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The British Empire in India, the Gulf Pearl and the Making of the Middle East

A number of studies have attempted to trace the first uses of the term 'Middle East' and attribute its authorship to specific individuals.¹ As early as 1883, *Harper's Bazaar* mentioned the 'dry Middle East', the expression referring to those territories where the Arabs and Persians lived.² On 9 July 1898, a Quaker from Pennsylvania declared he had ended up going 'into the Middle East among the Afghans'.³ Despite these early testimonies, General T. E. Gordon is often credited with being the inventor of the Middle East, on the basis of what he wrote in March 1900 in the journal *The Nineteenth Century*: 'It may be assumed that the most sensitive part of our external policy in the Middle East is the preservation of the independence and integrity of Persia and Afghanistan.'⁴ Yet other voices also participated in the following years in this process of semantic creation, for example those of Alfred Mahan or of the journalist Valentine Chirol, who in 1902 and 1903 both provided definitions of this expression, albeit divergent ones.⁵

Nevertheless, when one thinks about the question of the origin of the Middle East, it is not possible to be satisfied with simply putting a name and a date on a concept with a complex history, as if it were enough for a term to appear and name a reality in order for its history to begin. In reaction to this kind of approach, the goal of this article is to bring to light a key dimension of the history of this concept of the Middle East, by taking into consideration the political and geographical contexts which presided over the recourse to this term, still mostly unheard of at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, this article sheds light on the spatial invention of the Middle East over a long period of time, and not just the invention of the expression 'the Middle East'. Indeed, the aim of this article is to establish that the lexical invention was only a means in making sense of the political and spatial implications of a very long process which had begun at the end of the eighteenth century, namely the informal imperialism of British India in the Gulf and its hinterlands, that is a space the limits of which fluctuated, but which had been considered since the 1780s by India as an area that could potentially protect the empire on its western flank.

These brief introductory remarks demonstrate that historians, for decades, have only superficially explored a series of nevertheless major issues.⁶ How was the Middle East created even before it came to be a conceptual production? By whom, why and how? Drawing largely on sources of the Indian and British colonial governments, this article attempts to answer these questions by arguing that the Arabo-Persian Gulf and the areas neighbouring it played a

fundamental part in this gestation. Hence in order to explain this process, this article explores the nature of the imperialism set up by the expansively minded Indian empire in this region. More specifically, it focuses on the policies carried out throughout the nineteenth century with regard to the Gulf pearl fisheries, the main economic activity for the populations in this area.⁷ These policies played a central role in the transformation of the Gulf into a pacified margin, a buffer zone, the function of which was to protect India on its Western flank. This article contends that as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, the policies linked to Gulf pearls, replaced within the wider context of the existence and expansion of a world-wide economy of natural pearls, constituted a key tool in founding and strengthening the informal Indian empire in the Gulf and its hinterlands, in that very space to which the name 'Middle East' was given around 1902.

Moreover, this kind of dynamics between the Gulf pearl and British-Indian imperialism opens the way to a whole new field of investigation bearing on the links between empire, globalization and global commodities. This article also raises the question of whether or not, when it comes to the long nineteenth century, it is legitimate to speak of a global empire of pearls, structured by the trade flows and networks pertaining to this commodity. Pearls were not a mass commodity and remained a luxury product until the beginning of the twentieth century and the invention of cultured pearls. Yet during the nineteenth century, there was a pearl boom related to a rise in world demand owing to the taste for this particular commodity among western societies.⁸ Thus, in the nineteenth century, a global market for natural pearls developed, the heart of which was the Arabo-Persian Gulf. In these waters, pearls known for their high quality were harvested mainly in order to supply world markets. Yet, the Gulf pearl boom was also stimulated by a particular context, the existence of a deliberate imperial strategy centred around pearls. This article accordingly brings together the threads of two stories that are generally seen as separate: the expansion of the British Indian empire in the Indian Ocean world and the globalization of the Gulf pearl.

Moreover, the policies implemented by India in regard to pearls reveal a paradox which ought to be emphasized. Indeed, research focusing on commodities have analyzed how cotton or tea empires, for example, were organized along a double scale, each one corresponding to a different meaning of the word 'empire'.⁹ The first was global and conferred a global dimension upon the word empire. Cotton and tea had empires transcending the borders of different political organizations or even of different empires. But there were also small regional empires, completely organized economically and politically around the exploitation and production of one of these commodities and integrated into the structure of

the world economy. Historiography has highlighted how these two types of imperial systems were united by a single purpose: economic profit generated by the exploitation, production and marketing of these commodities.¹⁰

Indeed, the analysis of this tension within the historiography can be refined and revisited in the light of the case study of the Gulf pearl. The system devised by the Indian empire around Gulf pearls had a specific goal: ensuring peace on one of the most strategic buffer zones of this expansively-minded empire. There was thus an objective alternative to the mainly economic aim; pearls provided a tool to affirm and promote imperialism.

This article begins by reviewing the way in which during the eighteenth century the Gulf progressively came under British control. Two distinct agents sometimes collaborated and were sometimes in a position of rivalry: London, on the one hand, and the various semi-autonomous governments of India on the other, the Presidencies first, then the Government of India from 1858 on. This first part also examines the threats against which British India sought a barrier in the Gulf: France, the Ottomans and to a certain extent Russia. This overview will allow for an investigation of the scope and nature of the informal imperialism of London and of India in these territories, as well as its implications for local populations. The second part analyses the beginning of pearl policy in the Gulf and how the British takeover was articulated around the control of this commodity. The last section highlights the developments taking place at the end of the nineteenth century. During the time of the pearl boom, even though the production of Gulf pearls rose sharply, the greatest profit for London and India of this positive situation was not only economic in nature, but mainly political. The Gulf area, devoted mainly to harvesting pearl beds, had one key function as a strategic buffer zone: to protect the independent Indian empire on its western flank.

Inventing a buffer zone: India and the Gulf at the beginning of the nineteenth century

In order to understand the history of the Gulf at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to take into account an important phenomenon affecting the world of the Indian ocean: the rise of India as a major geopolitical actor. Indeed, at the end of the eighteenth century, India formed an entity which was truly autonomous, or semi-autonomous, from London, carrying out its own policies on the subcontinent, in South and South-East Asia and in the Indian Ocean.¹¹ From the early days of the East India Company (EIC) through to at least the 1920s, Britain's Indian colonies maintained a semi-independent empire of their own. This 'vast sphere of influence', this 'wide arc of territories' built from the eighteenth century

on, stretched at the end of the nineteenth century from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf to the China Sea and included territories going from East Africa to the Malaysian Peninsula.¹² This empire, at first administered by the structures created by the EIC, particularly the Presidencies, then by the Government of India after 1858, had well-defined political priorities, which at times gave rise to tension with London. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Gulf was hit by the wave of Indian sub-imperialism that engulfed the Indian Ocean World. Admittedly, the EIC was already present in this area in the seventeenth century, through agencies and factories, that is trading posts set up between 1610 and 1630 in Ottoman Iraq, Persia and on the Gulf shores. As early as the seventeenth century, there was a hierarchy among these various trading posts, which was modified several times because of geopolitical disruption affecting the Gulf. These different agencies were administered by a Residency controlling all of the activities of the EIC and which received its orders from the Bombay Presidency. At the end of the eighteenth century, it was the Residency of Bushire, situated on the Persian shore, that was at the head of this network of factories and agencies. The Resident of Bushire was thus a key figure in the functioning of EIC activities in the Gulf.¹³

