In 1974, Ian Short published a book titled Oman and Muscat: The End of an Era. With the passing of Sultan Qaboos, it is certainly the end of another era. It was also in 1974 when I first came to Muscat to do research for my doctorate. Many things had changed four years into the Sultan Qaboos era but equally the changes were just beginning.

The port in Matrah, began before 1970, was operating but struggling to handle the volume of ships. Al Khuwair consisted of open land punctuated by a couple of villages, a four-wheel-drive vehicle was needed to climb over the dunes to get to the beach where the Muscat InterCon was later built.

The Muttrah sea road had just been finished but travel between Muscat and Matrah was still along the narrow track clinging to the rocks and climbing up the pass from Riyam. Much of old Muscat remained intact and the new palace was just being constructed.

Bait Fransi was still occupied by the oil company and Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal, the new Sultan’s great uncle, resided in another of the grand old houses just around the corner. Movies were screened on the tennis court by the British Embassy in the moon shadow of Fort Bahla.

The road to Muscat was graded but unpaved; a running start was needed to cross the wadi at Fanja and race up the steep hill into and through the date gardens. Jabal Akhdhar was accessible to staff the new government, the Sultanate continued to expand. The winding road still wound around the base of the mountains and climbed over the hill between Bahar and Ghala, now it is buried below the Muscat Expressway. Even more impressive than the tangible development was the transformation of Oman’s people. At first, hourly dependent on expatriates to staff the new government, the schools and the hospitals, the Sultanate was producing an ever-expanding cadre of educated and dedicated Omanis to take over those jobs.

In those early years after 1970, if an Omanis was asked what he or she thought of their new ruler, the response invariably was “before Qaboos there was nothing; after he became Sultan everything changed.” Sultan Qaboos’ vision guided these changes, undoubtedly the result of his unique experience as the recipient of both a Western education in Britain and an Omani Islamic education in Salalah. Oman has come a long way during the fifty years under the leadership of HM Sultan Qaboos. Few countries have achieved so much in such a short time. HM Sultan Qaboos laid the foundations of Oman’s present and provided the guide for tackling the challenges that lay in Oman’s future. I feel honoured to have witnessed most of those fifty years and to have met His Majesty.

There is much work remaining to be done and progress to be realised. The new era begins today and one can not only hope but feel confident that Oman’s remarkable march over the past 50 years will continue unabated.

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