

Arabian Peninsula Background Notes

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Oman: al-Ghafiriyah and al-Hinawiyah Tribal Confederations

The dichotomy between Oman's two tribal confederations, al-Ghafiriyah (الغافرية) and al-Hinawiyah (الهناوية), has its immediate origins in the civil war of the early 18th century, fought over the succession to the Ya'rubī Imamate.¹ The intervention of the Bani Ghafir *tamimah* (paramount *shaykh*) Muhammad b. Nasir, widened its scope from simply a dynastic struggle to a country-wide alignment of inter-tribal forces. Muhammad's success in naming his candidate as Ibadi *imam* apparently resulted in rebellion by the Bani

Hina tribe against the imamate. The escalation of the battle by Muhammad's attack on allies of the Bani Hina and the latter's subsequent retaliation against allies of the Bani Ghafir was the beginning of the polarization into Hinawi and Ghafiri confederations respectively.

To some extent, this polarization has even deeper roots in ethnic and religious cleavages. Ethnically, it has been noted that many of the Hinawi tribes are south Arab (Yamani or Qahtani) in origin while the Ghafirīs tend to be north Arab ('Adnani or Nizari). Opposing alignments on North Arab/South Arab lines have their roots in historical rivalries dating from the arrival of north Arab tribes in Oman after the settlement of south Arab tribes there. In the religious sphere, the apparent recruitment of Sunni tribes by Muhammad b. Nasir al-Ghafiri against the Hinawi faction seems to have introduced the beginnings of a

1. The discussion in this note is taken largely from J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978), pp. 112-114. The treatment there in turn relies heavily on J.C. Wilkinson, "The Origins of the Omani State," in Derek Hopwood, ed., *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), pp. 67-88.

This is an *Arabian Peninsula Background Note (APBN)* written by J.E. Peterson

N.B. This background note is a preliminary attempt to present in summary form the essential details of a particular set of circumstances or event in Arabian Peninsula history. It lays no claim to being comprehensive or fully accurate. Although considerable effort has been made to assure the reliability of the information it contains, its accuracy is limited to the information contained in the sources listed in the note. The contents of this note may be freely quoted and cited provided both the author and source are given. A complete listing of APBNs is contained on www.JEPeterson.net.

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semi-valid distinction that the Hinawiyah faction is Ibadi and the Ghafiriyah is Sunni. It should be stressed that these distinctions are not rigid since important ethnic and religious anomalies occur across confederation lines. Indeed, the Bani Ghafir tribe is Ibadi although north Arab and its stances has fluctuated from the Ghafiri side to the Hinawi side and back.

The prolongation of the formal dichotomy over the last two centuries is largely due to its useful application to the centrifugal political system of the tribal interior. Disparities in tribal size and fighting strength could be ameliorated by the ability of a weak tribe to call for help from its Ghafiri or Hinawi allies to resist the activities of an aggressive tribe. Conversely, the dichotomy provided a defense against attempts by predominant tribes towards hegemony: any such tribe would find itself opposed by the collective weight of the opposing confederation. It could, of course, call upon its allies but the net effect would be simply to achieve a rough balance between opposing sides. If, however, a tribe were to call for help from other members of its confederation and those tribes failed to respond, the first tribe would have the option of changing sides: that is, a Ghafiri tribe could become Hinawi or vice versa.

As a consequence of these political foundations, the Ghafiriyah-Hinawiyah dichotomy evolved into an intricate series of balance-of-power systems. On a country-wide level, the system has been most obvious in the deliberations for the election of an imam. No imam was able to secure election – or what was usually more accurate, no tribal shaykh was able to secure the election of his candidate unless the leaders of the opposing faction agreed to it. Attempts made in the late nineteenth century to elect Ibrahim b. Sa‘id Al Bu Sa‘id, the nephew of Imam ‘Azzan b. Qays

(r. 1868-1871), failed due to Ibrahim’s perceived candidacy as a protégé of the Hinawi leader, Salih b. ‘Ali al-Harithi. Similarly, Salih’s occupation of Muscat in 1895 was seen as a Hinawi activity; his failure to depose the Sultan and establish an alternative government was once again due to lack of Ghafiri support.

