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SEARCHING FOR THE ALTERNATIVE TRADING SETTLEMENTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF AND THE RED SEA: A CASE STUDY OF THE ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY IN THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract:

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the port of Surat, situated on the western coast of India, played a pivotal role as a trade hub connecting southern and western Asia. The involvement of European powers in Asian commerce led to Surat becoming a recurring location for both confrontations and negotiations. The Portuguese had established their monopoly in the region by capturing the island of Diu and posed a threat to Indian merchants with overseas interests. They issued *Cartaz* against money to protect foreign ships. EIC and VOC merchants faced strong resistance from the Portuguese when they tried to trade directly with Asia. The Portuguese resisted the VOC and EIC's attempts to establish themselves in India, particularly Gujarat. The Dutch and the English could not silently accept the blockade. The English were also prohibited from accessing the Gulf. Armed warfare followed as both sides sought superiority. Their approach was antagonistic to the Portuguese. It was very important for the EIC to get a foothold on the coast of Gujarat so it could store goods and live there to help its trade. Surat was the most popular place to live because it was well populated, connected to production centers, and had expert brokers, wealthy bankers, and people who could help with trade by providing collateral. Because of this, the English began a series of direct attacks on the Portuguese ships that seemingly controlled trade in the Persian Gulf. Although English merchants were desperately seeking for the alternative trading settlements in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea as well to moor their ships without any hindrance. Simultaneously, they invested their energies in obtaining a grant from the Mughal court to establish themselves in Surat.

Introduction:

Between the late 1600s and mid-1800s, most trade in the Indian Ocean went through the big port of Surat in western India. Consolidated first by an Ottoman notable, it became the Mughal Empire's western window into the worlds of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Surat served as a significant maritime hub during the Mughal Empire's reign. It gained prominence in the early 17th century following the discovery of Swally Hole.¹ Surat became a global emporium due to land and sea trade. John Fryer visited Surat; found Surat as an entrepot for foreign as well as Indian trade. Surat has its trade relation with South East Asia and Middle East², Surat became a global emporium due to land and sea trade. **The English East India Company soon realized the economic importance of the city of Surat.** English landed on Indian territory in 1608 under the leadership of William Hawkins. English faced many challenges from the Portuguese, who did not welcome newcomers. Hawkins visited Emperor's court in Agra, but the Jesuits foiled him. His visit did not bear fruit as he could not secure a permit to establish a factory at Surat.³ EIC's first two voyages were to the Spice Islands. When the third fleet sailed, one vessel was sent to Surat to establish a factory, buy calicoes, and rejoin the rest at Bantam. Captain Keeling, the leader of the expedition, expressed his belief that this strategic move would provide the most advantageous basis for profit in the following year, surpassing any he had ever encountered.⁴ To the end, Thomas Roe visited the Mughal court as ambassador (1615-18) of King James I of England on behalf of the EIC.⁵ Through his friendship with Asaf Khan, the Empress's brother, Roe secured a strong ally for his countrymen, both now and in the future. The good relationships he built with other Court members, like Muqarrab Khan were also to prove useful.⁶ He managed an assurance from the court for the grant of a suitable place for anchorage and a factory on the west coast.⁷ Roe had been concerned about the Company's commerce conditions. He was concerned that English goods would not be in demand in India, requiring significant silver imports to produce return cargoes. He shared the prejudices of his time and saw this as a drain on the commonwealth. To address the issue, he suggested establishing a branch trade between Surat and the Red Sea, selling spices from Bantam and English goods/Indian goods at profitable rates to Egyptian merchants who frequently visited pilgrim ports and paid in specie.⁸ In November 1616, he informed the Company that a small ship carrying English goods and other goods travels with the Guzerattes annually, trading for money and returning in September to supply the area. Profits surpass all India trades and will drive this alone.⁹ Then he had been sent a correspondence from King James personally, commending his actions concerning Persia and providing encouragement to proceed with the matter. The letter granted him the authority to negotiate a commercial agreement with the Shah, if it was deemed possible.¹⁰ However, By the year 1604, English merchants were encountering challenges posed by the Portuguese and were actively endeavoring to expand their commercial activities in markets situated along the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. The EIC also advised its merchants to link Bantam with the Red Sea, especially Mocha, if they couldn't find trading space in Gujarat, where they were considering Cambay for trade.¹¹



Ormuz, famous for her trade and storehouse to all these neighboring parts, has declined so much in trade that we are credibly informed that these three or four years have not brought the sixth part of spices as in previous years. The Portingall's men, shipping, and frigates are weakening, and they can't defend the merchants trading to and from Indus, India, and Ormuz, who are now caught by thieves and sea-robbers on these passages' coasts owns of Persia, which we may, and do the rather desire, since this province (of which this road bears name) being of late years subdued and still It is poor, very poor, and only rich in camels and other beasts of burthen, so at least we have this benefit that we transport our goods each two bales, containing 8 cloths, eight days' journey by camel for 3 rials of eight, which will then be carried to Siras, the second great city of Persia, at as cheap a rate as I have known paid between Scanderone and Aleppo, from which your Honours know cloth is transported into these parts.¹²

