Chapter two seeks, firstly, to outline the initial contact between Oman and Britain throughout history in order to locate British travel writing about Oman within its historical context, and, secondly, to survey and discuss the images of Oman that are conveyed through the writings of British travellers who went to the area for a short time and wrote accounts, which are scattered in several journals and books. The main point in common between these travellers is that their writings do not offer a comprehensive view of Oman and its culture because they did not go beyond the coastal area, and their observations were, therefore, confined to the borders and their inhabitants.

Chapter three is devoted to travellers who explored the Interior¹⁴ of Oman, such as James Raymond Wellsted who travelled from 1835 to 1837, Samuel Barrett Miles from 1874 to 1885, and Bertram Sidney Thomas from 1924 to 1931. Unlike the first group of travellers discussed in chapter two, these men journeyed in Oman extensively beyond Muscat and the shores. Although they arrived in different historical moments, a common feature of their writings is that they reflect their association with different types of people in Oman and provide wider observations on the country. Another common feature of their accounts is that the travellers commenced their journeys through Oman while holding different political positions. Wellsted, for example, was a lieutenant in the East India Company; Miles was a British political agent at Muscat and Thomas was prime minister or *Wazir* to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a very distinctive type of adventure: the race, among British travellers, to explore the Empty Quarter, or al-Ruba al-Khali. This huge and mysterious desert

and other disciplines; hence it is necessary to limit the examination of this concept to a particular area. Secondly, these studies represent different approaches to western discourses on the Orient. Said's project in *Orientalism* is no longer the solo approach used to look at these discourses. Some of these studies are published and some of them are still unpublished doctoral theses. My focus on the works that have dealt with representations of the Middle East only, is the reason for this variety.

- 14 Although this geographical term is applied, now, to a specific district in Oman, it used to mean, at least in the minds of European travellers, all parts of the country except Muscat or the coastal area and the Empty Quarter.

was a challenge to Europeans, but British travellers managed to cross this sea of sands from coast to coast. They came back overwhelmed by its fascinating silence. Bertram Thomas made the first crossing from south to north in 1931, followed by Harry St. John Philby, who traversed the north-western part of the desert in 1932, and Wilfred Thesiger, who crossed the same sands twice during 1946–1948. Chapter four is devoted to the works of Thomas and Thesiger, who both journeyed in the Empty Quarter, from Dhufar in the south of Arabia to Qatar in the north.¹⁵

From 1950 to 1970, another era of exploration took place, ending the traditional journeys in Oman. The use of motor vehicles instead of animals, and travel either for political purposes or for oil, are the main aspects of this era. Unlike their predecessors, travellers of this time did not go to the country inspired by ‘the lure of the unknown’. Instead, they were employed in Oman by either the Sultan of Muscat or the petroleum companies. Edward Henderson is one of the British travellers who represents this age. He came to Sahil Oman in 1948 in the service of the Petroleum Development Trucial Coast, an international British run-company. Prior to 1956, he undertook several expeditions in trucks searching for oil fields and acting as a British diplomat. His book *Arabian Destiny* (1999) describes very important political events that happened in that period and provides information about tribal customs and history. In addition, it is a story about the discovery of oil and the consequences for the region.¹⁶ From January 1963 to July 1964, David Gwynne-James served with the Sultan of Muscat’s Armed Forces. His first book, *Letters from Oman* (2001), is founded on letters to his future wife Charmian Nevill; they were written during his three months’ Arabic language learning in Aden,

15 I will exclude Philby in this study because his travels in the Empty Quarter were limited to the north-western part, which lies in Saudi Arabia, and his companions were also from that area.

16 Edward Henderson, *Arabian Destiny: The Complete Autobiography* (Dubai: Motivate, 1999). This book was first published in London by Quartet in 1988 with the title, *This Strange Eventful History: Memoirs of Earlier Days in the UAE and Oman*.

and during his secondment to the Sultan's Armed Forces in Oman.¹⁷ Ian Skeet was in Oman from 1966 to 1968 employed by Shell as liaison officer for Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). He travelled widely through the country providing many details about its geography and history. In his book *Muscat and Oman* (1974), he painted portraits of Muscat, Mutrah, the Interior, the Batinah, the Sharquiya, the Dahirah and the desert. Since Sultan Said bin Taimur, the ruler of what was known as 'Muscat and Oman', was working hard to keep the country remote and prevent outsiders from seeing what was happening within its borders, Skeet's narration of events and life in Oman during that time is of extreme significance.¹⁸ Chapter five is concerned with the works of these three travellers.

The period from 1800 to 1970 is chosen because the first official contact between Britain and Oman was in 1800, when an important treaty was signed to declare the intention that 'the friendship of the two states may remain unshaken to the end of time, and till the sun and moon have finished their revolving career.'¹⁹ Moreover, the presence of Sayyid Said Bin Sultan as the ruler of Oman in 1807 strengthened this liaison. His open policy and contact with Europeans made Muscat a main *entrepot* on the route to India. As we shall see in the ensuing chapters, British travellers have flocked increasingly to Oman since that time. The year 1970 was chosen as the end of the scope of this study because after this year Oman moved into another era. Since

17 *Letters from Oman: A Snapshot of Feudal Times as Oil Signals Change* (UK: Blackwater Books, 2001) is the first and only edition of the book so far. It is worth noting here that Gwynne-James, as he claims, did not think about writing a book during his service in Aden and Oman. Only, later after 36 years, he decided to collect his letters in a book.