On the other hand, the elections of Imams Salim b. Rashid al-Kharusi in 1913 and Muhammad b. ‘Abdullah al-Khalili in 1920 succeeded because both factions had agreed on the candidate, even though the first was a protégé of the Ghafiri leader and the second of the Hinawi leader. The reason why only an imam could over-ride factional rivalry was due to religious identification: the imam had become primarily a religious figure and it was necessary for any candidate for the office to possess the necessary religious qualifications – even to the point of neglecting political criteria to be elected. Even Ghalib b. ‘Ali al-Hina‘i, elected in 1954, possessed the essential religious qualifications, which included long service as a *qadi* in al-Rustaq and Nizwa, followed by administration of the imamate’s *bayt al-mal* (public treasury). Nevertheless, his political credentials were lacking and he proved to be easily manipulated by his brother Talib and the Bani Riyam *tamimah*, Sulayman b. Himyar al-Nabhani.

Even more important than these Ghafiri-Hinawi interactions on the country-wide level is their effect on the province. This is principally because Omani provinces possess natural limitations and are not artificially created to serve political purposes. Geography, in the form of mountains and deserts, has dictated that the primary focus of political attention has been the immediate area. Wider involvement was discouraged by

the considerable amount of time required to inform other areas of events and to assemble conventions of notables or armies. The tribes of one province generally had little to do with tribes of another, even those from their own confederation. Indeed, some of the provinces were so isolated that they were rarely active in Omani politics, as in the case of the Ru'us al-Jibal and Dhufar. Others were geographically vulnerable to outside influences and thus their inhabitants tended to shy away from involvement in Omani tribal politics, as in al-Batinah and al-Dhahirah.

The province was thus in many ways a microcosm of the political system for the country as a whole. The Ghafiri-Hinawi struggle was therefore replicated on the provincial level: the role of the Imam would frequently be assumed by the *tamimah* of a dominant tribe, such as the *tamimah* of the Hirth in al-Sharqiyah province. The rivalry assured stability in most provinces: neither side commanded enough resources to warrant waging war against the other. It was a rare

occasion when local or tribal disputes embroiled an entire province. More often, the threat of partisan response predisposed tribes to settle their disputes through recourse to mediation and acceptance of blood money.

The physical effects of the dichotomy are most readily seen in the settlement patterns of the larger towns and wadis. These are generally divided into two separate parts: *'alayah* (upper) and *sifalah* (lower), each controlled by one faction. Prominent examples of this development are in Nizwa – where Ghafiri tribes, such as the Bani Riyam and the Kunud, dominate al-'Alayah and Hinawi tribes, such as the Bani Hina and the Al Bu Sa'id, are found in al-Sifalah – and Sama'il, where the settled area of Wadi Sama'il, which is abundantly watered and cultivated, actually consists of two towns separated by approximately five miles, the upper inhabited by the Hinawi Bani Ruwahah and the lower largely by the Ghafiri Siyabiyin.

TRIBES OF OMAN AND THEIR AFFILIATIONS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Nisbah</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Sect</i>	<i>Alliance</i>
'Ababid	'Abbadi		Ibadi	Hinawi
'Abriyin, al-	'Abri	OMA	Ibadi	Ghafiri
'Adi, Bani	'Adwani	HJG, HJS, BAT		Hinawi
'Afar		DHH		Hinawi (?)
'Ali, Bani		HJG		Hinawi
'Ali, Bani Bu	'Alawi	SHQ	Sunni	Ghafiri
'Awamir, al-	'Amiri	OMA, BAT, WST, MCT	Ibadi	Hinawi
'Arabah, Bani		HJS		Ghafiri
'Awf	'Awfi	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
'Aziz, Yal	'Azizi	DHH	Ibadi, Sunni	Ghafiri
Bada'	Badi	HJG		
Balush, al-	Balushi	DHH		
Batahirah, al-	Bathari	WST		
Battash, Bani	Battashi	HJS	Ibadi	Hinawi
Burayk, al-	Burayki, al-	BAT		Hinawi