Having come, by command of Sir Thomas Roe, English Ambassador to the Great Mogul, to seecke frendly traide and commerce and also to free the seas of pierates and men of ware which may roob and injoure the traiders that useth to this porte,'they desire his farman for their good usage and entertainment and for permission to settle factories at 'Sinan, Ties ,Mocha, Aden ' or other towns at their discretion. Request the Pasha's confirmation of all such articles, and commerce already granted to the English by the Grand Signor

; also a written promise that he will procure the Grand Signor's farman approving the same against their next coming to this port.¹³

Persia was a market for broadcloth and other goods, but since the Company no longer bought raw silk (a royal monopoly), the English factors' main concern was to secure their share of **Gombroon customs**. In exchange for English cooperation in the capture of Ormus (1622), the Company was to be exempt from import duties and receive half of the net customs revenues. As the memory of that event faded and the need for English help against the Portuguese faded, the Persian officials lowered the payment on this account to a fraction of what was due, meeting all remonstrances with allegations that the original treaty had contemplated the maintenance of an English fleet for the Persian coast.¹⁴ Rumor has it that the Dutch chief at Gombroon and his staff have left and sailed somewhere unknown. We think they're going to Muskaat, where they could find footing, but we've been told several times against it. At our departure from Bander, the Emaam or King of that country had men at port and daily went to the Dutch howse, but we could not learn "Lar stopped 600 bales of silk sent down by six Dutchmen, and their broker was summoned from Gombroon to explain their departure. On August 30, letters from the English broker at Gom-broon, dated about the end of June, and one from Hargrave, dated June 24, announced that he and his son had escaped the Dutch ship in a boat the day before and that the remaining prisoners were treated poorly. Apparently, the Dutch ships hadn't left for Batavia. Merchants are holding up their goods on rumors that the Dutches' departure will cause a general disturbance and raise prices. Since the court is absent, the markets are dead and dull. Since no English goods are expected this monsoon and the Dutch are unlikely to bring much, prices will likely rise soon."¹⁵

The Company's directive prohibiting the transportation of coffee to employees' residences was received belatedly. A certain amount had already been purchased at Mokha (at an extremely low price), and since prices were also low at Surat and the American ship needed weight to stabilize, the purchased goods have now been loaded onto the ship. Due to this reason, a quantity of red soil obtained from Gombroon had also been dispatched back home. The pepper in that container was obtained at the specified price, but only in exchange for immediate payment, as we are unable to engage in trade at Ouiloan or Porcatt with any merchandise.¹⁶

Ships have been filled for England, leaving the rest for Basrā. Have also brought saltpeter (in chests), olibanum, aloes, turmeric, gum-lac, myrrh, ginger, and benzoin. Enjoy the Company's approval of their actions. If they had more money and were freed from interest, they could produce even better results, as their limited credit causes them to lose many profit opportunities. The Discovery and Francis made 28% profit selling some of their goods at Mokha. The Seahorse, returning from Basra in November, brought 'good encourage-ment to prosecute that trade, for there goods produced neerest 50%. profit', so they have arranged a further investment of suitable goods for dispatch thither.¹⁷

Mokha, Mocha was located at a latitude of 13 degrees 30 minutes north and has recently become the main port in the Red Sea. Ships from Surat, Cambay, Dieu, Malabar, and other regions of India come to trade at this port. Ships from various European countries such as England, Holland, France, Denmark, and Portugal, as well as from Casseem, Socatra, Muscatt, and the Guiph of Persia, also arrive here. These ships bring the products of their respective countries and were met by merchants from Barbary, Egypt, Turkey, and other places. These merchants purchased their goods with cash and only provide limited returns such as coffee, sena, aloes heptica, and other insignificant items. Europeans pay 3% customs on both sides and can store their goods in their homes without having to bring them to the customhouse. All other merchants' goods are examined and their customs are 5%, 2% more than the Europeans'. This used to benefit those merchants, but now it hurts them. If Europeans bring cloth or piece goods, they open some to determine their type and give the governor a fair account. The custom for them is paid according to what they are sold and bought at, which the government accepts; however, if the broker falsifies his accounts and is found guilty of fraudulent returns, he suffers greatly and flees after the ships leave.¹⁸ The Company's order that no coffee should be sent home had arrived too late. A quantity had already been bought at Mokha ('soe cheape as never any was'), and as prices were low at Surat and the American needed ballast, it had now been shipped in her. For the latter reason some red earth, 1 procured at Gombroon, had also been sent home. The pepper in that vessel was procured at the price limited, but for ready money, as we cannot bartar at Ouiloan or Porcatt with any goods. The Company's order that no coffee should be sent home had arrived too late. A quantity had already been bought at Mokha (soe cheape as never any was), and as prices were low at Surat and the American needed ballast, it had now been shipped in her. For the latter reason some red earth, 1 procured at Gombroon, had also been sent home. The pepper in that vessel was procured at the price limited, but for ready money, as we cannot bartar at Ouiloan or Porcatt with any goods.¹⁹