Until the late eighteenth century, the Gulf was a periphery for the two main political powers of the region, the Ottoman and Qajar empires. The political influence of the Wahhabi state, centred on the Najd in the Arabian Peninsula, extended to the southern shores of the Gulf, with Ras el Khymah being a maritime satellite state of this rising power.¹⁴ At the end of the eighteenth century, Ras el Khymah had established a stronghold on Sharjah and on Lingah and smaller port cities on the Persian littoral. The numerous small independent Arab trading states arrayed along the southern fringes of the Gulf were independent, as the authority of the Ottoman empire had vanished in this area as in most of the Arabian Peninsula. The eighteenth century had seen the rise of the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar governed by the Āl Bū Sa'īd dynasty, who exerted a strong political and economic influence in the Gulf, the western Indian Ocean World and on eastern African shores.¹⁵ Around 1800, these different political entities competed for the control of the shores and islands of the Gulf. People in Kuwait, Bahrain, Ras el Khymah and other Gulf port cities enjoyed strong economic connections with merchant communities of the Indian Ocean World, based in India, East Africa, Zanzibar, Madagascar and Mauritius. The monsoon wind system allowed these links to develop, and the Gulf trade in dried fish, shark fins and skins, dates and pearls to flourish. Besides trade, pearl fishing was the main economic activity of Gulf people.¹⁶

Nevertheless, at the end of the eighteenth century, the political and economic importance of the Gulf for India was very limited, and the trade of the Company in the area

was relatively insignificant.¹⁷ Yet, the situation changed precisely in this period, and the Gulf and its neighbouring areas, because of a particular context, became an object of renewed interest for India.¹⁸ While the consequences of the Revolutionary Wars were being felt in the Indian Ocean World, Britain's Indian colonies began to fear an invasion of India by France. After 1798 and the French campaign in Egypt, rumours spread in India of a project by Napoleon to establish a foothold on the subcontinent with the support of the Tsar, but also of regional powers from West Asia and the Indian ocean, such as the Shah of Persia and the Sultan of Oman. Napoleon's project on India was seen as a revival of Dupleix's dream to create a French India and to challenge the expansion of the EIC in the subcontinent. According to these rumours, weaving together reality and fiction and spreading throughout the subcontinent, as early as the end of the 1790s, in order to carry out his invasion plans, Napoleon had been attempting to form an alliance with the Sultan of Muscat and the Shah of Persia through diplomatic missions and the signature of various agreements. In Bushire and Bombay, there was a mood of panic reinforced by Napoleon's military ventures. Rumours spread of plans for a landing in India of the French army, which would be transported from Egypt and the Red Sea and backed by troops stationed in the French islands in the Indian Ocean. After 1803 and the failure of the Treaty of Amiens, the threat was embodied by the *Grande Armée*, which led by Napoleon, was reputed to have been on the brink of advancing on British possessions in India, with the logistical support of the Shah of Persia.¹⁹ For Bombay and Bushire, at a time when the French threat looked genuine and India seemed to be at the mercy of the 'trouble-maker of Europe', the Gulf was of key importance: it was truly the access corridor to India, and therein lay the danger.

The maritime and territorial zone situated on the western flank of India thus represented a threat in India's imagination. Another fear was added to that of having Napoleon establish a foothold in the Gulf, since the region also seemed dangerous and threatening in another way. India imagined it as a vast earthly inferno, burnt by a hellish sun and populated by those troubling creatures, pirates. Indeed, as early as the end of the eighteenth century, when India thought it was at the mercy of Napoleon, a complex discourse depicting the Gulf as a haven for pirates was being developed in Bombay and Bushire.²⁰ The Gulf populations were thus accused of attacking the ships of the EIC cruising in the Gulf and in the straits of Hormuz, of disrupting Indian trade and more generally of being 'enemies of mankind', disturbing the peace at sea and being detrimental to free maritime movement.²¹ In the late 1750s, Bombay had made similar accusations against the seafaring and maritime communities living on the shores stretching between Kathiawar Peninsula and the Gulf of

Cutch, in order to justify military interventions against the small states arrayed on these coasts and the political expansion of the Presidency in the Indian Ocean World.²² A whole range of negative representations became associated with the Gulf coastal societies, combining ideological considerations about race and Islam, but also a negative geographical determinism and a certain wariness of nomadism.²³ The maritime and coastal space of the Gulf, with the rugged coastline of Ras Musandam plunging into the waters of the straits of Hormuz, the many islands and sandbanks, the numerous lagoons, was thought to be the source of pirate violence.²⁴ In a way, the place and its very wildness determined the people. The part of the coast stretching from Bahrain to the straits of Hormuz was then called 'the Pirate Coast'.²⁵ The Qasimi, likened to genuine 'barbarians' and to Jihad fanatics allied with the first Saudi Wahhabi state, were the more particular object of the stigmatization carried out by Bombay.²⁶ They were thus accused of being the armed wing on the sea of the most radical Islam.²⁷ The caricature of the Qasimi and British-Indian discourse on the Gulf populations centred around a certain number of acts of piracy which took place between 1802 and 1808. Two particularly violent and spectacular attacks occurred in 1808, one in the spring and the other in the autumn. The crews of two ships flying the British flag, the *Shannon* and the *Minerva*, were put to death by Gulf pirates.²⁸ Why were the Qasimi especially targeted by this rhetoric from Bombay? And above all, were they really pirates?²⁹ Rather than a single tribe, the Qasimi formed a group of allied tribes, some of them living on the Arab bank, some on the Persian bank. The centre of their power was situated in Ras al Khaimah and it was thus on this port that the British targeted their attacks.³⁰

For India, a question arose within this context: how to transform the Gulf, a threatening space in more ways than one and a haven for pirates, into a possible buffer zone that might be able to protect India on its western flank? How might the Pirate Coast and the Gulf be transformed into a pacified space? The first response was a large-scale deployment of violence, justified by the pirate threat personified in the Qasimi and other Gulf tribes. It took the form of assaults against the city of Ras al Khaimah and other allied or dependent strongholds which had been set up on both sides of the straits of Hormuz. This unequal violence translated in 1809 and 1819 into two bombings of the city by EIC ships, but also into punitive raids against the ports of the Persian shore, the populations of which had pledged allegiance to the Qasimi.³¹ These two interventions organized by the Bombay Presidency were decisive on a number of counts. They reduced considerably, or even perhaps annihilated the emerging power of Ras al Khaimah, which witnessed the almost total destruction of its fleet. And above all, they established a monopoly on violence in the Gulf, which for the rest

of the long nineteenth century would lie with the British. Other means were later employed to transform the Gulf into a pacified margin integrated into the territorial system protecting India. New threats were alleged throughout the nineteenth century to justify an ever more visible presence. Hence, the French danger to India was followed as early as 1820 by the Russian threat, which in turn was replaced around 1880 by what was thought to be the great risk represented by the imperialism of the Sublime Porte allied with Germany. One can consider therefore that it was the existence of repeated threats to India, no doubt as much real as imagined, and the existence or designation of enemies representing a danger for the security and territorial integrity of this empire, expanding throughout the nineteenth century, which motivated Indian imperialism in the Gulf. These anxieties of empire played a central role in the transformation of this area into a buffer zone, the function of which was to protect the western flank of an evolving, and anxiety-ridden, Indian empire.

