

Cut from the Same Cloth: Salem, Zanzibar, and the Consolidation of the Indo-Atlantic World,
1790-1875

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For Gizmo and April and Lucy and Morty and Woody

“and there ain't nothing in this world except for us and the little things we do”

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Introduction

After eighty-seven days at sea, the *Sultana* cruised into New York harbor on April 30, 1840. From afar, the *Sultana* did not stand out on New York's crowded wharves. In many ways, the 305-ton vessel was nearly indistinguishable from innumerable European merchant ships. The craft's flag, a swath of blood red cloth, offered the first hint of the *Sultana*'s unique provenance. The vessel's motley crew, however, composed of West Indians, East Africans, and two Frenchmen, immediately drew attention as they disembarked. As port officials attempted to register the *Sultana*, they struggled to process the ship and its inhabitants. Seeing the British navigator, William Sleemen, the Americans initially listed him as the vessel's captain before Ahmad bin Na'aman, secretary to Said bin Sultan, the ruler of "Muscat and his Dependencies," personally intervened, informing them in English that he was in charge of the ship.¹ The Americans' confusion was understandable. In the United States' sixty-year history, no vessel from an Arab state had ever reached an American port.

With the *Sultana* safely docked, Ahmad bin Na'aman could get to work. Fulfilling his diplomatic responsibilities, Na'aman forwarded two letters from Said bin Sultan to Martin Van Buren, proclaiming the Sultan's earnest friendship and outlining the many gifts the *Sultana* carried for the president.² These overtures were hardly new. The United States and Oman had already established formal ties, implementing a "Treaty of Amity and Commerce" in 1835. Na'aman's primary interests in New York, like his superior's, were commercial. In addition to overseeing territories in the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa, Said bin Sultan was one of the

¹ Hermann Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'Aman's Mission to the United States in 1840, the Voyage of the Al-Sultanah to New York City," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 98 (1962): pp. 219-27, 223.

² Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'Aman's Mission to the United States in 1840," 255.

Western Indian Ocean's most prolific merchants. Hardly a pleasure vessel, the *Sultana* was filled to its fore and aft with an array of Indian Ocean commodities: dates from Oman, coffee from Yemen, hides, gum copal, and ivory from East Africa, and cloves from Zanzibar. As his merchandise sold, Na'aman began to accrue a return cargo of highly sought-after American goods: cotton cloth, guns, and gunpowder, rounded out with a variety of beads and dishware.³

In the meantime, Ahmad bin Na'aman and his deputies were treated to a dizzying array of events and sightseeing expeditions. Overcoming their initial confusion, New York City's officials pulled out all the stops, treating Ahmad and his retinue somewhere between foreign dignitaries and a travelling performance. With their guides, Na'aman and his officers took a ride on the Long Island Railroad and toured the New York Institution for the Blind as well as a local prison.⁴ Touted by New York's press, the *Sultana's* extended visit turned into a public spectacle as the city's inhabitants flocked to catch a view of its outlandish crew. The men were the center of attention at more formal events as well, receiving a dinner at city hall and taking part in receptions for New York Governor William Seward and Vice President Richard Johnson.

Reading about the events in local newspapers, most Americans probably considered the *Sultana's* arrival a passing oddity or at most yet another example of New York's rapid commercial rise. To more curious businessmen, the *Sultana* may well have hinted at a burgeoning commercial relationship between New York City and the Omani capital, Muscat. In reality, however, the *Sultana's* trading venture to New York City represented the latest chapter in over a decade of commercial exchange, not between New York and Muscat, but Salem, Massachusetts and the East African island of Zanzibar.

³ Ahmed bin Na'man Account Book, MSS 1624, Peabody Essex Museum (PEM).

⁴ Eilts, "Ahmad Bin Na'Aman's Mission to the United States in 1840," 242.

Contributions

The United States' nineteenth-century economic expansion cannot be understood simply by looking within the nation's borders. Often discounted after the War of 1812, American merchants remained essential economic and political actors throughout the century. Although the rapid growth of manufacturing disrupted merchants' preexisting commercial practices and threatened their political influence, America's maritime and industrial sectors remained mutually reinforcing. Mercantile capital poured into new industrial projects, producing an ever-increasing flow of consumer goods that helped fuel international trade. More than one-dimensional commercial actors, nineteenth-century merchants served as a fulcrum between burgeoning American industries, the federal government, and vast regions of the world. In addition to conveying large amounts of commodities in both directions, these men acted as translators between American elites and their foreign counterparts, all the while tweaking the narrative to bolster their profits.

In New England, the early nineteenth century was a period of dizzying social and economic change. Well beyond the United States' most iconic commercial centers, innumerable merchants continued to chase profit through maritime commerce. Pushed to the brink by war and recession, the merchants of Salem, Massachusetts struggled to carve out a future in the growing shadows of Boston and Lowell. To remain relevant, Salem's merchants positioned themselves as skilled practitioners of interpersonal and institutional commerce. With corporations rapidly becoming the order of the day in finance and manufacturing, Salem's businessmen continued to rely on time-tested mercantile arrangements, using familial connections and the shared ownership of vessels to organize commercial ventures. Far from resisting change, a new generation of Salem merchants championed

bringing corporations to Salem, serving as founding members of the town's first banks and insurance companies while also lobbying for railroads and manufacturing. Steady access to corporate finance became a prerequisite for international trade, even as the trading houses themselves rejected incorporation.

Succeeding in an increasingly integrated American economy meant transforming Salem into an outlet for American manufacturing as well as a source for a unique array of foreign commodities, a mix of luxury goods and raw materials that could fuel burgeoning industries. Long successful intermediaries between the United States and far-flung ports, Salem's merchants forged a new trading network in the Western Indian Ocean, centered on Zanzibar. Located off the coast of modern-day Tanzania, the island was an emerging commercial hub in the Omani Empire, an inter-ethnic collection of coastal enclaves in Southeast Arabia and East Africa. Alighting on Zanzibar for the first time in 1825 or 1826, American traders entered a deeply layered economic system and political culture, dominated by Indian business networks carefully nestled under the superstructure of Omani sovereignty. Very little could be taken for granted. Everything from the language of trade to the process of exchanging and storing goods had to be negotiated, formally or otherwise.

Far from home, Salem's merchants slowly realized that sustained, profitable trade required them to acquiesce to many established practices, albeit with some caveats. Each the heir to mature mercantile traditions, Americans, Indians, and Omanis steadily co-created a highly practical and profitable commercial system. Eased by the establishment of an American consulate in 1837, Salem's merchants slowly established long-lasting relationships with Said bin Sultan, the Omani Sultan, and Jairam Shivji, his Indian custom master. With a functional system of exchange in place by 1840, trade flourished. Each year, Salem's ships carried hundreds of thousands of

pounds of cotton cloth, muskets, gunpowder, and brass wire to the Western Indian Ocean, returning filled with cloves, ivory, gum copal, hides, dates, and coffee.

While at home Salem's influence on federal policy was waning, in the Indian Ocean the town's merchants liberally coopted governmental authority. To Washington, the Western Indian Ocean remained so many lines on a map. The government's disinterest did little to impede the U.S.'s growing economic influence in the region. During the mid-nineteenth century, American merchants served as their nation's predominant representatives between the Cape of Good Hope and India. Far from home, they used governmental trappings for their own purposes, negotiating a diplomatic treaty with Oman and monopolizing America's consulate on Zanzibar to bolster their profits. This strand of diplomatic commerce was emblematic of American engagement with most of the world. Beyond Western Europe and parts of Latin America, merchant diplomats predominated, wrapping themselves in the American flag to bolster their legitimacy in an uncertain world.

Over the decades, Salem's merchants slowly expanded their commercial and diplomatic influence in the Western Indian Ocean, surviving economic downturns, political upheaval, cultural misunderstandings, and interpersonal squabbles. The American Civil War, however, brought trade to a standstill as the United States' extended supply chains shattered. Beyond posing an existential threat to Salem, the conflict stalled Zanzibar's economy as it lost access to American goods. The rapid decline in the United States' economic and diplomatic influence eased British commercial and political interference in East Africa. During the 1860s, the British Empire expanded its imperial infrastructure across the Western Indian Ocean, forcing merchants of all nationalities to adapt to British institutions. As the Americans tried to recapture their antebellum profits, they became increasingly reliant on Indian merchants to facilitate their

commerce under the economic and legal frameworks of the British Empire. Although Salem's merchants found some success, their prominence in the region slowly declined as they faced expanding competition from ascendant European traders backed by imperial governments. Commercial conditions in the United States proved challenging as well. After 1870, Salem's merchants dispatched their remaining ships from Boston, bowing to decades of commercial pressure. While trade between Salem and Zanzibar continued into the 1890s, its outsized economic, diplomatic, and cultural influence had largely faded.

Historiography

Historians have long credited American merchants with driving the nation's early development. Before 1815, no claim seems too grand. As James Fichter argues in *So Great a Proffit*, America's international traders funded industrialization almost singlehandedly, galvanizing the United States' rapid economic expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵ Mercantile influence, however, is heavily periodized. After the War of 1812, the United States' economic transformation becomes an American affair, driven by Western expansion and the increasingly continental scope of the nation's economy. Even the most comprehensive and influential syntheses of this period, such as Daniel Howe's *What Hath God Wrought* and Sean Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy* rarely mention international trade after 1815.⁶

Charles Sellers's economically minded *the Market Revolution* has a similar blind spot. Early on, Sellers notes that "the merchant was a general capitalist entrepreneur, not only sending

⁵ James Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 83

⁶ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: the Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

out trading ventures but lending to local borrowers, financing retailers, speculating in urban real estate and interior lands, underwriting marine insurance, and engaging in privateering and military contracting during the recurrent colonial wars.”⁷ After 1815, however, Sellers rarely returns to this theme, rendering international trade’s contributions to American growth almost invisible. A handful of monographs have called attention to the ongoing role of international trade in shaping the United States’ internal development, albeit usually in passing. In *Enterprising Elite*, Robert Dalzell notes that “shipping in Boston and Massachusetts generally continued to expand... thus the facts do not support the view that the traditional activities of Boston merchants failed to attract and employ capital in 1815; if anything they suggest the reverse.”⁸

Recent scholarship on the Cotton South and its integration into the global economy offers the fullest exploration of international markets’ influence on American development. Works like *River of Dark Dreams* position the South as a key player in a system of international exchange, tracing cotton’s trajectory through far reaching supply chains.⁹ Walter Johnson also delves into the world of international merchants, exploring the role of cotton factors in New Orleans, New York, and Liverpool in transferring capital, credit, and commodities across the Atlantic. Other works, like *Debtor Diplomacy*, examine the close financial links that the cotton trade facilitated

⁷ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21.

⁸ Robert Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite: the Boston Associates and the World They Made* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 63.

⁹ *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013). See also: Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), Edward Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), and Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

between the United States and Britain.¹⁰ This rapidly expanding field, however, focuses almost exclusively on the United States' commercial ties to a small slice of Western Europe. As this project illustrates, American merchants worked tirelessly to integrate a rising wave of commodities and manufactured goods into commercial networks and markets around the world. Beyond Europe, the diplomatic and cultural impacts of these transactions often proved as influential as their immediate economic effects.¹¹

Even as the United States expanded into new territories, it experienced a period of rapid economic consolidation. As canals, railroads, telegraph lines, and credit networks snaked their way westwards, the very boundaries of time and space seemed to bend. Every decade a new city jumped to the fore, promising to be the future center of American enterprise. As depicted in William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis*, as Chicago and other cities' populations and capital reserves grew, they reoriented the flows of goods and people to further accelerate their growth, establishing large hinterlands of relative commercial dependence.¹²

No economic integration, however, is entirely linear or one directional. Understanding America's economy during a period of unprecedented flux requires looking well beyond the

¹⁰ Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹ In his study detailing the outsized cultural significance of American textiles in East Africa, Jeremy Prestholdt illustrates the rich potential for research into the United States' expansive commercial reach. Indeed, works like *Domesticating the World* are essential to fully untangling supposedly domestic affairs. Beyond simply increasing demand, savvy East African consumers affected the logistics of cotton cloth production in New England factories. Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹² William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991). For other examples of case studies of the nation's leading commercial centers, see: Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010) and Mark Peterson and Henry Hardy, *The City-State of Boston: the Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Power, 1630-1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

nation's largest cities. Even with technological advances, the largescale movement of commodities and capital required knowledgeable actors at every step along the way, many of whom, like Salem's leading men, remained largely independent. In addition, even as large cities consolidated their hold over wide swaths of mercantile activities, they often specialized in the most profitable ventures. Boston, for example, dominated American trade with India and China as well as early cloth manufacturing. Although fraught with challenges, this rapidly changing commercial landscape offered savvy merchants a range of overlooked opportunities to pursue. And Salem's businessmen were nothing if not savvy.

Like its animating commercial actors, Salem fades from most historical accounts after 1815. Most scholarship on the town after the War of 1812 focuses on the life and works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Salem's most famous, and resentful, resident.¹³ In a typical complaint, Hawthorne bemoaned, "I am intolerably weary of this old town... Dost Thou not think it really the most hateful place in all the world?"¹⁴ Drawing on Hawthorne's jaundiced writings, historians have depicted nineteenth-century Salem as a shadow of its former self, an early casualty of industrialization and commercial consolidation. In one maritime history of the United States, a chapter opens with the simple phrase "Salem was declining" before noting that "when Reconstruction formally closed the books on the Civil War, Salem's maritime past was a distant

¹³ See: Alfred Rosa, *Salem, Transcendentalism, and Hawthorne* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), Luther Luedtke, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Romance of the Orient* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), Edwin Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: a Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), and Margaret Moore, *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Sophia Peabody, November 27, 1841, quoted in Moore, *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 2.

memory.”¹⁵ While Salem’s market share of imports and exports had declined significantly, the town’s leading men fought tooth and nail to remain relevant, and profitable. After 1815, Salem’s regional and national influence stemmed more from its close relationships with a handful of a foreign communities, especially Zanzibar, than from the total amount of goods that arrived on its wharves. For much of the nineteenth century, Salem’s merchants served as the predominate middlemen between the United States and the Western Indian Ocean, mediating key commercial and diplomatic interactions that shaped decades of cross-cultural trade.

As scholars have reexamined American foreign policy after the War of 1812, they have increasingly turned to international commerce to explain a period of relative disorder. In 1979, Paul Varg struggled to craft a comprehensive narrative of the period, noting that he could find “no overarching theory to explain what took place.” Even so, Varg argues that “the promotion of trade was the most basic” “characteristic of both policy formation and the conduct of foreign affairs.”¹⁶ More recently, Paul Gilje situates support for commerce as a central, albeit diminishing, feature of American policy through 1850, arguing that international trade must be placed at “the crux of analysis” in any exploration of the era.¹⁷ Still, Gilje positions commerce and conquest as competing forces.¹⁸ As the federal government became increasingly wedded to territorial expansion, fostering international trade became a secondary concern. In fact, rabid domestic expansionism often lent itself towards an aggressive commercial presence overseas.

¹⁵ Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 99.

¹⁶ Paul Varg, *United States Foreign Relations, 1820-1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1979), xv.

¹⁷ Paul Gilje, “Commerce and Conquest in Early American Foreign Relations, 1750–1850,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 4 (2017): pp. 735-770, 736

¹⁸ See also: Jay Sexton, “Toward a Synthesis of U.S. Foreign Relations during the Civil War Era, 1848-77,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 2004): pp. 50-73.

Men as dissimilar as William Seward and James DeBow called for the United States to build a commercial “empire of the seas.”¹⁹ After all, as one naval officer noted, there was “no colonizer, civilizer, nor Christianizer, like commerce.”²⁰

Although clear lines can be drawn between domestic politics, federal policy, and international trade, as this project shows, the federal government often had limited interest, and influence, over international affairs beyond Europe and Latin America. American merchants, on the other hand, were heavily invested in ports around the world. Although they called on the federal government when it suited them, Salem’s merchants prioritized personal profits over vague national interests, even when formally employed as American diplomats. In the Western Indian Ocean, and many other regions as well, self-interested merchants were often the driving force behind “American” influence. As a result, studies of foreign policy, and their overarching focus on a centralized nation-state, cannot fully capture America’s expanding role on the world stage. Scholars of “America and the World” must meaningfully incorporate non-state actors to better understand the United States’ broader economic, cultural, and even political influence during the mid-nineteenth century.

That being said, a handful of historians have already examined Salem and Zanzibar’s close commercial ties, most notably Norman Bennett. Most of this work, however, is more than fifty years old. Meticulously researched and heavily narrative, this small body of scholarship centered on wayward Americans is strikingly insular, rarely venturing past the municipal boundaries of Salem or the shores of Zanzibar.²¹ During this period, both communities depended

¹⁹ John Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire the Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829-1861* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 91.

²⁰ Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 105.

²¹ See: “Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections*. v. 95 (1959), Norman Bennett, “Americans in Zanzibar: 1845-1865,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v.

heavily on their commercial integration into their surrounding regions, necessitating a wider geographical vantage point as well as periodic examinations of political as well as economic developments.

Older histories of Zanzibar and Oman have paid relatively little attention to American merchants. In works like Mohamed Bhacker's *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, Americans appear as little more than a speedbump on the road to the British Empire, negotiating a treaty with Said bin Sultan before sailing into the sunset.²² In *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, Abdul Sheriff offers a more nuanced consideration of American traders, noting their essential role in importing cotton cloth and much needed specie.²³ In Sheriff's thematic framing, however, the American presence on Zanzibar remains relatively periodized in the 1830s and 1840s although he does briefly explore the effects of the American Civil War on the island's economy.

During the last decade, scholars of the Indian Ocean World, especially Fahad Bishara, Thomas McDow, Pedro Machado, and Chhaya Goswami, have investigated the innumerable commercial threads binding together the Western Indian Ocean. In particular, Bishara and McDow's research on the Omani Empire serves as an essential foundation for this project. In *A*

97 (1961), and Norman Bennett "Americans in Zanzibar: 1865-1915," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v. 98 (1962). In addition, Bennett and George Brooks Jr.'s edited collection, *New England Merchants in Africa*, compiles a broad source base, on both East and West Africa, that is an essential first step for any research on this topic. Norman Bennett and George Brooks, Jr., *New England Merchants in Africa: a History through Documents, 1802 to 1865* (New York, N.Y., 1965). For another early overview of Salem's mercantile activities in the Indian Ocean, see: Philip Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar-East African Trade, 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 90 (1954).

²² Mohamed Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar* (London: Routledge, 1992).

²³ *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Ohio University Press, 1987).

Sea of Debt and *Buying Time* these historians untangle the web of economic and legal innovations that facilitated commercial transactions across the region.²⁴ These works illuminate core tensions between increasingly intangible lines of debt and the essential role of personal relationships in holding together social and commercial networks. By examining the fraught process of incorporating foreign players into the prevailing commercial system, this project establishes the limits of these flexible economic structures as well as the many adaptations required by all parties to ensure sustained and profitable cross-cultural trade.

Alongside Sugata Bose and Engseng Ho, these scholars have purposely reestablished the centrality of indigenous merchants and their communities by carefully qualifying and contextualized the role of the British Empire and other European actors in the Indian Ocean.²⁵ Understandably, few have actively sought out other Westerners to explain the trajectory of the region's history. Nevertheless, American merchants, as well as their commodities and capital, played an integral role in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of commercial life in the Western Indian Ocean, especially on Zanzibar. Still, this is a hardly a story of unchallenged Western agency. As Nicholas Roberts argues, the Indian Ocean was an arsenal of capitalism, home to a mature and supremely flexible commercial realm, who's leading figures—Jairam Shivji and Said bin Sultan

²⁴ Fahad Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and Thomas F. McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018).

²⁵ See: Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) and Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

chief among them—sought out new markets and actively coopted foreign merchants for their own benefit.²⁶

This project focuses heavily on the relationship between Salem and Zanzibar, positioning the latter as an unparalleled center of American interactions with East Africans, Arabs, and Indians. Salem and Zanzibar, however, were intimately connected to their wider regions, with commercial, political, and personal relationships binding them tightly into their Atlantic and Indian Ocean contexts. As quickly becomes clear, no clear line divides the two realms. While the Cape of Good Hope and its tempestuous weather severely challenged human ingenuity, trade and profit won out. As Kevin McDonald argues, an “Indo-Atlantic framework provides an expanded historical perspective that goes beyond the limiting notions of Atlantic history.” McDonald notes that this lens allows historians to “avoid the interpretive and analytical constrictions that have bounded traditional Atlantic approaches, necessitating a more complex, nuanced, and global perspective than most present Atlantic frameworks allow.”²⁷ While undoubtedly true, perhaps even this framing is too limiting.

Even during a heyday of transnational scholarship, large gaps in the historiography remain. During the nineteenth century, innumerable commercial relationships flourished across traditional geopolitical boundaries, often well beyond state regulations. As the American consul noted in 1864, “the great and unfortunate rebellion in America has probably affected the trade of [Zanzibar] as much, if not more, than any place of its kind or size.”²⁸ In turn, the effects of

²⁶ Nicholas, Roberts, “A Sea of Wealth: Sayyid Sa’id bin Sultan, His Omani Empire, and the Making of an Oceanic Marketplace,” PhD diss., (University of Notre Dame, 2021)

²⁷ Kevin McDonald, *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonial America and the Indo-Atlantic World* (Oakland, Cal.: University of California Press, 2015), 4.

²⁸ William Hines to William Seward, October 25, 1864, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 533.

Zanzibar's economic stagnation quickly radiated to ports across East Africa, Arabia, and India. If a brief commercial rupture between Salem and Zanzibar, two towns often relegated to historical obscurity, affected the trajectory of an entire world region, what can other comparable "horizontal" historical relationships contribute to broader narratives of global history and modernity? The line between Indo-Atlantic, transnational, and global histories seems thin indeed.

Chapter Overviews

Beginning with Salem's commercial heyday during the early republic, Chapter One explores the town's shifting role in Massachusetts's economy after the War of 1812. As Boston's population and wealth grew, Salem's merchants struggled to remain commercially viable. Lowell's meteoric rise as a center of textile manufacturing posed yet another threat to the town's trade. Ultimately, however, Salem's merchants gained access to these goods, using them to establish a variety of new trading routes around the world. Pivoting to the Indian Ocean, Chapter Two delves into the history of Oman. After examining the rise of the Busaidi dynasty, the chapter focuses on the reign of Said bin Sultan and his efforts to expand his political and commercial influence across the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. Faced with ongoing opposition from regional competitors and rising British interference, the Omani leader turned to East Africa, a historical sphere of Omani influence, alighting on Zanzibar in 1828.

Chapter Three returns to the commercial world of Salem, tracing the careers of Michael Shepard, David Pingree, and John Bertram as they weathered the ebbs and flows of Salem's tumultuous maritime sector. In time, each man turned to the Western Indian Ocean, emerging as dominant figures in Salem's nascent trade with Zanzibar and its surroundings.

Chapter Four follows Richard Waters, the first American consul to the Omani Empire, after his arrival on Zanzibar. Far from home, Waters faced numerous obstacles to commercial success. This section focuses on Waters's relationships with Said bin Sultan and Jairam Shivji before detailing the unique commercial practices that developed on the island, a careful melding of Indo-Atlantic traditions.

Beginning with the arrival of Waters's successor, Charles Ward, Chapter Five examines the tensions between American commerce and diplomacy on Zanzibar. As British interests in East Africa grew, the inexperienced merchant-diplomat struggled to appease Said bin Sultan and the British consul. In turn, growing diplomatic disputes threatened to subsume Salem's commercial interests. Said bin Sultan's death in 1856, however, upended the status quo. Even so, American trade remained robust, reaching record highs in the late 1850s. Finally, Chapter Six traces the ramifications of the American Civil War on Zanzibar and the Western Indian Ocean. As their supply chains shattered, American merchants rapidly lost out to European competitors. Returning to the region after the war, Salem's businessmen faced a resurgent British Empire. Building on longstanding relationships, Salem's merchants turned to Indian businessmen in Zanzibar, Aden, and Bombay to act as intermediaries to British financial and legal institutions. Over time, however, expanding European empires and shifting commercial patterns at home proved exceedingly challenging. Although Salem's merchants continued to trade in the region until the 1890s, their broad influence in commercial and diplomatic affairs faded after the 1870s.

Prologue: The Custom House

*In my native town of Salem, at the head of what, half a century ago, in the days of old King Derby, was a bustling wharf,—but which is now burdened with decayed wooden warehouses, and exhibits few or no symptoms of commercial life; except, perhaps, a bark or brig, half-way down its melancholy length, discharging hides; or, nearer at hand, a Nova Scotia schooner, pitching out her cargo of firewood,—at the head, I say, of this dilapidated wharf, which the tide often overflows, and along which, at the base and in the rear of the row of buildings, the track of many languid years is seen in a border of unthrifty grass...*²⁹

Such is the unassuming beginning to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, a lurid tale of community, stigma, and isolation. For three long years, 1846 to 1849, Hawthorne labored as the "Surveyor for the District of Salem and Beverly and Inspector of the Revenue for the Port of Salem," a job for which he held great ambivalence. Its salary assured him the economic stability that he often struggled to achieve, while its limited and repetitive responsibilities dulled his mind.³⁰ For Hawthorne, it was a time of creative stagnation.³¹ Upon climbing the thirteen auspicious steps to the custom house's yawning double doors, Hawthorne bemoaned that "my doom was on me. It was not the first time, nor the second, that I had gone away,—as it seemed, permanently,—but yet returned, like the bad half-penny; or as if Salem were for me the inevitable centre of the universe."³² And yet, just as surely as Hawthorne used the ageing edifice of the custom house as a literary framing device, positioning his masterpiece as simply a lost manuscript rediscovered amongst the ephemera of Salem's former glory, his wider description of the town's fortunes framed mid-century Salem as a place lost to history, or at the very least,

²⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. Brian Harding (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

³⁰ Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 258.

³¹ Miller, *Salem is My Dwelling Place*, 265.

³² Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 12.

relevance. While once it had status and meaning, now it simply lingered on, forever in the shadow of Old Salem, the jewel of the early republic.

Salem's economic standing and cultural significance had undoubtedly declined over the preceding decades albeit not to the extreme degree often depicted. Hawthorne's Salem was still deeply involved in the American and international economy. Whereas once it had aspired to direct maritime competition with Boston, Salem now found itself nestled, if awkwardly, into Massachusetts's manufacturing economy, closely interconnected with Boston and Lowell in ways unimaginable to its inhabitants of just a generation earlier. Some parts of Salem's present were more recognizable. Its ships still plied oceans the world over, now departing from its wharfs loaded with manufactured goods instead of raw materials, and sailing for South American and East Africa instead of China, India, or Western Europe. Even the jaded Hawthorne acknowledged that these ongoing voyages gave Salem a semblance of its old spark: "On some such morning, when three or four vessels happen to have arrived at once,—usually from Africa or South America,—or to be on the verge of their departure thitherward, there is a sound of frequent feet, passing briskly up and down the granite steps."³³

While there is much truth in Hawthorne's writings, both on history and human nature, his "commanding view" from the custom house's arched windows gave him but a glimpse of Salem's place in the world. Nonetheless, this *is* the story of Hawthorne's world of the "sea-flushed shipmaster," the ship "owner, cheerful or sombre, gracious or in the sulks," the "wrinkle-browed, grizzly-bearded, care-worn merchant," the "smart young clerk" and the "outward-bound sailor... or the recently arrived one, pale and feeble."³⁴ But it is also much more. It is the story of

³³ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 6.

³⁴ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 7.

Americans a world away from Hawthorne's office, on the small, lush island of Zanzibar and in port cities up and down East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. It is the story of the people they encountered and who in turn encountered them, spanning over half a century: Enslaved East Africans and laborers, Indian merchants, Arab landowners and captains, European diplomats and thousands of others who defy easy categorization. It is the story of Salem and Zanzibar, two places linked by profit, too often viewed as inhabiting the very edge of relevance in larger narratives, if mentioned at all. At its very core, it is the story of trade: the exchange of goods and money and the circulation of people and ideas. But before we can more fully engage with Salem or Zanzibar and their place in a rapidly changing world, we must, like Hawthorne, turn to the past.

Chapter One: Massachusetts's Triangular Trade: Salem, Boston, and Lowell, 1790-1830

In 1800, the town of Salem, Massachusetts stood as one of the clearest beneficiaries of American independence. The nation's sixth-largest town, between 1789 and 1800 Salem brought in over three million dollars' worth of tariffs, roughly 4.5 percent of all federal revenue.³⁵ Freed from the restraints of British mercantilism and coerced, if relatively benign, colonial dependency, its numerous vessels sailed across the world's oceans, enriching the town's merchants and the country as a whole. Beyond a healthy presence in the carrying and re-export trade between the Caribbean and Europe, Salem had become synonymous with mercantile ventures to India, Southeast Asia, and China. Departing with a wide array of raw materials, agricultural goods, and shipping supplies, Salem's vessels returned full of Chinese tea, Sumatran pepper, Indian cloth, and other commodities. By 1830, however, Salem's national standing had waned. Even in Massachusetts, its status as the state's second city had become murkier.

Between 1800 and 1830, Salem had been drawn further into Boston's orbit. Separated by only fifteen miles, the two towns were bound ever closer as better transportation networks spread across the region. Increasingly, Salem's merchants lost out to their Boston peers as they competed for the same money, men, and commodities.³⁶ As Boston's population and wealth grew, it achieved a handful of competitive advantages over its smaller rival. Aided by its easy access to the halls of power, the city amassed a highly capitalized collection of banks and

³⁵ Charles Osgood and Henry Batchelder, *Historical Sketch of Salem, 1626-1879* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1879) and Hugh McCulloch, *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the State of the Finances for the Year 1866* (Washington: Treasury Department, 1866), 306-7. These calculations do not include loans or treasury notes as part of federal government's total revenue.

³⁶ For a detailed depiction of Boston's consolidation of the region's economy see Benjamin Labaree, "The Making of an Empire: Boston and Essex County, 1790-1850," in *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850*, ed. Conrad Wright and Kathryn Viens (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), pp. 343-364.

insurance companies. At the same time, Boston's grandees ensured that new transportation projects prioritized their city. Following the cataclysms of Jefferson's Embargo and the War of 1812, steady profits from maritime trade were far from assured. To preserve their wealth, Boston's elites continued to scout out other opportunities. Building on a successful wartime venture in Waltham, which proved that a comprehensive system of mechanized cloth production could operate profitably, a cabal of Boston merchants began planning the industrial center of Lowell. By the late 1820s, the manufacturing facility had been realized, producing hundreds of thousands of yards of cheap, relatively high-quality cloth.

By 1830, Salem, Boston, and Lowell lay at the heart of a profound shift in the region's, and the nation's, economy. While the rapid rise of manufacturing began to reorient Massachusetts's economy away from the sea, the emergence of a powerful new industry did not doom maritime commerce.³⁷ Far from it. While Salem faced its own struggles, Boston, New

³⁷ Prevailing scholarship on the American economy after the War of 1812 includes relatively little consideration of international trade, often casting it aside as a relic of the Federalist Party. While rapid Western expansion and the increasing continental scope of the nation's economy diluted the influence of merchants and maritime commerce, they remained essential to economic growth. Beyond their well-acknowledged role of supplying essential capital to early industrial and transportation projects, merchants imported wide arrays of materials needed for emergent industries and even more importantly marketed, shipped, and sold the massive amounts of raw materials, agricultural goods, and manufactured items that flowed from American farms and factories. Even the most comprehensive and influential syntheses of this period rarely mention international trade after 1815. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: the Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009); This dearth of information also extends to Charles Sellers' *The Market Revolution*. Early on, Sellers notes that "the merchant was a general capitalist entrepreneur, not only sending out trading ventures but lending to local borrowers, financing retailers, speculating in urban real estate and interior lands, underwriting marine insurance, and engaging in privateering and military contracting during the recurrent colonial wars." After 1815, however, Sellers rarely returns to this theme, rendering international commerce almost invisible. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21.

York, and other ports prospered, growing exceptionally quickly in the first half of the nineteenth century. Even as the rise of Lowell and other mill towns resulted in significant shifts in capital allocation and commercial practices, the manufacturing and maritime sectors remained heavily intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Although some merchants did turn their back on the sea, many more invested in both industries or remained committed to international trade.³⁸ Led by Salem, New England merchants quickly incorporated a new wave of manufactured products into their trade networks.

³⁸ A handful of monographs have called attention to this misconception although generally in passing. Of particular note is Robert Dalzell's *Enterprising Elite*. Although Dalzell is referring to the immediate aftermath of the War of 1812, his insight holds true for the following decades as well. See Robert F. Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 63. In *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, John Schroeder offers a more comprehensive consideration of America's international trade albeit beginning in 1829. Although less concerned with the national economy as a whole, Schroeder argues that merchants meaningfully influenced national politics and federal policy, continuing to shape the nation to benefit their ventures whenever possible. John H. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire: the Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829-1861* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); The most expansive consideration of the extensive influence of international trade on the American economy comes from recent literature on the Cotton South and its integration into the global economy. Although primarily concerned with the period after 1830, works like the *River of Dark Dreams* position the South as a key player in a system of international exchange, touching on the role of global supply chains for agricultural materials and cash crops. Johnson also delves into the world of cotton factors, primarily in New Orleans, New York, and Liverpool, analyzing the role of the specialists in transferring capital, credit, and commodities across the Atlantic. Nonetheless, besides periodic considerations of Liverpool and a chapter investigating the Cotton South's role in instigating American expansionism and filibustering, Johnson's remains primarily concerned with the continental system of American agriculture. *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013). In *Empire of Cotton*, Sven Beckert also acknowledges the centrality of merchants in creating and maintaining the global supply chains at the heart of his work, noting that "mill owners focused on manufacturing only and left the selling to a burgeoning group of merchants." Nonetheless, the global scope and expansive chronology of his work often minimizes the role of international brokers as he traces the often-convoluted path from production to consumption of cotton goods across the world. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 150.

Although Lowell's rapid success added even more pressure on Salem's economy by funneling outsized profits to Boston's elites, the mill town soon offered Salem a salve to its financial woes. As Salem struggled to compete directly with Boston in trade with India and China, it used its newfound access to cotton cloth to bolster its flagging economy. Nor was this a one-sided relationship. In turn, Salem's merchants, and their peers across New England, offered upstart manufacturers a nearly inexhaustible outlet for their wares. With each passing year, merchant ships carried more manufactured goods to ports across the world. Although many speculative ventures proved unprofitable and were not repeated, others served as the basis for sustained, profitable trade routes that expanded the United States' influence around the world.

Salem: 1790-1815

The last quarter of the eighteenth century brought upheaval to New England. And yet, the American Revolution and its aftermath offered new opportunities across the region. A generation of young men left their rocky farms in search of better economic prospects at sea. One such man was Thomas Perkins. Born in 1758 in the small farming community of Topsfield, Massachusetts, initially Perkins followed his father's path, training as a cobbler.³⁹ Around 1780 he set off for Salem, finding work as a sailor. Caught up in the Revolution, in barely a year Perkins had become the first mate of the *Ranger*, a privateer carrying goods between Salem and ports in Virginia and Cuba. By the time the war ground to a halt, Perkins was firmly integrated into maritime Salem. In his first peacetime voyage, he sailed to Jamaica, onboard the *Three Friends*,

³⁹ Not to be confused with his more famous contemporary, the Boston based merchant Thomas Handasyd Perkins (1764-1854), who gained a large fortune through the slave trade and selling furs to China.

owned by Salem's Johnathan Gardner.⁴⁰ By 1789, Thomas Perkins had amassed enough capital to buy a stake in Gardner's ship, *Two Brothers*.⁴¹ In 1793, Perkins joined forces with Joseph Peabody, whom he had served alongside during the revolution. Buoyed by their commercial prowess as well as economic forces beyond their control, the partners soon expanded their maritime operations. Between 1793 and 1800, the men purchased seven ships, becoming a commercial force on Salem's crowded wharfs.⁴²

The post-revolutionary growth of maritime trade in Salem, Boston, and New England depended significantly on developments across the Atlantic. The prolonged upheaval of the French Revolution triggered a decade of warfare that embroiled much of Europe. After the execution of Louis XVI in 1792, France declared a preemptive war against Britain. British maritime superiority, however, effectively severed France from its colonies, leaving both nations without access to a variety of goods. American traders were more than happy to fill the void, selling raw materials and foodstuff primarily to the West Indies but also as far away as the Indian Ocean. British interference made direct trade between French colonies and mainland Europe almost impossible. Instead, American merchants carried goods from the West Indies to the United States, unloading and paying custom duties before exporting them to Europe. As British merchants became entangled in the war, American traders increasingly frequented British ports as well. As part of the Jay Treaty in 1795, the British allowed American ships to access their

⁴⁰ William Endicott and Walter Whitehill, *Captain Joseph Peabody; East India Merchant of Salem (1757-1844)* (Salem, MA: Peabody Museum, 1962), 10.

⁴¹ A. Hitchings and Stephen Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1906), 188.

⁴² Seafaring was far from a one-way ticket to riches or even subsistence, assuming a sailor survived. Forced back to land by age, disease, or economic downturns, countless sailors found themselves in poverty, dependent on mutual aid societies or the charitable whims of their former employers. Hitchings and Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts 1789-1900*.

colonies in the West and East Indies, albeit with severe limitations. Between 1790 and 1815, a full third of American imports were re-exported.⁴³ As the wars dragged on, the British increasingly targeted American ships regardless of their point of origin in an attempt to stop any supplies from reaching their adversaries.

While Salem's economic interests were heavily concentrated in maritime trade, the town's political allegiances were less unified.⁴⁴ The Jay Treaty proved particularly controversial. Although the treaty offered access to British ports, it imposed heavily limitations on neutral trade with other European powers, a direct threat to many of the town's merchants.⁴⁵ Nationwide, the treaty served as an early line of political demarcation, galvanizing dissenters to Washington's policies into the nascent Republican party. While opposition coalesced in the House of Representatives, in Salem, Federalists dominated city government.⁴⁶ America's adoption of the Jay Treaty exacerbated tensions with France, leading to a series of naval altercations that brought to two countries to the brink of war. With trade increasingly threatened on all sides, Salem's citizens began to split more radically over potential political solutions.

⁴³ James Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 83.

⁴⁴ Salem's role as an economic powerhouse of the early republic ensured its citizens a leading role in state politics and a place at the table in the nascent federal government. Throughout almost all of the 1790s and the first decade of the 1800s, Salem controlled one of Massachusetts's senate seats. Salem's influence extended into the Executive Branch as well. Timothy Pickering, a rare Salem elite with few direct ties to maritime trade, served as the United States' second postmaster general under Washington before joining his cabinet first as Secretary of War and then as Secretary of State. With the Republicans in control of the executive branch after the election of 1800, Pickering transitioned to the Senate, where he served as a leading critic of Jefferson and his economic policies. See: Gerard Clarfield, *Timothy Pickering and the American Republic* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 229-35.

⁴⁵ Randall Flaherty, "To 'the Most Distant Parts of the Globe': Trade, Politics, and the Maritime Frontier in the Early Republic, 1763-1819" (dissertation, 2014), 251.

⁴⁶ Flaherty, "To 'the most distant parts of the Globe,'" 256.

By 1800, a Republican party had emerged in Salem. Its first candidate for the House of Representatives, the merchant Jacob Crowninshield carried Salem but lost the election.⁴⁷ Two years later, however, Crowninshield won the seat. When Secretary of State James Madison entered into treaty negotiations with Great Britain in 1806, he turned to Crowninshield as a de facto expert on American mercantile interests.⁴⁸ Crowninshield did not disappoint, describing American commerce as “under peculiar embarrassments” due to the numerous punitive regulations imposed by Great Britain.⁴⁹ As most of Salem’s elites and workers depended on international trade, each party in Salem supported policies they believed would bolster maritime commerce in the long run.

