The Rebellions Of The People Of Ja’lān Region Against The Authority Of The Musqat Government During The Nineteenth Century

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The Ja’lān region is located to the east of Oman on the coast of the Arabian Sea and is encircled by the Ja’lān Mountains. The most important of this region's towns and villages were Balad Ba’ni Bū ‘Āli, al-Ashkharah, Ra’s al-Ru’ays, and Sūr, the last of which was both the main port for Ja’lān and the most important of its towns.

The chief tribe of the region was Banū Bū ‘Āli, a Ghāfiri tribe of political prominence also in Oman. Socially the tribe consisted of two kinds of people: the bedouin, who worked as shepherds and owned camels, and urbanized members of the tribe, who, settled in the region's towns and villages, engaged in trade, fishing, agriculture (especially the cultivation of date palms), and other settled activities. Banū Bū ‘Alī was, in fact, made up of smaller tribes such as al- Fuhūd, al-Ja’āfirah, Banū Rizq, and al-Sinadah. A clan of the last-mentioned, Al Hamūdah, produced the sheikhs of Banū Bū’ Alī. It has been estimated that during the second half of the nineteenth century, the tribe of Banū Bū ‘Alī numbered nine thousand members. There were other, smaller tribes in Ja’lān such as al-Jinabah and some clans of al-Qawasim, all belonging to the Sunni sect and on good terms with Banū Bū ‘Alī. There was, however, one important tribe in the region, Banū Bū Hasan, of the Hinawi tribal grouping, who adhered to the Ibad sect and who were consequently at enmity with Banū Bū ‘Alī.

The general motivation of the revolts of Ja’lān's tribes against the Musqat authority in the nineteenth century was their adherence to the ideals and faith of the Islamic Reform movement (Salafiyyah) of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab.
The expansion of the first Saudi State to the western coast of the Gulf at the end of the eighteenth century brought with it Salafid thought to the towns and villages of the region, even in Oman, but it was particularly the people of the Ja'lan region who became most influenced by the movement during the first decade of the nineteenth century, especially after the first Saudi State seized the oasis of Buraymi from Oman and proceeded to use it as a military base from which they could control most of the towns in that region of the western coast of the Gulf. Under the command of the greatest leader of the Saudi army in the north of Oman, Sa'd bin Mutlaq al-Mutayri, the Saudis drove the Omani into retreat southwards and forced their ruler to pay tribute.

During this time, a member of the sheikh family of Banu Bu'Ali, Salim bin Ali bin Sultan Al Hamudah, made his way to Dir'iyyah, the capital of the first Saudi State in Najd, and studied there the Islamic sciences and the Salafid creed of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab. When he returned to Ja'lan, he refused to enter his town and sent a message to his tribe that he would only enter it if they destroyed the tomb built over one of the graves in Ja'lan that has become a centre of pilgrimage, since he was now firmly of the conviction that such practices were contrary to sound Islam. The older generation of Ja'lan rejected his demand, but as he remained outside the town he was visited by the younger people, whom he taught on different aspects of Islam including the Salafid creed, so that in time his students and then his followers increased in numbers. Being now strengthened by numerous supporters, Salim displayed his zeal in attacking the tomb and destroying it completely, the consequence of which was that the older generation found it expedient to change their position and condone the work of the young zealots. The influence of Salim Al Hamudah continued to grow and reached its zenith when the tribal chief, Muhammad bin'Ali, came to his support, as the result of which the dawa (proclamation) of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab became propagated throughout the Ja'lan region and most of the tribes converted to the Salafid creed. Al-Mutawwa is confused in depicting the former religious
stance of these converts. Generally, he speaks of them as being formerly Ibadis, whereas in another place he maintains that they were formerly adherents of the Shafi'i madhhab (creed). The latter seems more likely to have been the case, since Ja'lan is close to Hadramawt, where the inhabitants belong to the Shafi'i madhhab. (creed).

