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According to Arabia Felix: Between Exploration and Representation, Bertram Thomas's 1931 Journey to Qatar

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Abstract

Objectives: This research aims to analyze Bertram Thomas's impressions of Qatar during his 1931 visit, as recorded in his book Arabia Felix. It explores how he described the country, the key features he highlighted, his motivations for travel, and the accuracy of his observations compared to other contemporary accounts.

Methods: The study utilizes selected excerpts from Arabia Felix as its primary source. The first section of the research introduces the traveler, Bertram Thomas, offering context about his background and the broader scope of his explorations. The second section summarizes the route and purpose of his journey to Qatar. The conclusion draws attention to the historical insights derived from his observations, particularly focusing on Qatar's history, the Gulf region, and the customs and lifestyle of the Qatari people. The research also explores the possible motives behind Thomas's journey and critically evaluates the reliability of the information he documented.

Results: The findings reveal that Bertram Thomas's accounts provide valuable historical insight, as he served as a direct eyewitness to aspects of Qatar's past and the everyday life of its people during that period. His work represents an important perspective within the early Western documentation of the Arabian Peninsula.

Conclusion: Despite the historical value of his narrative, the authors of this study identified several inaccuracies and some incomplete data in Thomas's work. These suggest that Thomas may not have been fully aware of certain errors in his observations and the descriptions he presented. This highlights the importance of critical analysis when using travel literature as a historical source.

Keywords: Bertram Thomas, Exploration, representations, journey, customs, data validity.

وفقًا لكتاب *Arabia Felix*: بين الاستكشاف والتمثيل، رحلة بيرترام توماس إلى قطر في عام 1931

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ملخّص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى رصد انطباعات بيرترام توماس عن قطر، التي كتبها خلال زيارته في عام 1931، وهي تعالج الأسئلة البحثيَّة الآتية: كيف وصف بيرترام توماس قطر في كتابه ***Arabia Felix*** (1931)؟ وما السِّمات الرئيسة التي أبرزها؟ وما الدوافع الرئيسة وراء رحلته إلى قطر؟ وكيف شكَّلت هذه الدوافع ملاحظاته؟ وإلى أي مدى كانت المعلومات التي قدَّمها في ***Arabia Felix*** (1931) دقيقة وموثوقة بناءً على المصادر التاريخيَّة والمعاصرة؟ وكيف قارن صورة قطر مع الأوصاف المعاصرة الأخرى للمنطقة؟

المنهجيَّة: استُخدِمَت مقتطفاتٌ من كتاب ***Arabia Felix*** يتناول القسمُ الأول من الدراسة تعريفَ الرحالة، بينما يلخِّصُ القسمُ الثاني مسارَها، وتبرزُ الخاتمةُ الرؤى التاريخيَّة المستخلصة من أوصافه، مع التركيز على تاريخ قطر ومنطقة الخليج وعادات الشعب القطري. بشكل عام، تستكشفُ الدراسةُ الدوافع المحتملة وراء رحلة توماس وتقيِّمُ دقَّة المعلومات التي قدمتها.

النتائج: تكشفُ الدراسة عن أنَّ حسابات بيرترام توماس تحملُ قيمةً تاريخيَّة؛ حيث كان شاهد عيان على تاريخ قطر وأهاليها.

الخاتمة: حدَّد مؤلفو هذه الدراسة العديد من الأخطاء وبعض المعطيات الناقصة في كتاب توماس، التي تشيرُ إلى احتمال أن توماس ربما لم يكن على دراية بالأخطاء في روايته وبالتوصيفات التي أوردها .

الكلمات الدالة: بيرترام توماس، الاستكشاف، التمثيلات، الرِّحلة، العادات، صحَّة البيانات.

Introduction

Most Western travelers have preconceived notions about the East before they have direct contact with its people. However, after experiencing Eastern cultures in person, these attitudes and stereotypes begin to change. Through personal experience, travelers modify their image of the East. The same goes for traveler Bertram Thomas, whose impressions of Qatar remained hostage to the colonial background and the mission for which he came: to explore the Qatari environment.

Some studies have examined travelers who visited Qatar during the modern era (Afifi, 2023; Al Abdulla, 2018). One such study by Ali Afifi focuses on Thomas's guide during his crossing of the Empty Quarter, Hamad bin Hadi bin Sultan Al Hathlin Al Ghofran Al Marri (1879 – 1972). Afifi highlights the crucial role Hamad al-Marri played as a desert guide, contributing significantly to the success of the journey and the subsequent crossing of the Rub' al Khali region. (Afifi, 2024).

Western travel books about the Arabian Gulf during the twentieth century AD are an important source of information for understanding the effects of the British presence in the region. These books provide a valuable complementary source of information to the available documentary funds on the history of the Gulf in general and the history of Qatar in particular. Among these travelers, Bertram Thomas is particularly notable for his visit to Doha on February 5, 1931.

This paper aims to analyze the descriptions of Qatar provided by Bertram Thomas in his book *Arabia Felix* (Thomas 1932), based on his visit to the region. Additionally, the study explores possible motivations behind Thomas's trip and attempts to assess the accuracy of the data he presented.

The researchers adopted an interdisciplinary approach that includes the following methodologies: these included collecting data from diverse sources, such as historical records (both published and unpublished) from Qatar National Library, archaeological reports, and extensive archaeological and topographical research. Geographical sources were also utilized, including spatial history, which integrates temporal dimensions with map-based analysis.

1-Bertram Thomas (1892-1950): Desert Explorer

First European to Cross the Empty Quarter

Bertram Thomas was born in Easton-in-Gordano, near Bristol, England, June 13, 1892. He was educated privately, then received his PhD from Trinity College in Cambridge, England. He served with the British Civil Service from 1908 to 1914, the North Somerset Yeomanry in Belgium from 1914 to 1915, and the Somerset Light Infantry in Mesopotamia (Iraq) from 1916 to 1918. He then worked as Assistant Political Officer in Mesopotamia from 1918 to 1922 and Assistant British Representative in the Trans-Jordan (Jordan) from 1922 to 1924 (Thomas 1986: 20).

