

Our Man in Zanzibar: Richard Waters, American Consul
(1837-1845)

by

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Foreword

Atkins Hamerton sailed into Zanzibar harbor on May 4 1841. He was in for a surprise. As a high level British official, Hamerton expected to be treated with respect, if not outright deference. This was a reasonable expectation. He was a captain of the 15th Bombay Native Infantry. As a British consul, Hamerton was both an agent of the East India Company and an official representative of the British government. And Britain, with its far-flung empire, was the greatest power on the face of the earth. It could crush the sultan of Oman and absorb tiny Oman and its tinier possession, Zanzibar, any time it wished.

That, however, was not why Hamerton was there. He had been sent to Zanzibar to report back to London and Bombay on the status of the slave trade in the sultan's dominions and to gather information about recent French activity in east Africa. Immediately after his arrival, however, Hamerton was besieged with complaints from British and Indian traders. They all complained about the same thing: the monopoly on the lucrative trade that came to and from east Africa through Zanzibar, a monopoly operated by Customs Manager Jairam Sewji and American consul, merchant and commercial representative Richard Waters. The monopoly was preventing outsiders, even British traders, from competing in the Zanzibar market. By doing so it was pushing up prices and making Waters, Sewji and their partners and associates very, very rich.

Hamerton could be forgiven for thinking that this matter could be easily solved with a quick visit to the sultan and a subtle reminder of who was running

things in that part of the world. With his credentials in hand, Hamerton went to the sultan's impressive stone palace. As soon as he arrived, he was surprised to notice a pair of new paintings on either side of the sultan's throne:

I [Hamerton] observed two pictures hung up on either side of Imam's [the sultan] chair in the room where he holds his *darbar* [court]; the subjects were naval engagements between American and English ships; the ship of England is represented as just being taken by the Americans, and the English ensign is being hauled down and the American hoisted at the masthead.¹

To Hamerton's further surprise, a number of the sultan's courtiers began "talking loudly of the power and wealth of America and the superiority of their sailors over the English." These comments were provocative, but not entirely untrue. While Britain was the dominant foreign power in the Indian Ocean, on the other side of the globe the young United States had recently defeated the British in two wars. Additionally, the British were becoming used to the annoyance of having to compete commercially with Yankee traders in ports and lands under their military or political control.

It dawned on Hamerton that breaking up the Sewji-Waters monopoly was not going to be easy. Even more disturbing for Hamerton, he realized his reception at the sultan's palace was not the work of a scheming American who had the sultan's ear. It was much more complex than that. The sultan's right hand man, Captain Hassan, had named his plantation "Salem."² Moreover, many local Zanzibaris believed England to be a suburb of Salem. Hamerton was seeing the workings of a system and a culture

¹ John Milner Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 205. See also, Reginald Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders : From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), 477.

² Norman R Bennett and George E Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa; a History through Documents, 1802 to 1865* (Brookline: Boston University Press, 1965), 213.

that had operated in the Indian Ocean long before the British arrived and would continue to operate long after they departed. This system was about trading and commercial relationships, not about exploitation, domination or empire building.

As for the problem American consul, Richard Waters of Salem, Massachusetts, he was not in Zanzibar at the time. He was in Bombay, India – on business.

Introduction

The average citizen of the United States would not be able to locate Oman on a world map, nor would they be aware that the governments of the two countries have a close relationship. If you asked an expert, say a political scientist specializing in the Middle East, about United States–Oman relations, they would most likely cite the United States’ obvious interests in the Persian Gulf and tell you how Oman’s friendship with Iran and the U.S. and U.K. has made it an important mediator of conflicts in the region. They would talk about events that occurred mainly in the 1980s and 90s.

The fact is that United States–Oman relations are much, much older than that. The friendship between the two countries began not in the 1990s but in the 1790s. This thesis will focus on the years between 1820 and 1856, a fascinating time in which merchants from the fledgling merchant nation the United States and the ruler of ancient Indian Ocean trading power Oman reached out to each other. This period saw the United States’ very first treaty with an Asian Arabic nation and extensive economic and trade agreements and cooperation between the two. These had to do mostly with the Omani-controlled island of Zanzibar, which served as the conduit for the lucrative trade for raw materials and other goods from a large part of east Africa. There were other political, economic and cultural contacts between the nations during this time, including a trip by an Omani vessel to New York City in 1840 that was the first voyage ever from an Arabian nation to the United States of America. Intended to be the first of many, this voyage shows that at least one of the parties to the Oman-

U.S. relationship had a grander vision of its possibilities than the mere trading of Yankee hardware and bolts of cotton for elephant tusks and zebra skins.

The story begins with the appointment of the first American consul to Zanzibar, Richard Waters of Salem Massachusetts. On the surface, much about the Richard Waters story seems highly unlikely. In the middle nineteenth century the United States and Oman knew very little about each other. Richard Waters came from the United States, a democracy, while the Omani sultan, Said bin Sultan, was a monarch who controlled territory not only in the gulf country of Oman and points east along the coast of the Indian Ocean, but along the east African coast as well. Waters was a devout Christian. Said bin Sultan was an equally devout Muslim. For nearly seven decades, the U.S. had been free from British rule while Oman found itself more and more dependent on British help and at the same time increasingly dominated by the British.

Historians make sense of different events in different ways and through different intellectual prisms. Some may focus on the large geopolitical forces at work. Others may place more or less importance on individual personalities and actions. Historians can be more or less willing to attribute significant historical events to chance. In order to properly understand the Richard Waters story it is necessary to examine all three – geopolitical and historical context, relationships between and characteristics of individual actors, and simple chance -- and the ways in which they interacted with each other, in order to understand this episode and its full meaning.

The initial success of U.S.-Oman relations grew out of a personal relationship that developed in Zanzibar between Waters and Said bin Sultan, the sultan of Oman.

Historians tend to undervalue the effect of personal relationships, in part because they can be hard to quantify or evaluate, especially from a temporal distance. As we will see, personality and personal relationships are indispensable to understanding both the Waters-Said bin Sultan alliance and the larger merchant environment in Zanzibar. This is not, however, to ignore the historical and geopolitical forces that made the Richard Waters story possible in the first place. At a time when such a voyage took five months or longer, what were merchants from Salem doing sailing to Zanzibar in the first place? By the 1840s, partly because of the after effects of the War of 1812, Salem had lost commercial ground to cities with larger, deeper ports, such as New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Salem merchants were forced to look to more exotic and faraway ports for trading opportunities. In Zanzibar, they found that they were at a competitive advantage because like Salem, Zanzibar had small, shallow harbors. This meant that large ships from New York, Boston and Philadelphia could not enter the harbor even if they wanted to. While clearly interested in promoting the Zanzibar trade, which he controlled, the Omani sultan had other concerns. Once a primary player in the Indian Ocean trading system, Oman found itself increasingly operating in a world dominated by the powerful and aggressive British. In an attempt to reduce British influence in east Africa and perhaps to offset British pressure on him to end slave trading, Said bin Sultan embarked on a program of encouraging foreign trade at Zanzibar. (Ironically, this led him into a close friendship with a staunchly Abolitionist Yankee, Richard Waters). The Americans made ideal partners, for one thing, because they did not have territorial ambitions in east Africa. Of course, for Omani purposes their new American trading partner did not have to be Salem, or only Salem; one far-

away American trading city full of energetic, commercially savvy Yankees would do as well as another. A fundamental tension would develop after the initial years of the Waters consulship, when Said bin Sultan and merchants in Zanzibar actively tried to expand the trade to include more American and foreign merchants while Waters and others tried their best to keep the trade to themselves.

When modern readers think of the Indian Ocean, they are likely to think of merely a large body of water. However, for centuries the Indian Ocean has functioned as a complex, intertwined commercial system that transcended geographic, cultural and religious boundaries with ease. In the mid-1800s Oman, Zanzibar and India were long-standing members of this system, as were coastal Asian cultures from Persia to Java to China. The climate of the Indian Ocean and its web of trading arrangements allowed persons, goods and ideas – Islam, for one -- to move around it with fluidity. This trading system was complex and resistant to control or subjugation by any single participant or, for that matter, by any of the European colonial powers that entered the Indian Ocean, beginning with the Portuguese and the Dutch and ending with the British and French. In the 1830s merchants from Salem started to become players in the Zanzibar trade. This was not the first time that Salem merchants had participated in the larger Indian Ocean system. Salem merchants had been involved in commercial activity around the world before the War of 1812 and had been quite successful trading in Indian, Chinese and Indonesian ports. It has been assumed by some that the fluid multi-cultural quality of the Indian Ocean trading system changed after the Portuguese and other Europeans entered into the Indian Ocean, beginning in the sixteenth century -- that the Europeans fundamentally inhibited or even destroyed this

system. The Richard Waters story shows that while the system may have been affected by European interference, it surely had not come to an end or lost its essential characteristics.

Because of their tendency to reduce identity to nationality, historians have underappreciated the complexity of Richard Waters's identity, as well as the degree to which he constructed his position as consul *ad hoc* and to suit himself. Initially quite vaguely defined, his position as consul took on a variety of different functions. The formal role of diplomat for the United States was arguably the least important of them.

While Waters and the sultan were products of their own time, cultural and national identity, there is an undeniable and significant personal context to these events as well -- the attraction of an unusually shrewd and worldly Asian Muslim head of state toward an energetic, new nation on the other side of the earth and his respect for the enterprise, commercial skill and religious piety of an American diplomat and entrepreneur. A comparison with Richard Waters's successor, Charles Ward, demonstrates the extent to which the strong personal relationship between Waters and the sultan drove U.S.-Oman relations. For the most part, the geopolitical forces in play remained the same in Zanzibar after Waters left in 1844. However, when the personalities involved changed, so did the relationship. Despite the sultan's desire to continue to develop a deeper relationship with the U.S., the departure of Waters meant, in essence, the beginning of the end.

Chapter 1 – Historical Background and Historiography

Review of Indian Ocean Historiography

To understand what happened in Zanzibar in the mid nineteenth century, it is necessary to place it in the context of the Indian Ocean trading system, which was more than a watery highway for traded commodities; it was a world unto itself. It was a world governed by ancient customs and arrangements and commercial structures that enabled traders from nations with differing languages, religions and laws to interact with ease. In a sense, participants in this world had acquired “maritime identities” as participants in a much larger world, completely apart from their identities as Persians, Gujaratis, Javans and so on. In the words of historian R.N. Chaudhuri:

How far the Indian Ocean made its influence felt in the vast sweep of land in the north and the south west, in the direction of Asia and Africa, is a fascinating question.¹

In recent decades there has been considerable research on the culture and economics of the Swahili coast and its place in the wider Indian Ocean trading system. Some historians have begun to question the previously accepted scholarship on Africa’s relationship with the wider world, challenging the notion that Africa and the various different peoples within Africa were primarily inward looking, insular and confined to the continent. Particularly relevant to this topic is the work of historians

¹ K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean : An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 160.

such as Michael Pearson and K.N. Chaudhuri.² These historians aim to look beyond traditional land borders and examine spatial boundaries that are both physical (like the Indian Ocean) and psychological. As Indian Ocean historian Sugata Bose states, “the continuity of a spatial surface and an idea of its limits are dependent not only on physical structure but also on the cognitive domain of mental processes.”³

Indian Ocean historians have differing opinions about how even to describe the Indian Ocean in this sense.⁴ This thesis will use the shorthand phrase, “Indian Ocean system.” Historians of all stripes can agree on one thing: historically, the Swahili coast and the Indian Ocean system operated in a far more complex way than scholars had realized before. The Swahili coast was a place where Arab, Persian and south east Asian merchants and settlers traded and interacted in matters of culture, religion, material culture and many other ways.⁵ These historians are interested in the notion of a discrete civilization of the Indian Ocean, much as Fernand Braudel regarded the Mediterranean world. Pearson states that, “historians have too often neglected the role of the sea in world history. This has produced skewed, incomplete

² Pearson, Chaudhuri, and others have taken an approach similar to that of Fernand Braudel of the Annales School and the study of the Mediterranean and have applied it to the Indian Ocean.

³ Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons : The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5.

⁴ Bose believes that the term “system” is too rigid in describing the Indian Ocean and that the term “interregional arena” is a better characterization because it is more flexible. “An interregional arena lies somewhere between the generalities of a “world system” and the specificities of particular regions.” *Ibid.*, 6. Michael Pearson expresses concern about using the term “Indian Ocean” because it implies that India is in the center. Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 13.

⁵ K.N. Chaudhuri in 1985 was one of the first to employ a quasi-Braudelian analysis of the Indian Ocean, covering the period between the rise of Islam and the year 1750. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean : An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*. Kenneth McPherson takes a similar approach. Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean : A History of People and the Sea* (Delhi: New York, 1993). R.J. Barendse offers an extremely detailed study of the commercial world of the 17th century Indian Ocean and draws on Braudel for inspiration. R. J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas : The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002). Abdul Sheriff operates in a similarly Braudelian manner, focusing on the dhow trade. Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean : Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

histories of human kind.”⁶ Pearson also maintains that the Indian Ocean holds too little significance for European scholars and is too often wrongly viewed as static. For many European scholars, Pearson argues, the Indian Ocean only comes into history when European powers choose to travel across it. He also points out that the sea and its system have left little or no historical imprint in themselves, perhaps one of the reasons that the numerous voyages of Salem and other American merchants have been forgotten or devalued in most histories of the nations and empires of the Indian Ocean.

The complex multicultural interactions in the Indian Ocean throughout history combined to produce what might be called a “maritime identity,” one that transcends the conventional limitations of identity as local, national, or in Richard Waters’s case, continental. In some contexts, the phenomenon of “maritime” identity could make “national” identity almost irrelevant. It reveals much about the Indian Ocean system that Said bin Sultan and Richard Waters were able to construct a close personal relationship despite the obvious differences in their lives and backgrounds. An environment such as Zanzibar in the mid nineteenth century, populated by people from many far-flung nationalities and places interacting via continually renegotiated and complex arrangements, is a case in point. The people who made Zanzibar work belonged to just such a non-national, non-religious, non-geographic identity, an identity based on participation in a system with its own particular rules, customs and even etiquette.

The Indian Ocean was a multicultural world full of merchant communities including Arabs, Swahilis, Persians, Gujaratis and many others. It was also a

⁶ M. N. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean: Seas in history* (London: Routledge, 2003). 3

surprisingly peaceful place. Historically, the Indian Ocean saw very little violence or religious conflict until the Portuguese arrived. This is surprising considering the variety of religious groups that lived along the shores of the Indian Ocean. These groups included Hindus, Muslims (of a variety of different sects), Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians – groups that have shown no reluctance to do violence to each other elsewhere. Abdul Sheriff describes it as, “a world dominated not by any single monopolizing superpower, but by the concept of free trade in which innumerable port city-states flourished.”⁷

Tolerance in the face of cultural differences, religious ideas and local customs is a major theme of the Richard Waters story. Sheriff raises an issue that is highly relevant to the Richard Waters story when he discusses the nature of cross-cultural trade. He writes, “Trade, therefore, often provided not only an opportunity for an exchange of economic goods, but also a meeting point where initial chuckles about the other’s ignorance of economic value was soon replaced by a deeper appreciation of each other’s cultural values. Tolerance is only the first stage in the process that may develop into respect, and even celebration of the difference.”⁸

The scope of the Indian Ocean’s long-distance trade could be read on the clothing of its inhabitants. Sheriff writes, “Brides in far away India wore ivory bangles while the Chinese even farther east made their unique intricate carvings using ivory from Africa in the far west of the then known world. By the time the Europeans arrived, almost everybody from the Cape of Good Hope to China was clothed ‘from

⁷ Sheriff writes, “The east African coast, for example, is said to have experienced its golden age in the fifteenth century when no fewer than thirty-seven port city-states dotted the Swahili Coast.” Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean : Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam*, 317.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 319.

head to foot' in Indian textiles; and the Indonesian sarong has become an almost universal male attire all around the rim of that ocean."⁹ This was true for the Salem merchants who plied the Indian Ocean as well. When Salem shipmaster George Nichols married his wife Sally in 1801, Nichols described Sally's wedding dress as, "a beautiful striped muslin, very delicate, made in Bombay..."¹⁰ Besides shared clothing styles there was a sense of familiarity among people from Indian Ocean trading communities. During the time of Richard Waters, the Banyan merchants were considered locals in the Zanzibar community.¹¹ This sense of familiarity among peoples from port cities extended to members of Richard Waters's own family. Waters's mother "was said to know more about Zanzibar's surroundings than she did the outskirts of Salem, even though she had never visited East Africa."¹² The cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean was on full display in Zanzibar and not only on the docks. Salima bin Said, a daughter of Said bin Sultan, writes of the many different members of the sultan's harem. There were wives from Oman, Circassia, Ethiopia, Persia and elsewhere.¹³

⁹ Sheriff further adds that, "commodities are not merely economic goods; they are also embodiments of cultural values." *Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁰ George Nichols, *George Nichols, Salem Shipmaster and Merchant; an Autobiography* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 48.

¹¹ Many of the Indians in Zanzibar spoke Swahili as their first language. Erik Gilbert, "Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long-Distance Trade, Empire, Migration, and Regional Unity, 1750-1970," *The History Teacher* 36, no. 1 (2002): 25.

¹² Jeremy Prestholdt, "On the Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004): 769.

¹³ Emilie Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar* (New York: M. Wiener Pub., 1989), 44-45. Arabic, Persian, and Turkish food was offered at the Sultan's palaces as well. See *Ibid.*, 14-15.

Oman and East Africa

Oman and Zanzibar had their own history within the larger Indian Ocean system. For centuries there had been much contact between Arab peoples and the people of Zanzibar and east Africa. In the days of sail, routes of trade and commerce in the Indian Ocean were directly related to the seasonal patterns of the monsoon winds. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to appreciate the resources and commercial possibilities of the east African coast. They expressed their appreciation in the traditional European manner. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Portuguese military aggression greatly disrupted commerce in the area. "Following a strategy articulated by d'Albuquerque, they successfully attacked and occupied the crucial commercial centers of the entire Indian Ocean, including Sofala, Kilwa, Mombasa, Brava, Shihr, Muscat, Ormuz, and Goa."¹⁴ The Portuguese goal was to profit from existing trade through the implementation of customs duties and monopolies and to do so at the point of a cannon's mouth.

The Portuguese conquered the coast of Oman and occupied the city of Muscat from 1508 until 1650, when the Yaaruba Dynasty of Oman evicted them and permanently eclipsed Portuguese power in the region. The Yaaruba Dynasty, conventionally believed to be more concerned with religious matters than trade, in fact exercised regional maritime commercial dominance in the seventeenth century. Oman became a feared and unpredictable enemy of the Portuguese and other Europeans. "Portuguese settlements were attacked frequently, though not it seems

¹⁴ Randall L. Pouwels, "Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean to 1800: Reviewing Relations in Historical Perspective," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, no. 2/3 (2002): 399.

with any clear plan in view.”¹⁵ The Yaaruba extended their attacks to east Africa in 1661, sacking and then abandoning Mombasa. They followed in 1670 with raids on Mozambique and destroyed the Portuguese settlement of Pate in 1689. Their crowning military success was the siege of Mombasa, begun in 1696 and completed in 1698. Once expelled from Mombasa’s Fort Jesus in 1698, the Portuguese effectively ceased being a significant power in the western Indian Ocean. This enabled the Yaaruba Dynasty of Oman to extend its reach and by 1698, it controlled the entire east African coast.

Although related through existing systems of trade, east Africa and Zanzibar had a rather different experience from that of India in the eighteenth century. While India was controlled directly by the British, Oman managed to retain much autonomy in east Africa by making strategic concessions to Great Britain. The year 1744 marked the founding of the Al-Busaid dynasty, after Ahmed bin Said was elected Imam, (as Omani leaders were then titled), following his success in repelling an invading Persian force.

The Al-Busaid dynasty, now a sultanate, continues to rule Oman in the present day. In the early nineteenth century, after working out internal issues, Oman again focused its attention on east Africa. The rising power of the British in India had made it impossible for Oman to continue to play a significant political or economic role in India. By the mid eighteenth century, Oman had solidified its control of Zanzibar and by the early nineteenth century, ruled over most of the Swahili coast. Succeeding Imam Ahmed, Sayyid Said bin Sultan came to power and ruled Oman from 1804 to

¹⁵ M. N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders : The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 159.

1856. Under his control, Oman further expanded its political influence throughout the Persian Gulf and east Africa. An energetic and forward-thinking ruler, Said bin Sultan was also the key player in early United States-Oman relations.

Westerners in the Indian Ocean

The Salem merchants of the first quarter of the nineteenth century were not the first westerners to trade in the Indian Ocean. From the Portuguese in the sixteenth century to the British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries an increased European presence brought even greater complexity to the Indian Ocean system. However, one thing that most new histories of the Indian Ocean have in common with older works or narratives about Indian Ocean trade is that the role of American traders such as Richard Waters is oversimplified and underdeveloped, if it is mentioned at all.¹⁶

It is important for any study of the role of American trade in the region to consider the historical scholarship on the role of Europeans in the Indian Ocean. It is also important to consider its limitations. Unlike the British and French, or their predecessors the Dutch and the Portuguese, the Americans had no imperial agenda in the Indian Ocean during this time. The nature of American trade was different from that of European trade; while America absolutely had every intention of gaining economic influence and privileges through trade, it had no intention at all of acquiring

¹⁶ The following is Erik Gilbert's description of the sultan's move to Zanzibar. "Oman revived its claims in East Africa, and in 1838 Seyyid Said, the Sultan of Oman, moved his residence to Zanzibar, bringing with him Atkins Hamerton, the East India Company's agent in Muscat, and Britain's first official representative in East Africa." Gilbert, "Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long-Distance Trade, Empire, Migration, and Regional Unity, 1750-1970," 25. The Americans are left out completely. As shown in chapters three and four, Hamerton's coming to Zanzibar had quite a lot to do with the Americans.

or colonizing foreign land. This was in great contrast to the long history of European territorial expansion and imperialistic exploitation in the area. At the same time, many American merchants had close relationships with local sovereigns and merchants; despite their vast cultural and religious differences; rulers such as the sultan of Oman and local functionaries such as Zanzibar's Customs House manager Sewji seem to have enjoyed an unusual rapport with American merchants and officials. An important aspect of the treaty of 1833 between the United States and Oman was the issue of the right to trade on the Mrima Coast of east Africa. Said bin Sultan's actions regarding this part of the treaty showed that he treated American merchants quite differently from European ones. This will be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four.

Looking at the Indian Ocean as distinct from the British Empire or any other political or economic entity is useful to historians studying the United States' role in the region. For one thing, it allows historians to evaluate American trade in a way that is less likely to be colored by a Western-centric point of view. Regarding the Americans in Zanzibar, historians have not given Said bin Sultan enough credit for shaping the east African trade. In many instances, they treat him as a passive actor in both the United States-Oman relationship and in his relationship with Britain.¹⁷

Additionally, historians have a tendency to overstate European influence in the Indian Ocean because of the dominance of the colonial powers on land. For most of its long history, the Indian Ocean did not include a particularly strong or pronounced European presence. Even in later centuries Western nations had little control or involvement with events and trends within the Indian Ocean system.

¹⁷ This false notion of Said bin Sultan is discussed later in the chapter.

As for what role westerners actually did play in the Indian Ocean, Pearson argues that the Portuguese did not affect the Indian Ocean system as much as previously thought. In essence, their function was to operate a glorified protection racket against violence and insecurity that they themselves created.¹⁸ A historian of Islamic history, Patricia Risso, asks the question: “how can we best explain the role played by West Europeans in the Indian Ocean region, particularly in relation to Muslims?”¹⁹ Risso also raises other relevant issues about how historians view the past. One common historical viewpoint is outcome-based. Should historians take the outcome of British dominance in India as a basis to ask questions about the previous centuries leading up to it? Risso presents an opposing view, arguing “that the historian should not work backward, that the historian’s knowledge of outcomes should not determine his or her analysis of the past.”²⁰ While there are differing opinions about the degree to which the European presence changed the character of the Indian Ocean trade, one thing is clear.²¹ The Portuguese, Dutch and English could certainly control many things, but they could not control the monsoon winds or the fundamentals of a trading system that had been in place for centuries. This helps to

¹⁸ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 121. Pearson also demonstrates that there is very little evidence of the use of violence in the Indian Ocean before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498. See ———, *The Indian Ocean*, 97-99, 123.

¹⁹ Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith : Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹ Chaudhuri argues that when evaluating Portuguese military success in the Indian Ocean, it is necessary to separate naval battles from territorial gains. According to Chaudhuri Portuguese territorial gains, “were mostly made at the expense of rulers who had no reason so far to defend their trading ports... The success of the Portuguese against places such as there must be viewed in the light of their failure or incapacity to establish a real territorial empire in Asia. No strong Asian power at the time, whether in India, the Middle East, or China, considered the Portuguese to be a serious threat to the existing balance of power.” Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean : An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, 78-79.

explain why, to their evident frustration, the British could not stop Said bin Sultan from signing an economic treaty and doing business with the United States.

The Braudelian analysis has its limitations. While it can be justified for studying one ocean, it becomes unwieldy when trying to take into account, say, two oceans, e.g., the Indian as well as the Atlantic. That is why it is useful to put the Salem trade in Zanzibar in its full context. There are parts of the Richard Waters story that cannot be explained by global trends. Looking at Waters's close personal relationships, in fact, offers a far different and more complicated picture of what it was to be the American consul in Zanzibar.

Bose states that the organic unity of the Indian Ocean rim was widely assumed to have been ruptured with the establishment of European political and economic domination by the latter half of the eighteenth century.”²² The Richard Waters story challenges this claim. Waters was not born in an Indian Ocean port; he was a westerner born in Salem, Massachusetts. Yet during his time in Zanzibar (1837-1845) he was actively engaged in a vital segment of the Indian Ocean trade system. He was living in a community consisting of Omanis, Zanzibaris, Persians, Europeans, Banyans, etc. and was able to relate to these people, even though he was from the other side of the world. How was this possible? One possible answer lies in Salem's own history of commercial activity around the world, which helps answer the question of what Richard Waters was doing in Zanzibar in the mid nineteenth century and how Waters was able to fit into the Zanzibar community and form the personal relationships he needed to succeed.

²² Bose, *A Hundred Horizons : The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*, 6-7.

Salem, Incorporated

Salem, Massachusetts had a long history of commercial and maritime prowess in the Indian Ocean and throughout the world. The American Revolution had both positive and negative effects for American merchants in general. American merchants no longer had to deal with constricting commercial policies such as the British Navigation Acts. At the same time, no longer British subjects, American merchants were not able to enjoy the protection of the British navy or use Britain's far-flung colonial ports.

American merchants suffered during the War of 1812. However, after its victory in that war, the United States resumed maritime activities. The merchants from Salem were somewhat at a disadvantage during this time in that they could no longer compete with the rapidly increasing power and influence of New York and Boston in western markets.²³ Thus, Salem concentrated on trade with east Africa, Oman and other eastern ports. It was no coincidence that the eventual first American consul, Richard Waters, was a Salem native.

Richard Waters's voyage to Zanzibar on the brig *Generous* was a huge step for early United States-Oman relations, but it was not the first. It is difficult to establish the date of the earliest visit of an American ship to Zanzibar. The first recorded vessel was the brig *Ann* in 1826. The brig *Virginia* also reached Zanzibar in 1826.

²³ Of the two hundred registered Salem vessels in 1812, all but fifty-seven were destroyed in the war. James Duncan Phillips, *Salem and the Indies; the Story of the Great Commercial Era of the City* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), 422.