<i>Name</i>	<i>Nisbah</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Sect</i>	<i>Alliance</i>
Daramikah, al-	Darmaki	DHH		
Dhahuriyin, al-	Dhahiri	MUS		Ghafiri
Dhawahir, al-	Dhahiri	DHH	Sunni	Hinawi
Duru', al-	Dara'i	DHH	Sunni	Ghafiri
Fazarah, al-		BAT		
Fawaris, al-	Farisi	DHH		
Ghafalah	Ghafali	BAT	Sunni	Ghafiri
Ghafir, Bani	Ghafiri	HJG, BAT	Ibadi	Hinawi
Ghayth, Bani		HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Habus, al-	Habsi	SHQ	Ibadi	Hinawi
Hadiyin	Hadi	HJS	Ibadi	Hinawi
Hadrami, Bani	Hadrami	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Hajariyin, al-	Hajari	SHQ	Ibadi	Hinawi
Harasis, al-	Harsusi	WST		Hinawi
Harras, Bani		HJG		Ghafiri
Hasan, Bani		MCT	Ibadi	Hinawi
Hasan, Bani Bu		SHQ		Hinawi
Hawasinah, al-	Hawsini	HJG, BAT	Ibadi	Hinawi
Haya, Bani		DHH, BAT	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Hikman, al-		WST, BAT		Ghafiri
Hina, Bani	Hina'i	OMA, HJG, BAT, DHH	Ibadi	Hinawi
Hirth, al-	Harithi	SHQ	Ibadi	Hinawi
Hishm, al-		SHQ		Ghafiri
Jabir, Bani		DHH, BAT	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Janabah, al-	Janabi	SHQ, WST	Sunni	Ghafiri
Jarad, Yal		BAT		Hinawi
Jawahir, al-	Jawhari	BAT	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Jisas, Bani	Jisasi	OMA		Ghafiri
Ka'b, Bani	Ka'bi	DHH	Sunni	Ghafiri
Kalban, Bani	Kalbani	DHH, OMA	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Kathir, al-	Kathiri	DHF	Sunni	Hinawi
Khalid, Bani		BAT		Hinawi
Khamis, Yal	Khamisi	BAT	Ibadi	Hinawi
Kharus, Bani	Kharusi	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Khazam, Bani		MCT		Hinawi
Khurayban, Al Bu		DHH		
Kunud	Kindi	OMA, BAT	Ibadi	Ghafiri, Hinawi
Lamk, Bani	Lamki	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Ma'awil, al-	Ma'wali	HJG	Ibadi	Hinawi
Mahariq	Mahruqi	SHQ, OMA	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Mahrah, al-	Mahri	DHH	Sunni	
Manadhirah, al-	Mandhari	DHH, HJG	Ibadi	Hinawi
Maqabil	Maqbali	HJG, BAT		Ghafiri
Masakirah, al-	Maskari	SHQ, Sur	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Mashafirah, al-		BAT, SHQ		Hinawi
Matarish	Matrushi	BAT	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Mawalik, al-	Maliki	BAT, HJG, SHJ	Ibadi	Hinawi
Mazari', al-	Mazru'i	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri

<i>Name</i>	<i>Nisbah</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Sect</i>	<i>Alliance</i>
Miyayihah, al-		HJG		Hinawi
Nabahinah, al-	Nabhani	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Na'im, al-	Na'imi	DHH	Sunni	Ghafiri, Hinawi
Najadat		DHH		
Nawafil, al-	Nawfili	BAT	Ibadi	Hinawi
Nidabiyin, al-		HJS		Ghafiri
Qara, al-	Qarawi (jibbali)	DHF	Sunni	Ghafiri
Qawasim, al-	Qasimi	HJG	Sunni (?)	Ghafiri
Qitab, Bani	Qitbi	DHH	Sunni	Ghafiri
Rahbiyin, al-	Rahbi	HJS, MCT	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Rashid, Al Bu	Rashidi	BAT		Hinawi
Rashid, Bani, or Rawashid, al-	Rashidi	DHH, BAT, OMA, SHQ	Ibadi	Hinawi
Rasib, Bani		SHQ		Ghafiri
Riyam, Bani	Riyami	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Riyaysah	Riyaysi	BAT, HJG, OMA	Sunni	Hinawi
Ruwahah, Bani	Ruwayhi	HJG	Ibadi	Hinawi
Sa'd, Yal	Sa'di	BAT	Ibadi	Ghafiri, Hinawi
Sa'id, Al Bu	Al Bu Sa'idi	OMA, SHQ, MCT	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Salam, Yal 'Abd al-		BAT		Ghafiri
Shabul, Bani	Shibli	BAT, HJG	Ibadi	Hinawi
Shamis, Al Bu	Shamsi	DHH	Sunni	Ghafiri
Shahrah, al-	Shahri	DHH	Sunni	neither
Shihuh, al-	Shihi or Shihuhi	MUS	Sunni	Ghafiri
Shukayl, Bani		HJG		Ghafiri
Siyabiyin, al-	Siyabi	HJG, BAT, MCT	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Subh, Bani		HJG, OMA		Ghafiri
Tamim, Bani	Tamimi	DHH		
'Umar, Bani	Ma'mari	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Wahibah, al-	Wahibi	SHQ, BAT	Ibadi	Hinawi
Washahat, al-		BAT		Ghafiri
Wuhayb, Bani	Wuhayb	MCT, HJS	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Ya'aqib, al-	Ya'qubi	HJG	Sunni	Ghafiri
Ya'aribah, al-	Ya'rubi	HJG	Ibadi	Ghafiri
Yahya, Bani		DHH		Ghafiri
Yaman, al-		OMA		Hinawi
Za'ab, al-	Za'abi	BAT		Hinawi
Zayd, Bani		DHH		Ghafiri