Having once accepted the Salafid creed, the people of Ja'lan became fervent devotees of the movement and loyal supporters of its leaders and the first Saudi State's governors, especially Sa'id al-Mutayri and his army in Oman. This marked the start of a period of enmity between the people of Ja'lan and the government of Musqat, a period of riots and revolts against the authority in Musqat. Therefore, when the Saudi army started to deal with Muhammad 'Ali Pasha's army in the Hejaz, Sa'id bin Sultan, the ruler of Oman, sent several small and abortive missions, using his Omani followers, against the people of Ja'lan who rejected his authority and gave their allegiance to the Saudis and their Islamic Reform movement. However, when the Egyptian army destroyed Dir'iyyah in 1818, the ruler of Oman, depending on the friendship of the British authority in the Gulf, began preparations to regain his dominion over all the Omani regions and tribes, especially those who had rejected his authority and supported the Saudi presence and their Islamic Reform movement in Oman. Having rallied his men and joined the British army in their attack on the Qawasim in the north of Oman in 1819, he began to contemplate using the alliance with the British army to subdue the strong tribe of Banu Bu 'Ali in Ja'lan, who had forcefully rejected the administration of Sa'id bin Sultan in 1818. Sa'id bin Sultan recognized the opportune moment when he heard talk among some people of Musqat that some members of Banu Bu 'Ali were plotting piracy against British ships and their Indian escorts in the Gulf. Captain Bruce heard of this accusation when he passed through Musqat in May 1820 on his way from Bushire to Bombay and he informed his superiors. While the Imam of Musqat did his best to oppose the revolt against his authority in Ja'lan, the disturbances and accusation of piracy were brought to the
attention of the Bombay Government by Captain T.P. Thompson, the Political Agent of the Bombay Government stationed on Kishm island. In reply, the Bombay Government instructed Captain Thompson to co-operate with the Imam of Musqat in Suppressing Ba'nu Bu'Alī. but the order stipulated that the British Agent should first ascertain whether or not it was men of Ba'nu Bu'Alī who had been attacking British ships, before he undertook any military engagement against them. Therefore, Captain Thompson sent a posse of men on the vessel Mercury, accompanied by the sheikh of Ra's al-Hadd who went with them from Musqat to assist them and deliver their letter, requesting discussion of the accusation of piracy, to the sheikh of Ba'nu Bu'Alī in J'a'lan. When the party approached the coastal town of al-Ashkharah, where it was intended that the sheikh of Ra's al-Hadd should deliver the letter, they were not able to reach the town and so the sheikh tried to swim ashore to hand it over to the tribesmen of J'a'lan. The latter however attacked the boat and cut the messenger to pieces while the sailors remaining on board could do nothing to rescue the messenger even though they fired their cannon and killed three of the assailants.

This convinced the British of the enmity of Ba'nu Bu'Alī not only toward themselves but toward any who assisted them, so that the Imam of Musqat became the victor on a diplomatic level. Thereafter, he could contemplate more clearly an expedition against the people of J'a'lan with the help and moral support of the Bombay Government army in the Gulf.

The first combined Omani-British expedition against the people of J'a'lan

As soon as the British boat and their men returned to the base in Kishm, a plan of operations was immediately drawn up by Captain Thompson and the Imam of Musqat. It was decided that a detachment should proceed to Sur in J'a'lan by sea, while the ruler of Oman marched overland with his forces to the same place. Both the size of the Omani army (2,000 men) and Sa'id bin Sultan's
personal leadership of the army testify how much the ruler of Oman wanted to
destroy the Ja'lanī people with the help of the tribes of Banū Jabir, Banū Hashim, Banū Wuhaybah, and Banū Hajar.⁴¹

The allied Omani and British forces united in Falaj al-Mashayikh on the 8th
November 1820 and there they destroyed some of the Ja'lanī fortifications and
arms, together with the persons who had murdered the sheikh of Ra's al-Hadd.⁴²