None of these vessels would be as important or influential as the *Mary Ann*, sailing from New Bedford, Massachusetts, and captained by Edmund Roberts.²⁴

Edmund Roberts arrived in October 1827, looking to sell his cargo in Zanzibar. He encountered considerable difficulties and was only able to negotiate a deal through the intervention of agents of Sayyid Said bin Sultan, sultan of Oman.²⁵

Amity and Commerce

When Said bin Sultan arrived in Zanzibar of 1828, Roberts sought an audience with him to discuss the predicament of American traders. Roberts represented himself as an American official, something he was not, but he succeeded in persuading Said bin Sultan to allow American traders to express their grievances. Said bin Sultan was impressed by Roberts and suggested to him that the United States send a mission for the purpose of negotiating a treaty. The sultan told Roberts that an

²⁴ The earliest contacts between Omanis and Americans took place even before the well-known Edmund Roberts mission. Records suggest that the first American vessel to visit Muscat was the Boston brig *Rambler*, captained by Robert Folger, which sailed into port during the presidency of George Washington, in September 1790. Two years after the arrival of the *Rambler*, a group of Americans, survivors of the wrecked Boston ship *Commerce*, “traveled via the grueling mountains and deserts of south and central Oman to Muscat.” See Joseph A. Kechichian, *Oman and the World : The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1995), 140. In 1795 Charles Derby reached Muscat in the brig *Cadet*, out of Salem. Derby purchased a cargo of coffee. This would turn out to be the start of a lucrative trade for Salem merchants in Muscat. There were several kinds of American goods that were in great demand in Zanzibar and east Africa, including cloth, guns, household goods such as glassware and chairs, domestic goods including soap, white sugar, and flour. In return for these, the Omanis traded cloves, ivory, dates, animal hides, and gum-copal.

²⁵ On the necessity of making a treaty with Oman, Roberts writes, “Previous to the conclusion of the treaty, American vessels paid generally seven and half per cent upon imports, and seven and half per cent upon exports, with anchorage money and presents. The governor of the out ports claimed the right of pre-emption in both cases, and they resorted to the most nefarious practices to accumulate wealth.” Roberts later writes, “The commerce of the United States, under the treaty, is entirely free from all inconvenient restrictions, and pays but one charge, namely five percent on all merchandise landed, and it is freed from the charge of pilotage, as every port has pilots which are kept in pay by the sultan.” Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat; in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock ... During the Years 1832-3-4* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1837), 362.

existing economic treaty protected British trading rights. This, however, was just a ploy; Britain had no such treaty with Zanzibar. Said bin Sultan had made a smart tactical move.²⁶ When Roberts returned to the United States in 1828, he began lobbying the chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, Senator Levi Woodbury, a relative through marriage, to pursue a trade agreement with Oman. Woodbury was unable to help Roberts until 1831, when he became President Jackson's Secretary of the Navy.²⁷

With the government's backing, Roberts sailed to the Far East in the sloop of war *Peacock*. The "Treaty of Amity and Commerce" was signed with Oman on September 21, 1833. It granted America "most favored nation" status, allowing it to trade freely in all of the sultan's ports while paying no fee beyond the universal five percent import tax on all goods.²⁸

When he returned to the United States, Roberts brought back his draft trade agreements with Oman and Siam. The United States Senate ratified both treaties and selected Roberts to personally exchange the treaty with Oman. Roberts sailed for

²⁶ Some historians have confused the balance of power in the western Indian Ocean at this time. Nicolini states that Roberts, "threatened Said bin Sultan Al bu Saidi with a cessation of all trade with Africa unless the sovereign agreed to sign a treaty with the United States of America guaranteeing the same commercial conditions already conceded to the British." Beatrice Nicolini, *Makran, Oman, and Zanzibar : Three-Terminal Cultural Corridor in the Western Indian Ocean, 1799-1856* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 141. Nicolini's statement gives the impressions that Edmund Roberts exerted power over Said bin Sultan in order to make the treaty of 1833. This simply was not true. As mentioned in the text, the Sultan, in fact, did not have a trade agreement with the British in Zanzibar.

²⁷ The State Department named Roberts "Special Agent" to negotiate treaties with Oman, Siam, and Cochin-China. Roberts failed in Cochin-China (now the southern part of Vietnam), but was successful in Siam and Oman. In fact, Roberts's mission was kept secret as he was listed as "captain's clerk" aboard the *Peacock*. Only a few of the officers knew his true position. See Norman R. Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar, 1825 - 1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 95, no. 1 (1959): 246.

²⁸ For the full text of the treaty, see Alexander I. Cotheal, "Treaty between the United States of America and the Sultan of Maskat: The Arabic Text," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 4(1854).

Oman on March 25 1835 and arrived in September in Zanzibar with two vessels. Soon after, Roberts and a small crew sailed in the *Peacock* for Muscat to exchange the treaty with Said bin Sultan. They suffered a potentially fatal setback when the *Peacock* struck a coral reef and ran aground on treacherous Masirah Island, about four hundred miles from Muscat. Roberts, along with seven crewmembers, decided to sail to Muscat in a twenty-foot boat to get help.²⁹ When Said bin Sultan was informed of the *Peacock's* accident he immediately sent the brand new *Sultanah* to Masirah with food and water. Meanwhile, the sultan had sent a messenger to Sur (a city in northeastern Oman) with orders to send a relief party to Masirah Island at once with six dhows (a type of ship) and three hundred men in order to protect the grounded crew from pirates.³⁰ Luckily, the *Peacock* crew survived, albeit barely, after throwing overboard roughly half the guns and other supplies.³¹

Roberts met with Said bin Sultan and they agreed that the treaty would go into the effect on the same day it was ratified in the United States, June 30 1834. However, Edmund Roberts became ill on his way east and died in Macao on June 12 1835.

One of the main reasons for the success of U.S.-Oman relations in this early stage was the mutual respect between Roberts and the sultan. Edmund Roberts's primary concern was to enhance America's commercial position and status in the Indian Ocean. By looking at Edmund Roberts's writings, it is clear that while his

²⁹ For a full account of the Masirah incident, see Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders : From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 370-72.

³⁰ The Sultan had also sent one hundred and fifty of his own mounted (camel) troops overland to Masirah. Ibid., 371.

³¹ Said bin Sultan later recovered the guns that had been thrown overboard and shipped them to Roberts free of charge. Ibid.

original concerns were purely economic, he came to hold a very high personal opinion of the Said bin Sultan. Roberts writes,

The sultan is of a mild and peaceable demeanour, of unquestionable bravery, as was evinced during the Wahabee war, where he was severely wounded in endeavouring to save an English artillery-man. He is a strict lover of justice, possessing a humane disposition, and greatly beloved by his subjects. He possesses just and liberal views in regard to commerce, not only throwing no obstacles in the way to impede its advancement, but encouraging foreigners as well as his own subjects.³²

Roberts was impressed by the sultan's power as well as by his character.

Roberts writes, "The sultan of Muscat is a very powerful prince; he possesses a more efficient naval force than all the native princes combined from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan. His resources are more than adequate to his wants: they are derived from commerce, owning himself a great number of merchant vessels: from duties on foreign merchandise, and from tribute-money, and presents received from various princes, all of which produce a large sum: a small tithe also is taken on wheat and dates, but more on houses or lands."³³ This was clearly a ruler who could be a very valuable friend, both to the United States and to a New England trader.

The writings of Edmund Roberts also give a clue about Said bin Sultan's unusual eagerness to formulate a treaty with the United States. Roberts writes,

When the fifth article of proposed treaty was read, which related to shipwrecked seamen, he at once objected to that part of it relating to a remuneration for expenses, which would be necessarily incurred in supporting and forwarding them to the United States, and said, the article he wish so altered as to make it incumbent upon him to protect, maintain, and return them to their own country, free of every charge. He remarked, that it would be

³² Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat*, 361.

³³ Ibid. Additionally, Roberts states, in reference to Said bin Sultan, "His force is sufficient to give him entire control over all the ports in East Africa, the Red Sea, the coast of Abyssinia, and the Persian Gulf. He has as an abundance of sailors and although he has but a small number of regular troops, yet he can command any number of Bedouin Arabs he may want, by furnishing them with provisions and clothing. This force consists of between seventy and eighty sail of vessels, carrying from four to seventy-four guns." ———, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat*, 362.

contrary to the usage of Arabs, and to the rights of hospitality, which have ever been practiced among them; and this clause was also inserted, at his request.³⁴

Said bin Sultan's own writings show that he valued the formalization of diplomatic relations between Oman and the United States of America as much or more than Roberts. In fact, after drawing up the treaty of 1833, Said bin Sultan wrote a letter to Andrew Jackson asserting his strong desire to engage in diplomatic relations with the United States. The following is an excerpt from that letter:

Your Highness's letter was received by your faithful and highly honourable representative and ambassador Edmund Roberts, who made me supremely happy in explaining the object of his mission and I have complied in every respect with the wishes of your honourable ambassador, in concluding a treaty of friendship and commerce between our respective countries, which shall be faithfully observed by myself and my successors, as long as the world endures....I most fervently hope that his Highness the President may ever consider me as his firm and true friend, and that I will ever hold the President of the United States very near and dear to my heart.³⁵

Captain Hart's Visit to Zanzibar

When the British Government at Bombay learned of the treaty they were alarmed.³⁶ A certain Captain Hart was sent to investigate what exactly the Americans were up to on the east African coast. The year was 1834, a year after the United States had signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the sultan of Oman. As stated, the treaty gave American traders the coveted "most favorite nation status,"

³⁴ Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat*, 360-61.

³⁵ As seen in *Ibid.*, 430.

³⁶ The British were all too familiar with American merchants and their commercial prowess within areas where Britain was the dominant foreign power. Regarding American merchants in the China trade, Downs writes, "The Americans were marvelously ingenious in their exploitation of the commerce. They managed to circumvent both the East India Company's franchise and the Chinese Government's prohibition and carried on a very lucrative, if antisocial and ultimately ruinous trade." Jacques M. Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-1840," *The Business History Review* 42, no. 4 (1968): 419.

which allowed them to trade freely in the sultan's ports, subject to the normal five percent import tax. But losing the commercial upper hand to the U.S. was not all the British were worried about; they were extremely fearful of the United States' selling arms to the sultan and acquiring a colonial foothold in Africa. Captain Hart's report confirmed the growth of American trade in the area but temporarily put to rest the fear of a potential American colony in Africa.³⁷ The alarm of the British government was partly justified. All things considered, the United States was not a powerful nation in the region; Britain and France had far more power, more influence, a bigger military presence, higher prestige and longer relationships with the sultan. Yet it had been the United States that forged this kind of treaty with Oman first. In fact, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce served as the model for later treaties between Oman and Britain, and Oman and France.

Throughout his life, Said bin Sultan had to carefully navigate a world in which Oman was overshadowed by larger foreign powers. This required shrewdness and flexibility on the sultan's part. Hart's 1834 visit to Zanzibar could have potentially stopped the early U.S. venture in Zanzibar in its tracks. However, Said carefully mastered the situation, telling the British exactly what they wanted to hear. As Captain Hart reported,

He [Said bin Sultan] is greatly attached to the English, and everything that is English, and appeared to have a pride in telling me "all his saddles were made in England." He was wounded some years since when in a joint expedition with the English; and appears to wish to be considered as an Englishman in everything. The English, he says, he looks upon as his brothers, and will

³⁷ While British suspicion of an American colony in East Africa is generally viewed as a local phenomenon, it may have been part of a widespread fear. See K. A. MacKirdy, "The Fear of American Intervention as a Factor in British Expansion: Western Australia and Natal," *Pacific Historical Review* 35, no. 2 (1966): 131-32.

willingly give them his country. He married the granddaughter of the king of Persia, but in consequence of a quarrel between His Highness and the King of Persia about the English, he lost his wife, and she is now detained in Persia.³⁸

It would be easy to assume that the British were still the dominant commercial presence in Zanzibar. A closer look at Hart's report, however, reveals the extent to which Americans were already beginning to elbow the British out. Tellingly, Hart got his information about the climate in Zanzibar from American merchants.³⁹ Hart additionally reported the following about the American trade in Zanzibar:

The revenue [at Zanzibar] is chiefly received from ships, which come here to trade upon the coast, and which are mostly Americans. These ships have great difficulty in collecting a cargo, and their plan is to touch upon different parts of the coast, and leave one or two of their crew behind, with an interpreter, whilst they visit some other parts, or come to Zanzibar, which is the great mart and rendezvous.⁴⁰

While not completely frank, Hart's report did concede the growing trend toward American trade. Hart states, "Out of the thirteen ships which touched here last year (between January 1833 and January 1834) only four were English, all the rest Americans."⁴¹

Said bin Sultan's shrewdness has been consistently underrated by historians. Some have taken all of Captain Hart's report at face value, which has led to misrepresentations of early U.S.-Oman relations. Nicolini writes,

³⁸ Captain H. Hart, "Extracts from Brief Notes of a Visit to Zanzibar, in the Months of January and February 1834," in *Historical and Other Information Connected with Place in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Robert Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856), 277.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

On 31 January 1834, in fact, Said bin Sultan Al Bu Saidi was prepared literally to tear up the treaty with the Americans before the eyes of the English Captain Hart, sent on a mission to Zanzibar from Bombay. Hart, however, felt that the revocation of this agreement with the Salem merchants would have forced the Anglo-Indian government into defending Said bin Sultan Al Bu Saidi against the American protests and reprisals which would inevitably follow such a gesture.⁴²

The second part of Nicolini's statement may have been true. Unfortunately, Nicolini regards Said bin Sultan as a mere pawn of the British. This is further evident when Nicolini states, "This shrewd English official therefore decided to 'forgive' Said bin Sultan Al Bu Saidi, making him promise that, in future, he would consult the English *before* entering into diplomatic or commercial relations with other nations."⁴³

Nicolini falls into the trap of focusing excessively on the issue of arms exchange in early U.S.-Oman relations.⁴⁴ Nicolini writes, "Moreover, the cautious terms in which President Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) ratified the treaty on 30 June 1834, warning American merchants not to involve the nation in dangerous distant waters, prevented Al Bu Saidi from acquiring that return in weapons, ammunition and artillery that he had so ardently hoped for, mainly so to be able to annihilate the Mazrui."⁴⁵ Said bin Sultan may have wanted to acquire weapons from the United

⁴² Nicolini, *Makran, Oman, and Zanzibar*, 142.

⁴³ Ibid. In actuality, the treaty demonstrated Said bin Sultan's freedom within the British shadow of power. In regard to the treaty of 1833, George Rentz states, "These treaties and others concluded since have given the Sultan of Muscat a special position as compared with his fellow rulers along the coasts of Arabia who are under British protection: unlike them he is free to maintain relations with foreign powers without securing the sanction of the British Government." George Rentz, *Oman and the South-Eastern Shore of Arabia*, 1st ed. (Reading, Berkshire, UK: Ithaca Press, 1997), 19.

⁴⁴ This may be because of the modern association of arms, war, and violence with conflicts in the Middle East. Others have fallen into this trap as well. Malone writes, "The treaty with Muscat served no purpose for Roberts, who died before ratification, but facilitated American entry into the now-controversial practice of arms transfers to the Middle East." Joseph J. Malone, "America and the Arabian Peninsula: The First Two Hundred Years," *Middle East Journal* 30, no. 3 (1976): 410.

⁴⁵ In reality Andrew Jackson had very little to do with the treaty. As mentioned earlier, the only reason the treaty was ever signed in the first place was because the Secretary of the Navy, Levi Woodbury. Woodbury was also the conduit through which the Salem merchants got Richard Waters the consulship. Nicolini's obsession with the arms trade can be further seen in Beatrice Nicolini, "The

States, but this was certainly not at the top of his agenda. In fact, he expressed more worry about too many American weapons getting into his dominions, where his enemies might use them against him.⁴⁶ Taken together, this fundamental misreading of Said bin Sultan's reaction to Captain Hart's visit to Zanzibar leads to a very different view of early U.S.-Oman relations. In reference to Captain Hart's visit, Nicolini states, "It also explains why Said bin Sultan Al Bu Saidi, confronted with new approaches by the English, was so ready to disown the Americans in favour, once again, of the British."⁴⁷

Said bin Sultan and the British

As much as the sultan would have liked to throw off British influence, the geopolitical reality of the time was that Britain was the dominant military power in the region.⁴⁸ Consequently, Oman had to work closely with Britain in order to survive.

In 1798, Said's father, Sultan bin Ahmed, had signed a treaty with the British. Sultan bin Ahmed signed the treaty in order to protect Omani commercial interests in India.⁴⁹ The British were eager to sign such a treaty after news of Napoleon's quick

Myth of the Sultans in the Western Indian Ocean During the Nineteenth Century: A New Hypothesis," *African & Asian Studies* 8, no. 3 (2009).

⁴⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁴⁷ Nicolini, *Makran, Oman, and Zanzibar*, 141-42. Of course this never happened. In fact, the American presence in Zanzibar became even greater, especially during the consulship of Richard Waters.

⁴⁸ Said bin Sultan was not the only ruler to realize the benefits of increased American commerce in his realm. In 1837, American Consul in Egypt, G.R. Gliddon, "reported on Mehemet Ali's desire to create commercial relations with the United States as a 'great neutral power' from which he might need aid, and gave a list of commissions with which the Pasha had entrusted him as an earnest of his intentions." David R. Serpell, "American Consular Activities in Egypt 1849-63," *The Journal of Modern History* 10, no. 3 (1938): 345.

⁴⁹ In fact, the treaty granted Sultan bin Ahmed several concessions including, "exemption from

defeat of the Egyptians.⁵⁰ The Omanis took a somewhat neutral position *vis a vis* the two superpowers as they continued to trade and exchange frequent communications with the French. In fact, in January 1799 Napoleon himself wrote a letter to Sultan bin Ahmed. The letter asked sultan to pass on a letter for Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, India.⁵¹ Tipu Sultan had recently waged war on the British.

Oman needed British help after attacks from the bellicose Wahhabis of modern day Saudi Arabia and their allies, the Qawasim.⁵² During this conflict, the Omanis suffered humiliating losses in Bahrain as well as in Buraymi in northern Oman. Desperate to secure alliances against this dangerous opponent, the sultan sailed for Basra in order to join an Ottoman attack on the Wahhabis. After arriving in the port, he learned that there was to be no battle with the Wahhabis. Undoubtedly disappointed, the sultan set sail back to Muscat. On his way home, Qasimi war ships attacked his vessel and the sultan was killed.⁵³

The circumstances surrounding Said bin Sultan's rise to power seem in direct contrast to his character as described by nearly all who met him as sultan of Oman

pilotage charges for all Omani ships; supply of free wood and water to one of Sultan b Ahmad's ships resorting annually to Bombay and to two of his ships sailing to Bengal every year; permission for each Omani ship to take 1,000 maunds of salt per year to Calcutta and for two of Sultan's own ships to take 5,000 maunds there annually." M. Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: Roots of British Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 36.

⁵⁰ The British feared that the French had designs on India. "When the Surat authorities learned that Napoleon's main ambition the eventual domination of India, they immediately engaged in a flurry of activity forging alliances with rulers of the Gulf in their effort to defend their Indian territories and to nip in the bud Bonaparte's challenge to their commercial and political position in the Indian Ocean." Ibid.

⁵¹ The letter was to let Tipu Sultan know that French assistance was on its way. As fate would have it, a British warship intercepted the letter. Christiane Bird, *The Sultan's Shadow : One Family's Rule at the Crossroads of East and West* (New York: Random House, 2010), 66.

⁵² Said Ruete comments, "Indeed, even under the strongest rulers hardly a decade passed without the Wahhabis or the Cowasim assimilating some portion, large or small, of Oman territory, burning villages, pillaging the trading dhows and holding the community to ransom." Rudolph Said Ruete, *Said Bin Sultan (1791-1856) Ruler of Oman and Zanzibar: His Place in the History of Arabia and East Africa* (London: Alexander-Ouseley, 1929), 19.

⁵³ The Qawasim did not even realize whom they had killed as Sultan bin Ahmed refused to give away his identity in the battle. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 42-43.

and Zanzibar. Under the influence of a strong willed aunt, the teenage Said bin Sultan murdered a relative, the ruler of Oman, Bedr bin Sayf.⁵⁴ The political situation in Oman during Said bin Sultan's lifetime remained anything but stable. While Said bin Sultan was described by many outsiders as an absolute monarch, his power was in fact far from absolute.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, in 1805 the Qawasim attacked two British ships belonging to their resident traders at Basra as well as various British cruisers belonging to the East India Company. After the death of Sultan bin Ahmed, the British felt compelled to engage the Qawasim by mounting a joint expedition with Said bin Sultan. The sultan in turn found himself dependent on the aid of foreign powers against threats from both the Wahhabis and the Qawasim. But as Said bin Sultan would soon find out, British foreign policy goals in east Africa were not always consistent during Said bin Sultan's early rule.

Despite their earlier military cooperation, on several occasions Said bin Sultan was let down and refused help by the British.⁵⁶ One reason was the British policy of ending the slave trade in its entirety; this put the sultan in a difficult position. Said bin Sultan walked a thin line by complying with more and more limitations on his

⁵⁴ Bedr had become very unpopular due to his friendly relationship with the Wahhabis.

⁵⁵ As Rudolf Said- Ruete (grandson of the Sultan) states, "An Imam in the earlier period and a Seyyid in the later appears to have all the powers of a central government; he is supreme ruler of a family of Arabs, all of whom have the same descent. In effect, however, he is merely a figurehead, presiding over a series of scattered tribes who pay more attention to the smaller unit of which they are members than to the central government to which they have submitted. The power of an Imam or Seyyid, therefore, is not that which is handed down to him, but that which he carves out for himself." Said Ruete, *Said Bin Sultan (1791-1856) Ruler of Oman and Zanzibar*, 18.

⁵⁶ When the Wahhabis began a full scale war against Oman, the British advised that Said bin Sultan make peace with his enemies. When the sultan asked the French for help, they offered the same advice. Bird, *The Sultan's Shadow*, 81. Said bin Sultan even asked the Persians for military aid against the Wahhabi/Cowasim advance. See Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 62.

lucrative slave trading but refusing to end the practice completely, as this would mean economic ruin and probably the loss of his position as sultan.⁵⁷

While many scholars have focused on Said bin Sultan's need for British help, the ways in which the British needed the sultan cannot be overlooked. A strong Oman acted as a buffer against the resilient Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. Throughout Britain's colonial presence in India, British authorities remained extremely fearful of any force that could enlist the natives of Britain's Asian colonial possessions to rise up against Britain. Wahhabi Islam was just such a threat.⁵⁸

For the British, Said bin Sultan became a familiar and trustworthy presence in an otherwise foreign Arabian and east African environment. As British Consul Atkins Hamerton reported to Bombay, "The British Government have not any political relations of a separate nature of the Shaikhs or Cheifs in any part of the territories of the Imaum of Muskat, either in Arabia or Africa: all the engagements or treaties which have from time to time entered into by the East India Company, and the Government of Great Britain, have been made with the Imaum of Muskat, and not with any of the Chiefs or Shaikhs."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Said bin Sultan signed the Moresby Treaty in 1822, which prevented all external traffic in slaves to Christian nations. Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, 2 ed. (London: F. Cass, 1964), 198. In 1823, an overzealous British captain, William Owen, believing that the Moresby Treaty was being violated, threatened Said bin Sultan that the British would give Mombasa (part of the Sultan's territory) its independence unless Said abolished the slave trade, both internal and external, within three years. Said bin Sultan, of course, could make no such promise. See *Ibid.*, 199-200.

⁵⁸ See C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society (New York, 1996), 172, 320-21, 40.

⁵⁹ Atkins Hamerton, "Brief Notes, Containing Information on Various Points Connected with His Highness the Imaum of Muskat," in *Historical and Other Information Connected with Place in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Robert Hughes Thomas (Bombay: Bombay Education Society Press, 1856), 242-43.

Conclusion

Throughout his reign, Said bin Sultan had his hands full trying to secure his position in the intertwined web that was the Indian Ocean geopolitical situation during the mid nineteenth century. The sultan's early interest in bringing American trade in Zanzibar was shown by the Masirah Island incident and letters sent to President Andrew Jackson. Considering the treacherous political culture in Oman and the Omanis' dwindling economic prospects in the Persian Gulf and India, Said bin Sultan's move to Zanzibar and his newly founded relationship with American merchants was a brilliant strategy.⁶⁰ In many ways, this new relationship with the Americans offered Said bin Sultan a new beginning.

It is hard not to admire Said bin Sultan's creative accommodation to Britain's ascension as the dominant Indian Ocean power. Said bin Sultan looked to achieve a degree of political and economic leverage against the British and to cement his own rule by reaching out to and forming economic treaties and alliances with the United States, which he seems to have seen, with some clairvoyance, as a future potent rival to Britain on the world stage. Taking all of this into account, a different image of Said bin Sultan begins to emerge. Said bin Sultan was an active, independent and deep thinking statesman. If the Richard Waters story means anything, it reveals something the nature and limitations of nineteenth-century empire. Empires such as that of the

⁶⁰ As much as the Sultan would have liked to stay permanently in Zanzibar, disputes back home in Oman would force him to return every few years. As one of his daughters, Selma recalls, "When I was about nine years old, the Sultan took a journey to Oman, as he was in the habit of doing at intervals of three or four years, to regulate the government of his Asiatic realm." Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar*, 101.

British wielded tremendous military might, but would become gradually obsolete in the coming mercantile age.

Zanzibar was physically insignificant compared to the other coastal countries of the Indian Ocean.⁶¹ But this did not mean that under sophisticated leadership, it could not be a great commercial center. Consider the following observation by Cyrus Townshend Brady:

The smallness of an island's surface creates no hindrance to the influence it may radiate through time and space. Tyre, Venice and Mozambique are all very small. Bombay, which once belonged to Portugal, is but little larger, and Manhattan, the financial metropolis of the contemporary world, is only twelve miles long. Zanzibar, too, is only a speck on the map of Africa, yet the eastern sun once cast its shadow so far across the continent that its tip neared the Atlantic."⁶²

Both Salem and Said bin Sultan were "small" compared to the British Empire, albeit in different ways. Yet the important point is that small did not necessarily mean weak or inevitably subject to domination by better-armed actors. Small could also be smart, efficient, resourceful and – like the Muslim dynasty of the Abu Sa'ids, which still rules Oman today and the Yankee family dynasties of Salem, who created some of America's first and greatest fortunes -- rich.

⁶¹ The Zanzibar harbor was too small, sometimes even for the gifts that the Sultan received. The Sultan told the British Captain Hart that the warship *Liverpool* was physically too big for the service of Oman and a result the sultan sent it as a present to King William IV. Hart, "Brief Notes of a Visit to Zanzibar," 276.

⁶² Cyrus Townsend Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa : With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade with Zanzibar* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1950), 68.

Chapter 2 – Sticks and Stones: Waters’s Welcome to Zanzibar

Imagine that it is the mid nineteenth century and you are Richard Waters, the recently appointed American consul to Zanzibar, a small island off the coast of the present day nation of Tanzania. While you are not the first American to visit Zanzibar, you will be the first American official to be stationed there. On October 26 1836 you set sail from Massachusetts in the brig *Generous*, commanded by a Captain Conant, no doubt a descendant of Roger Conant, a passenger on the *Mayflower* and founder of your hometown of Salem. As you pass the long hours at sea, you re-read your instructions from Washington, which are unsettlingly vague. They inform you that the United States’ treaty of 1833 with Oman, a Persian Gulf sultanate that conducts trade with east Africa through its control of Zanzibar, grants you “unusual privileges,” and that you must make no attempt to take personal advantage of them. On the other hand, your nominal consular salary conveys a contradictory message; you are expected to take enough advantage of your position, it seems, to make the venture worthwhile for an ambitious Yankee businessman such as yourself.

You have almost no idea what to expect when you reach the other side of the globe. All that you know about east Africa comes second-hand from newspapers, port gossip and Salem seafaring men. You are acquainted with many of the latter, among them the powerful Salem merchants Michael Shepard and John Bertram. Two of your brothers, John and William, have chosen careers at sea and become ship captains. John G. Waters has already visited Zanzibar and made a favorable impression on the local community, which is made up of Arab traders (some of whom deal in human beings), Banyans (Gujarati clerks and merchants from northwestern India) and

assorted other Europeans, Asians and Africans. You have taken a different path, pursuing wealth on land and entering directly into the business world. You had some early success and in 1832 -- at the age of twenty-five -- opened up your own shop in Salem's bustling commercial district.¹

You may be a worldly and well-connected Yankee, but you are not a sailor, you have never traveled abroad and you do not speak a word of either of the local languages, Arabic and Swahili. What is worse, you are beyond the reach of the American navy and can expect nothing but hostility from the dominant colonial actor in the Indian Ocean, Great Britain. Unlike most other former powers in the Indian Ocean, Oman has remained more or less autonomous despite the advent of the British. In the late seventeenth century Oman had forced the rapacious Portuguese out of the area and inherited their control of much of the east African coast. It would be a mistake, however, to think that the sultan of Oman does not appreciate Britain's power. From his early days as ruler, Said bin Sultan has had to live by his wits in a world where the British and, to a lesser extent, the French project overwhelming military power in the Indian Ocean. Said bin Sultan knows that the British, if provoked, could cut off his trade with India at any time, which would be an economic disaster for Oman. The British have been pressuring Said to limit his involvement in the slave trade; if slavery were abolished completely, which may be the ultimate British goal, it would mean the end of another pillar of Omani prosperity, their trading monopoly in east Africa. In short, while Oman remains an independent nation, Great Britain casts a long and wide shadow over the Indian Ocean and wields

¹ Richard H. Gates-Hunt, "Salem and Zanzibar: A Special Relationship," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 117, no. 1 (1981): 16.

a tremendous amount of influence over Said bin Sultan, Sultan of Oman and Its Dependencies. As consul of the United States of America, which has a long history of commercial prowess in the Indian Ocean but virtually no military resources in the area, you may feel free to negotiate with Said bin Sultan, but you will be doing so under that same British shadow.