18 *Muscat and Oman: The End of an Era* was first published in London in 1974 by Faber & Faber, then reprinted in 1975 by Travel Book Club. Ian Skeet visited Oman again in 1990, under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Information to write a follow-through volume of his *Muscat and Oman*. Relying on official documents and interviews more than his experience, Skeet published his second work *Oman: Politics and Development* (London: Macmillan, 1992), which recounts the development of the Sultanate of Oman from 1970 to 1990.

19 For the full text of this treaty, see *Arabian Gulf Intelligence: Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, ed. by R. Hughes Thomas, new series, no. 24 (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), pp.248–250.

1970 when Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne, life in Oman has changed dramatically. The discovery of oil and changes in the regime have contributed to make Oman a modern state and more open to the external world. Now, the roads are perfectly paved for motor vehicles, the hotels are numerous and comfortable, travel agencies have replaced camel caravans and Bedouin companions, the inaccessible Inner Oman is quite open to foreigners, the 'unknown people' of southern Oman have been 'discovered', and the dangerous Empty Quarter has been 'penetrated'. Thus, the curiosity of exploration, the allusion of untrodden paths, the lure of the unknown, and the risk of adventure that imbued travel writing in the past began gradually to vanish after 1970. In short, travel to Oman after 1970 became a kind of tourism. In this context, I would agree with Paul Fussell, who differentiates between two concepts, travel and tourism. According to him, travel is related to hardship and risk, unlike tourism, which implies relaxation and security. He puts the distinction as follows:

As a form of intensified, heightened experience, travel differs from tourism in being not relaxing and comfortable and consoling. The word of course derives from travail, and travel is less like the vacationing which tourism resembles than like a quest for a new kind of strenuousness. It is a laborious adventure amidst strange evil as well as strange good.²⁰

Elsewhere, Fussell also argues that there is difference between exploration and tourism, asserting that 'if the explorer moves toward the risks of the formless and the unknown, the tourist moves toward the security of pure cliché'.²¹ Although I have no intention to make light of travel writing on Oman after 1970, it is necessary to mention that it more likely belongs to 'tourism', as defined by Fussell, and deserves a separate study.

The significance of the current study lies in the significance of British travel writing itself to Oman in that it documents the culture and history of the country. Because, perhaps, of Oman's isolation and

20 Paul Fussell, *Thank God for the Atom Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), pp.127–128.

21 Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.39.

internal wars, seldom have Arabs and Omani chroniclers paid attention to writing about their culture. The most important Omani historical source, albeit devoted to the history of Imamate was published in 1912 in Cairo. Assalimi, the author of the book, complains in his introduction about the lack of Omani historical sources, asserting that 'Omani scholars did not concern themselves with history' because they were mainly interested in religious affairs.²² The ultimate contribution of British travellers to Omani culture is that they described everyday life in Oman, which is almost neglected in the few Omani historical works. In British travel accounts, we read about several interesting themes: hospitality, contentment, tolerance, slaves, sorcerers, men's and women's clothing, hair fashions, greetings, habits of eating, the habit of sipping coffee, the Sultan's palace and harem, the excessive heat of Muscat, the physical appearance of the natives, the splendour of Hormuz, the narrow and dirty bazaars of Mutrah, the local wine of Al-Jabal Al-Akdhar, the tedious bargains of Ibri, the *Zutt* or 'Arab gipsies', tribal quarrels, the traditional Omani system of learning, traditional Omani architecture, the process of cooking and drying dates, hand-loom, the manufacture of porous clay vessels for cooling water, ordnances fired off for salutation, camel caravans, camel chants, the cult of the *Zar* and its ceremony, customs and folklore of Oman, the particular Omani irrigation system of Aflaj, superstitions, using cauterization and incantations as treatment, Devil Dancing in Dhufar, hairstyles of the inhabitants of Dhufar, circumcision rites, exorcism, spirits, sacrifices, the tradition of curing diseases by burning frankincense and practicing blood sacrifice, beliefs in oaths upon shrines, the Bedouins' belief in the absolute will of Allah, the practice of using urine or vomit of the camel to cure diseases or, as a hair-wash to kill vermin, the Bedouins' childish manners and simplicity, their love of the camel, their sense of humour, their ability to read tracks, their greed and intrusiveness, their disputes, their patience, bravery, tolerance, generosity and nobility, and natural phenomena in the Empty Quarter, such as singing sands and the devouring sands of Umm Assamim.

22 Abdullah bin Humaid Assalimi, *Tuhafat Al-A'ayan Bisirat Ahel Oman* [in Arabic] (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Imam, 1912), p.4.

All these themes and details about the everyday life of Oman narrated in British travel accounts, I am sure most Omani intellectuals would agree, have been neglected in Arabic sources related to Oman. Even some of these themes were considered taboo by Omani chroniclers, as they would not have spoken of subjects such as the 'Zar cult', exorcism or the local wine, which certainly were rejected by Islamic doctrines. Therefore, I hope in my work will fill a gap in the cultural history of Oman by tracking the images and descriptions of Omani life in British travel writings.