Maritime trade did indeed face severe threats. A single long-distance vessel, filled to the brim with exports or a return cargo, represented an investment of at least ten thousand dollars, and often much more. Even with insurance, losing a ship could break a merchant’s business and leave behind a series of unpaid debts, triggering a wave of insolvencies in Salem’s tightly integrated commercial sector. No merchant was immune. In 1799, a French privateer captured Perkins and Peabody’s vessel, the *Tabitha*, in the Caribbean.⁵⁰ On the ground, however, Salem’s economy continued to grow, with the profits of foreign trade outweighing the risks of European aggression. Even after losing the *Tabitha*, Perkins and Peabody prospered. In 1800, the businessmen dissolved their partnership, having made enough money to undertake ventures independently.⁵¹ Beginning in the summer of 1800, the two men divided their four remaining

⁴⁷ Flaherty, “To ‘the most distant parts of the Globe,’” 259.

⁴⁸ “John Reinoehl, “Some Remarks on the American Trade: Jacob Crowninshield to James Madison 1806,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (January 1959): pp. 83-118, 85.

⁴⁹ Reinoehl, “Some Remarks on the American Trade,” 93.

⁵⁰ A. Hitchings and Stephen Phillips *Ships Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900*, 182.

⁵¹ Endicott and Whitehill, *Captain Joseph Peabody*, 17.

ships. Between 1801 and 1806, Perkins purchased five new vessels, using them to make voyages to the Caribbean and Western Europe.⁵²

Britain and France's increasingly brazen attacks on American shipping forced the country's merchants and politicians to make a series of tough choices. Writ large, Federalists believed that some limits on the scope and scale of trade, like the Jay Treaty, were acceptable in order to limit instability and avoid open conflict. Republicans called foul. Having fought a revolution for the opportunity to make economic decisions free of coercion, how could the U.S. let European powers dictate its policy? Republicans in Salem and across the nation believed that the U.S. needed to take extreme measures to ensure free trade across the globe. Supported by a Republican Congress, Thomas Jefferson considered a handful of radical solutions. Trying to avoid outright war, for which the U.S. was woefully unprepared, Jefferson proposed an embargo banning all international trade. Any exemptions would require explicit permission from Congress.

With the stroke of Jefferson's celebrated pen on December 22, 1807, a generation of mercantile growth spluttered to a stop. Across the nation, hundreds of ships languished in port. Nowhere was hit harder than Salem, whose maritime ascent had continued even under the threat of European seizures. In just three months during 1807, Salem paid \$511,000 in tariffs, the highest in the town's history.⁵³ Jefferson could not have done more damage to the town's merchants and economy if he had tried. Salem's international voyages sank from 242 in 1807 to

⁵² "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879," Online Database, Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT, <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>

⁵³ Elias Derby, "Memoir of Elias Hasket Derby, Merchant of Salem, Mass.," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review* XXXVI, no. II (February 1857): 147-188, 168.

just 21 in 1808.⁵⁴ Although Thomas Perkins' had four active ships, only the *Union* managed to make a voyage in 1808. Further from the Massachusetts coastline, things looked little better. American exports fell by eighty percent and imports by sixty.⁵⁵ Federal revenue sank nearly fifty-five percent between 1808 and 1809 as tariffs plummeted.⁵⁶ By comparison, the main target of the policy, England, saw relatively little effect.⁵⁷

Struggling to remain relevant and convinced that the embargo spelled economic disaster, Federalists took the offensive, encouraging protests, circulating letters, and publishing article after article lambasting Jefferson, the embargo, and the Republican Party. As the embargo stretched on, unemployed sailors and their families clamored for relief.⁵⁸ With decades of prosperity crumbling around them, Salem's citizens began turning against the Republican Party. While Federalists pointed to the economic downturn as proof of the embargo's failure, Republicans blamed its ineffectiveness on Federalist merchants who continued a modicum of trade by exploiting loopholes. In the election of 1808, the Federalists won Salem's house district,

⁵⁴ "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879," Mystic Seaport Museum.

⁵⁵ Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: a History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 655.

⁵⁶ McCulloch, *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the State of the Finances for the Year 1866*, 307.

⁵⁷ At the outset of the embargo, both Salem and Massachusetts were politically divided, with Republicans rapidly making gains. In 1806 the party had taken over the governorship and both houses of Massachusetts's General Court although the state's Senators remained Federalists. At a glance, one might assume the maritime community of Salem would universally decry the embargo, a policy that left the majority of its ships indefinitely beached. Views on the embargo, however, filtered through the all-powerful lens of partisanship. Salem's representative, Jacob Crowinshield, was one of the strongest supporters of Jefferson's hardline approach. Although by the summer of 1808 over seventy towns across Massachusetts had signed onto a Federalist petition calling on Congress to repeal the embargo, Salem voted fifty-four percent to forty-six percent against adding its name to the resolution. Flaherty, "*To 'the most distant parts of the Globe,'*" 265.

⁵⁸ Flaherty, "*To 'the most distant parts of the Globe,'*" 308.

carrying the town by a single vote.⁵⁹ Statewide, the party won both houses of the General Court. Nationally, the Federalists gained seats, succeeding even in the South, Jefferson's traditional power base. Although the Republicans retained a healthy majority in Congress, the embargo's glaring failings forced the legislature to act. Days before he left office, Jefferson approved the embargo's repeal. To save face, the Republicans passed the largely unenforceable Non-Intercourse Act which allowed American ships to trade with every country besides Britain and France.

Salem's global scope allowed it to rebound quickly. After the embargo, the town experienced a large, albeit short-lived, commercial boom. In 1809, the town fielded 250 international trips, its highest number ever. The next year, Salem's merchants dispatched another 192 voyages to ports around the world. Thomas Perkins also prospered, going on a ship buying spree. In a single year, Perkins purchased four vessels, as many as he had bought during the last decade. During the heady years of 1800-1807 Perkins preferred to go it alone, purchasing ships outright. After the crunch of the embargo, however, he returned to undertaking shared ventures; three of the four vessels he bought were purchased with other investors. The 1810s, however, were not to be a replay of the 1790s. Salem's international voyages declined significantly in 1811 as political tensions spiked yet again. The outbreak of war in 1812 significantly hampered New England's maritime trade. Unlike the embargo, war allowed for other profitable, albeit risky, maritime ventures. As Thomas Perkins and thousands of his peers had discovered a generation earlier, military careers and privateering offered a range of opportunities for ship owners and sailors alike.

⁵⁹ Flaherty, "*To 'the most distant parts of the Globe,'*" 312.

Initially, Salem fared relatively well, transitioning rapidly from commerce to privateering. Within a year, the town had outfitted over forty ships that captured half a million dollars' worth of British cargos.⁶⁰ As the British strengthened their blockade, however, the town's economy and citizens suffered. Any ship that ventured from the harbor faced the threat of seizure. As a resident bemoaned, "we have so little to do in these days of non-intercourse, embargo & war."⁶¹ With British raids striking a number of coastal communities across New England, many Salemites felt abandoned by the federal government. Led by Salem's Representative, former Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, a group of New England elites assembled the Hartford Convention, eager to renegotiate, and perhaps even void, the constitutional contract between New England and the federal government.

When peace came in 1815, calls for disunion diminished although many hard feelings remained. Even as maritime trade resumed, the town's recovered slowly. Already heavily strained from a decade of turmoil, maritime commerce faced increasing economic and political headwinds. As the Federalists floundered on the national stage, damaged by the Hartford Convention's treasonous undertones, more bills passed Congress that injured maritime trade, the party's favored industry. In 1816, Congress passed a sizable tariff on imported cotton cloth, signaling the beginning of a new economic regime. With each passing year, Salem faced more threats to its longstanding commercial prowess.

Confronted with an uncertain future, an aging Thomas Perkins assessed his options. For two years none of his vessels had been able to make an international voyage. Seeing the writing on the wall, Perkins began divesting from shipping. The old mariner sold most of his ships to his

⁶⁰ Flaherty, "*To 'the most distant parts of the Globe,'*" 330

⁶¹ Nathaniel Bowditch to Timothy Pickering, January 18, 1814, Ms. N-708, Timothy Pickering Papers, 1731-1927, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

junior partners although he retained investments in two vessels trading with the West Indies, South America, and Europe. Instead, Perkins put his fortune to work on land, loaning money to nearby businesses and municipalities. In 1819, Perkins retired to his native Topsfield, leaving his business to his longtime deputy, Michael Shepard.⁶² While Perkins' forty-year career as a mariner and merchant had come to an end, New England's merchant class forged ahead even as it faced new headwinds.

Beginning in 1807, the United States faced a series of severe economic stresses that hit the country's maritime sector particularly hard. In addition to Jefferson's embargo and the War of 1812, the nation suffered an unprecedented economic collapse in 1819 as its expanding market economy fell prey to rampant financial speculation and inflation. New England's merchants also faced new challenges from the federal government. As the United States expanded west, incorporating new territories and adding states, port cities no longer held as much sway over the nation's economy or politics. Starting with the Tariff of 1816, Congress passed a series of new laws taxing foreign imports. More than simple attempts to raise revenue, the tariffs targeted foreign goods, especially cotton cloth, in order to galvanize domestic production. In particular, the Tariff of 1816 imposed high duties on cotton textiles, a central feature of Salem and Boston lucrative trade with India.

Echoing Nathaniel Hawthorne's jaded portrayal of the town in *The Scarlet Letter*, historians of nineteenth-century Salem depicts a town in decline, whose maritime trade cratered after the War of 1812. Although less explicit, historians have outlined a similar declension for New England's broader shipping sector. More a sin of omission than anything else, relatively

⁶² Hitchings and Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts 1789-1900*, 156.

little scholarship centers, or even meaningfully considers, New England's maritime commerce after 1820. While Salem's shipping capacity did fall significantly between 1810 and 1830, it rebounded and held relatively steady until the Civil War. During the same period, Boston and New York's shipping expanded rapidly belying the idea of a general decline in international commerce.

Even as maritime trade rebounded, the recovery favored larger ports, especially Boston and New York. Although Salem's overall shipping capacity and international voyages never reached their pre-war highs, the loss of trade was limited. Between 1810 and 1820, Salem's tonnage fell over twenty percent. Although the town's shipping capacity continued to decline until 1830, within a decade Salem had regained nearly ninety percent of its pre-1812 shipping capacity.⁶³ Boston and New York's maritime sectors experienced similar trajectories as Salem's albeit with much stronger rebounds. Both cities' tonnage fell roughly fifteen percent between 1810 and 1820. Unlike Salem, both Boston and New York overtook their 1810 levels in the 1830s and never looked back.⁶⁴ By 1860, Boston's total capacity was over three times higher than in 1810, and New York's had expanded by almost five and a half times.⁶⁵

⁶³ See Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

⁶⁴ See Figure 3 in the Appendix.

⁶⁵ The rebound and expansion of America's maritime trade resulted primarily from the country's growing exports of raw cotton and other agricultural goods. While the United States exported roughly twenty-eight million pounds of cotton in 1826, by 1859 it had risen to 1.7 billion, an increase of over sixty times. As Lowell ramped up production, and other businessmen scrambled to cash in, America's manufacturing output, especially of cotton cloth, soared as well. While the majority of American cloth was consumed domestically, by the 1830s, American merchants shipped millions of yards of cloth to Europe and beyond, greatly facilitating the nation's commercial growth. Henry Earl, *A Centennial History of Fall River, Mass.: Comprising a Record of Its Corporate Progress from 1656 to 1876, with Sketches of Its Manufacturing Industries, Local and General Characteristics, Valuable Statistical Tables, Etc.* (New York: Atlantic Publishing and Engraving Company, 1877), 72. Massachusetts's smaller ports weathered the stormy 1810s more successfully than either Boston or Salem, with Ipswich, Gloucester, New Bedford, Barnstable, Edgartown, and Nantucket all seeing net increases. The

Salem to Boston

Even before the War of 1812, Massachusetts's changing economy had favored Boston over Salem. After 1815, many of the trends accelerated. While Massachusetts's maritime trade continued expanding, especially after 1830, Boston's relative share rose much faster than Salem's. As communication and transportation became more efficient, the two towns, separated by barely fifteen miles, were placed in constant competition. With each passing year, Boston overshadowed Salem's maritime commerce, siphoning off its trade routes, businessmen, and their capital. While there were numerous overlapping causes, the most basic factor was geographical.

Although each port had its limitations, Salem's shallow harbor began imeding the town's trade. As American manufacturing underwent a technological revolution, ocean trade experienced a subtler evolution. Earlier generations of American traders had used smaller ships to their benefit, outpacing East India Company (EIC) behemoths in the Indian Ocean. As American trade in the region expanded and became more established, American merchants turned to bigger vessels.⁶⁶ After the War of 1812, ships with larger cargo capacities became the norm. At Salem, any ship with a hull deeper than twelve feet had to be unloaded by smaller boats, adding to the time and expense of doing business. At low tide, much of the land bordering Salem's wharves was actually above water.⁶⁷ A similar ship approaching Boston could

whaling centers of Nantucket and New Bedford faired particularly well. While the towns had to grapple with the War of 1812 and the Panic of 1819, they were much more isolated from the economic fallout of the tariffs on cotton imports. Samuel Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts: 1783-1860* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 378.

⁶⁶ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit*, 191.

⁶⁷ Nathaniel Bowditch, *Chart of the Harbours of Salem, Marblehead, Beverly and Manchester from a Survey taken in the years 1804, 5, & 6, 1834*, Chart.

comfortably dock at any time.⁶⁸ Boston's steady expansion into deeper parts of its harbor, first with wharfs and then by backfilling, meant that the port's capacity grew as time went on. Salem's proximity to the peninsula of Marblehead made similar attempts impractical. While dredging allowed minor alterations to natural features, it required massive amounts of capital and promised uncertain returns. By the 1830s, Boston commonly sent 450-ton vessels to the Indian Ocean.⁶⁹ Salem's ships remained much smaller, with tonnages ranging between 100 and 250.⁷⁰ Although Salem succeeded in finding profitable trade routes with smaller ships, its harbor limited the town's overall capacity as well as its merchants' ability to adapt to a wider range of shipping routes.

As Massachusetts's maritime trade spiked after independence, businessmen founded financial institutions to ease access to capital and minimize risk. As Massachusetts's largest city and political center, Boston was the site of the state's first banks and insurance companies, granting a comparative advantage to its inhabitants. With fewer connections to Boston's elite, Salem's merchants did not have as easy access to these institutions. Although banks sometimes issued shares to raise funds from the wider community and circulated paper notes, early banks predominantly lent money to a small cadre of investors and their closest business associates. Boston's first bank opened in 1784, followed fifteen years later by Salem's.⁷¹ By 1810, Boston boasted three banks to Salem's two. Although similar in number, the banks' capitalization varied dramatically. Boston's reserves totaled two million dollars versus Salem's six hundred thousand.

⁶⁸ Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 97.

⁶⁹ Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 254.

⁷⁰ Hitchings and Phillips, *Ships Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900*.

⁷¹ Tamara Thornton, *Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers: How a Nineteenth-Century Man of Business, Science, and the Sea Changed American Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 86.

By 1820, Boston boasted seven banks worth nearly seven million dollars while Salem's funds had stagnated.⁷² Still, Salem retained some influence as Nathaniel Silsbee, a local merchant and future senator, served as a commissioner and eventually the director of Boston's branch of the Second Bank of the United States.⁷³

If anything, the emerging insurance industry proved even more essential to seafaring. While a semblance of maritime insurance had existed in the American colonies, it had been a less formal affair, mirroring a mutual aid society in which a group of subscribers covered a member's losses. In the 1790s, Massachusetts's merchants began chartering profit seeking companies, taking advantage of the state's loosening restrictions on creating corporations.⁷⁴ This led to a rapid expansion of marine and fire insurance companies. Boston saw its first in 1795, followed by Ashton's Salem Marine Insurance Company in 1800.⁷⁵ Like banks, early insurance companies were exclusive organizations. Accessing their capital depended heavily on cultivating close commercial relationships with their backers.⁷⁶ By 1837, there were twenty-six insurance companies in Boston alone, worth roughly sixty million dollars.⁷⁷ Boston's booming industry did not preclude the success of Salem's smaller counterparts, as merchants often purchased policies from multiple companies to cover the extensive capital they invested in a single long-distance voyage. For any given trip, a Salem merchant might buy two or three policies from companies in town as well as one from a firm in Boston to cover the cost of the cargo and the vessel itself.

⁷² Joseph Van Fenstermaker, *The Development of American Commercial Banking: 1782-1837* (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1965), 139-41.

⁷³ Nathaniel Silsbee, "Biographical Notes: Nathaniel Silsbee," *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* XXXV, no. 1 (January 1899): pp. 1-79, 39.

⁷⁴ Thornton, *Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers*, 86,

⁷⁵ Thornton, *Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers*, 87.

⁷⁶ Thornton, *Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers*, 87.

⁷⁷ Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: the Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 36-9.

Still, Boston's financial sector, which offered a wide array of services and access to large pots of money, made the town a uniquely appealing place to do business to Salem's detriment.

While numerous factors privileged Boston's shipping industry over Salem's, the state capital was not simply edging out Salem in new opportunities but actively siphoning off its wealth. The two cities' proximity allowed people to relocate relatively easily. Men who had made their fortunes in Salem eyed Boston as they aimed to further their commercial and political careers. Even before the War of 1812, a handful of Salem's most prominent men began moving to Boston adding to Salem's economic woes and struggling sense of self-importance. In 1809, Salem's largest ship owner William Gray made the move, followed the next year by one of the scions of the East India trade, Israel Thorndike. After the war, the hits kept coming, forcing Salem to adapt to, if not fully accept, its place in Boston's shadow. As Joseph Peabody's son noted caustically, "the good people of Boston—not content with their own capital, they avail themselves of their neighbors' funds."⁷⁸

While Boston enjoyed a period of economic growth, increasingly at Salem's expense, it faced its own challenges from New York City. The rapid development of more efficient transportation networks, first canals and then railroads, threatened to divert commerce from Massachusetts's coastal cities. As the nation's population pushed west, access to international trade was not enough to ensure a port's future. To remain commercially viable, coastal cities had to be able to move goods and people arriving from across the Atlantic hundreds of miles inland. As the ports' own populations spiked, and exports became a larger part of American maritime commerce, Salem, Boston, New York, and other Atlantic cities competed to corral goods streaming in from across New England and the Midwest. The completion of the Erie Canal in

⁷⁸ Toast by Joseph A. Peabody in "Dinner to Dr. Bowditch," *Salem Gazette*, August 12, 1823, 2.

1825 connected New York City directly to Lake Erie, granting it access to a large swath of the interior, severely threatening Boston's status as a national port. Boxed in by the Berkshire Mountains to the west, and with no major river in its vicinity, Massachusetts's premier city risked being forced into a purely regional role.

Boston to Lowell

Challenged by the collapse of international trade during the War of 1812, a handful of Boston's richest merchants looked inland. Later dubbed the Boston Associates, this group, headed by Francis Lowell, proposed an expansive commercial vision: the mechanized production of cotton cloth, from raw material to finished textile, under a single roof.⁷⁹ While similar ventures had existed in Britain for decades, Lowell's proposal far outstripped existing American projects. Building upon Samuel Slater's textile spinning factories in Rhode Island as well as a couple of unsuccessful attempts by their peers, the men incorporated the Boston Manufacturing Company (BMC) in 1813. Of the twelve initial stakeholders, the majority were international merchants, including onetime Salem fixture Israel Thorndike.⁸⁰ Although composed almost completely of Bostonians, five of the twelve founders had connections to Salem's India and China trades, including James Lloyd, the BMC's first president.⁸¹ As James Fichter has shown, Massachusetts's early industrialization was a direct outgrowth of mercantile trade, specifically with the Indian Ocean: "American merchants' capital accumulation progressed from small-scale shipping to renting freight for silver, to partnerships in a single voyage, to business corporations.

⁷⁹ Frances Gregory, *Nathan Appleton, Merchant and Entrepreneur, 1779-1861* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 145-50.

⁸⁰ Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 150.

⁸¹ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit*, 265; Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 154.

Each stage included more investors and raised larger amounts of capital while containing vestiges from the previous stage.”⁸²

The BMC built its first factory in Waltham, just up the Charles River from Boston. Finished in 1814, the factory sold its first cloth the next year. Although the venture was capital intensive, it quickly proved profitable. The BMC’s stakeholders had estimated that they would earn a profit selling cloth at \$.25 per yard. The fabric hit the market at over \$.30.⁸³ Still in its infancy, the Waltham experiment nonetheless quickly gained support from the federal government. Frustrated by British attempts to flood the market with discounted cotton cloth, Congress passed a twenty-five percent tariff on cotton and wool imports in 1816. The bill also set a base price for all India cottons, effectively making them more expensive than their domestic counterparts. The timing of the tariff was hardly coincidental. Francis Lowell spent much of 1816 in Washington arguing for the law. Targeting South Carolina representative John Calhoun and the tariff’s author William Lowndes, Lowell pushed congress to support a moderate tariff that perfectly fit his needs at Waltham.⁸⁴ In a large part due to the tailored policy, the BMC’s sales jumped from \$2,574.87 1815 to \$121,368.59 in 1819.⁸⁵ As the Waltham factory ramped up production, it began pushing the limits of the Charles River’s water supply. Although Francis Lowell died in 1817, ten of the twelve original investors recombined to form the Merrimack Manufacturing Company (MMC) which spearheaded the next chapter in American manufacturing: the creation of Lowell.

⁸² Fichter, *So Great a Proffit*, 271

⁸³ Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 165

⁸⁴ Nathan Appleton, *Introduction of the Power Loom and Origin of Lowell* (Lowell, MA: B. H. Penhallow, 1858), 13.

⁸⁵ Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 168.

Founded in 1822, the MMC allowed the Boston Associates to assemble the land, water, and capital needed to build an expansive industrial center. After scouting out various locations, the investors decided on the nearby community of East Chelmsford.⁸⁶ Already planning on an industrial center with fifty mills, the Boston Associates formed a handful of new companies to raise capital. By 1825, the MMC's first mills were up and running, producing cloth profitably at \$.25 per yard.⁸⁷ Like other corporations of the time, the BMC, the MMC, and their successors, were insular organizations that funneled their ballooning profits to a handful of stockholders. While a handful of former Salem merchants had invested in the Boston Associates' early companies, they had only been able to do so after they moved to Boston.

Although European wars had helped a generation of Salem and Boston merchants earn their fortunes, they had paid a heavy price between 1807 and 1815. Spurred by the collapse of maritime commerce during the War of 1812, many of New England's merchants were eager for new, reliable economic opportunities. The first profits from the Boston Associates' Waltham factory in 1815 and the passage of the Tariff of 1816 made manufacturing an appealing, if largely untested, investment. As a result, many of the Boston Associates began shifting their maritime fortunes to manufacturing, albeit slowly. Between the 1810s and the 1830s, Israel Thorndike, a former scion of Salem's India trade, transitioned most of his commercial investments from maritime commerce to industrial pursuits. Following his move to Boston in 1811, Thorndike and his son purchased twenty percent of the BMC's initial stock in 1813.⁸⁸ Upon his death in 1832, Thorndike had over \$400,000 invested in manufacturing stocks, nearly

⁸⁶ Heidi Vernon, *Lowell: The Corporations and the City* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 4-5.

⁸⁷ Earl, *A Centennial History of Fall River, Mass.*, 83.

⁸⁸ John Forbes, *Israel Thorndike, Federalist Financier* (New York: Exposition Press, 1953), 138.

forty percent of his total fortune. By that time, almost none of his wealth remained invested in shipping.⁸⁹

Although other members of the Boston Associates followed Thorndike's example, pivoting from merchant to manufacturer, the small group of wealthy men were not representative of New England's merchant class. Although many merchants did invest in manufacturing after the War of 1812, there was no full-fledged transition of merchant capital into industrial projects. For each merchant who invested their fortune into manufacturing during the 1810s and '20s, numerous men, like Michael Shepard, kept the bulk of their wealth in maritime ventures. The men who did make the change tended to be older, well-established, and wealthy. Having survived the political and economic hurricanes of the 1810s, these men found manufacturing particularly appealing. Initially, investing in Massachusetts's first factories required a large amount of capital, limiting the number of men involved. As industrial investments became available to more people through expanded stock sales, many active merchants bought manufacturing stocks as a relatively simple way to diversify their portfolios. As Robert Dalzell notes in *Enterprising Elite*, "shipping in Boston and Massachusetts generally continued to expand... Thus the facts do not support the view that the traditional activities of Boston merchants failed to attract and employ capital in 1815; if anything they suggest the reverse."⁹⁰ While the rapid rise of American manufacturing reoriented of the nation's economy after the War of 1812, Massachusetts and New England's maritime sector expanded proportionately, especially after 1830.

⁸⁹ Forbes, *Israel Thorndike*.

⁹⁰ Dalzell, *Enterprising Elites*, 63.

During the late 1820s, the Boston Associates' business ventures began to inch open. While the MMC had five initial investors, twenty years later, nearly 400 men and women owned its stock.⁹¹ Nonetheless, power and profits still flowed predominately to the founders and their heirs. Transferring stocks remained a private affair, which insured that family members, business partners, and close friends had first access. Spurred by expansive domestic, and even international, demand, Lowell's founders continued to pour money into the industrial center. By 1840, the surviving Boston Associates, their families, and business partners had created seventeen distinct corporations to produce ever more cloth.⁹² Such rapid growth, however, required new sources of capital. Over time, a new wave of businessmen bought stock in existing companies and founded their own, largely with the blessing of the existing owners.

Some of the most influential newcomers were Abbott and Amos Lawrence. Like most elites of their generation, the Lawrences had grown wealthy through international trade. Based in Boston, the pair had made their fortune importing large quantities of cloth, primarily from China and Britain. The Boston Associates' rapid production of domestic cloth had seriously undermined their business. By the time the Lawrences began to invest in Lowell in the late 1820s, they had been forced to transform their company, becoming exporters of American cloth. In 1830, the Lawrences took the next step. Alongside charter members of the Boston Associates, they founded three corporations in Lowell, the Lawrence Manufacturing Company, the Suffolk Manufacturing Company, and the Tremont Mills. The largest of the three, the Lawrence Manufacturing Company encompassed five mills. In late 1833, the LMC's first two mills came

⁹¹ Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite*, 56.

⁹² Gregory, *Nathan Appleton*, 195.

online, producing over 1.3 million yards of cloth in just six months.⁹³ By 1836 all five were up and running, producing over 5.3 million yards of cloth in six months.⁹⁴

Although Massachusetts still did not have a clear answer to the Erie Canal, Lowell's rapid rise offered the state an entire industry to bolster its economic future. Millions of yards of cotton cloth, however, served very little purpose languishing in the Massachusetts countryside. A commercial colony of Boston from the very start, Lowell already had a direct path to the city. In addition to a steady supply of water, the Boston Associates had selected East Chelmsford for its location on the Middlesex Canal. Completed in 1803, the waterway connected Boston to the Merrimack River, granting the city access to much of New England's interior. As Lowell's production spiked, the Middlesex Canal proved insufficient. In response, the Boston Associates turned to another burgeoning industry: railroads. Leveraging their collective fortunes and political influence, the businessmen lobbied the state for a corporate charter which they received in 1830. Funded by stock sales, the twenty-six-mile track opened in 1835, allowing for the fast, reliable movement of bulk goods between Lowell and Boston.⁹⁵

Lowell to Salem

As Boston consolidated its commercial advantages and its citizens funneled money into a growing number of manufacturing centers, Salem's economy shuddered. Even after losing a number of its merchants to Boston, however, the town's commercial district remained crowded with a new generation of businessmen. As Thomas Perkins enjoyed his pastoral retirement, his

⁹³ Volume HA-2, Lawrence Manufacturing Company Collection, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA.

⁹⁴ Volume HA-2, LMCC, HBS.

⁹⁵ Ronald Karr, *The Rail Lines of Southern New England: a Handbook of Railroad History* (Pepperell, MA: Branch Line Press, 1994), 231.

former deputy, Michael Shepard, adapted to Salem's shifting fortunes on his own. For the time being, Shepard remained committed to international trade, overseeing a fleet of six ships while also selling goods imported from other American cities on commission.⁹⁶ While Shepard and many of his peers managed to stay afloat, national policies placed them at a sustained disadvantage. As the Boston Associates' industrial ventures flourished, Massachusetts's politicians pivoted quickly, seeking to bolster industrial development. By the 1820s, Salem's merchants could not even count on their own elected officials to prioritize maritime trade above all else. While Salem Representative Nathaniel Silsbee had fought tooth and nail against a new tariff in 1819, as a senator he voted for yet another round of tariffs in 1828, as did Salem's representative Benjamin Crowninshield.⁹⁷

As Massachusetts's manufacturing capacity expanded, even Salem's most entrenched merchants understood that their futures depended on accommodating the manufacturing sector. Like their wealthier counterparts in Boston, many of the town's traders sought to found their own industrial projects. This was hardly a new idea. As early as 1796, a group of Salem businessmen, including Joseph Peabody, financed the construction of the Salem Iron Factory in nearby Danvers.⁹⁸ Although surrounded by water, Salem lacked a waterway capable of powering large mills. Forced to look beyond the town's borders, a group of Salem financiers founded the Newmarket Manufacturing Company in 1822. The next year, they built a six-story factory full of

⁹⁶ MH 23, Box 1, Michael Shepard Papers, Peabody Essex Museum, Rowley, MA and Hitchings and Phillips, *Ships Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900*

⁹⁷ *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States, Sixteenth Congress, First Session*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1855), 1987 and Robert Booth, *Death of an Empire: the Rise and Murderous Fall of Salem, America's Richest City* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2011), 171.

⁹⁸ Francis Bradlee, "The Salem Iron Factory," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 54 (1918), 105.

the newest looms. Although the project offered Salem merchants a source of income, not to mention cloth, the mills were located relatively far away in southern New Hampshire.⁹⁹

Encouraged by Waltham's profits, and worried by Boston tightening grip on the state's economy, Salem's leaders sought to transform their town into Massachusetts's newest industrial center. During March 1823, the town held a meeting to discuss the possibility of damming Collins Cove, a shallow inlet bordering Salem's eastern shore, to provide tidal power for industrial expansion.¹⁰⁰ Although the town's residents rejected the proposal as prohibitively expensive, Salem's would-be industrialists soon turned to an even grander scheme. Instead of blocking off only Collins Cove, they would build a mile-long dam bridging both the cove and the nearby North River. Inspired by a similar project in Boston, the businessmen, including Joseph Peabody, commissioned a report that estimated that the project could power multiple mills totaling 50,000 spindles.¹⁰¹

By the time the Salem Mill Dam Corporation (SMDC) was formally incorporated in 1826, Lowell's first mills were already up and running. Although the SMDC floated almost three thousand shares, they did so preemptively, requiring only the promise of future payment. When the board called for the money, a large number of shareholders did not pay. Although the company faced a series of setbacks, including multiple board members resigning, its backers continued to champion the cause, lauding the effort in local newspapers.¹⁰² To its supporters, the company represented the town's best hope for economic prosperity and perhaps even survival.

⁹⁹ Booth, *Death of an Empire*, 96-7.

¹⁰⁰ Booth, *Death of an Empire*, 97.

¹⁰¹ John Pickering, Joseph Ropes, and John Treadwell, *Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Practicability and Expediency of Establishing Manufactures in Salem* (Salem, MA: Warwick Palfray, 1826).

¹⁰² Benjamin Hawkes, *Report of the Directors of the Salem Mill Dam Corporation, at a Meeting of the Stockholders, Held May 7th, 1827* (Salem, MA: W. & S. B. Ives, 1827).

Although the corporation forged ahead, it made little progress towards constructing the dam, the basis for the entire industrial endeavor. As the SMDC languished, some of its backers began to lose patience. In 1827, Joseph Peabody forced a special meeting of the board to allow him and other defectors to “withdraw their names from the subscription books of the Corporation.”¹⁰³ A second engineering survey proved much less optimistic than the first, eventually dooming the entire project.¹⁰⁴ By 1830, the SDMC, Salem’s grand foray into the industrial age, was mired in lawsuits and facing the prospect of dissolution. For the time being, Salem had failed to transform into an industrial center.

Not to be put off, Salem’s merchants plotted their next move. Following the success of the Boston-Lowell line, railroads began to spread across eastern Massachusetts. Unlike Lowell, Salem did not need a railroad to import or export large amounts of goods. Being cut out of Massachusetts’s expanding rail network, however, risked further curtailing the town’s commercial viability. Still, the new technology had its detractors. In 1833, a group of recalcitrant residents, many with vested interests in existing turnpikes and shipping routes, undermined an attempt to bring rail to Salem. In 1838, the first railroad reached Salem, with the town serving as a waypoint between Boston and Portland, Maine.¹⁰⁵ Although the branch helped integrate Salem into the regions increasingly land-based economy, it also solidified the town’s dependence on Boston. As Lowell’s output of cotton cloth expanded, and became increasingly integral to the state’s commerce, Salem was forced to rely on Boston for access. The first rail link directly connecting Lowell and Salem was built in 1850. By then, however, the competition between

¹⁰³ J. Walsh, “Notice,” *Salem Gazette*, October 23, 1827, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Treadwell, *To S.C. Phillips, Benja. Hawkes and Perley Putnam, Esqr's, Committee of the Directors of the Salem Mill Dam Corporation* (Boston, MA, 1828).

¹⁰⁵ Karr, *The Rail Lines of Southern New England*, 257.

Boston and Salem for commercial prominence had long been settled. Lowell's factories continued to send their cloth directly to Boston.¹⁰⁶

Eager to take advantage of Massachusetts's rapid industrialization, Salem's merchants did not wait for a railroad to integrate Lowell's cloth into their commercial networks. By 1827, Michael Shepard had added cotton cloth to his cargoes, seeking out potential consumers across the world. When his vessel, the *Ann* departed Salem that August, it carried more than 10,000 yards of the fabric valued at over \$1,300.¹⁰⁷ More than a third of the *Ann*'s cargo, the cloth offered Michael Shepard and other Salem merchants a much-needed opportunity for commercial growth, or least adaptation, as they struggled to adjust to life in Boston's shadow. In return, Salem's merchants purchased an ever-increasing amount of Lowell's output. More importantly, however, they opened entire world regions to American textiles and other manufactured goods. As the *Ann* ventured deeper into the Indian Ocean, its captain made sales in ports across East African and the Arabian Peninsula. With each visit, Salem's merchants helped established the United States as a commercial and industrial power. While Salem's traders integrated American manufactured goods into preexisting systems of global exchange, their sustained presence slowly began to transform well-established patterns of trade in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

¹⁰⁶ Karr, *The Rail Lines of Southern New England*, 231.

¹⁰⁷ Invoice of the *Ann*, 1827, MH 23, B1 F2, Michael Shepard Papers, Peabody Essex Museum, Rowley, MA.

Chapter Two: The Rise of Said bin Sultan and his Omani Empire, 1750-1828

In 1800, the Omani Empire was one of the Western Indian Ocean's leading commercial and naval powers, serving as an essential intermediary between Arabia, India, and East Africa.¹⁰⁸ From their perch at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, the Omanis controlled a swath of the Arabian coastline, the opposing shore of Persia, and a series of strategic islands.¹⁰⁹ Beyond their immediate surroundings, Omani rulers claimed a series of tributaries thousands of miles down the coast of East Africa. Oman's wealth, power, and prestige, however, stemmed more from its maritime commerce than any terrestrial holdings. Although Oman had long been a naval power, during the first half of the eighteenth century the territory had been embroiled in an extended

¹⁰⁸ Communities across the Indian Ocean have been deeply connected by commerce and migration for millennia. Even so, scholarly consideration of the region as a discrete entity is fairly recent. Although shaped by older scholarship such as Fernand Braudel's work on the Mediterranean, the concept of the "Indian Ocean World" draws most heavily upon work by K. N. Chaudhuri. See: K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: an Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For a more recent synthesis of the field that fully integrates Africa into the history of the Indian Ocean and continues to the present, see: Edward Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁹ Although Oman has its share of national(ist) histories, scholars have long examined its role in politics and commerce beyond Southwestern Arabia. While Mohamed Bhacker centers Oman's relationship with the British, his monograph galvanized a reconsideration of Oman's outsized influence on the development of the Western Indian Ocean. See: Mohamed Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar* (London: Routledge, 1992). During much of the nineteenth century, Oman and Zanzibar operated as a single political entity, necessitating a detailed consideration of East Africa in any comprehensive work on Omani history. A wave of recent scholars has built on Bhacker's foundations, tracing the many connections between Oman, East Africa, and the rest of the Western Indian Ocean. See: Nicholas Roberts, "A Sea of Wealth: Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan, His Omani Empire, and the Making of an Oceanic Marketplace," PhD diss. (University of Notre Dame, 2021) and Thomas McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018). For a wide-ranging consideration of Oman's influence in the development of legal and commercial practices across the region, see: Fahad Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

civil war. By the 1750s, the Busaidi family, led by Ahmad bin Said, had gained control of Oman's most important ports. Over the next thirty years, Ahmad bin Said amassed a sizable fleet of vessels which he used for both mercantile and naval purposes. An established merchant in his own right, Ahmad prioritized his own commercial success while also working to increase the overall flow of trade through Muscat. Even after his death around 1780, Ahmad bin Said's successors pursued similar ventures. During this period, commercial expansion and the accumulation of wealth underwrote Oman's military and diplomatic decisions.

By the late eighteenth century, Oman had extensive experience dealing with European states and their merchants, having weathered a century of Portuguese occupation ending in 1650.¹¹⁰ During the 1790s, European interest in the Persian Gulf spiked as Britain and France faced off in yet another war. Although Oman quickly became caught between the two empires as the Revolutionary Wars reached the Indian Ocean, it carefully maintained its neutrality.¹¹¹ As it had in the United States, the conflict offered Oman an opportunity for commercial expansion. With each side eager to court the Omanis, the sultan traded diplomatic recognition and minor concessions for expanded commercial access to British and French ports. As a result, Muscat's merchants prospered by serving as neutral carriers to colonial cities. Ahmad's successor, Hamad bin Ahmad, took particular advantage of the situation, buying a series of captured British ships

¹¹⁰ For two recent explorations of the East India Company's long history in the region, see: William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: the East India Company, Corporate Violence, and the Pillage of an Empire* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), and Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: a History* (London: Routledge, 2014). For a comparable overview of the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean, see: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: a Political and Economic History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

¹¹¹ For a comprehensive reconsideration of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars as truly global conflicts, in which indigenous powers affected the outcome in the Indian Ocean theater, see: Alexander Mikaberidze, *The Napoleonic Wars: a Global History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

from the French. Although at times European fighting threatened Oman's ships and ports, on the whole the country experienced a period of commercial and territorial expansion. When Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, Britain's interest in the Gulf intensified. Convinced that France sought to attack India directly, Britain began aggressively courting Oman while the Busaidis strove to remain neutral. By the early 1800s, the British had largely prevailed in the Western Indian Ocean although the French retained their regional base on Île de France. Choosing the winning side, Oman cultivated a stronger diplomatic and military relationship with the British even as they retained the right to trade with the French.