On the way to Zanzibar, the *Generous* stops in Mozambique and you pay your respects to the late William Bates by visiting his grave. While you did not know Bates personally, the fact is that as members the small seafaring city of Salem, Massachusetts you are countrymen. Salem is an extremely tightly knit, if highly competitive community. As consul you will work closely with merchants from Salem in the United States, India and east Africa, exchanging information about the market for goods such as gum copal, animal hides and ivory. You will keep in touch with John and William Waters, who are also involved in the Zanzibar trade. Handling cargoes from Salem will be a major responsibility and you plan to make sure that merchants and ships from your homeport receive preferential treatment.

In some ways, this is not a totally foreign environment for you. You belong to the Salem trading network, which spans the globe – or at least the two thirds of it that is covered with water. You will be living and working on an island full of merchants, businessmen with whom you will discover that you can build a rapport, national and linguistic differences notwithstanding, thanks to Salem's long history of trade and maritime expertise around the world. In other ways, however, Zanzibar will be very foreign indeed. The first thing you notice about east Africa is the rain. It rains so hard in Zanzibar in springtime that you can barely sleep; at times you are afraid to go

outside.² The rain is harder than any you have ever experienced. “It rains every day, two or three times a day for an hour or two, and then the sun pours down with tremendous power.” The result is a thick, hot vapor that hangs over the land like a heavy gray curtain. The vapor is so strong it makes people sick with fever; it hits Europeans and Americans particularly hard and you doubt that you will be any different. So you opt to sleep on board the ship, where there are only a few mosquitoes and a mild, drying saltwater breeze. Eventually, of course, you will have to go ashore.³

Almost six months after you set sail from Salem, on March 18 1837, you finally set foot in Zanzibar. You greet two Salem merchants named Kimball and Rhea. The Salem brig *Leander* fires a salute of thirteen guns in honor of your arrival. The sultan’s brig *Shahalum*, (“King of the World”), likewise fires a salute, which your ship returns, following maritime etiquette. Kimball and Rhea accompany you inland to the house of the Omani Royal Secretary, Captain Hassan, where, according to local custom, you have a long and leisurely meal over which nothing important is discussed. Two days later, along with Captain Conant and Mr. Rhea, you are finally introduced to the sultan, Sayyid Said bin Sultan, and you leave your first interview with His Majesty feeling optimistic and eager to get down to business.

Your optimism is very short-lived.

Not long after his first friendly meeting with the sultan, Consul Richard Waters found himself completely stymied, unable to navigate a tortuous maze of

² Diary of Richard Waters, 17 May 1837. Box 4 Folder 1, "Richard Waters Papers," (Used by Permission from the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum).

³ Ibid., March 1st, 1837

confusing foreign customs, incomprehensible trade regulations, unanticipated taxes and obscure relationships -- in short, completely unable to accomplish anything. His biggest obstacle was customs house manager Jairam Sewji. Jairam Sewji was a Banyan without whose say-so nothing, Waters learned, passed through Zanzibar. Sewji was said to have rented his position from the sultan for \$150,000 per year, on a three-year renewable basis.⁴ In 1834 Edmund Roberts reported the rent to be \$110,000 per year.⁵ Joseph Osgood (later American consul in Muscat) writes that Sewji's 1854 rent was \$170,000.⁶ For the time these are astronomical sums and Sewji justified them with even more astronomical profits. Moreover, Osgood writes, "The trade at this port being in a more prosperous condition than at any other port on the eastern coast, enables the collector of customs to realize a handsome income above his contract with the Imaum (Said bin Sultan). Most of the produce of the coast and interior of Africa is brought to this market for exportation..."⁷

Richard Waters was frustrated, but he was not entirely sure what he had done wrong. After all, his apparent adversary was not someone who felt threatened by or uncomfortable with European or American merchants. It was Sewji's father who had encouraged the first Salem merchants to come to Zanzibar. As Osgood describes, Sewji related, "that his father, learning that a vessel manned by whites was at Majunga, went over in a *bugala* to induce the captain to visit Zanzibar and open a trade with its people. The captain complied with the Banian [sic] merchant's request,

⁴ Richard Waters to John Forsyth, May 6th, 1837. Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 216.

⁵ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar, 1825 - 1845," 250.

⁶ Joseph Barlow Felt Osgood, *Notes of Travel; or, Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscat, Aden, Mocha, and Other Eastern Ports* (Salem: G. Creamer, 1854), 54.

⁷ *Ibid.*

and an intercourse with Americans, of a most friendly character, was commenced and has been continued interrupted to this day, almost exclusively with the port of Salem. No wonder then that when the ignorant inhabitant of Zanzibar hears the United States spoken of, he thinks a small port of Salem is meant.”⁸ Sewji and his firm would control the Zanzibar customs house from 1835 to 1886.⁹ But as Waters would soon learn, Sewji’s power and influence in Zanzibar came from a variety of sources, of which being customs house manager was only one.

Sewji and his fellow Indian merchants served several important functions. For example, they offered the best financial and banking services available in the region. J.S. Mangat, points out that during the nineteenth century the “Indian rupee and pice currency gradually replaced the Maria Theresa dollars (thalers) as the principal currency in circulation in East Africa.”¹⁰ Sewji and the Indian merchants invested their capital in loans to the principal actors in the Zanzibar trade: the sultan and Arab, Indian, Swahili and European merchants. Loans were also freely extended to American merchants. In the 1860s and 70s, American merchants in Zanzibar struggled tremendously to recuperate from the effect on the cotton trade caused by the Civil War. On numerous occasions, Sewji helped out American merchants by giving loans.¹¹ British Consul Hamerton was aware of the power of Sewji and in 1849 as he explains, “The best and only certain way of obtaining a supply of cash for immediate service is by getting it from the Imam’s Custom Masters, who alone of all the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ J. S. Mangat, *A History of the Asians in East Africa, C.1886 to 1945*, Oxford Studies in African Affairs; (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1969), 12.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹ Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar : Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987), 107.

merchants here would give a thousand dollars if required immediately.”¹² Hamerton later states that he could get any amount of money from Jairam Sewji, up to five thousand dollars, in a matter of a few hours. Jairam Sewji was a very powerful player in the Zanzibar trade and for Richard Waters, the very worst adversary he could possibly have.

Waters searched for a strategy to contain Jairam’s power and exert his own. At first, Waters tried to exploit his status as a diplomat. In a May 6 1837 letter to John Forsyth of the U. S. Department of State Richard Waters writes with some irritation that, “The interest of American commerce at this place [Zanzibar] requires that I should apprise the Department of certain customs which on my arrival I found to exist in this place, to the injury of American trade, and as I have supposed, in violation of the Treaty which the Sultan has made with the United States.”¹³

What could bring Waters, in his first months in Zanzibar, to the serious step of officially complaining to the United States government that the treaty between the United States and Oman had been violated? In addition to controlling the customs house in Zanzibar, Sewji also controlled the laborers that were required to carry cargo from the ships to the Customs House. Because of this, Sewji in effect added roughly a \$100 to \$150 personal surcharge to each shipment of cargo.¹⁴ Richard Waters considered this an outrage. Waters states that, “Capt. Conant, of the American Brig *Generous*, (owned by the influential and wealthy Michael Shepard of Salem, Mass.), requested my permission to deposit for safe keeping his export cargo, (which he was collecting daily), in my store house, as it would facilitate his business, and be much

¹² Mangat, *A History of the Asians in East Africa, C.1886 to 1945*, 10.

¹³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 216.

¹⁴ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar, 1825 - 1845," 251.

more convenient for him...¹⁵ Waters was trying out a way to get around Sewji's surcharge by having cargo brought to his own storehouse, even though the ostensible reason was that this was simply for the convenience of Captain Conant. Note the name of Conant's ship; the *Generous* was the same ship that had brought Waters to Zanzibar from Salem. This means that this was one of the first deals that Waters tried to broker as consul in Zanzibar, making it that much more important that he secure a successful outcome. And Waters does not drop the name of Michael Shepard casually. Shepard was one of the most important merchants in the east Africa trade and a very important figure to Waters. Consul Waters was and continued to be employed by the Salem firm owned by Shepard and John Bertram; in fact, these two had used their influence to secure Waters the consulship.¹⁶ Waters further recounts in his letter that Captain Conant was told by Sewji that his goods must be transferred to the customs house and proceed to the *Generous* from there. Conant replied, "notwithstanding the great inconvenience and delay with their removal to the Custom House would occasion, yet he would submit to it if he [Jairam Sewji] would pay the expense of their removal." Sewji refused and told Conant that he, Conant, would have to pay the expense. Sewji and Conant "became enraged and highly improper words passed between them. The Capt. then proceeded to the sea shore, where his boats lay, and sent his men to my [Waters] stores to take the goods."¹⁷

Why did Captain Conant and Waters believe this customs house carrying fee to violate the treaty of 1833? Recall that the treaty states that nothing over a five percent import tax should be placed on American ships. Waters writes diplomatically

¹⁵ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 216-17.

¹⁶ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar, 1825 - 1845," 250.

¹⁷ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 217.

that although he agreed with Conant about the violation of the treaty, he “regretted exceedingly that an angry altercation had taken place.”¹⁸ Later the sultan verbally told Waters that Jairam Sewji had taken the matter seriously enough to make a complaint about the incident to the sultan.

On the next day, Waters visited the sultan, apologized for what had taken place and stated his hope that nothing like it would ever occur again. It is clear that Waters was embarrassed by the incident, which, diplomacy aside, was far from an ideal start to his own business dealings in Zanzibar. Waters and the sultan then discussed whether or not what had occurred was, in fact, a technical violation of the treaty. The sultan told Waters that, “he sold the customs with the understanding that the Americans carry their export cargo to the Custom House, and pay the Cooley hire.”¹⁹ Waters, unyielding, restated his claim that the so-called “Cooley hire” was in violation of the treaty and that he would have to inform the United States government of the complaints that he had received about it. Not wanting the issue to disrupt American commerce at Zanzibar, Said bin Sultan stated that if the American government believed the custom to be a violation of the treaty and wanted it ended, then he would agree to do so.

Jairam Sewji was determined that if he could not charge for this hired labor, then would find another way to make up the cost. Soon after, Waters mentions that Sewji began charging a five percent duty to his fellow Banyans who sold goods to American merchants. After taking this, too, to the sultan, Waters was assured that this

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 218.

practice would also be discontinued. As we will see, in the end Sewji did find a way to cooperate with Waters and the other Salem traders without any loss of profit.

In a letter to the State Department Waters writes, “Perhaps it may be proper for me to state to the department that the Sultan and his officers do not appear to understand the nature of a Treaty. From what I have seen of the Sultan... I think him to be a man who would [sic] wish to do right, but he is surrounded by a set of unprincipled men, who have daily intercourse with him, and who would persuade him to adopt any measures by which that party of the Treaty which gives up the 5 per ct. on exports might be evaded.”²⁰ Waters is clearly frustrated, trying to navigate through a business environment that is based on personal relationships and local practices that are poorly understood by him. While he had the terms of the treaty to rely on, Waters quickly learned that he would have to make strong personal relationships of his own in order to win friends and influence people in Zanzibar.

In his first months in Zanzibar, Waters found not only his ability to do business in danger, but also his physical health. One such incident occurred when Amir bin Said, a local merchant, assaulted Waters. Waters waited two days to write to the sultan, “being unable in consequence of severe pain and weakness to write all the particulars of the assault, at that time.”²¹ Believing Amir bin Said to have stolen a pile of wood that Waters had received from the sultan’s secretary Captain Hassan, Waters confronted bin Said, after which they began to argue. According to Waters, “his [Amir bin Said’s] language and manner became so highly insulting to me and my country, that I felt obliged to notice it. I stepped up to him, and putting my hand on

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

his collar, said ... 'Do you know what you are saying?' 'Yes,' said Armere [sic], 'I know very well what I say.' And then with his hand gave me a slap in the face, and at the same moment, three of his slaves surrounded me with clubs. Finding myself thus suddenly and unexpectedly attacked, and having no weapon with which to defend myself, I was obliged to use such as nature gave me, until I could make my retreat, which I did as soon as I was able, believing my life in danger." Waters's injuries were severe but not grave and he recovered in a couple of weeks. In another letter to the sultan, Waters asked that Amir bin Said be dealt an appropriate punishment, "as will in the future prevent insults to my country, preserve my person from felonious assaults, and the Treaty which guaranties that a 'Consul's person and property shall be inviolate."²² Waters again invokes the treaty, but soon discovered that a piece of paper can only protect him only so far.

In the conflict with Amir bin Said, Waters's person had been attacked. Next would be his property. It started with a landlord refusing to deliver to Waters a house after initially agreeing to a rental. Waters writes, "Being the first treatment of the kind I had received since I arrived, I made considerable stir about it, thinking it might prevent the same happening again."²³ On September 16 1837 Waters makes a reference to problems with his neighbors. Said bin Sultan suggested that Waters look for another house in a different neighborhood. This would not be the first time that such a thing occurred. On September 24 1837 Waters describes being visited by people asking about stones having been thrown at his house the previous night. Waters mentions that this had happened five or six times before. On October 19 1837

²² Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 220.

²³ *Ibid.*, 196.

Waters writes that his house had been stoned again. Initially, Waters was so generally unpopular in Zanzibar that he could not persuade any of the Arab-speaking merchants to help him translate messages sent by the sultan.²⁴ Stones were rained upon his house so often that in a letter to the sultan on October 13 1837 Waters writes that his house, “was stoned again last night, for about the twentieth time, within two months. I am satisfied that the stones last night came from the house next to mine, occupied by the ironically-named Masuda bin Salem and Mohammed bin Salem,” two Arab merchants.²⁵ In short, despite an apparently friendly beginning to his relationship with its ruler, Said bin Sultan, the first few months of Richard Waters’s stay in Zanzibar were extremely trying and, even worse, commercially fruitless.

Consuls American and Otherwise

Before continuing with the Richard Waters story, this is a good place to examine the historical roots and antecedents of the position of consul in the U.S. diplomatic service. Because as bizarre as the experience of Richard Waters was in many ways, he was not the first American consul of the times to find himself in a difficult situation in a far-off land.

By 1776 any country with major shipping interests and markets abroad recognized the need to have a consular service and the value of having that recruited and kept men who were knowledgeable in trade and in dealing with foreign governments.²⁶

Like many diplomatic or government positions then and now, the consular post given to Richard Waters in 1837 consisted of a variety of distinct and sometimes

²⁴ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar, 1825 - 1845," 251.

²⁵ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 220.

²⁶ Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The American Consul : A History of the United States Consular Service, 1776-1914*, Contributions in American History (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 4.

overlapping roles which entailed different responsibilities and which made him answerable to more than one master. Waters' role in Zanzibar consisted of five principal roles. These were: to represent the United States Government; to represent the merchants of Salem; to act as agent on behalf of particular Salem trading companies; to further commercial and personal activities on his own behalf and to pursue a personal relationship with the sultan.

Before analyzing the five roles played by Richard Waters as consul in Zanzibar, we will first examine the job of consul and the differences between the consulship and other diplomatic positions. Historians of American history and foreign relations tend to ignore or minimize the role of the American consul. There are three main reasons for this. One is because of the class differences between consuls and other diplomats. "Until recently diplomats in all countries came almost exclusively from the families of the upper classes, the professionals, the affluent; consuls came more often from families with modest trade or commercial backgrounds."²⁷

Another reason, not unrelated to the previous one, is that the diplomatic service has always been considered more prestigious than the consular one. The diplomatic position of ambassador carries with it the responsibility for dealing with heads of state and other high-level foreign officials. At the same time, ambassadors often have little or no involvement with or understanding of everyday aspects of more mundane aspects of international relations such as the details of American trade with the foreign countries in which they are serving. This remains true today. On a 2009 study abroad trip in Oman, I was taken to the American embassy, where I listened to a talk about Omani families, customs and culture. Talking with the other guests, I

²⁷ Ibid., vii

learned that while many of the staff of the American embassy had worked in Oman for several years and had had countless official interactions with Omani businessmen and diplomats, none had ever been invited into a private Omani house for dinner.

Kennedy sums up the main difference between consuls and ambassadors when he writes, “Courts and ports were two different worlds, and it took different types of men to deal with each. Even today, although there are attempts to meld professional diplomats with consuls, individual differences in persons sharply affect preferences for one or the other field of work.”²⁸ Consul Richard Waters, for example, enjoyed a multitude of varied personal interactions in Zanzibar. He had close relationships with men such as Sultan Said bin Sultan, various Zanzibari merchants, Arab and Indian merchants, European traders, missionaries, fellow American merchants, foreign diplomats, ordinary sailors and others. The third reason that the American consulship has been neglected by scholars lies in the fact that the consular service itself can be amorphous, confusing and chaotic. Kennedy offers this general description of the American consulship; “Untrained men were acting on their own with minimal guidance, responding to local events, each according to common sense and instinct.”²⁹ While this may not be exactly applicable to the case of the savvy Richard Waters, Stuart’s reading of the vague nature of the consulship is apropos.

Of course, the position of consul considerably predates the founding of the U.S.A.. As far back as the sixth century B.C., an institution similar to the consular service functioned in Egypt. In an effort to encourage trade with the Greeks, the Pharaoh Amasis set aside the city of Naucratis in the Nile Delta as a place where the

²⁸ Ibid., 2.

²⁹ Ibid., viii

Greeks could live under their own “governors.” The role of these “governors” was similar to that of a consul in that their primary duties were to “encourage trade, act as magistrates for their citizens living in Egypt, serve as intermediaries with the Egyptian authorities, and probably report back to their city-states on political and economic conditions in Egypt.”³⁰ Consul-like positions existed in the Greek city-states and later in the Roman Empire. However, with the Roman Empire’s collapse and the subsequent arrival of the Dark Ages, it would not be until the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the institution of the consulship would re-emerge in Europe. Kennedy writes, “With the codification of mercantile practices, consuls began to reappear to help merchants of their cities or states on foreign shores. By the thirteenth century Venice had more than thirty consuls placed abroad in Tunis, Alexandria, Cairo, and Damascus as well as in the major European ports.”³¹

The American conflict with the Barbary States demonstrates the importance of eighteenth and nineteenth century consuls in facilitating international trade, as well as the ways in which consuls could help citizens who found themselves in difficult or possibly dangerous situations abroad. The United States’ first diplomatic contact with the Muslim world took place shortly after it became a sovereign nation. This early episode exposed the United States’ lack of expertise in foreign relations. The young United States wanted to trade in the Mediterranean but did not have a foreign policy infrastructure to protect its commercial activities.

In July 1785, the North African pirate-state of Algiers declared war on the United States. It was prodded to do so by the British, who wanted to drive competing

³⁰ Ibid., 1

³¹ Ibid., 2

American commerce – particularly the grain trade -- out of the Mediterranean. As Robert J. Allison writes, “British papers reported that Algiers had already captured ‘an infinite number’ of American vessels, including one carrying Benjamin Franklin from France.”³² If the United States had responded by withdrawing from the region, then ultimately British ships would have been able to “capture all the carrying trade or Americans would have to pay exorbitant insurance premiums.”³³

One year earlier, Morocco had captured the American ship *Betsy*. This was not exactly the act of aggression, however, that it may have appeared to be. “Emperor Mawlay Muhammad had recognized American independence in 1778, but to his annoyance the Americans had so far failed to acknowledge this by sending a diplomatic representative. To get their attention, he ordered an American ship captured and promised to hold it hostage until the United States sent a diplomatic agent.”³⁴ America’s international inexperience is highlighted by the views expressed by John Page, a friend of Thomas Jefferson, who dismissed new reports of Algeria capturing American ships and demanding payments of yearly tribute; he was convinced that, “a little Flattery, a few Presents, and the Prospect of our Trade with them” would be enough to allow American trade in the Mediterranean to resume.

After word got back to Washington that Algiers had in fact captured two American ships, a debate began in the United States on whether to go to war or to solve the problem by paying the demanded tribute. America had a very weak central government with no power to raise money or troops, and most Americans thought it

³² Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured : The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

foolish to attempt to fight a war in the far-off Mediterranean. At first, Secretary of State Jefferson tried to organize a multinational force to combat Algiers. When this did not succeed, Jefferson advocated a naval blockade, but without success. Meanwhile, the U.S. agreed to pay the tribute. In the summer of 1786, the United States negotiated a commercial treaty that ended tribute payments from the United States to Morocco.

But it was not until 1796, after years of internal disagreement and failed attempts at multinational cooperation, that the United States finally achieved stable economic and diplomatic relations with Algiers and fellow Barbary States Tunis and Tripoli.³⁵

During the presidency of John Adams the United States had been late with tribute payments and Tripoli threatened war. Soon after, Thomas Jefferson assumed the presidency and was able to implement the naval blockade that he had been urging since the beginning of the conflict. The blockade was successful and in 1805 a new peace treaty was negotiated. It had been a rough lesson in diplomacy for the United States as well as a difficult first encounter with the Muslim world. An important outcome of the conflict with the Barbary States was the realization by the United States that it needed to strengthen its navy and that having “American consuls in distant ports, would be a vital part of national defense.”³⁶

In the conflict with the Barbary States, the primary goal of the United States was to secure its economic position in the region. This was likewise a key goal of the United States’ early interactions with Oman. It was not, however, the only goal. As

³⁵ The United States had to pay tribute.

³⁶ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 156.

we shall see, the United States-Oman relationship developed quite differently, in large part because of how the Omani ruler and American representatives interacted both on a personal and a policy level.

The birth of the American consular service took place shortly after the colonies became the United States of America and evolved considerably between the years 1789 and 1800. Before the colonies broke off from Great Britain in 1776, American traders naturally enjoyed the benefits of the British consular system as British subjects. The power of British consuls and their relationship to British subjects was something that Consul Richard Waters would encounter in the early 1840s when Britain, in an attempt to gain more influence in Zanzibar at the Americans' expense, declared, bizarrely, that all Indian merchants on the island were, by virtue of British rule over India, British subjects and would operate under the aegis of the British consul at the time, Atkins Hamerton. Kennedy points out that the British had a more organized and structured consulship than the Americans, for whom the first few decades after the American Revolution was a period of *ad hoc* diplomacy.³⁷

The founding of the United States consular service reflected a growing realization that a strong executive branch, particularly a strong secretary of state, was needed to facilitate foreign affairs and foreign trade. This is why Jefferson's appointment as secretary of state was vital both in regards to the birth of the American consulship and to the resolution of the Barbary States conflict.

³⁷ For more, see Kennedy, *The American Consul*, 4-5.

Jefferson had served in France for five years, not only dealing with consuls and commercial agents, but learning the difficulties of an American minister who did not have these men in the ports where they were needed. Jefferson had successfully negotiated the first American consular convention with a foreign power; thus he understood both the domestic and foreign concerns that consular operations raised.³⁸

The 1792 act spelled out the duties of American consuls. These included receiving protests or declarations regarding American shipping matters and taking charge of stranded American ships until the rightful owners could take charge. One of their most important duties and the reason that they were set apart from American diplomats was because, “they had judicial duties prescribed by law regarding notarial acts and estates and what amounted to police functions over American ship owners and their masters.”³⁹

On the topic of American consuls in the Middle East, Kennedy writes, “an effective consul in the Moslem world needed either to speak Arabic or Turkish or to have a competent interpreter. It was also necessary to have some understanding of how the Arab or Turkish minds worked and knowledge of Islamic laws and customs. Such expert knowledge was a lot to expect from a U.S. political appointee. Other Western powers had the same difficulty in finding consular officers or diplomats with adequate language qualifications. Therefore, most diplomatic missions and consular posts in the Near East employed dragomen.”⁴⁰ A full description of the qualifications of an ideal consul in Zanzibar would include knowledge of Arabic, Swahili and Hindi. Richard Waters spoke none of these languages. (British Consul Atkins Hamerton did speak fluent Arabic, Hindustani, and other Indian Ocean languages).

³⁸ Ibid., 19.

³⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 90.

For this reason, it is remarkable that Waters was able to achieve such high levels of access to so many important members of the Zanzibar community.

Waters and Sewji Monopoly

To return to the story of Richard Waters, his early days in Zanzibar were very difficult. He was unable to make any kind of business transaction without forfeiting much of his profit to customs house manager Jairam Sewji. Waters was assaulted by an Arab merchant and his slaves, had difficulty securing a house and when he did secure a house, it was repeatedly vandalized. Fortunately, although he could be stubborn, Waters had an opportunistic business mind and was a quick learner. Within a few months Waters succeeded in completely turning his situation around. By 1838, foreign merchants arriving in Zanzibar from India, Europe and other American ports were surprised to find that it was Waters who was the insider and major player in a local monopoly while they were on the outside looking in. This monopoly was an arrangement Waters formed with former antagonist and commercial nemesis Jairam Sewji.

Despite their strained initial relationship, Sewji and Waters came to respect each other's business acumen. The monopoly the two created dominated the Zanzibar trade for many years. Besides being the customs house manager in Zanzibar, by 1840 Jairam Sewji had bought the rights to oversee customs collection on the African mainland opposite Zanzibar. To stimulate trade from the mainland, Sewji abolished any taxes on items shipped from the coastal ports on east Africa to Zanzibar. This meant that nearly all the goods originating in a large area of east Africa would pass

through his hands at Zanzibar. At the same time, Richard Waters, using his power as American consul and his influence as a Salem merchant, would direct most of the international trade coming into Zanzibar and Africa towards Sewji. It was an arrangement that made both men very rich.

In a letter to Sewji's brother Abji bin Sewji, Waters enthusiastically reports that "[Jairam] is making a great deal of money this year. I think about one lac [100,000] of dollars!" Waters congratulates Abji on his new wife and writes that, "When I [Waters] return from America I hope to visit (Cutch) and have the pleasure of seeing your family."⁴¹ The fact that Waters is not only reporting happily on how much money Jairam Sewji is making but is also discussing visiting Abji's family in such an intimate way underlines the complete turnabout from those initial months at Zanzibar, when Jairam Sewji and Waters were opponents.

In a December 17 1839 letter to his brother William C. Waters, Richard Waters reports, "Jeram and I [Waters] are on the best of terms...I do nine tenths of my business with Jeram." This letter also reveals that Waters has learned to play the Zanzibar trade game, especially with respect to Sewji. Waters writes that, "[Sewji] respects and fears me at the same time. I have his confidence...He wants watching but it must be done in a kind skilful manner, so that he will not observe *when* you have your eye on him. And at the same time he must have the impression that you are always watching him."⁴²

Besides building a close relationship with Sewji, Waters reports that he has become personally close to the sultan's right hand man, Captain Hassan: "I am on

⁴¹ Richard Waters to Abji bin Seva, 20 September 1839. Box 2 Folder 3, "Waters Papers."