Among the means used to pacify the Gulf and transform its geopolitical situation, the survey campaigns to map the Gulf and its shores played a key role. They were organised by India and London as early as the 1820s. They opened the way to a wide-ranging process of reconnaissance of the area, and above all, to the making of maps. Parallel to military operations, these surveys, campaigns and expeditions made it possible to take possession of the space through the formation of geographical knowledge and the simultaneous process of imposing a new order upon cartographical language. At first, it was the south of the Gulf which was the object of reconnaissance, from 1820 to around 1828. A second wave of surveys took place from 1835 to around the end of the 1860s, of which the main setting was what the British themselves called 'Lower Mesopotamia'. The third was begun in 1870 and ended on the eve of the First World War. It concerned mainly the 'Upper Gulf', that is, the regions situated north of Bahrain, the lower Shatt-el-Arab region as well as the Persian coast.³²

To military violence and survey campaigns were added other instruments for pacifying and taking control of the Gulf space: the establishment of naval patrols and the reinforcement of the role of the Resident, which became much more political as early as the 1820s.³³ A representative of the Bombay Presidency in the Gulf, the Resident was really one of the artisans of a policy of peacekeeping and change in the Gulf.³⁴ There was also a second type of response, one of pacification and transformation of the space and its inhabitants through the promotion of legal activities, especially trade, replacing piracy and various trafficking deemed to be illegal and outlawed by the British.³⁵ It was in this context that the British set up a policy

centred on pearl fishing and trading, in order to transform the Gulf and to convert its populations from being ‘a lawless predatory race of robbers’ into ‘useful subjects’.³⁶

Pirates, tribes and treaties: Inventing India’s pearl policy in the Gulf

A specific diplomatic context presided over the implementation of India’s pearl policy. In the wake of the second expedition against Ras al Khaimah, preliminary treaties were signed with several sheikhs from the Pirate Coast. Then a ‘General Treaty’ was concluded between all of the sheikhs and British India.³⁷ These treaties set up a new order, both on the shores and at sea. They called for the destruction of what was left of the old order, such as the fortifications of Ras al Khaimah and the remnants of the Qasimi war fleet.³⁸ The slave trade, illegal trafficking, and violence on the sea were assimilated to piracy.³⁹ Trade and ‘legal’ activities liable to bring about prosperity were to replace ‘lawless and predatory habits’.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, it was pearling that was truly at the core of the Preliminary Treaties of 1819 and of the General Treaty of 1820. In several of the Preliminary Treaties, it was demanded that the ‘Arab tribes’⁴¹ give up to the British all of their fleets, with the exception of the boats used for pearl fishing.⁴² These articles were meant to keep the tribes from rebuilding fleets other than those specialized in pearl fishing. The goal of these articles was to stabilize their presence at sea within the strict limits of solely pearl harvesting as a monoculture. Several clauses of the General Treaty reinforced these measures, demanding that pearling dhows be in possession of a register and a port clearance.⁴³ Four years later a decision, issued directly from Bombay in this instance, came to complete the crucial step taken with the Preliminary Treaty. In May 1823, in order to step up the surveillance of Gulf waters during the pearl-diving season, regular sea patrols were organized. By decision of the Governor of Bombay, M. Elphinstone, a Gulf Squadron was set up, endowed with six cruisers and placed under the orders of the Senior Maritime Officer. Its main mission was to cruise the pearl beds from May to November and to make sure the fishing went smoothly.

During the 1820s, critical voices were heard both in Bushire and Bombay, denouncing a partial failure of the General Treaty and of this first phase in pearl legislation.⁴⁴ According to Bushire, the feuds existing between the different Gulf tribes generated a climate of violence in the Gulf waters which disturbed the peace at sea, and above all was highly detrimental to pearl fishing.⁴⁵ In 1835, proposals came out of Bushire to find solutions to the deficiencies of the General Treaty. It appears indeed that in that year the pearl harvest had not been very satisfactory, due to several conflicts among various tribal groups, according to Bushire, and

notably to tension between the sheikhs of Ajman and Abu Dhabi on one hand, and the Sultan of Oman on the other.⁴⁶ The Resident of Bushire, S. Hennel, suggested a new system intended to regulate the relations among the sheikhs and to increase the authority of the Resident of Bushire, the 'maritime truces'. As in the case of the Preliminary Treaties and of the General Treaty, pearl fishing was at the heart of the new order which the maritime truces were meant to establish. The first goal was to guarantee the peace at sea in the Gulf for six months, that is, during the pearling season, in order to ensure that the latter would take place without disruption. Pearl fishing was thus meant to contribute at the same time to shaping the peace at sea and prosperity, both of them being seen as protecting peace on the buffer zone. An initial maritime truce was signed in 1835 by the sheikhs of the Pirate Coast.⁴⁷ By virtue of this agreement, peace was to reign upon the seas, significantly from 21 May to 21 November 1835 during the high season of pearl fishing. Breaking this agreement in any way was assimilated to piracy. In the case of aggression or recourse to violence, the members of the tribe of one of the signatory sheikhs pledged not to respond, but to report the incident immediately to the Resident who was to act as a 'mediator'. From 1835 and until 1843, the temporary maritime truces were renewed every year, for the duration of the pearl season. To make sure the Truces were being respected, maritime surveillance of the pearl beds was reinforced. Thus, from 1840, two cruisers from the Gulf Squadron were posted permanently on the pearl beds from April to November.⁴⁸ The temporary maritime truces were thus an instrument to reinforce the authority of the key figure of the informal empire in the Gulf, the Resident. Indeed, as early as 1835, the main mission of the Resident during his yearly tour of the Gulf was to visit the various sheikhs so that they would agree to the renewal of the Truce.