The death of the reigning Busaidi Sultan in 1804, however, threatened to undermine Oman's commercial rise. After a period of upheaval, Said bin Sultan won the throne. Only sixteen years old, the youth faced a series of pressing challenges. On land, Wahhabi forces occupied parts of Oman's interior and threatened to overwhelm Said's coastal enclaves. At sea, local rivals harassed Omani ships and sought to supersede Muscat's commercial primacy. And yet, through savvy politics, violence, and luck, Said bin Sultan managed to solidify his control over Oman. As the Busaidi princeling emerged as a power player in the Gulf, he faced growing pressure from the British. Although the imminent threat of French invasion had passed, Britain still considered the Persian Gulf essential to their commercial and geopolitical standing in India. While British and Omani interests sometimes converged, culminating in joint naval operations against Said's competitors, over time Britain's insistence on curtailing maritime confrontations limited Oman's opportunities for territorial and commercial expansion close to home.¹¹²

¹¹² There are numerous books exploring the expansion of British power in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf although more recent scholarship has significantly reinterpreted Britain's influence in the region especially before 1820. Stretched thin by war in Europe and consumed by troubles in India, Britain remained heavily dependent on the support of local powers like Oman to exert tangible influence in the region. See: John Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795 -*

As Said consolidated power, he expanded his mercantile endeavors, dispatching trading ventures across the Western Indian Ocean. His overall wealth, however, depended heavily on Muscat's custom fees as well as those collected at other ports he controlled. To bolster his income, Said turned to Muscat's Gujarati community.¹¹³ Although merchants from Western India had played pivotal roles in Arabian ports for centuries, the Busaidis cultivated a particularly close relationship with a handful of prolific Indian businessmen, especially members of the Shivji Topan family. By the time Said ascended to the throne, courting Gujarati merchants had become a prerequisite for Busaidi rule.

Although Said and Muscat's mercantile community remained heavily invested in the Gulf and Western India, Britain's expanding presence complicated Oman's established blend of naval pressure and commercial prowess. As a result, Said and his Gujarati backers began to explore prospects in East Africa, a longstanding sphere of Omani influence. Although a handful

1880 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Richard Alston and Stuart Laing, *Unshook till the End of Time: a History of Britain and Oman, 1650-1975* (London: Gilgamesh Publishing, 2012).

¹¹³ During this period, Indian merchants served as essential conduits to trade in ports across the Indian Ocean. Although Muscat and Zanzibar were home to traders from multiple Indian cities, Gujarati merchants, specifically from Kutch, proved particularly successful. For the most comprehensive exploration of the role of Kutchi merchants in facilitating the commercial success of the Omani Empire, see: Chhaya Goswami, *The Call of the Sea: Kachchhi Traders in Muscat and Zanzibar; c. 1800-1880* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2011) and Chhaya Goswami, *Globalization before Its Time: the Gujarati Merchants from Kachchh* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2016). For an authoritative examination of the role of Indian merchants, Kutchi and otherwise, in the commercial development of Muscat, see: Calvin H. Allen, Jr., "Sayyids, Shets and Sultāns: Politics and Trade in Masqat under the Āl Bū Sa'īd, 1785-1914" (Ph.D. Diss., Seattle, University of Washington, 1978) and Calvin H. Allen, Jr., "The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44, no. 1 (1981): 39–53. For a detailed examination of a comparable Indian community in Mozambique, see: Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

of ports already paid lip service to Said's rule, Oman's presence in the region was marginal. Still, as Muscat's commerce began to flag, East Africa offered Said an opportunity for territorial and economic expansion. Beginning in the early 1820s, Said dispatched a series of naval forays thousands of miles down the East African coastline. Although the Omanis met with mixed results, the Busaidi forces cemented Said's control over the burgeoning commercial center of Zanzibar.¹¹⁴ As the island's economy expanded, it received more of Said's attention and resources.¹¹⁵ In 1828 the Omani Sultan sailed to Zanzibar to consolidate his rule and take stock of the island's economic potential. From that moment on, the fate of Said bin Sultan and his

¹¹⁴ Zanzibar is the largest part of the Zanzibar archipelago, a series of barrier islands located off the coast of modern-day Tanzania. Zanzibar lies more than twenty miles off the coast, separated from the mainland by a shallow channel. The moniker Zanzibar likely emerged as an Arabized version of a Persian name combining "Zang" (black) and "Bar" (land). Arabian and Persian traders and travelers originally applied the term to a wide swath of the East African coast before it slowly became associated with a single island. While the island retains the name Zanzibar in most Western languages, locally it is referred to as Unguja, its Swahili name. Richard Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), 28.

¹¹⁵ During the mid-twentieth century, Zanzibar attracted a steady stream of attention from Western scholars who produced a series of primarily narrative, and sometimes dubiously ethnographic, historical works, see: William Ingrams, *Zanzibar, Its History and Its People* (London: Witherby, 1931), Cyrus Townsend Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa: with Particular Reference to the Salem Trade with Zanzibar* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1950), John Gray, *History of Zanzibar: from the Middle Ages to 1856* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), and Norman Bennett, *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar* (London: Routledge, 1978). More recently, Abdul Sheriff has emerged as the preeminent scholar of nineteenth-century Zanzibar. Although focused on the commercial realm, Sheriff's scholarship offers insights into many aspects of Zanzibari society as well as the island's pivotal role in the history of the wider region. See: Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Ohio University Press, 1987). For a nuanced examination of the economic and cultural context of nineteenth-century Zanzibar, see: C. S. Nicholls, *The Swahili Coast: Politics, Diplomacy and Trade on the East African Littoral 1798-1856* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971). In the last few decades, historical scholarship on Zanzibar has been relatively limited although works focused more broadly on the Omani Empire and the Western Indian Ocean have contributed new insights to the island's history. See previous footnotes.

Omani Empire would be intimately linked to the small East African island almost 2500 miles from Muscat.

Monsoon

Largescale maritime commerce in the Indian Ocean predates recorded history. By the first millennium BCE, sailors from East Africa to Indonesia, and everywhere in-between, harnessed seasonal monsoon winds to travel across the ocean, often for extended distances.¹¹⁶ This chapter, and the project as a whole, focuses heavily on the development of trade networks in the Western Indian Ocean. Using the Indian subcontinent as a subjective line of demarcation, the “Western Indian Ocean” stretches from the southern tip of India, across the Arabian Peninsula, and down the coast of East Africa, reaching to the southernmost extent of the monsoon system off the coast of Mozambique and Madagascar. Still, early traders were not limited to a single region or even an individual oceanic system. Maritime and terrestrial trade routes anchored in the Indian Ocean propelled goods, people, and ideas to the Mediterranean, China, and beyond.

For millennia, annual monsoons nurtured Indian Ocean trade. A massive meteorological phenomenon, the Indian Ocean monsoon system involves seismic changes in atmospheric circulation, precipitation, and the distribution of heat, affecting regions from East Africa to Southeast Asia. On a more human scale, however, monsoons resulted in predictable, sustained winds that significantly eased extended oceanic travel. The system is largely biannual, creating two stark seasonal variations: the northeast monsoon and the southwest monsoon. Each year between November and January, a large mass of high pressure develops over central Asia, blowing dry winds from western India and Arabia down the coast of East Africa. Corresponding

¹¹⁶ Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, 7.

surface currents also flow south, speeding enterprising dhows along their way. Beginning around April and lasting through August the process reverses, with high pressure in the Southern Indian Ocean triggering strong northerly winds bringing with them large amounts of rain. From the coast of East Africa, a trading vessel would soon be swept north past Somalia, along the Arabian coast, as far as Persia or northwestern India.¹¹⁷ The seasonal nature of monsoons, which might strand a sailor at his destination for months as he waited for the winds to change, contributed to the cosmopolitan nature of the region. When American traders first rounded the Cape of Good Hope, they were forced to bend the prevailing rules of Atlantic seafaring to the new realities that awaited them in the Indian Ocean. As they struggled to do, a steady stream of dhows skimmed by, the latest inheritors of well over a thousand years of maritime knowledge and experience.

The Ya'rubis and the Busaidis

Throughout Oman's long history it has rarely existed as a unified entity. Southeastern Arabia can crudely be divided into two regions: the more insular high arid interior and the comparatively densely inhabited coastline oriented to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Although tightly interconnected by shared culture, religion, trade, and heritage, the two regions often belonged to different local rulers. In reality, power in Oman was usually much more diffuse with each city and its surroundings falling under the influence of a different strongman or family. During the early seventeenth century, internecine warfare engulfed much of the interior. Even when a dominant faction implemented some control, Oman's loose confederations of extended families made volatility a permanent feature of the landscape. For centuries, the most powerful institution was the position of Imam, the elected leader of Oman's dominant Ibadi sect

¹¹⁷ Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, 7-8.

of Islam. Historically, Omani Imams had toed the line between religious figures and military and political leaders. Every so often, the Imam managed to tie together significant stretches of territory into a political entity, dubbed an Imamate, in Oman's interior.

In 1624, Nasir bin Murshid al-Ya'rubī claimed the role of Imam, forming a loose coalition that controlled much of the interior. Since the early 1500s, however, the Portuguese had occupied Oman's largest ports. Nasir initiated an extended campaign against the Europeans. Over the next twenty-five years, the Ya'rubis and their supporters expelled Portugal port by port, finally reclaiming Muscat in 1650. Although Nasir bin Murshid died before the reconquest was completed, the Ya'rubis emerged from the conflict as Oman's dominate political family. As they consolidated power, they refashioned the position of Imam into a hereditary title. Although the role did not always pass from father to son, it became the sole preserve of the Ya'rubis.¹¹⁸

Ya'rubī rule triggered a rapid turnaround in Omani fortunes from Portuguese client to maritime power. After expelling the Portuguese from much of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, the Ya'rubis began to eye maritime trade with growing interest, sending representatives to India, Persia, Yemen, and Iraq.¹¹⁹ Oman's growing fleet was hardly limited to trade. Flushed with victory, the Omanis quickly targeted their perennial rival, the Persians, taking control of the languishing port of Hormuz. Within just two years, the Omanis raided Portuguese holdings thousands of miles away, reaching as far south as Zanzibar.¹²⁰ Controlling Muscat and Hormuz, the Omanis exerted more control over trade in the Persian Gulf than the Portuguese had ever

¹¹⁸ For a succinct overview of the Ya'rubī Dynasty, see: Roberts, "A Sea of Wealth," 46-61. For an examination of Ya'rubī precursors to Busaidi trading practices, see: Abdul Aziz El-Ashban, "The Formation of the Omani Trading Empire under the Ya'Arabah Dynasty (1624-1719)," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 1 (1979): pp. 354-371.

¹¹⁹ Salīl ibn Ruzaik and George Badger, *History of the Imāms and Seyyids of Omān* (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1871). 89.

¹²⁰ Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa*, 77.

managed. While their practical imposition on trade was limited, the Ya'rubis grew wealthy through commercial taxes.

By the late 1600s, Oman's navy had matured into an effective fighting force. Overall, "Omani maritime power... was stronger than that of any of the native rulers along the entire shores of the Indian Ocean."¹²¹ While the Omanis could not match the firepower of the strongest European states, the Portuguese Empire was a different story. In 1670, the Omanis landed an army at Diu, sacking the town in a nighttime attack.¹²² During the late seventeenth century, the Omanis conducted frequent raids across the region, exacting money and resources while targeting any competitors for maritime supremacy. As had long been the case, the Ya'rubis did not make a clear delineation between mercantile and military activities, using the same ships for trade and naval forays. In the 1690s, the Omanis became increasingly aggressive, seeking territorial expansion in order to solidify their control of regional trade. In 1696, an Omani fleet laid siege to the Portuguese fort at Mombasa, more than two thousand miles from Muscat. After two years, Portuguese resistance collapsed as their garrison succumbed to disease.¹²³ The Omanis continued south, laying claim to the coastal islands of Pemba and Zanzibar.¹²⁴ Still, the Omanis did not have the means to directly oversee the region, leaving behind only a small garrison at Mombasa.

The Ya'rubis' increasing disregard for the religious role of the Imam as well as their expansive commercial undertakings led to growing disillusionment amongst some tribal leaders

¹²¹ El-Ashban, "The Formation of the Omani Trading Empire under the Ya'Aribah Dynasty (1624-1719)," 368.

¹²² Samuel Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1919), 215.

¹²³ Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa*, 62.

¹²⁴ Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East Africa*, 63.

in the interior. Following the death of the Ya'rubī Imam in 1719, Oman experienced thirty years of instability and civil war. While there were many moving alliances and factions, the fighting often pitted the inhabitants of the interior against those of the coastal cities. Periodically the Persians entered the fray, chipping away at Oman's coastal holdings.¹²⁵ In 1743, the Persians captured Muscat. Pressing their advantage, Persian troops continued to the port of Sohar. When the Persian forces failed to take the city, the town's governor, Ahmad bin Said, repaid the favor, marching to Muscat and besieging the city. By capturing Muscat, Ahmad bin Said, a member of the relatively minor Busaidi family, seized the title of Imam, although a Ya'rubī claimant remained. In 1749 the two sides met in a decisive battle. The last Ya'rubī Imam was killed, clearing the way for Ahmad bin Said and the Busaidis.¹²⁶

The extended period of instability severely curtailed Oman's maritime activities. In 1756, Ahmad bin Said's navy reportedly amounted to two ships.¹²⁷ The new Imam, however, was well versed in commerce. Before serving as governor of Sohar, Ahmad bin Said had been a merchant, at one point leading a Ya'rubī trading mission.¹²⁸ During his reign, Ahmad expanded Oman's maritime influence, primarily through trade. While Oman had retained nominal oversight over its East African outposts throughout the infighting, only Zanzibar accepted Busaidi rule without trouble. Mombasa quickly emerged as the center of resistance. The ruling Mazrui family, who had been appointed by the Ya'rubis, consolidated support from other Omani enclaves in the region. While the Mazruis continued to resist Busaidi oversight for decades, Oman's expanding

¹²⁵ Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, 253.

¹²⁶ Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf*, 264.

¹²⁷ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 20.

¹²⁸ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 16.

commercial presence strengthened the longstanding connections between the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa.

Following Ahmad bin Said's death around 1780, Oman began to splinter. As multiple male relatives vied for control, the Busaidis' influence waned in the interior. Even the coast, however, was far from unified as each claimant consolidated power over a different port. Although Ahmad's brother Hamad bin Said eventually won out, he struggled to regain control over the interior. Instead, Hamad turned his attentions to his de facto capital of Muscat. Although Muscat had been a commercial center for centuries, before the rise of the Busaidis it had vied for prominence with other Omani ports such as Sohar and Sur. Under Ahmad and Hamad, the Busaidis established Muscat as the center of government. To increase their income and prestige, the ruling clan worked to attract trade to Muscat, using the town's position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf to levy commercial duties on passing ships. Although the Busaidis took a variety of measures to bolster Muscat's economy and their own income, their alliance with Indian merchants proved most effective.

Indian Merchants

By 1800, Muscat was home to a well-established Indian community. Traders from Western India had long been a fixture at ports across Arabia and East Africa. Centuries before European ships reached the region, Indian merchants had set up shop in every major port. Residing in town for anywhere from a few months to decades, the businessmen filled a variety of essential roles as shippers, wholesalers, lenders, and merchants. Although Arab traders and members of other ethnic and religious minorities filled many of the same roles, some Indian traders had sizable advantages including ready access to a wide array of Indian commodities as

well as mature financial networks. Although the Busaidi relationship with Muscat's Indian community was particularly close, it was far from new. According to Omani traditions, Indian cooperation had proven essential to expelling the Portuguese from Muscat in 1650 when a leading merchant conspired to help Ya'rubi forces enter the city.¹²⁹ The Indian community's early support of the dynasty earned them an exemption from traditional Islamic taxes on non-Muslims.¹³⁰

For most of the eighteenth century, Muscat's Indian community had been dominated by Banyan merchants from Sind in northwestern India.¹³¹ In 1765, a Danish explorer estimated that the Indian population in Muscat numbered around twelve hundred. To his foreign eye, they were also well treated: "they are permitted to live agreeably to their own laws, to bring their wives hither, to set up idols in their chambers, and to burn their dead."¹³² Around the same time, the community erected a second Hindu temple. Still, commercial fortunes could change quickly. When an economic downturn hit Sind in the 1780s, much of the community departed looking for new opportunities. Their role was soon filled by traders from Gujarat, a nearby region of the Indian subcontinent.¹³³

By the nineteenth century, most commercial activity in the Western Indian Ocean involved Indian merchant houses to some extent. Although the organizations took a variety of

¹²⁹ ibn Ruzaik and Badger, *History of Imams and Seyyids of Oman*, 80-5.

¹³⁰ "Calvin Allen Jr., "The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 44, no. 1 (1981): pp. 39-53, 41.

¹³¹ Strictly speaking, "Banyan" refers to a member of the Vanya Hindu merchant caste. Early European sources, especially British writings, conflated Banyan with Indian, collapsing nuanced cultural identities into the broad stroke of a single signifier. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 69.

¹³² Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, trans. Robert Heron (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), 116.

¹³³ Allen, "The Indian Merchant Community of Masqat," 40-5.

forms, the most common was the family firm. Often these organizations started fairly local, with a merchant slowly building up a fleet of ships for trade with nearby towns. As he amassed more capital, the trader might expand his horizons, dispatching ships to major ports across the region. To facilitate and oversee his investments in more distant ports, the businessman would dispatch younger male relatives to live and work in important trading centers for an extended period. When they had gained enough experience and wealth, the junior relatives could expand their operations abroad or return home to take a larger role in the original venture. If all went well, over a relatively short time an extended family could build up an efficient, flexible commercial network, moving money, commodities, and information hundreds or thousands of miles around the Indian Ocean. While numerous Indian families jockeyed for market share in ports across the region, few were as successful or resilient as the Shivji Topan family.

Headed by Thakkur Topan Pashu, the patriarch based in Mandvi, Kutch, during the mid-eighteenth century the family firm grew into a well-established maritime business.¹³⁴ During the 1780s at the latest Topan dispatched his son, Thakkur Shivji Topan to Muscat to represent the firm. By 1785, Shivji had formed a close financial relationship with the Busaidis, accompanying the Omani sultan on a naval venture to East Africa. As time passed, Shivji's financial support became increasingly central to Busaidi rule, as the family firm began to underwrite Omani military campaigns.¹³⁵ Although highly influential, the Shivji Topan firm faced stiff competition in Muscat. Indeed, a rival firm run by another Kutchi family, the Bhimanis, served as the city's custom masters for decades, ensuring a steady flow of cash as the port's fortunes rose.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Gosswami, *The Call of the Sea*, 192.

¹³⁵ Bishara, *Sea of Debt*, 8.

¹³⁶ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 71-2.

Between 1783 and 1804, three sultans ruled Oman in relatively quick succession. Although at times the turnover threatened Oman's territorial holdings, each sultan prioritized expanding Muscat's commercial sector. Maximizing the flow of goods into Muscat ensured the Busaidis a steady income which underwrote their entire system of government. In the 1780s, Muscat's custom duties were lowered to 6.5 percent for all foreign trade. Previously, the port had used a much less efficient system based on the religion and ethnicity of each merchant.¹³⁷ By 1802, the tariffs had been lowered again, reaching 1.5 percent for Muslims and five percent for everyone else. Export duties were entirely eliminated. Alongside these favorable policies, the Busaidis sent representatives to numerous ports, even as far away as Batavia, to encourage traders to visit Muscat. Once again, the Busaidis melded commercial expansion with naval might, building up their own fleet. For the first time since the early 1700s, Muscat fielded one of the largest navies in the region. Putting the ships to good use, during the 1790s the Busaidis expanded Omani sovereignty on both sides of the Persian Gulf, capturing key islands and a handful of cities on the Persian coastline.¹³⁸

The British (and Americans)

Even as Oman reached a level of prosperity and regional importance it had not enjoyed since the early eighteenth century, it faced growing competition from the British East India Company (EIC). Although Oman harbored few territorial ambitions in India, Indian merchants and commodities had long played a central role in Omani commerce. Direct European control or economic imposition on the region threatened Muscat's profitability. While the EIC had arrived

¹³⁷ Before this policy change Western Christians were taxed five percent, Muslims six percent and Hindus and Jews nine percent. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 26.

¹³⁸ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 27.

in India nearly two centuries before, it had only recently emerged as a significant economic and political force. As recently as 1750, the company held almost no territory in the region. During an extended period of European conflict, encompassing the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the EIC appropriated other European holdings in India and began aggressively targeting local states that had allied with their enemies.¹³⁹

Although half a world away, the fate of the EIC depended on events occurring in Salem, Massachusetts, and the American colonies more broadly. While there had never been a clear delineation between the British Empire in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, during the mid-eighteenth century the regions were integrated as never before. As the population of the American colonies grew, London attempted to orchestrate a transoceanic commercial system. The EIC would oversee the largescale purchase and transport of Indian cotton cloth, tea, and other commodities for sale in England and the American colonies. In return, the American colonies would supply raw materials for the entire empire. As Jonathan Eacott put it:

the desires of colonists in America had been second in London to the perceived need for the colonists to be markets, not only for British manufactures but also for goods from India as well. Parliament dissuaded Americans from making products while encouraging Asian Indians to make them for Americans, supporting the Company in trading for these products and using imperial officials to impose duties on them.¹⁴⁰

Following the Seven Years' War, the British Government expanded their efforts to integrate the EIC's exports into the American colonies. While American Independence did not completely end this strategy, as the British still attempted to corner the market for American textiles, it did effectively divorce the success of the EIC from that of the American colonies. As discussed in Chapter One, after independence, American merchants faced significantly fewer

¹³⁹ Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Ra*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Jonathan Eacott, *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America 1600-1830* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 224.

impediments to direct trade with India. The Jay Treaty, which lifted some British regulations in 1795, facilitated even more trade with British India. American merchants proved so successful that they heavily eroded the EIC's profitability leading Parliament to revoke the Company's monopoly over Indian trade in 1813.

Broadly speaking, American Independence elicited renewed British investment in India, which in turn threatened Oman's commercial viability. Suddenly divested of a large swath of its colonies, and their incomes, the British Empire redoubled its efforts to monetize its eastern holdings. While India remained the domain of the EIC and not the British Crown, the hazy delineations between the two entities, controlled by overlapping cabals of the British elite, began to blur even further. In 1784, Parliament passed the India Bill which established a "Board of Control" that gave the government direct, if limited, oversight of the EIC.¹⁴¹ The Company's territorial acquisitions also began to speed up. The relatively small confrontations of the 1760s gave way to pitched battles involving tens of thousands of EIC troops and Indian allies.¹⁴² By 1805, the British had gained control of broad swaths of the subcontinent, although their holdings on the western coast remained limited.¹⁴³

War and Trade

Beyond parts of India, Britain's reach remained limited. The outbreak of yet another European war in 1793 stretched British resources even as it heightened its need for regional allies. Like it had in Salem, the conflict between Britain and France offered Omani merchants a range of commercial opportunities. Using its neutrality as a negotiating tactic, Oman wrung

¹⁴¹ Lawson, *The East India Company*, 122.

¹⁴² Lawson, *The East India Company*, 134.

¹⁴³ Lawson, *The East India Company*, 142.

commercial concessions from the British and the French while managing to retain access to both countries' ports. During the Revolutionary Wars, Muscat's merchants significantly increased their market share in the carrying trade between Indian cities. The period proved particularly lucrative for the Gujarati community who were well positioned to take advantage of rapid shifts in trade across India. The sultan and other Omani merchants also bought a series of captured British ships from the French. Around the same time, the port attracted a new wave of traders who sought the protection of the Omani flag and the commercial opportunities it offered. Between 1793 and 1803, Oman's merchant marine grew from half a dozen ships to more than fifty, becoming one of the largest commercial fleets sailing between India, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁴⁴ At its peak in the early 1800s, Muscat's tonnage totaled between forty and fifty thousand tons, comparable to the largest number ever achieved by Salem.

Although the outbreak of war had proved particularly lucrative, Omani shipping had other advantages. Like the Americans, Omanis employed much smaller vessels than the EIC. Drawn by lower costs, merchants across the region relied on Muscat's growing fleet to transport their goods.¹⁴⁵ While Oman's commercial growth during the 1790s relied heavily on carrying goods between Indian ports, Muscat's merchants also expanded their reach across the Western Indian Ocean. The Omanis doubled down on the coffee market of Mocha, Yemen while also furthering direct trade with Sind. At the same time, French purchases of enslaved East Africans rose, leading to increasing custom duties in Oman's East African enclaves.¹⁴⁶ Oman's newfound maritime strength also allowed them to chip away at Persian holdings on both sides of the Gulf.

¹⁴⁴ Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Ohio University Press, 1987), 22.

¹⁴⁵ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 26.

With each town and city brought under Omani oversight more money accrued to Muscat. In 1804, Muscat's revenues from custom duties hit MT\$180,000, almost double that of twenty years earlier.¹⁴⁷

The Rise of Said bin Sultan

As Oman's commercial fortunes rose, the region remained politically fragmented. In 1800, three of Ahmad bin Said's sons jockeyed for control of the coastline. Said, the Imam, at least in name, resided in Rustaq, Qays oversaw Sohar, and Sultan controlled Muscat and Oman's enclaves on the Persian Gulf.¹⁴⁸ Although they faced an array of shared enemies, the brothers sporadically targeted each other as they attempted to consolidate power for themselves. For the most part, Oman's vast interior remained out of reach, reverting to the oversight of a loose coalition of powerful extended families.

As a whole, Oman faced a series of significant threats. In the west, the puritanical Wahhabis seized territory and subjugated the populous. To the northwest, the Qasimi family chipped away at the Busaidis' recent acquisitions, at times attacking Muscat directly. Although the war between Britain and France had proved profitable, any misstep threatened to drag the Omanis into open conflict with one or both European powers. In 1804, Sultan bin Ahmad died in a naval confrontation with the Qasimis, breaking the tense status quo. Although Sultan had two sons, Salim and Said, they were too young to assume power. Sultan's brother, Qays, quickly marched on the city, eager to seize Oman's richest port. To retain control for Sultan's heirs, his sister Moza bint Said, recruited her nephew Badr bin Saif to protect the city, promising him the

¹⁴⁷ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 78.

¹⁴⁸ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 48.

role of regent. With Qays ascendant, Badr recruited Wahhabi troops to support his cause. Although Moza and Badr's coalition eventually won, Badr's reliance on the deeply unpopular Wahhabis caused immediate tensions. As time passed, Badr consolidated more support behind him, threatening to supersede Salim and Said's claims to the throne. With the status quo becoming untenable, Moza bint Said acted decisively, choosing Sultan's second son, Said, as his heir apparent. At her behest, the fifteen-year-old invited his cousin Badr to a meeting outside of Muscat. Although accounts vary slightly, most agree that Said bin Sultan stabbed his cousin to death, clearing his way to the throne.¹⁴⁹ In July 1806, Muscat had a new sultan.

Said's problems, however, were just beginning. Beyond Muscat he wielded little influence. Although Qays had been defeated, he still had numerous supporters as did the handful of other contenders for the throne. For the time being, Said was forced to pay tribute to the Wahhabis to prevent a full-scale invasion. The French and British continued to pressure Said to take a side, hoping that he would target their adversary. By Said's accession, Britain had solidified its position in the Western Indian Ocean although the French remained potent. With Muscat's economy heavily reliant on trade with India, Said had clear reasons to befriend the British even if it caused tensions with France. By 1809, Said was pursuing a closer relationship with the British who periodically offered, and then withdrew support. Stifled, Said turned to the Persians who offered him 1500 cavalry and a few pieces of artillery in his attempts to pacify Oman.¹⁵⁰ Said's offensive ended in disaster. In 1813, the Wahhabis reached Muscat, raiding outlying towns and refusing all offers of tribute. Luckily for Oman, around the same time

¹⁴⁹ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 53.

¹⁵⁰ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 62.

Ottoman troops advanced into the heart of Wahhabi territory, forcing them to withdraw from Oman.

Although his military undertakings had proved ineffective, Said bin Sultan had survived. As the leading figure in the anti-Wahhabi campaigns, Said gained prestige if not actual territory. During the 1810s, Said steadily expanded his reach. Through a savvy combination of bribes, imprisonment, and military forays, Said gained control over coastal Oman while also targeting other regional ports, particularly Bahrain and Ras-al-Khayma. In 1819, Oman and the British organized a joint attack against Ras-al-Khayma, who had targeted both nations' ships. The expedition was a success. Controlling the port would have cemented Said's commercial preeminence in the Gulf. The British, however, had other plans. Although increasingly allied with Said, the Empire benefited from a politically fractured Gulf where they could serve as a de facto mediator and sole great power. Instead of allowing Said to claim the city, the British imposed a "General Treaty of Peace" on a collection of Gulf leaders, forming the so-called Trucial Coast.¹⁵¹ Although Said retained a few holdings outside of Oman proper, Britain's actions heavily curtailed his ability to corner regional trade. To continue to expand his own wealth and prestige, Said would have to look beyond the Gulf.

The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 severely weakened Muscat's commercial standing, undermining Said's authority as well. As had long been the case, uniting Oman's disparate communities depended heavily on distributing payments to local leaders. During the war, Oman's neutrality, and ability to rebuff European aggression, had drawn merchants from across the region, attracting a new wave of investments. Although most of Muscat's established Indian community remained after the war, many newcomers reverted to older trade routes or

¹⁵¹ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 92.

sought out lucrative opportunities in western India and East Africa. In 1816, Muscat's revenues amounted to MT\$95,000, nearly fifty percent less than a decade earlier. Five years later, the situation was bleaker still, with Oman's chief port raising just MT\$90,000.¹⁵² Although Said had established a firmer hold over southeastern Arabia, his future was far from assured.

As Muscat stagnated, other regions experienced a period of economic expansion. Led by Zanzibar, East Africa's Swahili Coast attracted a new wave of Indian merchants and Omani immigrants. The region was far from a blank slate. For centuries, East Africa had been home to an array of maritime and commercial communities that slowly coalesced into a cosmopolitan Swahili society. By the fifteenth century, Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Kilwa had already emerged as sizable commercial centers with well-established connections to ports across the Western Indian Ocean. For centuries, generations of Swahili merchants served as key conduits between foreign traders and the African interior, marshalling credit, capital, and commodities to connect disparate buyers and sellers. Even as the Omani presence expanded, Swahili caravans continued to stream into the interior, supplying many of the commodities that underwrote Busaidi rule in East Africa and Arabia.¹⁵³

During the early 1800s, trade between Western India and East Africa spiked, driven by Indian demand for ivory and African consumption of Indian cloth. As was the case in Muscat, Gujarati merchants led the charge, transitioning from seasonal visitors to semi-permanent inhabitants. Although the traders frequented numerous ports, Zanzibar emerged as a regional hub, gradually supplanting Mombasa as the coast's preeminent commercial center. Omani

¹⁵² Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 78.

¹⁵³ Adria LaViolette and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, "The Swahili World," and Erik Gilbert, "East Africa and the Dhow Trade," in *The Swahili World*, ed. Stephanie Wynne-Jones and Adria LaViolette (London: Routledge, 2020).

influence in the region was hardly new. Since the late seventeenth-century, Omani sultans had made periodic forays down the African coastline, exacting tribute whenever possible.¹⁵⁴

Although Omani leaders sometimes appointed governors with small garrisons, their authority remained meager. Indeed, the most powerful clan in Omani East Africa was not the Busaidis but the Mazrui. Granted control over Mombasa by the Ya'rubi dynasty in the early eighteenth century, the Mazrui family had never accepted Busaidi oversight. From their redoubt in Mombasa, the Mazrui steadily expanded their influence in surrounding towns, undertaking a handful of military excursions against Swahili leaders and Busaidi governors during the 1810s.

As East African trade expanded, the Mazrui made a concerted effort to coopt local revenue, sidelining Said bin Sultan's commercial representatives while also pursuing direct trade with India. In response Said attacked the Mazrui in 1817, dispatching a fleet of thirty ships carrying four thousand men. Although few accounts survive, it appears that the Mazrui repelled Said's forces. In an attempt to forestall Omani oversight, a handful of Arab governors in East Africa reached out to the French for protection, raising the specter of European interference in yet another region of longstanding Omani influence. Determined to prevail, in 1822 Said

¹⁵⁴ One of the first clearly recorded interactions between Oman and Zanzibar occurred in 1652 although Omani Arabs had been trading, and even settling, along the East African coast for hundreds of years. After expelling the Portuguese from Muscat in 1650, an Omani fleet arrived on Zanzibar two years later, sacking Portuguese settlements. In response, Zanzibar's ruler bent her knee, becoming a tributary of Oman. While the Portuguese eventually returned, Omani forces expelled them again in 1698. On the ground, Omani oversight differed little from Portuguese rule, centered around maritime trade and sporadic demands for tribute. At the height of Ya'rubi power in the early 1700s, Zanzibar and Pemba both were garrisoned by a few dozen men. The period of extended civil strife in Oman between 1719 and 1749 left few resources for an armed presence in East Africa. In 1746, the ascendant Ahmad bin Said dispatched troops to Zanzibar to fend off the Mazrui. While Zanzibar remained nominally aligned with the Busaidis, Mombasa, Pemba, and most of the surrounding coastline paid little heed to the Omani Sultans between 1740 and 1800. Jan Knappert, "A Short History of Zanzibar," *Annales Aequatoria* 13 (1992): pp. 15-37, 18. William Ingrams, *Zanzibar: Its History and Its People* (London: H. F. and G. Witherby, 1931), 120.

dispatched another force to the area. This time he managed to capture the island of Pemba, an important agricultural center north of Zanzibar. Two years later, Said wrestled the mainland port of Lamu from the Mazrui, effectively isolating them in Mombasa. Even so, Busaidi “control” remained nominal, primarily limited to collecting commercial taxes.

As Said committed more resources to East Africa, he relied on Zanzibar as a base of operations. Although Mombasa had a larger harbor, a bigger population, and an imposing fort, the Mazrui remained in open revolt. Unlike most of its neighbors, Zanzibar had rarely challenged Busaidi rule, largely acquiescing to Omani oversight. More importantly, by 1820 the island’s custom fees had drawn even with Muscat’s. Having spent fifteen years establishing Muscat as the Gulf’s dominant port, Said realized Zanzibar’s potential as a gateway to East Africa. Although Gujarati merchants had facilitated Zanzibar’s economic growth, and continued to drive its commerce, Said bin Sultan undertook an extended campaign to establish the island as the region’s premier commercial outpost. While cloves had been introduced to Zanzibar in the early 1800s, Said emerged as an early proponent of large-scale production, helping to establish Zanzibar as the world’s largest clove exporter by mid-century.¹⁵⁵ In close collaboration with members of the Shivji Topan family, whom he awarded the port’s custom revenues, Said pressured regional merchants to transport East African commodities directly to Zanzibar, bypassing traditional trading centers on the mainland. By doing so, he ensured his cut of the revenue. Although separated from Muscat by nearly twenty-five hundred miles, during the 1820s Zanzibar emerged as a center of Oman’s oceanic empire. In 1828, Said bin Sultan made the

¹⁵⁵ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar*, 48-60.

voyage himself, solidifying the formation of Omani East Africa.¹⁵⁶ For the rest of the century Zanzibar and Oman would remain intimately connected.

¹⁵⁶ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 93.

Chapter Three: But the Past was not Dead: Salem's Merchants and the Zanzibar Trade, 1820-1836

Although Massachusetts's expanding industrial sector offered Salem a lifeline, the town still faced severe economic challenges. By 1830, Salem's own efforts to establish a manufacturing base had largely failed. The town's future remained heavily dependent on the port's maritime activity which had contracted by nearly a third since 1810.¹⁵⁷ Despite the headwinds, Salem still boasted dozens of active merchants who continued to trade with ports across the world. As Thomas Perkins' generation died, retired, or moved to Boston, a new group of businessmen established themselves on Salem's waterfront. Men like Michael Shepard, David Pingree, and John Bertram effectively combined recent innovations in corporate finance with well-worn mercantile practices. All the while, the men dispatched commercial forays to new markets, bolstering Salem's entire economy as trade with South America and the Western Indian Ocean took off.¹⁵⁸

As U.S. exports spiked and demand for foreign commodities rose, American merchants competed for market share. After decades of losing out to Boston and New York, Salem's merchants strove to monopolize their newest routes. After opening trade with Zanzibar in 1826, Salem's businessmen attempted to maximize their profits while also heading off any

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 378.

¹⁵⁸ Scholarship on Salem after the War of 1812 is relatively sparse. Many of the best accounts of nineteenth-century Salem come from research into the life and works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Salem's most famous resident (and detractor) during this period. See: Alfred Rosa, *Salem, Transcendentalism, and Hawthorne* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), Luther Luedtke, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Romance of the Orient* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), Edwin Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: a Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), and Margaret Moore, *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998).

competition. Despite their best efforts, other Americans soon arrived on the island. New York merchant Edmund Roberts proved particularly dogged. In the long run, Roberts “interference” greatly benefited Salem. Earning a commission from the Jackson Administration, Roberts negotiated a “Treaty of Amity and Commerce” with Said bin Sultan. After its implementation in 1834, Salem traders flocked to Zanzibar in ever greater numbers, taking advantage of significantly lower fees. Building off Roberts’ success, Michael Shepard and John Bertram made their own foray into commercial diplomacy.¹⁵⁹ Invoking the United States’ newfound right to a consulate, Shepard and Bertram installed their own partisan, Richard Waters, into the position. With each passing year, Michael Shepard, David Pingree, John Bertram, and a handful of other Salem men invested more capital and time into commercial ventures to Zanzibar.

Old Routes and New Horizons

Before the American Revolution, a small number of British colonists had pursued commercial ventures in the Indian Ocean through both official and illicit channels.¹⁶⁰ American

¹⁵⁹ As interest in transnational history has grown, scholars have worked to more fully integrate the United States into regional and global trends, paying particular attention to how foreign governments and peoples affected the internal development of the nation. For the most part, this scholarship has focused on Latin America and Europe with sporadic considerations of other regions such as the Pacific Ocean and China. Even the most comprehensive scholarship, however, has rarely incorporated the Indian Ocean into this historiographical movement. Nonetheless, recent works on transnational U.S. history offer crucial frameworks for how to effectively incorporate early trade, diplomacy, and cross-cultural interactions into narratives of nineteenth-century American history. See: Steven Hahn, *A Nation without Borders: the United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830-1910* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012) and Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For scholarship centered on the development of early American diplomacy see Chapter Five.

¹⁶⁰ Although the British Government ensured the East India Company a monopoly on the Empire’s trade with India until 1813, London’s ability and interest in curtailing all internal competition ebbed and flowed over time. For works examining the American colonial presence

Independence allowed widespread, direct trade between the two regions, with limited British interference, for the first time.¹⁶¹ As Salem's ships visited ports across the world, its merchants discovered that many European colonies in the Indian Ocean offered sizable returns. During the 1780s and 1790s, Salem's merchants flocked to a handful of British, French, and Dutch outposts. In particular, Salem relied on the French colony of Île de France, modern day Mauritius, as a de facto headquarters. Arriving on the island stocked with beef, pork, flour, tobacco, and naval supplies, American merchants acquired a range of commodities and cash, as well as information on regional prices and the availability of goods. From Île de France, Salem's ships scattered across the region, making stops at Calcutta, Sumatra, and even as far away as Canton.¹⁶² While Salem's merchants imported a variety of commodities and luxury items, Indian cotton cloth, Chinese tea, and Sumatran pepper made the fortunes of a generation of traders.

Constant competition from other American cities, especially Boston, forced Salem's merchants to scope out new ports in search of better prices and new merchandise. In the late eighteenth century, Salem increasingly turned to commercial centers outside of European

in the Indian Ocean, see: Kevin McDonald, *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonial America and the Indo-Atlantic World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), and Jonathan Eacott, *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America 1600-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2017). It seems likely that many colonists in British North America would have served as sailors in either the Royal Navy or the EIC during the eighteenth century. As of now, little investigation has been made into this possibility.