⁴² Richard Waters to William C. Waters, 17 December 1839. Box 2 Folder 3, Ibid.

good terms with Captain Hassan. He frequently visits my house, and I do the same at his.” Jairam and Waters would visit Captain Hassan’s clove plantation, named *Salem*. Waters describes it as a “delightful place about 8 miles from the town.” Waters also comments that Hassan’s plantation has a very impressive twelve thousand clove trees on it. Waters would later visit the plantation with his temporary replacement Parker (about whom more below) and John G. Waters.⁴³

In 1840 Richard Waters took a one-year trip away from Zanzibar during which he returned to the United States to visit his aging mother, search for a wife and attend to some business arrangements. Waters left illuminating and detailed instructions to his temporary replacement P. Starr Parker. The instructions are particularly telling about the Waters-Sewji monopoly. In a letter to Parker dated January 1st, 1840, Waters writes,

After you have engaged to do the business of any vessel, you will do well to hold a conversation with Jeram bin Seva [sic], the Custom Master. Inform him what the vessel has to sell and what she wishes for return cargo. It will be well to consult him in regard to the best way to proceed. He will propose at once to call the Merchants together at my house, show the samples of cottons &c and fix a price for them. Should the Capt. conclude to sell at the offers made, Jeram will be the person to whom you will deliver the goods and also charge them to, he being the only person you are to know in the business. [It is clear that Waters and Jairam have mastered the art of monopoly]...Before you conclude the sale, you will talk to Jeram in regard to what you may want for return cargo, and fix upon the time for which the vessel must properly wait to receive it. Jeram does not desire any other benefit from the sales than this.⁴⁴

In the same letter of instructions, Water discusses his business relationship with Sewji, writing, “I wish to give Jeram the preference in offering him whatever I may have to sell and in purchasing whatever I may wish to buy. I can generally make

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 224-25.

better sales to him, and purchases from him, than any one else. Not but what I should wish to make trade with others when it can be done to advantage, but taking all things into consideration, a more safe & expeditious business can be done with Jeram, than all the other merchants put together, in Zanzibar.”⁴⁵

Newman, Christopher and Hunt

The only significant outside competition that the Salem merchants faced in Zanzibar during this time was from the great British trading company of Newman, Christopher and Hunt. Their agent in Zanzibar during Waters’s time was a Captain Norsworthy. Norsworthy’s complaints against the Waters-Sewji monopoly show how the monopoly functioned to push out rival firms. “R. Norsworthy claimed that from May to October in 1840 he had been offered contracts to deal with three American vessels – the *Rolla*, the *Rattler*, and the *Cherokee*. In each case Jairam had stepped in and blocked the transaction.”⁴⁶ Norsworthy’s American partner states that they were told by Sewji that, “unless we consented to give one-half the commission to him for Mr. Waters, the Banyans would not be allowed to trade with us, at the same time saying his arrangement with Mr. Waters was to compel all who came here to do their business through the House of Mr. Waters.”⁴⁷

Norsworthy would complain further to the Chamber of Commerce of Bombay. The sultan offered no remedy to the situation and even referred Norsworthy to Richard Waters (!) to settle his claim.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 225.

⁴⁶ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar, 1825 - 1845," 253.

⁴⁷ As told in Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 254.

Eventually, the British firm would lose so much money that they completely abandoned all Zanzibar business.⁴⁹ Although at one point they had nearly as many vessels in the trade, they simply were not as politically skillful as the Salem firms. Letters between John G. Waters (brother of Richard Waters) and George West (of the Salem firm Pingree and West) are particularly revealing. John G. Waters writes of several English vessels on the east African coast belonging to Newman, Christopher and Hunt. Waters is clearly worried about their presence and says, “You [West] will remember that in making up the Voyage I told Mr. Pingree that should the English Vessels swarm the Coast as they did least year, that their [sic] would be but a poor Chance for Hides & so it is.... They Injure our trade very much.”⁵⁰

However, Waters later writes that upon talking with some of the Banyan merchants in Zanzibar that the English firm had told them that they [the English] would send a vessel of Zanzibar containing a large quantity of cotton goods. Waters also writes, “In fact they boasted that they would drive the Americans from Zanzibar,”⁵¹ an odd thing to say not only because the American cotton was much preferred over the English cotton but also because the English firm was deeply in debt. Mr. Robert Hunt (the Hunt of Newman, Christopher and Hunt) had come to Zanzibar, dismissed his agents from Zanzibar and Majunga (Madagascar) and told John G. Waters that his firm stood to lose between eighty thousand and one hundred

⁴⁹ A possible warning sign of the British firm’s failure to come was described by one of the firm’s employees, John Studdy Leigh. “Mr Hunt was presented with a fine Arabian [horse] by His Highness a short time since which threw him by running the first time he mounted and nearly killed him. Having offered him to me to ride I got on him and mastered him after his attempting by every means in his power to throw me.” John Studdy Leigh and James S. Kirkman, “The Zanzibar Diary of John Studdy Leigh, Part I,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13, no. 2 (1980): 289. The British, literally, could not stay on their feet in Zanzibar.

⁵⁰ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 221.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

thousand dollars. One of the replacement agents told Waters that the real figure was closer to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Waters concludes by saying that, “Their expenses are Immence in agents & clerks &c. Mr Hunt is here in a *yatch* [i.e., a yacht] & they keep two or three small sharp Schooners from 70 to 100 tons Built at an Expençe of 9000 Dollars Each to trade on the Coast when their whole trade at the outports would not pay the Expençe of one Vessal. They begin to get tired of the trade & Mr. Hunt tell me he thinks he shall wind up...”⁵²

Sometime in 1842 Norsworthy placed a complaint about the Salem monopoly in the *Bombay Times*. Waters heard of this from Cursejee Merwanjee, a Bombay merchant who acted as trading agent for Salem merchants. Waters describes the situation to his brother John G. Waters, calling it “a laughable affair.” He also writes, “Poor man [Norsworthy], he is quite done up. He makes Mr. Waters quite an important character. I wish I could persuade myself that it was true.”⁵³ Norsworthy also made a legal claim on Jairam Sewji for \$2,232 in lost commissions, which was forwarded to the British Government.⁵⁴

It was not that the British firm of Newman, Christopher and Hunt was particularly maladroit in their dealings in Zanzibar, but rather that the Salem merchants were so shrewd. Livermore describes a contemporary American consul in what is now Indonesia, which provides an interesting contrast to the experience of Waters and his Salem associates. In describing how consuls in Indonesia were selected, Livermore writes,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 236.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 240.

Up to that time [1849] consular representatives had been picked from Dutch or American merchants resident in Java who were undoubtedly aware of the attitude of the colonial authorities toward the admission of foreign consuls. In the future, however, the department was not so careful; and considerable injustice was done on at least one occasion by sending a stranger to Batavia under the impression that the only prerequisite to taking over the consulate was the presentation of his credentials to the governor general.⁵⁵

The colonial authorities he is referring to are the Dutch. Livermore points out that, "England, like Spain, reluctantly came to accept American consul in its colonial ports after 1835, but the Netherlands continued to exclude them for another twenty years."⁵⁶ The American traders were known for their economic prowess and it is not surprising that some authorities were afraid to let them in.

Even when left to their own devices by Washington, the Salem firms were better than most American traders at operating in a heavily relationship-based commercial environment such as Zanzibar. Livermore writes about American consuls in the East Indies:

The vagueness of the relationship between the Department of State and the Consular Service sometimes produced awkward misunderstandings. The most incredible feature of the system was the neglect to warn a man about to leave for a remote post of what was in store for him at the end of his journey. More than one unsuspecting citizen was given a commission and sent half way around the world at his own expense, only to find upon arriving at his destination that he had embarked upon a fool's errand. When Charles A. Wells of New York arrived in Batavia in July, 1840, and presented his credentials to the governor of Java, the latter informed his visitor that Secretary of State Clayton must have known that a consul would not be admitted to the Dutch East Indies because the Netherlands minister at Washington had been specifically instructed to tell Clayton so.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Seward W. Livermore, "Early Commercial and Consular Relations with the East Indies," *Pacific Historical Review* 15, no. 1 (1946): 48.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 57-58.

Contrast this with the experience of Richard Waters in Zanzibar. While Wells and Waters assumed their posts merely three years apart from each other, the nature of their positions was quite different from the start. Richard Waters was carefully vetted by the influential Salem merchants, Bertram and Shepard, as a candidate for the Zanzibar post. Waters was also a good friend of Levi Woodbury's brother through their connections with the anti-slavery movement. Levi Woodbury was the U. S. official who made the final decision on who would be named consul. Waters's brother John G. Waters had already made a favorable impression on Said bin Sultan, as had other Salem merchants, years before Waters ever set foot in Zanzibar. In reference to Charles A. Wells, Livermore writes, "The crestfallen consul felt justifiably indignant at the department for failing to acquaint him with the fact before his departure. The department's action in this instance was all the more surprising since as the treaty of amity and navigation concluded with the Netherlands of January 19 1839, specifically restricted the appointment of American consul to the ports of the Netherlands in Europe."⁵⁸ For his part, Waters arrived in Zanzibar with the "Treaty of Amity and Commerce" under his arm and providing specific authority for his post. Not only was this treaty the first formal agreement between the Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar and the United States, but it also preceded the first treaty between the sultan and the British by several years. It preceded the first treaty between the sultan and the French by nearly a decade.

⁵⁸ Ibid.:58.

Chapter 3 – The Five-Sided Consulship of Richard Waters

Richard Waters has been largely forgotten by history. On the surface, it may be easy for historians and scholars who write about American merchants in Zanzibar to view him as a fairly insignificant diplomat who did a little business on the side.¹ This, however, would miss both the richness and complexity of the personal and professional relationships Waters established in Zanzibar and, more importantly, the historical significance of this strange encounter between two distant nations with so little, apparently, in common.

First, a caveat: even though this thesis will analyze Waters's consulship by dividing it into five roles or parts, this is not to say that each of them is entirely unconnected to the others, or that they were of equal importance in Richard Waters's mind or in any other way. It does show, however, that there are sides to the story of Richard Waters in Zanzibar that have not been given adequate scholarly consideration. When these are taken into account, a truer, more dynamic portrait of Waters's time in Zanzibar emerges, one that sheds new light on subjects as diverse as African history, British history, American history, diplomacy and commerce, slavery, relations between Islam and Christianity and the Indian Ocean as an economic and cultural milieu.

¹ It is easy to overlook the complexity of Waters's consulship, as historians tend to focus solely on Waters's official position. For example, Bird writes, "Waters's main duties were to settle disputes between American and Arab merchants, oversee transactions between the same, and report to the U.S. government. Occasionally, too, he was expected to intervene in cases of desertion or mutiny on board whaling ships." Bird, *The Sultan's Shadow*, 164. As shown later in the chapter, Waters's role as consul was far more complex, encompassing a variety of different loyalties and responsibilities.

American Consul

Waters's first role as consul – call it part one -- was to act in the place of the far-away United States government. Richard Waters was issued consular instructions on April 7 1836 that were vague and brief. They emphasized that Waters should make no attempt to take advantage of the “unusual privileges” given to him by the treaty of 1833 with Said bin Sultan.² As stated before, these instructions were self-contradicting because along with the small salary of contemporary American consuls came the expectation that they would indeed take advantage of their position in order to make a reasonable income. Part of Richard Waters's consular duties was to settle disputes between American citizens and locals in Zanzibar. Waters also had the thankless job of settling disputes aboard American vessels that were docked in Zanzibar. The misbehavior of seamen and the inhuman conditions of long sea voyages meant that disputes between crew and captain were common. On May 24 1837 Waters writes in his journal:

The more I become acquainted with foreign lands I am impressed with the importance that seamen should be converted to God! Their example has a great influence over the people they visit when absent from home. The Lord grant that the time may soon come when instead of a curse, they may prove a blessing to many heathen souls.³

Richard Waters was not the first traveler to worry about the poor example that his nation's sailors set. The British were perennially concerned about the immoral behavior of their sailors and soldiers abroad; some saw it as a serious threat to the prestige of the empire. This is not surprising considering the justifications for

² Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 200.

³ The Diary of Richard Waters, 24 May 1837. Box 4 Folder 1, "Waters Papers."

colonialism that Britain and other imperialist powers espoused. It would be hypocritical for the British to argue moral superiority over a group of people, the Indians for example, when members of their (the British) own society acted in a conspicuously immoral way – especially in India.

Clare Anderson points out that, “Poor Europeans could bring the ‘ruling race’ [British Society in India] into contempt... Company administrators viewed ‘poor whites’ as they were generally known, with suspicion, and vagrants as a menace.”⁴

Later, Anderson states,

Though the status of escaped convicts, time-expired convicts, and free migrants from Australia was quite different, the response to their presence across the Indian Ocean during the first half of the nineteenth century reveals a great deal about British society and the construction of social boundaries of exclusion in the colonial context. Local authorities shipped convict absconders back to the Australian penal settlements as soon as possible, for their escape signified a threat to imperial governance and their presence challenged the illusion of British social and moral superiority in the colonies.⁵

For American traders, bad behavior by their sailors frequently became problematic. There was no question of damage to imperial prestige because the United States was not an empire. But it could be bad for business. Salem merchants were extremely careful about protecting the Zanzibar trade and were often concerned that poor behavior on the part of American crews could possibly endanger it. Harald Fischer-Tine writes in reference to British seamen that, “Their proverbial affinity for drink and prostitution, their notoriously ‘unruly conduct’ and their often cruel behavior towards the ‘natives’ turned these particular representatives of Britain’s

⁴ Clare Anderson, "Discourses of Exclusion and the 'Convict Stain' in the Indian Ocean (c. 1800-1850)," in *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region*, ed. Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tine (New York: Routledge, 2009), 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

working classes into a threat against the ideological substructures of British rule.”⁶

Richard Waters condemned immoral behavior aboard American whaling ships not only because of his strict religious beliefs but also because he worried that this behavior, like that of the unruly British tar, could threaten his business dealings in Zanzibar and weaken the strong local relationships that he depended on.

The undisciplined crews of whaling ships – which were more like floating abattoirs than what we think of when we envision typical nineteenth-century merchant or naval vessels -- were a notoriously difficult problem for American consuls throughout the world, especially in the Indian Ocean. Livermore describes some of the difficulties that Consul Owen M. Roberts faced in Batavia (Indonesia). He writes, “The presence of a large American whaling fleet in East Indian waters complicated the consul’s task in this respect. Sixty or seventy whalers passed through the Straits of Sunda annually, and Roberts advised stationing a squadron of American warships permanently in East Indian waters to keep order among the turbulent whale men and relieve the consulate of the care of those were beached for illness, injury, and insubordination.”⁷

The case described by J. Ross Browne would test how well Richard Waters could navigate such a situation. Fischer-Tine points out that one reason desertion was common among American sailors was because they could so easily get away with it.

⁶ Harald Fischer-Tine, "Flotsam and Jetsam of the Empire?: European Seamen and Spaces of Disease and Disorder in Mid-Nineteenth Century Calcutta," in *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region*, ed. Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tine (New York: Routledge, 2009), 121.

⁷ Livermore, "Early Commercial and Consular Relations with the East Indies," 47-48.

There was no legal basis to extradite them back to the United States or into the custody of American authorities stationed abroad.⁸

When American ships landed in far away ports such as Zanzibar, generally only the captain and a few other crewmembers would disembark to deal with the business at hand. The majority of the crew was not granted shore leave because of fear of desertion. A crewmember on an American ship, Browne describes an incident in 1837 in which the whaler *London Packet* sailed into Zanzibar. After setting anchor nine members of the crew refused to work, citing brutal treatment by their captain. While it is impossible for us to judge the truth of these allegations, their mere existence presented a thorny problem for Richard Waters. In the end, Waters had to go to the sultan for help. Waters writes that he was, “obliged to go on board the Ship, and likewise to Matony (which is one of the Sultan’s palaces) to request his Highness to give me some soldiers to assist in taking these men on Shore in case they refused to come.”⁹

The seamen who had refused to work were rounded up and brought to the sultan’s fort, a notoriously appalling place. Waters appealed to the seamen to return to work in order to avoid the terrible conditions of the prison.¹⁰ The ship, meanwhile, went on a short cruise and when it returned, according to Browne, several of the imprisoned sailors had died and the rest were stricken with a severe fever.¹¹ The survivors decided that a return to duty was better than a gruesome death.

⁸ Fischer-Tine, "Flotsam and Jetsam of the Empire?," 123.

⁹ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 206.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ For more on this incident, see Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 211.

Ross Browne describes another incident where three members of an American whaling crew deserted and hid in a Zanzibar town. However, after a couple of days, two of the crew decided to return and the third, a Scotsman, remained hidden. Browne's account of what happened to the Scotsman is not only disturbing but also telling about the willingness, or lack thereof, of American merchants to help fellow sailors in need.

Day after day I [Ross Browne] saw him wandering about the streets sick and destitute, without power to relieve him. Far from feeling any sympathy for him, the white traders turned him from their doors with threats of imprisonment in the fort. The natives, fearing the displeasure of the Sultan if he did not follow the humane example of the whites, kicked him out of their houses; and for more than two weeks he had neither shelter nor medical aid, nor, as far as I could learn, any food, except what he could beg from the female slaves when their masters were absent, or occasionally a scrap of bread from Captain F—'s men, who had been wrecked and were themselves in great distress. My own situation was so precarious that it was only by stealth I dared speak to him; for I know the penalty of being caught aiding or befriending a deserter; nor was it in my power to relieve his distress, even if this were not the case. Early one morning I heard that a man was found dead on the beach, and that he still lay there. I went down, and was shocked to see the body of the poor Scotchman [sic] stretched upon the sand, with his face down, and his eyes and nostrils covered in sand.¹²

This is not the only incident of its kind that Waters would have to deal with. A very devout Christian who was generally appalled at the character of American seamen, Waters did not enjoy taking time out of his busy schedule for these kinds of duties. Waters writes on December 30 1837 that, "I am ashamed of my countremen [sic] when they conduct in such a manner as to bring disgrace upon themselves and

¹² As seen in *Ibid.*, 211-12.

their country.”¹³ Waters notes elsewhere that the root cause of much of the bad behavior by sailors was demon rum.

Perhaps that is the reason why in the case of the whale ship *Emma*, he took a less empathetic approach. “Five of the crew refused to obey orders and complained of the food. They refused to appear at the Consulate when ordered to do so and had finally to be arrested and brought there in irons. After personally inspecting the food supplies, the Consul found them to be fresh and sufficient, but the men refused to obey the Consul’s order to return to duty.”¹⁴ Consul Waters then suggested that each noncompliant crewman receive two-dozen lashes. Reportedly, after one flogging every single one of the other crewmen asked to return back to work.

The modern reader may be surprised at how Waters treated his compatriots. In fact, it was quite normal for the time – and not only for deserters. In 1843, after the whaler *Bogota* struck a reef in the Mozambique Channel, the captain and a few of the crew were able to sail the irreparably damaged vessel into Zanzibar. Upon arrival the vessel was destroyed and the crew was left to live in a temporary cane hut with very little in the way of supplies. The established American merchants on the island made no attempt to provide for or assist the marooned crew. A short while later, nearly all of them had perished.¹⁵

How could Waters and other American merchants let this happen? In a different context, Browne describes Waters as being, “a thoroughly humane man endeavouring to tackle a difficult problem in a just and equitable manner.”¹⁶ There

¹³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 206.

¹⁴ Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 211.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 212-13.

was talk of a plan to build a house at the sultan's expense that would serve as a hospital for sailors and would employ an American doctor. This never came to fruition.¹⁷ Yet these good intentions hardly excuse his behavior for the modern reader. We know that Waters generally believed the crew of whaling ships to be a deeply immoral lot and would likely have been worried about the bad behavior of American whaling crews affecting his and other merchants' ability to do business on the island. But another key to understanding Waters's and the other American merchants' behavior lies in the issue of identity. In previous chapters it was discussed how both in the Indian Ocean trade system and in ports such as Salem, a maritime identity had formed that transcended cultural, national and geographic borders. It is precisely this notion that is at play in Zanzibar during the time of Richard Waters. Even though Richard Waters was an American and a United States consul, a key element of Waters's identity is distinct from that of a particular country or nation. His identity is as a trader and he belongs to a community and a culture apart; when his life is viewed as a whole, his maritime trading identity is in fact his truest identity. Remember that the *Bogota* was a whaler – a floating meat processing plant manned by the dregs of society – and not a merchant vessel operated by career seamen. In the final analysis, Waters may have felt a close personal connection to the brother of a fellow merchant who spoke a different language and who practiced a religion he does not understand and who lived in a country he knew nothing about, but he may at the same time have felt little obligation to help the crew of an American whaling ship simply because they were American.

¹⁷ See *Ibid.*, 213.

Even though dealing with shipboard disputes was a significant part of Waters's primary duties as consul in Zanzibar, he found other reasons to visit American ships. In 1838 the American warship, the U.S.S. *John Adams*, visited Zanzibar. This would be the only time that an American warship stopped at Zanzibar during Waters's stay. Waters introduced the captain of the *John Adams*, Thomas W. Wyman, to the sultan. The officers of the *John Adams* were then given a friendly reception, which included a visit to one of the sultan's palaces. Prince Khaled [son of Said bin Sultan] came aboard the *John Adams*. Waters writes, "when he left the Ship, he was saluted with 21 guns which was answered by the Frigate *Charlum [sic]*."¹⁸

Another aspect of part one of Richard Waters's job as consul was to relay information about Oman's compliance with the 1833 treaty. On May 14 1838 Waters notified the State Department that the sultan of Muscat, "has given an order that American citizens are at liberty to sell gun powder to any of his subjects in the Island of Zanzibar, now that he had no war in any part of his dominions."¹⁹ It was important that Waters relay this new information because at the time the treaty had been signed between Edmund Roberts and Said bin Sultan, the sultan placed a restriction on such powder sales on account of the ongoing revolt in Mombassa against Omani rule.

The sultan helped facilitate American trade in areas where his presence was not overly strong. In 1841, Richard Waters told John Shirley, captain of the *Rowena*, to proceed to Bravo (Brava, a port on the Somali coast). Waters writes to Shirley, "You have a letter from the Sultan, under his seal, giving orders to the people at Bravo not to charge you any export duty as they have sometimes done to vessels

¹⁸ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 209.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

trading there. What you sell and land there you will pay five percent duty. The same as in Zanzibar.”²⁰

In 1844, the sultan asked Waters to arrange a treaty between France and Zanzibar. While this was a very time consuming project, Waters, nevertheless was flattered that the sultan would ask him to undertake such a task. Waters writes to John G. Waters,

The French Brig of War *Messenger* is here for the purpose of making a commercial treaty with His Highness, the Sultan, and I as have been intrusted [sic] by His Highness with the business of arranging a treaty, I have been busily engaged on the subject the last ten days – and much to the satisfaction of His Highness and his sons. To arrange this Treaty was one of the objects which induced me to remain here this year, as His Highness was very desirous for me to take charge of the matter on his behalf. When it is completed I will send you a copy so that you can see what a fine diplomatist I have become!!²¹

The fact that Said bin Sultan chose Waters to do this showed not only that he respected his business ability but also that he deeply trusted Waters.

Salem Merchant

The second and third parts of the Waters consulship are Waters’s agency on behalf of all Salem merchants, (i.e., to the disadvantage of American merchants from other cities), and his agency on behalf of particular trading firms from Salem with whom he was closely connected.

As mentioned earlier, Richard Waters’s consular instructions were brief and warned that Waters should by no means take advantage of the “unusual privileges” of

²⁰ Ibid., 231-32.

²¹ Ibid., 249.

being consul. This admonition may seem odd and unnecessary to the modern reader, but it was absolutely appropriate in the context of the mid nineteenth century. As historian Norman Bennett points out, "Until the twentieth century consuls were non-career men, usually merchants, who were paid a very nominal salary and thus were almost always the agents of mercantile firms in their place of residence."²² Henry Marshall, who served briefly as American consul in Oman's capital, Muscat, complained to the State Department that, "the fees of the Consulate would not amount to enough to furnish stationery."²³

This meant that before they even arrived in their various foreign countries, American consuls had divided loyalties and responsibilities. Richard Waters's were more complex and more divided than most. Waters was an employee of the Salem merchant firm of Bertram and Shepard and he provided their ships with considerable assistance, yet even while working for Bertram and Shepard he often assisted ships from another Salem firm, Pingree and West.

Waters's diary of his early years as consul shows that while he lived in Zanzibar, thousands of miles away from Salem, he remained very conscious of his responsibility towards his own trading firm.

The Brig *Cherokee* brings me goods to sell, which I think I will set at a good profit. I hope never to forget my obligations to Capt Bertram and Mr. Shepard, for in addition to their kindness before I left America, they have now sent me business, and I hope to give them entire satisfaction.²⁴

Captain John Bertram was influential in demonstrating the profits to be had from trading in Zanzibar. In 1832 Bertram arrived in Salem in his ship *Black Warrior*

²² Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar, 1825 - 1845," 250.

²³ Gates-Hunt, "Salem and Zanzibar: A Special Relationship."

²⁴ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 198-99.

with a large amount of un-cleaned gum copal from Zanzibar.²⁵ Gum copal was a vital ingredient in the manufacture of shellacs and varnishes. For thirty-years the gum copal trade would remain a very profitable one for the Salem merchants. In 1835, Jonathan Whipple, another Salemite, invented a method for cleaning gum copal efficiently and subsequently established a factory to do so.²⁶

Copal was not the only profitable good to be purchased in Zanzibar. Just as the much-coveted Merkani (Swahili for “American”) cloth became a staple of the east African economy, animal hides and skins from Zanzibar were much in demand in Salem. Fifty-two percent of the American ships (i.e., Salem ships) from 1837 – 1844 trading in Zanzibar carried hides or skins in their return cargo to Salem. As Gates-Hunt writes,

These hides and skins were tanned or curried in the tanneries located along the banks of the North River in the area called “Blubber Hollow” and were then sold either as finished leather goods or as the raw material for the manufacture of boots and shoes. They fed into what was Salem’s predominant manufacturing activity, the production of boots, shoes, and leather goods, which in 1845 accounted for nearly fifty percent of all manufacturing in Salem. This industry, the backbone of Salem’s economy from that time hence, maintained its dominant position until the late nineteenth century.²⁷

Bertram and Shepard had introduced Waters to the Zanzibar trade, but he would soon switch loyalties. Sometime in 1839, Waters agreed to work exclusively for the firm of Pingree and West. In a letter to his brother William, Waters writes that while on his nine or ten-month trip to the United States, he will make new

²⁵ Thaddeus Sunseri, "The Political Ecology of the Copal Trade in the Tanzanian Coastal Hinterland, C. 1820-1905*," *Journal of African History* 48, no. 2 (2007): 207. For a list of American purchases in Zanzibar throughout the 1840s and 1850s, see C. S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast; Politics, Diplomacy and Trade on the East African Littoral, 1798-1856* (New York: Africana Pub. Corp., 1971), 332-35.

²⁶ Gates-Hunt, "Salem and Zanzibar: A Special Relationship," 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 225.

arrangements with certain Salem merchants. Waters tells his brother, “keep this to yourself and in due time you will know all about it.”²⁸ The Zanzibar trade was a delicate and competitive enterprise; it is no surprise that Water would want to keep his personal cards close to the vest.

From 1840 to 1844, the two Salem firms competed for the American business in Zanzibar. In 1841, Shepard and Bertram sent another agent, John Webb, to Zanzibar to try to take away business from Waters and the Pingree and West firm. In an attempt to further penetrate the east African market, Pingree and West placed their representative Vincent Marks on the island of Majunga (Madagascar). Along with Pingree and West, John Waters and Richard Waters were to provide Marks with American merchandise and Marks would sell these items according to the instructions of the firm. Marks was to notify Richard Waters any time that he needed more goods. This was Marks’s full-time, exclusive position as he was “not to do business for any other concern.”²⁹

Later, Bertram and Shepard would send their own agent to Majunga. However, unlike in Zanzibar, in Majunga the two firms decided to partner and form a monopoly of sorts. Ebenezer Tibbits (the Bertram and Shepard agent in Majunga) was told, “that you and any other agent of ours at Majunga shall not sell your goods under a price you and their agent at Majunge [sic], Mr. Marks, or any other agent they may have there, may agree on, and that you shall not pay over a price you and their agent may agree upon for Hides and other goods you may purchase at Majunga. That your sales and purchases for goods of the same quality shall be at the same price and

²⁸ Richard Waters to William C. Waters, 17 December 1839. Box 2 Folder 3, "Waters Papers."

²⁹ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 227.

that there shall be no cutting under. That everything shall be fair and open between you.”³⁰

At one point in 1843, angered by a new local tariff imposed on imports and exports at Majunga, Richard Waters contemplated recalling Marks as a protest to the Queen of Madagascar. Waters changed his mind, however, when he learned that Tibbets, the agent for the rival firm, was coming to Majunga.

The competition between the two Salem firms became fierce.³¹ In a letter to Richard Waters, Pingree and West write that, “the Shepard concern intend to drive us out of the trade, but this is of no use. You will do all our business with deliberation...forethought and decision, which is always sure of success in the end.”³² On December 30 1841 Pingree and West write urgently to Richard Waters that, “You [Waters] must take every possible advantage in purchasing, or our competitors will have an advantage of us.” They warn and remind Waters that, “We intend to work up this end of the business, and we trust you will your end in spite of all opposition. It is of great importance to get our cargoes back and in the market before the vessels of our enemies [Bertram and Shepard] return, as we are first in the market, and nothing cramps them so much as to be delayed in selling their cargoes here.”³³

³⁰ Ibid., 243.