One of the first British diplomats who served in the Arab Mashreq, Thomas served 13 years in the diplomatic corps in Iraq, Jordan and the Gulf. In October 1910, he arrived in Muscat during the reign of Sultan Faisal bin Turki (1888-1913). He frequently resided in Arabia from 1915 onwards and was later transferred to Iraq during the First World War.

Thomas was also one of the youngest British officers appointed by the British administration in Iraq. His work as Assistant Political Officer in Iraq began in the region of Aswaq al-Shuyukh on March 6, 1918. He was then transferred to Shatrah on February 6, 1919, and then to Baghdad on the beginning of 1920, as a second assistant in the government income secretariat. He returned to Shatrah in June 1920, and added Kalaat Sukkar to his responsibility on June 30, 1920. On August 27, 1921, he bid farewell to Al-Shatrah (Abdel Ghani Ibrahim 2013: 306). The city of Shatra was greatly affected by the events taking place in Iraq, especially in the Middle Euphrates region. Thomas left Shatrah for health reasons and traveled to London for treatment, then returned to Baghdad and from there to Shatrah because he was an expert on the region and its local leaders, especially since the situation was on the verge of explosion.

After his time in Iraq, he then worked in Aden and was able to cross the Empty Quarter in the Arabian Peninsula successfully, described in his Through the Empty Quarter in the Land of Arabia. In 1924, Sultan Taimur bin Faisal (1913-23) appointed him Minister of Finance and Wazir to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman (Bertram Thomas 1986: 20). These were the highlights of Bertram Thomas's career and assignments. The Omani authorities subsequently created favorable conditions for his stay in Muscat.

A letter issued by the Council of Ministers of the Sultan of Oman and Muscat, addressed to the British Consul on October 10, 1924, included information about the date of his arrival and the privileges he would obtain upon assuming his duties there:

"We have received your letter dated March 5, 1925, informing us about a letter received by Mr. Bertram Thomas referring to the finances of the Muscat government, according to what was recommended by His Highness the Sultan, that he would be appointed to this position starting from in April 1925, and that he hopes to arrive in Muscat in early April. Arrangements have been made for his residence, and we have familiarized ourselves with the conditions for his appointment that are written in your letter. 1- A contract for a period of five years and a six-month license after three years, in addition to a one-month license for each year. 2- A house with free furniture, 3- The pension is 1.500 rupees per month and increases each year by 100 rupees until it reaches two thousand rupees" (IOR-R-15-6-57).

In 1941, Charles Geoffrey Prior, the Political Resident in the Gulf, and Britain's senior administrator, based at Bushire in Persia, who was knighted in 1943 as Sir Geoffrey Prior, writes a letter praising the qualities of Thomas describing him as a professional and expert in the secrets of the desert, with great knowledge of the local community and a successful network of relations with the Arab tribes. These qualities made him an ideal candidate for spreading the necessary propaganda for the British in the region:

"You will remember that during your stay here you were good to ask my opinion about the employment of Bertram Thomas. I think that the employment of a professional man like Thomas is perhaps what is required to take in hand our publicity effort here. I feel that our publicity here is not all that it could be, and this may partly be due to inexperience of the subject. Thomas, a person who was able to establish connections with Arabs and keeps up with the news and local gossip. His services would I am sure be sufficiently valuable to us here to make it worthwhile engaging him if he is still free to come"(IOR-R-15-2-933).

Thomas married Bessie Hoile in 1933, then served as information officer in Bahrain, 1942-1943; Director of the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies in Palestine, 1943-6, and in Lebanon, 1947-1948; and an adviser to Shell Group, 1948-1949. He wrote several books in the early twentieth century about his travels in the Arabian Peninsula, including *Arabia Felix, Alarms, and Excursions in Arabia*. He was an honorary lecturer at the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (Established in 1884) in 1932 and 1933 and was awarded the Livingstone Medal "in recognition of his valuable work and his crossing of Arabia's unexplored desert, the Rub' al Khali" (https://rsgsexplorers.com/2015/08/04/bertram-thomas-gentleman-diplomat-and-desert-wanderer/). He died in Cairo on December 27, 1950. What distinguishes Bertram Thomas from other travelers is that he had good relations with the Gulf Arabs and had the qualities that qualified him to make his journey from Oman to Qatar.

An Expert

Thomas researched the Shihuh dialect, translating some of its vocabulary (Abdel Ghani Ibrahim 2013: 306) . He also worked on exploring the topography of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula, writing many articles and books (Thomas 1929, 1931, 1932).

In a letter addressed to Colonel Francis Brida(1871-1938), Thomas discloses some of the objectives of his expeditions, including compiling a bibliographical list of all works related to Muscat and Oman, as requested by several institutions and research centers, including the Royal Geographical Society, founded in 1830 as an institution to promote the 'advancement of geographical science' and the British Institute of International Studies, founded to study international affairs. His vision was to foster mutual understanding between nations and for the institute to propose solutions to the biggest challenges facing the world. This reflects the strong exploratory side of his trips (IOR/R/15/1/419, from Bertram Thomas to Prideaux).

Thomas distinguished himself by recording his observations in an eloquent literary style, which he used to craft popular narratives, common among the Bedouins, and he published his studies of these tribes on one of his travels. His writings capture the beauty of the sandy dunes that shimmer with sunlight, and he provides a description and an accurate map of the region for those who would come after him. To accomplish his mission, he engaged deeply with the daily life of the Bedouins, gaining the confidence of the tribesmen, and learning to act like them.