¹⁶¹ Recent scholarship has offered a fuller picture of early interactions between the United States and the Indian Ocean, tracing the outsized economic and cultural ramifications of trade between the two regions. See: James Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), Jenny Rose, *Between Boston and Bombay: Cultural and Commercial Encounters of Yankees and Parsis, 1771-1865* (London: Palgrave Macmillon, 2019), and Susan Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001).

¹⁶² Randall Flaherty, "To 'the Most Distant Parts of the Globe': Trade, Politics, and the Maritime Frontier in the Early Republic, 1763-1819" (dissertation, 2014), 187.

control. For the first time, American ships visited the Arabian Peninsula. In 1790, the *Rambler*, out of Boston, reached Muscat. Five years later, the first Salem ship arrived, buying a cargo full of coffee and initiating commercial contact between Salem and the Omani Empire.¹⁶³ Two years later, another Salem vessel sought out the coffee's source. In 1797, the *Recovery* docked in Mocha, Yemen, opening American trade with the city. At first, American visits were relatively infrequent. Nonetheless, large amounts of commodities changed hands. On the *Recovery*'s second visit to Yemen, its captain purchased 300,000 pounds of coffee. While a few ships from Salem and Boston continued to visit Muscat, buying dates, goat hides, and a handful of other goods, Mocha's coffee proved more attractive. In 1805, Salem received eight shipments of Mocha coffee, totaling two million pounds.¹⁶⁴

The cataclysmic decade of 1807-1816 triggered a significant, but relatively slow, recalibration of Salem's commercial interests in the Indian Ocean. Salem's ships continued to visit India well after the Tariff of 1816, often considered the death knell of the town's East India trade. Between 1816 and 1825, the number of Salem's ships visiting India was higher than during the early 1800s.¹⁶⁵ Even as tariffs raised prices on imported goods, the United States' nascent textile industry could not match the country's growing demand for cloth. The opening of Lowell's first factories in 1825 closely mirrors the decline of Salem's India trade as domestic

¹⁶³ Joseph Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1995), 140.

¹⁶⁴ Charles Osgood and Henry Batchelder, *Historical Sketch of Salem, 1626-1879* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1879), 161.

¹⁶⁵ Between 1816 and 1825, 119 separate voyages listed India as a terminal destination with an addition sixty-two naming the nebulous "East Indies" as their endpoint. Records from the 1780s and 90s are less comprehensive and thus render direct comparison difficult. The term India, however, likely still served as a shorthand for the entire region of the Indian Ocean on some occasions, making an exact estimate challenging. See: "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879," Online Database, Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT, <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>

supply began to meet demand. By comparison, America's trade with Île de France and Bourbon fell off more rapidly as the Napoleonic Wars subsumed the islands. The British captured Île de France in 1810, renaming it Mauritius, and prioritizing British traders. As a result, American visits declined. Instead of visiting the port to buy commodities, U.S. ships sporadically stopped on the island to make repairs and buy supplies.¹⁶⁶ While Bourbon had long played second fiddle to Île de France, the British occupation of the island from 1810 to 1815 precluded any smooth transition of American trade to the nearby island.

As geopolitical headwinds curtailed some trade routes, Salem's merchants sought out new opportunities. In 1819, Salem traders reached Madagascar for the first time. Although Americans had visited the island since the 1790s, trade had been slow to develop. Before Salem's arrival, American ships usually stopped in Eastern Madagascar, seeking supplies for their return trips from the Mascarene Islands.¹⁶⁷ Salem's traders, however, turned to Mahajanga on the island's western coast. Located on the Mozambique Channel, the port served as a convenient waypoint on voyages to the Arabian Peninsula or India. Unsurprisingly, the first Salem merchants to visit the island, Nathaniel and J. W. Rogers, were heavily invested in Mocha.¹⁶⁸ The Rogers were quickly joined by Robert Brookhouse. During the 1820s, the two firms dominated Salem's trade with Mahajanga, selling American cloth, guns, and gunpowder amongst other goods. While Salem's first purchases included large amount of tallow and salted beef, by the end of the decade, cow hides dominated American imports. By the mid-1820s,

¹⁶⁶ Jane Hooper, "Yankees in Indian Ocean Africa: Madagascar and Nineteenth-Century American Commerce," *African Economic History* 46, no. 2 (2018): pp. 30-62, 35.

¹⁶⁷ Hooper, "Yankees in Indian Ocean Africa," 34.

¹⁶⁸ Hooper, "Yankees in Indian Ocean Africa," 36.

Salem's trade in the Western Indian Ocean had largely shifted to East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula although some ships continued to visit the Mascarene Islands and India.

Nonetheless, most of the town's merchants remained active in multiple regions, dispatching ventures as new information about commodity prices and shifts in demand reached them. In early January 1825, Robert Brookhouse sent the *Laurel* to Brazil. Arriving in the Portuguese colony weeks later, the *Laurel*'s captain struggled to purchase a complete cargo. Likely familiar with his boss's interests in Africa, the ship's captain turned east. By summer, the *Laurel* had rounded the Cape of Good Hope. After stopping at Mauritius, the *Laurel* headed to the mainland, still on the lookout for merchandise. Making stops at the Comoros Islands and Mombasa, the *Laurel* ventured ever closer to the small island of Zanzibar.¹⁶⁹ While no extant manuscript confirms that the *Laurel* landed on the island, nineteenth-century sources credit the ship with opening trade between the United States and Zanzibar in July 1825.¹⁷⁰ Within months, the Rogers Brothers' *Virginia* definitively made the trip, arriving in March 1826. Relatively quickly, Brookhouse and the Rogers integrated the island into their preexisting trade routes. For the time being, Zanzibar remained a secondary port. Both merchant houses continued to send some of their ships into the region without stopping at the Omani outpost. It was only in the late 1830s that Zanzibar emerged as the United States' dominant trading partner in East Africa.

Generations of Trade

Although the upheaval of the 1810s and the uncertainty of the 1820s had disrupted Salem's business community, maritime commerce still dominated the town. Beyond merchants

¹⁶⁹ Norman Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*. 96 (1959), 240.

¹⁷⁰ Osgood and Batchelder, *Historical Sketch of Salem*, 164.

and sailors, local businessmen provided most of the food and materials needed for long voyages while hundreds of tradesmen and laborers built, loaded, and repaired ships. Although new trade networks gradually replaced old stalwarts, the businesses and relationships formed during the early republic continued to shape the town. While any given merchant might retire, die, or invest in other sectors, the broad framework of Salem's mercantile houses remained fairly steady. Clerks and junior partners slowly rose through the ranks before accumulating enough capital to strike out on their own.¹⁷¹

All the same, mercantile practices were shifting. As supply chains and credit networks expanded across the United States, financial acumen gained importance. As a result, merchants increasingly cut their teeth in the backrooms of counting houses as clerks and bookkeepers and not as sailors.¹⁷² Making the jump from sailor to merchant, a relatively common occurrence during the early republic, became increasingly rare. Unlike Thomas Perkins, Michael Shepard never went to sea, instead working his way up through Perkins' operation before starting his own firm. As had long been the case, personal and familial connections often proved definitive. The majority of Salem's leading businessmen came from established mercantile families. If not the son of a captain or merchant, they were often the nephew, cousin, or some other relative, as was the case for David Pingree, Thomas Perkins' nephew. Unlike Shepard, Pingree could count on familial connections and inherited wealth to bolster his career. On occasion, sailors could still

¹⁷¹ Overall, Salem's maritime sector was one of relative upward mobility, albeit with clear limitations. Between 1800 and 1850, roughly a fourth of young sailors eventually became a mate or ship's captain. About the same percentage, however, died from disease or maritime accidents.¹⁷¹ The prevailing factor in advancement from seaman to mate was experience. Of a sampling of sailors whose careers lasted less than five voyages, only twenty percent received a promotion to mate or master. For sailors whose careers lasted longer, thirty-six percent reached a higher rank. See: Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 270, 201.

¹⁷² Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea*, 200.

end their careers as merchants.¹⁷³ John Bertram arrived in Salem as a child, the son of middling European immigrants. Beginning his maritime career as a cabin boy, Bertram worked his way up to captain. When he retired from seafaring, Bertram transitioned into commerce, eventually becoming the richest Salem businessman of his generation.¹⁷⁴

No matter how worldly, a few dozen men dominated Salem's commercial sector. Each regional subtrade was smaller still. Over fifty years, a handful of men played an outsized role in developing Salem's trade with Zanzibar and the Western Indian Ocean. Even though Thomas Perkins retired well before the first American ship reached Zanzibar, he still cast a large shadow over the trade. While the Rogers Brothers and Robert Brookhouse reached the East African island first, they were soon overtaken by Michael Shepard, Perkins' former deputy, and David Pingree, Perkins' nephew.

A prolific businessman, Michael Shepard left behind extensive archival collections. Dominated by financial accounts and ecclesiastical matters, his records contain very few personal writings. Only occasional glimmers of Shepard's personal relationships shine through. Born in 1786, Shepard grew up in Salem where his father worked as a grocer and hatter. In 1811, he married Matilda Clarke. Less than a year later, Clarke died. A widower in his mid-twenties, Shepard joined the local Baptist church, whose community defined much of the rest of his life. In 1816, Shepard married Harriot Clarke, Matilda's younger sister.¹⁷⁵ Together the couple had nine children. Shepard's commercial relationship with Thomas Perkins proved personally influential

¹⁷³ William Endicott and Walter Whitehill, *Captain Joseph Peabody; East India Merchant of Salem (1757-1844)* (Salem Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1962), 26.

¹⁷⁴ John Bertram, *John Bertram of Salem, Massachusetts; His Own Account of Incidents in His Life* (Santa Barbara Calif., 1964), 16.

¹⁷⁵ *Vital Records of Salem, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849*, vol. 4 (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1916), 302

as well. In 1817, he named his first son after his partner. Following Perkins' death in 1830, Shepard christened a ship in his honor.¹⁷⁶ At some point during his career, Shepard gained enough legal training to earn the honorific esquire. Over the years, he offered pro bono legal guidance to local widows and orphans, most likely through his church.

Michael Shepard's commercial career is easier to follow. Around 1810, Shepard joined Perkins' commercial house, likely serving as a clerk. That year, the pair jointly purchased the brig *Return*, cementing their commercial association.¹⁷⁷ As Perkins divested from international trade after the War of 1812, he delegated most of his remaining mercantile ventures to Shepard, selling some of his ships to him outright.¹⁷⁸ When Perkins formally retired in 1819, Shepard took over his remaining business. During the 1820s, Shepard purchased a series of ships himself, emerging as one of Salem's leading merchants.¹⁷⁹ At Perkins' request, Shepard helped train three of his nephews: David, T. P., and Asa Pingree. While Asa quickly fled the counting house for the farm, David and T. P. both began successful mercantile careers under Shepard's guidance.

With no family of his own, Thomas Perkins took an abiding interest in his younger sister's. In 1795, Annar Perkins married Asa Pingree and settled onto his family's farm in Rowley, Massachusetts.¹⁸⁰ David was born soon after followed by T. P. in 1803 and Asa in 1807. Struggling financially, the family moved to Southwest Maine where Asa Sr. opened a lumber

¹⁷⁶ William Pingry, *A Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Moses Pengry, of Ipswich, Mass.: so Far as Ascertained* (Ludlow, VT: Warner and Hyde, 1881), 66.

¹⁷⁷ A. Hitchings and Stephen Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1906), 156.

¹⁷⁸ Hitchings and Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts 1789-1900*, 141, 199.

¹⁷⁹ George Shepard, *A Genealogical History of William Shepard of Fossecut, Northamptonshire, England, and Some of His Descendants* (Salem, MA: Observer Book and Job Print, 1886), 52-4.

¹⁸⁰ Pingry, *A Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Moses Pengry, of Ipswich, Mass.: so Far as Ascertained*, 29.

mill. Relatively soon, however, the Pingrees hit hard times and the mill failed. Thomas Perkins' intervened, repurchasing the family's homestead on their behalf. Back in Massachusetts, David entered a local academy in his early twenties, having received little formal education as a child. Perkins, however, clearly valued commercial acumen over formal instruction. By 1822, he had placed his nephew with Michael Shepard, introducing Pingree to the commercial world of Salem.¹⁸¹

Pingree's exact role in Michael Shepard's business remains hazy. A family history depicts Pingree and his brothers as clerks in Shepard's trading house, learning the tricks of the trade under his watchful eye. Pingree's surviving commercial records paint a more independent picture. Nonetheless, David Pingree and Michael Shepard undertook a series of joint commercial ventures during the 1820s. In 1823, the pair dispatched the *Cynthia*, still formally owned by Perkins, to South America.¹⁸² While Shepard usually oversaw the sale of his own merchandise, Pingree occasionally sold commodities to other American ports for Shepard or his brother, T.P.¹⁸³ Shepard and Pingree's shared interests lasted until at least 1830 when the *Cynthia* wrecked off of Cape Cod.¹⁸⁴

As the first ships to reach Zanzibar returned to Salem, Michael Shepard began to take an interest in the region. By the end of the 1820s, at least eleven ships had made the journey.¹⁸⁵ For

¹⁸¹ Box 87 Folder 4, MSS 901, David Pingree Papers, Peabody Essex Museum.

¹⁸² Hitchings and Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts 1789-1900*, 37.

¹⁸³ Entry for February 24, 1823, Volume 1, MSS 901, David Pingree Papers, Peabody Essex Museum.

¹⁸⁴ Box 3 Folder 6, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, Peabody Essex Museum.

¹⁸⁵ Like with the *Laurel*, records of American vessels at Zanzibar before the establishment of an American consulate in 1837 are spotty, especially those before 1832. During these early years, it is likely that at least a few other ships from Salem visited Zanzibar without leaving behind clear documentary evidence. By the 1840s, the data is more comprehensive, encompassing almost every journey between Salem and Zanzibar. Estimates given throughout this work draw

the time being, Robert Brookhouse and the Rogers remained the dominant players. Together, the two merchant houses oversaw nine of the trips. The only other vessel involved in the trade, the *Ann*, made two voyages, one in 1826 and the other in 1827. The *Ann*'s first voyage was orchestrated by two local merchants, Henry Prince and his son Henry Prince Jr. By the time the ship returned from the Indian Ocean, however, the Princes' fortunes had soured. The Exchange Bank of Salem foreclosed on the pair, forcing Henry Prince to sell the *Ann*. As their commercial ventures collapsed, the Princes, and their many creditors, needed to dispose of the *Ann* and its cargo as quickly as possible. Michael Shepard jumped at the opportunity, agreeing to organize and oversee the sale, for a price.

The cascading effects of the Princes' insolvency illustrate the tightly interwoven relationships between Salem's merchant houses, the town's wider business community, and other American ports. Although Prince and his son owned the vessel outright, they used the *Ann* to transport merchandise to the Indian Ocean for other merchants. All told, eight men, including a Baltimore businessman, staked a claim to the *Ann*'s revenues. In addition to the merchants, the Oriental Insurance Company, the American Insurance Company, and the Exchange Bank all jockeyed to recoup money from the Princes. Alongside Michael Shepard, the claimants deputized William Ropes, a Boston merchant, to oversee the sale of the cargo, likely to assure the Bostonian contingent that their interests were being looked after. The final agreement

primarily on records of outgoing ships from Salem's custom house as well as surviving ships' logs held at the Peabody Essex Museum. These have been cross-checked with the papers of merchants engaged in the trade as well as the records kept by American consuls on Zanzibar, all of which are also held at the Peabody Essex Museum. This estimate also draws heavily from works by Norman Bennett. See: Norman Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v. 95 (1959), Norman Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1845-1865," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v. 97 (1961), and Norman Bennett "Americans in Zanzibar: 1865-1915," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v. 98 (1962).

organizing the sale of the *Ann*'s cargo required seventeen parties to sign off. So many claimants inevitably led to disputes, some of which were beyond Shepard and Ropes' powers of mediation. Years later, the legal fallout finally reached the Massachusetts's Supreme Court who decided once and for all how much each merchant received.¹⁸⁶ In the meantime, Shepard forged ahead. Within weeks, Shepard and Ropes oversaw the sale "of the Cargo of Brig Ann, Capt. Miller, from Mocha and Zanzibar" which was "sold at public auction, at Derby Wharf."¹⁸⁷

The integration of Zanzibar into Salem's Indian Ocean circuit did not immediately reshape the town's marketplace. The bulk of the *Ann*'s cargo were familiar Indian Ocean commodities that local merchants had imported for years, including dates, goat and cow hides, and coffee. An array of luxury items rounded out the lot: ostrich feathers, turtle shell, frankincense, and myrrh. The vast majority of the goods had been purchased at Mocha, the *Ann*'s stated destination. Zanzibar, however, had supplied 14,000 pounds of ivory.¹⁸⁸ All told, the auction brought in \$60,844.84. Once various labor costs, fees, and duties had been paid, \$46,421.81 remained. The initial cost of the voyage, primarily spent buying merchandise, had totaled around \$40,000. All told, the *Ann*'s journey half way around the world had earned roughly fifteen percent in profits. Shepard's first exposure to Zanzibar proved tantalizing. Taking advantage of the situation, Shepard promptly sold the *Ann* to himself and entered the Zanzibar trade. A few months after the auction, Shepard essentially recreated the *Ann*'s 1826 voyage, employing the same captain and shipping goods for many of the same merchants. On August 7,

¹⁸⁶ Gideon Tucker to William Ropes and Michael Shepard, September 8, 1830, Box 1 Folder 1, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

¹⁸⁷ Catalogue of the Cargo of Brig Ann, Box 1 Folder 1, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

¹⁸⁸ Although Zanzibar's clove production was expanding rapidly, the *Ann*'s cargo did not contain any cloves. Logbook of the Ann 1826-1827, Log 230, PEM.

1827, the *Ann* departed Salem bound for “India,” carrying cotton cloth, tobacco, lead, nails, anchors, mirrors, flour, and sugar.

As Michael Shepard broadened his horizons, David Pingree’s own star was rising. After a few years under Shepard’s tutelage, Pingree began investing in ships himself. When Thomas Perkins died in 1830, he left roughly half of his estate to Pingree, making him one of Salem’s leading merchants almost overnight.¹⁸⁹ Using his new-found wealth, Pingree expanded his maritime ventures. During the early 1830s, Pingree focused on Salem’s burgeoning trade with South America. Following in his mentor’s footsteps, however, Pingree soon made his first foray into the Indian Ocean, dispatching the *Tigris* to Madagascar and Zanzibar in 1832.

All the while, Pingree integrated himself into Salem’s maturing financial sector. A decade younger than Michael Shepard, Pingree came of age in an era of expanding corporate finance underwritten by ballooning networks of credit and debt. By 1830, Salem boasted six banks, capitalized at \$1.8 million, as well as ten insurance companies.¹⁹⁰ As was true across the country, especially in ports, Salem’s banking and insurance industries emerged as outposts of maritime commerce. The boards of directors and presidents of the town’s corporations were a who’s who of Salem’s merchant elite, most of whom remained active international traders. By 1827, David Pingree sat on the board of Salem’s Mercantile Bank alongside Nathaniel Rogers.¹⁹¹ For most of the next decade, Pingree served as the president of another bank.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Pingry, *A Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Moses Pengry, of Ipswich, Mass., so Far as Ascertained*, 64-6.

¹⁹⁰ “Essex County Register, for 1830.,” *Salem Gazette*, January 1, 1830.

¹⁹¹ “Salem Banks.,” *Essex Register*, October 18, 1827.

¹⁹² “Bank Directors.,” *Salem Gazette*, October 25, 1831. “Bank Directors.,” *Salem Gazette*, October 6, 1837.

As discussed in Chapter One, local banks played a crucial role in facilitating trade, using their corporate status to raise large amounts of capital by selling shares and issuing notes. Banks allowed affiliated merchants to access steady streams of credit, an essential resource in a time when hard currency remained scarce. Nonetheless, banks and other corporations played a secondary, albeit essential, role in Salem's maritime economy. As Naomi Lamoreaux has noted, during the first half of the nineteenth century, incorporation did not offer unparalleled opportunities for commercial profit or expansion.¹⁹³ Like other preexisting commercial organizations, corporations had their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. Dominated by established merchants who used their positions to bolster their own mercantile profits, the daily operations of Salem's banks and insurance companies mirrored those of the town's commercial houses. Like Salem's mercantile establishments, "corporate" financial organizations had few employees and depended heavily on personal relationships built over years of commercial interactions. Although David Pingree undoubtedly benefited from his dual role as financier and merchant, maritime trade remained his dominant, and most lucrative, concern. While incorporation made sense for banks and insurance companies, Pingree and most of his peers continued to operate their maritime businesses as sole proprietorships, using the joint ownership of vessels as their central method of commercial organization.

Even though Salem's richest merchants could afford to own a ship outright or with a single partner, they frequently purchased vessels with three or four other men, creating de facto trading groups that often made joint investments in multiple ships. Like incorporation, this method helped merchants consolidate the large amounts of capital needed for international

¹⁹³ Naomi Lamoreaux, "The Partnership Form of Organization," in *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community 1700-1850*, ed. Conrad Wright (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2005).

voyages while also diluting their exposure to financial losses. At the same time, merchants could coopt potential competitors who in turn contributed expertise and commercial information to the venture. Many merchants also sought out captains who could afford to buy a stake in their vessel, easing their financial commitments while also ensuring the captain's commitment to a profitable venture.¹⁹⁴ Before the Civil War, these small groups of traders led by men like Michael Shepard and David Pingree, and dubbed "concerns," dominated Salem's wharves. As the cost of entry to international trade grew, sailors, captains, and poorer merchants struggled to compete. Just as eager to profit off of Salem's emerging trade routes, large groups of middling men sometimes joined forces to purchase and outfit vessels for themselves.

Overall, this system allowed Salem's merchants to form stable, yet flexible, commercial relationships. While a single merchant might cash out, the same group of men often collectively purchased and sold a series of ships as their business interests shifted. As a result, tracing shared ownership of vessels is often the best way to track evolving commercial relationships. As years turned to decades, merchants' economic affiliations could change significantly as each man pursued his own self-interest. After nearly a decade of working with Shepard, David Pingree struck out on his own around 1830. As each man funneled more resources into the Zanzibar trade, they found themselves in increasing competition, slowly becoming each other's largest rival.

Diplomacy of Sorts

Eager to retain their early monopoly on trade with Zanzibar, the few Salem merchants in the know attempted to head off competition. After a generation of losing lucrative trade routes to

¹⁹⁴ Vickers and Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea*, 204.

Boston and New York, many of which they had established and carefully cultivated, Salem's merchants used a variety of tactics to obfuscate Zanzibar's commercial potential. In the earliest days of the Mocha trade, one merchant had "sealed the voyage instructions and informed the captain not to open them until out at sea" to keep the destination secret.¹⁹⁵ When the Sultan of Oman tried to send an open letter to American merchants advertising Zanzibar as a commercial center, a Salem merchant quickly intercepted and destroyed it.¹⁹⁶ Even after a decade of trade, Salem's merchants limited the spread of information whenever possible. In 1836, a Boston newspaper described Zanzibar as an island "on the western coast of Africa...scarcely ever put down on the maps." The account was soon reprinted in newspapers across New England, even appearing in Salem's *Essex Register* without clarification, even though dozens of the town's residents knew Zanzibar's precise location in East Africa.

Despite Salem's best efforts, news of Zanzibar quickly reached other ports. A few weeks after Shepard auctioned off the *Ann*'s cargo, a New York trader, Edmund Roberts, set off for the island. Born into a merchant family in New Hampshire, Roberts had lost much of his wealth during the Napoleonic Wars. As he sought to reestablish himself, Roberts turned to the Western Indian Ocean. On the lookout for new opportunities, he borrowed money from friends to fund a trading venture to Zanzibar.¹⁹⁷ No matter the island's potential, international trade remained complicated and dangerous. Establishing new commercial connections that crossed cultural, religious, and linguistic barriers proved particularly difficult. Unable to fall back on preexisting

¹⁹⁵ Flaherty, "To 'the most distant parts of the Globe,'" 210.

¹⁹⁶ "Beautiful Workmanship," *Gloucester Democrat*, March 18, 1836, p. 3 and Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," 248-249.

¹⁹⁷ Frederic Greenhut, "Edmund Roberts: Early American Diplomat," *Manuscripts* vol. 35, pp. 273-80, 274. Greenhut incorrectly lists the date of Roberts first trip to Zanzibar as 1831 and not 1827.

relationships, or even allude to shared commercial norms, Americans' first forays onto Zanzibar were severely limited by misunderstandings as well as gamesmanship by the island's hardnosed merchants.

When Roberts arrived on the island in October 1827, he faced a series of obstacles that limited his ability to buy and sell goods. Although American merchants could enter into contracts with local traders, all commerce on the island passed through the Sultan's agents who, according to Roberts, raised prices, delayed sales, and substituted goods as they saw fit.¹⁹⁸ As Roberts lamented, "American vessels paid generally seven and half per cent upon imports, and seven and half per cent upon exports, with anchorage money and presents. The governor of the out ports claimed the right of pre-emption in both cases, and they resorted to the most nefarious practices to accumulate wealth."¹⁹⁹ Frustrated by his inability to secure a return cargo, Roberts made a sustained effort to break down barriers to trade. When Said bin Sultan arrived from Oman in January 1828, Roberts was still attempting to fill his ship.

Eventually, Roberts talked his way into an audience with the Sultan. The pair's conversation soon shifted into de facto negotiations over the future of American trade on Zanzibar. Although both men were interested in expanding trade between the United States and Oman, Said bin Sultan wielded much more influence over the eventual outcome. To pressure Roberts, Said alluded to a commercial treaty with England that did not exist.²⁰⁰ In response,

¹⁹⁸ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," 243.

¹⁹⁹ Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern Courts of Cochin-China, Siam, and Muscat; in the U.S. Sloop-of-War Peacock... During the Years 1832-3-4* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1837), 362

²⁰⁰ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," 244; While the EIC and the Omanis had entered into a handful of treaties by this time, they dealt primarily with joint opposition to French expansion and limitations on the geographic scope of the slave trade. None contained any commercial agreements or regulations between either the EIC or the British Government and the Omanis. Whether or not Said bin Sultan or his father received any payments for these treaties is

Roberts argued that existing obstacles to trade were so prohibitive that Americans would drop Zanzibar from their regional circuit. Heavily dependent on commercial income, Said bin Sultan's eventually relented. Eager to expand his control over the African coast, and likely aware that American cargos often contained guns and gunpowder, Said pressed Roberts for "bombs" and "shells." Roberts demurred, knowing that he and other American traders depended heavily on non-interference to access as many ports as possible.²⁰¹ In the end, Said bin Sultan asked Roberts to have the United States send a diplomatic mission to draft an official treaty.

Upon his return to the U.S., Roberts struggled to fulfil Said's mandate. Caught up in the tumultuous Election of 1828, Washington had little time for Omani affairs. Indeed, few men had ever even heard of Zanzibar, Oman, or Said bin Sultan. To gain traction, Roberts leaned on a distant relative, New Hampshire Senator Levi Woodbury. Although Woodbury expressed interest, the pair did not make much headway until Andrew Jackson appointed him as Secretary of the Navy. From across the world, Said bin Sultan continued to push for a treaty, sending Jackson a letter expressing his interest.²⁰² In late 1831, the Jackson Administration finally tasked Roberts with opening diplomatic relations with a number of Indian Ocean states including Oman, Siam, and Cochin-china.²⁰³ More than three years after his return from Zanzibar, Roberts set off again aboard the U.S.S. *Peacock*.

After making calls at Manilla, Canton, Macao, Bangkok, Singapore, and Batavia, Roberts finally arrived in Muscat in 1833. Finding Said bin Sultan in residence, Roberts attempted to pick up negotiations where he and the Sultan had left off. After overcoming a few sticking

unclear. C. U. Aitchison, *Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighboring Countries* (Calcutta: O. T. Cutter, 1865) VII: 208-15.

²⁰¹ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," 244.

²⁰² Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," 245.

²⁰³ Cochin-china encompassed the southern regions of modern-day Vietnam.

points, Roberts and Said agreed on an expansive “Treaty of Amity and Commerce.”²⁰⁴ Under the new rules, American traders received unrestricted access to Omani ports. Instead of multiple taxes, United States’ merchants would be charged a single five percent import fee. In response, Omani subjects were also granted access to American ports, where they would be treated as members of “nations nearest in friendship” to the United States. The treaty also called for an American consulate in Omani territory, an essential step towards facilitating and expanding trade. Following Roberts’ return to the U.S. in 1834, the Senate ratified the Omani-American treaty. To spread the word, Said bin Sultan circulated a written announcement informing his officials and foreign merchants of Oman’s first commercial treaty with a Western nation.²⁰⁵

Although Edmund Roberts’ deepening relationship with Said bin Sultan threatened Salem’s emerging dominance on Zanzibar, his extended foray into international diplomacy sidelined him from commercial activities. For the most part, Salem’s merchants had little interest in conducting diplomatic missions that promised little immediate economic benefit, although they were more than happy to reap the rewards of Roberts’ efforts. Had Roberts returned, treaty in hand, and redoubled his commercial ventures on Zanzibar, he would have proved a formidable

²⁰⁴ The only explicit limitation on American trade concerned weapons: “whenever any powder, bullets and muskets come for sale and purchase and barter... the Sultan alone shall buy them, to the exclusion of others, his subjects.” Having faced decades of armed uprisings, Said sought to monopolize access to Western weapons if at all possible. Although the United States’ government refused to supply military-grade weapons to the Omanis, their hesitance did not apply to the commercial sale of muskets which rapidly became a central feature of American trade in East Africa. “Treaty between the United States of American and the Sultan of Maskat: The Arabic Text,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 4 (1854), 355.

²⁰⁵ To seal the deal, Roberts set off for the Indian Ocean again in 1835. Finding Said bin Sultan absent from Zanzibar, the peripatetic diplomat continued to Muscat where the treaty was finally instated, retroactively going into force on June 30, 1834. Bennett, “Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845,” 250.

obstacle to Salem's interests. Roberts, however, never reached home, dying onboard his ship near Macau in 1836.²⁰⁶

As news of the preliminary treaty reached Salem, local merchants dispatched a wave of ships to cash in. After just seven voyages in five years, Salem's merchants made eight trips to the island in 1833 even though the tentative understanding had not been formally adopted. Even if it had, American merchants had few avenues to claim their newfound rights. When American captains arrived in East Africa in 1833 and 1834, they likely faced many of the same headaches that Roberts had railed against years before. Nonetheless, the promise of lower fees hinted at profits to come. The potential for more predictable and profitable trade lured more of Salem's trading houses to the region.

Bolstered by the treaty, Salem's trade in the Western Indian Ocean expanded, becoming one of the town's largest economic drivers. As more ships rounded the Cape of Good Hope, Zanzibar emerged as Salem's regional hub, serving a comparable role as Île de France a generation earlier. Even as the island became an essential stop, Salem's vessels continued to visit numerous ports in Madagascar, East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and India. It was only in 1838 that Zanzibar appeared as a terminal destination in Salem's custom records for the first time.²⁰⁷ Still, in just a decade, ten different merchants and trading groups sent forty-eight ships to

²⁰⁶ Following his success in Muscat, Edmund Roberts continued on to Thailand, where he put the finishing touches on an American treaty with the king of Siam. By the end of the negotiations, however, much of the crew, and Roberts himself, had contracted dysentery. Nonetheless, the U. S. S. *Peacock* set off for Cochin-china. On his first journey, Roberts had failed to reach any tentative agreement with the government. Upon arrival, Roberts' stand-ins found themselves equally stymied by the cultural barrels between the two peoples who struggled to even speak a common language. After a few weeks with little progress and ongoing sickness, the ship retreated to Macau where Roberts' died in June 1836, never assuming his intended role as the United States' first envoy to Japan. Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845" and Roberts, *A Voyage Round the World*, 345-55.

²⁰⁷ "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879," Mystic Seaport Museum.

Zanzibar. Even so, the trade remained a relatively insular affair. Only five of the ten merchant groups sent more than one trip during the decade. Despite his initial lead, Robert Brookhouse gave up on the trade as more competitors poured in, sending only one voyage to Zanzibar during the thirties. Hammered particularly hard by the Panic of 1837, the Rogers sent their last ship to Zanzibar in 1839.²⁰⁸ In 1836, the Emmerton family sent their first vessel, the *Richmond*, to the island. Although they continued to trade in the region until the 1850s, they remained secondary players. As the 1830s progressed, two groups increasingly dominated the trade, one led by David Pingree and the other by the burgeoning alliance of Michael Shepard and John Bertram. For the time being, Pingree led the way, dispatching thirteen voyages between 1830 and 1840.

John Bertram Enters the Fray

Unlike Michael Shepard, David Pingree, and many of his mercantile peers, John Bertram had extensive experience at sea. Born in 1796, Bertram emigrated from the Isle of Jersey as a child. Arriving in Salem during the embargo, Bertram's family struggled financially. Like the Pingrees, the Bertrams relocated to Maine in search of economic opportunity. After briefly working alongside his father, John discovered that he had "no taste for any mechanical trade" and "determined to go to sea."²⁰⁹ At the age of sixteen, Bertram did just that, serving as a cabin boy on a voyage to Lisbon. Caught up in the War of 1812, Bertram soon turned to privateering, serving on multiple ships and surviving two periods of imprisonment.

After the war, Bertram sailed to South America, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, and Russia. Now a mate, Bertram cruised across the Indian Ocean for the first time in 1820. For a

²⁰⁸ Letter of Recommendation, February 20, 1845, Box 3 Folder 2, MSS 87, Rogers Family Papers, PEM and "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879," Mystic Seaport Museum.

²⁰⁹ Bertram, *John Bertram of Salem, Massachusetts*, 2.

few years, Bertram made repeated trips to Indonesia. All the while, he used the small amount of cargo space allotted to officers to import and sell goods. After a failed search for coffee in Batavia, Bertram visited Mocha for the first time in 1822. On shore leave in 1823, Bertram married Mary Smith. Even after a decade at sea, Bertram did not have enough money to set up his own household. Still, Bertram slowly built up his commercial capacity, investing in his first ship in 1825. Taking advantage of Salem's burgeoning trade with South America, Bertram spent years captaining voyages between Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and the Caribbean.

As Salem's trade in the Western Indian Ocean picked up, Bertram pivoted, captaining the Rogers Brothers' *Black Warrior* to Madagascar, Zanzibar, and Mocha in 1831. Deathly ill for much of the voyage, Bertram lost seventy pounds. When he finally made it back to Salem over a year later, Bertram was shadow of his former self. After twenty years at sea, however, John Bertram had finally amassed enough capital to make investments from the safety of Salem's wharves. Within a year, he began collaborating with Michael Shepard.²¹⁰ After Bertram independently dispatched a ship to Zanzibar in 1834, the pair entered into a prolonged collaboration that emerged as one of the most effective American commercial organizations in East Africa and Arabia.

As trade between the United States and Oman expanded, Shepard and Bertram faced stiff competition from David Pingree, other Salem merchants, and a handful of new entrants from Boston and New York. Eager to develop a sustained competitive advantage, the pair eyed the "Treaty of Amity and Commerce," whose provisions called for an American consulate in Omani territory.²¹¹ As was often the case in distant ports, American citizens' commercial interests

²¹⁰ Bertram, *John Bertram of Salem, Massachusetts*, 16.

²¹¹ Outside of a handful of missions in Western Europe, nineteenth-century American diplomats fell into two broad categories: indigenous inhabitants deputized with protecting American

outpaced the State Department's need for political representation. Taking the initiative, Shepard and Bertram worked to establish a Zanzibari consulate manned by a Salem native. More than that, however, the pair hoped to handpick the consul, ensuring a representative who would prioritize their business interests above all else. In February 1836, Michael Shepard and John Bertram made their move, dispatching Salem native Richard Waters to Washington to lobby for the appointment. Like Edmund Roberts, Waters had a connection to Levy Woodbury, now serving as the Secretary of the Treasury.²¹² By March, Waters was back in Salem, commission in hand. For months, Waters bided his time, waiting for Shepard and Bertram's next vessel. When Shepard's the *Generous* returned from a successful circuit of the Western Indian Ocean in early September, Waters was more than ready to go.²¹³ His diplomatic career, however, would have to wait as Shepard marshalled capital, commodities, and workers to ready the *Generous* for another transoceanic voyage.

Logistics

Preparing a ship for a yearlong voyage was an extensive undertaking. Before the *Generous* could return to sea, the vessel had to be unloaded, cleaned, inspected, repaired, and restocked. To maximize his profits, Shepard needed to dispatch the *Generous* as quickly as possible. In the rush to outfit his ship, he leaned on relationships with merchants, businesses, and financial institutions in Salem and Boston that he had carefully cultivated over his twenty-five-

interests and American citizens with investments in the region. Even when an American was selected to run a far-flung consulate, they were rarely appointed proactively by the State Department. Instead, interested parties lobbied for the position, using their commercial knowledge of the region as their chief selling point. For a more comprehensive examination see Chapter Five.

²¹² Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," 250.

²¹³ Box 5 Folder 8, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

year career.²¹⁴ Eager for a quick turnaround, Shepard prioritized readying the *Generous* and purchasing goods for its next voyage over making quick sales of its current cargo. While some preparations could be made in advance, the exact composition of the *Generous*' merchandise depended on up to date information on prices, supply, and demand for both American and Indian Ocean commodities.

Leaning on his contacts in Boston and Salem, Shepard amassed an entire ship's worth of cargo and supplies in a few weeks. On October 13, Shepard made his first purchase, one case of yellow Nankeen cloth and another of handkerchiefs. Over the next few days, Shepard collected an array of commodities including ninety-one bales and fourteen cases of assorted cotton cloth, fifteen bags of sugar, twenty kegs of tobacco, and two boxes of muskets. Shepard selected many of the goods in person, travelling to Boston with the *Generous*' captain multiple times. The pair made their largest purchase from A. & A. Lawrence & Co., the leading commission house for Lowell's factories. In one fell swoop, Shepard purchased over ten thousand dollars of cloth from at least five different Massachusetts's factories.²¹⁵

While Shepard bought most of his commodities in Boston, he relied on Salem for provisions, shipping supplies, and small amounts of luxury goods including cutlery, brass utensils, and paper. For these, Shepard turned to local businesses including William Chase, "importer of hard ware and cutlery," and Frothingham & Cross "manufacturers of copper, tin,

²¹⁴ Even as his commercial footprint grew, Shepard's core operation remained remarkably small. In 1837, he only had one employee, George West Jr., who served as a clerk in his Union Wharf office. Henry Whipple, *The Salem Directory, and City Register, : Containing Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupations, Places of Business, and Residences, : with Lists of City Officers, Banks, Insurance Offices, Societies, &c.: Names of the Streets and Wharves, and Other Useful Information* (Salem, MA: Published by Henry Whipple: 1837), WES.

²¹⁵ Box 5 Folder 9, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

and sheet iron ware.”²¹⁶ Shepard made his largest purchases of food from grocers S. Chamberlain & Son and baker William Ball who supplied him with 1700 loaves of bread. Shepard even purchased five pigs from the local almshouse. As the *Generous*’ departure neared, Shepard stocked up on lumber and spars, bought anchors from a local auctioneer, and employed dozens of artisans and workers as teamsters, sailmakers, stablers, caulkers, pilots, and coopers.