³¹ One of the reasons that the Salem firms were so competitive in Zanzibar is because they could no longer compete in many foreign ports. At the same time that the Pingree/West and Bertram/Shepard Firms were battling in Zanzibar, firms like Augustine Heard and Company (with strong Boston connections) and William Appleton and Company (of Boston) were fighting for the China trade. Mary Gertrude Mason, "Aspects of the Trade between China and America, 1840-1870," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 10, no. 2 (1936): 25. Of course, one of the most prominent merchants in the China trade was Samuel Russell, whose firm dominated the China trade for years. Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-1840," 435. The Russell name may sound familiar as Samuel Russell was from Middletown, Connecticut and his mansion, the Samuel Wadsworth Russell House, stands prominently as part of the Wesleyan University campus today.

³² Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 231.

³³ Ibid., 235.

Ultimately the competition between the firms would lead to a spike in the cost of goods being sold in Zanzibar, which would have tremendous implications for the Waters-Sewji monopoly (discussed in Chapter 4). In 1844, Waters writes, “we have no Ivory on cargo, as it has been held too high for us to purchase under circumstances...When the Ivory comes to market it must be cheaper unless Webb or Bates (from the opposing firm) have funds with which to purchase. And if they have they will be sure to keep the price up. For it is not their custom to get the prices of Ivory or copal *down*, but the contrary, to get them *up*...”³⁴

Later Waters states, “We see but little of Webb or Bates. They are both busily engaged in running the price of Copal and Ivory *up* and we are hard at work in running the price *down*...It would be far better for them (Shepard &c) to do less business at a profit than to go on as they do now. Even their own vessels often interfere so much with each other as to produce a serious loss.”³⁵

The competition grew so heated that the Pingree and West group decided to enter another vessel in the trade, “first to keep others out of the trade as much as possible, secondly that we may send to the north or on the East Coast Madagascar or any other places you may think best, and to keep up with the other concern who have know five vessels & if Capt Bertram had Mr Pingrees Means he would hire twenty...”³⁶

Closely connected to the second part of Waters’s consulship is part three. This is Waters’s efforts on behalf of Salem merchants generally, to the exclusion of merchants from other cities and other countries. While the two principal Salem firms

³⁴ Ibid., 249.

³⁵ Ibid., 250.

³⁶ See Ibid.

competed for dominance of the Zanzibar market, they were ever mindful of the common potential threat of merchants from larger American cities. In 1844, the bark *Mohawk* arrived in Zanzibar from Boston and both Salem firms did everything in their power to ensure that the *Mohawk* did not have commercial success. In regard to the *Mohawk*, Richard P. Waters gave instructions to William C. Waters, telling him,

You must do all you can honorably to prevent their contracting and thus getting a footing in Zanzibar. We must be willing to pay as high as they will if necessary and if it comes to the worst loose a few thousand dollars if by so doing we can keep the trade in the hands of those who now hold it... We must keep all new comers at a distance and so try to make one voyage sufficient to disgust & sicken them of Zanzibar and its trade...³⁷

Thus, the Salem traders were willing to even lose significant sums in order to keep the Boston traders from getting a footing in Zanzibar. Benjamin F. Fabens (resident agent in Zanzibar for the Bertram and Shepard firm) reported to Michael Shepard, "Every effort was made to force the *Mohawk* from the market. The whites engaged in business here, both English and Americans, called upon those of the natives with whom they did their business and made use on entreaty, promises, and threats to prevent them from contracting with Ballard [Captain of the *Mohawk*]."³⁸

Because of his sharp business mind, stubborn personality and conspicuous religiosity, Waters was not always the best-liked person on Zanzibar. Ebridge Kimball writes to George West (the very agent that Waters worked for after 1839), "I expect you will be greatly astonished and amused with the American Consul...I think there is not a man in the place that desires his return, not even the Sultan. Mr. Waters

³⁷ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 251.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

is not the right kind of man to be placed here.”³⁹ What Kimball writes is not true of everyone -- there were many in Zanzibar who desired Waters’s return, including the sultan – but it may well have been true of those who were excluded by the Waters-Sewji monopoly.

Kimball’s complaint was relatively harmless, but others were less so. In 1841, Richard Waters was accused of the serious crime of destroying a diplomatic communication sent to President Martin Van Buren by Said bin Sultan on January 4 1838. Edward Brown, clerk aboard the Salem brig *Cherokee*, claimed to be an eyewitness.

I was in Mr. Waters house at the time and I know he sent the servants away from the Cook room and I knew it was his desire for the despatches [sic] to be destroyed...I was present when Capt. Hassan & Ahmen ben Amen [Ahmad bin Na’aman] brought the package. I saw it open in Mr. Richard P. Waters hand, this I will take my oath to anywhere, who put them into the fire, I of course cannot swear to, as I was not at the stove.... for I am confident that the letter never went on board the *Cherokee*, and to the best of my belief Palmer [sic] Waters destroyed those despatches. [sic]⁴⁰

Secretary of State Daniel Webster became involved. In a letter from William B. Smith to Webster, Smith writes that Waters had tried to pin the blame for the destruction of the letter on Smith. Smith states that Waters, “did not wish the letter to go as he feared it contained charges against him...and that he did not think it any harm to destroy the letter as it was not the work of the Imaum [the sultan], but wrote at the instigation of the native merchants who wished to drive him from the Island, so that they could again get the American business.”⁴¹ In a letter to Webster, Edward

³⁹ Ibid., 226.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 228.

⁴¹ Ibid., 234.

Brown writes that Waters destroyed the letter and that he heard, “Mr. Waters express fears to Capt. Smith, that the Imaum would write home requesting his recall; or words to that effect.”⁴²

What is at the bottom of this claim? It is interesting to note that this controversy arose in 1841, nearly three years after the alleged events. Edward Brown worked for Captain Bertram, who in 1838 would have been on good terms with Richard Waters, who worked for Bertram’s firm. By 1841, however, Waters had switched over to Pingree and West, putting that firm and Bertram’s in competition.

Another possible explanation is leftover anger about the Waters-Sewji monopoly. In a letter to Henry P. Marshall (who had served as American consul in Muscat in 1838 and 1839) Botsford writes, “... but having for 2 years laboured under great disadvantage in business in consequence of a monopoly, which Mr W aided and abetted, seeing our treaty violated without ceremony & our flag disrespected...” Botsford goes on to say rather strongly that, “I venture to say it will be found, that few men, more regardless of the honor and interests of their country, have ever disgraced a public office. He has a number of times been published in the Bombay Papers, is there accused of interfering with the trade and affairs of British subjects in a most unaccountable manner.”⁴³ Botsford goes on to describe the letter burning incident in a list of other complaints about Waters.

Our Flag has been stoned while flying at the Consulate, Mr. Waters himself has been stoned in the street and flogg'd [sic] by slaves, and can such a man afford protection even if disposed! Since, furthermore I have never seen evidence of a disposition to protect the interests of [anyone] but himself. He refuses to forward Letter except when he pleases to do so & detains some

⁴² Ibid., 235.

⁴³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 238.

coming into his hands 2 & 3 months or if he does not think proper even ... [destroys] them. This is a picture of our Consul, and what a picture. Can you not lay the case before Government in such a way as to induce them to investigate it?⁴⁴

Botsford also wrote to Secretary of State Webster, claiming that the Waters-Sewji monopoly was in violation of the 1833 treaty. Botsford states that, “since the ratification of the treaty between the Government of the United States and His Highness the Imaum of Muscat [i.e., Sultan Said bin Sultan, often referred to as ‘Imaum’ or ‘Imam,’ which is Arabic for ‘priest’] there has been no inconsiderable increase of the trade, and there is every reason to believe, that a still greater increase is prevented only by a most unwarrantable monopoly in which I regret to say R.P. Waters, Esq, the United States Consul is an abettor.” Botsford then goes on to cite the second article of the treaty, “which guarantees a fair trade to all and forbidding any interference by any Officers of the Sultan, [and which] is by and with the advice and consent of Mr. Waters rendered null and void.”⁴⁵ Bennett and Brooks note that, “One result of Waters’ system was that American traders [who were left out of the monopoly] celebrated the fourth of July 1841 by raising a flag with the inscription “No Monopoly” over Norsworthy’s house.⁴⁶

Botsford’s frustration was somewhat misplaced. What he had failed to grasp and Waters had come to learn was that the Zanzibar trade was -- and always had been -- relationship-based.⁴⁷ It hardly mattered what the actual treaty said; the treaty’s

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 239-40.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 241.

⁴⁷ William C. Waters relayed to Richard Waters that the sultan, “has been in treaty some days for the Customs for the next five years. After the expiration of Jerams time, several applications were made, and one at \$15,000 advance on the present sum paid. Jeram stood out for some days and was rather cool to H.H., but today H.H. sent for Jeram and concluded a bargain at an advance of \$7,500 per year

primary purpose was not to create a relationship but to serve as a relationship-enhancing mechanism. This explains why Richard Waters initially failed in Zanzibar when he tried to hide behind the provisions of the treaty, whereas he succeeded when he acquired an understanding of how things were done in Zanzibar and throughout the Indian Ocean – through mutually beneficial personal relationships.

Interestingly enough, by 1842 Said bin Sultan seemed to have caught on to the difficult aspects of Waters's dual loyalties. When the sultan wished to change part of the treaty with the United States regarding trade on the Mrima Coast (opposite Zanzibar), he elected to write to the U.S. State Department himself, instead of having Waters do it. This coast was considered closed to all European traders but in the American treaty no such prohibitive clause existed.⁴⁸ While no Americans up to that point had elected to trade directly on the Mrima Coast, the sultan wished to have this custom formalized in writing. He realized the possible difficulty Waters might face as an agent for a particular trading firm trying to maximize profits in the east African trade.

Richard Waters, Christian

Part four is Waters's work on behalf of himself. This part of Waters's role as consul has been given little to no scholarly attention. This includes not only his personal business, but also his religious activities and work with missionaries.

Richard Waters was a deeply religious man. He felt strongly that one of the main purposes for his coming to Zanzibar was to convert the locals to Christianity.

for five year..." Ibid., 232. Doing the math gives an idea of the literal value of relationships to those involved.

⁴⁸ See Ibid., 239.

I have desired to be made useful to the Souls of these pagans among whom I am called to reside. That my going to dwell with them for a season may be the means of introducing the gospel of Christ to them. That the way may soon be opened for Missionaries to reside there. I desire to be made instrumental of good to that people. May the Lord increase this desire.⁴⁹

Richard Waters wrote this during his first voyage to Zanzibar on the brig *Generous*, just before dropping anchor in Majunga harbor in Madagascar. Richard Waters may have been sent to Zanzibar first to act as consul and second to secure the Zanzibar trade for the traders of Salem, but Waters himself saw his trip as an opportunity to spread the Gospel. Waters was deeply devoted to his religious activities at home and often expressed his pain at having to be away from his friends, family and religious community.

If I am faithful and successful in my efforts to dispel their darkness, and to show them how lovely the light of the Sun of righteousness is my sacrifices in leaving my dear Christian friends, and a land of Sabbath and Sanctuary privileges will be well made up. Is it not the Lords doings, in my coming to this distant land? – so that I may be more useful, than I ever should be at home?

I think it is. May my life and health be preserved to be useful in promoting the interest of my fellow men.⁵⁰

This was not a case of a man turning towards religion as a source of strength on a long voyage to a distant place. Waters's attention to his own religious beliefs and to promoting his religion did not waiver during his seven years in Zanzibar. Religion was a profound part of who he was: a deeply devout Protestant with strong anti-slavery beliefs. The irony of finding himself operating in a deeply competitive economy that relied directly or indirectly on the slave trade and slave labor was not lost on Waters.

⁴⁹ The Diary of Richard Waters, 1 January 1837. Box 4 Folder 1, "Waters Papers."

⁵⁰ The Diary of Richard Waters, 30 December 1836. Box 4 Folder 1, Ibid.

While Richard Waters did not let his religious beliefs interfere with his professional and business duties, neither did he let his business obligations get in the way of his religious duties. In fact there were many times where religion seemed to provide him a much-needed distraction.

I have thought much during the past week of the Anniversaries of the benevolent Societies, which were held in the City of New York, last week. One year ago I was permitted to meet many greatly beloved Christian Friends in New York and to attend many of the Anniversaries. It was one of the happiest weeks my soul ever experienced! To be engaged one whole week in the business of religious (to the exclusion of worldly business and worldly cares) and to meet daily with a great number of the followers of the Savior – to consult upon the interest of Christ Kingdom in this World and to seek for heavenly Wisdom and direction.⁵¹

Waters criticized the religious practices, or the lack thereof, of the people of Zanzibar when he writes, “This people here remind me of those spoken of in Holy Writ.” Waters explains that while they talk a fair game of being religious, in truth their hearts are from it. “I often talk with them on the interest of the Soul, and they most always reply by saying -- ‘Our book speaks all the same as yours and we pray plenty.’” Waters replies by saying, “I tell them, yes it is true, you pray often with the lip, but your hearts are destitute of the true spirit of prayer I fear.”⁵² This was not an uncommon critique of Muslims in Richard Waters’s time. However, Waters would come to hold a very different opinion of one prominent Muslim, Said bin Sultan.

Waters’s religious zeal did not lessen during his time in Zanzibar. One of his most cherished goals was to help Christian missionaries establish themselves there.

⁵¹ The Diary of Richard Waters, 14 May 1837. Box 4 Folder 1, Ibid. Additionally Waters was quite pleased when copies of the *New York Evangelist* would arrive for him. See Diary of Richard Waters, 11 June 1837. Box 4 Folder 2, Ibid.

⁵² Bennett, ed. *New England Merchants in Africa*, 197-198.

On July 2 1839 the brig *Waverley* arrived in Zanzibar on its way to Bombay. On board were passengers Reverend Mr. Burgess, Rev. Mr. French, Rev. Mr. Hume and their wives. A Miss Farrer was on board as well. Waters writes in his journal, "I cannot express my thankfulness for this delightful opportunity of meeting these beloved Christian friends."⁵³ They were missionaries on their way to work in India.

Throughout Waters's time at Zanzibar, he kept in close touch with religious anti-slavery circles back home, as well as with various missionaries abroad. Waters writes on Wednesday, June 14 1839, "I see by my religious papers that the cause of Missions and the cause of the poor slave are advancing in my country. 40 Missionaries I see were ordained and received their instructions with a few weeks of each other. And 70 Anti Slavery Lecturers appointed and commissioned to plead the cause of the oppressed. O That each and all may go forth in the spirit of their Master."⁵⁴

One might expect that Christian missionaries and their associates would be given a hostile or at the very least an indifferent reception by the Muslim natives of Zanzibar. This was far from the case. On July 4 1839, Waters and another group of missionaries spent time at the plantation of the Governor of Zanzibar, Syed Suleiman bin Hamed al Busaidi, a relative of the sultan. Waters writes that they were treated very well by the sultan's wife and that one of the sultan's daughters was, "quite delighted with the American ladies."⁵⁵

The very next day, the group visited the sultan along with a Mr. Thorn and a Captain Millet. Waters writes, "His Highness treated us with great kindness, invited

⁵³ Diary of Richard Waters, 2 July 1839. Box 4 Folder 1, "Waters Papers."

⁵⁴ Diary of Richard Waters, 14 June 1839. Box 4 Folder 1, Ibid.

⁵⁵ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 211.

the Ladies up stairs to see his family. He presented each of the four ladies with a Cashmere Shawl.”⁵⁶ The ladies attempted to decline the gifts but Said bin Sultan insisted that they accept them. The sultan later invited the group to his country estate and, as Waters noted, a good time was had by all.

Despite Richard Waters’s expressed hope that they would stay in Zanzibar, the missionaries were intent on going into the interior of Africa. The Reverend Mr. Burgess did write to the American Board for Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a society that had been founded in 1830 in Massachusetts, saying that based on their stay in Zanzibar, the island could serve as a suitable base for working on the mainland. This idea never came to fruition.⁵⁷ Waters writes, “The brethren have been pursuing their inquiries in regard to the interior of Africa. We have been fortunate in finding a very respectable man who has five times far into the interior, And whose statement can be relied on.”⁵⁸ A few days later, these missionaries went on their way.

Dr. Krapf’s Indiscretion

Five years later, in 1844, Richard Waters would try to convince two German missionaries, Johann and Rosine Krapf, to locate in Zanzibar. While Said bin Sultan always treated missionaries such as the Krapfs with kindness and respect, the missionaries did not always reciprocate. Mr. Krapf was an experienced traveler who had spent time working in Abyssinia before he came to Zanzibar. He had also spent five years in Ethiopia, hoping to create a base for further missionary activity. Krapf’s

⁵⁶ Diary of Richard Waters, 5 July 1839, Box 4 Folder 2, "Waters Papers."

⁵⁷ Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 203.

⁵⁸ Diary of Richard Waters, 6 July 1839. Box 4 Folder 2, "Waters Papers."

dream was to Christianize Africa through Ethiopia.⁵⁹ When this plan did not work, Krapf went to Zanzibar. In fact, Krapf was the first Christian minister to locate permanently in east Africa since the fall of the Portuguese more than a century earlier.⁶⁰

Krapf was “hospitably received” by British Consul Hamerton. Waters took Krapf and his wife into his house. More importantly for the prospects of his mission, Krapf was given a “most friendly reception by Seyyid Said, to whom Hamerton presented [Krapf] on the second day after his arrival.”⁶¹ In fact, the sultan had gone out of his way to make Krapf feel as welcome as possible. Mr. and Mrs. Krapf were invited to the on of the sultan’s palaces where Mrs. Krapf was invited upstairs to see members of the sultan’s family. Not only were the Krapfs genuinely thankful for such hospitality but also very impressed with the sultan’s furnishings. As Krapf writes,

Mrs. Krapf states His Highness displayed much of the cordial feeling which unites the members of a family. At last she [Mrs. Krapf] was regaled with a dinner of numerous dishes, which had not expected in this remote quarter of the world. The room was furnished with large mirrors, couches and chairs of all kinds: and tables covered with various articles of luxury of European extraction.⁶²

Krapf himself was also impressed. He writes,

When the consul appeared with me at the entrance of the palace, the Sultan, accompanied by one of his sons and several grandees, came forth to meet us, displaying a condescension and courtesy which I had not before met with at the hands of any oriental ruler...I described to him in Arabic my Abyssinian adventures and plans for converting the Galla. He listened with attention and

⁵⁹ See Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa : 1450-1950*, The Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1994), 242.

⁶⁰ Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders : From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 388.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 190. Mrs. Krapf was given a Persian shawl upon leaving.

promised every assistance, at the same time pointing out the difficulties to which I might be exposed.⁶³

The sultan offered more than “advice;” he gave Krapf a “passport” to carry. This document stated, “This comes from Seyyid Said. Greeting to all our subjects, friends, and governors. This letter is written on behalf of Dr. Krapf, the German, a good man who wishes to convert the world to God. Behave well to him and be everywhere serviceable to him.”⁶⁴ Said bin Sultan meant what he said and his support of Krapf would prove extremely helpful.

Dr. Krapf was surprised by such a friendly and hospitable welcome, especially from a Muslim ruler. Krapf writes, “How little could I suppose, when beginning my journey, that in the distant south of Africa an Arabian prince was preparing for me a way to the heathen! Yet so it was; for without the conquest of Mombasa by a prince as well inclined as the Imam of Muscat [Said bin Sultan] to Europeans and especially to the English, the establishment of a missionary station in Nyika-land could never have been effected.”⁶⁵

Why was Said bin Sultan so tolerant of Christian missionaries in his realm? It is important to note that Said bin Sultan was very unusual in this respect. For example, in Madagascar during the period of 1835 to 1861, missionaries were not

⁶³ Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders : From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 388-89.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 389. As Coupland writes, “The injunction was obeyed. The Governor of Pemba [an island to the North of Zanzibar], where Krapf touched *en route*, instructed him about the ‘monsoon,’ plied him with questions as to the politics and religion of Europe, and asked for an Arabic copy of the Bible. The Governor of Mombasa, Ali-bin-Nasir, who had recently been in England as Said’s envoy, was as anxious to help as Said himself, and the townspeople visited Krapf’s lodgings ‘in great numbers’ to pay their respects to this new kind of Englishman—for English, no doubt, he seemed—who had not come like Owen and Reitz and Emery with a garrison and a flag, but alone armed only with his faith.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 412.

treated with similar consideration. In 1835, Queen Ranavalona I announced that anybody who continued to pray to Christ would suffer the death penalty.⁶⁶

Krapf was in the beginning somewhat baffled by the sultan's kindness. In a letter to Richard Waters, Krapf describes a problem with the Governor of Mombas, Ali bin Nasser. Krapf felt that Nasser had not only been unhelpful in finding the Krapfs a suitable house, but also deliberately hostile towards the effort. Perhaps displaying the anxiety of being in a strange new environment, Krapf goes on to write to Waters, "I will not yet complain of Ali bin Nasser, and still less will I give way to the supposition, that he acts upon secret orders he may have from the Imam [Said bin Sultan]. I cannot yet think that the Imam can possess such a dissembling character as to pronounce the kindest wishes and orders in your and my presence, and afterwards do the very reverse of his promises."⁶⁷

Undoubtedly getting carried away, Krapf writes to Waters, "Let him [the sultan] know that the Church of Christ does not fight with the carnal weapons which the world uses, but she prays and wrestles with her glorious Head in heaven to the destruction of those powers which are opposing the course of the invisible and eternal kingdom. God will not forget, what the Imam does for or against the gospel and its ministers...."⁶⁸ Whatever frustration and anger Krapf felt over this incident must have soon eased for the townspeople of Mombas visited Krapf "in great numbers" in order to pay respect to the newcomer.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Bengt. Sundkler, and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 490-91.

⁶⁷ Johann Krapf to Richard Waters. 28 May 1844, "Waters Papers"

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ As seen in Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders : From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 389.

Not only did the sultan of Oman and Zanzibar offer help to the missionaries at every opportunity, he tolerated many other religions within his dominions. As Edmund Roberts stated in 1833, “All religions are not merely tolerated but protected by his highness, and there is no obstacle whatever, to prevent the Christian, the Jew, or the gentile from preaching their peculiar doctrines, or erecting temples.”⁷⁰ Putting aside the fact that these missionaries were trying to convert Africans to Christianity when the sultan himself was a devout Muslim, missionary journeys deep into Africa might have become problematic for the sultan.

Coupland offers the following explanation: Said’s conduct in this matter has been sometimes cited as a striking proof of his enlightened and magnanimous attitude towards other religions than his own. Certainly Said was tolerant.”⁷¹ Coupland then cites the sultan’s tolerance of the Banyans in Zanzibar as an example. However, Coupland offers this important caveat, “But Islam has never been so fanatical or militant in East Africa as elsewhere; and religious toleration was, after all, an essential complement of Said’s desire to foster contact with the outer world.”⁷²

Coupland goes on to say that the sultan wished to keep on good terms with the Banyans and that he wanted to attract Europeans to Zanzibar, especially the English. Coupland is right in pointing out that Said bin Sultan wanted to keep on good terms with the Banyans and the foreigners at Zanzibar. But to state that he wanted to attract more English to Zanzibar is to misread the political environment at the time. Said wanted to attract foreign merchants such as the Americans and the Germans precisely

⁷⁰ Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat*, 358.

⁷¹ Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders : From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 412.

⁷² *Ibid.*

in order to diversify the Zanzibar economy and reduce the dependence of Oman and Zanzibar on the all-powerful English.

According to Coupland, English power may well have played another part in this story. He writes, “And without denying that Said, compared with other Arab rulers, was signally broad-minded or that his friendliness to Krapf accords with the general tradition of his courtesy and benevolence to strangers or that he was naturally or keenly interested in the more secular side of the missionaries’ work, the exploration of his little-known ‘dominions,’ it should be remembered that Krapf was commended to his care by Consul Hamerton. If Hamerton had disavowed him or discountenanced his plans in East Africa, Krapf, it is safe to assume, would have got little help from Said.”⁷³

Without denying the influence of Hamerton and the British over Said bin Sultan, Coupland’s analysis is off the mark. The Krapf mission in east Africa owed as much or more to the good will and efforts of Consul Waters as it did to that of Consul Hamerton. As with Coupland’s earlier statement about the sultan desiring to encourage Europeans, especially the British, to come to Zanzibar, he undervalues the importance of the relationship between Said bin Sultan and Richard Waters. One of the main reasons that the sultan treated Krapf and other missionaries so well was his desire to please Waters.

In his travels around east Africa, Krapf would acquire important knowledge about the political situation in different parts of the sultan’s dominions. A problem arose after Krapf conveyed some of this information to the French consul in Zanzibar. Perhaps this was the reason for a complete change in attitude on the part of Said bin

⁷³ Ibid.

Sultan toward the missionaries in 1853. British Consul Hamerton reported that, “something was troubling him [Said bin Sultan]; and which I now find to be a communication which the Consul of France sometime since made to the Imam’s son, the Prince Khalid, relative to His Highness’ title to certain places on the coast of Africa, saying that the Imam had no right or authority to claim places on the coast...that the Consul had been so informed by Dr Krapf, the missionary.”⁷⁴

It is not hard to imagine why Said bin Sultan would be alarmed at this news. Krapf’s indiscretion was egregious. Hamerton reported that upon questioning by the French consul, Krapf’s answers had proved that, “the Imam had no right to exercise authority at several places on the coast, but particularly the Pangani River and Lamu...His [Krapf] fellow missionaries, the Reverend Messrs Rebmann and Erhardt told the Doctor [Krapf] he had better not answer the questions or interfere in such matters with which he ought not to have anything to do. All this has caused the Imam to doubt the intentions of the missionaries.”⁷⁵ Krapf additionally had given Chief Kimweri of the Usambara the names of European and American trading firms that he could trade with directly, thus cutting out the local Swahili middlemen.⁷⁶

The sultan had had some recent disputes with the French and there were already fears of a French colonizing venture on the east African coast.⁷⁷ Thus Krapf’s information gave the sultan’s enemies something useful to use against him. Said bin Sultan had done everything to ensure Krapf’s safety and enjoyable stay in Zanzibar. Hamerton wrote that he did not think that Krapf was aware of the mischief he had

⁷⁴ Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 192.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 116.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

caused. In a letter to the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, Krapf reports that it was only after the French consul's determined probing that such information had been revealed. Krapf stated that the French consul had invited him for dinner and subsequently, "took up a map and said that he [French Consul] had heard a portion of the coast between Vanga and Pangani did not belong to the Imam."⁷⁸

Krapf's actions would cause problems for Said bin Sultan and the British Consul Hamerton as well. In a letter to the Bombay government in 1854, Hamerton states that, "there has unfortunately a most unfavorable change taken place in the minds of the peoples of these countries as to the missionaries; and which I regret to say has been caused by the Reverend Doctor Krapf."⁷⁹ Eventually Said bin Sultan would forgive Krapf and forget the incident. After Krapf had departed to Europe, a colleague of his, James Erhardt, had an interview with Said bin Sultan about travelling into his territories. As Gray writes, "Not only did the Sultan make no reference to Krapf's indiscretion, but also offered Erhardt a letter of introduction to Kimweri [chief of Usumbara, where Erhardt wished to go]."⁸⁰

Why was the sultan so tolerant of Christian missionaries, even when they might have represented a threat to his power? In a similar analysis to Coupland's, Norman Bennett writes, "The Sultan, a tolerant individual, nonetheless knew the dangerous implications of having a European reside in or pass through lands claimed by his government, the visitor doubtlessly communicating to the always interested

⁷⁸ Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

British upon the trade in slaves.”⁸¹ Bennett suggests that the sultan had no real choice in the matter, “But he could not refuse: Said bin Sultan remained prisoner of his need for British support. Krapf was the agent of a British society, requesting and receiving Hamerton’s intervention.” Again, Bennett has misread the situation. Maybe it is not surprising that the author of a book entitled, “Arab versus European, Diplomacy and War in Nineteenth Century East Central Africa” would underestimate personal relationships between key figures in Zanzibar and instead focus his attention on larger power struggles. As I have argued, Richard Waters’s position as consul involved a complex set of loyalties to different people and different agendas. This may also have been true, to some extent, of British Consul Atkins Hamerton. It is clear from Waters’s papers that assisting missionaries to east Africa was a goal of both Waters and Hamerton, something they worked together on despite their competition in other areas. Waters and Hamerton exchanged letters about missionary activity in Africa and specifically about the Krapfs. In these correspondences Waters referred to Krapf as “[their] old friend.”⁸²

A letter from Krapf to Richard Waters on February 17 1845 demonstrates the closeness of their relationship. Krapf starts off the letter by stating that he has a “deep sense of gratitude, which I owe to you [Waters], since I put my foot the first time on the shore of Zanzibar.”⁸³ Further along in the letter Krapf thanks Waters again. Mr.