After this event, negotiations were started between the Omani-British alliance
and the Ja'lanī people. The ruler of Oman demanded the surrender of the Banū
Buʿ Ali's fortifications and arms and, in addition, the persons who had murdered
their messenger at al-Ashkharah. His ultimatum to Banū Buʿ Ali also contained
an explanatory note to the effect that, in the opinion of the British, the war had
been provoked by the Banū Buʿ Ali's acts of piracy in the Gulf and that this was a
cause quite distinct from those which had induced the ruler of Oman to proceed
against them. At first, it appeared that Banū Buʿ Ali were prepared to comply
with the summons, but they baulked at the request that they should surrender
their arms.⁴⁶ Because the negotiations having reached a stalemate, a course of ac-
tion was decided upon. Leaving the heavy guns and stores in an entrenched camp
at Banū Bu Husayn, 380 sepoys of the Indian army with 4 canons, accompanied
by the Omani army of 2,000 men, marched on the hinterland of the region in the
direction of Balad Banū Buʿ Ali.⁴⁷ It is worth quoting at this point the official re-
port on the campaign. It describes how this army moved:

towards the enemy's town, which was situated with its back to a deep date
grove, round which it was necessary to defile in order to get at the assailable
front, which looked towards the sandy plain, and was protected by ditches. On
arriving within sight of the town, the light infantry of the 1st battalion 2nd regi-
ment, which had headed the column in extended order, opened its fire, and be-
gan to fall back, and soon after the enemy appeared in motion on the top of some
elevated ground, with the apparent design of turning the right flank. The officer
commanding immediately directed the troops to form column of sections to the
right, so as to present a new front, parallel to the enemy's attack, and then to charge bayonets. Some hesitation on the part of the sepoys is asserted to have been displayed at this moment in obeying the last order, and as the only course left, they were directed to fire, which was done; but immediately after, on the enemy being within twenty yards of the line, they are alleged by the commanding officer to have turned about, and thrown themselves on the Imam's troops in the rear. These soon gave way, and the whole took to flight, being pursued by the enemy in the direction of the entrenched camp at Beni Boo Hussain, within which the remnants of the force were collected.38

The British officers and Sa'id bin Sultan were engaged in the ensuing battle in which 207 men of the Indian army and 7 British personnel were killed while the remainder retreated except for the men of Banu Hajar, who stood until they were all slain.39 In the fierce fighting, nearly the whole of the British detachment are said to have been cut up, only two officers escaped, one of whom later died of his wounds. On the Omani part, the Imam himself was shot through the hand while he was attempting to save an artilleryman. A further attack on the entrenched camp was launched during the night and was repulsed, but seeing that the position could no longer be held, the commanding officer directed the remnant force to retreat to Musqat, where they arrived on the 17th November.40

After the abject failure of this allied expedition, the survivors returned to Musqat and arrived there on the 17th November 1820.41 As soon as Captain Thompson reached his base, he wrote for his Government a report on the expedition, explaining the reasons for the defeat of the British and Omani troops and requesting additional reinforcements for another major expedition.42

The second combined Omani-British expedition against the people of Ja'lan

According to Lormier's account, the Governor of Bombay felt keenly the worsened relations in the Gulf between the British and the local inhabitants and deemed that the Political Agent in Kishm, Captain Thompson, had exceeded his
orders to punish the pirates. Even worse, he had placed himself in the hands of the ruler of Oman and become embroiled in his internal affairs.\textsuperscript{43} Therefore, Thompson was ordered back to India to face a court martial.\textsuperscript{44} Then, to regain lost British prestige in the area and for the maintenance of British influence in the Gulf, it was considered necessary to dispatch a large force under the command of Major General Lionel Smith, who was commissioned to co-operate with the Sultan of Oman, Sa'id bin Sultan, in punishing the people of Ja'l\'an.\textsuperscript{45} Major General Smith therefore led out an expedition consisting of more than 3,000 British and Indian troops and arrived at Sur on the 27th January 1821.\textsuperscript{46} The Bombay Government had stipulated two aims to their commander: firstly, to capture those people who had attacked the British ships and later attacked the messenger vessel and its sailors, whether by direct assault or by assisting in any way those who had made the assault; and secondly, to give to Sa'id bin Sultan, the ruler of Oman, authority over the region of Ja'l\'an and its tribes, including the strong tribe of Banu Bu 'Ali.\textsuperscript{47}