While Boston and Salem could supply almost everything Shepard needed, the nation’s perennial scarcity of hard currency forced him to source specie from farther away. In order to round off his cargo, Shepard bought two thousand Spanish dollars from the Philadelphia firm T. Deland and Co. and 3600 silver dollars from Baltimore’s Garland & Elwell. To fill any remaining gaps in his inventory, Shepard turned to his colleagues around Salem, though he avoided his direct competitors in Zanzibar. From his brother Stephen, Shepard received a barrel of flour, from Robert Brookhouse 180 dollars, from James Peabody a bit of cloth, and from T. P. Pingree some cables and copper money. Although Shepard and Bertram’s commercial relationship was deepening, signified by their joint sponsorship of Richard Waters, Bertram did not own a stake in *the Generous*. Tucked amongst hundreds of other entries, Shepard recorded buying “cordage” from John Bertram, his only direct involvement in the venture.

After nearly two months of preparation, the *Generous* departed Salem’s harbor on October 29, 1836. On board the brig, packed to its fore and aft with merchandise, was Richard Waters. In his belongings, Waters carried a dispatch from Andrew Jackson sending greetings to his “Great and Good Friend” Said bin Sultan “of Muscat and his Dependencies.”²¹⁷ Although thousands of miles of open ocean still separated Waters from Zanzibar, his very appointment was

²¹⁶ Whipple, *The Salem Directory, and City Register*, Directory Advertiser.

²¹⁷ Andrew Jackson to Said bin Sultan, April 5, 1836, RG 59, General records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, USNARA.

the culmination of over a decade of commerce and diplomacy in the face of extensive cultural and commercial differences. The establishment of a consulate on Zanzibar signified the maturation of trade between the United States and Oman and would serve as the backbone of the two countries' relationship for the next thirty years. As Waters's soon found out, however, innumerable challenges remained for any wayward Americans driven to the Indian Ocean by the possibility of profit.

Chapter Four: An Honest Business? Cross-Cultural Trade on Zanzibar, 1837-1844

During the nineteenth century, Americans visited the Western Indian Ocean almost exclusively for trade. Following the implementation of the American-Omani Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1835, the federal government's tepid interest in formal diplomacy evaporated. On the ground in Zanzibar the treaty had little immediate effect. Commercial transactions continued to favor local merchants who had extensive knowledge of the island's marketplace and prevailing practices. Following his arrival in 1837, Consul Richard Waters slowly integrated himself into the island's commercial community. Vested with a thin veneer of political authority, Waters had broad discretion over how he balanced his diplomatic and commercial interests. Unsurprisingly, Waters prioritized his own financial success, speaking for many of his peers when he quipped that "our object is to do an honest business and make all the money we can."²¹⁸

Although Waters faced numerous obstacles, many self-imposed, he established a firm relationship with the Omani ruler, Said bin Sultan, and his deputies. Waters's commercial success, however, ultimately depended on Zanzibar's custom master, Jairam Shivji. Over time, the two men formed close commercial ties, funneling trade and commission fees to each other. Largely due to this self-serving relationship, American-Zanzibari trade expanded and became more cohesive during the early 1840s. Through innumerable mundane negotiations and transactions, American merchants, their Indian counterparts, and Omani officials co-created a mutually beneficial commercial system that melded established techniques of Indian Ocean trade with their Atlantic equivalents.²¹⁹ With each passing year, everyone involved gained a better

²¹⁸ Richard Waters to Sadick bin Barack, December 12, 1844, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²¹⁹ Philip Curtin's seminal work, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, continues to frame scholarly discussions of the historical development of commerce around the world. Offering

understanding of the broad expectations and boundaries of the market, aided by the use of standardized dual-language commodity contracts. The resulting mercantile arrangements were hardly a balanced mix of Atlantic and Indian Ocean practices. Far from home, and in a deeply foreign environment, Richard Waters and his peers slowly realized that sustained, profitable trade required them to acquiesce to many pre-existing Zanzibari practices.²²⁰

particular insights into trade diasporas and the formation of commercial institutions, the work offers a starting point for any extended examination of trade between different groups of people. Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). More recent scholarship on cross-cultural commerce has focused on the internal workings of trade networks, providing new insights into mechanisms regulating cohesion and commercial transactions over long distances. In particular Francesca Trivellato and Sebouth Aslanian have expanded upon established depictions of insular trade networks bound together by kinship or the shared experiences of religious and ethnic minorities. Both scholars question the concept of “trust”—previously depicted as an essential, yet ill-defined, lifeblood of in-group trading networks. In *The Familiarity of Strangers*, Trivellato argues that Sephardic merchants often chose non-Sephardic agents over their brethren to further their economic interests. By comparison, Aslanian deals exclusively with commercial relationships between members of the Armenian community of New Julfa. Aslanian argues that trust developed out of actively cultivated personal relationships as well as through co-dependence between members of the same ethnic minority group. Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: the Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Sebouth David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: the Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011). One of the closest precursors to this project in geography and chronology is Pedro Machado’s *Ocean of Trade*. Focusing on a community of Indian traders in Mozambique, Machado untangles the complicated relationship between consumer demand and mercantile practices. Although this Vanyan community played an essential role in organizing and facilitating the movement of large amounts of commodities across the Indian Ocean, shifting consumer demand in East Africa and Western India bounded the commercial viability of their endeavors. Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²²⁰ During this period, Salem’s merchants dominated American trade on Zanzibar. The island itself was one of the most important trading partners for the United States in the Western Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, Americans, including the same Salem merchants, traded across the region. For targeted studies of the American presence in other Western Indian Ocean settings, see: Jenny Rose, *Between Boston and Bombay: Cultural and Commercial Encounters of Yankees and Parsis, 1771-1865* (London: Palgrave Macmillon, 2019), Susan Bean, *Yankee India: American Commercial and Cultural Encounters with India in the Age of Sail, 1784-1860* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2001), and Jane Hooper, “Yankees in Indian Ocean Africa:

As upstarts from Boston and New York pressured Salem's merchants, Richard Waters struggled to retain his privileged position. Angered by his tight grip on the trade, Waters's competitors revolted, lobbying the State Department for his removal. On Zanzibar, however, Jairam Shivji had the last say. Access to American commodities, especially cotton cloth, had become a key part of Zanzibar's trade in East Africa.²²¹ Eager to maximize foreign imports, and his own income, Shivji ended his exclusive arrangement with Waters around 1843. Although the two men continued to trade, Waters lost his near monopoly over American imports. Still, by his departure in 1844, Waters had amassed a small fortune. Driven by self-interest, during his short tenure Waters had nonetheless helped standardize and simplify cross-cultural trade on Zanzibar, laying the groundwork for decades of mutually beneficial exchange. The future of the American consulate remained less clear. Would the next consul fight to regain a monopoly over American trade or privilege his nation's broader diplomatic aims over his own wealth?²²²

Madagascar and Nineteenth-Century American Commerce," *African Economic History* 46, no. 2 (2018): pp. 30-62.

²²¹ Although the rising demand for cotton cloth benefited Salem, it largely resulted from East African's incorporation of the commodity into cultural practices for establishing and strengthening social relationships. Indeed, East Africans' role as consumers reshaped the world around them, affecting the formation of trade networks across the Indian Ocean as well as the development of manufacturing as far away as India, Western Europe, and Salem. While merchants often receive extensive attention from scholars of business and economic history, the viability of their commercial ventures ultimately depended on the choices of innumerable consumers who were often members of indigenous communities. See: Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

²²² This chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, draws heavily on scholarship by Norman Bennett. His extensive work on American merchants as well as his broader research on Zanzibari and East African history serve as an essential foundation for this project. In his publications, Bennett examines a wide swath of documents and collects data that offered key avenues for further investigation. See: "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v. 95 (1959), Norman Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1845-1865," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v. 97 (1961), and Norman Bennett "Americans in Zanzibar: 1865-1915," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, v. 98 (1962). In addition, Bennett and George Brooks Jr.'s edited collection, *New England Merchants in Africa*, compiles a broad source base, on both East

Arrival

After stops in Madagascar and Mozambique, the *Generous* arrived off Zanzibar on March 17, 1837, 139 days after embarking from Salem. Onboard was Richard Waters, the first American consul in East Africa. Like almost all Americans of his day, Waters knew very little about the region although he had likely gleaned what he could from Salem's worldly sailors, in particular, John Bertram, who had captained a ship to Zanzibar in 1831. Unable to speak any of the island's languages and with very limited communication with the United States, Waters would have to find his own way. While Waters's ignorance complicated American-Omani relations, and his own commercial ambitions, his upbringing in the United States proved just as much of a hurdle.

Broadly speaking, Richard Waters's America continuously asserted the superiority of white, Anglophone, protestant "civilization." Any deviations from these norms were deemed inherently inferior and attributed to the innate failings of non-white races.²²³ While en route to Zanzibar, Waters scribbled heartfelt invocations of the glories of Jesus Christ. Although Waters had accepted the consulship to make money, he also viewed himself as a de facto missionary, bringing the light of Jesus to his inferiors. Waters mused, "I desire... to be instrumental of good to the people with whom I am to reside for a season... in that dark portion of the world. If I am

and West Africa, that is an essential first step for any research on this topic. Norman Bennett and George Brooks, Jr., *New England Merchants in Africa: a History through Documents, 1802 to 1865* (New York, N.Y., 1965). For another early overview of Salem's mercantile activities in the Indian Ocean, see: Philip Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar-East African Trade, 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 90 (1954).

²²³ Even as Waters's childhood had inculcated a fundamental belief in white supremacy, his strain of northern Protestantism allowed him to foster a meaningful belief in the sinfulness of slavery, be it in America or East Africa.

faithful and successful in my efforts to dispel their darkness... – my sacrifices.... will be well made up.”²²⁴ Such a world view did not easily lend itself to accommodating foreign cultural traditions or even commercial practices. Once on shore, Waters took his self-imposed mission seriously, occasionally to the detriment of American-Omani diplomacy, going so far as to lecture Said bin Sultan on the righteousness of Christianity. Before he even reached dry land, Waters’s ignorance of Islam became apparent. As the *Generous* lay offshore on the morning of March 18, a handful of Arab officials visited Waters onboard. Playing the gracious host, Waters offered his visitors wine, carefully noting in his journal that they refused for religious reasons.²²⁵

The next morning, uncharacteristically active on the Sabbath, Waters set foot on Zanzibar for the first time. Although he recorded few early impressions, many of his countrymen were less reticent. From the sea, weary American sailors and merchants marveled at the tropical landscape unfolding before them: “The island is low, gently undulated, beautifully verdant, crowded by trees of various kinds, and fringed with groves of cocoanuts,” observed an American naval officer. “After gazing on the blue skies and blue seas for fifty days, such a sight carries with it an exhilarating and delightful influence, which one must experience to understand.”²²⁶ As they drew nearer, the town itself came into sight, the view dominated by the fort, the palace, and the façade of other imposing stone buildings. Travelling on one of his father’s ships, Michael W. Shepard remarked that “the town presents a very good appearance from the harbor, especially that part situated on the beach, composed of stone and covered with... mortar.” Pretty soon, however,

²²⁴ Entry for December 31, 1836, Journal of Richard Waters, Box 4 Folder 1, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²²⁵ Entry for March 18 1837, Journal of Richard Waters, Box 4 Folder 1, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²²⁶ W. S. W. Ruschenberger, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World: during the Years 1835, 36, and 37: Including a Narrative of an Embassy to the Sultan of Muscat and the King of Siam*, vol. 1 (London: R. Bentley, 1838), 24.

almost every American account soured. Shepard continued, “on arriving ashore the place presents a very different aspect; the beach and streets are very filthy and the horrid smells that sometimes fill the air are enough to turn the stomach.”²²⁷ As Americans ventured deeper into the town’s narrow, winding alleyways, their descriptions became still more dire. Used to the aging grandeur of Salem’s wide commercial boulevards, the crisp federal architecture of the town hall, and the imposing edifice of the custom house, American arrivals struggled to fit their preconceptions of a thriving commercial center with the reality in front of their eyes. As one critical Salemite put it:

The streets of Zanzibar are short and irregularly laid out. In the business section of the town, they are formed by the shops of the various trades-people, whose filthy habits make the streets constant receptacles for every kind of filth, the accumulations of which are suffered to remain till the purifying floods of the rainy season wash them away.²²⁸

A World Apart

In 1837 Zanzibar was a thriving entrepôt, home to tens of thousands of people from across the Western Indian Ocean. On any given day, its narrow streets pulsed with life, as men from all walks of life went about their business. Bands of recently captured East Africans trudged towards the slave market on the town’s eastern border, haggard from weeks of forced marches and a short, but hellish, dhow ride to the island. Their predecessors eyed them wearily as they walked by, too busy running errands or unloading their owner’s merchandise to give them much thought. A lone Arab, escorted by a retinue of slaves wrapped in long bands of cotton cloth, strode confidently in the other direction towards the custom house, hoping to find a buyer for his rapidly ripening cloves. On his way, he passed a handful of Indians, arguing good

²²⁷ Entry for May 15 1844, Log 1987, PEM.

²²⁸ Joseph B. F. Osgood, *Notes of Travel, or, Recollections of Majunga, Zanzibar, Muscat, Aden, Mocha, and Other Eastern Ports* (Salem, MA: G. Creamer, 1854), Osgood, 32.

naturedly in Gujarati, clustered around a small shop that could barely hold the assorted goods carefully tucked inside. A pair of Baluchi guards, leaning on aging muskets, sweated in the sparse shade of a nearby coconut tree as they awaited the end of their shift.

All told, Waters's initial foray onto Zanzibar proceeded smoothly. Said bin Sultan, who was often absent traveling to and from Muscat, was in residence, allowing Waters to appeal to him directly if trouble arose. On March 20, the two men met for the first time at Mtoni, Said's country palace a few miles northeast of town. Waters's first impression of Said was positive, describing him as a "fine looking man about 50 years old."²²⁹ Via a translator, Waters spent an hour expressing the U.S. government's sincere interest in maintaining a friendly relationship with the Sultan and extending America's mercantile presence in his domains. With formal introductions out of the way, Waters turned to the more mundane necessities of acquiring a house and outfitting it for business. At the same time, he took stock of the strange world around him, eager to begin his commercial endeavors.

With each passing day, Waters gained a slightly clearer understanding of the prevailing balance of power on the island. Above all others stood Said bin Sultan, the Sultan of Muscat and its Dependencies. Zanzibar's small size allowed Said a steady hold on power that eluded him in Oman. Said was generally able to manage Zanzibar with less than a hundred Baluchi soldiers. His standing on the nearby coast of East African was much more tenuous. Although he appointed governors to oversee each sizable port, their authority was primarily limited to collecting commercial duties. Even this sometimes proved impossible as shifting alliances of Swahili and Arab notables jockeyed for influence and outright sovereignty. When faced with sustained

²²⁹ Entry for March 20, 1837, Journal of Richard Waters, Box 4 Folder 1, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

opposition that seriously threatened his revenue, Said periodically projected tangible, if delayed, military might, importing troops from Zanzibar and Arabia.²³⁰ As the 1830s progressed, Said returned to Oman less frequently, with longer sojourns on Zanzibar between each voyage.²³¹ While the island served as a safe haven in the stormy waters of Omani politics, Said still had to carefully balance the shifting and often conflicting interests of multiple power bases.

Nonetheless, gaining Said's favor was the first prerequisite for amassing influence and wealth. As a result, Said's immediate family, especially his three or four eldest sons, wielded significant authority. Next in line were distant relatives and members of prominent Omani tribes. Even amongst Zanzibar's small Arab population, which numbered in the hundreds, tribal divisions that had defined centuries of Omani politics and warfare remained a constant undercurrent. Still, Said rewarded competency. Although Zanzibar's government had few official positions, Said appointed capable followers to oversee the island's management. One of the most powerful figures was Suleiman bin Hamad, who served as the island's governor and handled most of its daily affairs. A distant cousin of Said, Suleiman earned the position around 1830.²³² One of the richest men on the island, Suleiman owned a vast array of clove plantations, second only to Said's. As governor, he presided over a wide array of business disputes as well as other matters needing immediate attention while Said's focus lay elsewhere.²³³ Said's other main deputy was his son Khaled.²³⁴ By the 1830s, the teenager had displaced his older brother Hilal as

²³⁰ Charles Guillain, *Documents sur l'Histoire, la Géographie et le Commerce de l'Afrique Orientale*, vol. 2 (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1856), 238.

²³¹ Mohamed Reda. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: The Roots of British Domination* (London: Routledge, 1992), 93.

²³² John Milner Gray, *History of Zanzibar, from the Middle Ages to 1856* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 127.

²³³ Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Ohio University Press, 1987), 203.

²³⁴ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 179.

heir apparent.²³⁵ By 1835, Khalid oversaw Zanzibar in Said's absence, assuming overarching authority even as Suleiman bin Hamad maintained his role as chief administrator.²³⁶

During Oman's limited settlement of Zanzibar in the eighteenth century, the indigenous leader, the Mwinyi Mkuu, retained significant sovereignty over his people, especially outside of the small coastal enclave that developed into Zanzibar Town. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a larger wave of Omani settlers arrived on Zanzibar. Radiating out from the western coast, the Arabs steadily dispossessed the indigenous population. As clove production increased in the 1820s, Arabs appropriated indigenous agricultural plots to form large plantations. By Said's arrival in 1828, Omanis controlled much of the island, although the Mwinyi Mkuu retained significant influence over the indigenous population who still dominated the island's eastern and southern sections.²³⁷ The explosive growth of the East African slave trade weakened the Mwinyi Mkuu's authority. As captives streamed onto Zanzibar, the indigenous inhabitants became a smaller fraction of the island's total population. While the vast majority of new inhabitants were East Africans, they belonged to a disjointed mélange of ethnic groups whose ancestral lands spanned hundreds of miles of the African coastline and interior. While this upheaval fed into the flowering of Zanzibar's Swahili culture, the brutal, fractured nature of Zanzibar's slave society undermined the indigenous community.

Zanzibar's final core constituency were Indian merchants who oversaw a large percentage of the island's trade. Although dependent on Said bin Sultan and his limited governmental institutions, the Indian community played a dominant role in Zanzibar's economic

²³⁵ Gray, *History of Zanzibar*, 127. Khalid died in 1854, two years before Said bin Sultan, complicating the dispute over succession. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 179.

²³⁶ Ruschenberger, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World*, 33.

²³⁷ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 51.

ascent, connecting the island to a dozen other commercial ports across the Western Indian Ocean. Dominated by men from Gujarat, specifically Kutch, on the subcontinent's northwestern coast, the community also included smaller numbers of traders from Sind and other parts of western India. Even as their economic ties to Zanzibar deepened, most of the men continued to treat the island as a commercial outpost. Although increasingly vibrant, Zanzibar was still a relatively new commercial player, attracting younger, junior members in established Indian family firms. As representatives of larger organizations, some of the merchants had access to substantial capital, able to draw upon specie or credit to take advantage of emerging opportunities in East Africa.²³⁸ Simply put, Indian capital underwrote Zanzibar's economy. As always, money peddled influence. While the broader Indian community exerted considerable economic power, Jairam Shivji, Zanzibar's perennial custom master, held particular sway with Said bin Sultan.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Shivji family had a long history with the Busaidis. By 1819, Jairam's father, Shivji, had gained control of Zanzibar's revenues, reaping his reward for decades of crucial economic support to Said and his predecessors.²³⁹ During the 1830s, Shivji dispatched Jairam to Zanzibar following a short apprenticeship with other family members. Jairam soon took over his family's commercial outpost as well as the position of custom master.²⁴⁰ Within a few years, Jairam had amassed considerable influence on Zanzibar becoming

²³⁸ For example, aspiring Arab merchants contracted with these middlemen, borrowing funds which they used to undertake extended ivory and slaving caravans hundreds of miles into the African Interior. After a few successful voyages, a small-time slaver could transition comfortably into the more genteel role of plantation owner.

²³⁹ M. Reda Bhacker asserts that before Shivji, the customs fell under the purview of Zanzibar's governor while Chhaya Goswami argues that they were overseen by the Bhimani trading family who controlled Muscat's revenues as well. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 75; Goswami, *Globalization Before its Time*, 205.

²⁴⁰ Goswami, *Globalization Before its Time*, 205.

one of its most prolific merchants and richest inhabitants. Besides earning a cut on every commodity imported to the island, he bought and sold tens of thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise in his own right.²⁴¹

Assuming his role as a commercial agent, Waters must have come into contact with Jairam, one of the island's few English speakers, almost immediately. Still, the custom master is conspicuously absent from Waters's early records. Instead, the consul turned to three Arab businessmen who Said bin Sultan had chosen as envoys, primarily due to their varying knowledge of English: Hassan bin Ibrahim, Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr, and Mahi Mershed. Of the three, Hassan bin Ibrahim took the lead. Dubbed Captain Hassan by the Americans due to his former role in the Sultan's navy, he now served as Said's secretary. In 1835, Edmund Roberts remarked that Hassan "transacted nearly all the [American] business."²⁴² During Waters' early tenure, Hassan bin Ibrahim helped him secure a house and frequently checked up on him. All the while, Hassan played an essential role in easing communication between Waters and Said, translating the Sultan's letters and conversations while also providing crucial support and information as the American found his footing.

Although Hassan was the leading figure, Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr and Mahi Mershed also served as crucial contacts to the Sultan's court as well as to the island's Arab community.²⁴³ While Waters, Muhammad, and Mahi were thrown together to ease

²⁴¹ By Waters's arrival in 1837, Jairam had purchased the rights to farm the customs of Mombasa and much of the nearby East African coastline, establishing his firm as the predominant commercial organization in Omani East Africa and himself as a power player on Zanzibar. Goswami, *Globalization Before its Time*, 205.

²⁴² Edmund Roberts to John Forsyth, October 10, 1835, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 162.

²⁴³ Entry for October 23 1837, Journal of Richard Waters, Box 4 Folder 1, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

communication, Waters formed a friendly relationship with the two men who periodically visited his house to discuss business. Waters in turn received grand receptions at their clove plantations a few miles outside of town. Unsurprisingly, when it came time for deals to be made, Waters turned to the three men, especially Muhammad, who provided him with thousands of pounds of cloves and hides while occasionally buying American goods in return.²⁴⁴ On Zanzibar, diplomacy was a means to a commercial end.

Troubled Waters

Even as he made inroads with Zanzibar's Arab elite, Waters, in his role as consul, was dragged into numerous business disputes, magnified by the cultural chasms between American captains and the Indian and Arab businessmen they encountered onshore. Although 1837 was a relatively slow year for American commerce, with only three ships arriving, significant amounts of commodities and specie still changed hands. During the year, Americans offloaded MT\$58,000 worth of imports and purchased MT\$104,000 of Indian Ocean goods.²⁴⁵

To ensure Shivji received his hard-won duty, incoming ships were required to unload their cargos on the beach in front of the custom house, an unimposing shack thatched with coconut fronds near the fort. To unload their goods, the Americans were forced to hire numerous

²⁴⁴ Assorted Contracts, Box 2 Folders 6-7, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁴⁵ See Figure Six in the Appendix. Based on Richard Waters's use of "dollar" to likely refer to Maria Theresa Thalers and the fact that William Speer drew on existing consular records and various commercial accounts to compile his data, the values are listed in MT\$ even though Speer also listed the currency as "dollars." In effect, throughout this project transactions conducted in the United States are listed in United States Dollars (\$) and those in the Western Indian Ocean are listed in Maria Theresa Thalers (MT\$). Report of Zanzibar, William Speer, Dispatches from United States Consuls in Zanzibar, Zanzibar British African 1836-1906, Roll 2 Volume 4, Dispatches from United States Consuls in Zanzibar, Zanzibar British African 1836-1906, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Consular Posts, RG 84, United States National Archives and Records Administration (USNARA).

laborers, possibly Jairam's own slaves, to do the heavy lifting. This seemingly mundane stipulation caused Waters, and incoming American captains, immediate consternation. Far from objecting to coerced labor, the men decried the costs. One of the key tenets of the American-Omani treaty was a hard limit on fees, restricting all charges to a five percent import tax on American goods. The Americans considered the labor costs a clear breach of the treaty. Waters diplomatic standing and commercial viability depended heavily on the vaguely worded agreement. As a result, Waters meant to enforce every clause.

Waters's countrymen agreed. Before long, an American captain, Benjamin Conant, got into a heated argument with Shivji over the practice. As Waters recounted in a letter to the Secretary of State, "the Capt. and the Master of Customs became enraged and highly improper words passed between them."²⁴⁶ In response, Conant pointedly flaunted the requirement by refusing to transfer his goods at the custom house. Although Waters sympathized with Conant, his undiplomatic actions forced Waters into an uncomfortable position. Within hours, Shivji had informed the Sultan of the dust-up. The next day, Waters called upon Said arguing that the fees violated the treaty. While Waters reported that the Sultan acquiesced in person, six months later when he again broached the issue, Said demurred, writing that such a change "would bring trouble to the place."²⁴⁷ With decades of experience dealing with powerful but faraway European empires, Said bin Sultan was a master of prevarication and strategic delay. Clearly, the relatively brief American-Omani Treaty left much unsaid. As a result, a series of negotiations, mostly informal commercial exchanges, were required to establish extended financial relationships.

²⁴⁶ Richard Waters to John Forsyth, May 6, 1837, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 217.

²⁴⁷ Said bin Sultan to Richard Waters, October 19, 1837, Box 1 Folder 6, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

A shouting match at the customhouse, however, paled in comparison to some of Richard Waters's early misadventures as American consul. Although Hassan bin Ibrahim dealt extensively with visiting Western merchants, he was far from alone. Before Waters arrived, American captains had contracted with a handful of local merchants to sell their goods and procure outgoing shipments. While American vessels sometimes stopped on Zanzibar for months while Zanzibari businessmen assembled their return cargos, they usually continued north and visited the Arabian Peninsula, leaving their chosen agent with little oversight.

One local merchant, Amir bin Said, had long conducted business for Salem's merchants. Years before Waters's arrival, he served as an agent for the Rogers Brothers, one of the first Salem firms to trade on the island. By 1832, however, he owed the Rogers over two thousand dollars. For years, the firm had attempted to recoup the payment, offering to take a shipment of ivory or tortoise shell in lieu of cash.²⁴⁸ Still, the Rogers could do little to compel him to pay his debts. While their captains repeatedly urged Said bin Sultan to intervene, their transitory presence put little pressure on Said or Amir to respond. Living on the island, Waters was harder to put off. To add insult to injury, the consul directly threatened Amir's business as he soon became the *de facto* agent for all Americans on Zanzibar.

Within months, tensions flared. In mid-July, some of Waters's lumber went missing. When similar wood appeared in Amir bin Said's yard, Waters accused him of theft. After a testy exchange, Waters threatened to tell the Sultan. According to Waters, Amir's "language and manner became... highly insulting to me and my country." When Waters grabbed the Omani's collar, three of Amir's slaves descended on him, beating him with clubs. Writing to the Sultan,

²⁴⁸ Copy of Letter, N. L. Rogers & Bros to Amir bin Said, August 22, 1835, Box 4 Folder 2, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

Waters invoked the treaty, that ensured “that a ‘Consul’s person & property shall be inviolate.’”²⁴⁹ While Said bin Sultan was sympathetic, he vacillated, trying to establish who started the brawl before taking sides. Taking advantage of his limited consular authority, Waters began to pressure Amir bin Said to repay his debts. The way forward was far from clear. As Waters remarked to the Sultan “the Treaty which I received from my Government, provides no way, by which disputes between citizens of the United States, and your subjects are to be settled.”²⁵⁰

By October, Waters urged the Sultan to seize Amir’s house and other property to repay two Salem firms. Waters’s escalating dispute with Amir bin Said exemplified the almost nonexistent distinctions between his roles as consul and commercial agent. Although supposedly acting on behalf of his countrymen, Waters pursued a decidedly personal vendetta against a commercial competitor. Waters’s grudge soon ostracized him from Zanzibar’s Arab community. In the months after his fight with Amir, Waters’s house was repeatedly stoned at night.²⁵¹ Of much more concern, he lost the goodwill of the Sultan’s retinue, hinting at Said bin Sultan’s own displeasure. By November, Captain Hassan, Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr, and Mahi Mershed; all refused to serve as translators, effectively cutting off the American consul from Said bin Sultan. Eventually the dispute petered out. Waters made up with the three men and did not experience prolonged ill-will from the Sultan. Although Amir bin Said had poisoned his relationship with most Western merchants, having also run off with merchandise belonging to a

²⁴⁹ Richard Waters to Syed bin Sultan, July 15, 1837, Box 4 Folder 2, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁵⁰ Richard Waters to Syed bin Sultan, October 26, 1837, Box 4 Folder 2, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁵¹ Richard Waters to Syed bin Sultan, October 13, 1837, Box 4 Folder 2, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

British firm, he made enough money to set himself up as an influential merchant.²⁵² For the moment, taking advantage of inexperienced Westerners remained good business.

For his part, Richard Waters was slowly learning the limits of his commercial and diplomatic influence. A year after the disagreement over unloading cargo, Waters's relationship with Jairam Shivji remained frosty. In mid-1838, Waters complained to Said that Jairam had perpetrated "a most outrageous cheat" on an American captain, who just happened to be his brother. Sailing for David Pingree, John Waters had agreed to buy almost two hundred thousand pounds of gum copal from the custom master.²⁵³ After the goods were delivered, the brothers claimed that a large amount of low-quality copal and dirt had been mixed in to pad the shipment. Although Richard Waters decried "Jerams highly criminal conduct" to Said bin Sultan, there is little indication that he received much sympathy, or even a response.²⁵⁴ Jairam served as Said's de facto banker, granting the Sultan an essential line of credit that underwrote his commercial, political, and military ventures. While Said bin Sultan had overarching authority on Zanzibar, much of his prestige stemmed from a carefully cultivated policy of benign neglect. In financial

²⁵² Around the same time, Amir had contracted with the British firm of Newman, Hunt, and Christopher who provided him a large amount of cargo to sell on their behalf. Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 91, 108.

²⁵³ Roughly 140,000 pounds and 35,000 pounds respectively. A frasilah was the predominant unit of weight used to measure commodities on Zanzibar, equivalent to roughly thirty-five pounds. Gum copal is the fossilized resin from a tree, *Hymenaea verrucosa*, native to Tanzania's coastal forests. The older, and more completely fossilized the copal, the more valuable it was. As such, high quality copal was dug out of the earth, often several feet below ground, and not harvested directly from trees. In the nineteenth century, copal became increasingly sought after in the United States and Europe for use in furniture vanishes and for coating carriages. While lower grade copal taken directly from the tree or ground could be sold, it fetched a lower price and was universally understood to be of inferior quality. Thaddeus Sunseri, "The Political Ecology of the Copal Trade in the Tanzanian Coastal Hinterland, c. 1820-1905," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 48, No. 2, (2007).

²⁵⁴ Richard Waters to Syed bin Sultan, 1838, Box 4 Folder 2, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

matters, especially, Jairam Shivji had extensive leeway. In the long run, Richard Waters had little chance of success if he continued to butt heads with the island's leading capitalist

The Consul and the Custom Master

By the end of 1838, Waters had a firmer grasp on how business was done on Zanzibar. And that meant developing a strong personal and financial relationship with Jairam Shivji. Sometime between late 1838 and early 1839, Waters and Shivji's relationship drastically shifted from antagonistic acquaintances to colleagues. While the exact cause remains hazy, Waters had significantly more to gain by approaching Jairam than vice versa. A strong connection with the custom master would allow Waters more influence over the prices he procured while also significantly improving his standing on Zanzibar. As Shivji was able to assert considerable pressure on the island's other Indian merchants, and to a lesser extent its Arab traders, finding willing buyers depended on his tacit approval. Although Waters's status as consul gave him an edge in representing American traders, and earning two and a half percent commission fee on all transactions, Zanzibar was a competitive marketplace. Numerous hard-nosed merchants, like Amir bin Said, would jump at the chance to undercut Waters and force him off the island. Coopting American commerce had fewer upsides for Jairam who was already the richest merchant on the island. Still, more foreign trade meant more money as he earned a five percent duty on all imports. In addition, by personally negotiating the sales, Shivji would earn a commission, ensuring a second line of profit on the same transactions. Unlike Waters, who had to worry about direct competition, Shivji's dominant commercial status and influence with Said bin Sultan allowed him to unilaterally position himself as the main supplier of Indian Ocean goods to American ships if he so chose.

With the slow realization that cooperation would prove more profitable than competition, the two men struck a deal: Waters offered Shivji first access to all American goods and Shivji ensured Waters consistent access to Zanzibar's commodities at fair prices. By the fall of 1839, Waters and Shivji were working hand in glove. When the Salem vessel *Waverly* docked at Zanzibar, Waters set about procuring over twenty-five thousand pounds of cloves. While he sourced the spice from more than a dozen traders, including Shivji, Waters scrawled in the margin of almost every transaction "P[ai]d Jeram." Illustrating their growing trust, Waters stored hundreds of dollars of his employer's money with Shivji, as well as a bit of his own, a far cry from their toxic relationship a year earlier.²⁵⁵

In 1840, Waters described the new status quo to his temporary replacement:

On the arrival of any American vessel in Zanzibar, the Captain will visit you soon after the vessel comes to anchor... It will be your duty when thus invited to a private interview to state about what you know regarding this market... After you have engaged to do the business of any vessel, you will do well to hold a conversation with Jeram bin Sera, the Custom Master... Should the Capt. Conclude to sell at the offers made, Jeram will be the person to whom you will deliver the goods and also charge them to...

After understanding a bargain distinctly, it will be necessary to close it by shaking hands, and at the same time, to repeat it over – Soon after, draw up a written contract in duplicate... – Retain one yourself, and one hand to Jeram. I wish you to give Jeram the preference in offering him whatever I may have to sell – and in purchasing whatever I may wish to buy... taking all things into consideration, a more safe & expeditious business can be done with Jeram, than all the merchants put together in Zanzibar.²⁵⁶

Thanks to his association with Jairam Shivji, Richard Waters had established himself as the predominant agent for American vessels, ensuring a steady stream of income.

While the American-Omani Treaty laid the groundwork for an expanded commercial relationship between the two states by standardizing trading duties and allowing for an American

²⁵⁵ Memoranda Book, Box 3 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁵⁶ Richard Waters to P. S. Parker, January 1, 1840, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

consulate, sustained cross-cultural trade on Zanzibar depended first and foremost on establishing and maintaining personal relationships with the islands most influential men. On Zanzibar, Said bin Sultan's deeply personal form of government and Jairam Shivji's dominant economic position meant that the men themselves often played the regulating role of "institutions."²⁵⁷ In his position as custom master, Shivji served as a de facto bank for the Sultan, fronting money as needed. At the same time, he also effectively underwrote much of the island's trade, significantly bolstering American confidence in the legitimacy of any given contract. As Waters informed a colleague "anyone for whom Jeram would become security, you might credit with the understanding that in case the individual did not meet his engagement, you should hold Jeram responsible."²⁵⁸ During Waters's early confrontations with Shivji or when he periodically fell out of Said's favor, he struggled to conduct commercial transactions. With the two men's support, Waters succeeded.

As much as Shivji and Waters's commercial relationship served as the bedrock of American and Zanzibari trade, it remained susceptible to mutual misunderstandings and suspicion. Although Waters's acknowledged Jairam's unique commercial status, he still often portrayed himself as the driving force in the relationship:

Jeram and myself are on the best terms. He respects and fears me and at the same time I have his confidence... He wants watching but it must be done in a kind skilful [*sic*] manner, so that he will not observe *when* you have your eye on him. And at the same

²⁵⁷ In his influential work, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, Philip Curtin centers the development of "institutions" as an essential prerequisite to sustained trade. Interested in establishing broadly recognizable, if variable, forms of commercial development over wide swaths of time and space, Curtin leaves this term largely undefined, spanning everything from formal trade organizations to concepts of fictive kinship. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*.

²⁵⁸ Richard Waters to P. S. Parker, January 1, 1840, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

time he must have the impression that you are always watching him. By pursuing a right course you will soon get his confidence and find him a great help.²⁵⁹

While shared commercial interests brought the two men together and facilitated large, ongoing financial transactions, outright trust remained elusive, and not entirely necessary.

Commercial growth also depended heavily on the emergence of a mutually comprehensible framework of exchange. While Waters and Shivji's understanding helped solidify emerging norms, many of the strictures of American-Zanzibari trade had begun to take shape during the previous decade, negotiated and renegotiated with each commercial transaction. During initial American visits, each aspect of trade had to be actively determined, and if possible, tweaked to better suit American norms and profit margins. While many of Salem's captains had already visited Madagascar or Mocha, neither was a perfect proxy for Zanzibar. Luckily, the Indian-led commercial system of Zanzibar was well-established and flexible, lending itself to expansion and the incorporation of new trading partners. For centuries, Indian commercial networks had reached into new markets spanning large regions of the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa. Many of the traders themselves were Hindu, including Jairam. Still, the Omanis relied on Islamic legal traditions which offered a broadly shared set of guidelines as well as judges that could provide arbitration if necessary.²⁶⁰

For years, the growth of American trade on Zanzibar had raised a myriad of basic questions. What goods would sell? What currencies would be accepted? Was it possible to access credit reliably? How would commodities be evaluated and measured? The answers to

²⁵⁹ Richard Waters to William Waters, December 17, 1839, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁶⁰ For a discussion of the widespread influence of Islamic legal reasoning on commerce in the region see: Bishara, *A Sea of Debt*.

many of these questions appear in dozens of surviving bilingual commodity contracts which served as the fundamental vehicle of American-Zanzibari trade. Rendered in English and either Arabic or Gujarati, Jairam Shivji's native tongue, the agreements' formulaic clauses depict the careful melding of Indian Ocean and Atlantic commercial traditions:

Zanzibar April 28th. 1842

It is agreed between Mahomed bin Abdel Cardree on one part, and Richard P. Waters on the other part as follows. The said Mahomed bin Abdel Cardree agrees to furnish the said R. P. Waters with Two hundred and fifty frasillas Cloves – ea[ch] frasilla 35 lbs – at Four dollars and fifty cents per frasilla within Six months from date. The Cloves are to be in the best order dry and free from dirt and the said Mahomed hereby acknowledges to have received Eleven hundred and twenty five dollars in payment for the same: and hereby binds his heirs and executors to the full performance of this contract.²⁶¹

During the early years of American trade, most transactions were conducted in English. No American had more than a rudimentary understanding of Gujarati, Arabic, or Swahili while a handful of Zanzibar's prominent merchants, both Indian and Arab, knew at least some English. Even when a contract appeared on a single sheet of paper in two languages, the two sections were rarely a one-for-one translation of the other. Although the two disparate groups were developing a shared language of business, each iteration of the same contract reflected their own prevailing trading system as well as their priorities in a given transaction. The most striking difference between the English contracts and their Arabic and Gujarati counterparts are the length. This discrepancy resulted from the level of detail included in each section. While the English version usually included the quality, amount, and price of the goods being sold, as well as the expected date of delivery, the Arabic and Gujarati versions were often briefer and less

²⁶¹ Mahomed bin Abdel Cardree refers to Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr. Contract, April 28, 1842, Box 2 Folder 6, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

detailed, sometimes limited to just naming the commodity in question and the amount being exchanged. Even the price often went unwritten.²⁶²

These variations likely resulted from a confluence of factors. Broadly speaking, American traders were far from home, conducting business in a seemingly inscrutable, exotic locale. Writing down every detail and locking their foreign partners into a specific, recorded stance provided Waters and his peers a relatively secure basis from which to move forward. If they later felt the contract had been breached, they had a clear record to bring a complaint to the Sultan or his representatives. Conversely, Zanzibar's resident merchants were much more firmly positioned on the island, with a strong understanding of the fundamental precepts of regional trade. Men like Jairam Shivji had an encyclopedic knowledge of the going prices of a wide array of commodities as well as the generally acceptable quality of each item. Why write down what went without saying?²⁶³

For these contracts to function efficiently, a broad framework of standards had to be agreed upon. Even if Waters and his American peers had learned through trial and error to accommodate many of the prevailing customs of Zanzibari trade, the contracts do illustrate key blendings of Atlantic and Indian Ocean commercial practices, most visibly in the use of contrasting units of weights and measures. During this period, traders appropriated a diffuse

²⁶² Fahad Bishara and Hollian Wint, "Into the Bazaar: Indian Ocean Vernaculars in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 1 (2020): pp. 44-64.