Bait ul Faqih Coffee is the only good commodity in this port, and it's abundant. It grows abundantly at Bectlefuckee Sonany, Asab, and other places, but it rarely comes garbled or well-packed, causing buyers new problems. It can be shipped for 45 dollars per baharr one year after another. Like our corn and fruits, it is ripe at the right time and susceptible to blasts. Like holly berries, it grows in clusters near water. The berry resembles a bay berry, with two in one shell that splits when broken. Its leaf is large but thin like a lawrel's. Although the tree does not grow large or produce fruit, it is constantly supplied by new plantings. According to the Arabs, Heaven gives this commodity only to these parts to provide them with all the necessities they need from other parts. There are few valuable commodities here except sena, which can be bought cheaply, and aloes heptica. Aloes, socatra, and olibanum come from Casseem, Seer, and Socatra; mirrh from Gella and other Abasseen shore areas; elephants' teeth and gold dust from Socachim [Suakin], which Indian merchants buy. The whole province of Bait ul Faqih was planted with coffee trees that were never allowed to get taller than 4 or 5 yards, and beans or berries grow on the branches and twigs. The berries stick to the branches like bugs, and when they were ready, they fall off.²⁰

Since the port of Mocha was disturbed by English ships in the Indian war and Captain As seized the merchants' goods bound for Suratt, this struck such terror in all those who were formerly wont to trade thither that they declin'd the port and remov'd the trade to Lohia, which is located 15 degrees a. m. Without pilots, the harbor entrance is dangerous, but the port is known for its convenience and trade in small vessels and Judda ships. The governor's residence for this region and the island above is also honored.²¹

Judda, at 21 degrees 30 minutes, is the Grand Signior's main port in this sea. Strangers have trouble entering this port due to dangerous sands, but ships are safe when they anchor. The air is clean and its food is plentiful, with mutton, beef, fish, grapes, and other fruits. The seaport to Mecca, where the vile impostor Mahomet was born, is famous. Indeed, the land around that place is so useless, unprofitable, and unfit for improvement that it seems cursed by nature and questionable of Heaven's blessings, with constant scarcity of all things unless imported from other kingdoms. Thus, the Grand Signior must pay a high annual maintenance fee from Egypt and send 20 or 25 large ships with provisions, money, and other goods to support it and trade. Judda thrives on trade from India, Persia, Arabia, and the Abasseen shore. Englishmen were not much interested in Jeddah trade and not making a permanent station there because of the difficulty in navigation between Mokha and Jeddah. Jeddah perhaps was not suitable for Europeans ships.²²

Aden The company letters shows that when their merchants went to Red Sea first they reached near Jeddah, the place was Socotra it was the nearest place from Jeddah. According to the fleet, here is fresh water and wood to be had but pains must be taken to come thereby. There is a great store of sheep and goats at a low price. The monsoon would not allow us to travel to Surat until September, so we could spend the time in the Red Sea (Aden). Making use of this advice and standing upon our guard, and that hereby we might give the company satisfaction of what may be expected in these parts. The Englishmen were satisfied with the place of Jeddah and they decided to select this place for the trading settlements.²³

Masqat, Mascat The ruler of Persia were interested in capturing Muscat. They sought to help from the English.²⁴ They needed the help of English to defeat the Portuguese in the Muskat region. Britishers were not satisfy to settle a factory in Muskat because the ruler of Persia would be the partner in all region. The ruler of Persia had said in his letter "Touching any the ports of India or the Ports of Sohar and Muscat etc. any that hereafter be taken therein." However English were ready to help them because they knew very well if they did not it Dutch will.²⁵

After the monsoon failed in 1630, torrential rains swept away crops and fields in the following year. One of the famines that periodically devastated India resulted.

According to a Dutch factor, when they arrived in Surat, they found few living people and a strong stench of dead people. Even the sound people who entered the town were infected by the smell, and the dead lay scattered on the streets without burial. Over 30,000 people have died in this town. The English house and ours are like Batavia's hospital. The English have ten or eleven dead, and we have three. English survivors are mourning the death of Mr. Rastell, their president, who died twenty days earlier. The English factory

was crippled by the loss of its factors and the paralysis of its trade, and survived only on the profits from Persian goods, especially silk. At the end of 1632, it owed £90,000.²⁶

Conclusion:

The letters of EIC's servants from Suart to their employers in England and from them to their Suart factors being chiefly devoted to their own commercial activities are of great value in tracing the EIC' activity in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. To establish a factory in a particular region, there must have been good population, freedom to trade without custom and duties, strong base to settlement as well as land and sea place (coastal area). The Englishmen were facing stiff resistance by the Portuguese so they were focused in searching new trade settlements in the Persian Gulf and Red sea. Suart was suitable place for trade and settlements. Suart was the only place to connect them with the Red Sea and Persian Gulf trade. At the other places English were not able to negotiate with the ruler power properly, while in India the population were much better for their market. In the end the English found India as the best place for trading settlements. They can negotiate with authorities and the Ruler powers here while other places for permanent settlements were not convenient. In the early eighteenth century Bengal and Masulipattanam were the suitable place for English and the instructions of company were mainly focused in these region. In the end Englishmen Found India as a best place for permanent settlement. They Started focusing in Indian trade with the East.

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