Two days after the arrival of the British leader, the Sultan of Oman arrived with some of his army and promised that the remainder of the forces from the Omani tribes would be ready within ten to twelve days. Therefore, the British decided not to proceed but to wait for the remainder of the army before entering the region of Ja'l\'an. However, the Banu Bu 'Ali tribe suddenly attacked the British camp on the night of the 10th February, before the rest of the Omani forces had gathered, and succeeded in killing more than 40 men and injuring many more before they were compelled to withdraw when British reinforcements arrived from outside.\textsuperscript{48}

By the last week of February, the remaining Omani forces arrived and the allied forces began to move toward the capital of Ja'l\'an. On the afternoon of the 2nd March, they repulsed forays of assailants who issued upon them from the citadel and then attacked the town in a major battle which resulted in much loss of lives on both sides as well as many injuries. The town was now completely sur-
rounded and prisoner took many away to sur and thence to Bombay, along with
the injured, who included Sheikh Muhammad bin' Ail and his brother Khadim.⁴⁹
After having blown up the enemy's military works and defences,⁵⁰ and having re-
gained in good condition the guns which had been seized during Captain Thomp-
son's earlier expedition, Smith submitted his report on the mission and, at the
same time, described the influence of the new faith of Wahhabism.⁵¹ At the same
time, the men of Sa'id bin Sultan,⁵² took about 80 men of Ja'lan and put them in
prison in Musqat where they starved to death.⁵³

After the return of the expedition to Bombay, the Court of the East India
Company made an investigation into Smith's expedition and took him to task for
his conduct. They criticized him for his rough procedures and his manner of deal-
ing with the tribes people, especially for his permitting the army of Sa'id bin Sul-
tan to cut down the date groves of the Ja'lan tribes people and to destroy the wa-
ter courses of Balad Banu Bu' Ali.⁵⁴ He was also criticized for his lack of care for
the injured, who had been taken away to Bombay, where some of them had
died.⁵⁵ The East India Company therefore decided to return the prisoners to their
towns and they further granted them aid in rebuilding their houses, in return for
which the sheikh of Banu Bu' Ali went to Bombay in 1827 to thank the Governor
of India for the aid given.⁵⁶ By such conduct, the Government of India made a
greater conquest and relations between the people of Ja'lan and the Bombay Gov-
ernment were much improved, so that the primary historical sources do not men-
tion any subsequent serious dangers to the British advantage in the Gulf or the
Arabian Sea.

It was only begrudgingly, however, that the Ja'lanis accepted the authority of
the ruler of Oman, which they had formerly refused on account of their new Sal-
afid faith, which was contrary to the Ibadi form of Islam traditionally accepted
among the majority of the Omani people, especially those who were in power in
Musqat. So, in the mid nineteenth century, after the Saudi regime had risen again
in Najd under the rule of Faysal bin. Turki and, after his reign, became extended
to the Buraymi oasis in the north of Oman under the military command of the Saudi governor al-Sudayri, the latter found acceptance among the people of Ja'lan. Somewhat later, after the death of Sa'id bin Sultan, al-Sudayri went to Ja'lan with a small army and seized the fortress of al-'Ayjah, which had been built by the Saudi governor of Buraymi during the first Saudi State. However, after the return of al-Sudayri to Buraymi, the new Sultan of Oman, Thuwayni bin Sa'id (1856-1866) led a large expedition into the region of Ja'lan, where he destroyed the Saudi forces without meeting any resistance from the inhabitants in 1281H. 1864 A.D. According to al-Mutawwa, there was no military clash and he was not resisted by the sheikh; he deemed it sufficient to destroy all marks of the Saudi presence there.\(^5\)