⁸¹ Norman Robert Bennett, *Arab Versus European : Diplomacy and War in Nineteenth-Century East Central Africa* (New York: Africana Pub. Co., 1986), 40.

⁸² Richard Waters to Atkins Hamerton, 10 December 1844. Box 2 Folder 3, "Waters Papers."

⁸³ Johann Krapf to Richard Waters, 17 February 1845. "Waters Papers."

and Mrs. Krapf became very ill in Mombasa and Mrs. Krapf died there. Richard Waters would pay for a monument to be erected over her grave.⁸⁴

Thanks to a bizarre accident, this kind gesture would actually cause considerable anguish to Said bin Sultan. Mrs. Krapf's gravestone was sent to Zanzibar at the same time that Said bin Sultan was expecting some rich silver presents from Queen Victoria. (On several occasions the sultan had sent gifts to the British monarchy, in an attempt to bypass the East India Company in Bombay). When the gravestone arrived, Consul Hamerton, thinking that it was the silver gifts from Queen Victoria, sent it to the sultan's palace. As Osgood writes, "Image the holy horror and superstitious awe of the Imaum, and the discomfiture of the consul when the contents of the case proved to be a grave stone... Said's superstition will perhaps excuse him for bestowing the silver service upon his personal friends when it did arrive, soon after."⁸⁵

Krapf was deeply grateful towards Waters for his kind and unexpected gesture. Krapf writes, "The grave-board of wood, which you [Waters] had on board, would have pleased me, but your present arrangement is by far better, and I fully agree with you and Mr. Larking in the erection of a grave-stone over the remains of my dear deceased partner [Mrs. Krapf]."⁸⁶

Krapf's letter reveals that Waters was to send Krapf other items, including several articles of clothing and thermometers from Bombay as well, (Waters was in Bombay at the time). Waters additionally had uncovered several important letters in Bombay for Krapf that had been lost. The letter also stated that Waters had been

⁸⁴ Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, 98.

⁸⁵ Osgood, *Notes of Travel*, 66.

⁸⁶ Johann Krapf to Richard Waters, 17 February 1845. "Waters Papers."

involved in direct correspondence with the Church Missionary Society through a certain Mr. Larking, whom Krapf identifies as the Secretary of the Corresponding Committee. It also clear that Waters had been very active in trying to help missionaries become permanently established in Zanzibar. Krapf writes that he is sorry that, “my former fellow-labourers in Abyssinia intend to be fixed in the Bombay presidency Mission. I regret, that these dear friends have drawn this conclusion from the instance of Mrs. Krapf; but her case did not result from the climate, but from an occurrence, to which all pregnant women are exposed...A lady can live here as well as in India but the want of a physician would render it indispensable that she should proceed to Bombay when her day is approaching.”⁸⁷ It is clear that Krapf shared Waters’s hope of more missionaries in east Africa. Krapf writes that he had wished, “they [the missionaries in India] might further remain connected with the east African mission, and not leave me alone on this immense and important field of labour, of which I will now proceed to give you [Waters] some account.”

Krapf goes along to give Waters specific details about the status of missionary work in east Africa, including his work amongst the Waranbas. Krapf tells Waters that, “nearly all the gospels and a few other parts of scripture have been translated into the Swahellee [sic] tongue; and now I [Krapf] am translating these works into the Warika-language, in which I am at the first to proclaim the sweet tidings of the Saviour.” Krapf, with help from his colleague and successor Rebmann would

⁸⁷ Ibid.

complete a translation of the entire New Testament into Swahili and start work on a translation into the Nyika, Kamba, and other languages.⁸⁸

In an earlier letter to Richard Waters, in 1844, Krapf thanks Waters for lending him a copy of the *New York Evangelist* magazine. It is clear that they are on the best of terms when Krapf writes, “Your *New York Evangelist* is an excellent paper and its reading gives me much encouragement and comfort. I will send it back when I have read the whole series; and so I will do with the other volumes which I have from you for perusal.”⁸⁹ Krapf asks Waters to send, “the boy who wished to cater our service when we left Zanzibar [sic].” Krapf also writes that Mrs. Krapf sent Waters a special bundle of fruit known as korosh and begs Waters not only to accept it but also to send back some onions and oranges, which were difficult to procure. Thus these two letters show that not only was Waters an important figure in the east African missionary movement but also that he and Krapf were personally close.

What does this missionary work reveal about the complex identities at play in Zanzibar? Coupland makes an important point when he discusses the difference between the German merchants in east Africa and the German missionaries there. He writes, “The work of the Hamburg merchants in Africa may be rightly described as national: they were all representatives of German commerce: but of the German explorers Hornemann was employed and salaried by the African Association in London and Barth by the British Government. Similarly, the German missionaries Krapf and Rebmann, the first Europeans to explore equatorial east Africa at any

⁸⁸ Hastings, *The Church in Africa : 1450-1950*, 242.

⁸⁹ Johann Krapf to Richard Waters. 28 May 1844, “Waters Papers”

distance from the coast, were agents of a British institution, the Church Missionary Society.”⁹⁰

This is another example of how Richard Waters’s identity is far more complicated than simply that of American consul or commercial agent. While Waters and Hamerton were very much economic and geopolitical rivals, competing for the sultan’s loyalty and attention, during their time in Zanzibar they worked closely together, at least in part for purely personal reasons, on recruiting and assisting missionaries in east Africa.

Richard Waters and the Sultan

The fifth part of Waters’s role in Zanzibar involves his personal friendship with the sultan. Historians have noted that Waters and the sultan were friends, but their relationship has not been explored deeply. For example, Gray writes, “During his residence at Zanzibar Seyyid Said sent the Consul a horse for his personal use and after his departure sent another horse to him in America. Waters’ journal records frequent presents of fruit from the Sultan as well as of a boat for his use in visiting ships in the harbour. In addition, Waters was often the Sultan’s guest either at his palace or on one of his plantations.”⁹¹ One of the officers aboard the ship that delivered Waters’s present writes, “... and bringing home two splendid Arabian horses in a house on the main hatch. They were a present from the Sultan of Zanzibar

⁹⁰ Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders : From the Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 387.

⁹¹ Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 202.

to the United States consul, the late Palmer Water [Richard Palmer Waters].”⁹²

Waters’s relationship with the sultan went far beyond exchanging gifts, even if they were very valuable ones. Waters’s journal shows that he and the sultan connected on a deeply personal level and often discussed religion, family and other personal subjects.

Waters and the sultan quickly developed a strong rapport, although initially Waters was slightly taken aback about the sultan’s coming to visit him on short notice. On April 26 1837, the sultan along with the Prince Khalid and twenty or so soldiers stopped by and they “passed a few compliments.”⁹³ Waters felt reassured after the sultan reminded him that if Waters wished for anything, simply to call on him.

Waters and Said bin Sultan soon found out that they had much in common. Surprisingly, this included enthusiasm about religion. On June 10 1837, Waters describes a meeting that he had with the sultan. The sultan said, “that he had been intending for some time to invite me to take a ride with him, out to his gardens about 5 miles in the country, and if I would like to go on the next day (the Sabbath) he would be happy to have me accompany him. I replied that tomorrow was the Sabbath, and on that day, Christians in America did not do any work nor allow themselves to ride for pleasure.”⁹⁴ The sultan replied that, “he had never seen but *one* American or Englishman who observed the Sabbath as I [Waters] did.” Waters later comments,

⁹² George Granville Putnam, *Salem Vessels and Their Voyages; a History of The "George," "Glide," "Taria Topan" And "St. Paul," In Trade with Calcutta, East Coast of Africa, Madagascar, and the Philippine Islands* (Salem: Mass., Essex Institute, 1924), 81.

⁹³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 197.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

“His Highness is very strict in observing the Mahometan religion.”⁹⁵ Acknowledging another’s strict religious observance was one of the greatest compliments Richard Waters could give. As mentioned earlier in reference to whaling crews, Waters was often extremely disapproving of those whose morals he deemed questionably. At one point, due to some immoral behavior on the part of a certain Captain Ingalls, Waters banned Ingalls from entering his house.⁹⁶

Waters finally visited the sultan’s plantation on August 1 1837. Indeed the sultan persisted in trying to get Waters to come spend more time away from the city. This was not an easy task. It seems from Waters’s journal entry that the Saturday before, the sultan sent a note to Waters asking him to accompany him at the plantation on the following day (the Sabbath). Waters again refused, stating that, “it was against my principles and practice to indulge, either in pleasure or business on Gods holy Sabbath, and that I would take some other day to ride to his gardens.”⁹⁷ Eventually they were able to agree on a suitable time. When Said bin Sultan was too sick to go out riding with Waters, Prince Khalid accompanied Waters instead. “Our party consisted of his Highness son, the Prince, a young man 18 years old, two of the Sultans secretaries and several other gentlemen either connected with the Navy or Army...Our horses were first rate Arabian.” Waters seemed very pleased with his visit to the plantation. “The birds were singing, which reminded me of the many pleasant rambles I had enjoyed in the company of beloved friends at home.” Waters later writes that upon his return back he spent a half hour with the sultan. Waters “thanked him for the pleasure I had derived from my visit, and he seemed gratified to

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Diary of Richard Waters, 30 July 1839. Box 4 Folder 2, “Waters Papers.”

⁹⁷ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 200-02.

see that I had enjoyed it. He said, he was glad that I was pleased with my ride, and he had that day given orders to his head ostler in the town, to keep a horse ready for my use whenever I wanted one, and likewise to send a man with me, so as to show me the different rides in the Country.”⁹⁸

It would soon become clear that Waters and the sultan were becoming emotionally close. One example of this can be seen when the sultan lost his youngest child. Waters writes on August 23 1837 that this child “was a very interesting little boy, two and a half years old. He was sick only 4 days.”⁹⁹ At the first opportunity, Waters went to see the sultan and “found him with his son, the Prince, in great grief.” Waters took this opportunity to console the sultan, telling him that, “however much the child was beloved by his earthly parent, whose love was infinite, and although this providence looked dark and was distressing to his Highness, yet God had done it in infinite wisdom, and that it was all right.” The sultan replied that Waters spoke the truth. Upon leaving Said bin Sultan, Waters said that he had, “called as a friend, to mourn with him, but that God only, could heal his troubled and sorrowful heart, but my desire for him was that his death may prove a blessing.” Waters later comments that he remembered the sultan in his prayers daily and that we wished that the event of his youngest child passing, “might lead him to enquire in regard to the *true* way to eternal life.” What Waters is referring to, as the *true* way, is of course Christianity. Throughout his time in Zanzibar, Waters believed that he might, in fact, be able to convert the sultan to Christianity. This would not have been a first. In the late eighteenth century, the London Missionary Society had succeeded in converting one

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 204.

of the rulers of Tahiti, Pomore II, to Christianity.¹⁰⁰ Waters, undoubtedly aware of this accomplishment, may have thought of trying to match it in Zanzibar.

Said bin Sultan reciprocated Waters's concern about the health of his family. When one of Waters's brothers was ill, Said bin Sultan, along with Prince Khalid and several others all came to visit.¹⁰¹

Additionally, Said bin Sultan made sure that Waters was taken care of in Zanzibar. When Waters's first house was being stoned the sultan told Waters that, "he wished me [Waters] to look at another house in the other part of the town, and if I found one to suit me, he thought I had better remove from the neighborhood in which I now lived, as it was unpleasant and I was troubled with bad neighbors."¹⁰² When Waters's boat broke down, the sultan immediately sent him one of his horses as a replacement.¹⁰³

As we know, after 1834 there was intense competition between the two Salem firms in Zanzibar, forcing Richard Waters to work even harder than before. Waters felt that he was not spending enough time with the sultan. In a letter to Said bin Khalfan (agent for the sultan), Waters writes, "His Highness needs some good person near him to advise him. My own time is so completely occupied with our own business that I have not the leisure to devote to affairs here which I sometimes wish I had."¹⁰⁴ Waters, a good friend to the sultan, seemed worried about family conflicts within the Al bu Saidi family. Waters states, "It is very important that His Highness

¹⁰⁰ John Barker, "Where the Missionary Frontier Ran Ahead of Empire," in *Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 88-90.

¹⁰¹ Waters recount this incident in a journal entry Sunday Evening, June 24th, 1838. Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 208.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

son's and family keep united and at peace among themselves. But I am sorry to say they are far from this good state of feelings for each other now."¹⁰⁵

Conflicting Roles

At times, Waters's roles came into conflict with one another. The issue of the slave trade in Zanzibar is a prime example.

On August 19 1837 Richard Waters writes that he is, "willing to work hard for a few Years, and be sepperated [sic] from dear friends, if I can acquire a necessary portion of riches. Not that I mean to make gold my God, but feel that I am in the performance of my duty, while engaged in an honest business and acquiring riches. I want money for my own sake, for my dear Mothers, Sisters & Brothers sake..."¹⁰⁶

This is one of the few places where Waters hints at a possible conflict between his economic transactions and his religious beliefs.

Further evidence about Waters's attitude about the relationship between his religious beliefs and his business dealings is found in his journal entry from October 21 1837. Waters describes a Spanish slave ship staying in Zanzibar for one week to restock provisions. Waters describes the captain of the ship, who had been visiting Waters's house daily. Waters writes that before the captain left, "he called and bid me good bye. I shook hands with him and said, I cannot wish you a prosperous voyage for you are engaged in a business which I hate from the heart. He smiled and said that they were better off where he carried them."¹⁰⁷ Richard Waters deeply despised the business and practice of slavery and could not wish the Spanish captain a safe voyage

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 203-04.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 205.

because of it. Yet Waters later writes that he, “talked a little with him, and told him, if he come to Zanzibar with a cargo of merchandize to sell I should be happy to see him. As we parted I told him to remember that there is a God above us who knows all we do, and that soon we must meet him.”

Richard Waters was extremely active in anti-slavery circles back home in the United States. In fact, it is reported that a young Richard Waters once walked from Salem to Boston for an antislavery meeting because he did not have the money for better transportation.¹⁰⁸ Yet his strong personal beliefs did not stop him from actively participating in a trade system, the Zanzibar trade, which was fueled by the trade of slaves. An example of Waters’s hatred of slavery can be seen in his journal entry from February 22 1837 after Waters observed two slave ships arriving from Zanzibar. He writes, “Slavers are filled with Slaves, mostly with children, from 10 to 14 years of age. This sight called up many unpleasant feelings. What can I say to those engaged in this trade, when I remember the millions of Slaves which exist in my own country.”¹⁰⁹

The Slave Trade and Hamerton

As discussed in chapter one, one of the foreign policy goals of the British in east Africa was the suppression of the slave trade. Exactly how they intended to accomplish this not clear. What is clear, however, is that Consul Hamerton’s arrival in Zanzibar in 1841 worried Said bin Sultan.

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous, "Richard Palmer Waters - a Sketch," *Bulletin of the Essex Institute* 20, no. (1888): 175.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 192.

As with Richard Waters's consular position, Atkins Hamerton's role as consul had multiple aspects and Hamerton himself had many loyalties. The most obvious was Hamerton's dual position as consul for the British Government and agent for the East India Company. Historians tend to focus on Hamerton's role in breaking up the Waters-Sewji monopoly, which is overstated. What actually broke up the Waters-Sewji monopoly is discussed in the next chapter. While it was not until 1845 that Said and Hamerton constructed a new treaty prohibiting the slave trade altogether from his African dominions, (permitting the trade to continue between the mainland Arab ports in east Africa and Zanzibar), Waters early on sensed that there were serious tensions between Said and Hamerton.

In a letter to John G. Waters in 1842, Richard Waters writes, "Since my return from Bombay I have called on the Sultan three times. Our conversations has [sic] been about Muscat, Bombay, and his connection with the English. He appears much dissatisfied with the English agent here and would like to have him recalled. I have been obliged to make each visit much shorter than I would wish in consequence of my pressure with business which occupies most of my time."¹¹⁰ The issue of the potential suppression of the slave trade was undoubtedly at the heart of the conflict between Hamerton and Said. In fact, it would seem that Said bin Sultan, fed up with having to deal with the British in India, tried a more direct diplomatic approach. Waters writes, that "his Highness' Ship *Sultana* sails from here to-morrow morning for London via St. Helena with four horses and other valuable presents to Her

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 236. In 1845, a French captain visiting Zanzibar commented that Said bin Sultan was very displeased that the British Government did not recall Hamerton, after Said bin Sultan had requested them to do so. Norman Robert Bennett, "France and Zanzibar, 1844 to the 1860s," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 4 (1973): 605.

Majesty Queen Victoria... His Highness prefers doing his business immediately with the Government in England rather than with, and through, the Governor of Bombay, or the Governor General of India.”¹¹¹

Because some historians think that Hamerton’s primary mission in Zanzibar was to suppress the slave trade, they regard him as having a higher moral character than other members of the Zanzibar community at the time. For example, Gray writes, “Unlike his American colleagues Hamerton had no commercial interests at stake in Zanzibar.”¹¹² While Hamerton himself may not have had any personal ventures at Zanzibar, many British merchants whom he worked with did. Robert Cogan, the official who negotiated the 1839 treaty between Britain and Said bin Sultan, entered into a personal agreement with the sultan for the production of sugar. The labor needed for the sugar plantations came from slaves.

Gray states that the sultan “came to realize that Hamerton’s advice, unlike that of Consul Waters, was disinterested advice and had no ulterior motive behind it.”¹¹³ While Hamerton, as representative of both the British Government and the East India Company, undoubtedly had an important relationship with the sultan, to say that his advice was disinterested would be to misread the geopolitics of east Africa at the time. As early as 1851, American Consul Charles Ward (Waters’s successor) reported, “From the conversations I have had with the English consul [Hamerton], it is the Policy of the British Government to take possession of the East African Coast at no distant day.”¹¹⁴ Said bin Sultan sensed British designs on his territory as well

¹¹¹ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 236.

¹¹² Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 244.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹¹⁴ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 170.

and while he did not live to see it, one of his successors, his son Bargash, would. As Bhacker points out, “Already by Bargash’s time, the ‘Omani State’ had been divided up and the ground was being prepared for the future absorption of Omani dominions in Africa within the European colonial systems and the subjugation of those territories once controlled by Oman in the Gulf to the British.”¹¹⁵

How were the British able to gain complete control over Oman and Zanzibar? The British adopted two policies designed to take power away from the sultan. The first was the gradual banning of the slave trade. The second was to claim that the economically indispensable Indians in Zanzibar were, in fact, British subjects.

Officially, the Americans were not interested in suppressing the slave trade. What is more, there seemed to be a scheme by which American merchants would help the sultan to transport slaves after the British ban. A letter from the American consul in Cape Town, Isaac Chase, to William C. Waters and Richard Waters states, “I have not as yet been able to do any thing concerning [sic] the importation of free labour from His Highnesses dominions spoken of to your Mr. Waters passenger on His Highnesses Ship *Sultana*. In fact I am fearful we should get into trouble through seizures by H.B.M. Cruisers unless we could obtain a special License form the Governor of the Colony for the special purpose.”¹¹⁶ Botsford mentions this as well when he writes, “that a demand has been made upon His Highness by the English Govt for the property under the head of Piracy committed in the Harbour, and His Highness has written back saying that this was not done by any of his people, but by

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 198.

¹¹⁶ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 230.

Mr. Waters, the American Consul over whom he has no control.”¹¹⁷ It would seem that Waters made an agreement with the sultan to take the blame if the British were to complain.

Adding to the complexity of the slave trade situation in east Africa after the 1845 treaty between Said and Hamerton was the return of the French to the trade, in defiance of the British ban. After the French Revolution of 1848 (one result of which was the abolition of slavery in the French colonies), the French planters on the island of Bourbon (now renamed Reunion) were in desperate need of labor. After an initial scheme to import labor from India, which did not work out, the planters set up the so-called “Free Labour Emigration System.”¹¹⁸ Despite its harmless sounding name, this system functioned very much like slavery. Said bin Sultan, not surprisingly, protested this practice, as he considered the mainland where the slaves were being taken to be under his authority. The British protested this practice as well, “firmly declaring that they regarded it as a form of Slave Trade, but the French replied as firmly that it was nothing of the sort.”¹¹⁹ It would seem that once again Said found himself navigating carefully between colliding French and British interests.

Complex Identities

The story of Richard Waters in Zanzibar raises issues about the identities of foreign merchants in Zanzibar. On July 4 1837, Waters writes that, “This being the anniversary of American Independence, I invited the English gentlemen in port to dine with me. I had the company of Lieut. Franklin and Midshipman Cross, two of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 238.

¹¹⁸ Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, 205.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 206.

the officers who brought the Yacht out to the Sultan from the King of England.”¹²⁰

Waters also mentions the presence of more Englishmen. Later, Waters writes, “I fired a salute with my pistols, from the top of my house, at sun rise, noon & sunset, and hoisted the American Flag all day. The two English vessels in port hoisted their Flags in honor of the day, which pleased me.”¹²¹ Waters comments that he regrets that there were no Americans in Zanzibar to enjoy the holiday with him. While the issues of salutes, flags and national holidays may seem trivial, a closer look at the time of Richard Waters reveals something very different. In a cosmopolitan and polyglot environment like Zanzibar, communication could be complex. Obviously, language was problematic with Arabic, Swahili, British, French, German, American and merchants from other countries trying to do business with each other. Yet while these merchants spoke different languages and come from very different cultures they did share a common maritime identity that came about through countless interactions in countless ports over a long period of time. Part of this maritime identity involves use of the ship’s salutes, the use of flag codes and symbolism, etc. The United States’ relationship with Said bin Sultan would suffer under the next consul, Charles Ward, because of a dispute over flag etiquette. Historians have attributed this to some sort of defect in Ward’s character. While they may be right, it is important to remember that what we think of now as trivial now may have carried much greater significance in the mid nineteenth century.

That is not to say that the salutes could not be an occasion for fun. Waters writes on July 4 1838 (American Independence Day), “fired a Salute of 26 guns at 12

¹²⁰ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 199.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

o'clock, which was returned by the Sultans Ship *Charlam* and the English Brig *Sandwich*. In the evening sent up some rockets, which frightened some of the people out of their wits. They said the stars was falling, and many trembled with fear."¹²² Again it is no surprise that an American, English, and Omani ship participated through the firing of salutes in the celebration of an American holiday.¹²³

On August 14 1837 Waters was invited by British merchant Robert N. Hunt to dine aboard his ship the *Sandwich*. Hunt was from the same British trading firm of Newman, Christopher and Hunt that Waters and other Salem merchants were in direct competition with. Waters writes,

He [Hunt] requested me to come in Uniform, in the character of Consul. And so he made a great day of it. He has five vessels in this port at the present time, and he gave orders to have all their Colors hoisted in the morning. At one o'clock I went on board. As soon as it was noticed that I was approaching the vessel, with the American flag flying over my boat, the Yards of the Yacht was immediately maned [sic], with 36 men, all dressed in uniform. When I landed on the deck, a Salute was fired." Waters mentions that the dinner party included Hunt, a couple of other British ship captains, a Mr. Franklin, Mr. Leigh, the Sultan's secretary Captain Hassan, and as Waters writes, "my humble self, who for the time was made a very great man. However, I shall come down to my usual dimensions in a little time!"¹²⁴

This episode is important because it shows a kind of cross-national group identity and also that Waters took his role as consul less than seriously at times. The fact that Waters even mentions that he was asked to come in uniform, "in the character of Consul," is telling. It shows his role in Zanzibar is much more complicated than his title suggests and that his identity as consul is perhaps secondary

¹²² Ibid., 208.

¹²³ Contemporary American consuls in other parts of the world did not experience a close-knit merchant community like that in Zanzibar. Kehoe writes, "Foreigners in China generally did not intermingle. Frenchmen would not associate with Dutchmen or Portuguese, and Americans and English were 'almost as distinct in their social festivities and amusements if the Atlantic still rolled between them.'" Barbara B. Kehoe, "William Patterson Jones: American Consul in China, 1862-1868," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 73, no. 1 (1980): 50.

¹²⁴ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 203.

to other roles. While there was a long history of business competition and social cooperation between the British and the Americans, episodes such as this further illustrate the complexity of shared maritime identity in Richard Waters's time in Zanzibar.¹²⁵

Of course, Said bin Sultan was part of the merchant maritime community as well. First, Said bin Sultan was a citizen of Oman, whose long history of seafaring prowess in the Indian Ocean was a source of pride and respect by others.¹²⁶ Second, unlike other rulers, Said did not merely ride as a passenger on sailing vessels; he would often command them himself. As British Captain Hart reported in 1834, "He [Said bin Sultan] has a squadron of one line-of-battle ship, three frigates, two corvettes, and a brig, which appears to constitute his great pleasure and amusement; and he has now given an order to the English brig to bring out naval stores to the amount of 30,000 dollars. When on board, he conducts everything himself; gets her under weight, shifts her berth, or brings her to anchor, by giving every word of command."¹²⁷ It is also important not to forget that Said's battle scars (from a sea battle) were a constant reminder of the dangers of the ocean. Said's daughter Selma recalled, "He [Said] limped slightly; during a battle a ball had struck his thigh, where it was now permanently lodged, hindering his gait, and occasionally giving him pains."¹²⁸

¹²⁵ For more on the phenomenon of commercial competition and social cooperation between the British and Americans, see Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa : With Particular Reference to the Salem Trade with Zanzibar*, 104-05.

¹²⁶ See Chapter 1.

¹²⁷ Hart, "Brief Notes of a Visit to Zanzibar," 279.

¹²⁸ Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar*, 14.

Because his maritime identity was so central to Said bin Sultan, he was quite familiar with proper international maritime etiquette, including naval salutes. When Captain Hart arrived in Zanzibar in 1834, Hart apologized to the sultan for not being able to salute the sultan until the next morning because it was after sunset. Said bin Sultan, “said that they [Omanis] knew our custom very well and that the flag-ship was ready to return our [British] salute whenever we began.”¹²⁹ It is surely not surprising then that in future letters between Waters and Said bin Sultan, when asking about each other, they would often ask about the news in each other’s port.¹³⁰ Waters and the sultan were interested in the news from each other’s ports but the fact that they were natives of ports, Salem and Zanzibar, meant that they shared a special connection – a common maritime identity.

¹²⁹ Hart, "Brief Notes of a Visit to Zanzibar," 274.

¹³⁰ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 18 July 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.” See also, Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 1 May 1846. Ibid.

Chapter 4 – Game Over

By 1842, it seemed that the Waters-Sewji monopoly had been broken. Waters was now doing approximately one-third of his business with Jairam, when just a couple of years earlier he reported doing nine-tenths of his business with him. Who or what broke the Waters-Sewji monopoly?

The easy answer is that British Consul Hamerton broke the monopoly. The logic behind this is that because Britain was the dominant power in the Indian Ocean, the advent of a British counterpart to Richard Waters must have led to an end for the monopoly operated by American Consul Richard Waters and Indian Customs Manager Jairam Sewji. Many historians have followed this line of thinking. For example, Christine Bird writes, “The man who did break the Waters-Sewji stranglehold on the island’s trade was British consul Hamerton. Shortly after arriving on the island in May 1841, Hamerton was deluged with complaints from the port’s Indian and British traders...So ended the Waters-Sewji monopoly.”¹

This story, however, does not quite fit the facts. While Hamerton did play a role in the decline of the monopoly, the driving reason for the break up of the monopoly was the fundamental problem with the entire early U.S.-Oman relationship, namely that the Salem merchants were trying to hide and protect the Zanzibar trade while the sultan and Omani agents such as Sewji were trying very hard to expand it. This tension came to the fore after the Pingree-West group and the Bertram-Shepard group waged open commercial war on each other. In the first chapter it was discussed

¹ Bird, *The Sultan's Shadow*, 165.

that mid-nineteenth century Salem was on the decline in terms of the volume of its overseas commerce. This meant that while the Zanzibar trade was very lucrative for certain Salem merchants, Salem as a whole was only three or four decades from ceasing to be a player at all in international commerce. Said bin Sultan was actively trying to expand the Zanzibar trade to as many foreigners as possible, hoping to offset Great Britain's influence in the western Indian Ocean.