In 1841, the commander of the Persian Gulf Squadron declared himself pleased with the efficiency of the Truces and the smooth running of the pearl season. According to G. B. Brucks, from 30,000 to 40,000 men, spread over a fleet of approximately 2500 boats, had kept busy fishing pearls between April and October 1841, in a climate that was said to be 'peaceful'.⁴⁹ In 1843, Bombay came out in favour of a new treaty with the sheikhs, on the model of the temporary truces, but this time around meant to last longer, that is ten years.⁵⁰ This new maritime truce was concluded in 1843, with several articles recognizing the harmful economic effects on pearl fishing of the rivalry between sheikhs and of violent attacks at sea.⁵¹ Ten years later, in 1853, the sheikhs of the Pirate Coast signed the 'Treaty of Maritime Peace in Perpetuity' which marked the birth of the 'Trucial Coast' and the disappearance of the 'Pirate Coast'. They declared that they renounced any form of violence at sea 'for evermore' and not just during the pearling season.⁵² Bahrain was associated with this

agreement in 1861. In the 1880s and 1890s, the system of treaties was completed by other agreements, the ‘exclusive treaties’ by which Bahrain in 1880, the various States of the Trucial Coast in 1892 and Kuwait in 1899 agreed to maintain relations only with Great Britain and to ban any foreign interference in their territories.⁵³ Qatar signed the Treaty of Maritime Peace in Perpetuity and the Exclusive agreement only in 1916, since the Sublime Porte had kept its sovereignty over this area until 1913.⁵⁴

From 1820 to around 1860, what has been identified as the first phase of pearling legislation was an integral part of the vast imperial plan of India for West Asia: the transformation of the Gulf into a buffer zone. By means of the pearling policy, the point was to firmly establish the authority of India over this space, to discipline the Gulf populations and to institute the peace at sea. As an essential component of the *Pax Britannica*, pearling legislation made it possible to define the spatial and legal shape of the buffer zone, organized around pearl beds, around the sea and along a thin coastal strip over which the sheikhs’ authority was exerted at various points.

Beginning in the 1870s, the second phase of pearling legislation was launched in a context in which, with the intensification of the global pearl boom, pearl beds, having been overexploited in response to global demand, became the object of attempts to modernize fishing techniques or to obtain concessions for foreigners to fish pearls. In an analysis of this second stage, this last section demonstrates how yet again India, through its protection of Gulf pearls in this new age of pearl imperialism, remained focused as always on the preservation of peace on its strategic buffer zone.

India and the globalization of the Gulf pearl: protecting the ‘pacification’ of the buffer zone

As early as the 1820s, there was a sudden surge in the enthusiasm for pearls in Europe and in the United States, a surge maintained within the context of the Industrial Revolution thanks to the rise of a global bourgeoisie with its own codes of appearance.⁵⁵ Pearls were thus considered to be an indispensable fashion accessory for these new social groups, for their ‘distinction’, for the link they established between what they defined as a ‘legitimate taste’ – to quote Pierre Bourdieu – and the assertion of their symbolic pre-eminence.⁵⁶ According to the Parisian jeweller and gem broker Léonard Rosenthal, in the nineteenth century, ‘the pearl necklace became one of the surest warrants of bourgeois dignity’.⁵⁷ The phenomenon of the taste for pearls took on an ostentatious dimension in jewels for women and tie pins for men for example.⁵⁸ Other accessories, such as buttons and marquetry, stimulated the demand for

mother-of-pearl and for pearls.⁵⁹ The demand from regional markets – India above all, the Ottoman and Persian empires to a lesser extent – was not drying up, but it was not in any way comparable to European demand.

As a consequence of this fashion in Europe and the United States, the nineteenth century was a period of worldwide growth of the exportation of Gulf pearls. Over the seventy years from 1830 to ca. 1900, taking the Gulf as a whole, the value of pearl exports was multiplied by five: indeed, exports amounted to £300,000 in 1833; £400,000 in 1866; and £1,434,399 in 1905. It is estimated that between 1873 and 1905, the value of pearl exports doubled.⁶⁰ Within this economic context of a rise in exports, the price of pearls also rose, doubling between 1852 and 1878. The pearl boom reached a peak between 1900 and 1912. In Bahrain, exports were multiplied by six during this period. A strong European demand accounts for most of this simultaneous rise of exportation and prices beginning in the 1830s, but it was also a result of irregularities, or even crises, in the production of the other fisheries traditionally supplying Europe. Thus, in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a temporary decrease in the production of the fisheries of Ceylon or of the Red Sea, which left Gulf pearls in a situation of dominance on various markets, at times for several years in a row.⁶¹ It can be estimated that from 1860 to 1914, more than half of all the pearls supplied to world markets, and over 80 per cent of natural pearls, came from the Gulf. In 1906, Gulf pearls made up 49 per cent of the worldwide production of pearls.⁶²

The pearl boom had a major geographical, social and economic impact on the Gulf. The main socio-economic consequence of this intensified harvesting of pearl beds, however, was an increase in the indebtedness of local populations, and this phenomenon attracted the attention of the Government of India. For pearl fishing on the Arab coast of the Gulf was based on a permanent system of loans at every level, largely controlled by Indian merchant communities, Kacchi Hindu Bhatias and Muslim Khojas based mostly in Muscat.⁶³

Before the beginning of the pearl season, and in order to fit out ships, and to buy material and supplies, the boat captains, the nakhodas, borrowed money from two categories of lender.⁶⁴ The first category was made up of Indian merchants who were very active in the Bombay pearl market.⁶⁵ In the second group, one found pawnbrokers, mostly Banyan traders. The role of these two groups in the financing of pearl fishing tended to decrease at the end of the nineteenth century, and they were replaced by Arab merchants. The lenders reimbursed themselves at the end of the season by buying the ‘harvest’ at a price 15 to 20 per cent under market price. Another option was for the nakhoda to choose to sell the pearls to a merchant and then pay back his debts to the lender – indeed this was the most frequent case. If the

nakhoda was not able to reimburse the pawnbroker after having sold his pearls to a merchant, the merchant then became responsible for the nakhoda's debts. Given the fluctuations of the world pearl market and the irregularity of the harvests, the nakhodas frequently found themselves unable to pay their debts and might thus get into debt for many years, sometimes even for life. If a nakhoda was the owner of his ship, sometimes the pawnbroker would demand that the debtor sell his boat to pay back his debt. It may be noted that a nakhoda in debt to a pawnbroker could manage to escape the influence of the latter, by going and concluding a deal with another pawnbroker who would accept to buy back his debt. Such arrangements also existed for fishermen who were in debt; they would have their debts bought back by a nakhoda. Fishermen and crew members indeed borrowed from the captain to purchase what they needed to survive once the pearl season had ended and could thus fall victim to this same cycle of indebtedness.