Notes on Locations. Key for abbreviations:

BAT al-Batinah

DHF Dhufar

DHH ... al-Dhahirah (including al-Buraymi region)

HJG al-Hajar al-Gharbi

HJS al-Hajar al-Sharqi

MCT ... Muscat and hinterland

MUS ... Musandam

OMA ... Oman province, officially known as al-Dakhiliyah (Interior) since 1970s.

SHQ al-Sharqiyah (including Ja'lan and Sur)

WST ... al-Wasta (central Oman including nomadic tribes; a region with this name was created by the Omani government only in the 1990s)

Notes on Sources:

① Blank areas indicate that reliable information is not available.

② The above list of Omani tribes is based on a British official compendium updated to 1961 and maintained by the GSO 2 Intelligence at Headquarters, Land Forces Persian Gulf (Bahrain). [United Kingdom, National Archives, Public Record Office, Foreign Office records, FO/371/156820, BC1821/1]. This compendium began as a list created by the Foreign Office Research Department in 1951 from notes made by the Consul-General in Muscat, F.C.L. Chauncy [FO/371/91262, EA1017/11]. Chauncy based his list on a compilation made by an earlier Consul-General, S.B. Miles, in his administration report of 1880, as well as on Lorimer's *Gazetteer*. Subsequent updates are to be found in FO/371/109808, EA1016/1, the Political Residency in the Persian Gulf to the Foreign Office Eastern Department, 13 Feb. 1954; FO/371/126881, EA1015/201, Chauncy to Eastern Department, 28 July 1957; and FO/371/149153, BA1823/1, J.F. Walker, Political Agency in the Trucial States (Dubai), to W.N. Monteith, Consul-General, Muscat, 28 Apr. 1960. Information in the table above is derived principally from these British documents and Lorimer, as well as personal observation, and tribal lists maintained by the (Omani) Sultan's Armed Forces.

British interest in Omani tribes was driven by the efforts of British-owned Petroleum Development (Oman) to commence oil exploration in the interior of the country. These efforts were complicated not only by the sultan's lack of control over the interior but also by a continuing dispute between Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Abu Dhabi and Oman and the other over boundaries and sovereignty over al-Buraymi oasis. Saudi occupation of one of the Buraymi villages in 1952 was followed by the election of a new Ibadi *imam* in 1954, whose close advisers solicited and received Saudi and Egyptian support. Although the sultan succeeded in assuming full control over the interior in late 1955, the *imam* and his followers staged a brief uprising in 1957. With British help, they were soon forced to retreat to the isolated top of al-Jabal al-Akhdar in central Oman and remained there until forced to flee the country in early 1959. For more detail on this episode, see Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, and other sources.

③ Numerous cautions should be exercised with this listing. Not all tribes are listed and, indeed, there is considerable debate over what constitutes some tribes. Al-Qara and al-Mahrah are listed as tribes of Dhufar when they may be more properly described as "nations" comprised of a number of tribes. It is unclear whether some tribes are really subsections of other tribes; tribal organization frequently evolves over time. For example, the Al Bu Shamis appear to have emerged from al-Na'im. Although the Bani Riyam are listed here as a single tribe, they are often described as a loose conglomeration of smaller tribes. In modern times, until the late 1950s, the *tamimah* of the tribe came from al-Nabahinah, which remains a distinct tribe and is so listed here. In addition, placement of a tribe in specific regions can be only approximate: some tribes straddle regional – and even national – boundaries and many tribes contain various sections located in other regions.

④ The entry for al-Balush refers only to the community settled in al-Dhahirah amongst Arab tribes, and not to the large, scattered Baluch ethnic community found throughout Oman, especially in al-Batinah and Muscat.

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