This is not to say Waters did not continue to make great profits in Zanzibar. As Sherriff writes, "By 1842, he [Waters] did less than one-third of his trade with Jairam, while he increased his commercial dealings with at least nineteen Indian and Arab traders and plantation owners, including Topan Tajiana, the second most important Indian merchant in Zanzibar."²

Meanwhile, because of the fierce competition between the two Salem firms in Zanzibar, Sewji "had begun to realise that external demand for African commodities was growing rapidly, and that cut-throat competition between the foreign traders was precisely what was advantageous to the Zanzibar merchants, because it lowered the prices of imports and raised those of exports."³ Waters's business dealings with Topan did not go unnoticed and in 1844, Waters was forced to go the sultan's palace at Mtony to submit a complaint against Abjee (Jairam's brother) and Renshaw bin Ramji (also connected with Jairam's firm) for, "trying to injure my [Waters's] business by threatening Topan that they would undersell him."⁴

² Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar : Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873*, 98-99.

³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 257.

Because of the trade war between the two Salem firms and the resultant drop in the prices of American goods, Waters was forced to find other markets for large Salem cargoes. Waters writes, “I have been obliged to plan out voyages for the Banian Dhows, and thus try and induce them to purchase our goods and ship them away to other places.”⁵

As shown by the earlier analysis of the five different roles of Richard Waters, Waters’s economic dealings were not the sum total of his life in Zanzibar. Thus, even though Waters and Sewji were not doing nearly as much business with each other as they had done in Waters’s early years in Zanzibar, they remained very close friends, something ignored by most historians. But just as in the prime of the Waters-Sewji monopoly, there were still traders who were left out of the economic success in Zanzibar or simply out maneuvered by the likes of Waters, Sewji, et al.. Waters writes in July 1843, “Four weeks since some person got in Jeram bin Sevas [Jairam Sewji] house in the night and stabbed Jeram in seven different places and came very near taking his life.” What is important to note is whom Sewji called in this emergency: “Jeram sent for me and also Capt. Hammerton & Capt. Webb and we dressed the wounds as well as we could.” Sewji even appointed Waters and Hamerton as executors of his will! An extremely concerned sultan visited Sewji every day for two weeks. While the perpetrator was never found, Sewji did eventually recover his health.⁶

Waters’s letters demonstrate that he and Jairam were still on very good terms. In a letter to one of the sultan’s men, Ahmad bin Na’aman, Waters writes of Sewji, “I

⁵ Ibid., 245.

⁶ Ibid., 245-46, 55.

see that Jeram likes Bombay very much. He is building a new house (which is almost completed) and it must cost him over twenty thousand Rupees. I shall do all I can to make him return to Zanzibar before this monsoon closes because I know His Highness wishes him to be in Zanzibar.”⁷

This fundamental tension, i.e. that of the sultan and Zanzibar merchants actively trying to expand the trade while the Salem merchants were actively trying to protect it and keep it for themselves manifested itself in what can be described as perhaps the most entertaining episodes of the early U.S.-Oman relationship, the voyage of the ship *Sultanah* to New York City in 1840.

A Passage to New York

Nothing highlights the depth of Said bin Sultan’s desire to maintain strong contacts with the United States as much as the 1840 voyage of the Omani ship *Sultanah* to New York City. One year earlier, Said had had discussions with the Scoville Britton firm of New York City, who had undoubtedly encouraged his proposal to send a vessel to New York. This trip was literally unprecedented, as it was the first vessel from an Asian Arabian nation to cross the north Atlantic and reach the United States. This event is also a reminder us that the 1833 treaty was not simply a one-way street by which American merchants were given most favored nation status in the sultan’s ports; the benefits went both ways and the sultan was entitled to most favored nation status in American ports as well. Said bin Sultan was

⁷ Ibid., 252.

accustomed to sending trading vessels to England and France, but this journey was considerably longer.

The *Sultanah* arrived in New York on April 30 1840 in bad condition. This was not the result of out of date equipment or material on board the *Sultanah*, as some have presumed, but rather because of the incompetence of the captain, William Sleeman. Although there is no way of knowing all of the details of how this trip was planned and scheduled, it is known that Sleeman, an Englishman with a propensity to become drunk at crucial times during the voyage, had not been the sultan's first choice. Waters once stated that he would feel unsafe in a ship navigated by Captain Sleeman.⁸ Waters also reported that the person in charge of the mission, Ahmad bin Na'aman, was not the sultan's first choice either and that he (Waters) did not think much of Ahmad bin Na'aman.⁹ Hermann Frederick Eilts, the only scholar to write extensively on the *Sultanah's* trip to New York, describes Sleeman as follows:

Sleeman was a good navigator, but highly intemperate. It was recounted, for example, that after buying a large quantity of spirits at St. Helena, he had drunk himself into a state of stupor, just as the vessel was getting underway and before a course had been set. For eight days he had continued thus in his bed and would probably have remained so longer, had not his remaining supply of gin judiciously been thrown overboard.¹⁰

Without an alert and effective captain, the *Sultanah's* crew took the advice of two American ship captains they encountered at sea and set a due northwest course. Remember, this was the first voyage from (Asian) Arabia to the United States and it was 1840 – many decades before the age of accurate charts, GPS devices, or radios.

⁸ Richard Waters to William Waters, 17 December 1839. Box 2 Folder 3, "Waters Papers"

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hermann Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'aman's Mission to the United States in 1840, the Voyage of Al-Sultanah to New York City," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 98, no. 1 (1962): 222.

“Inexpertly, the distraught ship’s officers now sought to steer such a course; *insha’allah*, God willing, they would make their destination.”¹¹ Unfortunately for the crew of the *Sultanah*, even a sober Sleeman was far from an effective leader, something very much needed on board a long journey of this kind. “His [Sleeman] frequent outbursts of temper evoked only sullen insolence and neglect of duty on part of the crew. The ship’s wretched condition on arrival in New York was the result.”¹² It is amazing that the *Sultanah* managed to avoid running aground on a shoal or sandbar and arrived in New York City battered but still afloat.

As unlikely as this voyage may seem to the modern reader, imagine the surprise and excitement it provoked in the people of 1840 New York City. Port officials in New York were baffled to find out that the English captain, Sleeman, was not in charge of the mission and that the dark and strange looking Ahmad bin Na’aman, special representative of a far away sultan unknown to all but a few New Yorkers, was. What made Na’aman’s presence even more interesting was his striking and colorful attire. “A magnificent, gaily colored turban was on his head. Around his waist was tied a cashmere shawl of equally bright colors. Over a long white undergarment, he wore a beautiful black robe, or *qaftan*, trimmed with gold and splendidly embroidered at the shoulders.”¹³ His New York hosts had a further surprise in store; Na’aman spoke English quite well.

The *Sultanah*’s arrival was the talk of the town in New York. The *Morning Herald* described Said bin Sultan as, “a remarkable man; as ambitious and as

¹¹ Ibid.: 223.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.:224.

enterprising as Mehemet Ali of Egypt.”¹⁴ Adding spice to the episode was the presence of two English ladies on board the ship, one of them the wife of the unfortunate Captain Norsworthy. Rumor had it that the two ladies were Circassian slaves, meant as gifts for the harem of the president of the United States.¹⁵ Ordinary New Yorkers went to the docks in droves, hoping to get a glimpse of the *Sultanah* and its exotic crewmembers. There were so many curious visitors that two policemen were stationed on board the vessel at all times for security purposes.

On what was a part diplomatic, part economic mission, Said bin Sultan sent gifts on the *Sultanah* to be presented to the president. These included jewels, a silk Persian rug, a gold-mounted sword and two Arabian horses. But the gifts presented a problem for President Martin Van Buren. As Joseph Fitchett writes, “As the Constitution forbids an American President to accept gifts, the sultan’s well-meant generosity put the Congress in an uproar and Van Buren, bending to Congressional pressure, had to sell them at a public auction and deposit the revenues to the United States Treasury.”¹⁶

Ahmad bin Na’aman hoped for a presidential audience in Washington but never received one. Nevertheless, many important figures in New York City extended invitations to Ahmad. The Board of Aldermen of the Common Council of New York, as the City Council was then known, wishing to formally greet Ahmad bin Na’aman and other officials, met on May 4 to enact a welcoming resolution. The resolution describes the *Sultanah*’s visit as the “first step towards the establishment of a friendly commercial intercourse with that interesting country [Oman].” Additionally, a special

¹⁴ Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'aman's Mission to the United States," 240.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 241.

¹⁶ Joseph Fitchett, "Embassy Ahoy!," *Saudi Aramco World* 26, no. 5 (1975): 3.

committee of the Board of Assistant Aldermen waited on Ahmad, offering him, “the civilities and accustomed hospitalities of the city [New York].”¹⁷ Additionally Na’aman and the two other principal officers aboard the *Sultanah* were given tours of the city. These included a visit to the Institution for the Blind, lunch at the country home of former Council President Williams in Morningside Heights and a ride on the Harlem Railroad. They were also treated to a formal visit to the Brooklyn Navy Yard; and, according to proper maritime etiquette, the men were given booming thirteen-gun salutes from the naval vessels *North Carolina* and *Independence*. A portrait of Ahmad bin Na-aman was commissioned that still hangs in New York’s City Hall.¹⁸

The sultan’s choice of vessel to send to New York conveyed a message in itself. The *Sultanah* was the same ship that had rescued Edmund Roberts and the *Peacock* back in 1835. By sending the *Sultanah*, the sultan was subtly reminding the United States not only of the fruitful relationship that the two nations had enjoyed since 1833 but also the often extraordinary lengths to which Said bin Sultan was prepared to go to ensure its continuation. While very few people in the United States today are familiar with the *Peacock’s* rescue in 1835, in 1840 the episode was still fresh in peoples’ minds. The *Evening Post* wrote of the sultan, “There is not a monarch in Christendom whose character would not have been elevated in the eyes of the world by conduct like this.”¹⁹ The *New York American* added, “It is hoped that every facility will be given by our Government to the first commercial enterprise [sic] of the Sultan with the New World, that the Sultane [even more sic] and her officers

¹⁷ Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'aman's Mission to the United States," 241.

¹⁸ Ahmad bin Na’aman’s portrait is currently (April 2011) in storage while City Hall is undergoing renovations.

¹⁹ Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'aman's Mission to the United States," 240.

may be greeted with the courtesies approaching in some degree to those (of which she has been the instrument) extended by the hospitable Arabs to our people.”²⁰ The *Sultanah* was refitted at U.S. government expense in the Brooklyn Navy Yard; the total cost of repairs was roughly \$5,000.

The visit of the *Sultanah* to New York also raised the issue of slavery. Militant Abolitionists attempted to help members of the crew, presumably slaves, to escape the ship while it was docked on the East River in Brooklyn. In reference to the *Sultanah*, the *Connecticut Courant* states, “She is lying in the North [i.e., Hudson] River, having been compelled to quit the Navy Yard, by the attempts the Abolitionists there had an opportunity of making to entice the crew away. Seven they have already got off who are secreted somewhere in the city probably.”²¹

Besides refitting the *Sultanah* at the Navy Yard, the U.S. government gave a variety of lavish gifts to the sultan. According to the *New York Weekly Herald*, these gifts included an “enameled white and beautifully polished” pleasure boat, “two large and elegant mirrors,” “a magnificent chandelier,” and a collection of firearms all “of the most finished and perfect workmanship,” including “two splendid pairs of Colt’s pistols and two of his [the President’s] patent rifles.”²²

The visit of the *Sultanah* was more than a friendly visit to reaffirm United States-Oman relations. It seems that Said bin Sultan was also testing the United States as a potential export market. Remember that as part of the 1833 treaty, vessels from the Sultanate of Oman enjoyed full trading privileges in the United States. According

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Connecticut Courant*, August 14, 1840

²² “Departure of the Sultane--Presents to the Imam of Muscat,” *New York Weekly Herald*, August 1, 1840.

to Fitchett, Ahmad bin Na'aman, captain of the *Sultanah*, "After presenting his letters of credence and messages from Sultan Sayyid ... set about selling his cargo: bags of Omani dates, cloves from Zanzibar, sacks of coffee from Mocha, bales of Persian carpets, salted hides and ivory tusks."²³

As to the idea that Said bin Sultan was hoping to negotiate a deal for American arms to use in a campaign against Mozambique, this may be true, but it was certainly not the primary mission for the voyage. According to Fitchett, the proceeds from the sale of the Omani cargo were used to purchase three hundred muskets and three tons of gunpowder. However, the weapons presented by the president of the United States were mere showpieces, not samples of military hardware intended to stimulate future sales.

Some historians have described New Yorkers of 1840 as unfriendly or even hostile to their Omani visitors.²⁴ It is important, however, not to confuse curiosity, surprise, or even shock – all quite understandable -- with malevolence. And if the *Sultanah* crew was treated with so badly and with so much hostility, it would make little sense that Ahmad bin Na'aman, after his return to Zanzibar, became, as we know he did, the leader of what British Consul Hamerton described as the "American Party" in the sultan's court.

There were Americans of the early nineteenth century who viewed Muslims as different and even barbaric. As Robert J. Allison writes, "The American and European image of the Islamic world is most clearly seen in an anonymous

²³ Fitchett, "Embassy Ahoy!," 1-3.

²⁴ See Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856*, 213.

Englishman's biography of Muhammad written at the end of the eighteenth century and reprinted in America in 1802."²⁵

A newspaper article from the *New York Sun* describing the return visit of the *Sultanah* to Zanzibar calls its inhabitants "[a] very filthy, half-naked, slavish race, and the town a collection of hovels, scarcely fit for dog kennels."²⁶ Later the article states, "A proof of the apathetic indifference of these people is the fact that when [the ship] left, not one of the packages containing the presents to the Sultan had been opened. The opening was postponed time to time for nearly two months, and perhaps they have not been examined to this day." On the other hand, Americans who had regular commercial contact with Arab merchants in the region saw them as "shrewd businessmen whose societies were generally well ordered and civil."²⁷

With the possible exception of a bigoted minority, the crew of the *Sultanah* was in fact treated with great respect. Influential members of New York society were interested in their visitors and invited them to their homes and to numerous events. Ahmad bin Na'aman and his principle officers were given a formal dinner at City Hall, a tour of the Navy Yard, a lavish banquet at the Grand Central Hotel and trips on the Long Island Railroad. They were also invited to the personal residences of Commodore Renshaw, Gilbert Davis (a popular character known as the "Governor of Coney Island") and others.²⁸

²⁵ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 35. The book Allison refers to is titled, *The Life of Mahomet; or, the History of that Imposture which was begun, carried on, and finally established by him in Arabia: and which has Subjugated a Larger Portion of the Globe, than the Religion of Jesus has set at Liberty*. The title conveys the tone of the book. Another contemporary biography of Muhammad was entitled, *The True Nature of Imposture*.

²⁶ *New York Sun*, May 6, 1840.

²⁷ Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York Free Press, 1992), 3.

²⁸ Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'aman's Mission to the United States," 242,43,44,45.

While all this was going on, Richard Waters was at home in Salem for a roughly a year-long absence from Zanzibar. Said bin Sultan had suggested that Waters take the *Sultanah* home to the United States, but Waters declined. In a letter to John G. Waters, Richard Waters explained that while he initially accepted an offer of passage on the *Sultanah*, he ultimately decided to take the *Cavalier*, a New Bedford ship, because the *Cavalier* “will sail so much sooner and arrive in America about the middle of April the very time at which I should wish to be at home as I shall then have an opportunity to attend the anniversaries in New York City... There are other reasons which have influenced me and among them John’s [Waters’s brother] wish for me to take passage with him. I shall have a fine large state room to myself on board the “Cavalier” and I anticipate a pleasant and speedy passage.”²⁹ Waters later states that he hoped to find a wife while in the United States -- in this he would be disappointed -- and that another reason for his departure to the States was the fact that his mother was very aged.

Often, however, the most important reasons for human actions are the unstated ones. While the *Salem Gazette* suggested that a side trip to Salem by the *Sultanah* was considered, it never occurred. Why Waters did not want anything to do the *Sultanah* voyage, no one can know for sure. It is clear, however, is that the *Sultanah*’s voyage worried the Salem merchants. If bigger ships from New York City started coming to Zanzibar and east Africa, they thought, the smaller Salem ships would be driven out.

As for the business part of the mission, the *Sultanah*’s cargo included, “1,300 bags of dates, 21 bales of Persian wool carpets and 100 bales of Mokha coffee” as well as “108 prime ivory tusks, 81 cases of gum copal – partly cleaned, partly

²⁹ Richard Waters to William Waters, 17 December 1839. Box 2 Folder 3, “Waters Papers.”

“jackass” copal (unclean), ... 135 bags of cloves and 1,000 dry, salted hides.”³⁰ The cargo was supposed to be sold through Scoville and Britton but upon arriving in New York, Ahmad found that the firm had gone out of business. Instead, he used the firm of Barclay and Livingston. The sales grossed \$26,157.00.³¹ Ahmad then purchased a return cargo, which consisted of three categories of goods. The first category included items intended for the general Zanzibar market that would, of course, pass through Jairam Sewji. This included Merkani cloth, scarlet cloth, beads, prints, muskets, gunpowder and china plates. The total cost of these purchases was \$11,177.56.³² The next category included items that were for the personal use of Said bin Sultan and Prince Khalid. The value of these purchases amounted to \$3,681.25 and included decorated rifles, spermaceti candles, gold thread, reams of paper, refined sugar, vases, perfume, music boxes, mirrors, glass and china plates for the sultan. Prince Khalid purchased some mirrors, chandeliers, glass plates and lamps totaling \$505.08.

From the sultan’s point of view the *Sultanah*’s voyage was a success. Not only did it capture the imagination of many New Yorkers, giving the *Sultanah*, Oman and Said bin Sultan unprecedented exposure in the United States, exposure that the Salem merchants were desperately trying to prevent, but it also allowed Ahmad bin Na’aman to make invaluable personal business contacts in New York. These contacts seemed fruitful enough that Said bin Sultan expressed his hope to make arrangements for regular voyages to New York.³³

Not surprisingly, the *Sultanah* decided not to sail with Sleeman as their captain

³⁰ Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'aman's Mission to the United States," 250.

³¹ Ibid.: 252.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.: 261.

for the return journey. Ahmad chose instead the soberer (surname notwithstanding) Captain Drinker of Philadelphia. While Richard Waters did not return to Zanzibar on board the *Sultanah*, William Waters did. Thus, on August 7 the *Sultanah* departed New York harbor heading for Muscat and Zanzibar.

In order to generate even more competition between the foreign traders in Zanzibar, Said bin Sultan decided to enter the trade, in a way that he previously had not, by sending his own ships to the foreign merchants' home countries. "As a sovereign [the sultan] enjoyed a number of advantages which made him, in the eyes of the foreign traders, an unfair and deadly competitor. He enjoyed exemption from all customs duties, and he could exercise an enormous influence in collecting his cargo within East Africa."³⁴

Historians have differing interpretations of the *Sultanah*'s voyage to New York. Richard Gates-Hunt writes, "While his [Said bin Sultan's] ships may or may not have succeeded in securing a profitable margin of trade in foreign ports, they were assured of great profits on their return cargoes in Zanzibar... This system of trade yielded profits to the sultan guaranteed by his prerogative powers and caused great consternation among American traders who feared he might assume control of the American trade. Their fears, needless to say, were groundless, and *al-Sultanah* was the only ship that the sultan outfitted to America. Salem's dominance of the American trade with Zanzibar remained intact."³⁵

Gates-Hunt writes that the Salem merchants' fears of losing out to New York City were groundless. While they were ultimately not realized, they were not in fact

³⁴ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar : Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873*, 101.

³⁵ Gates-Hunt, "Salem and Zanzibar: A Special Relationship," 15.

groundless. It is true that the sultan in the end sent only one ship to the United States, but a closer look at the Richard Waters papers reveals that there were at least two other times when sending ships to the States was seriously discussed by the Omanis. The Salem merchants were worried about this to the point that Richard Waters purchased certain cargoes from the sultan at inflated prices in order to head off any attempt by him [the sultan] to sell them in New York.

A few years after the voyage of the *Sultanah* to New York, Waters reported that Said bin Sultan wished to send another vessel to America. Waters, however, would not make the mistake again of allowing it to be a non-Salem project. Waters writes, "But I think it may be best for me to contract with him to bring them out in one of our vessels."³⁶

Throughout Richard Waters's stay in Zanzibar, the sultan showed himself to be deeply interested in the United States and American affairs in general. This interest was evident as early as in 1837, Waters's first year in Zanzibar. Waters writes, "At 4 o'clock I called with the Capt. of the *Cherokee* and the clerk, Mr. Brown, upon his Highness. He made many enquiries in regard to the United States. We presented him with a map of the states, and book of explanations, with the names of every State, Territory, County, City, and Town in the Country, with their population, which Capt. Bertram sent out to him."³⁷ A couple months later in September 1837, Waters reports that he "visited His Highness the Sultan this morning with Capt. Conant. We spent two hours with him very pleasantly. He talked about America, what a large country it

³⁶ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 246.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

was, and made many enquiries which I was pleased to answer.”³⁸ In 1842, Richard Waters notes, “Ahamed bin Aman [Ahmad bin Na’aman] and myself translated for His Highness an article from an American paper...respecting the failure of the Niger expedition &c.”³⁹ The sultan also often sent letters to both the State Department and the President of the United States.

Waters’s notes reflect a continuing worry about the prospect of the sultan establishing a trade with United States that would bypass Salem. On November 8 1842 Waters writes that Ahman bin Na’aman told Waters that Said bin Sultan had made up his mind to send the *Gazelle* to America, stopping in London on the way. Two days later, Waters enthusiastically reports that, “His Highness had given orders to sell what Copal they had bought for him *as he should not send the Gazelle to America!!!*”⁴⁰ But this decision by the sultan would not come without a price; the very next day Ahmad bin Na’aman called Waters, letting Waters know that a merchant had requested Na’aman to say to Waters, “that he had the selling of Highness Copal and if I wished to buy and would call at his house he would me the samples.” Thus, Waters and the Salem firms would have to purchase certain goods in order to keep the sultan from sending ships to the United States, a threat to Salem’s quasi-monopoly in Zanzibar. Waters, undoubtedly aware that of the trick they were trying to pull, told Na’aman that he “saw through all this business.”⁴¹ Even so, Waters would end up buying the copal. And like most of the lucrative deals to be had in Zanzibar, Jairam Sewji was a part of it. Waters recalls, “Jeram called in the Forenoon

³⁸ Ibid., 204.

³⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 254.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and said he wanted to talk with me about buying His Highness Copal. We had some talk about it, and then I told Jeram that I would send *him* my agent to buy the copal.” Yet Waters was sure to remind Sewji that he “was not going to enter into any competition to buy it, and thus run the price up, but that If I could buy it at a fair price I was willing to buy it.” Waters later writes that Sewji had purchased all the copal for Waters, “at the same price which it cost.”⁴²

Leaving Zanzibar

In 1844, Waters decided to leave Zanzibar. He did not say why. Waters may have been ill at the time and perhaps felt that a break from Zanzibar would restore his health. A letter to William C. Waters in April 1844 suggests that a business downturn may have caused Waters to return home. Waters writes, “Had a talk with William C. Waters to day [sic] with which I was much displeased and came to the determination to close up my business here in Zanzibar by the first of next February, and all hands return to America...”⁴³ This, however, seemed to be only a temporary feeling because Waters’s later letters suggest that he would only be gone from Zanzibar temporarily. He also left much earlier than the following February, (in October), suggesting that something more urgent pressed him to leave.

While ultimately he would never return, his letters reveal that at the time, his absence from Zanzibar was expected to be a temporary one. In a letter to Captain Hassan (of the sultan’s court), Waters mentioned that he thought he would be in

⁴² Ibid., 255.

⁴³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 256.

America for only a year.⁴⁴ It is clear from a letter to Zanzibar merchant Mohammed Abdel Cardree that Waters planned on coming back to Zanzibar.⁴⁵

The sultan did not want Waters to leave. In a letter to John G. Waters, Waters states, “His Highness told me yesterday that I must not think of going to America. That if I would remain here he would do anything for me I might wish.”⁴⁶ Waters did not make any promises.

On October 3 1844 Waters sailed for the last time, whether he knew it or not, out of Zanzibar harbor. “Fired three guns on passing Matony (the sultan’s palace), which were answered by the *Chararlum* [Shahalum].”⁴⁷ Fittingly, just as Waters was welcomed to Zanzibar with a salute by the Omani brig *Shahalum*, his departure from Zanzibar was also marked by a salute by the same vessel.

Ward’s Follies

One difficulty with judging Waters’s success as U. S. consul in Zanzibar is that he had no predecessor with whom to be compared. He was not the last consul, however. A comparison with the second American consul in Zanzibar, Charles Ward, reveals the extent to which Waters had become a valued member of the Zanzibar community, as well as the degree to which his personality and his ability to forge effective relationships were responsible for his success.

⁴⁴ Richard Waters to Hassan bin Ibrahim, 11 December 1844. Box 2 Folder 3, “Waters Papers.”

⁴⁵ Richard Waters to Mohammed Abdel Cardree, 12 December 1844. Box 2 Folder 3, “Waters Papers.” A letter to Haji Merchead, Arab merchant of Zanzibar, confirms that Waters was planning on spending only a year in the United States. See, Richard Waters to Haji Merchead, 12 December 1844. Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 246.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 257.

With Waters out of the way, the Bertram-Shepard firm became top dog in Zanzibar. This was reflected in the fact that Waters's successor as consul, Charles Ward, worked directly for the Bertram-Shepard firm. Remember that after 1840 Waters had worked exclusively for the rival Pingree-West firm, also of Salem. William H. Jelly, agent for Pingree-West, wrote to Richard Waters that, "This has been a hard year [1845] in Zanzibar. The trade is done for and no mistake. As things are now it is not worth pursuing."⁴⁸ It seems that without Waters in Zanzibar, the Pingree-West firm no longer enjoyed a productive relationship with Customs House Manager Jairam Sewji. Jelly writes, "Jeram is as bad as ever Abjee [Jairam's brother] was. The natives say much worse. If a strange vessel arrives here Jeram will not let her leave if it is a possible thing for him to dispose of her cargo, as he is making a poor year of it in the duty line..." Thus, the Pingree firm not only suffered from the absence of Richard Waters but also from skyrocketing prices due to increased foreign competition in Zanzibar. As Jelly somberly reported to Waters, "We have had here within the last six months a Hamburg Brig, a Bremen Brig, a Swedish Bark, two vessels from Mauritius, and an English Brig consigned to Norsworthy, all after copal. They have not taken any great quantity, yet they have served to keep the price up here."⁴⁹ In short, the Pingree-West firm's domination of the Zanzibar trade was coming apart.

Despite the apparent advantage that Ward's arrival initially gave the Bertram-Shepard firm, Benjamin F. Fabens, resident merchant for the Bertram-Shepard group, suspected that Ward was not the right man for the job. Fabens writes, "Respecting the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 343.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 344.

new Consul, I cannot see that he can be of any use to me. The Consul must be a “big man,” take things easily and let others do his work for him, a la Waters. He would hardly feel like garbling Gum Copal or working among hides & skins. Indeed he could not without losing caste. I wish to have one with me who can take part in all the work connected with the business. His Consul influence might be of service but still I think not of much...”⁵⁰ According the contract between Ward and the Bertram-Shepard firm, Ward was to act as partner to Fabens.

Fabens’s concern is quite telling. Richard Waters understood the local customs and environment, which included knowing how to behave in public. It seems that this was not true of Ward, who focused to a fault on menial things, like cleaning gum-copal, instead of delegating such tasks, as a “big” merchant should. Fabens letter also reveals something that became evident early on in the consulship of Richard Waters; namely that the office of “consul” meant very little in itself, especially when compared to the status of a wealthy and successful merchant. When he faced problems, Ward ineptly and usually futilely fell back on his alleged status and prestige as “American consul.”

There are three episodes that exemplify the differences between Richard Waters and Charles Ward. The first was the issue of the right to trade on the Mrima Coast. In February 1846, Said bin Sultan called on Charles Ward and request that he write to the United States Government. The sultan wished to add an amendment to the article of the U.S.-Oman treaty stating that “The citizens of the United States shall have free liberty to enter all the ports of his Majesty...”⁵¹ As Ward writes, “His

⁵⁰ Ibid., 347.