In the 1860s and 1870s, the British began to worry about the social effects of this endemic indebtedness, such as the rising number on the Pearl Coast of 'runaway debtors', that is, individuals who were so far in debt they could no longer borrow and were thus seeking refuge in another territory in order to continue to borrow and be able to fish. For a sheikh, granting asylum to a runaway debtor was seen as an important political gesture and a challenge to the authority of a neighbouring sheikh.⁶⁶ In the 1870s, conflicts and outbreaks of violence called in some cases for the intervention of the Resident.⁶⁷ India and its representative in Bushire, Edward C. Ross rapidly came to see the existence of these runaway debtors as a threat to the peace at sea and to the political and socio-economic balance of this buffer zone of the Indian empire: 'The maintenance of peace and friendly relations amongst the chiefs and people of Oman will lead to the prosperity of the country'. The debtors were thus described as 'a cause of strife and dispute' and 'a risk of the breach of peace at sea'.⁶⁸ In 1878, following up on a request by the sheikhs of Ajman and of Umm Al Quwain, Ross declared running away in the case of debts to be illegal.⁶⁹ He demanded that all debtors return to their territories and jurisdiction of origin and settle their debts. While difficult to implement, this decision represented a step toward the signature of a treaty in 1879 with the sheikhs of the Pearl Coast, the 'Mutual Agreement Entered into by the Trucial Coast Rulers about Absconding Debtors'.⁷⁰ The existence of runaway debtors was in all likelihood an ancient and structurally important indicator in the Gulf pearl industry, on the model of what occurred in all of the societies in the Indian Ocean.⁷¹ Yet the phenomenon increased in the 1870s no doubt due to the world pearl boom. Nevertheless, it is possible to wonder about the consequences it generated. The representative of the Government of India in the Gulf kept

explaining that these debtors brought about tension and violence. As a matter of fact, these accusations, like those which had been formulated earlier against piracy, served a purpose manifest in the exclusive treaties of the 1880s and 1890s: the reinforcement of the authority of India in the Gulf and therefore an even more assertive construction than before of a buffer zone. Indeed, by virtue of the agreement of 1879, the sheikhs agreed to refuse asylum to any runaway debtor and to help him return to his jurisdiction of origin.⁷² If a runaway debtor was found on the territory of a sheikh, the latter ran the risk of being fined MT (Maria Theresa Thaler) 50. The fine could be doubled if it was found that a sheikh actively protected a debtor, thus assisting him in contracting new debts. If a sheikh refused to submit to the rules set by this agreement, the final decision went to the British Resident.

Another consequence at the level of the Gulf of this world enthusiasm for pearls was the arrival in the 1880s and 1890s of foreign companies and adventurers bent on making a fortune in pearl fishing and trade. Two groups may be distinguished here. The first to appear were foreign merchants, often jewellers or gem-brokers wishing to buy pearls directly from local tradesmen or fishermen. Secondly, there were companies attempting to develop pearl harvesting using modern techniques. As for the first group, Parisian jewellers stood as pioneers. At the close of the nineteenth century, Paris, with the jewellers from the place Vendôme, established itself from this time on as the world capital of pearl brokerage, to the detriment of Bombay. The rise of Paris as the European capital of the pearl was a consequence of the US stock exchange panic of October 1907. Indeed, from late 1907, British creditors based in Bombay who used to give credit to Indian pearls merchants of this port city specialized in the trade of Gulf pearls, asked for the repayment of their debts. Pearl merchants from London, Vienna and mostly Paris saw in this transformation of the Bombay pearl-purchasing system a major opportunity to capture the Gulf pearl's trade. The temporary withdrawal of Bombay pearl merchants from the trade resulted in a shift of the centre of the global pearl market to Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. Paris remained the capital of the pearl until the late 1920s. Another consequence of the withdrawal of British creditors from the Bombay pearl market was that Indian merchants partly stopped acting as intermediaries in the global pearl trade. Indeed, a Parisian pearl broker, Sigismund Ettinghausen, set up contacts with Bahrain as early as 1899.⁷³ He was followed by the Rosenthal brothers, Léonard and Victor, who benefitted from the economic downturn affecting the pearling industry in the Gulf in the wake of the 1907 stock-market crisis.⁷⁴ During the year 1909, V. Rosenthal spent thirteen weeks in Bahrain and bought 1,300,000 rupees worth of pearls, that is approximately 25 per cent of the total Gulf stock.⁷⁵ The

following year, 36 per cent of the production was acquired by Rosenthal & Frères, for 4,000,000 rupees. This presence of French jewellers culminated with the admittedly brief visit of Jacques Cartier to Bahrain in the summer of 1912.⁷⁶ In 1911, the house of Rosenthal & Frères attempted to obtain a concession from one of the sheikhs, a clear sign of the actually competitive activism of some European companies.⁷⁷ The presence of Rosenthal & Frères and Ettinghausen seeking to buy Gulf pearls is not just only an evidence of the globalization of the Gulf pearls at the end of the nineteenth century. Their adventures in the Gulf are also a reminder that from the late 1880s, Jewish jewellers and brokers acquired a growing importance at the European end of the pearl trade, especially in Paris, but also to a lesser extent, in London. Parisian Jewish brokers and jewellers made fortunes in the Gulf pearl trade and became at the beginning of the twentieth century distinguished members of the Parisian bourgeoisie.⁷⁸

From as early as the 1890s, some companies opened branches in the Gulf, which in turn took part in commercial development projects with European partners. This was the case with the German company Wönckhaus, specialized in the pearl and mother-of-pearl trade with Germany. In 1897, R. Wonckhäus set up in Lingah the first branch of the 'Perlen Compagnie Wönckhaus GmbH', which in 1909 also had agencies in Bahrain, Bandar Abbas, Dubai and Sharjah.⁷⁹

The activities of these jewellers and adventurers did not overly worry the Government of India. However, the attempts at intensive harvesting of the pearl beds were a cause for alarm for both India and Bushire, and led them to pass laws to protect this essential resource, in accordance with the standard case made to legitimize their control apparatus, as well to maintain the existence of the resource. Indeed, attempts to introduce 'modern' fishing methods occurred in Bahrain as early as the 1860s and they aroused immediate anxiety among the Bahraini fishermen.⁸⁰ These cases seem to have multiplied between 1890 and 1910.⁸¹ In 1900, a British Indian merchant established in Muscat thus managed to obtain directly from the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi the authorization to position on the beds two divers equipped with diving suits. For Bushire, the problem was that the Government of India had no legal means to prevent and ban this type of intervention and to protect pearl beds from over-exploitation, even though they were described as 'the common property of the coast Arabs'.⁸² The question was submitted to the Crown jurists by the India Office in 1904, 'upon the legal and international points raised by his Excellency's Government'. In the memorandum delivered to the jurists, it was emphasized that the creation of a legislation relative to the fisheries was part of the policy of preservation of peace in the Gulf, India's western buffer zone:

The Government of India have called the attention of His Majesty's Government (...) to the fact that in the steps they have consistently taken for more than a century to maintain the maritime peace of the Persian Gulf, they have deprived the Arab Chiefs on the coast of the means of forcibly protecting their interests in the pearl fisheries, and that they therefore feel themselves to be under an obligation to defend those rights in so far as they can reasonably be substantiated.⁸³