²⁶³ Recent scholarship also points to this discrepancy as resulting from a fundamental difference between traditions of Atlantic and Indian Ocean commerce. Indian Ocean exchange was heavily influenced by relational social factors in which supposedly static market prices remained in flux as each transaction was filtered through a complex array of social hierarchy, outstanding obligations, and lines of credit and debt. Thus, a fixed contractual price, so essential to American traders, was fundamentally less useful to their Zanzibari counterparts who understood exchange as a social as well as economic agreement. See Fahad Bishara and Hollian Wint, "Into the Bazaar: Indian Ocean Vernaculars in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 1 (2020): pp. 44-64.

combination of units that varied by commodity but tended to be internally consistent. The predominant unit for Zanzibar goods was the “frasilah,” equivalent to a weight of roughly thirty-five pounds, that was widely used across the Western Indian Ocean. Cloves, ivory, and gum copal were generally recorded and sold by the frasilah as were dates and coffee on the Arabian Peninsula. In American records, Indian Ocean commodities retained the same foreign system of measurement throughout the entire cycle of trade. When ivory, cloves, and gum copal arrived back in Salem, the goods often appeared in local newspapers still advertised by the frasilah. Likewise, the Gujarati versions of these contracts used direct translations of American units, referring to buying cotton by the bale and muskets by the box.²⁶⁴ This continuity likely served as a functional way to minimize conversions, limiting the potential for costly accounting errors. The other Indian Ocean measurement widely adopted by American traders was the “corgie,” a unit of mass used predominately in the sale of hides. In general, a corgie signified roughly twenty hides, with each expected to weigh at least eight pounds.²⁶⁵

The predominant currency of the Omani state and the Indian traders within its borders was the Maria Theresa thaler (\$MT), an Austrian silver coin first minted in the mid-eighteenth century. Used to an economy backed by silver reserves, American businessmen accepted the status quo with an important caveat. The thaler’s distant point of origin and consistent high demand forced merchants of all origins to substitute other forms of specie, usually at a discounted rate. To fill the gap, American traders relied on large shipments of North American silver.²⁶⁶ By 1840, most American purchases on Zanzibar were made with Mexican or Spanish

²⁶⁴ Thanks to Hollian Wint for translating the Gujarati portions of the contracts.

²⁶⁵ Contracts between Richard Waters and various merchants, 1840-5, Box 2 Folders 6-7, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁶⁶ By the mid-1830s, the United States’ financial system relied heavily on large amounts of Mexican silver. During the same period, American imports of Mexican silver pesos peaked at

dollars, although sometimes American commodities were directly exchanged for their Indian Ocean counterparts.²⁶⁷ The amount of currency each ship carried into the region varied significantly. Most cargos included around \$10,000, although sometimes they held much more. In 1840, the *Star*, owned by Shepard and Bertram, had nearly three thousand silver dollars and two thousand “Gold Johannas” on board.²⁶⁸ The next year, David Pingree’s *Cavalier* carried \$20,000 Spanish dollars while another of his vessels, the *Eliza*, brought \$12,500.²⁶⁹ While Zanzibar’s merchants generally accepted this specie, especially when Americans paid upfront, it was rarely accepted on a one-for-one basis with the thaler. The discounted rate of exchange, usually a few percentages, caused ongoing consternation.

By the 1840s, American ships introduced tens of thousands of silver dollars into Zanzibar’s market each year. While the economic and cultural impact of American commodities, especially cotton cloth, on Zanzibar and its environs has been well-researched, the significance of American specie on the regional economy has garnered less attention.²⁷⁰ As Abdul Sheriff mentions in passing, “this system enabled a larger number of Indian and Arab merchants to play

over eight-million per year. In search of specie to carry to the Indian Ocean, Salem’s merchants usually relied on this widespread currency which was accessible at large banks. The exact distinction Salem’s merchants drew between Mexican and Spanish silver is unclear. Alejandra Irigoin, “The End of a Silver Era: The Consequences of the Breakdown of the Spanish Peso Standard in China and the United States, 1780s–1850s,” *Journal of World History* 20, no. 2 (2009): pp. 207-244, 218.

²⁶⁷ This depended to a large extent on which goods were being exchanged. While gum copal was often traded directly for gunpowder or cotton cloth, ivory was almost always bought with specie. Contracts between Richard Waters and various merchants, 1840-5, Box 2 Folders 6-7, MH 14, PEM.

²⁶⁸ A Johanna was a Portuguese gold coin generally accepted in the Western Indian Ocean. Cargo Manifest of the *Star*, 1840, Box 9 Folder 5, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

²⁶⁹ Cargo Manifest of the *Cavalier*, 1841, Box 74 Folder 4, MSS 901 David Pingree Papers, PEM. Cargo Manifest of the *Eliza*, 1842, Box 87 Folder 4, MSS 901, David Pingree Papers, PEM.

²⁷⁰ See: Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008).

the middleman's role in collecting the required commodities from the mainland without needing to invest their meagre capital."²⁷¹ For every scion of an Indian trading family like Jairam Shivji, who could access lines of credit and specie in Kutch and Bombay, there were a dozen Indian shopkeepers and merchants interested in expanding their small commercial ventures. American silver played an essential role in bolstering the liquidity of the Zanzibari market, allowing a wider array of Indian merchants to expand their reach to the East African coast and beyond. As Zanzibar became an ever more central port, with close links across the Western Indian Ocean, the silver undoubtedly flowed to Arabia and India as well.

Like the use of various currencies, the process of paying and receiving goods was also a carefully crafted, and practical, compromise. In the majority of his contracts, Waters promised to pay part, or all, of the sum upfront. In return, he would receive the goods at a later date, usually in four or six months. By the early 1840s, Waters was willing to forward large sums of money to an array of Zanzibar's merchants. In the contract quoted above, Waters fronted Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr MT\$1,125 for cloves, set to be delivered within six months. The sums in question could be much larger. In one 1844 contract, Waters lent Isa bin 'Abdu, a frequent trading partner, four thousand dollars.²⁷² Although these arrangements depict high levels of trust between Waters and a dozen Zanzibari merchants, they were also highly practical. Besides cloves, coconut oil, and coir, all goods sold on Zanzibar had to be imported from East Africa and aggregated in large amounts. This took time. As more traders from New England and Europe reached the marketplace, access to these goods, especially gum copal and ivory, became highly competitive.

²⁷¹ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 96.

²⁷² Contract between Richard Waters and Esau bin Abdue Rahaman, January 9, 1844, Box 2 Folder 7, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

By advancing large sums of money, Waters ensured first access to the commodities as they arrived on Zanzibar.

These de facto loans represent one of the most substantial variations from comparable contracts between indigenous merchants in the region. Most surviving Zanzibari contracts used the leasing of land, resources, and crop yields as collateral to ensure fulfilment. The focus on cash and the clearly-defined, relatively short lengths of these contracts bring to light a fundamental difference between Americans in the region and more permanent inhabitants. Recent scholarship on the economic system of the Western Indian Ocean is dominated by discussions of extended debt.²⁷³ By promising a combination of cash, land, resources, and crop yields, Indian Ocean actors tied themselves to their lenders. For both parties, the obligatory relationship was often as important as the monetary yield provided. In an increasingly mobile region, especially as the East African slave trade funneled thousands of Africans to Zanzibar each year, slaves, former slaves, and new immigrants could find themselves without essential kinship networks. Tying oneself to a prominent local figure served as the basis for reforging communal identity, and debt served as a crucial method to do so. For the more transient Americans, with little desire to integrate into a foreign, and supposedly inferior society, tangible cash, profits, and commodities carried the day. While Zanzibari contracts might stretch on for years or be renewed multiple times, their American counterparts rarely pushed past half a year.

An American Interlude

²⁷³ See: Bishara, *A Sea of Debt*, and Thomas F. McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018).

For the moment, Waters had stabilized his relationships with key players on Zanzibar, ensuring a steady flow of money. Waters's rising status attracted renewed attention from the few Salem firms in the region. Initially, Waters had acquired the consulship with the support of Michael Shepard and John Bertram on the understanding that he would conduct their business on the island. While Waters prioritized their commerce, ensuring that they had first access to goods, he also served as an agent for multiple American firms on a ship-by-ship basis. With Waters's newfound success, trade with Zanzibar transitioned from one of many speculative ventures to a staple of Salem's maritime economy.

As Zanzibar became more saturated with American merchandise, competition turned increasingly cutthroat. Salem's merchants were nothing if not savvy capitalists, having survived the economic transformation of the early nineteenth century as well as the ongoing fallout from the Panic of 1837. In the spring of 1839, George West Jr., David Pingree's deputy, offered Waters an exclusive position with their firm.²⁷⁴ As Waters planned a trip to the United States, he confided in his brother William that "the probability is that I shall make arrangements while in America with some of our Salem Merchants to be concerned in this trade with them. I have already had proposals from some of them to this effect – and I think it will be for my interest to become connected with some one of them. But keep this to yourself..."²⁷⁵

In Salem's insular commercial sector, competitors were rarely more than one step removed. While Richard Waters had likely already conducted some business for Pingree on

²⁷⁴ Richard Waters to William Waters, December 17, 1839, Richard Waters Papers, Box 3 Folder 2, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁷⁵ Richard Waters to William Waters, December 17, 1839, Richard Waters Papers, Box 3 Folder 2, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

Zanzibar, his brother John had captained Pingree's ships for almost a decade.²⁷⁶ Back in Salem, Richard Waters signed an exclusive contract with David Pingree and George West Jr. In return for a steady commission and other perks, Waters would leverage his unparalleled knowledge of the market and his relationship with Jairam Shivji solely for Pingree. Across town, Shepard and Bertram could only watch as the man they had helped gain the consulship defected to their biggest rival.

Nearly a year after his initial departure, Richard Waters returned to Zanzibar in January 1841. In his absence, American trade, especially purchases of Zanzibari goods, had slowed substantially.²⁷⁷ After his return, American trade reached new heights. American exports rose to MT\$218,000, nearly double the previous high of 1839. The value of Indian Ocean goods purchased also reached a near record, totaling MT\$314,000.²⁷⁸ Although Waters's return heralded renewed commercial expansion, it also scrambled the intra-Salem balance of power on Zanzibar. David Pingree's firm was now ascendant. Although Waters had previously prioritized

²⁷⁶ An experienced seaman, John Waters had a long history with both David Pingree and Michael Shepard. As early as 1829, he had captained the pair's shared vessel, the *Cynthia*, to South America. When Shepard and Pingree parted ways, John Waters followed Pingree, serving as captain while also buying shares in a handful of his ships. By 1836, Waters co-owned Pingree's bark, the *Eliza*, captaining it on an Indian Ocean voyage that stopped at Zanzibar less than a year before his brother assumed the consulship. Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879, online database, Mystic Seaport Museum, <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>; A. Frank. Hitchings and Stephen Willard Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1906), 49.

²⁷⁷ While some of this precipitous drop can be attributed to Waters's departure, as he had built an unparalleled position on the island, some of the recorded decline likely resulted from a more mundane breakdown in record keeping as assorted American representatives failed to aggregate data in the same centralized manner. Report on Zanzibar, 1862, William Speer, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA, 34.

²⁷⁸ See Figure Six in the Appendix. Report on Zanzibar, 1862, William Speer, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA, 34.

Shepard and Bertram's interests, he had still conducted sporadic business for other firms. Now, Waters was Pingree's man.

Zanzibar's miniscule but growing American community reacted coolly to Waters's defection. As news of the island's economic potential spread to merchants across the northeastern United States, ships from other ports became a more frequent sight. By late 1839, Edgar Botsford, a New York merchant who had previously visited Zanzibar as a supercargo, had settled on the island. As he struggled to compete with Waters, Botsford joined forces with Robert Norsworthy, the representative of a floundering British firm, Hunt, Newman, and Christopher.

As long as Waters had served as a relatively evenhanded broker for Salem's incoming ships, his townsmen had been content for him to go about his business. When it became clear that this was no longer the case, Waters's American rivals, led by Botsford, undertook a concerted effort to dethrone their consul. To do so, they revived an incident from years earlier. In the aftermath of his 1837 dispute with Amir bin Said, Waters received a letter from Said bin Sultan intended for President Martin Van Buren. Assuming it contained accusations against him, Waters burned the letter in front of a handful of Americans, claiming that "it was not the work of the Imaum, but... the native merchants who wished to drive him from the Island so that they could again get the American business."²⁷⁹ Backed by a handful of Salem merchants, Botsford repeatedly contacted the State Department decrying Waters's abuses. The federal government, however, turned a blind eye. American trade on Zanzibar was flourishing and Waters had established a durable relationship with Said bin Sultan. As he had throughout his short career,

²⁷⁹ During this period, the Americans and British often referred to Said bin Sultan as Imam, a traditional title of Omani leaders that Said bin Sultan never claimed for himself, due to its outmoded religious responsibilities. William B. Smith to Daniel Webster, November 23, 1841, Roll 1 Volume 1, RG 84, USNARA.

Waters privileged his commercial interests over his diplomatic position. His attitude, widely accepted and shared by his peers, only became a problem when it threatened their own economic standing.

No matter his detractors' allegations, Waters's had overseen a period of extremely rapid growth. Between 1837 and 1841, the compound annual growth rate of American imports reached thirty-nine percent alongside thirty-two percent for Zanzibari exports to the United States.²⁸⁰ For the time being, there was enough business to accommodate multiple Salem firms. Still, the merchants knew that such growth was unsustainable. Sooner rather than later, American trade on the island would edge closer to a zero-sum game. Richard Waters's defection served as a warning shot, instigating a period of heightened intra-Salem competition. The early 1840s turned into a veritable arms race, with Pingree, Shepard, and Bertram funneling more money and ships into the region. In 1840, Salem sent six ships to Zanzibar, two of Shepard and Bertram's and two of Pingree's. The next year, the two firms dispatched seven ships, with Pingree fielding four to Shepard and Bertram's three. Between 1840 and 1844, thirty-four Salem vessels made the trip, sixteen of Pingree's and fourteen of Shepard and Bertram's.²⁸¹

As members of Salem's relatively small elite, Bertram, Shepard, and Pingree were well-acquainted, especially given Pingree's former role in Shepard's commercial house. While the two sides seem to have kept the bad blood relatively in check in Salem, on Zanzibar the firms took increasingly antagonistic positions, eager to undercut their opposition. As Pingree reminded Waters soon after his return to Zanzibar, "you will have to be very vigilant and keep a sharp look

²⁸⁰ See Figure Six in the Appendix. Report on Zanzibar, 1862, William Speer, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

²⁸¹ During this period, only one other Salem merchant, Ephraim Emmerton, made more than a single voyage. His brig, the *Richmond*, visited the island three times.

out as Shepard's concern are determined to root you out..."²⁸² Months later, Pingree remained worried that "the Shepard concern intend to drive us out of the trade." By 1842, Pingree referred to Shepard and Bertram's ships as the "vessels of our enemies."²⁸³

As the two firms expanded their footprint on Zanzibar, they began to face sustained, if limited, competition from other American ports. In 1838, Salem fielded all eight American merchant ships that visited the island.²⁸⁴ Three years later, nine American commercial vessels, again all from Salem, made the trip. By 1845, however, nine Salem vessels were joined by two from Boston and one from Providence, Rhode Island.²⁸⁵ The increasing American competition over goods, as well as the arrival of more European vessels, caused a sustained rise in commodity prices. Still, the spiking value of Zanzibari commodities in American cargos did not result solely from changes in prices.²⁸⁶ During this period, Zanzibar emerged as the dominant American port of call between Madagascar and Yemen. While early American ships stopped at multiple East African ports, by the 1840s, this was increasingly rare. In 1837 Americans only sold fifty-five percent of their cargos on Zanzibar. Between 1840 and 1844 the proportion ranged from sixty-three percent to eighty-five percent.

While Zanzibar attracted a wave of newcomers, Richard Waters and Jairam Shivji continued to dominate American trade. Under Jairam's watchful eye, Waters cut deals with a

²⁸² David Pingree to John G. Waters and Richard Waters, October 24, 1840, Box 1 Folder 6, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁸³ David Pingree and George West to Richard Waters, December 30, 1841, Box 1 Folder 6, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM; George West Jr. to Richard Waters, April 1841, Box 1 Folder 6, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁸⁴ Consular Return 1838, Roll 1 Volume 1, RG 84, USNARA.

²⁸⁵ All told, between 1837 and 1845, the total carrying capacity of American ships visiting Zanzibar increased by fifty-five percent. Consular Return 1838, Roll 1 Volume 1, RG 84, USNARA.

²⁸⁶ Between 1837 and 1845, American imports shot up by 148 percent and Zanzibari exports increased by 272 percent. Consular Return 1838, Roll 1 Volume 1, RG 84, USNARA.

wide array of Indian and Arab merchants, leaving behind dozens of surviving contracts. These documents offer an instructive, if not inherently representative, overview of commodity sales on the island. During the early 1830s, Salem's merchants carried a wide variety of goods to Zanzibar, still gaining an understanding of regional demand for American products. By the 1840s, American trade had become more consistent, dominated by a handful of commodities that commanded profitable prices. Cotton cloth served as the bedrock of American trade, accounting for nearly eighty-seven percent of Waters's sales in 1841. By comparison, brass wire, the second highest grossing commodity, represented just 7.8 percent. Muskets, gunpowder, and crockery rounded out Waters's merchandise. Waters sold nearly ninety percent of his goods to Jairam, including almost all of his cotton and all of his brass wire.²⁸⁷

During the same year, Waters purchased a cross-section of prominent Zanzibari and East African commercial goods including cloves, gum copal, coconut oil, ivory, and hides. His most valuable purchase, hides, accounted for more than a third of his expenditures, followed by gum copal and cloves. Although Waters spent the least amount of money on coconut oil, a commodity that has received little attention in research into East African trade, he purchased over sixty-six thousand pounds of it, a massive haul that rivaled his combined acquisitions of cloves and gum copal. Of note, Waters only purchased 3500 pounds of ivory, a relatively small amount, hinting that American demand for ivory was still in its infancy.²⁸⁸

Trouble in Paradise

²⁸⁷ See Figure Five in the Appendix.

²⁸⁸ See Figure Four in the Appendix.

Even as Waters dealt with a dozen different businessmen, he remained closely bound to Shivji. In 1840, the two men's transactions amounted to MT\$2,7500, followed by MT\$33,365 in 1841, before reaching a high of MT\$53,607 in 1842. With each passing year, however, more Western ships arrived on the island, straining Jairam and Waters's exclusive agreement. While Waters benefited from limited Western trade with Zanzibar, ensuring high prices for his goods and a relatively low cost for regional commodities, Jairam, who earned five percent on all imports, did not. Sometime during 1842 or 1843, their economic relationship began to fray. While the two men remained in fairly close contact, and continued to trade, their exclusive, monopolistic arrangement broke down. Different scholars have attributed this important shift in Zanzibar's international commerce to a kaleidoscope of different actors, pinning blame on everyone from Shivji and Waters to competing Salem firms and British operatives.²⁸⁹ Undoubtedly, the relationship faced increasing external pressure. Other American and British firms heavily resented Shivji and Waters's arrangement as it forced them to employ Waters as an agent or face a severe disadvantage. The arrival of Zanzibar's first British consul in 1841 meant that these voices had a permanent envoy to the Sultan. The following year, Michael Shepard and John Bertram's new representative, Captain John Webb of Salem, arrived on Zanzibar as well. Like Hamerton, Webb had every reason to try to undermine the status quo.

²⁸⁹ Abdul Sheriff largely attributes the split to the actions of Waters and Pingree's firm by in explicitly pulling back from Shivji and in alienating him by undermining his own trading position, Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 97. In *The Call of the Sea*, Chayya Goswami credits Hamerton's intercession, and Britain's increasing power over Said bin Sultan, prompting him to block Shivji from pursuing the policy, Chhaya Goswami, *The Call of the Sea: Kachchhi Traders in Muscat and Zanzibar; c. 1800-1880* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2011), 206-8. Norman Bennett, however, argued that Shivji severed the link, eager to bolster his profits through expanded Western commerce. Norman Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*. 96 (1959), 256.

No matter how eager Hamerton and Webb were to strengthen their own standings, Jairam Shivji could not be bullied out of a lucrative commercial arrangement by relative newcomers. Jairam had extensive influence on Zanzibar, especially in economic matters. Even Said bin Sultan, who perpetually owed Shivji vast sums of money, usually avoided direct confrontation with his custom master. While the growing opposition to Waters and Shivji's manipulation of the market probably played a role, more than likely, Shivji's own economic interests won the day. Throwing open Zanzibar to any and all passing Western ships would likely bring in more custom fees.

As a result, Waters's dealings with Shivji fell precipitously. Between 1842 and 1844, their transactions fell from MT\$53,607 to MT\$28,340. Shifting market forces also affected the overall value of their trade.²⁹⁰ The arrival of more American, British, and French ships, all offering similar goods, depressed prices for American imports even as an influx of commodities from East African kept local prices relatively low.²⁹¹ Even as their relationship changed, the consul and the custom master remained in contact; Shivji frequently visited Waters's house to discuss commercial matters. When Jairam was stabbed by an unknown assailant in 1843, Waters

²⁹⁰ These estimates vary from those made by Abdul Sheriff even though they appear to be drawn from the same sources. In his English contracts, Waters's consistently refers to conducting business in "dollars." Nonetheless, the Arabic and Gujarati texts refer clearly to Thalers suggesting that while on Zanzibar, Waters, and likely other Americans, defaulted to the Maria Theresa "Dollar" due to its ubiquitous role as Zanzibar's reigning currency. Still, the potential for attributing multiple values to the same transactions, depending on the currency used, makes definitive estimations of the value of trade between Salem and Zanzibar difficult.

Contracts between Richard Waters and various merchants, 1840-5, Box 2 Folders 6-7, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM and Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 98.

²⁹¹ Richard Waters to Brother, September 20, 1843, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

was one of the first men he called to help bandage his wounds. Uncertain of his survival, Shivji made Waters an executor of his will.²⁹²

Although his commercial standing was declining, Richard Waters remained an influential figure on the island. Still, the arrival of John Webb, Shepard and Bertram's new agent, in 1842, only increased the pressure on Waters. While another American merchant, Edgar Botsford, had lived on Zanzibar for a few years, he lacked the institutional backing and resources that Webb could command. Waters did his best to protect his profit margins. Unable to block Shepard and Bertram from the market entirely, the consul attempted to manipulate key commodity prices: "I was pleased to have the *Elisa* bring so small a cargo. It was as large a quantity of Cottons as one vessel ever out to bring out here. We can make as much profits on *four* hundred bales as we can on eight hundred."²⁹³ By 1844, increasing American and European demand for the same goods led to a rise in Indian Ocean commodity prices, straining both Pingree and Shepard and Bertram's firms.²⁹⁴

Even as Waters struggled to stem the flow of American traders, he proudly accepted a role negotiating a commercial treaty between Oman and France in early 1844. As French commerce and influence in Madagascar expanded, the Empire's merchants hoped to access to Zanzibar's booming markets. In theory, any subsequent expansion of French commerce would be detrimental to the economic interests of both Waters and the United States.. The consul,

²⁹² Jairam eventually recovered, and the assailant was never found. Due to their outsized economic power and role as money lenders as well as their nebulous standing on the edge of Arab society, Indian merchants were frequent targets of violence. June 3, 1843, Box 4 Folder 2, Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁹³ Richard Waters to John Waters, September 2, 1843, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁹⁴ Richard Waters to John Waters, March 19, 1844, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

however, decided to take part in the process, likely concluding that his involvement would help ensure that the treaty did not overly compromise the United States' standing on the island. While Waters's stonewalling might have delayed the treaty, it would have had little long-term effect except to hurt his relationship with Said bin Sultan.

As Waters eyed a permanent return to the United States, he leaned into the more prestigious aspects of his diplomatic position, opportunities that had been few and far between during his turbulent tenure. As Waters bragged to his brother, "to arrange this Treaty was one of the objects which induced me to remain here this year – as His Highness was very desirous for me to take charge of the matter on his behalf. When it is completed I will send you a copy so that you can see what a fine diplomatist I have become!!"²⁹⁵ The resulting treaty was similar to its American and British counterparts. Although French merchants gained a foothold on the island, their success was far from assured. A few months later, Shepard and Bertram's new agent, Benjamin Fabens, noted that one French merchant unwittingly bought goods at outrageously high prices: "this does not affect the market price however as he is a stranger and the... natives consider all strangers as fair game. The one who cheats him most has the most to boast of."²⁹⁶

Months later, Waters took a much harder line against another set of newcomers: Boston merchants. While intra-Salem competition was fierce, Waters and his peers found the arrival of other American ships particularly galling. Although European traders affected prices on Zanzibar, competition from New England threatened Salem's entire economy. Since Waters's arrival, Salem had become increasingly dependent on the Omani outpost. After nearly two

²⁹⁵ Richard Waters to Brother, March 1, 1844, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁹⁶ Benjamin Fabens to Michael Shepard, September 27, 1844, Box 3 Folder 1, MH 94, Fabens Family Papers, PEM.

decades of commercial exchange with Zanzibar, Salem had successfully found a profitable niche in the U.S. economy, leveraging its access to manufactured goods and its expertise in overseas commerce to profitably import sought after luxury items and recourses for American industries. Salem's role as the premier supplier of Indian Ocean commodities depended on finding buyers in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. As Salem well knew, one ship from Boston could quickly turn into ten, causing decades of commercial investments to turn to dust. In September 1844, Michael Shepard warned Benjamin Fabens that a Boston vessel, the *Mohawk*, had just set off for East Africa. Shepard informed his deputy that the *Mohawk's* "owners are large and enterprising merchants in Boston, who will ruin the trade if they should succeed in the present voyage."²⁹⁷ When the *Mohawk* arrived off Zanzibar a few months later, Waters shared Shepard's dire conclusion:

Do all you can honorably to prevent their contracting and thus getting a footing in Zanzibar. We must be willing to pay as high as they will if necessary and if it comes to the worst lose a few thousand dollars if by so doing we can keep the trade... We must keep all new comers at a distance and so try to make one voyage sufficient to disgust & sicken them of Zanzibar and its trade.²⁹⁸

Always a businessman first and consul second, Richard Waters did his best to actively sabotage American trade that ate into his, or David Pingree's, profits

In late 1844, Richard Waters departed Zanzibar after serving as consul for nearly seven and a half years. From a middling family, Waters returned to Salem a wealthy man.²⁹⁹ Even so, his legacy on the island was decidedly mixed. As a merchant, he had largely succeeded,

²⁹⁷ Michael Shepard to Benjamin Fabens, September 15, 1844, Box 2 Folder 9, MH 94, Fabens Family Papers, PEM.

²⁹⁸ Richard Waters to William Waters, November 13, 1844, Box 2 Folder 3, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

²⁹⁹ Family tradition pegged his profits at \$80,000, a princely sum in the mid-nineteenth century. Philip Northway, "Salem and the Zanzibar-East African Trade, 1825-1845," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 90 (1954), 272.

enriching himself and his bosses. His final years on the island, however, had been less profitable. No longer dominant, Waters was still first among equals. By the time he departed, David Pingree's firm was struggling to eke out a profit as more Western traders poured onto the island. Still, by developing a strong relationship with Jairam Shivji and coordinating the majority of American trade during a period of rapid growth, Waters had played a crucial role in crafting and standardizing American-Zanzibari commerce, laying a firm groundwork for his countrymen moving forward.

As consul, Waters's reign had been much more turbulent. Many of the conflicts were nearly inevitable as the chauvinistic American made his way through a deeply foreign society. After his first year on the island, Waters had become much more willing to adapt to prevailing commercial and diplomatic norms, generally maintaining functional relationships with Said bin Sultan, Jairam Shivji, and a plurality of prominent traders on Zanzibar. His relationships with his American counterparts, however, were much caustic. While Waters had bolstered American trade during his tenure, he almost always put his own economic interests first. At times, the American consul actively conspired to undermine other American traders, earning him a healthy dislike from many of his peers. All the same, by 1845, in a large part due to Waters's stewardship, Salem remained Zanzibar's dominant western trading partner.

Chapter Five: Amity and Enmity: Diplomacy and Trade on Zanzibar, 1845-1860

By 1845, the United States' annual trade with Zanzibar was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. In a large part due to Richard Waters's trials and tribulations, American merchants had worked through many of the commercial disputes that had plagued their transactions with Zanzibar's Indian and Omani merchants since the 1820s. During Waters's tenure, however, formal diplomacy had played a limited role. On Zanzibar, the political was personal. America's standing on the island depended heavily on the ebbs and flows of Waters's relationship with Said bin Sultan and Jairam Shivji. When Waters departed, he left behind only the most basic framework for dealing with diplomatic disputes.

When Charles Ward, Waters' replacement, arrived on Zanzibar in January 1846, he faced a fraught situation. Although Britain's presence in East Africa remained meager, the nation's consul, Atkins Hamerton, was busy shoring up his influence. In addition to an unrelenting pressure campaign on Said bin Sultan, Hamerton began asserting British jurisdiction over Indian traders and supporting maritime raids against the East African slave trade. The rising British presence put sustained pressure on Ward as he attempted to balance his roles as merchant and consul. To the dismay of other American traders, Ward engaged in a series of prolonged diplomatic disputes with Said bin Sultan and Atkins Hamerton that threatened to overwhelm the country's commercial interests. Although Ward's inexperience contributed to the disagreements, which culminated in his resignation in 1850, they also reflected America's shifting foreign policy priorities.³⁰⁰ As the United States expanded to the Pacific Ocean and its citizens became

³⁰⁰ Until recently, scholars have struggled to find many continuities between American foreign policy and diplomacy in the decades before and after the Civil War. For an overview of America's shifting role in the world as the nation expanded beyond its early years as a marginal Atlantic state, see: Jay Sexton, "Toward a Synthesis of U.S. Foreign Relations during the Civil

increasingly convinced of their racial, religious, and political superiority, American politicians and diplomats responded more aggressively to foreign disagreements and competition.³⁰¹ For much of the 1840s, disputes over North American territories led the United States and Britain to the brink of war, hardly an incentive for Anglo-American cooperation on Zanzibar.

During the 1850s, America's growing commercial presence continued to chafe against Britain's rising political clout, ensuring that the two countries, or at least their representatives, remained at odds as each consul struggled to bend the status quo to his benefit.³⁰² Although Said

War Era, 1848-77," *American Nineteenth Century History* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 2004): pp. 50-73. For detailed accounts of American foreign affairs during this period, see: Paul A. Varg, *United States Foreign Relations, 1820-1860* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1979) and George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁰¹ Buoyed by rapid economic growth and territorial expansion, during the 1840s and 50s White Americans developed a unique ideology of racial, religious, and cultural superiority, often referred to as "manifest destiny." Centered around American territorial claims to large swaths of North America, the heady, white supremacist ideology was also closely linked to broader governmental policy, both domestic and foreign, as well as commercial expansion. See: Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: the Origins of American Racial Anglo Saxonism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) and Sam Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1997).

³⁰² Recently, scholars have questioned the chronology and extent of British power in the Western Indian Ocean. Older research portrays the British Empire as the dominant force across the entire region beginning in the early nineteenth century. This school of thought is typified by the opening lines of Gerald Graham's *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean*: "By the close of the Napoleonic wars Britain possessed a military predominance that was unique; her position as a maritime power was unchallenged... Within the huge quadrilateral that extended roughly from the Cape to the Red Sea, eastward to the Malay peninsula... no jealous rivals could threaten British hegemony." Even much more recent works allude to a similar power differential albeit while also offering much needed contextualization and texture to Britain's relationships with indigenous states. In *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, M. Reda Bhacker works to uncover "the roots of British domination" over Oman which he traces back to "the heady days of the 1830s." In the last fifteen years, scholars of Oman, East Africa, and the broader region have worked to escape this paradigm, centering indigenous peoples and states within their own geographical and cultural contexts. Led by scholars of the Indian Ocean like Sugata Bose, this movement has contributed to a much broader rethinking of Europe's role in the creation of the "modern world." See: Gerald Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean: Maritime Enterprise*

bin Sultan's death in 1856 threatened to upend Zanzibar's vibrant economy, it also offered the British and Americans a unique opportunity to consolidate their influence on the island. As a handful of Said's sons tried to coopt his fracturing empire, the Indian Rebellion in 1857 sidelined the British. At the same time, American trade surged to all-time highs. Even though the American presence remained almost exclusively mercantile, for the moment, the United States stood as the predominant Western influence on the island, raising the possibility of a new era of economic, and perhaps even political, sway over a significant portion of the Western Indian Ocean. After putting down the Indian Rebellion and nationalizing the EIC's territorial holdings, the British returned to East Africa with a vengeance, more willing than ever to intervene in Omani affairs. Ultimately, however, it was the United States' political disintegration, and not British machinations or imperial might, that upended thirty years of spectacular commercial growth on Zanzibar.

Charles Ward and American Diplomacy

The final years of Richard Waters's tenure had proved that controlling the American consulate did not guarantee outsized commercial returns. Even after David Pingree coopted Waters, Michael Shepard and John Bertram fared relatively well. As their current representative on Zanzibar, Benjamin Fabens, argued, "U.S Consular influence would... be of no benefit... in

1810-1850 (Oxford University Press, 1967), Mohamed Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar Roots of British Domination* (London : Routledge, 1992), Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), J.C. Sharman, *Empires of the Weak: The Real Story of European Expansion and the Creation of the New World Order* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019). For a insightful rethinking of Oman's relationship with Britain during the early nineteenth century, see: Nicholas Roberts, "A Sea of Wealth: Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan, His Omani Empire, and the Making of an Oceanic Marketplace," PhD diss., (University of Notre Dame, 2021).

the way of trade. Waters was successful at first because he had no one to oppose him. When Capt. Webb entered into the business the trade went out of his hand.”³⁰³ Shepard came to a different conclusion. Waters’s early success cornering the trade showed the significant possibilities that the consulship could offer commercial houses back home. At the very least, controlling the consul ensured that neither current rivals in Salem, nor any upstart merchants from other cities, could coopt his services. If push came to shove, Shepard believed that the consul’s “official influence” would “insure a greater degree of safety, both to person & property.”³⁰⁴

To fill the role, Shepard and Bertram turned to Charles Ward, a merchant from Kennebunk, Maine.³⁰⁵ Charles Ward’s arrival in 1846 was a far cry from Richard Waters’s less than a decade earlier. By the mid-1840s, America was Zanzibar’s leading Western trading partner and multiple Americans agents resided on the island. While Ward might have been fresh off the boat, he entered a world where Americans, Indians, and Arabs had a fuller understanding of each other’s motivations and the acceptable boundaries of commerce. The problems of a decade earlier—currency, credit, debt, fees, and weights and measures—had largely been standardized allowing for a smoother experience, at least in theory. Ward still faced his fair share

³⁰³ Benjamin Fabens to Michael Shepard, January 28, 1846, Box 12 Folder 7, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

³⁰⁴ Michael Shepard to Benjamin Fabens, October 4, 1845, Box 12 Folder 7, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

³⁰⁵ Exactly how Ward snagged the consulship remains unclear. Although Ward had been born and raised in Maine, some of his extended family resided in Salem including his second cousin Andrew Ward. One of Salem’s many captains, Andrew had sailed into the Indian Ocean since the 1820s. For more than a decade, he had been in business with Michael Shepard, captaining many of his voyages while owning a secondary stake in a handful of his vessels. George Curwen, “Materials for a Genealogy of the Ward Family in Salem,” *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute*, Vol. 5, 1863, 207-218; Hitchings and Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, 1789-1900*.

of challenges as a businessman. From the get-go, his role in Michael Shepard's firm put him in an awkward position. Shepard already had a full-time employee on the island: Benjamin Fabens. Fabens had long been requesting a clerk to help him manage his daily tasks. Instead, he found himself with an unwanted, untrained partner who would take half of his commissions.

No matter his early challenges, as a merchant Ward had a clear goal: to earn money for himself and his employer. As consul, his purpose was much less defined. Beyond a vague responsibility to bolster American trade and to defend the interests of American citizens on the island, Ward was primarily left to his own devices. Unlike his commercial legacy, in diplomacy Waters had left behind little to build upon. Most disputes had faded with time even when no clear solution had been reached. The many vagaries of the American-Omani treaty, much more concerned with easing commerce than personal or political disagreements, remained. Like Waters, Ward could expect little support or illumination from his superiors. Although the State Department had begun to assert more oversight on its representatives around the world, Zanzibar warranted little attention, offering the federal government a steady stream of tariff revenues and little else. Secretary of State James Buchanan had little time for East Africa as tensions spiked on the Mexican border. As Ward soon discovered, he had little explicitly delegated authority: "the Department is aware that this consulate is differently situated from almost any other, & as consuls are not invested with Diplomatic powers, it would seem proper that I should have more particular information than is contained in my general instructions."³⁰⁶ Thousands of miles from the U.S. with little guidance, Ward soon faced a crisis beyond anything that had confronted Waters.

³⁰⁶ Charles Ward to James Buchanan, January 26, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

How to Get Away with Murder

While American-Zanzibari trade had settled into a fairly comfortable, if still variable, status quo, Ward and other Americans on the island were still foreigners far from home. In August 1846, commercial interests threatened to buckle in the face of outright violence. On the night of August 30, Ward, Fabens, and John Lambert, a Salem captain, were gathered at the consul's home when a Zanzibari messenger rushed in. Conversing with Fabens in Swahili, the man informed him that an American sailor, potentially from Lambert's ship, had brutally attacked an Arab man on the beach.³⁰⁷ Ward dispatched Fabens and Lambert to investigate the matter. As usual, Jairam Shivji was already at the center of the action. Under Jairam's orders, the wounded man had been carried to his house where he now lay with a shattered skull, barely alive. In a matter of hours, a decade of American-Zanzibari relations had seemingly disintegrated as Shivji warned the Americans that any White man found in the streets would be attacked.

As Lambert and Fabens asked around, a clearer picture emerged. That day, sailors from Shepard and Bertram's *Cherokee* and the Portsmouth whaler the *Ann Parry* had been granted shore leave. Finally unleashed, bands of intoxicated Americans wandered through the exotic locale on the lookout for entertainment. By nightfall, they were back on the beach where a confrontation broke out. After a dispute, three Americans threw stones at a group of Zanzibari men. Following the volley, one of the sailors ran to a nearby dhow, grabbed a stick, and stuck an old man, Thabit bin Halif, on the head as he washed himself before prayer.³⁰⁸ The assembled Zanzibaris fought back, pelting their assailants with stones and forcing the Americans to run to a

³⁰⁷ Deposition of John Lambert, September 1, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

³⁰⁸ Deposition of Charles Ward, September 5, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

nearby boat. Six Americans, three men from the *Cherokee* and three from the *Ann Parry*, rowed furiously to the *Cherokee* bobbing in the harbor.³⁰⁹

As the sun rose on August 31, Ward faced a cascading crisis that he was ill-prepared to handle. The injured man had died at midnight, leaving behind three aggrieved sons and thousands of irate local residents. Not only had American sailors murdered a man, but they had done so during the sacred practice of ablution. At first, the case appeared to be open and shut. The *Ann Parry*'s mate soon informed Ward that one of his sailors had confessed. Eager to limit the fallout, Ward sent a note to the Sultan informing him of the confession and asking how to proceed. In a reprise of Waters's confrontation with Amir bin Said years earlier, Ward soon discovered the shortcomings of the American-Omani treaty: "I brought the treaty and read it, then said there was no provision for any thing of this kind, and the sultan must do as he pleased. I... suggested the propriety of having an examination in my presence."³¹⁰ With Jairam Shivji and Hassan bin Ibrahim as intermediaries, the Sultan and Ward agreed that a judge would be dispatched to wrap up the affair.