A professional explorer who was considered a member of the British elite, he served the British colonial project in the Gulf region, according to British documents. Thomas arrived in Doha in 1931, and his notes were published one year later,

a sufficient period of time to arrive at a valid appraisal. The short time between travel and documentation raises a central problem related to the extent to which the impressionist memory of Thomas blends with history. For example, he made a number of mistakes in some of his descriptions of Qatar. He claimed that he crossed the walls of Doha and then crossed the Empty Quarter in half an hour, which is difficult to achieve in that period of time, (Thomas 1932: 297).

2-Itinerary of Bertram Thomas's voyage to Qatar

In October 1930, Thomas departed from Muscat to Dhofar on a Persian Oil Company oil tanker (Thomas 1932: 295), followed by a trek across the Rub al Khali Desert to the Qatari Peninsula (Figure 1) (Wilkinson 1964: 337-349). He was then the first European to cross the Empty Quarter, 1930-1931 (LeBlanc 2015: 39). He commented during his journey to Qatar, "After leaving the lake, a more north-easterly course towards the hog-backed Jabal Udaid" (Thomas 1932: 295). Lorimer also mentioned the area of Khor Al-Udid, which is situated on the Qatari border. He described a lake in this area that is six miles long and three miles wide, with a depth of six fathoms. The lake is connected to the sea by a winding channel, and ships can approach up to three miles from the channel entrance due to rock chains close to the surface (IOR/R/15/1/729).

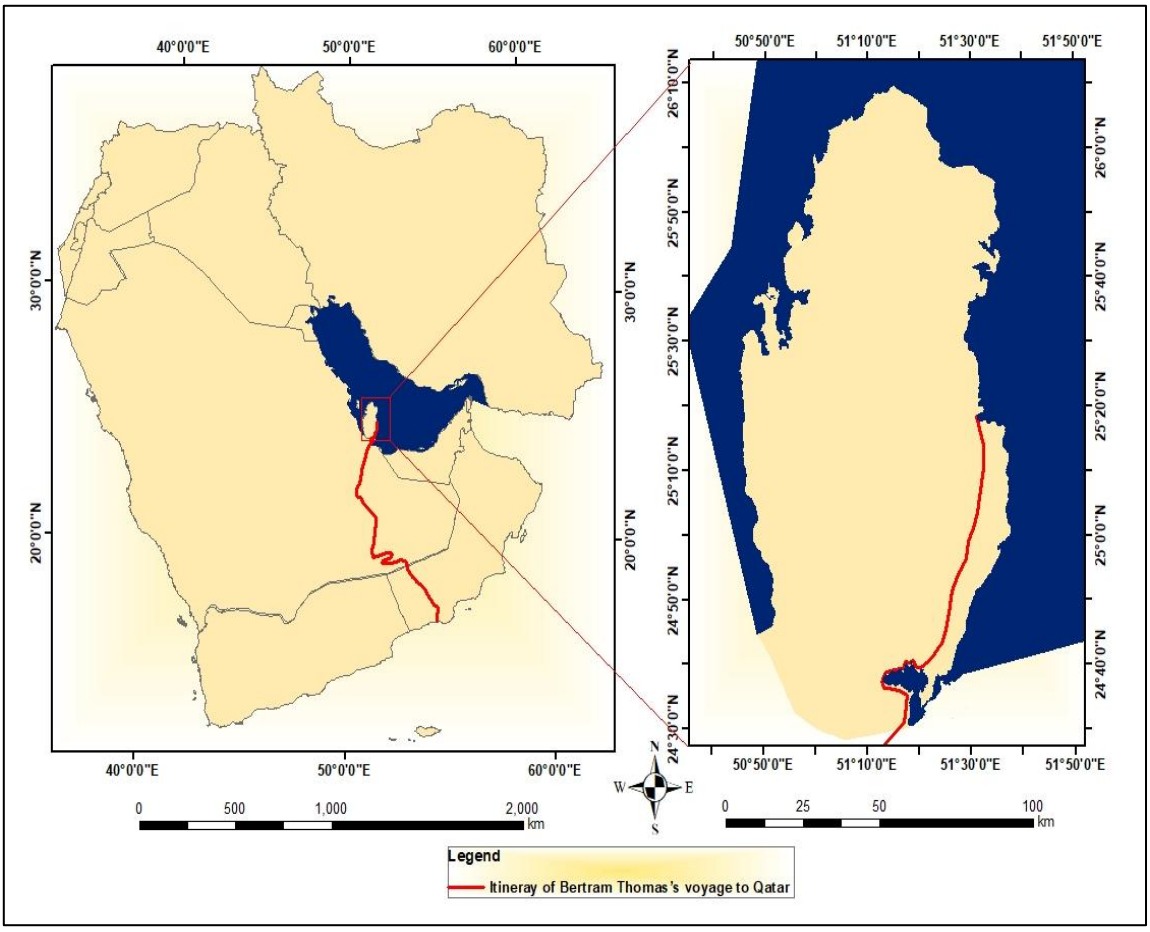


Figure 1: Itinerary of Bertram Thomas's voyage to Qatar

Author: Dr. Abdulaziz Ali Al-Mannai. 2024. Data Source The Centre for GIS - Ministry of Municipality (Doha), 2020.

Khor Al-Udid is comprised of multiple marine intrusions, ultimately leading to the Arabian Gulf (Figure 2), with three interlocking segments, one distinct in its morphology, unique extension, characteristics, and detailed form.