During the month of February 1905, the Crown jurists drafted two texts, one on the right of tribes over the pearl beds and the other concerning protection measures. The first document expressed the opinion that in the waters situated between the coast and three marine miles, called 'territorial waters', the 'tribes of the Arabian coast' enjoyed 'the exclusive use' of the beds. In the 'territorial' waters, therefore, the Arabs could demand to have the benefit of an exclusive fishing right. In consequence, 'foreign' societies or individuals could thus be excluded. In the 'deep' sea, beyond three marine miles, the right to exclusivity of the tribe could not be claimed. It was specified that the representatives of the Government of India in the Gulf had the authority to enforce the right of the Arabs in territorial waters. In the second document, the jurists recommended avoiding by 'indirect means' the intrusion of 'foreigners' even in the deep sea. If it came about that the prohibition on fishing was not respected, they indicated it was 'admissible, in the case of the banks only, to effect the compulsory removal of the vessels'. This kind of action was only to be undertaken warily and only with the sheikhs' agreement. Moreover, in case of a dispute, it was possible to bring before the Court in the Hague any problems having to do with territorial waters, keeping in mind at the same time that the outcome of such a procedure, which when all was said and done was not very advisable, could be uncertain. In order to guarantee the implementation of these measures, in 1911, the Government of India, through the Resident of Bushire, made an agreement with the sheikhs of the Trucial Coast, of Bahrain and of Kuwait, according to which they could not grant concessions having to do with the pearl beds without asking the Resident.⁸⁴ This agreement restated one last time that the attempts to develop modern fishing techniques would lead to the end of the political and economic prosperity which had been built up by India for more than a century: 'In these days, possibly will come people seeking their own profits and from this profit will arrive loss to us and to our people.' Above all, it was stated that it was not up to the sheikhs to exploit this resource: 'I do not seek profit without your consultation.'⁸⁵ Pearls were thus India's asset, an imperial commodity from which the Indian

empire drew its greatest profit: peace, and by extension what was its primary goal, security on one of its most strategic buffer zones.

Throughout the long nineteenth century, India thus invented a peculiar imperial model centred on a particular prize, Gulf pearls. What henceforth could be called the 'pearl imperialism' of India had as its goal the exploitation of Gulf pearls in order to gain a profit that went beyond the economic dimension and was instead first and foremost political. The Government of India, by promoting pearl exploitation beginning in the early decades of the nineteenth century, sought to perfect the apparatus it had set up as it intervened militarily and politically in the Gulf. The point was to settle and discipline the populations, to allow for the development of economic activity, and to gradually build up a legal framework meant to pacify and better control territories which had become eminently strategic since they were meant to be a buffer zone, a sort of western border of India. This policy was continued and systematized throughout the nineteenth century at the same time as this border became more important, and the Government of India, drawing inspiration from the experiments in governing undertaken in the sub-continent, relied on the sheikhs to carry it out. The demand for pearls, greatly increasing at the end of the nineteenth century, led western, non-British merchants to try and insert themselves into the commercialisation of this commodity. India endeavoured to react by limiting the intensive exploitation of the beds. Indeed, what was important was the preservation of this resource, which was essential to the stability of this buffer zone of the Indian empire.

In light of these conclusions, it can thus be claimed that the field of enquiry relating to the history of the relationships between commodities and empires, and of their mutually reinforcing character, remains open. What India implemented in the Gulf was assuredly a political-economic model, with a global commodity at the heart of its operation, yet with a political objective the conceptualization of which cannot be dissociated from a series of deeply-felt anxieties linked to the fear of seeing the domination of India undermined. It can also be stated that the pearl paradigm does not quite function as the cotton paradigm studied by Sven Beckert does.⁸⁶ Cotton operated within a system of absolute violence represented by the slave trade which was to provide available labour at a very low price. Pearls, paradoxically because they claim the lives of the divers while at the same time being a highly lucrative commodity, were associated in the way they were exploited with the struggle against the slave trade, so that they may appear as a means to reduce violence.

Whatever the case, it is still possible to wonder about the longevity of the imperial model created in the Gulf and about the durability of pearls as an imperial commodity. Signs of the depletion of the beds became apparent as early as the first decades of the twentieth century, even before two phenomena took place during the interwar period which precipitated the end of the cycle of pearls as imperial commodity. First of all, with the Great Depression the market for luxury goods collapsed, depriving pearls of their outlet in Europe and in the United States. Second, and more importantly, as early as the end of the 1920s, cultured pearls created by the Japanese inventor Mikimoto Kokichi took over the markets and displaced Gulf pearls. During the 1930s, outbreaks of violence increased, with notably the pearl riots in Bahrain. Nevertheless, precisely during those years after the First World War, an alternative imperial system was beginning to be invented, centred on another commodity, the importance of which would turn out to be political as well as economic: oil. Once again, through the control of a resource, the issue of the stability of a region essential to the functioning of the British imperial system was being raised.

Notes

¹ On this kind of approach see, C.R. Koppes, 'Captain Mahan, General Gordon, and the Origins of the Term "Middle East"', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 12, No.1, (1976), pp.95-98; K. Culcasi, 'Constructing and naturalizing the Middle East', *Geographical Review* Vol.100, No.4, (2010), pp.583-597.

² 'Locusts and wild honey (...) and the Persians, Arabians, and other people of the *dry Middle East* have always included them, and do yet, in their bill of fare', *Harper's Bazaar* Vol.16, No.10, (10 March 1883), p.154.

³ *The New York Times*, 9 July 1898, p.26.

⁴ T. E. Gordon, 'The Problem of the Middle East', *The Nineteenth Century* Vol.47, No. 277, (March 1900), p.413.

⁵ V. Chirol, *The Middle Eastern Question or Some Political Problems of Indian Defence* (London: John Murray, 1903). The book is made up of articles published in the *Times* in 1902 and 1903. See also A. T. Mahan, 'The Persian Gulf and International Relations', *National Review* Vol.40 (September 1902), p.39, reprinted in A. T. Mahan, *Retrospect and Prospect* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1902), p.237.

⁶ See for example, M. Bonine, A. Amanat and M. Gasper (eds), *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁷ On the economy of the Gulf and the importance of pearling, see F. Bishara, B. Haykel, S. Hertog, C. Holes and J. Onley, 'The Traditional Economy of the Gulf' in *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History*, J. E. Peterson ed., (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp.187-222; F. Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition* (London: Longman, 1996), pp.202-7, 250; M. S. Scott Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp.80-104; D. A. Agius, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: People of the Dhow* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.143-154.

⁸ X. Beguin Billecocq, *Les Emirats ou la fabuleuse histoire de la Côte des Perles* (Paris: Relations internationales & culture, 1995); R. Donkin., *Beyond Price. Pearls and Pearl-Fishing: Origins to the Age of Discoveries* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1998); A. Farn, *Pearls: Natural, Cultured and Imitation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1991); S. Malaguzzi, *The Pearl* (New York: Rizzoli, 2001); R. Carter, *Sea of Pearls: Seven Thousand Years of the Industry that Shaped the Gulf* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2012); R. Le Baron Bowen, 'The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf', *Middle East Journal* Vol.5, No.2, (1951), pp.161-180.

⁹ Within this abundant historiography, see, among others, S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2015); G. Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); E. Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); T. Brook and B. Tadashi Wakabayashi (eds), *Opium Regimes: China, Britain and Japan, 1839-1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); D. Valenze, *Milk: A Global and Local History* (Yale: New Heaven University Press, 2011); W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000); W. G. Clarence-Smith and S. Topik (eds), *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia and Latin America, 1500-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ See for example Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*.

¹¹ For a general overview, see T. Metcalf, *Imperial connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); S. Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); K. McPherson, S. Arasaratnam, H. Furber and S. Subrahmanyam (eds), *Maritime India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); R. J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa, and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹² Metcalf, *Imperial Connections.*, pp.1, 6.