In May 1869, when the Saudi garrison in al-Buraymi was much weakened after interference in the affairs of Sharjah,\(^5\), Azzan bin. Qays, who ruled Oman from 1868 to 1871 and was religiously motivated, succeeded in bringing a complete end to the Saudi presence in Oman when he drove out the governor of the Buraymi oasis and his Saudi garrison.\(^6\)

After achieving this success, 'Azzan intended to lead an expedition against the people of Ja'lan, but when he arrived in their territory in Sha'ban 1286 H. November 1869, he entered into negotiation with the people and agreed to accept their pledge of loyalty without engaging in any fighting.\(^6\) Before leaving the region, however, he decided to capture the sheikhs of the tribes of Banu Bu' Ali, Bani Rasib, and Banu Hashim and took them away to al-Kut prison in Muscat.\(^6\) These sheikhs remained in prison in Muscat for some time, until they succeeded in escaping, eluding the guards with the help of their relatives who smuggled into the prison ropes concealed in a leather sack of dates. At an arranged time, they made their escape in a boat in which their relatives took them back to Ja'lan.\(^6\) Al-Salimi\(^6\) states that the commander of the prison guards, a man of the clan of al-Khudur from al-Huqin, secretly aided the escape and, indeed, Banu Bu' Ali continued to correspond with this man until he passed away.
At a later time, the people of Ja'lan succeeded in obtaining their revenge against 'Azzan bin Qays by supporting Turki bin Sa'id (1871-1888), who managed to kill 'Azzan and became ruler of Oman. This was the last occasion for the people of Ja'lan to act against the central authority in Musqat during the nineteenth century, even though their region was used as a place of refuge by some members of royal family of Al Bu Sayd, such as Salim b. Thuwayni.  

During the reign of Faysal bin Turki, who succeeded his father in 1888, most of his army came from the people of Ja'lan, who has supported his father. Furthermore, he depended once more on the Ja'lanis during the rebellion which commenced on the 13th February 1895, when Salih bin 'Ali (a wealthy man) and his son' Abd Allah, together with Muhsin bin 'Umar and Humud al-Jahhaf. led an army of tribesmen from Harath, al-Hubus, Banu Battash, al-'Awa'iq, Banu Ribawah, al-Rabawiyyah, and some other tribes in an expedition to install Sa'ud bin 'Azzan as Sultan of Oman, since they looked upon Sa'ud as a pious and fellow-Ibadi. On this occasion, Faysal found support with the Ja'laní people, especially Banu Bu 'Ali and Banu Rasib, who came to Musqat and put an end to the rebellion on the 10th March. Although the rebels had succeeded in taking over all of the city apart from its fortresses, they agreed to withdraw. Thus, Faysal succeeded through the exemplary loyalty of his army of Ja'laní fighters as well as through the good services of others from the same region who came by sea to assist their brethren in the fortresses of Musqat.