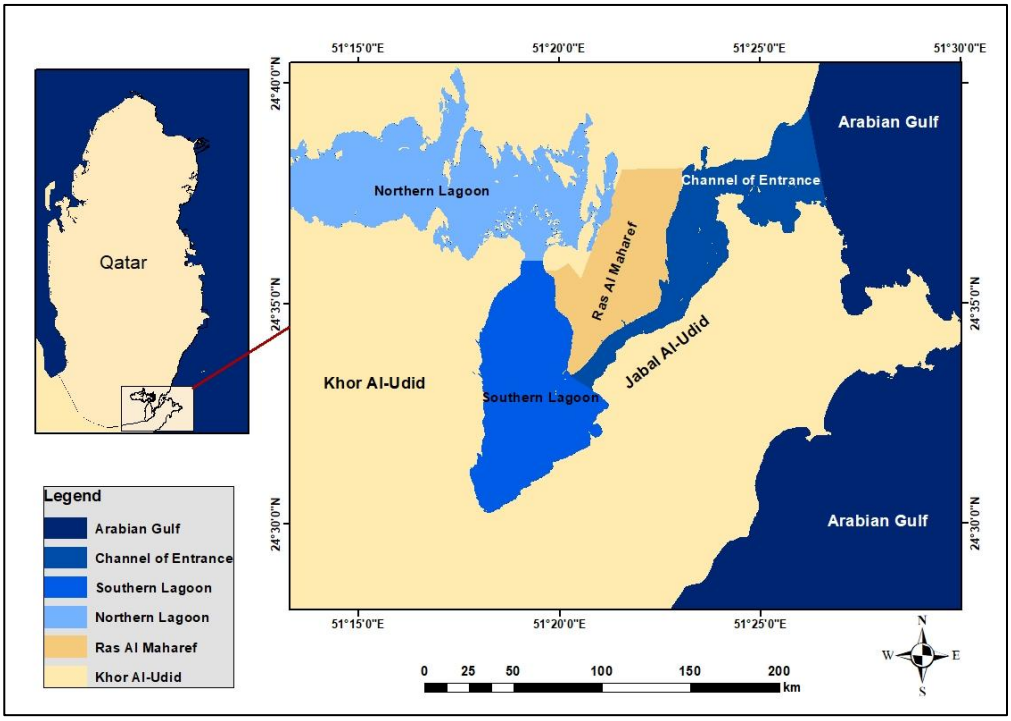


Figure 2: Map of Qatar showing the location of the Khor Al-Udid

Author: Dr. Abdulaziz Ali Al-Mannai. 2024. Data Source The Centre for GIS - Ministry of Municipality (Doha), 2020.

Channel Entrance: At the entrance of the narrow channel that connects Khor Al-Udid to the Gulf, there is a large coral ecosystem bordered by dense seagrass and macroalgae fields (Figure 2) (Rivers et al., 2020: 3). These benthic assemblages exhibit complex biophysical interactions, where coral reefs, seagrasses, and macroalgae engage in nutrient cycling, substrate stabilization, and trophic linkages that enhance ecosystem productivity and resilience (Orth et al., 2006). Running east-southwest, the channel extends 14.5 km to Ras Al Manharif, with roughly parallel sides and widths ranging from 0.55 km to 2.55 km (Rivers et *al*., 2020: 6). It typically follows a direct path aligned with the southeast, including Miocene layers beneath the region. However, it changes direction to align more in a north-south orientation over its length. The northwest side is usually flat with minimal elevation changes, except when the sheltered sides of the south-southeasterly-moving sand dunes meet the coast. Conversely, the southeastern edge is rugged and uneven.

The intermittent thalweg of the entrance channel—characterized as the linear depression delineating the zone of maximum depth and flow velocity—ranges between five and seven meters and is displaced toward the northern shoreline within the upper segment of the channel. In contrast, the southern sector is predominantly shallow, with bathymetric measurements typically less than two meters (Rivers et al., 2020: 7). The full extent of the north-south axis of the channel is interrupted by a series of diagonally aligned sedimentary ridges or barriers, collectively extending approximately 3.5 kilometers in length and 1.25 kilometers in width. At the distal, seaward end of the channel, a small ebb-tidal delta has developed—representing a subtidal depositional feature formed through the seaward transport and accretion of sediments under ebb-dominant tidal conditions. Beyond this geomorphic structure, the bathymetry deepens abruptly, exceeding 15 meters (Rivers et al., 2020: 7).

While using terms such as thalweg, ebb-tidal delta, and karst dissolution reflect technical precision, their geoscientific specificity may obscure interpretation for non-specialist readers. The thalweg denotes the deepest part of a channel where flow velocity is typically greatest, serving as a key determinant of sediment flux and channel morphology. An ebb-tidal

delta refers to a subaqueous sedimentary complex situated seaward of a tidal inlet, formed primarily by the hydraulic action of ebb flows and playing a crucial role in inlet stability and coastal sediment budgets. Karst dissolution describes the chemical weathering of soluble lithologies—particularly carbonate rocks—through interactions with weakly acidic water, resulting in the development of characteristic landforms such as sinkholes, dolines, and subterranean conduits.

Khor Al-Udaid, also known as the Inland Sea of Qatar, is a unique coastal ecosystem located in the southeastern part of the country. It is characterized by its interconnected lagoons, sand dunes, and tidal inlets. The area consists of two main lagoons—commonly referred to as the Southern Lagoon and the Northern Lagoon—each with distinct geomorphological and hydrological characteristics. The Southern Lagoon is relatively small and rectangular in shape, measuring approximately 10 meters in length and 5 meters in width. It contains the deepest body of water within Khor Al-Udaid, reaching a maximum depth of 20.5 meters in its northern section (Figure 2). In contrast, the southern portion of the lagoon is predominantly shallow, with depths of less than two meters (Rivers et al., 2020: 6). Its steep sides and narrow coastal margins are only interrupted along the southern edge, where the topography flattens slightly.

The Northern Lagoon, in contrast, is approximately seven kilometers in length and has an irregular shape that is wider than it is narrow (Figure 2) (Rivers et al., 2020: 7). It is believed to have formed during the Quaternary period, when rising sea levels inundated parts of the Arabian Gulf, shaping a shoreline similar to the present-day coast (Alsheeb, 1988: 78). The lagoon resembles a flower, with three smaller sub-basins separated by elongated sand dunes. The westernmost sub-basin connects to the central inner lagoon via a narrow canal around 45 meters wide. Some hydrological connectivity exists between the sub-basins in the western portion (Rivers et al., 2020: 7). The deepest parts of the Northern Lagoon are found in the channels of major flood and tidal estuaries. However, these typically do not exceed two to three meters in depth (Rivers et al., 2020: 7).