¹³ J. Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a general overview see also, J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

¹⁴ On the history of the Wahhabi State, see M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁵ J. Jones and N. Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), chap. 1 and 2.

¹⁶ F. Bishara, B. Haykel, S. Hertog C. Holes and J. Onley, 'The Traditional Economy of the Gulf', pp.187-222.

¹⁷ On this topic, see J. Peterson, 'Britain and the Gulf: At the Periphery of Empire', in *The Persian Gulf in History* (London: Macmillan, 2008), pp.277-294; C. E. Davies, *The Blood-Red Arab Flag. An Investigation into Qasimi Piracy, 1797-1820* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997), pp.5-11.

¹⁸ On the strategic importance of the Gulf over the Red Sea, see E. Ingram, *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia 1797-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

¹⁹ On this real and imaginary threat, see G. Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient. Le Golfe Persique à l'âge des impérialismes (c.1800-c.1914)* (Ceyzérieux: Champ Vallon, 2015), pp.95-106; A. Das, *Defending British India against Napoleon. The Foreign Policy of Governor-General Lord Minto, 1807-13* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016), pp.150-152.

²⁰ For an analysis of this discourse, see Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, p.53; P. Risso, 'Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Piracy: Maritime Violence in the Western Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf Region during a Long Eighteenth Century', *Journal of World History* Vol. 12, No.2, (2001), p.293-319. Two sources are particularly important to understand this discourse: J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, 2 vol., (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1908-1915), C. R. Low, *The History of the Indian Navy (1613-1863)*, 2 vol., (London: R. Bentley, 1877).

²¹ On the pirate as a fluid legal construct, see L. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.112-120.

²² L. Subramanian, *The Sovereign and the Pirate: Ordering Maritime Subjects in India's Western Littoral* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016); J. L. Anderson, 'Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective on Maritime Predation' *Journal of World History* Vol. 6, No.2, (1995), pp.175-99. On the history of piracy as a symptom of the rivalries between imperial powers and thalassocracies in the Indian Ocean World, see Anne Pérotin-Dumon, 'The Pirate and the Emperor: Power and the Law on the Seas, 1450-1850', in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade 1350-1750*, J. Tracy ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.196-227.

²³ On discourses on race in India and beyond, see S. Kapila, 'Race Matters: Orientalism and Religion, India and Beyond, c. 1770-1880', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 41, No.3, (2007), pp.471-513.

²⁴ On this discourse in the nineteenth century, see for example, J. S. Buckingham, 'The Pirate Coast was an ideal place for sea robbers', *Travels in Assyria, Media, and Persia*, 2 vol., (London: Colburn & Bentley, 1830), vol.1, p.210; J. R. Wellsted, 'This plundering or piratical disposition is so general among the Arabs of these parts', *Travels to the City of the Caliphs, along the Shores of the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, Including a Voyage to the Coast of Arabia and Tour on the Island of Socotra*, 2 vol.,

(London: Henry Colburn, 1840), vol.1, p.99 ; ‘I question if any part of the globe presents a more tortuous or irregular outline than the north-east portion of Arabia’, *Travels to the City*, vol.1, p. 100.

²⁵ On this ‘piratical geography’, see S. Layton, ‘Discourses of Piracy in an Age of Revolutions’, *Itinerario* Vol.35, No.2 (2011), pp.81-97; Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, p.78-80.

²⁶ On the Qasimi, see M. Al-Qasimi, *The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf* (London: Croom Helm, 1986). For another point of view and defending the existence of piracy in the Gulf, see Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*.

²⁷ See for example Buckingham on the conversion of the Qasimi to Wahhabism: ‘They obeyed the call with all the enthusiasm which new religions are so frequently found to inspire, and directed their views to war and conquest; their leaders easily persuaded them that God was on their side, and that therefore the legions of hell itself could not prevail against them’, Buckingham, *Travels in Assyria*, vol.2, p.213.

²⁸ On this attack, see Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, p.105.

²⁹ On discussions concerning the invention of the pirate myth, see *ibid.*, pp.74-82; M. Al-Qasimi, M., *The Myth*; S. Layton, ‘Discourses’.

³⁰ On the discourse in Bombay on the Gulf pirates post 1800, see F. Warden, ‘Historical Sketch of the Joasmee Tribe of Arabs from the Year 1747 to the year 1819’, in R. Hughes Thomas (ed.), *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, NS xxiv (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856), pp.299-312.

³¹ On these two interventions, see Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, pp.113-114, 141-145.

³² On the chronology of the Gulf mapping surveys, see Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, pp.192-206.

³³ J.F. Standish, ‘British Maritime Policy in the Persian Gulf’, *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol.3, No. 4 (1964), pp.324-354.

³⁴ J. Onley, *Arabian Frontier*; J. Onley, ‘Britain’s Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820–1971’, *Journal of Social Affairs* Vol.22, No. 87, (2005), pp.29-45.

³⁵ For an analysis of this discourse, see Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, pp.79-86.

³⁶ IOR/R/15/1/14, f. 67, April 1814, Bruce to Farish.

³⁷ On the discussions around these preliminary treaties, IOR/R/15/1/21, ff 4-12, 16 January 1820, Keir to Bruce; IOR/R/15/1/21ff 21-26, 21 March 1820, Warden to Bruce. The preliminary treaties are reprinted in C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. 10, *Containing the Treatises, Etc; Relating to Persia and the Persian Gulf* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1892).

³⁸ ‘Sultan bin Suggur shall surrender to the general towers, guns, and vessels which are in Sharjah, Imam, Umm-ool-Keiweyn and their dependencies’, Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, vol. 10, p.122.

³⁹ See article 7 of the General Treaty: ‘If any tribe, or others, shall not desist from plunder and piracy, the friendly Arabs shall act against them according to their ability and circumstances, and an arrangement for this purpose shall take place between the friendly Arabs and the British at the time when such plunder and piracy shall occur’, *ibid.*, p.128.

⁴⁰ IOR/R/15/1/14, f 77v, May 1814, Bruce to Warden.

⁴¹ The treaty was thus designated as the ‘General Treaty with the Arab tribes’.

⁴² See notably the treaty signed with the Sheikh of Ras al Khaimah: ‘Leave the boats which are for the pearl fishery and fishing boats, and the remainder of the vessels shall be at the disposal of the General’, Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, vol. 10, p.124.

⁴³ ‘The vessels of the friendly Arabs shall all of them have in their possession a paper (Register) signed with the signature of their chief, in which shall be the name of the vessel, its length, its breadth, and how many Karahs it holds. And they shall also have in their possession another writing (Port Clearance) signed with the signature of their chief, in which shall be the name of the owner, the name of the Nacodah, the number of men, the number of arms, from whence sailed, at what time, and to what port bound. And if a British or other vessel meet them, they shall produce the Register and the Clearance.’, *Ibid*, p.120.

