Relentless Warrior and Shrewd Tactician: Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad of Bahrain 1795-1849 A Case Study of Shaikhly Statecraft in the Nineteenth Century Gulf

Submitted by
Abdulaziz Mohamed Hasan Ali Al Khalifa

to the
University of Exeter

as a thesis for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies,

April 2013.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... vi
Glossary ........................................................................................................................................... vii
Table of Maps ................................................................................................................................... ix
Transliteration and Terminology ...................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER I ......................................................................................................................................... 1
Introduction: ....................................................................................................................................... 1
Local Political Statecraft and Mechanisms of Political Survival for Arab Gulf Shaikhdoms in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century ................................................................. 1
  1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1
  2. Background .................................................................................................................................... 3
  3. Subject of the Study ........................................................................................................................ 4
  4. Political and Socio-Economic Conditions of Nineteenth Century Gulf Shaikhdoms and the Al Khalifa Shaikhs in Particular .................................................................................................. 5
  5. Literature Review .......................................................................................................................... 8
  6. Primary Resources ........................................................................................................................ 15
  7. Significance and Aims ..................................................................................................................... 16
  8. Outline .......................................................................................................................................... 18

CHAPTER II ....................................................................................................................................... 26
Early History and Foundation of the Al Khalifa Family as a Shaikhly Dynasty, 1600s-1795 ............... 26
  1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 26
  2. Origins of the Al Khalifa ................................................................................................................ 28
  3. Migration to the Gulf and Formation of the Bani Utbah (al-Utub) Tribal Alliance...................... 31
  4. Immigration to Qatar: Establishment of Zubarah and Dynastic Power ........................................ 35
  5. The Challenge of the al-Jalahma ..................................................................................................... 42
  6. The Rise of Zubarah ....................................................................................................................... 43
  7. Escalating Tensions 1777-1782 ....................................................................................................... 45
  8. Reign of Shaikh Khalifa bin Muhammad Al Khalifa, 1778-1782 ................................................... 47
  9. Battle of Zubarah .......................................................................................................................... 53
 10. Aftermath of the Battle ................................................................................................................ 57
 11. The Conquest of Bahrain .............................................................................................................. 59
 12. Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 67

CHAPTER III ....................................................................................................................................... 71
Joint Rule of Shaikhs Salman and Abdullah: the Omani, the Saudis, Rahma bin Jabir and the British, 1795-1825 ......................................................................................................................... 71
  1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 71
  2. First Omani Invasion of 1801 .......................................................................................................... 73
  3. Ousting the Omanis and Getting Entwined with the Saudis ........................................................... 77
  4. Rescuing the Shaikhs and Expelling the Saudis ............................................................................. 82
  5. Rahma al-Jalahma, a Relentless Foe: Battles of Huwaila and Akhakkira .................................... 89
CHAPTER IV
Joint Rule of Shaikhs Abdullah and Khalifa bin Salman: Continued Conflicts with Saudis, Omanis and Rahma 1825-1834

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 114
2. Dealing with the Threat of Rahma al-Jalahma: Death of Rahma al-Jalahma, 1826 116
3. Third Omani Invasion: Battle of Gazgaz ......................................................... 124
4. Repercussions of the Battle of Gazgaz .............................................................. 133
5. Facing the Renewed Saudi Threat ................................................................. 137
6. Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 143

CHAPTER V
Sole Rule of Shaikh Abdullah, Rise of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa: Beginnings of Internal Troubles, Isa bin Tarif, Persians and Egyptians 1834-1842

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 146
2. Threats .................................................................................................................. 148
3. Misdemeanours of the Shaikh’s Sons .............................................................. 151
4. Continuing the War with the Saudis ................................................................. 153
5. The Conspiracy of Shaikh Abdullah’s Sons ................................................... 154
6. The Battle of Huwaila ....................................................................................... 159
7. Ramifications of the Battle ............................................................................... 161
8. Continued Troubles with Shaikh Isa bin Tarif .............................................. 164
9. Persian Encroachments and Threats against Bahrain ................................ 168
10. The Egyptian Encroachment of 1839 ............................................................. 171
11. Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 177

CHAPTER VI
Shaikh Abdullah’s Downfall and Death 1842-1849

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 183
2. Background to the Civil War of 1842-1843 ..................................................... 185
3. The Revolt of Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and the Battle of al-Nasfah ...... 187
4. The Conspiracy of Shaikh Ali, the Battle of Souq el-Khamis and the Return of Shaikh Abdullah .......................................................... 188
5. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa’s Exile and Return ....................................... 192
6. Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa Retakes Bahrain: Takeover of Qatar and the Battles of al-Hunaynia and al-Saya ............... 196
7. Reign of Shaikh Muhammad, Exile of Shaikh Abdullah and attempts to recapture Bahrain 1843-1847 .................................................. 202
8. The Siege and Loss of Dammam in 1844 ....................................................... 207
9. Shaikh Abdullah Relocates to Naband ........................................................... 209
10. Shaikh Abdullah Leaves Naband .................................................................. 213
11. Relations between Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa and Isa bin Tarif, 1843-1847 ..217
12. Last Days: Battle of Umm Suwayya 1847 and Death of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad 1849 .................................................. 220

Abdulaziz Al Khalifa

Table of Contents
13. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 225

CHAPTER VII ......................................................................................................................... 229
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 229

Appendices .......................................................................................................................... 240
  Appendix I  Chronology of Key Dates ............................................................................... 241
  Appendix II  List of Battles .............................................................................................. 244
  Appendix III  List of Key People ...................................................................................... 248
  Appendix IV A Family Tree of the Al Khalifa ............................................................ 256
  Appendix V List of Treaties ............................................................................................. 262

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 265
  I.  PRIMARY SOURCES ..................................................................................................... 265
  II. SECONDARY SOURCES ........................................................................................... 270
This study examines the political life of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Fatih Al Khalifa, the fifth ruler of the Al Khalifa dynasty and the third of that family to rule Bahrain. It is a political biography, examining the tactics used by Shaikh Abdullah and his family to fend off threats from various foes. Those tactics ranged from direct military combat, to entry into temporary protector-protégé relationships, to playing off one foe against another. His ability to employ such tactics effectively enabled him and his family to neutralize or defeat their foes. This study examines local statecraft tactics through the case study of one of the Gulf’s greatest nineteenth century statesmen. It also looks at the reasons that resulted in Shaikh Abdullah’s political downfall. Those reasons were domestic and external factors that the Shaikh seems to have either ignored or been unable to fully address. That inability and/or shortcoming in addressing those factors would have cost any Gulf ruler his rulership, not just Shaikh Abdullah, as similar aspects prevailed in the other Gulf shaikhdoms. The study examines the life of a political leader whose achievements have been played down, even neglected, by most modern historians in Bahrain and the Gulf. The reason for this neglect lies perhaps in the natural desire of the current ruling branch of the Al Khalifa family to discourage any potential future claim to the throne by the descendants of Shaikh Abdullah, who have lived in exile from Bahrain ever since Shaikh Abdullah’s overthrow in 1843.¹

¹ Except for a brief period of time when there was reconciliation between the two family branches that lasted between 1863-1869. Then the family of Shaikh Abdullah returned to Bahrain but their involvement in the 1869 civil war resulted in their permanent exile from that time.