The origin of Khor Al-Udid is complex and not attributed to a singular process or geological epoch. The northern lake was formed due to erosion mechanisms, mainly through karst dissolution, which sculpted small basins that eventually merged to form its present shape. Over time, seawater incursions occurred, coinciding with the arrival of dunes into the basin during the early Holocene (Embabi, M. M. Ashour 1993: 49-69). Conversely, the southern lakes and Khor Al-Udid channel likely owe their existence to local tectonic forces, as evidenced by the straightness of their coastlines. Geological evidence indicates that these local structures took shape during the late Miocene and early Pliocene epochs, underscoring their formation during this geological time frame (Embabi, M. M. Ashour 1993: 49-69).

Jabal Al-Udid is a lengthy hill south of Ras Al-Udid, stretching about ten kilometers southwest (Figure 2). It runs parallel to the entrance channel and reaches a height of 89.9 meters above sea level at its highest point (Embabi, M. M. Ashour 1993: 49-69). This hill is famous for the historic sites of Iskak, Salwa, and Mabak, which lead to the shores of the Gulf of Qatar. Lumiere described Jabal Al-Udid as a remarkable sight and a popular tourist destination. In 2007, Khor Al-Udid was declared a nature reserve (Al-Hababi 2022: 28). Qatar has proposed Khawr Al-Udid 's inclusion as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but it is currently on the tentative list (Krupp et. *al*., 2014: 15).

Jabal Al-Udid has flat peaks stretching from northeast to southwest, with gentle slopes of several layers arranged in steps. Each layer has a steep slope followed by a gentle slope downwards, eventually reaching the coast of the Khor Al-Adid Canal. The hill is comprised of horizontal limestone sedimentary rocks with varying mineral compositions (Embabi, M. M. Ashour 1993: 49-69). These rocks react differently to external shaping factors. The steep slope units in the slope sequences correspond to the edges of the rock layers, while the gentle slope units correspond to the surfaces of the sedimentary layers. The route of the journey is significant from both historical and geographical perspectives. The geographer-author successfully mapped the path of the expedition, providing detailed and accurate descriptions of the locations along the way. This enriched the article with valuable data that other researchers can build upon. This section, therefore, carries considerable geographical depth. Moreover, it is important to note that Bertram Thomas undertook this exploration of the Qatari environment at the request of the British authorities, specifically the Royal Geographical Society. His meticulous documentation of geographical features and the distances between them also aligned with British colonial interests, particularly during a period marked by heightened competition among colonial powers following the discovery

of oil in several Gulf sheikhdoms.

A few small valleys intersect the hill, which is particularly noticeable on its steep slopes towards the Khor Al-Adid Channel of Entrance. These surfaces are generally steeper than those on the opposite side (Embabi, M. M. Ashour 1993: 49-69). Local geological structures have actively influenced the formation of Jabal Al-Udid. The type of tectonic structure formed in Jabal Al-Adid indicates that it is a concave fold (Theyab 2001: 158), making Jabal Al-Adid an inverted topographic phenomenon, with a surface initially lower than the surrounding lands. However, with external shaping processes, the central part of the concave fold, due to its merging during folding, resisted these external processes more than the adjacent parts, resulting in less erosion. Ultimately, unlike its initial state, it has become higher than the surrounding lands (Embabi, M. M. Ashour 1993: 49-69).

The low terrain of the Qatar Peninsula is primarily caused by strong northwest and northerly winds, known as "shamal" winds, which erode the limestone outcrops that cover most of the country, creating linear surface features. This information is supported by Embabi, Ashour and Rao et al (Embabi, M. M. Ashour 1993: 49-60; Rao et *al*. 2001: 445).

The Qatar Peninsula is a hyper-dry environment, classified as such due to sporadic rainfall, only about 75 millimeters per year (Heggy, et. al., 2022: 210-227). Due to its aridity and low, flat surface, the Qatar Peninsula has no permanent surface water. According to Sanlaville and Dalongeville (Sanlaville & R. Dalongeville 2005: 9-26) , the peninsula's coastline has significantly changed in response to sea-level fluctuations over the past few thousand years.

Sabkhas are widespread in the southeast region, specifically around Khor al-Udid. The coastal sabkhas are mostly Holocene features resulting from the coastal progradation along the entire Qatari coast after the mid-Holocene sea-level high stand. This information has been cited in various sources, including Engel et *al*., Billeaud et *al*., and Strohmenger and Jameson (Engel et *al*., 2020: 215-236; Billeaud et *al*., 2014: 561-587; Strohmenger & J. Jameson (2018: 169-186).

Research conducted by Engel and Brückner (Engel & H. Brückner 2014: 290-301) suggests that Differential Global Positioning System measurements at Al-Shaqra and Khor al-Udayd indicate that the relative sea level (RSL) during the late Pleistocene period was over 5 meters higher than that during the Mid-Holocene period. The coast of Qatar is a highly dynamic environment, even on relatively short geological time scales. The sea level reached its current position 7,000 to 8,000 years ago, but it apparently rose an additional two to four meters 6,000 years ago, when it flooded significant parts of Qatar's present coast, according to Puls et *al*(Puls, et *al*.2009:12).

According to Thomas (1932: 295), "Lake salt, and recent shell evidence and aneroid readings suggest that the coastal base of the Qatar Peninsula was at no very distant time depressed below the sea." This observation aligns with Harb Farzat's analysis, which states: "The rise in the elevation of the Qatar Peninsula's surface terrain—accompanied by a relative sea level rise of two meters below the current land surface—is indicated by stratified geological evidence dating back approximately 4000 years" (Harb Farzat 2020: 58). These changes in coastal morphology may be attributed to several contributing factors. First is the gradual rise in Gulf sea levels, a trend that has been relatively minor—less than one meter—over the past millennium. Second, recent land subsidence observed over the last three decades in Qatar's northern coastal zone, potentially driven by fluctuations in groundwater levels. Third, tectonic activity along fault lines may have resulted in the vertical displacement of coastal areas. Finally, modifications in shoreline contours are influenced by long-term variations in rainfall patterns (Potts 1990: 55–87).