⁴⁴ IOR/R/15/1/27, ff 4v-6, Jan. 1823, MacLeod to Senior Officer commanding EIC vessels in the Gulf; IOR/F/4/1163/30468, ‘Papers regarding the political situation in the Persian Gulf, relations with local Chieftains, suppression of piracy’, 1827-1828; IOR/F/4/990/27718, ‘Papers regarding the political situation in the Persian Gulf, Muscat, Mocha, etc...’, vol. 5, Nov.1825-Aug.1826.

⁴⁵ IOR/R/15/1/67, f 62, Hennel to Norris, 1835.

⁴⁶ IOR/R/15/1/67, f19v, ‘List of demands to be made on the Chief of Aboothabee in compensation for the “outrages” committed by the Beniayas on the “peaceable Arabs” of the Persian Gulf’, 27 April 1835; IOR/R/15/1/67, f 39v ‘General statement of the vessels detained or piratically seized by the Beniayas tribe and subsequently recovered by the Persian Gulf Squadron’, 21 May 1835.

⁴⁷ The Sheikhs of Abu Dhabi, of Dubai, of Ras al Khaimah, of Sharjah, of Umm al Quwain and of Ajman.

⁴⁸ IOR/R/15/1/67, ff 85v-86, Dec. 1835.

⁴⁹ IOR/R/15/1/92, Brucks to Hennel, Nov. 1841.

⁵⁰ 'From the 1st of June A. D. 1843 (...), there shall be a cessation of hostilities at sea between our respective subjects and dependants, and that from the above date until the termination of the month May A. D. 1853, an inviolable truce shall be established, during which period our several claims upon each other shall rest in abeyance.' Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, p.134.

⁵¹ 'Being fully impressed with a sense of the evil consequence arising from our subjects and dependants being prevented carrying on the pearl fishery without interruption on the banks, owing to the various feuds existing amongst ourselves, and, moreover, duly appreciating the general advantage to be derived from the establishment of a truce', *Ibid*, p.134.

⁵² 'That from this date, viz. 25th Rujjub 1269, 4th May 1853, and hereafter, there shall be a complete cessation of hostilities at sea between our respective subjects and dependants, and a perfect maritime truce shall endure between ourselves and between our successors, respectively, for evermore', *Ibid*, p.136.

⁵³ Qatar was associated in 1916. On the exclusive treaties, see Onley, 'Britain's Informal Empire'; M. Yapp, 'British Policy in the Persian Gulf' in *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey*, Alvin J Cottrell (ed.), (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp.70-73; H. M. Albaharna, *The Arabian Gulf States: Their Legal and Political Status and Their International Problems* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975).

⁵⁴ On this topic, see Z. Kurçun, *The Ottomans in Qatar: A History of Anglo-Ottoman Conflicts in the Persian Gulf* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2002); F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); J. Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1983).

⁵⁵ Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, p.141-150.

⁵⁶ P. Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979), transl., R. Nice, , *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

⁵⁷ L. Rosenthal, *Mémoires d'un chercheur de perles* (Paris: Deux Rives, 1949), transl. H. Briffault, *The Pearl Hunter: An Autobiography* (New York: Schuman, 1952).

⁵⁸ Carter, *Sea of Pearls*, chap. 4 and 5.

⁵⁹ On the connections between the Gulf pearl, the button and marquetry industries in France and England, see Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, pp.384-5.

⁶⁰ J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1 'Historical', Part II, Appendix C 'The Pearl and Mother-of-Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf', pp.2220-2293.

⁶¹ The Ceylon fisheries were said to have been devastated by natural phenomena: IOR/L/PS/10/457, 'Report on the Ceylon pearl fisheries by Sir W. Crofton Twynam', 1902. Fisheries in the Red Sea are also known to have experienced a crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century: 'Report on the nature of red sea piracies from Jeddah Consul diary', PRO/FO/78/5484, 1902, Devey to O'Connor.

⁶² Donkin, *Beyond Price*.

⁶³ On these Indian merchant communities in the Gulf, involved in pearl fishing and trade, see C. Goswami, *Globalization before its time: the Gujarati merchants from Kachchh* (Gurgaon: Portfolio-Penguin, 2016), pp.72-115.

⁶⁴ With a few exceptions, the nakhoda is not to be confused with the owner of the boat.

⁶⁵ Goswami, *Globalization*.

⁶⁶ V. P. Hightower, 'Pearling and Political Power in the Trucial States, 1850-1930: Debts, Taxes, and Politics', *Journal of Arabian Studies* Vol. 3, No. 2, (2013), pp.215-23.

⁶⁷ IOR/R/15/1/185, ff 4, 2 Dec. 1878, Chief of Amulgavine and Chief of Ajman to British Agent in Sharjah.

⁶⁸ IOR/R/15/1/185, ff 82, 1878.

⁶⁹ E. C. Ross was resident in the Gulf from 1877 to 1891.

⁷⁰ IOR/R/15/1/185, ff. 117-118, 1879. The sheikh of Bahrain was not a signatory.

⁷¹ On this global system of debt in the Indian Ocean, see F. Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Indian Ocean, 1850-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.56.

⁷² 'In the event of a runaway seeking refuge in our territories, whether by sea or by land, to consider it our duty to at once, restore him to the chief from whose jurisdiction, he may have absconded', IOR R/15/1/185, ff. 117-118, 1879.

⁷³ On S. Ettinghausen, see Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, pp.389, 482; B. J. Slot, 'French Relations with the Independent Shaikhdoms of the Lower Gulf', *Liwa, Journal of the National Center for Documentation & Research* Vol. 1, No.2, (2009), p. 10-20.

⁷⁴ On the history of the house of Rosenthal & Frères, see Rosenthal, *Mémoires*; Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, pp.390-93, 495, 592; M. S. Hopper, 'The African Presence in Eastern Arabia', in *The Gulf in Modern Times: People, Ports, and History* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014), pp.202-213; M.S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, pp.92-95, 193-194; Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, p.86.

⁷⁵ IOR/R/15/1/710, 'Administration report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency for the year 1909, Administration Report for Bahrein', p.84.

⁷⁶ IOR/R/15/1/71, 'Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency for the Years 1912, Administration Report for Bahrein', p.102.

⁷⁷ IOR/R/15/2/14/B/3, ff 9-10, 'Sponge and Pearl Concessions', Cox to Political Agent in Bahrain, July 1911.

⁷⁸ Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*, p. 95; Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, p. 391.

⁷⁹ E. Staley, 'Business and Politics in the Persian Gulf: The Story of the Wönckhaus Firm', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No.3, (1993), pp.367-385; Crouzet, *Genèses du Moyen-Orient*, pp.343, 392-395, 492.

⁸⁰ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, p.2247

⁸¹ IOR/L/PS/20/C247, 'Précis of correspondence on international rivalry and British policy in the Persian Gulf, 1872-1905', chapter 10 'Protection from foreign enterprise the rights of Arab tribes in the pearl fisheries of the Persian Gulf', pp.304-333.

⁸² IOR L/PS/20/C247, chapter 10.

⁸³ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, p.2249

⁸⁴ C. Aitchison, *The Treaties relating to Aden and the South Western Coast of Arabia, the Arab Principalities in the Persian Gulf, Muscat, Oman, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier province*, vol. XI, p.263.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.264.

⁸⁶ S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*.