⁵¹ Ibid., 353.

Highness is particularly desirous that the Americans should not trade on that part of the East Coast of Africa, in his highness dominions between the village of Tangate and Quila, [Kilwa] both ports inclusive.”⁵² The area in dispute is known as the Mrima Coast. The sultan’s stated reason for his desire to change the treaty was “on the ground that if Americans are permitted to [trade on the Coast], the English and French will claim the same right, and thus it will be the means of depriving him of revenues at Zanzibar.”

Recall that the issue over trading on the Mrima Coast came up during Waters’s consulship as well. In that instance, the sultan, recognizing Waters’s dual loyalties as both American consul and merchant for Pingree-West, elected to write to the State Department instead of going through Waters. The State Department responded with a letter telling Waters to remind American merchants not to trade on the disputed territory. While Waters never challenged the sultan’s claim to a monopoly on the Mrima Coast, Said bin Sultan realized the possible conflict of interest Waters might face as an agent for a particular trading firm regarding this particular matter. Said bin Sultan was content with the State Department’s somewhat informal action because Said bin Sultan trusted in his relationship with Waters and he knew that Waters would not go against him.

Now what made the Charles Ward situation different? It is not as if any American merchants had challenged the previous practice; no Americans had traded on the Mrima Coast. The difference here is the strength of the relationship. Said bin Sultan had no history with Ward and he could not be sure that Ward would not assert America’s right to trade on the Mrima Coast, absent a formal written prohibition.

⁵² Ibid.

It is important to remember as well that if Ward were to challenge the sultan on this issue, then Britain and France might soon follow. This would be especially problematic for Said bin Sultan, considering the large military presence of both the French and the English in the area. Benjamin Fabens describes this alarming phenomenon to Michael Shepard; “A great many Eng & Fr men of war visit this place and both nations are extending their colonies in this part of the world. We have never had but two American Men of War here and the Sultan does not hear of the Americans making any addition to their country by conquest and does not therefore stand in much fear of them...”⁵³

During Ward’s tenure as consul Said bin Sultan actually went to Richard Waters to petition the United States government for an addition to the treaty, forbidding American trade on the Mrima Coast. Waters, in turn, wanted a letter from Said bin Sultan appointing him the sultan’s agent in the United States, something that Said bin Sultan was hesitant to do. The sultan offered the following reason to Waters, “My dear friend, I do not feel like sending, as it would be necessary for me to write to the U.S. Government. And as I have within a short time written the Government four letter and have never received an answer to either of them, I do not feel like writing more.”⁵⁴ Said bin Sultan’s letter furthermore reveals that the sultan and Waters discussed (and later rejected) the idea of politicking to influence who would get the consulship after Waters.⁵⁵

⁵³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 360.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁵⁵ Said bin Sultan writes, “In regard to the new Consul appointed to Zanzibar, it would not be right for us [Waters and the Sultan] to interfere.” *Ibid.*

Stranded Whalers

As discussed in Chapter Two, one of the most difficult parts of Richard Waters's job as consul was dealing with American whaling crews. While many would describe Waters's treatment of the notorious crews as harsh, Waters did manage to keep the crews' behavior under control. In fact, after an incident in 1843 where some American seamen reportedly shot two Zanzibaris, Waters undertook decisive steps to make sure that it would not happen again. He issued a notice to all incoming vessels that firearms would not be allowed on shore and that whaling crews would have to be back aboard their vessels by sundown. There was no repeat of the 1843 incident. In late August of 1846, however, the crew of the whaler *Ann Parry* would cause serious problems for Charles Ward. Unlike Waters, he would not be so successful in handling it. Ward's mismanagement of the situation was largely to blame.

The undersigned U.S. Consul of America [Ward] is deeply grieved in the report of a murder committed by an american [sic] seaman, and would now inform your Majesty that he gave immediate orders to have the sailors put in Irons without delay.⁵⁶

Ward reported to Said bin Sultan that three men, one of whom had confessed to the murder, were put in irons. Ward suggested to Said bin Sultan, "the propriety of having an examination by some of your Judges in the presence of the U.S. consul."⁵⁷ The sultan replied to Ward, telling him that whenever Ward wished, the "Cazee" [judge] would come along with the sons of the man who was murdered. The sultan clearly expected Ward to help secure a quick outcome that would be satisfactory to all parties. Ward, however, did not understand this and assumed that a long investigative

⁵⁶ Ibid., 366.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

process was to take place. Ward may have felt that he was doing the right thing in proceeding carefully, but waiting was precisely not what the situation in Zanzibar called for. As he waited, Ward let the whale ship sail away without any sort of punishment for the murderer. When the sultan confronted him about this, Ward wrote, “I said that, I regretted [sic] the unfortunate occurrence, that I have not sent the vessels away, but they have gone of themselves, & I have no authority to detain them.”⁵⁸ On the contrary Ward certainly did have the power to detain them while they were still in Zanzibar, but was unwilling to do so. Ward’s idea of a response was to write to the Department of State and ask them what he should do.

Because of its potential to incite unrest – perhaps even retaliatory violence -- and disturb trade, this incident required quick thinking, assertiveness and flexibility on the part of the American consul. Ward did not exhibit any of these qualities. By failing to secure any punishment for the sailor that committed the murder, Ward put the rest of the Americans in Zanzibar at risk. Ward writes that the, “excitement was tremendous, & the Arabs threatened vengeance against any white men who were found in the streets after dark. Every white man in the place received warning from some quarter, not to go out after dark. The impression of some of our Americans is, that some unwary sailor will have to suffer for the guilty.”⁵⁹ Fortunately, nothing like this happened after the incident.

The sultan was looking to Ward to secure some sort of punishment, which certainly did not necessarily mean death for the American sailor. There were other options, including the payment of compensation; the going rate was \$800. Jairam

⁵⁸ Ibid., 370.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Sewji, speaking to an American in Zanzibar regarding the incident, told him that if he [Jairam], the American gentleman and Consul Ward had raised the required sum, the whole affair would have been settled.⁶⁰ In Zanzibar, a distraction of this kind was not good for business.

Unlike Waters, Charles Ward sent long dispatches to the State Department, so long that Secretary of State James Buchanan wrote to Ward to “recommend brevity.” All in all, Ward seemed to have an officious mentality that focused on small details rather than the bigger picture. But as the consulship of Richard Waters showed, success in Zanzibar required wisdom, flexibility and magnanimity. Ward was slow to catch on to the currents of commerce in Zanzibar. In a letter to Michael Shepard in 1846, Ward summarizes his strategy for gaining power and influence, “Ever since I came to Zanzibar my aim has been to use my official capacity so far as it can be done, without losing the confidence & respect of his Highness to promote the welfare of American trade.”⁶¹ In the same letter, Ward also seemed to be bothered by the sultan’s role in the Zanzibar market. Ward’s somewhat grandiose and naive plan for heading it off was as follows:

I have been concocting a memorial [memo] to his Highness...I shall in my memorial set forth the present course of the trade & shew [sic] how he does, & can at all times control the market; and that as a sum consequence he would destroy all Foreign trade, and in doing that he would lose his revenues by the customs.⁶²

In the same letter Ward tells Shepard, “I am sure of Jeram’s influence [in Zanzibar]...He receives no duties on his Highness importations, neither commission

⁶⁰ Ibid., 371.

⁶¹ Ibid., 365.

⁶² Ibid.

on sales or purchases...”⁶³ Sewji’s influence in Zanzibar and close relationship with the sultan was far from a secret not only to the members of Zanzibar but also to Michael Shepard, who had been involved in the east African trade for decades. The fact that Ward feels the need to write this, or perhaps believes that he has just figured it out, is telling about his unsophisticated character.

Scars and Gripes: Ward’s Flag Problem

Charles Ward became entangled in two rather ridiculous disputes over flag etiquette during his time in Zanzibar. First, Ward got into a spat with his French counterpart. In the fall of 1846, on the birthday of the ruler of France, all national representatives in Zanzibar were to raise their respective flags in celebration. Ward, however, did not. Ward explained that he had been ill, but the French consul was not satisfied. Bennett suggests that the real cause for the friction between Ward and the French consul may have been a recent occasion when Ward had been unable to secure an appointment with the sultan, while the French consul did get one.⁶⁴

Four years later, in 1850, Ward became involved in another flag dispute. This time, however, Ward contended that the American flag had been insulted. According to Ward, the sultan had forgotten to give a public salute to the American flag on the fourth of July. When the salute never came, Ward demanding not only a written apology but also a twenty-one gun naval salute.⁶⁵

⁶³ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 365.

⁶⁴ Norman R. Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1845-1865," *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* 97, no. 1 (1961): 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 48.

The sultan apologized and told Ward, “Our friend you had been appointed a Consul for nearly six years, you had never been mentioned that you wish Guns to be fired, and at present as you had mentioned to us, we acquainted you that Mr Waters when he had wished from us that is by the way of friendship he use [sic] to fired [sic] first, and we answered him, and we had mentioned to you if [you] wish us to fire, that you [ought] to fire first, and we will give you Guns and powder. All this what he had said to you, you did not approve.”⁶⁶ The sultan also reminded Ward that, “this custom [of firing first] never happened to us, and we never fired first to anyone except once by the way of friendship To the Queen of England, to her soul personally.”⁶⁷ This truthful and sincere response was not enough for Ward and in protest he brought down the American flag from the consulate at Zanzibar.

What was behind this accusation? It is not believable that Said bin Sultan would have botched a salute of this kind. We saw from Richard Waters’s time in Zanzibar that salutes were taken very seriously and routinely executed according to proper maritime etiquette. Interestingly enough, it seems that even before the second flag incident, Ward had become fed up with the consulship and had sent his resignation to Michael Shepard. Shepard replied, “We have not sent your resignation of the Consulship... We wish you could be relieved [sic] of the situation, and still hope some one will be appointed that will be satisfactory to all, but from appearances [sic] we do not believe anything will be done at present...”⁶⁸ It appears as if Shepard and company were having problems finding a suitable replacement and were hesitant to accept Ward’s resignation without having someone already in place to take the

⁶⁶ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 457.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 454.

position. Shepard wrote to Ward, "Your consulship is not in such demand as was expected... Mr King [Congressman] says if the place was vacated, you would be as likely to have a man from Wisconsin, as from one of our commercial cities."⁶⁹

Perhaps Shepard's delay had angered Ward, who may have felt that making a scene in Zanzibar would allow him cover to return home.

Ultimately, Ward's actions caused such a commotion that it took a visit from the warship U.S.S. *Susquehanna* to settle the matter. Commodore John Aulick arrived in Zanzibar in December of 1851. He visited the Governor of Zanzibar, as both Said bin Sultan and Hamerton were in Muscat at the time. Many in Zanzibar were impressed with the strength of the *Susquehanna*, including Jairam, who received a personal tour. The visit would do the trick to smooth over the bad feeling in Zanzibar and the new American consul, John F. Webb, reported to the State Department that, "Aulick had settled all and that the whole affair should be dropped and forgotten."⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, the flag affair caused widespread anger at Charles Ward. Michael Shepard was one of them; he felt that Ward's indiscretion might have caused the Salem firms to lose the influence and prestige they had worked so hard to secure in Zanzibar. Shepard writes to Charles Ward,

We exceedingly regret your misunderstanding with his Highness, who has forwarded to us a copy of your correspondence with him on the subject. We feel that it is of more consequence to us to preserve a good understanding with the Imaum [the sultan], than the want of etiquette in firing a thousand Salutes, especially as he can know but little of our national peculiarities. Besides we are sorry to see by the correspondence that all the influence you lost with his Highness is gained by Mr Hammerton, giving the English a great advantage over us. We trust that before this moment you will have adjusted this ugly business with his Highness. We deeply lament that you should have thought it

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1845-1865," 51.

worthy of a representation to our government. It, in our view, makes too serious a matter of what appears to us a very trifling affair.⁷¹

Shepard wrote another letter to the sultan, reaffirming his firm's friendship with Said bin Sultan – even at the possible expense of the sultan's relationship with the United States. “We exceedingly regret that there should arise any misunderstanding between our Mr Ward and your Highness... We beg your Highness to consider that in this matter Mr Ward acts in his official capacity, and not as our agent.”⁷²

Not content with engaging in *contretemps* with the French consul, Ward also found the time to annoy British Consul Atkins Hamerton over the issue of the status of the Indians in Zanzibar.

Waters Stays Home

Even though it seems that Waters originally planned to be away from Zanzibar for only about a year, Waters never returned. Even though his reasons both for leaving and for not coming back were unclear, it became evident that his presence in Zanzibar was sorely missed. Even more striking is the sheer number and variety of different people who expressed hope for Waters's return.

Said bin Sultan:

Said bin Sultan and Richard Waters were not able to say goodbye to each other before Waters went to Bombay. Said bin Sultan wrote to Waters, “I feel very sorry that you are going from Bombay to America before we see each other again.

⁷¹ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 471.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Because your friendship is always in our heart.”⁷³ In this same letter, the sultan asked Waters to help him with amending the part of the treaty regarding the Mrima Coast and discussed other news regarding Oman and Zanzibar. Said bin Sultan sent a top quality Arabian horse to John G. Waters and told Waters to “give my compliments to him [John G. Waters] and Mr. Pingree.”

A couple of months later, Said wrote again to Waters, subtly nagging him, “Since you left this place I have not had the pleasure of receiving a letter from you.” The sultan states that he hoped both Waters and his brother William had returned home safely. Asking an intimate favor of Waters, the kind that only a good friend would ask, the sultan writes, “you will purchase and send me by the first opportunity some American boards and shingles. I wish enough for to cover one of the upper rooms of my house at Metony. The length of the room is 45 feet. The width is 18 feet. I suppose an American carpenter will know how many is required.”⁷⁴

In another letter (July 18 1845) Said bin Sultan writes, “his highness presents his compliments to Richard P. Waters Esq. and says his house in Zanzibar is still deserted by him and that he is not present with us as in days gone by. We have plenty of news in Zanzibar, which is not worth writing. It will not amount to much in the end, [possibly a reference to Ward]. Sensible men like you will understand what I mean. Anything you may require from my port let me know.”⁷⁵

On May 1 1846, Said bin Sultan inquired into why Waters had not responded to his previous letter. The sultan states, “I pray by the pleasure of God that nothing

⁷³ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 3 February 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

⁷⁴ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 16 May 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

⁷⁵ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 18 July 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

that is unpleasant and disagreeable may befall on you...pray let me know all the news of your port, and any thing you may require in our port let me know.”⁷⁶

Dr. Johann Krapf:

In an 1845 letter from Krapf to Waters, Krapf writes that after Waters is done with his overland tour, “Perhaps you will then come out with a little band of missionaries, who, I need not tell you, will be treated by me as if they were my fellow labourers, if they come to this quarter.” Later Krapf kindly asks Waters to “send me from America a large quantity and variety of eatables, so that things were only to be warmed or prepared on the fire without much composition according to the rules of cookery. Prepared soups, meat, beans, fruit, etc were highly desirable...”⁷⁷

Zanzibar Merchants:

Ahmad bin Na’aman, (the sultan’s agent who had led the 1840 *Sultanah* voyage) wrote to Richard Waters, “For the welfare of your friend and I assure you that during your absence from us I will be much pleased to hear from you by every opportunity that offers. May God preserve your life and health and give you a happy meeting with your friends in America. I hope that you will be married and that on your return to this place you will bring your good lady with you. Your requests shall be attended to. I will do all and everything in my power for your people here.”⁷⁸

Waters never found a lady to bring back to Zanzibar and in fact, never married.

⁷⁶ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 1 May 1846. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

⁷⁷ Johann Krapf to Richard Waters, 17 February 1845, “Waters Papers.”

⁷⁸ Ahmad bin Na’aman to Richard Waters, 3 February 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

Zanzibar merchant Hajee Merchead also wrote to Richard Waters, responding to a letter of thanks that Waters had sent him. Merchead states, “I could hardly believe it possible that you have not returned in the schooner and I assure you that it makes me feel gloomy to have all my old friends leaving Zanzibar. I hope with God’s blessing to have the pleasure of seeing them again.” Later Merchead writes, “I hope that you will write to me often by your vessels from America.”⁷⁹

Hassan bin Ibrahim wrote a similar letter to Waters, stating, “give my best salam [greetings] to my good friend Capt John G. Waters. I do not know as I shall even see him again but I hope that God will bless him.”⁸⁰

Waters also received several warm letters from merchants Mohammed Abdul Cardree and Sadick bin Barrack. Cardree would later write Waters, “I received your kind letter and also I received the news of the death of your mother. I hope your brothers and family are all well, His Highness business all go well. I should be happy to see you at Zanzibar, all your friends Arab and Banian would be happy to see you. Please make my Salaam to your brothers John and William, all my boys send Salaam and please accept my Salaam.”⁸¹

Waters also heard from Jairam Sewji. Fittingly, these letters were more about business than anything else. On May 20 1845, Jairam asked Waters to inform the Pingree house that, “I have made arrangements for my house at Bombay to transact a general commission business. Any business which he may have in Bombay I shall be

⁷⁹ Hajee Merchead to Richard Waters, 3 February 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

⁸⁰ Hassan bin Ibrahim to Richard Waters, 3 February 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

⁸¹ Mohammed Abdul Cardree to Richard Waters, 4 May 1846. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

happy to have transacted through my house.” Jeram asks Waters to let other American merchants know as well.”⁸²

For whatever reason it seems that Waters did not reply to these letters as often or as quickly as their authors wished. On January 1 1847 Said asked why Waters was not responding to his letters.⁸³ However, it appears in a later letter from Said to Waters that Waters did eventually reply to the aforementioned letter and that the sultan was quite pleased to hear from Waters.⁸⁴

Said bin Khalfan wrote a letter in the same vein. Like many such letters, Khalfan’s contained requests for items from America. Khalfan writes,

I have not heard from you excepting one letter, sent for my brother Sultan, with the spoons and forks. When you sent the looking glasses, why did you not send a pair, why one little and one big? I wish they were a pair. With respect to the prices of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds I suppose you have not as yet disposed of them. I did hope you might have sold them, because four years have elapsed since you went away sometime ago. I sent you fourteen mugs but I have not heard of your having received them and the Captain of the ship by which I sent them has been here sometime ago. I asked him about the carpets and he declared to me that you had received them so you certainly have received them. Please God you have sold them. At this present time Mr. Webb arrived here at Muskat. I inquired of him as to your state and that of your brother William and your youth John. He told me you were all well and I was most happy to hear of your welfare. May God keep you always well. May I be preserved through God’s mercy from seeing any evil concerning you. Now again as touching the ring stones: if you have sold them, well and if there is anything over from the price then give to Mr. Webb or if you yet have any of the stones unsold then give them to Mr. Webb. He tells me he is returning to America and will quickly return. I want you to give any of the stones you have unsold to him and take the payment for the looking glasses, forks, spoons, knives from the money realized from the sale of the carpets. Pay yourself with the remainder buy for me American cloth (the wide sort) and send it to me by Mr. Webb and send me a clean account. I entertain good hopes from you let me constantly hear from you, whatever you require...⁸⁵

⁸² Jairam Sewji to Richard Waters, 20 May 1845. Box 2 Folder 1, “Waters Papers.”

⁸³ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 1 January 1857. Box 2 Folder 2, “Waters Papers.”

⁸⁴ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, 2 July 1847. Box 2 Folder 2, “Waters Papers.”

⁸⁵ Said bin Khalfan to Richard Waters, 23 January 1848. Box 2 Folder 2, “Waters Papers.”

Clearly, while Waters had ceased doing business in Zanzibar, he could not escape doing business for Zanzibar.

As discussed in chapters two and three, Richard Waters had forged close relationships within the highly competitive Zanzibar merchant community. Perhaps for this reason, some of Waters's foreign competitors did not long for his return. Benjamin Fabens enthusiastically reports to Michael Shepard, "Waters sails for Bombay Oct. 1st in His Highness' Schr. *Prince of Wales* which he fits out for the occasion. Report says that he is going home overland, and I think report speaks truly, for the Lac of dolls. which he imagines himself to be worth has given him an enormous idea of his own importance and he will hardly trust his valuable self on board a vessel of the *Eliza's* age... Waters I suppose will use what influence he may have at Washington in getting one of them appointed Consul..."⁸⁶

Waters's decision to take the overland route (instead of a direct sea voyage) to Salem may be significant. Had Richard Waters become tired of the maritime life? For whatever reason, after Waters returned home he did avoid the sea. Waters left Salem and bought a beautiful old farm several miles inland in North Beverly, Massachusetts. Called Cherry Hill, it was an estate of over one hundred and fifty green and rolling acres.⁸⁷ Waters became a member of the Essex Agricultural society, of which he was named a trustee in 1848; he remained one for the next nine years.⁸⁸

The issue of slavery continued to interest Waters when he was in the United States. In later life he became very involved with the national Kansas slave-state debate. In 1860, Waters presided over a meeting at the Mechanics Hall in Salem for

⁸⁶ Bennett and Brooks, eds., *New England Merchants in Africa*, 251.

⁸⁷ Anonymous, "Richard Palmer Waters - a Sketch," 184.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: 190.

“citizens interested in the relief of the surviving members of the family of John Brown.”⁸⁹ His obvious religious and political motives may well have been mingled with guilt. Recall that for several years Waters had participated in an economic system in Zanzibar that was highly dependent on slave labor and slave trading.

Waters’s business skills did not go unnoticed. He served as a director of the Naumkeag Bank for many years and also served as president of the Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company. When he retired from these positions he remained on their boards of directors.⁹⁰

Waters may have abandoned maritime trading and traveling, but he maintained one connection to the sea. Waters kept a powerful telescope at a spot located high on Cherry hill, from which a “magnificent panorama of inland and ocean scenery” could be observed.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company was not only the first fully steam-powered mill in the United States but also the largest mill in North America. Prestholdt, "On the Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism," 771.

⁹¹ Anonymous, "Richard Palmer Waters - a Sketch," 189.

Conclusion

On the surface, the Richard Waters story is a compelling one. After all, it contains national and commercial rivalries, slave trading, Christian missionary work, Islam, shipwrecks and a fair amount of violence -- all in one story. Yet on a deeper level there is even more.

It is commonplace to see grand forces -- economic trends, wars and religious movements -- as determining historical events and change people's lives. There is no question that these kinds of forces affected the Richard Waters story. If Salem had a deeper harbor or if its Yankee merchants had not experienced an economic decline after the War of 1812, they would not have set out to explore exotic foreign ports in the far-off Indian Ocean. The United States' new status as a nation and its history as a British colony, among other things, led it to relate to Oman and other nations via mutually beneficial commercial relationships instead of through military force. Britain's tremendous power in the region both limited and drove Said bin Sultan's efforts to develop the east African trade and, ultimately, to relocate his home and his government thousands of miles away to Zanzibar. Without the monsoon winds or the Indian Ocean trading system and its ability to transcend ethnic, national and religious identity, Gujarati merchants such as Jairam Sewji would not have played a key role in Zanzibar. If the Indian Ocean system had developed differently, the merchant community in Zanzibar in the nineteenth century would not have been open to Richard Waters and his fellow Salem merchants.

Still, the United States of America and Oman at the beginning of the early nineteenth century were not driven together by any inexorable historical force. Their

relationship had a context, true, but in hindsight, it was more or less of an historical detour. The treaty of 1833 did not have to happen. The Waters and Sewji monopoly did not have to happen. Said bin Sultan and Richard Waters's close friendship certainly was not inevitable. Much of this story was determined largely by the personal qualities of the people involved, Said bin Sultan, Edmund Roberts, Jairam Sewji and Richard Waters. A particular set of circumstances may have made it possible for two small trading nations to corner the market in African ivory, gum copal and other commodities – against the interests and wishes of a great imperial power – but it would never have occurred without the fortuitous coming together of an unusual group of individuals with the sophistication to see the opportunity and the courage to grasp it. The bottom line is that when the personalities involved changed, so did the relationship. The failed consulship of Richard Waters's successor, Charles Ward, makes this quite clear.

Focusing solely on the surface identities and official roles of the players involved has led historians to miss the complexity of Richard Waters's life and career in Zanzibar. Waters, Sewji and Said bin Sultan were people with complex identities who interacted in fascinating ways. In a way, they were able to overcome their own limitations and prejudices and to cooperate in ways that their modern descendants seem incapable of, despite America's stronger interests and frequent interventions in south Asia and the Middle East.

The Richard Waters story has not been fully told. Why in 1844 did Waters sail home with the apparent intention of returning to Zanzibar, yet never return? After he returned to America, why did Waters avoid involvement with anything related to the

sea, which had occupied much of his life? We do not know the answers to these questions.

Other parts of the story are clearer. The early U.S.–Oman relationship succeeded because of Said bin Sultan’s shrewd character, his open mind towards American commerce and his curiosity about and admiration for an upstart trading nation on the other side of the globe. Historians point to a variety of different reasons for Said bin Sultan forming a relationship with the United States, whether it be to balance British power in the region, to purchase arms for a campaign in Mombasa, or to expand the market for Omani and east African goods. While these may all be the valid, there is also another reason. That is that, Said bin Sultan, through his personal relationship with Richard Waters and to a lesser degree with Edmund Roberts and others, identified with and became genuinely interested in Americans. America, of course, was already interested in him, as it was in any potential trading partner. The sultan saw great potential and possibility in a relationship with their country as well as, perhaps, a glimpse of a future world where the power of empire would give way to the power of commerce. The voyage of the *Sultanah* to New York in 1840 was an expression of this sense of potential. The events of the past 150 years have made Said bin Sultan’s interest in the United States look visionary.

Afterword

At the end of Ward's consulship, it seemed as if the Salem merchants might permanently lose their dominant position in Zanzibar. In 1852 Salem's Michael Shepard retired from the Zanzibar trade. The Zanzibar trade became even more competitive with the addition of the Rufus Green and Company firm from Providence, Rhode Island and a number of merchant firms from Hamburg, Germany. Two French firms also joined the mix. Despite the increased competition, however, American merchants managed to remain on top.³

The beginning of the American Civil War halted the American part of the Zanzibar trade in its tracks. Cotton, a staple of the east African trade for American merchants, could no longer be produced in quantity. For obvious reasons, American merchants could no longer export arms and ammunition abroad. Additionally, many sea routes were no longer safe because of the presence of Confederate raiders. Still, American merchants struggled to maintain their Zanzibar trading contacts.⁴

As always, merchants from Salem and other American ports were resilient. By 1867, with the Civil War over, they would regain some of their former business in Zanzibar. This was due to the strong demand for cotton, which remained the main American export to Zanzibar. However, in the year 1870 Salem's presence in the Indian Ocean abruptly declined. In that year, the bark *Glide* was the last vessel to sail

³ Due to the increased competition, American merchants on any particular voyage increasingly had to plan visits to Mozambique, Madagascar, and Muscat (in addition to Zanzibar). British observers reported, "a virtual monopoly for the Americans for the coffee and gums of Aden, for the dates and hides of Muscat, and for the ivory of Mozambique." Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1845-1865," 53.

⁴ American merchants even included soap and codfish in their cargoes. They went to the extreme of trying to supply their customers with cottons from Manchester, rather than from America. *Ibid.*: 56.

back to Salem from Zanzibar.⁵ The end of the age of sail and the advent of the much larger steamships meant Salem's end as a major commercial port.

Today, Richard Waters and Said bin Sultan are dead and mostly forgotten. Yet the bonds that they created between their countries continue to resonate in the present day. Beginning with the alliance forged by Waters and the sultan, not only did American merchants enjoy a special standing in Zanzibar for decades after Waters left Zanzibar, but the United States and Oman continue to enjoy a close relationship today. While Oman has left Zanzibar and Zanzibar has faded into geopolitical and economic irrelevance, Oman and its ruler, who is descended from Said bin Sultan, have served in their quiet, understated way as an important mediator in conflicts involving far larger, richer and more powerful countries in the Middle East. Recently, the release of an imprisoned American hiker by Iran made worldwide headlines, but virtually no Americans noticed that she flew from Tehran to Muscat or that the unnamed figure who paid her \$500,000 bail was the sultan of Oman.

⁵ In 1877, the *Mattie F.* returning from South America was the last vessel to dock in Zanzibar from a foreign country other than Canada. Gates-Hunt, "Salem and Zanzibar: A Special Relationship," 26.

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