Bertram Thomas meticulously documented the geographical features of the regions he traversed, reflecting his deep interest in the diverse aspects of the Qatari environment—from vegetation and soil to desert formations and camel habitats—beginning with his departure from Oman. This attention to detail was integral to the broader objectives of his exploratory mission, which sought to map and analyze the topography of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula. His observations were not merely scientific; they also served strategic purposes, aligning with the geopolitical interests of British colonial policy in the region during a period marked by growing imperial competition and the discovery of oil in the Gulf.

3-Descriptions of Qatar provided by Thomas : Customs and Historical Data

Customs and Traditions of Qatari Tribes

Thomas communicated valuable information about the way of life of Qataris and the Arabic dialect he encountered

during his time in Oman. He referred to Qatari expressions, such as: "May God deliver you from evil," "May God bless you" and "Oh, God bless you," "'Ya Haiyakum, 'Ya Haiyakum, good news!" "If God wills" and "Praise be to God!" He highlighted the difference in expressions addressed to strangers among the tribes of Qatar, such as the Al-Murra tribe's "Welcome, God willing," and the Manasir greeting, "Welcome to you" (Thomas 1932: 297).

It is noteworthy that Thomas only mentioned a few Qatari tribes, omitting many others in his discussion of the people of Qatar and his description of Qatari society. This could be attributed to his focus on understanding the loyalties and influence of the tribes for the purpose of delineating regional borders, rather than considering their number and the geographical areas they controlled. It is well-established that the Ma'adid tribes, from which the Qatari tribes are descended, migrated from central Arabia and the heart of Najd in the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries. This migration was prompted by severe droughts and widespread tribal conflicts, leading them to the western coast of the Gulf in search of a new source of livelihood. (Abushouk, Ahmed, 2021: 10).

The expressions Thomas discussed undoubtedly reflect the cultural heritage of the Gulf region. The language of communication among Qataris and Arab tribes, as indicated by Thomas, contained overtones related to Arab-Islamic culture and carried an exceptional ability to fuse all historical accumulations. The strength of these phrases, similar to proverbs in their eloquent presentation, lay in the ability to create space for the imagination of the recipient. It was not important that what was said be accurate, but that it ignited the imagination, because the strength of a new idea lay in its ability to be transformed into an image (Demeerseman 1937: 20).

Thomas claimed that the dialect spoken in Qatar was very religious, firmly ingrained in Islamic culture, and adhered to the standards of civility. Because of their experiences and the tools at their disposal to analyze the psychology of the other person, the Qatari tribes—or at least the ones Thomas traveled with—had developed a rhetorical code that amply demonstrated their sense of civility and etiquette. Additionally, the existence of courteous language suggested a historical accumulation that was readily apparent and had a significant impact on their collective mood. This revealed a human depth and defied colonial assertions that characterized desert societies as "savage" societies that existed "outside civilization".

During his travels Thomas also directs his attention to the existence of the religiosity characteristic of his accompanying team, which distinguished the Qatari tribes through the teachings and morals of Islam. He indicated that references made by his companions emphasized their prevailing values, such as contentment with what predestination decrees, performing prayers at the proper times, the desire to obtain an eternal reward, and the virtue of fasting (Thomas 1932: 298). Thomas's analysis revealed a common mood, awareness and behavior among the various elements affiliated with this particular human group (Kardiner 1969).

It is also noted that the traveler scrutinized daily living standards and behavioral, moral and devotional expectations, with the aim of obtaining an accurate picture of culture in a rational manner, distancing himself from all impressionistic or sensory perceptions. Through the folds of Thomas's narrative and his descriptions of morality and behavior, meanings and connotations are easy to trace. He presented the lofty values of Gulf Arabs with simple and interesting language. He stimulated the attention of the reader as he evaluated their life concerns and how they overcame its difficulties. He described the lifestyle of Qatari tribes utilizing elegant anecdotes, deep thoughts and amusing facts.

One of the tribes he discussed was the Al-Manaseer tribe, a singular Mansouri Bedouin tribe from Al-Nutahdna, based in Al-Dhafra, Oman. They lived between northwest Qatar and the Al-Buraimi Oasis in the east and were found in all parts of Al-Dhafra, particularly in Liwa, and Al-Khatim. Some of them had settled in the coastal villages of Al-Khan and Al-Jumeirah, while others had ventured to the neighboring areas of Abu Dhabi city and the Al-Buraimi Oasis. In the north, they were in contact with the Bani Hajar next to Qatar, and to the west, they bordered the Al-Murra. Their nomadic groups sometimes reached Wadi Farouq in the east and previously uninhabited regions of the Empty Quarter. The nomads of Qatra and Liwa were known for their unique lifestyle. In the winter, they stayed in Qatra, and in the summer they moved to Liwa, where they built temporary villages of huts and palm plantations. Owned by the tribe, the land was divided among three branches: Al-Bu Mundhir, Al-Bu Rahma, and Al-Bu Sha'ar. The way of life in Liwa was described in the section on Dhafra (Lorimer: 192-195).