It soon became clear that an acceptable outcome for all parties was nearly impossible. Within hours, the sailor tried to retract his confession, insisting that he had only admitted to striking a man in another scuffle and that he was not the murderer. When the trial commenced, two of Thabit's sons arrived to testify, claiming Ward's note mentioning a confession proved the man's guilt. With little evidence forthcoming, the judge ruled that the supposed confession was proof enough. The only matter that remained was deciding the punishment. Ward was aghast, lambasting the Zanzibari system:

³⁰⁹ Deposition of Charles Ward, September 5, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

³¹⁰ Deposition of Charles Ward, September 5, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

So far as I have been able to ascertain Zanzibar is not governed by any municipal laws, neither does it contain a Police corps. The Sultan & his people profess to be governed by the laws of the Koran, and certain customs which have grown up among them from circumstances or necessity... The European & American residents have often told me that, there was no such thing as justice, & that the judge usually gave judgement in favor of the party who gave the largest sum of money.³¹¹

If Ward's aspirations to a fair trial, by Western standards at least, had been stymied by Omani legal practices, they were equally dashed by the wall of silence he faced from his countrymen. At least five other American sailors had been in the direct vicinity of the crime. And yet, each one swore they did not know who was responsible. Likewise, the captain of each ship professed the innocence of his men while pointing his finger at the other crew. It is entirely possible that the original confession was true. Given time to consider the potential repercussions of a vicious assault, the guilty man, his fellow sailors, and officers closed ranks. Far from home, on an island full of perceived racial and religious inferiors, American sailors protected their own.

According to Ward's understanding of Omani practices, two options remained. Either the murderer would be put to death in a similar manner as had befallen the victim or he would provide restitution, paying the dead man's sons. Ever the businessman, Jairam advised "you had better give money & settle it; I will be the first one to give, you give what you like, and the Consul what he pleases, & that will finish the business."³¹² Entirely unconvinced of the sailor's guilt, and worried that an innocent man might be put to death, Ward told the *Ann Parry's* mate to take the man back on board.³¹³ Unsurprisingly, the *Cherokee* and *Ann Parry* were eager to set sail. Four days after the attack the *Cherokee* weighed anchor, followed two days later by the *Ann Parry*.

³¹¹ Charles Ward to James Buchanan, September 14, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

³¹² Charles Ward to James Buchanan, September 14, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

³¹³ Deposition of Charles Ward, September 5, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

The Sultan was irate, blaming Ward for his inaction: “my subject who was killed is buried, & I see that you have sent the Brig away, & also the Whale ship.”³¹⁴ Throughout the incident, Ward interpreted his responsibilities as consul conservatively. With only a few months of experience, Ward chose inaction over the slightest possibility of overstepping his diplomatic authority. Because the affair had occurred on Zanzibari soil and involved an Omani subject, Ward believed that he could only push for fair treatment and serve as an observer during the proceedings. Under what authority could he stop a captain from departing when he pleased? Washing his hands of the matter, Ward defended his actions to his superiors: “if the purposes of justice have been defeated, it was by no act of mine, but of the judge himself in not examining the mate, & others whose evidence would have proved the innocence or guilt of the sailors.”³¹⁵

Said bin Sultan disagreed. Used to his own unilateral power, the Sultan found Ward’s inaction indefensible. When compared to the British consul, who had more explicit authority and was willing to stretch the limits of his commission, Ward had been confoundedly negligent. Either he had allowed a murderer to escape or he had actively conspired to help him. In an attempt to gain restitution, Said bin Sultan wrote directly to President James Polk laying out Ward’s failings: “I sent our Judges to him the U.S. Consul by his own wishes and he the U.S. Consul done nothing and he the U.S. Consul gave orders for the departure of the Barque ‘Ann Parry.’ Now I turn this cause over to your own consideration... until this occasion nothing has transpired between Arabia and America before to have one moments uneasiness.”³¹⁶ Just months into Ward’s tenure, American-Omani relations were at their lowest point in decades.

³¹⁴ Charles Ward to James Buchanan, September 14, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

³¹⁵ Charles Ward to James Buchanan, September 14, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

³¹⁶ Said bin Sultan to James Polk, August 9, 1846, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

The British, the Banians, and the Busaidis

The fallout between the Sultan and Charles Ward offered the British an opportunity to bolster their own standing on Zanzibar. Although the first British consul, Atkins Hamerton had arrived in 1841, he had struggled to garner influence. While the British asserted considerable pressure on Said bin Sultan in Oman, their meager presence in East Africa required less fealty. Originally appointed to the Sultan's court in Muscat, Hamerton had followed Said when he returned to Zanzibar. Thousands of miles from British interests in the Persian Gulf, Hamerton faced a new reality. Both of his backers, the British Government and the East India Company, considered East Africa a backwater with little strategic or economic importance. To make matters worse, British traders had largely missed out on Zanzibar's recent economic expansion. Used to Britain's dominance in Western India, Hamerton struggled to remain relevant as he faced the petty squabbles of daily commerce on Zanzibar.

Although English ships had been sailing past Zanzibar for hundreds of years, British merchants had only made their first sustained foray onto the island in the early 1830s. To oversee their ventures, the London firm of Newman, Hunt, and Christopher dispatched Robert Norsworthy as their agent.³¹⁷ Norsworthy had arrived four years before Richard Waters, making him the only Western merchant on Zanzibar. While this should have provided a significant advantage, Norsworthy stumbled when faced with many of the same hurdles as Waters. In an early misstep, Norsworthy contracted with the ever-opportunistic Amir bin Said and was caught flatfooted when Amir used much of the money to invest in his own commercial pursuits.³¹⁸ Ultimately, Newman, Hunt, and Christopher doomed their venture when they attempted to

³¹⁷ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 90.

³¹⁸ Mohamed Reda Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar Roots of British Domination* (London : Routledge, 1992), 161.

undercut Indian commerce in East Africa. While contemporary American firms dispatched a single large vessel on a long circuit of the region, Newman, Hunt, and Christopher built up a miniature fleet. The firm's smaller ships sailed to coastal ports buying up hides, ivory, and gum copal before transporting them to Zanzibar for shipment to England on larger vessels. By buying goods in East Africa, the Englishmen entered into direct competition with Zanzibar's dominant Indian traders. As Richard Waters would soon find out, succeeding on Zanzibar required the cooperation of Jairam Shivji and his peers. By threatening the heart of their business, the Englishmen ensured sustained opposition.

By the late 1830s, the firm was floundering.³¹⁹ As Waters found his footing, his partnership with Shivji effectively froze Norsworthy out of the market. Feeling the pressure, Norsworthy lobbied the British Government to send their own representative.³²⁰ Some officials in the Foreign Office concurred, believing that the move would "do away with the opinion of American supremacy at Zanzibar which by the ignorant is extensively believed."³²¹ With a British representative on the ground, commercial supremacy would supposedly follow as "the American Piece goods, which now supply [Said bin Sultan's] African Possessions, would soon be supplanted by those of British Manufactory."³²² Still, most British officials saw little reason to invest time or money in the region. Nonetheless, as part of Said's broader landholdings, Zanzibar could not be wholly ignored. Muscat's strategic location at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, which the British considered essential to controlling India, ensured ongoing interference. Over the

³¹⁹ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 161-3.

³²⁰ Robert Norsworthy to Robert Grant, November 23, 1837, FO 54/2, The National Archives of the UK (TNA).

³²¹ R. Cogan to Robert Gordon, June 9, 1838, FO 54/2, TNA.

³²² R. Cogan to I. C. Carnac, January 5, 1838, FO 54/2, TNA.

decades, the British had invested in Said bin Sultan's rule, periodically lending him crucial support when he came under sustained pressure in Oman.

Eventually, the rapid expansion of American trade in East Africa triggered a response. When the British discovered Said's commercial agreement with the Americans, they attempted to vacate it, chastising the Sultan for acting without their explicit permission.³²³ Even though the British had little interest in East Africa, they feared that an American presence in the region foreshadowed interference in Said's Arabian territories. Eager to appease the British, Said vacillated, claiming he had not fully understood the details of the treaty and that he was willing to break it. The Sultan went further, claiming that "Mr. Edmund Roberts, was an old, fat, blustering man, and I was glad to sign the Treaty to get rid of him... I never saw Mr. Edmund Roberts sign it, nor any one else, nor had it any witness."³²⁴ Although seriously displeased, the British Government considered the American-Omani Treaty legally sound and eventually decided that challenging it was not worth the diplomatic repercussions.

Coupled with Norsworthy's complaints and the slow realization that American traders were outperforming their British counterparts across East Africa and even on the Arabian Peninsula, the British negotiated their own trade agreement with Oman in 1839. While the Empire already had a handful of treaties with Said and his predecessors, this was the first to center on commerce. Many of the features closely mirrored the American-Omani treaty, including a universal five percent import duty. Likely a direct result of Norsworthy's complaints about Waters and Shivji, the British treaty also explicitly banned monopolies in the Sultan's

³²³ "Papers regarding the treaty of amity and commerce concluded between the United States of America and the Imam of Muscat on 21/26 Sep 1833," IOR, F/4/1475/57973, The British Library (BL).

³²⁴ "Papers regarding the treaty of amity and commerce concluded between the United States of America and the Imam of Muscat on 21/26 Sep 1833," IOR, F/4/1475/57973. BL.

domains except for Indian traders' well-established claim to transporting goods between the East African mainland and Zanzibar.

While the 1839 treaty theoretically put British merchants on equal footing with Waters and his peers, Britain's limited commerce on Zanzibar had already collapsed. Waters's dominant relationship with Shivji and the widespread East African preference for American cloth strictly limited British economic penetration of the region. The treaty did allow for the establishment of a British consulate, prompting Atkins Hamerton's arrival in 1841. With British trade on the island almost non-existent, there was only so much he could do to revive direct commercial ventures. Instead, Hamerton quickly began attacking the mercantile status quo. Eager to coopt some of Zanzibar's booming trade for his country, Hamerton took aim at two pillars of Zanzibar's economy: the Indian merchant class and the East African slave trade.

As Britain's foothold on the Indian subcontinent expanded, and its holdings became more firmly consolidated into formal colonies, British claims on Said bin Sultan's Indian subjects grew accordingly. Still, Britain's haphazard control over a patchwork of Indian territories led to a prolonged debate over the status of Indian merchants on Zanzibar. As the most prominent Indian contingency, including Shivji, hailed from Kutch, Britain's relationship with the region proved essential to the future of Zanzibari trade. Following a military defeat in 1815 the kingdom of Kutch, located on the northwestern coast of India, became a British dependency, one of an increasing number of princely states. Although Kutch had been neutered on the international stage, it remained a sovereign state, guaranteed "that the civil and criminal jurisdiction of the British Government shall not be introduced therein."³²⁵ No direct limits were introduced on

³²⁵ Charles Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. VII (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1909), 21.

Kutchi commerce except for the slave trade. By any reasonable standard, the British had no claims to sovereignty over Kutchi traders anywhere, especially on Omani Zanzibar.

Still, when Jairam Shivji toyed with the idea of chartering American ships to carry goods from Zanzibar to Kutch in 1837, the Bombay Government successfully blocked him, viewing the nascent network as a threat to Bombay's commercial future. Led by Shivji and his Kutchi compatriots, Zanzibar's trade with India already flowed primarily to the largest Kutchi port, Mandvi. In the late 1830s, Mandvi exported almost three times more cloth to Zanzibar than Bombay and imported twice as much ivory.³²⁶ With Americans ascendant on Zanzibar, and beginning to venture from there to Western India, the possibility of an American, Zanzibari, and Kutchi network on the subcontinent was a real, if limited, threat to British economic growth. By Hamerton's arrival, however, this scheme had been nipped in the bud.

Although well versed in the nuances of British rule in India, Hamerton took the totalizing, and patently false, view that all Indians abroad were British subjects regardless of their place of birth, residency, or professed allegiance.³²⁷ This claim was particularly ill-suited to Zanzibar where the Indian community received the clear support and protection of Said bin Sultan. In Omani territory, Jairam Shivji and his peers were allowed broad economic and cultural concessions, such as the construction of Hindu temples, that were far from a given under other regional rulers. Like their Arab counterparts, Indians had access to the Omani legal system, with their business disputes being overseen by Zanzibar's governor, Suleiman bin Hamad.³²⁸ Still, the Indian community, composed of Hindus and Muslims as well as various ethnic groups and castes from across Western India, remained relatively segregated from the island's other populations.

³²⁶ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 84.

³²⁷ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 165.

³²⁸ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 203.

Their ubiquitous role as merchants, creditors, and money-lenders attracted sustained animosity as did their relative wealth and influence over Said bin Sultan. Even Shivji, one of the most influential men on the island, was not immune. In 1843, he was stabbed multiple times in his bed by an unknown assailant.

While the Indians' position on Zanzibar had its difficulties, it was relatively stable and lucrative. The arrival of a single British representative with grand, condescending claims of authority did nothing to change this. Hamerton's early attempts to throw his weight around had little effect besides drawing Said's ire. In 1845, Said went over his head, asking the British Foreign Secretary to clarify the government's official position. The Secretary assured Said that only those from areas explicitly under British control were considered subjects.³²⁹ While this excluded Kutch, it was still an expansion of British claims over Indians on Zanzibar. Until then, there is little indication that any Indian merchants had claimed or received treatment as British subjects on the island. Drafted only a few years earlier, the British-Omani treaty made no claim to sovereignty over Indians on Zanzibar. In fact, it did not mention them at all, referring only to British subjects writ large. While Hamerton's attempts to expand British influence were beginning to gain traction, the newfound distinction between British Indians and Omani Indians did little to bolster his cause. In 1843, the British formally annexed Sindh, the home of a sizable minority of Zanzibar's Indian middlemen. Now supposedly British, the Sindhi traders were, in theory, no longer able to buy, sell, or own slaves, a serious handicap in Zanzibar's slave economy. To Hamerton's chagrin, this only bolstered Zanzibar's Kutchi community, the main target of his machinations.³³⁰

³²⁹ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 203.

³³⁰ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 166.

Knowing that his higherups were primarily interested in the East African slave trade, the British consul did his best to connect the two causes, emphasizing the role of Indian merchants in transporting slaves to Zanzibar.³³¹ While most of the island's Indian businessmen owned at least a handful of enslaved Africans, the majority were not directly involved in slaving. Still, many were. During the 1830s, Zanzibar became the premier slave market in East Africa. By 1840, roughly ten thousand enslaved people were carried to the island each year, the majority of whom were transported on Indian dhows. Almost every economic venture on the island, including American commerce, relied on enslaved labor. As Zanzibar's clove economy expanded, its numerous plantations absorbed thousands of people each year while a smaller number were exported to surrounding islands, the Arabian Peninsula, and India. Due to its relatively mature, capital rich financial system, Zanzibar also became the de facto staging area for slaving caravans. Financed primarily by Indian capital, Arab and Swahili caravan leaders amassed large amounts of supplies and hundreds of men, often enslaved themselves, before setting off into the interior. Armed with American muskets, and carrying American cloth and brass wire for purchasing people, these trips in search of laborers and ivory lasted for months if not years.

Britain and Oman had long engaged in an extensive tug of war over the slave trade in the Western Indian Ocean. In an 1822 treaty, Said agreed to ban the export of enslaved East Africans to Christian nations and allowed the British to stop suspected slavers in certain regions.³³² In 1839, this treaty was strengthened, expanding the area the British could target and allowing them to intercept all slave ships in these regions regardless of their destination. In 1845, Hamerton put his own stamp on the matter, successfully negotiating a stricter treaty that radically shrunk the

³³¹ AA12/1A, Zanzibar National Archives.

³³² Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. IX, 291.

acceptable slaving zone to a small strip of Said's African territory encompassing Zanzibar and a few hundred miles of the opposing coastline.³³³ On paper, the British had banned the slave trade between Said's African and Arabian domains, representing a significant expansion of their influence over the internal concerns and policies of his territory.

While the treaty would be impossible to fully enforce, it was a major coup nonetheless. Said had long resisted any new restrictions on the slave trade, having done almost nothing to enforce his 1822 concessions. With each passing year, the enslaved population of Zanzibar grew, becoming even more essential to island's plantation economy. Said, his retinue, and Zanzibar's merchants had few qualms about slavery or the slave trade, although they likely held an array of views on the moral tenets of slave ownership based on religious and personal differences. Even if Said had a remote desire to curb slavery, his hold on power depended heavily on his income from Zanzibar's customs which in turn relied on the importation of enslaved East Africans. Said rightly believed that any serious attempt to curb slavery on Zanzibar would significantly weaken his standing and perhaps cause him to lose control.

For decades, Said had taken advantage of the limited European presence in the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa. When a European power showed up on his doorstep, Said treated them with excessive politeness and respect, reassuring them of his friendship and borderline fealty. When platitudes alone did not work, Said signed what was placed in front of him, albeit agreeing to as few binding concessions as possible. As soon as the European ship departed from his harbor, Said generally ignored whatever promises he had made, reviving them only when the next vessel darkened his waters. Benjamin Fabens perfectly captured Said's artful duplicity: "His

³³³ Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. XI, 301; Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 36.

Highness made many professions of amity but amity and enmity are often synonymous terms here. 'Sweet talk' cost but little and it is consequently dealt out most liberally.'³³⁴ With a permanent British representative on Zanzibar, joined by a French consul in 1844, this strategy was becoming less effective.³³⁵

The Omani-British Treaty of 1845 clearly indicated that British influence was on the rise. When Hamerton arrived, he had been a relatively marginal figure. Five years later, his dual fixations on the slave trade and coopting Indian communities were beginning to produce results and exert tangible pressure on Said and the island's Indian merchants. In the cramped confines of Zanzibar Town, Hamerton's schemes quickly affected traders of all nationalities. In his regular report to Michael Shepard, Benjamin Fabens noted that "we have more to fear from failures than we ever had... The trading part of the community now claim to be English Subjects and in case of a failure protest to their Consul against the whites receiving the full amount of their dues."³³⁶ Hamerton's influence, however, had clear limitations. In reality, Zanzibar's cabal of Indian traders continued to tack into oncoming winds, making overtures to whoever could provide economic advantages at a given moment. While the Indians had long exerted tangible influence

³³⁴ Benjamin Fabens to Michael Shepard, August 29, 1844, Box 12 Folder 7, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, PEM.

³³⁵ At the same time, Said faced severe threats to his standing in both Africa and Arabia, making him more pliable to British pressure. In 1844, Said suffered a stinging defeat trying to advance his influence over the central Kenyan coast, costing him hundreds of troops and numerous pieces of artillery. Back in Oman, the Wahhabis were once again resurgent, demanding tribute and threatening to raid outlying Omani territory. Although a rare truce allowed Oman's competing tribes to repel them without European support, his wobbling authority likely pushed Said to make concessions in an attempt to secure British aid in Oman. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 168.

³³⁶ Benjamin Fabens to Michael Shepard, January 28, 1846, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*. 50-1.

over Said bin Sultan, the rising British political presence offered them another power base to try to coopt. And coopt they did:

In regard to the Banyans & Hindoos themselves, they claim to be Arab subjects or Eng[lish] subjects as will best suit their purpose. An individual will go to his Highness today with his complaint and is heard, and calls himself the subject of his Highness. Tomorrow the same individual will go to the British Consulate and claim protection as an Eng subject & he is received. They own Dows and make voyages to Bombay and other parts of India under the British registry & flag, and make their voyages to the coast under the Sultans flag, trade within the restricted limits in the articles of Ivory and Gum Copal, and enter largely into the Slave trade, all with the knowledge of the British Consul and the Sultan of Muscat.³³⁷

For the moment at least, Jairam Shivji and his cohort were treading carefully but confidently, reaping the benefits of dual British and Omani protection.

Ward Gets Drawn In

These developments had less of an upside for Charles Ward and his small cadre of Americans. By 1850, American trade amounted to roughly one million dollars per year and remained heavily dependent on Indian merchants. Any restrictions on the slave trade between East Africa and Arabia threatened to radiate into the wider economy as Indian merchants absorbed the losses. For the moment, however, enforcement remained spotty, and Indian traders largely continued to purchase thousands of captive Africans, making minor changes to avoid British interference. By comparison, the murky question of Indian subjecthood proved a much greater impediment to daily trade.

Previously, when disagreements inevitably arose, or, less frequently, outright fraud occurred, the Americans had turned to Said bin Sultan and Zanzibar's judicial system for

³³⁷ Charles Ward to James Buchanan, March 7, 1847, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 374.

recourse. Now, the path forward was much less clear. Turning to the Sultan for oversight immediately ostracized the British consul while looking to the British threatened to further undermine the American relationship with Said. To Ward's dismay, Said continued to prevaricate, contradicting himself every time the consul tried to get a firm policy. In one instance, Said parried Ward's request for clarification, chiding him: "my friend there is no necessity for your asking such a question, for all the people understand who are Arab people and who are English people."³³⁸

Days later, Ward managed to get a clearer answer. The Sultan's response offered little reassurance, instead depicting the rapid rise of British influence over Omani affairs:

I tell you that all the people in Zanzibar who hold slaves are my subjects; and those who do not are Eng[lish] subjects; and now my friend I am going to tell you something that perhaps you won't like very well. The English are my best friend, and at one time in Arabia they gave me three thousand men to fight for me and have done me various offices of kindness, and I can never forget them, for it is the custom of the Arabs... and now if any of these people come to me to settle their business, I will settle it, but if they go to the Eng[lish] Consul he will settle it, and it is all the same; for the Eng[lish] people and the Arab people are all one...³³⁹

In truth, there was no clear policy. The status of Indians on Zanzibar and across much of the region was being hotly contested. Even as American trade on Zanzibar chugged along, the rules of engagement were actively shifting and the final outcome remained far from clear.

In the face of sustained obstinacy, Ward struggled to respond proactively as either a diplomat or a merchant. Instead, he clung to his sparse official authority. Receiving little instruction or acknowledgement from Washington, Ward pledged that "in regard to all my intercourse with the Sultan I have endeavored to carry out the spirit of my instructions to the

³³⁸ Said bin Sultan to Charles Ward, February 28, 1847, Roll 1 Volume 2, RG 84, USNARA.

³³⁹ Charles Ward to James Buchanan, March 13, 1847, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 381.

very letter.”³⁴⁰ As Hamerton and Said’s positions converged, Ward increasingly saw Hamerton as a direct adversary and the real power behind the throne. While the British official’s influence had rapidly expanded, Ward veered towards conspiracy, seeing Hamerton’s fingerprints on every decision. By 1848, Salem merchant Ephraim Emmerton noted that Ward and Hamerton had severed all contact.³⁴¹

Although less dire, Ward’s record as a merchant was also mixed. Even though Emmerton liked Ward personally, he painted a grim picture of his standing on Zanzibar, “I find that the natives dislike him very much & I think from what I gathered from them he would find it difficult to procure cargoes for his vessels if there was another house established there...”³⁴² In mid-1848, Benjamin Fabens’ declining health pushed him to leave Zanzibar after nearly a decade. While Ward was now Shepard and Bertram’s senior representative, he leaned on William McMullan, Fabens clerk, who noted that “Mr Ward and I get along finely – he does not trouble me at all now, in fact he now throws all the business into my hands, and I do nothing without first telling him.”³⁴³ Despite the short-term upheaval triggered by the 1845 British-Omani treaty, the Zanzibar economy remained vibrant, buoyed by record trade between the United States and the Omani territory.

American Diplomacy Meets Manifest Destiny

³⁴⁰ Charles Ward to James Buchanan, March 7, 1847, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 380.

³⁴¹ Entry for July 28, 1848, Journal of Ephraim A. Emmerton, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 411.

³⁴² Entry for July 28, 1848, Journal of Ephraim A. Emmerton, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 411.

³⁴³ William McMullan to Benjamin Fabens, October 27, 1848, Box 3 Folder 4, MH 94, Fabens Family Papers, PEM.

On July 4, 1850, Charles Ward dutifully raised the American flag over his consulate. As he sweated in the humid air, he waited for the Sultan's flagship to salute his country. Instead of cannon blasts, Ward only heard the hubbub of daily life rising from the cramped streets below. Incensed, Ward plotted his next move, furious at the perceived snub of his country's honor, an "oversight" that Said bin Sultan would never make with Britain or France. After years of strained relations with Said, Ward could not stomach yet another insult to American prestige. After a testy exchange of letters with the Sultan, Ward had had enough. On July 13 he wrote to the Secretary of State: "in consequence of this rupture between the Sultan & myself, & his want of candor in our correspondence... I feel it my duty to leave Zanzibar, & I shall present myself to your department at the earliest practicable moment."³⁴⁴

Although Ward's reaction stemmed from his own frustrations with Said bin Sultan and his perceived fealty to the British, it also reflected shifting realities back home. The 1840s were a period of rabid expansionism in the United States. As Manifest Destiny, and its complex underlying racial, religious, and political ideology, animated American life, the United States added massive swaths of territory, usually violently. In 1845, the U.S. annexed the Republic of Texas. Three years later, America seized millions of acres of Mexican territory as the spoils of war. In addition, the U.S. took aggressive stances in disputes with the British over the boundaries of Maine and Oregon, although both were eventually settled through negotiation. In North America and beyond, the United States pursued an increasingly antagonistic foreign policy. In the estimation of George Herring, "Americans remained an aggressive, acquisitive, competitive breed certain of their own righteousness and the evil of their foes. Victorious in war, having

³⁴⁴ Charles Ward to John Clayton, July 13, 1850, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 458.

more than doubled the size of their nation, they began to see themselves as an emerging world power, even a rival to Britain.”³⁴⁵

As sectionalism increasingly hobbled American politics at home, international posturing became a way to appeal to a shared national identity. Although more central to the Democratic Party, an assertive foreign policy became increasingly bipartisan. As Secretary of State in the early 1850s, Daniel Webster, a stalwart Whig from Massachusetts, employed aggressive rhetoric against foreign countries as part of his crusade to preserve the Union at almost any cost.³⁴⁶ At the same time, a wide array of politicians framed international commerce as an extension of territorial expansion. Men as politically divergent as William Seward and James DeBow alluded to America’s rightful “empire of the seas.”³⁴⁷ After all, as one naval officer noted, there was “no colonizer, civilizer, nor Christianizer, like commerce.”³⁴⁸ By the 1850s, the threat of force, if not actual violence, had become part of American efforts bolster its merchants across the globe, culminating in Matthew Perry’s expedition to Japan in 1853. Even as this darker undercurrent became a fixture of the U.S.’s foreign policy, American commerce on Zanzibar and beyond remained primarily peaceful, structured around reciprocal trade between private citizens.

Nonetheless, the relationship between Salem’s merchants and the federal government was changing. As the United States’ political and commercial influence expanded overseas, the nation dispatched more ministers and consuls to protect its interests. As the department strengthened its internal organization, the foreign service became more professionalized, with a

³⁴⁵ George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 214.

³⁴⁶ Kenneth Shewmaker, “Daniel Webster and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1850-1852,” *The Journal of American History* 63, no. 2 (September 1976): pp. 303-315; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 214.

³⁴⁷ Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 91.

³⁴⁸ Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 105.

centralized hierarchy and new waves of regulations.³⁴⁹ Although these reforms were slow to reach Zanzibar, and mercantile interests still predominated, American consuls had to contend with domestic expectations if not clear directives. These developments encouraged officials to be less flexible in negotiations and daily interactions. Skeptical of foreign cultures, especially of non-Europeans, Charles Ward and his peers insisted on respect bordering on deference. Ward's actions reflected an increasingly striated view of the world where international relations depended heavily on intrinsic characteristics, be they religious or racial. As Ward repeatedly reminded Webster's predecessor, John Clayton, Said bin Sultan was a "Mohomedan and an Asiatic" and had to be dealt with accordingly. In Ward's own words, "there is nothing so convincing to Mohamedans & Asiatics as a display of physical force."³⁵⁰

Although geographically isolated from their compatriots, Zanzibar's American community imported their country's prevailing ideas of religion, race, and civilization as surely as they did American commodities. Ideas of profound religious difference—Christian superiority and Muslim inferiority—had long guided American beliefs and actions at home and abroad. Themselves the heirs to centuries of Western European disdain for Islam, since independence Americans had accrued their own grievances, some real and some imagined, against multiple Muslim peoples.³⁵¹ By the mid-nineteenth century, Americans "were enveloped by a web of

³⁴⁹ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 198.

³⁵⁰ Charles Ward to George Abbot, March 13, 1851, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 478.

³⁵¹ Immediately after independence, Americans lost access to the protection of the British Navy. A handful of North African territories including an independent Morocco and the liminal Ottoman provinces of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli began preying on American ships sailing into the Mediterranean seeking direct payments for safe passage. This ongoing disagreement simmered for decades before culminating in the Barbary Wars, composed of the Tripolitan War (1801-1805) and the Algerine War (1815). This dispute helped cement hostile views of Muslim peoples and Islam more broadly across wide swaths of American society. During the 1820s, these stereotypes were reinforced by the Greek Independence movement. The effort became a

language of their own making that characterized the Arabs—and other non-Western people—as dark, depraved, lost, primitive, backward, or savage.”³⁵²

As the United States’ expanding merchant marine intersected with its rising, if still limited, political clout, American ideas of religious hierarchy shaped commercial and diplomatic interactions with foreign nations and their inhabitants. In 1844, American politician and diplomat Caleb Cushing, himself the heir to a Bostonian shipping fortune, separated the world into two distinct categories, Christian and non-Christian states, that must be dealt with accordingly:

Above all, the states of Christendom have a common origin, a common religion, a common intellectuality. All these facts impart to the states of Christendom many of the qualities of one confederated republic. How different is the condition of things out of the limits of Christendom! From the greater part of Asia and Africa, individual Christians are utterly excluded, either by the sanguinary barbarism of the inhabitants, or by their phrenzied bigotry, or by the narrow-minded policy of their governments. To their courts, the ministers of Christian governments have no means of access except by force, and at the head of fleets and armies. As between them and us, there is no community of ideas, no common law of nations, no interchange of good offices; and it is only during the present generation that treaties, most of them imposed by force of arms or by terror, have begun to bring down the great Mohammedan and Pagan governments into a state of inchoate peaceful association with Christendom. To none of the governments of this character, as it seemed to me, was it safe to commit the lives and liberties of citizens of the United States.³⁵³

cause célèbre amongst elite Americans, cementing a whole host of anti-Ottoman, anti-Turkish, and anti-Muslim beliefs. For a wide-ranging overview of early American conceptions of and experience with Islam and Muslims see Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: the United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); For an authoritative account of the Barbary Wars and the extended American dispute with North African states over access to the Mediterranean see Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2007); For a detailed account of American interest in Greek independence and its effect on broader American conceptions of Islam, as well as an overview of early American missionary activities in Ottoman territory see: Karine V. Walther, *Sacred Interests: the United States and the Islamic World, 1821-1921* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

³⁵² Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced the Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2003* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2011), 45.

³⁵³ Caleb Cushing to John C. Calhoun, September 29, 1844, Charles Sumner Lobingier, *Extraterritorial Cases: Including the Decisions of the United States Court for China from Its Beginning, Those Reviewing the Same by the Court of Appeals, and the Leading Cases Decided by Other Courts on Questions of Extraterritoriality* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1920), 4.

While Cushing designated religion as the predominate delineating factor between West and East, many of his peers turned to racial differences to explain divergent, and thus inferior, cultural and social practices. To race-obsessed Americans, Zanzibar offered a confounding mélange of the world's peoples. Far from the prevailing White/Black dichotomy of the United States, Zanzibar's inhabitants defied easy categorization. As one visiting American noted, "the inhabitants are of various races, from the light-complexioned Hindoo to the darkest African: Banyans, Parsees, Malays, Bedouin Arabs, Oman Arabs, [Swahilis], Africans, &c..."³⁵⁴ While Americans had long dedicated most of their efforts to cataloging supposed racial distinctions between Whites and Blacks, their increasing interactions with far-flung peoples necessitated more comprehensive considerations of racial categories and their links to culture and civilization.

Drawing on eighteenth-century European scholarship that separated humans into five distinct races, Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopian, and American, American intellectuals began to adapt the concept for their modern sensibilities. Spurred on by Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana*, in which he argued that "cranial capacity and conformation, like color, was a distinctive racial character," a wave of American thinkers advanced theories of human development and difference.³⁵⁵ The same year that Caleb Cushing outlined his grand theory of religious diplomacy, Josiah Nott, an Alabama politician and enslaver, declared with certainty that "history and observation both teach that in accordance with this defective organization, the

³⁵⁴ John Ross Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* (New York City, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1846), 335.

³⁵⁵ William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 29.

Mongol, the Malay, the Indian, and the Negro are now and have been in all ages and all places inferior the Caucasian.”³⁵⁶

Steeped in this milieu, American visitors to Zanzibar did their best to categorize the people they encountered. For the most part, they projected their own racial prejudices onto the island’s inhabitants. In a few ways, Americans accommodated Zanzibar’s prevailing social hierarchy. As noted in Chapter Four, Salem’s merchants relied heavily on Said bin Sultan and his Arab deputies as well as Jairam Shivji and his Indian peers. To succeed commercially, Salem’s merchants needed to court, and at times work alongside, these influential figures. As their interests converged, Americans found some common ground with their Indian and Arab counterparts, or at least a better understanding of their motivations.

During the early 1850s, John Webb, Shepard and Bertram’s agent and Ward’s eventual replacement as consul, formed a close relationship with Shivji. While Webb spent much of his free time socializing with other Americans, he also had numerous casual interactions with the custom master. The two men, sometimes joined by other Americans, frequently walked around town in the evenings or went for canoe rides. While Richard Waters had established a close working relationship with Jairam, he never recounted similar, purely social, interactions. In addition to these one-on-one outings, Webb also joined the custom master in important social events in the Indian community. To celebrate the new moon, each month Shivji and some of his Hindu peers threw coconuts in the ocean, often accompanied by Webb.³⁵⁷ Webb also recounted visiting the custom master’s house for a dance performance.³⁵⁸ Throughout the period, however,

³⁵⁶ Josiah Nott, *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races* (Mobile: Dude and Thompson, 1844), 35.

³⁵⁷ Entries for June 30, 1851 and July 29, 1851, Diary of John Felt Webb, MSS 0.145, PEM.

³⁵⁸ Entry for June 30, 1851, Diary of John Felt Webb, MSS 0.145, PEM.

Americans, including Webb, continued to offer a barrage of degrading depictions of Zanzibar's Arab and Indian inhabitants.

That being said, Americans reserved their harshest criticisms for the island's East African population. Writing for a popular audience back home, John Ross Browne offered a representative account of Zanzibar's African inhabitants, shifting rapidly between physical racial descriptors and supposedly essential racial characteristics:

The [Swahilis], of whom a large proportion of the population consists, are a gay, light-hearted people, fond of amusement, and little influenced by the formal rules of etiquette laid down by their Arab brethren. In complexion they closely resemble the red Indians of North America. Their features are good, though not handsome, being a medium between the Arab and the African; less regular and comely than the first, and partaking more of the characteristics of the Circassian than the last. A writer of considerable celebrity speaks of them as a highly intelligent and 'poetical people. After three months' constant intercourse with them, I must say I never discovered any thing like intelligence or a poetic spirit among them. They are a lively, harmless, good-natured race, of a happy disposition, but entirely ignorant of the world, and few of them acquainted with letters.³⁵⁹

Although John Webb was perfectly willing to rub elbows with Zanzibar's influential Indian custom master, he held the island's African population in open contempt. Under the heading "Degraded Condition of the Natives," Browne recounted a conversation with Webb:

Captain Webb, of Salem, who spent some time there in the capacity of a mercantile agent, gave me a very unfavorable description of the town. The natives he described as an indolent, superstitious, and degraded race, extremely treacherous, and possessing no taste whatever for the refinements of civilized life. In their manner of living they are little better than mere brutes; and so hostile are they to any invasions upon their established customs, that they openly oppose every attempt to improve their moral and social condition.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise*, 335-6.

³⁶⁰ Browne, *Etchings of Whaling Cruise*, 358.

Nor did Webb confine himself to verbal assaults. A few months before he became the American consul, Webb casually noted in his journal that he “flogged a nigger who would not go out of the yard when ordered to do so.”³⁶¹

Diplomacy by Any Means

While Ward’s resignation eventually received a positive, if muted, response from the State Department, Michael Shepard was much less congratulatory, referring to the flag debacle as a “trifling affair.”³⁶² Ward’s intangible conception of national honor paled in comparison to the lost income that feuding with Said bin Sultan threatened. In response to a direct complaint from the Sultan, Shepard assured the leader that Ward had not acted as a representative for his firm: “We exceedingly regret that there should arise any misunderstanding between our Mr Ward and your Highness... We beg your Highness to consider that in this matter Mr Ward acts in his official capacity, and not as our agent.”³⁶³ Shepard’s commercial success now depended on Said bin Sultan’s willingness to humor the idiosyncratic delineations Americans made between Ward’s roles as merchant and consul.

Although determined to leave, Ward still needed to put his commercial affairs in order. His repudiation of Said, however, significantly undermined his efforts. With the American-Omani relationship almost nonexistent, Said bin Sultan edged ever closer to Hamerton and the British. With little warning, Said issued an edict banning all Indian merchants from buying or selling captives in East Africa. Even more damaging, Said also forbade them from selling

³⁶¹ Entry for July 11 1851, Diary of John Felt Webb, MSS 0.145, PEM.

³⁶² Michael Shepard to Charles Ward, October 31, 1850, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 458.

³⁶³ Michael Shepard to Said bin Sultan, November 4, 1850, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 471.

enslaved people on Zanzibar, the only exception being the roughly twenty-thousand enslaved East Africans already on the island.³⁶⁴

This decision triggered immediate economic fallout. Like most regional commodities, the purchase and movement of large numbers of captives from East Africa to Zanzibar relied on expansive lines of credit. Thousands of enslaved men, women, and children, purchased with borrowed money, were already being held on the East African shoreline, awaiting transport to Zanzibar. With this precious cargo supposedly unsellable, numerous Indian merchants faced the specter of bankruptcy. If even a few of them went under, the effects on Zanzibar's interconnected economy would be stark. Unlike earlier decrees, Britain's heightened presence indicated that this one would be enforced, albeit haphazardly. Just before the edict, a British warship visited Zanzibar on its patrol of the East African coast. At Hamerton's behest, the warship targeted a handful of suspected Indian slavers. The British captured the ships, imprisoned their owners and burned thousands of dollars of merchandise. With Said newly compliant, there was little to stop the British from targeting any Indian vessel, whether involved in slaving or not.

In addition to commercial uncertainty on Zanzibar, Ward's replacement would also face other significant challenges to the United States' regional trade. Although Salem's merchants remained the predominant American presence in the Western Indian Ocean, they were not alone. For decades, New England whalers had frequented the Indian Ocean in their ever-expanding hunt for sperm oil. While some of them stopped at Zanzibar for supplies, including the ill-fated *Ann Parry*, whaling vessels had developed a parallel circuit reflecting their own priorities.

³⁶⁴ Charles Ward to Michael Shepard, July 16 1850, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 463.