In summary, it may be said that the role played by the Ja'laní people in opposing the Musqat authority during the nineteenth century began with their ideological refusal of the Ibadi overlordship and the military support they received from their fellow-Salafís with the Saudi presence in the Buraymi oasis. Later, especially after the fall of the second Saudi State in the second half of the nineteenth century, they would support any individual member of the Bu Sa'idi family, who were competing for power in Oman, if they could obtain thereby freedom to decide their own affairs and some sort of respect for their faith.
Orthodoxy of faith was, indeed, the most prized possession of the Ja'laní people. Thus, al-Mutawwa' made it clear that during that time the people of Ja'laní refused to accept anyone to teach their children, to act as imam in their mosques, or to officiate as judge if he did not come from Najd or had not studied the Islamic sciences there.30
1-'Abd Allah bin. Salih al-Mutawwa'. 'Uqud al-juman fi ayyam Al Sa'ud fi 'Uman, typescript preserved in Abu Dhabi Cultural Centre (no.953.105/). (ألف عفة), 56.
2-J.G. Lorimer, Dalil al-Khalij, tr. by the Office of the Amir of Qatar from the original English Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia, Geography, I, Doha, 1975, 86.
3-Al-Mutawwa' loc. cit.
5-Lorimer, Dalil, Geography, I, 85.
6-Miles, loc. cit.; al-Mutawwa, loc. cit.
7-Miles, loc. cit.
8-Al-Mutawwa', loc. cit.
9-Miles, loc. cit.
10-Lorimer, Dalil, Geography, I, 87.
11-India Office Records, file L/P & S/20/C248, Precis of correspondence regarding the affairs of the Gulf, 1801-1853, by J.A. Saldanha, 131.
15-Al-Mutawwa', loc. cit. Perhaps the tomb in question was that of the poet Ibn al-Mughirah, originally of al-Ahsa', whose tomb in Ja'lan was noted by Miles (Countries, 528).
16-Ibid.
17-Ibid., 57.
18-As also does Shakib Arslan; see L. Stoddard, Hadir al-alam al-Islami, tr. 'A. Nuwayhid, with additions by Sh. Arslan, I, iv, n. pl., 1971, 342.
19-Ibid., 58.
20-Al-Salimi, Tuhfat, II, 186.
21-Abu 'Aliyah, Muhadarat, 71.
22-Al-'Amr, Social and political history, 157.
24-Lorimer, Dalil, History, II, 720.
27-Letter from the Bombay Government to Captain Thompson (file R/15/1/23 in Abu Dhabi Documents Centre).
28-Ibid.
29-A small coastal town in the south-east of Oman.
30-Selections from the records of the Bombay Government, no. XXIV, new series, compiled & edited by R. Hughes Thomas, Bombay, 1856 [hereafter SRBG], 189.
31-Ibid.; al-'Abid, Siyasah, 162.
32-Al-'Abid, loc. cit.
33-SRBG, 189.
34-Al-Salimi, Tuhfah, II, 189; Lorimer, Dalil, History, II, 721.
35-SRBG, 189.
36-SRBG, 189 f.
37-India Office Records, file L/P & S/20/C248, 131.
38-SRBG, 190.
39-Lorimer, loc. cit.
40-SRBG, 190.
41-Ibid.
42-Report of Captain Thompson on his expedition against Banu Bu 'Ali (file R/15/1/23 in Abu Dhabi Documents Centre).
43-Lorimer, Dalil, History, 2, 721 f.
44-Letter from the Bombay Government to Captain Thompson (file R/15/23 in Abu Dhabi Documents Centre); J.R. Wellsted, Travels to the city of the caliphs, London, 1840, I, 33.
45-SRBG, 190.
48-*Ibid.*, 166; Lorimer, *loc. cit.*
50-SRBG, 191.
51-Report from Major General Lionel Smith to the Government of India on the expedition against Banu Bu 'Ali and the capture of their fort (*file R/15/1/23* in Abu Dhabi Documents Centre).
52-Sa'id himself was not permitted to share in the fighting, but only to accompany his men (Miles, *Countries*, 327).
53-Lorimer, *loc. cit.*
54-SRBG, 191.
57-Al-Mutawwa', *Uqad*, 81.
62-*Ibid*. Al-Mutawwa' also mentions that the sheikh of Banu Bu 'Ali disagreed with those who decided to make an agreement with 'Azzan and therefore left taking his family up one of Ja'lan's mountains.
64-*Ibid.*, 270.
65-*Ibid.*, 270.
68-*Ibid.*, 829, 833 f.
69-*Ibid.*, 830-833.
70-Al-Mutawwa', *Uqad*, 89.