Thomas' descriptions of the customs and traditions of the people of Qatar were brief and to the point, as he mentioned neither the dominant tribal structure, nor the prevalence of intermarriage among most Qatari tribes. In contrast, J. Lorimer, in the third part of his historical guide, provided comprehensive and valuable data on the ruling families, tribes, and religious/ethnic groups. Lorimer included detailed information on genealogies, intermarriages, influence and relationships, as well as estimates regarding their personnel, weapons, customs, and the numbers of their houses, boats, horses and camels. (Lorimer, 1975)

Describing his camel Agaba, Thomas says, "As I came up, Agaba, my camel, decided the place suited her. She refused to be urged on ahead alone and sat bellowing for bint Riman, her usual companion on the march--an irreverent accompaniment to the audible supplications of the Faithful". He continues, "I was taken to task afterwards for making an elementary mistake, that of giving her the wrong signal. She has been taught to rise to a tap of the stick on her quarters, and my tapping her neck kept her couched" (Thomas 1932: 295).

He also explained how a Bedouin would shout to get Agaba to move when annoyed with her, "Hai! (nasal) Come to thee, kjarach (a wasting disease)! Hai! Come to thee death, lawful or unlawful. Hai! Come to thee a great burden." But Thomas asserts that the Bedouin actually loved her:

"But in his heart he means nothing of the kind. He has a genuine attachment for her which he knows is not reciprocated. And so, when she stumbles, it is more likely to be: "Hai! Thy deliverance. Hai! Allah deliver thee from evil. Even when he has tramped for miles in pursuit of his straying camel, he approaches her with the words: 'Hai! God bless thee,' or 'Ya hai b'ish fulana'--greeting her by name" (Thomas 1932: 295).

The text showed how he treated her, indicating that she was well trained. Camels have enjoyed an elevated position among the Arabs since ancient times. Camels were the only means of transportation, as they have more stamina than horses and donkeys and are able to travel long distances in the desert. The use of camels among Arabs was widespread in the Arabian Peninsula, where the profession of many was camel herding.

A strong and close bond arose between camels and Arabs in general, particularly those living in the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabs raised camels in their pastoral existence, Bedouin or rural communities were completely dependent on them in their daily lives. Camels were a source of food, drink and clothing, as well as a source of income. They were also a source of happiness, joy and pleasure. The Arab Bedouins treated the camel with friendliness, kindness and tenderness, also enjoying their company and entertaining time with them (Sarawi 2011: 15).

There seems to have been a language of communication between the camel and the owner through which the animal understood what the owner wanted. Hamed Al-Marri explained that "camels know the tone of voice of their owner and respond to them immediately, and if someone else communicates with them, they will not respond to him". Al-Marri explains that camel owners would train their camels "to know the difference between the right and left, and some other signals such as kneeling, for example, to ride the camels" (Sarawi 2011: 15).

With his desert companions, Thomas inspired a rich but highly flammable blend of amusement and curiosity. Unlike other Western travelers, Thomas did not provide any information about water locations, such as springs and wells, while crossing the Al-Ahsa region towards Qatar (Al-Majnouni 2020: 58). He raised the issue of consumer habits of the Gulf Arabs and the people of Qatar (Thomas 1932: 297) when talking about one of his companions on the trip. It is reported that Thomas quit smoking before crossing the Empty Quarter, because it was said that tobacco arrived in Iran during the Safavid rule 1501-1722 after the Europeans discovered the American continent. Note that its arrival in Iran is still a mystery, and some suggest that tobacco reached Iran through the Ottomans during their battles with the Safavids in 1609. In fact, tobacco may have been used in the Gulf since the nineteenth century, as Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah was said to have been smoking a pipe in 1839 when Lieutenant Edmunds, Assistant Resident in the Arabian Gulf, visited him at Bushire to discuss with him the establishment of a British postal line across the desert from Kuwait to the Mediterranean (Lorimer 1975: 1514). The entry of these consumer habits reflected the ability of the colonial capitalist system to stereotype tastes and to impose hybrid openness and modernization on the Gulf society, which led to these negative habits and tastes. It is certain that the Gulf countries, including Qatar, were not able at that time to stand in the face of imposed openness, dependency and an increase

in stereotyping, even in regard to the consumption of tobacco.

Historical data

Thomas' descriptions include a few notable historical references to the region. He refers to the Gulf as the Persian Gulf, as do most Western sources. He refers to political actors, like Abdul-Aziz bin Saoud and Emir of Al-Ahsa, Ibn Jalawi (Thomas 1932: 297, 299).

After Al Rashid entered Riyadh in 1883, and ended the rule of the Al Saoud family, Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman bin Faisal bin Turki (1901-1953) (Philby 1955: 230) and his father resided in Al-Ahsa, then Qatar, and then Kuwait, with the approval of the Ottoman authorities. In view of the poor relationship between the Rashid family and the opposition tribes in Najd in the late nineteenth century, this prompted these tribes to summon Abd al-Rahman ibn Faisal to lead them, so Abdul-Aziz took advantage of these circumstances and raided Riyadh. He was able to enter in 1901 but withdrew the same year, returning the following year with more force to establish his government there.

Prince Abdullah bin Jalawi was a close follower of Ibn Saoud and was at the forefront of power—with Prince Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman, on whom King Abdul Aziz relied during the restoration of Riyadh in 1902. So when the Anglo-Iranian company's excavations were opposed by the Saudi government, Abdullah bin Jalawi, Emir of Al-Ahsa, purposefully placed barriers in the way of the company's geological missions and restricted their freedom of movement. Among the manifestations of King Abdul Aziz's appreciation of Abdullah bin Jalawi was the assignment of the Emirate of Al-Ahsa to him in 1913, and before that, Al-Qassim, and granting him extended powers (Al-Khalidi 2017: 385).

Thomas pointed to the anxiety his companions felt when they noticed a few camels grazing on the outskirts of the Al-Ahsa region. He mentioned their trying to hide from sight so that the owners of the caravan of camels would not notice their presence. It is possible that Thomas sent someone to inquire about this caravan. It seems that this apprehension was due to the fear of a possible attack on Thomas's expedition, so Talib, one of Thomas's companions who was close to the Manasir tribe, provided reconnaissance of the caravan (Thomas 1932: 298). At this time, Ibn Saoud maintained a small, salaried army, with each province having its own garrison, and these men controlled the main strategic locations, with each province adhering to the orders of the local ruler. In Al-Ahsa, of Ibn Jalawi's 700-man security detail, 500 were from Al-Hofof and 200 from Al-Mubarrad, half on camels and the other half foot soldiers (Salman & Muhammad 2015: 308).

It is useful to note that Thomas, when he headed towards the Empty Quarter, penetrated areas that were under the rule of Ibn Saoud without obtaining his permission. This undoubtedly reflected the perceptions of colonial empires, as they considered every land untouched by colonial feet to be unidentified land that therefore could be colonized (Ibrahim 2013: 79) as soon as a traveler passed through it.

All nations bordering the Gulf coasts have rights over the waters, Arab Gulf countries refer to it as the "Arabian Gulf", and Iran refers to it as the "Persian Gulf". In Sumerian and Akkadian sources, the Gulf was called the Great Sea, the Great East Sun Sea, the Sunrise Sea, the Lower Sea (Al-Ahmad 1985: 9-10) and the Bitter River, meaning the Salty Sea and the Chaldean Sea. In 58 BC-23 AD, Strabon names it the Arabian Gulf (Sinus Arabicus)(Al-Mubadir 1981: 3-30). Alexander the Great named it the Persian Gulf, taking the name from Niyarkous, the commander of his fleet, who sailed to the Indian Ocean in search of geographical discoveries in 326-325 BC (Qalaaji 1992: 8). The term "Persian Gulf" was also used on the map of Claudiud Ptolemeus 90-168 AD, published in the historical Islamic atlas, and on the map of Bernardus Sylvanus 1511 AD. In 1548, Geustaldy used the name on his map, and in 1570 he uses two names, the Qatif Sea and the Persian Gulf. The use of the name Persian Gulf continues either alone or combined with the Qatif Sea until the end of the sixteenth century AD (Al-Mubadir 1981: 3-30).

The name Arabian Gulf was also used in the maps of Hondius in 1616 AD (Al Qasimi 1996: 42-47) and in 1625 AD. John Speed used the names Qatif Sea and Arabian Gulf in his map of the Turkish Empire, and in 1628 AD he used the name Arabian Gulf alone in his map. In 1634, G. Blacu used the name Qatif Sea and the Arabian Gulf, and then M. Merian used the name Persian Gulf on his map (Ramadan 2008: 27). N. Sanson mentions the name of the Gulf of Basra for the first time with the Qatif Sea (Al Qasimi 1996: 48-58), and a number of names are given to the Gulf in the period from 1654 to 1760 AD, including the Gulf of Basra, the Qatif Sea and the Persian Gulf (Ramadan 2008: 28).

Maps mentioned the term Persian Gulf from 1760 to 1930, as well as the maps of Desnos in 1760, the map of J.N. Bellin in 1762, the map of J. Pinkerton in 1815, the map of James Wyld in 1842, and the map of the journey from Dhofar to Doha through the Empty Quarter in 1931 (Al Qasimi 1996: 100-207). However, Bertram Thomas called it the Persian Gulf (Thomas 1932: 299).

The Arab League issued a resolution naming the entire region the Arabian Gulf, and it is officially recognized by the United Nations in Arab documents and Arab geographical societies in full (GCC Geographical Society, 2020). As for the naming of the Arabian Gulf, it is clear that each country that has benefited from the waters of this gulf desired to associate it with itself, from ancient times to the modern era.

Conclusion

Bertram Thomas was the first European traveler to cross the Empty Quarter in the 20th century. It is clear that his journey from Oman to Qatar, despite the difficulties he encountered, was useful in providing us with historical and geographical data of great importance to Qatar, the tribes and the Qatari environment. This data is undoubtedly part of his exploratory mission, especially if we know that it was required by institutions such as the Royal Geographical Society and the British Institute of International Studies.

The origin of the Thomas's writings is rooted in the idea that historical accounts should be based on observation, visualization, verbal communication, and direct inquiry. Thomas was particularly faithful to this rule, as he wrote down only what he saw with his own eyes. He was meticulous in his documentation and strived to be as accurate as possible in his descriptions of the places he visited and the people he encountered. His writings are a testament to the power of observation and the importance of recording one's experiences. However, some of the author's paragraphs and descriptions need clarification, such as his brief references to Qatari customs and traditions, and he did not dwell much on the Qatari tribes, perhaps due to the short duration of the trip. Like other Western travelers, Thomas used the term Persian Gulf. He also claimed that he crossed the walls of Doha and then crossed the Empty Quarter in half an hour, which is impossible.

Thomas's references carry confirmed historical importance, as they were written by an eyewitness to a crucial period in the history of Qatar and Gulf Arabs. However, these accounts are not without bias and reflect colonialist and racist viewpoints, influenced by Western powers' ambitions in the region. This is demonstrated by the fact that these writings were commissioned by the Royal Geographical Society in London to explore roads and routes in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf.

The authors of this paper have identified several errors made by Thomas in his book. For instance, at the end of his description of Qatar, he claims to have crossed the walls of Doha and then traversed the Empty Quarter in half an hour,a feat that would be difficult to achieve in such a short time. Additionally, some sections of his account lack precision and require further scrutiny. These writings are important, but they should be approached with a critical eye, taking into account both their valuable insights and inherent limitations. Moreover, Thomas's journey reflected the perceptions of colonial empires, as they considered any land untouched by colonialism to be uncharted territory that could be colonized as soon as the traveler passed through it, which is what we can infer from his crossing the Al-Ahsa region without obtaining permission from the Saudi state. In addition, the description of Qatar cannot be generalized to all Qatari tribes, which, although they share many of the features mentioned by Thomas, but they differ in some customs and traditions that differ relatively from one region to another, and it seems that he was influenced by his companions on the trip who provided him with information about their tribes and not all Qatari tribes.

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