Instead of aggregated commodities and access to credit, American whale ships sought out ports with reliable stocks of cheap supplies for their multi-year journeys. One such stop was Anjouan, a small spit of land located halfway between the northern tip of Madagascar and Mozambique. Part of the Comoro Islands, Anjouan, dubbed Johanna by the Americans, served as a crucial waypoint for U.S. whalers. As on Zanzibar, American captains had to acquire essential goods under unfamiliar conditions. On the smaller island, however, there were no permanent American residents to assist them. In April 1850, months before Ward's own diplomatic meltdown, negotiations between the captain of a New London whaler, the *Phoenix*, and Anjouani merchants broke down. When the *Phoenix*'s captain became convinced that his counterparts were acting in bad faith, he absconded in the night with \$120 worth of supplies.³⁶⁵

Days later, the *Maria*, out of New Bedford, sailed into Anjouan's harbor. Eager to recoup the losses from any American, the island's leader, Sultan Selim, demanded payment for the *Phoenix*'s supplies. When the *Maria*'s captain refused, the Sultan captured him, imprisoning the American for two weeks. Although a local British agent interceded and secured the captain's release, the initial spat remained unresolved. As the nearest U.S. consul, Charles Ward was expected to resolve the matter. While he urged his superiors to appoint a consul to Anjouan and send a warship for good measure, Ward departed from Zanzibar in September before the federal government had time to fully respond.

In an era still dominated by sail, news traveled slowly. Any meaningful response took longer still. Having seen the effects that British and French warships had on Said bin Sultan's policies, Charles Ward had repeatedly urged his government to send a gunboat to Zanzibar. Such

³⁶⁵ Charles Ward to John Clayton, July 4, 1850, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 462.

a visit was not unprecedented. In addition to the naval vessels that had carried Edmund Roberts to the region, the U.S.S. *John Adams* had visited the island in 1838, symbolizing the two nations deepening ties. For the moment, Ward's flag raising debacle took a backseat to the detainment of an American captain. Beyond the affront caused by the internment of an American citizen, the U.S. government likely prioritized the Ajouani dispute because of its potential effects on the nation's whaling fleet. Unlike the Zanzibar trade, which remained a relatively niche concern of a few commercial houses in New England, whaling was widely viewed as an essential American industry.

In response to Ward's missives, the U.S. eventually dispatched the U.S.S. *Dale* to Anjouan where it arrived in August 1851. To assuage the insult to American sovereignty, the *Dale's* commander, William Pearson, demanded \$20,000 in restitution. When Sultan Selim offered \$1000 worth of goods, Pearson positioned the *Dale* with its cannons pointing directly at the main town. Selim had twenty-four hours to pay up. In response, Selim upped his offer to \$5,000 while arranging his troops on the shore. With neither side willing to give in, Pearson opened fire. The era of American gunboat diplomacy had reached the Western Indian Ocean. After two rounds of shelling, Selim's fort lay in ruins. Following the American display of force, Pearson and Selim successfully negotiated a payment, with the promise of a commercial treaty to follow.³⁶⁶

On Zanzibar, the remaining American residents took the violent attack against a commercial partner in stride. Michael Shephard's current representative, John Webb, depicted the prevailing paternalistic viewpoint, "I hear the U.S. Ship *Dale* has been to Johanna & blown an old fort down & told the King he must be a good boy. All of which he has faithfully promised,

³⁶⁶ "The Bombardment of Johanna," *The New York Times*, February 4, 1852.

& I have no doubt will perform, if it suits his convenience.³⁶⁷” While Webb was perfectly happy putting an irritating local leader in his place, he acknowledged that the American advantage would likely dissipate as soon as the *Dale* sailed from Anjouan’s harbor. While the U.S. had shown it could project power when provoked, it had taken over a year to respond. In addition, Anjouan was hardly a political or military powerhouse. Sultan Selim was no Said bin Sultan.

Months later it was Zanzibar’s turn. On December 2, the U.S.S. *Susquehanna* steamed into the harbor tasked with kickstarting relations between the United States and Oman. With Said bin Sultan back in Arabia trying to reassert control over the region’s fractious leaders, his son Khalid was minding Zanzibar. After a series of convoluted back-and-forths between John Aulick, the *Susquehanna*’s commander, and Khalid, the two sides hashed out an agreement over the proper etiquette of flag raising and saluting. With the *Susquehanna* ominously bobbing in the harbor, Aulick pressured the princeling to salute first, the negotiations’ primary sticking point. While a handful of American sources hint that Aulick explicitly threatened violence, it appears that the *Susquehanna*’s mere presence was intimidating enough, although the smoking ruins of Anjouan’s fort could not have been far from Khalid’s mind. One American merchant noted that Aulick “had extraordinary power granted to him and he would have liked to have bombarded the town right well.” In the end, the American strategy was all awe and no shock. After coming to terms, Aulick laid down the red carpet, allowing the public onboard to get a first-hand look at America’s manufacturing and military might. Salem’s merchants approved: “I think the sending of the Frigate here has had a salutary effect upon the natives. She was crowded with people from the time of her arrival to her departure. They say that it must be a very strong government that

³⁶⁷ John Webb to Charles Ward, September 27, 1851, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 487.

can own such vessels and run at such great expense and all for the purpose of protecting the commerce of the Americans.”³⁶⁸

With the bad feelings mostly papered over, the United States needed a new consul. Aulick had been granted permission to appoint one on the spot. Having seen Ward’s rocky tenure firsthand, none of Zanzibar’s American agents wanted the position, each arguing that the others were better suited for the role. Eventually, John Webb reluctantly accepted the job. Webb was a true veteran of the trade, having captained a half-dozen vessels into the Indian Ocean and served as Shepard’s representative on Zanzibar in the early 1840s. Like his peers, Webb simply wanted to get back to business. Although the American community had initially supported Ward in his dispute with the Sultan, they had long been ready to return to the profitable status quo. While Webb could now privilege trade over diplomatic etiquette, he had little power over the larger economic and geopolitical forces that were threatening trade on Zanzibar and across the wider region.

Winds of Change

Although Zanzibar’s trading community had proved resilient to decades of rapid change, age began to catch up to the island’s leading figures. After two decades at the helm of Zanzibar’s economy, Jairam Shivji opted to return home in 1853. Like most of his peers, Shivji had never moved his family or household to the island, periodically returning to Kutch or Bombay to visit family and oversee his many commercial holdings. At sixty-one, however, Shivji still had grand designs. Upon his return to Kutch, he planned an expansive pilgrimage across wide swaths of the

³⁶⁸ Francis Ward to Charles Ward, December 18, 1851, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 490.

north-central subcontinent. Putting his Zanzibari custom duties to good use, Jairam Shivji travelled in style, accompanied by a retinue of four hundred people including friends, family members, servants, and an armed escort.³⁶⁹

Ever the savvy businessmen, Shivji left his life's work in good hands. In the past, Jairam had turned to his brother Ebji to fill in for him during extended absences, following the dominant tradition of relying on immediate or extended family members in commercial dealings. To permanently replace him, however, Shivji chose Laddha Damji, a longtime member of his firm. Although not related, the two men hailed from the same city in Kutch and were members of the same caste.³⁷⁰ Over many years, Damji had worked his way up through Shivji's organization, earning his role as deputy and eventual replacement. Already a central figure in Zanzibar's mercantile community, Damji inherited Jairam Shivji's status as custom master, as well as his close ties to Said bin Sultan, ensuring himself a prominent economic role for the foreseeable future.

Three years later, however, fate intervened. On October 19, 1856, Said bin Sultan died at sea while making yet another journey between Muscat and Zanzibar. For more than a month, Said's vessel, *The Queen Victoria*, had been propelled south by monsoon winds as the Sultan grew progressively weaker. After a prolonged illness, probably dysentery, the sixty-six-year-old died in the middle of the Indian Ocean, over a thousand miles east of Zanzibar.³⁷¹ Just six days later, *the Queen Victoria* arrived off Zanzibar, carrying the rapidly decaying body of the only

³⁶⁹ Chhaya Goswami, *The Call of the Sea: Kachchhi Traders in Muscat and Zanzibar c. 1800-1880* (Hyderabad: Oriental Blackswan, 2011), 212.

³⁷⁰ Goswami, *The Call of the Sea*, 211.

³⁷¹ Atkins Hamerton to the Earl of Clarendon, November 10, 1856, FO 54/17, TNA.

man who had managed to reign successfully over Omani holdings in Arabia and East Africa, however tenuously.

Suddenly, Zanzibar's future was far from clear. Said bin Sultan had been the central force behind the island's meteoric economic rise in part by ensuring its relative stability for twenty-five years. While at times Said had discussed the future of Zanzibar and his other domains, his will only addressed the division of his property. As ever, the British Consul had a strong opinion. Atkins Hamerton, who had been with Said during his three-year sojourn in Oman, claimed to know the Sultan's innermost thoughts on the matter:

I am perfectly well aware what His Highness' instructions regarding the succession were – That Said Thuenee at Muscat should succeed to the Government of his Arabian possessions – provisions being made for certain of his sons, as Governors of certain places in his Arabian possessions – and that the Prince Majid whom His Highness considered in the place of his deceased son Khalid – should succeed to the Government of his African possessions.... This arrangement His Highness has frequently told me with the blessing of God he would see carried into effect if God spared his life on his return from Muscat to Zanzibar – But it is now difficult to perceive what turn affairs may take.³⁷²

The broad outline of this plan likely matched Said's desires as they closely mirrored the positions he had given his sons while alive. The relative balance of power between each son, especially Thuwayni and Majid, remained more nebulous. Although Muscat was the traditional power base of the Busaidis, for the last fifteen years Said had heavily favored Zanzibar. Would Zanzibar remain under nominal Omani oversight or would it strike out on its own?

Although Said bin Sultan cast an immense shadow over Zanzibar and Omani politics, there was little guarantee that his wishes would be strictly followed. While Omani rule had become increasingly hereditary over the last century, there was no firm preference given to the eldest son. Any son, and to a lesser extent any male relative, could try to seize Said's mantle,

³⁷² Atkins Hamerton to the Earl of Clarendon, November 10, 1856, FO 54/17, TNA.

gaining power by coalition building and military force. At the time of his death, Said had about eighteen sons, the majority of whom were adults.³⁷³ It quickly became clear, however, that only four of his sons, Thuwayni, Majid, Turki, and Barghash, had realistic paths to the throne, primarily due to their role as Said's deputies over key territories. When Said died, Thuwayni was serving as governor of Muscat, Majid as Said's representative in Zanzibar, and Turki as governor of the Omani port of Sohar. Unlike his brothers, Barghash lacked a clear territorial claim, although the ambitious youth had been the only one present at father's death and had overseen his burial.

Relatively quickly, a two-tiered contest emerged. Majid and Thuwayni predominated over their respective realms. Unsurprisingly, each believed that he should gain the totality of Omani territory in Arabia and East Africa. Thuwayni staked his claim on his seniority and role as governor of Muscat, Oman's traditional power base. In response, Majid argued that Said had established Zanzibar as the de facto seat of government and that the port was the richest outpost in the kingdom. As they fought for sovereignty, they each had to fend off a challenger closer to home. Indeed, Turki and Barghash represented the best opportunities for Majid and Thuwayni to subvert their rival. Thuwayni did his best to bolster Barghash on Zanzibar while Majid sent Turki

³⁷³ Before news of his death even reached Zanzibar, the jockeying had begun. One son, nineteen-year-old Barghash, had been on his father's ship when he died. As the sun set over Zanzibar, Barghash took Said's body ashore and interred him at his palace at Mtoni. At the same time, Barghash dispatched men to his brother Majid's house to detain him before he learned of his father's death. Ultimately, Barghash's preemptive strike failed when Majid eluded capture and Barghash could not win over either the Arab elite or the island's garrison. For the moment, Zanzibar returned to an uneasy status quo under Majid. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 182.

money and military supplies in an attempt to foment a rebellion in Oman.³⁷⁴ Even as a parade of dhows carried threats between Zanzibar and Oman, the island remained relatively peaceful.

American and British Responses to Said bin Sultan's Death

Said bin Sultan's death left both the Americans and British on uneven footing. American trade had long prospered under Said's rule. As such, the Americans had generally privileged maintaining the status quo over every other diplomatic aim. Charles Ward had run into the most problems, and censure from other merchants, when he had privileged diplomatic posturing over commerce. For the time being, the Americans watched the developments warily, eager for a semblance of normality. Britain's path forward was equally murky. While Atkins Hamerton had meddled prestigiously in Omani affairs and made a concerted effort to bolster British influence on Zanzibar, he had done so with limited institutional support. Nonetheless, by the 1850s, Britain had established bases in Bombay, the Persian Gulf, Aden, and the Cape of Good Hope and were increasingly committed to crushing the East African slave trade. While the overextended Empire did not have a grand plan for Zanzibar, Said's death raised the possibility of more direct interference.

Before the Sultan's death, American merchants had offered a limited counterbalance to overly invasive British aims. For years, the Americans had viewed Hamerton's attempts to coopt Indian merchants and cripple the slave trade with disdain. Although their ability to directly intercede was largely limited to formal protests and appeals to Said bin Sultan and Jairam Shivji, their views held weight. During the 1850s, the United States was Zanzibar's largest foreign

³⁷⁴ Thomas McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018), 72.

trading partner and main source of manufactured goods, not to mention weapons. American silver and commodities had become key ingredients in the island's economic growth and rise to regional prominence. Still, the Americans remained most effective as commercial actors, having successfully smothered multiple British attempts to trade on the island.

When pushed far enough, however, the small American community did have more recourse than a strongly worded letter. American consuls and other merchants had long tied displays of naval strength to successful trade. In turn, each consul had repeatedly lobbied the State Department to send warships to Zanzibar. The desire for a naval presence represented more than a thinly veiled threat of violence, although this remained a clear subtext. Indeed, multiple Americans recounted that the Omani Sultan personally requesting such visits. To the Americans, the arrival of a large, technologically advanced ship illustrated the wealth and strength of the United States, which remained a largely intangible country half a world away. As representatives of such a serious power, American merchants could not be ignored or cheated. In turn, by commanding the respect of a foreign power, Said gained prestige in the eyes of his subjects and highlighted his close relationship to the Americans, a potential impediment to any overly ambitious European power.

Still, in twenty years only five American naval vessels had visited the island. In contrast, with each passing year more British warships appeared off the East African coast, albeit primarily interested in targeting Indian slavers. Following Said's death, Hamerton threw his support behind Majid, a stable, relatively pro-British figure. In 1857, however, Britain's presence in East Africa evaporated. In May, a revolt broke out in central India and quickly spiraled out of control. In July, Hamerton died, leaving the British without a representative on Zanzibar. As the British realized the extent of the crisis in India, they diverted their resources from across the

region. For the time being, Zanzibar, and to a lesser extent Muscat, were left to their own devices.

At the same time, Majid's relatively peaceful ascent to power, and his commitment to maritime trade helped bolster the Americans' standing. In 1857, American commerce on the island reached a new high, valued at around MT\$2.3 million. This record was quickly broken two years later when the number reached nearly MT\$2.5 million. In 1857, former consul John Webb, now Bertram's representative in Aden, wrote that "the trade to these regions, Zanzibar, Aden &c. has never been better than the past year, the profits have far exceeded my expectations when I came out."³⁷⁵

During 1857 and 1858, Majid and Thuwayni each consolidated their support.³⁷⁶ Ruling Zanzibar, or Oman, depended on knitting together an extensive patronage network based in part on direct payments. Majid's control over Zanzibar's trade significantly bolstered his efforts to consolidate support even as he struggled with large debts. American trade ensured that Majid had a steady supply of muskets and gunpower. More importantly, he had access to Zanzibar's custom revenues which continued to rise nearly every year. During this period, trade with the U.S. represented roughly a quarter of all foreign exchange. In 1859 alone, American imports were valued at MT\$568,795 which translated to nearly MT\$28,500 in custom fees. As Majid tried to undermine Thuwayni's claims to Oman, he funneled large sums of money to another brother, Turki, in hopes that he would attack Thuwayni directly.

Things came to a head in early 1859 when Thuwayni set out for Zanzibar with his fleet. At the same time, he urged Barghash to attack Majid directly. Unfortunately for Thuwayni, by

³⁷⁵ John Webb to Benjamin Faben, May 19, 1857, Box 3 Folder 5, MH 94, Fabens Family Papers, PEM.

³⁷⁶ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 135.

late 1858 the British had reasserted their control over India, nationalizing the EIC's holdings into a formal colony. Wary of any conflict near the Persian Gulf, the British responded quickly, dispatching ships to intercept Thuwayni.³⁷⁷ With the British navy at his back, the commodore convinced the princeling to return to Muscat and to submit the matter to arbitration.

Already on Zanzibar, Barghash was harder to put off. Thuwayni's backing helped him attract more supporters than he had in 1856. As Majid leaned more heavily on the British, Barghash used this to his advantage, casting himself as a traditionalist figure that would bring an end to European meddling.³⁷⁸ As he grew more assertive, Barghash was placed under house arrest. Still, he continued to plot against Majid. Eventually, Barghash escaped to a fortified plantation outside of town. After a short siege, he was expelled, taking refuge back in his townhouse. By this point, Britain's new consul, Christopher Rigby was firmly ensconced on the island. Like Hamerton, Rigby had his own ideas about the balance of power on Zanzibar. Believing Majid was more amenable to British aims, Rigby unilaterally dispatched marines from a warship in the harbor, forcing Barghash to finally surrender. Defeated for a second time, Barghash was exiled to Bombay under British supervision.³⁷⁹ After their short absence, the British had reemerged as a powerful force on the island.

In the aftermath of the Indian Rebellion, Britain's interests expanded across much of the Western Indian Ocean. Ensuring control over India required a firmer presence in the whole region. An ongoing war spanning Arabia and East Africa, and threatening to ensnare the Persian Gulf, was unacceptable. After Majid and Thuwayni failed to come to a quick agreement, the

³⁷⁷ McDow, *Buying Time*, 70.

³⁷⁸ Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar*, 190.

³⁷⁹ For a more extensive overview of the aftermath of Said's death in both Zanzibar and Oman, see: Thomas McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018), 61-79.

British intervened once more, forcing both parties to agree to British arbitration. As the matter bounced around the Foreign Office, the British weighed their own self-interests against their limited understanding of Omani politics and culture. In 1861, the verdict was passed down. Dubbed the Canning Award, the decree unsurprisingly mirrored Britain's geopolitical aims. Oman and Zanzibar were to be separate polities, although Thuwayni would receive a yearly stipend from Majid, a nod to Zanzibar's significantly higher income. In one fell swoop, Britain had cleaved the region's strongest indigenous power in two while significantly bolstering their influence over both sections.

The Americans, on the other hand, largely took a back seat. During the late 1850s, a handful of Salem agents served as consul in quick succession. Thuwayni's would be invasion and Barghash's insurrection had temporarily hampered trade, threatening their livelihoods. Unlike the British, there was little the Americans could do. While in the short term the British intervention allowed the resumption of trade, it heralded a new era of British imposition on Zanzibar, much to the Americans' consternation. In 1859 and 1860, American merchants bemoaned Britain's increasingly heavy-handed decrees, especially concerning slavery. Months before the election of Abraham Lincoln triggered the dissolution of the Union, Salem merchant William Webb complained to the Secretary of State "The English Consul at this port has compelled all the native English Subjects here to liberate their Slaves. This order of the English Consul has had a very injurious effect upon business having caused a great excitement among the natives."³⁸⁰ While Salem's merchants did their best to adapt to changing realities on

³⁸⁰ William Webb to Lewis Cass, September 1, 1860, Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 512.

Zanzibar, the collapse of their own nation rapidly overwhelmed decades of careful commercial development.

Chapter Six: The American Civil War and the Anglicization of Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1861-1875

The 1850s produced an array of threats to Salem's commerce in the Indian Ocean.

Zanzibar's growing prominence as a world port attracted a wave of new traders from the United States, Germany, and France. British impositions on Omani sovereignty, especially their attempts to curtail the slave trade, threatened to undermine Zanzibar's access to essential commodities. Nonetheless, Said bin Sultan's death in 1856 overshadowed every other development. Through an artful combination of force, negotiations, international diplomacy, and luck, Said had managed to unite Omani territory in East Africa and Arabia for decades. During his fifty-year reign, Zanzibar had transformed from an unremarkable tropical island to a center of global commerce. With Said dead and buried, the British became increasingly assertive, threatening Zanzibar's slave economy and Salem's commercial success.

In the short term, however, the United States' relentless incorporation of new territories, dedication to slavery, and political brinksmanship overwhelmed Salem's carefully crafted commercial network.³⁸¹ The outbreak of the Civil War and the disintegration of the nation's

³⁸¹ Understandably, histories of international relations during the Civil War have focused heavily on Britain, France, and, to a lesser extent, other countries in Western Europe. At the outbreak of war, both North and South had extensive economic ties to Europe, which had long shaped their internal economic and political development. At numerous points throughout the conflict, direct European intervention could have altered the trajectory, and potentially the outcome, of the war. For recent in-depth scholarship on the Union, Confederacy, and Europe, see: Richard Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), Frank Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), and Howard Jones, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: a History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University Of North Carolina Press, 2010). The impacts of the Civil War, however, hardly dissipated at the borders of Europe. Latin America, in particular, affected and was affected by the conflict. Although centered on American foreign policy before the War, Matthew Karp's *This Vast Southern Empire* offers an extended exploration of how American expansionism towards Latin America, led by a generation of Southern politicians, helped trigger the eventual schism. Karp's work offers an essential framework for scholarship on American relations with relatively

integrated manufacturing economy struck at the heart of the Zanzibar trade. By 1862, Salem's access to cotton cloth had run out, severely limiting the town's commercial capacity. As Confederate raiders spread out from Southern ports, Salem's ships faced the threat of open violence in the Atlantic and beyond. In 1863, for the first time in thirty years no ship travelled between Salem and Zanzibar.

With peace, Salem's trade resumed, albeit in a reduced state. While the immediate causes of the decline in trade were domestic, concurrent developments in the Western Indian Ocean posed serious challenges as well. Aided by the Americans' absence, Britain's economic and political influence on Zanzibar and the surrounding expanded rapidly. Although the island had long been part of wider commercial and financial networks, Britain's presence in India, Arabia, and East Africa increasingly funneled the region's trade through imperial channels. Before the Civil War, accessing capital from British financial institutions and making claims in British courts helped Americans succeed. After the war, doing so became essential to commercial survival. As a result, Americans turned to their Indian counterparts on Zanzibar and beyond. Building on decades of commercial relationships, Salem's firms contracted with Indian merchants to serve as intermediaries to imperial institutions. In Aden and Bombay, Salem's

understudied world regions. See: Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). More recently, these fields of scholarship have begun to be productively synthesized, inching towards a reconceptualization of the American Civil War as a truly global historical event. See: Don Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: an International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2017) and Don Doyle, ed., *American Civil Wars: the United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Even the most comprehensive works on Union and Confederate foreign policy, however, continue to largely ignore the world beyond Europe and Latin America. The outsized effects of the American conflict on Zanzibar's economy and the balance of power in the Western Indian Ocean suggest that many aspects of the Civil War's broader international ramifications remain to be explored.

firms hired Indian merchants directly as commercial agents. Even on Zanzibar, where Americans had long depended on Indian businessmen, these arrangements reached new heights.³⁸²

Although American traders managed to regain a foothold in the region, they never achieved their pre-war highs. Amongst other challenges, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 significantly favored European traders over their American competitors. Not only could they now reach Zanzibar much more quickly, but they could afford to dispatch large steamships to the region. For the first time in history, trading patterns began to diverge from the seasonal monsoons, albeit fitfully. More importantly, after the Civil War, American cotton cloth no longer commanded a premium in East Africa. The brief American absence had finally allowed British textiles to gain a foothold in the region. Following the collapse of American slavery, American cloth remained expensive, undercutting its competitiveness in the Western Indian Ocean. In order to survive, Salem's remaining traders fell back on specie, using it to purchase Indian Ocean commodities which remained profitable in the United States.

In 1870, the last ship departed from Salem for Zanzibar. Although a handful of Salem's merchants continued the trade, they now dispatched their ships from Boston, bowing to decades of one-sided competition between the two ports. Even as Salem's prominence in the Western

³⁸² For most of the twentieth century, western scholars depicted European states and organizations, especially the British East India Company, as uniquely dominant over the Indian Ocean economy. Even as British power expanded rapidly after 1857, innumerable Indian merchants flourished, skillfully evading the most onerous British stipulations while appropriating European institutions and protections when beneficial. See: Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants: 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), and Claude Markovits, *Merchants, Traders, Entrepreneurs Indian Business in the Colonial Era* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008). For a broader reconceptualization of indigenous actors in shaping modernity, see: Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006),

Indian Ocean declined, there was no clean break. Well into the 1880s and 1890s, Salem merchants continued to import Indian Ocean commodities, the heirs to generations of trade.

John Bertram Prevails

By 1860, John Bertram had been trading with Zanzibar for thirty years. Over the decades, his interests in the Indian Ocean, as well as numerous other investments, had made him one of the town's richest men.³⁸³ Bertram put his wealth to good use. Following Michael Shepard's retirement in 1853, he consolidated his control of their firm. Although he initially worked alongside a handful of co-investors, including Michael Shepard's son, by the late 1850s, Bertram had bought them all out.

At the beginning of the 1850s, Bertram's main competitor was the Salem firm of George West. After Pingree's retirement in the mid-1840s, George and his brother Benjamin had taken over his operation. In order to remain competitive with Shepard and Bertram, the Wests incorporated Ephraim Emmerton. An independent Salem merchant, Emmerton had sent vessels into the Western Indian Ocean for decades, albeit at a much slower pace than Pingree or Shepard. Following George West's death in 1852, the firm had struggled. Under Benjamin's oversight, initially the group only committed one ship to the Western Indian Ocean. By 1858, the West firm was on stronger footing and returned to the region with renewed vigor. In response,

³⁸³ Unlike his competitors, Bertram had firsthand knowledge of the region. During the 1820s and 30s he had captained multiple ships to the Indian Ocean and even visited Zanzibar. By the late 1830s, Bertram had joined forces with Michael Shepard. Together, the pair helped Richard Waters earn his commission as consul. Although Michael Shepard managed much of the firm's daily business, which each passing year, Bertram and his capital played a larger role. During the 1840s and early 1850s, Shepard and Bertram were half of Salem's duopoly on Zanzibar, first alongside David Pingree and then his successors, George and Benjamin West.

John Bertram bought a number of new ships, most of which he sent to the Indian Ocean.³⁸⁴

Driven by the competition between West and Bertram, trade between the United States and Zanzibar reached an all-time high.

The Civil War and the Collapse of the Zanzibar Trade

As the explosive election of 1860 unfolded in the United States, most of the Zanzibar traders unified behind Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party.³⁸⁵ While Salem largely followed suit—Lincoln received nearly sixty-four percent of the town’s vote—a disproportionate number of the town’s inhabitants voted for the Constitutional Union Party which privileged preserving the Union above all else.³⁸⁶ Reliant on the South for cotton and other goods, businessmen across the North had to balance their economic interests with the most pressing

³⁸⁴ First came the 495-ton Salem built *Guide* in 1857. The next year he purchased the 510-ton *Nubia* out of Boston followed by the 555-ton *Persia* in 1860. When the *Guide* wrecked off of East Africa in 1860, almost certainly fully insured, Bertram quickly commissioned its replacement, the *Glide*, which he registered in Salem in 1861. Hitchings and Phillips, *Ship Registers of the District of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts 1789-1900*.

³⁸⁵ Almost all of the men involved in the Zanzibar trade began the 1850s as Whigs. This was hardly surprising in Salem. In 1848, sixty-four percent of the town voted for Zachary Taylor, the Whig candidate. The lone holdout was the more radical Richard Waters who supported the Liberty Party. During the early 1850s, Michael Shepard, John Bertram, Benjamin Fabens, John Waters, and Benjamin West all attended various Whig party events. In 1851, David Pingree served as Salem’s mayor for a term, billing himself as a Whig. When the party fractured, most of Salem’s members transitioned to the nascent Republican party. So too did Richard Waters. After a short stint with the Free-Soilers, Waters was an early convert, joining the Republicans in 1854. In the 1856 election, more than sixty-two percent of Salem voted for John Fremont. “State Election: Nov. 13, 1848,” *The Salem Observer*, November 18, 1848; “Webster Meeting,” *Salem Register*, November 24, 1851; “Vote for Senators,” *Weekly Messenger*, December 28, 1853; “Vote of Salem, Nov. 4, 1856,” *Salem Register*, November 6, 1856.

³⁸⁶ In Salem, John Bell received 20.6 percent of the vote compared to 13.7 percent in Essex County and 13.2 percent in Massachusetts as a whole. “Vote for President” and “Recapitulation – Vote for President,” *Salem Register*, November 8, 1860.

political issues of the day.³⁸⁷ For some of Salem's inhabitants, a desire to preserve the Union at any cost, as well as their own commercial viability, won out.

As the political crisis deepened at home, Salem's agents remained more concerned with developments in East Africa. Although Barghash bin Said's exile had dispelled the immediate threat of armed insurrection, Britain's new consul, Christopher Rigby, had his own plans. After ensuring Majid bin Said's hold on Zanzibar, Rigby aggressively pursued his own agenda. In addition to targeting the East African slave trade, Rigby went after slavery on Zanzibar, a significant escalation of British interference. Rigby's crusade represented a profound threat to Zanzibar's commerce. If the legitimacy of enslaved property began to crumble, the island's economy was likely to follow.

Rigby's efforts were moderately successful. Africans enslaved by Indians, whether clearly British subjects or not, had a chance at freedom. A year into his cause, Rigby had freed over 5,600 people.³⁸⁸ As one of Bertram's representatives complained:

The English Consul at this port has compelled all the native English Subjects here to liberate their Slaves. By this order about 4000 blacks have been made free. These natives were not in the habit of trading in Slaves, but those liberated were house servants & plantation negroes. This order of the English Consul has had a very injurious effect upon business having caused a great excitement among the natives.³⁸⁹

For the time being, the effects were limited as the emancipations represented less than ten percent of the island's enslaved population. Many East Africans likely slipped back into slavery as soon as the consul's attention strayed. For the most part, the underlying system that kept tens

³⁸⁷ For an overview of New England's commercial connections to the South and their effects on the political allegiances of northern businessmen, see: Thomas O'Connor, *Lords of the Loom: the Cotton Whigs and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

³⁸⁸ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 206.

³⁸⁹ William Webb to Lewis Cass, September 1, 1860, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 512.

of thousands of East Africans enslaved, and ensured Zanzibar's economic prosperity, remained in place. In September of 1861, Rigby left Zanzibar in failing health, momentarily weakening British influence on the island.

Initially, the American Civil War had a relatively limited effect on Zanzibar. While northern businessmen worried about the war's commercial implications, most remained convinced that the North would win a quick and decisive victory. The handful of American traders in the Western Indian Ocean were far from the only interested parties. The fortunes of numerous Indian and Omani traders and businessmen depended heavily on American commerce. Joseph Winn, a representative for Rufus Green & Co. of Providence, kept an Indian associate in Bombay abreast of developments at home:

I will say nothing here of the existing troubles in this Country as you must be well posted by every mail. I am afraid they will continue at least all this year, but of the result we of the North free States with 20.000.000 population and nearly all the wealth of the Country have no doubt about conquering the Slave States with only 8.000.000 inhabitants and but little wealth, it is only a question of time, and it is the intention of the Govt. to do it with as little loss of life & property as possible.³⁹⁰

Within months, it became clear that the war would be neither quick nor easy. While most northern mills began the conflict with large stockpiles of cotton, allowing them to continue producing for months, spiking cotton prices changed their fiscal calculus. Realizing that they could make more money selling raw cotton than by providing a finished product, many owners sold their stockpiles to British buyers, ensuring a rapid fall off in production. By mid-1862, Salem could no longer buy enough cloth to justify sending ships to Zanzibar. As the American consul noted in 1864, "the great and unfortunate rebellion in America has probably affected the trade of this place as much, if not more, than any place of its kind or size. Formally many

³⁹⁰ Joseph Winn to Cursetjee Dhanjeebhoy, June 28, 1861, Box 1 Folder 4, MSS 155, Joseph Winn Papers, PEM.

thousand bales of Cotton goods, large quantities of powder, muskets, brass wire and many other things were brought here every year. This trade is now at a standstill.”³⁹¹

Although the collapse of cloth production severely limited American commerce in the Western Indian Ocean, Salem’s trade limped forward. Between 1861 and 1865, the town managed to field seven voyages. While cotton was no longer available, Salem did still have access to some of its longstanding trade goods. Throughout the war, Salem continued to supply guns and gunpowder to East Africa, albeit in reduced quantities. Although weapons were in high demand at home, Salem had long exported low quality “trade muskets” that were almost obsolete by American standards. While inferior, these guns were easier to repair, a selling point in a region that did not manufacture its own firearms. Exported gunpowder was of similarly low quality. Decades earlier, an American recounted how his personal supply of powder had proved too powerful for a Zanzibari gun, breaking it with a single shot: “on taking down the matchlock, he looked at it in sorrow, for the instrument was incapable of resisting the force of Dupont's best sporting powder; the bushing was entirely destroyed, and the pan was blown off from the barrel.”³⁹²

Scarcity was not the only threat to Salem’s commerce. For the first time since the War of 1812, Salem’s ships faced a sustained threat of violence at sea. During the war, the Confederate navy and affiliated privateers captured roughly two hundred and fifty Union merchant vessels, most of which were burned.³⁹³ Initially, Confederate ships were able to strike Union merchants relatively close to home, lurking off the coast of New England. As the Union bolstered its navy

³⁹¹ William Hines to William Seward, October 25, 1864, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 533.

³⁹² Ruschenberger, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World* Vol. 1, 31-2.

³⁹³ James McPherson, *War on the Waters: the Union and Confederate Navies, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 4.

and tightened its Southern blockade, Confederate raiders struck out for more distant seas. This effort took off in the summer of 1862 when the CSS *Florida* and CSS *Alabama* launched from British ship yards.³⁹⁴ Both ships passed through the Indian Ocean in search of their prey.³⁹⁵ The *Alabama*, in particular, threatened American commerce across the region, despite spending most of its time near Indonesia. In early 1864, the *Alabama* burned an American merchant vessel off the southwest coast of India.³⁹⁶ The *Alabama* and other Confederate raiders struck yet another blow to Salem's reeling Zanzibar trade. As the American Consul in Calcutta noted, "when the Alabama appeared in these Seas, the chartering of American vessels ceased."³⁹⁷ Bertram took note. After dispatching two of his own ships in 1862, he chartered the British vessel, the *Natal*, in both 1864 and 1865 to avoid wayward Confederates.

As cloth remained unattainable, Salem's merchants cast around for potential replacements.³⁹⁸ By the end of the war, each voyage relied on an eclectic array of goods. Some

³⁹⁴ McPherson, *War on the Waters*, 112.

³⁹⁵ Although sailing in the Indian Ocean had always been risky, Salem's ships had not faced an outright naval assault since the early nineteenth century when Arabian pirates occasionally targeted their ships. The most direct human threat to their interests occurred when a ship ran aground. Driven by opportunism and longstanding traditions of salvage rights, local inhabitants often attempted to raid the wreck, carrying off whatever they could.

³⁹⁶ Frenise Logan, "Activities of the Alabama in Asian Waters," *Pacific Historical Review* 31, no. 2 (January 1962): pp. 143-150, 148.

³⁹⁷ Logan, "Activities of the Alabama in Asian Waters," 149.

³⁹⁸ One such possibility was to restart large shipments of specie. A staple of American trade during the 1830s and 40s when a single ship might carry well over ten thousand dollars of silver, the practice had waned as Americans increasingly relied on accessing large sums of capital through their Indian counterparts. As Salem floundered for alternative trade goods, the time-tested appeal of specie would have been strong. Unfortunately, the Civil War also wreaked havoc on the American financial system. By late 1861, many northern banks had suspended specie payments. The federal government quickly followed in early 1862. Even if Salem's merchants managed to acquire specie, there simply were no good substitutes for cotton cloth. As the American consul noted, "since the breaking out of our civil troubles in America this Trade has been steadily on the decline. For specie is not a substitute on the coast for the cottons and munitions of war the natives barter their ivory, &c, for." David Thomson, "Like a Cord through the Whole Country": Union Bonds and Financial Mobilization for Victory," *The Journal of the*

items like sugar, flour, soap, tobacco, and clocks had played a minor part in American-Zanzibari trade in the past. In addition to these goods, Salem's merchants added an array of foodstuffs including cheese, bread, biscuits, salmon, cod, and mackerel.³⁹⁹ In addition, John Bertram sent speculative cargos of kerosene to Aden, and likely Zanzibar as well, and also broached the possibility of shipping ice to the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁰⁰ By 1864, small amounts of cotton cloth had become available. Even so, each voyage remained speculative, threatening to lose money. As Bertram acknowledged, "We have ordered 72 Bales sheetings & shirtings, from 40 to 80 Boxes Tobacco, Flour, Kerosene oil... Although there will be a loss (more or less) on those articles they will answer better than gold or drawing on Bombay where the rate is very bad."⁴⁰¹ While the outward journey might prove lackluster, Bertram still hoped that Indian Ocean commodities would prove profitable in the United States.⁴⁰²

The Politicization of the Indian Ocean

Civil War Era 6, no. 3 (September 2016): pp. 347-375, 349; Report on Zanzibar, 1862, William Speer, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

³⁹⁹ Arrivals and Departures of American Vessels at the United States Consulate at Zanzibar, June 15, 1863, Roll 2 Volume 5, RG 84, USNARA.

⁴⁰⁰ John Bertram to Edward Ropes, March 15, 1864, Box 1 Folder 5, MH 201, Edward D. Ropes Papers, PEM

⁴⁰¹ John Bertram to Edward Ropes, April 12, 1864, Box 1 Folder 5, MH 201, Edward D. Ropes Papers, PEM.

⁴⁰² Even the most sought-after Indian Ocean commodities could not escape the totalizing nature of the American war. As the North shifted to war footing, its consumption patterns changed. Purchases of gum copal and cloves decreased significantly even as those of hides and ivory remained relatively high. Salem continued to import significant quantities of African and Arabian hides, likely supplying shoe manufacturers in Eastern Massachusetts with an essential source of leather. Likewise, even war could not diminish northern demand for ivory. As thousands of men died in the Virginia mud, ivory combs, billiard balls, and piano keys remained essential signifiers of social and economic success. List of Zanzibar's Exports, December 24, 1863, Roll 2 Volume 5, RG 84, USNARA; Export Trade of Zanzibar for the Year Ending July 31, 1865, Roll 2 Volume 5, RG 84, USNARA.

While being appointed a consul had always depended on politics, Zanzibar's relative anonymity had limited its appeal to a small number of merchants. In the past, party politics had not precluded selection. Although Richard Waters was far from a Jacksonian Democrat, his passing acquaintance with Jackson's Treasury Secretary had helped him gain the position. As the Union fought for its survival, however, even far flung consulships hung in the balance. As a spate of American diplomats defected to the Confederacy, loyalty to the Union became a consul's primary qualification. At the outset of the war, William Webb, a Salem trader, held the position. A Yankee through and through, Webb had little sympathy for the Confederacy. Nonetheless, in late 1861 Webb lost the position to William Speer, a southern Unionist from Tennessee whose loyalty had cost him his career.⁴⁰³ An outsider with almost no knowledge of Zanzibar or American trade in the region, Speer struggled to even reach his posting. With ships to Zanzibar few and far between, Speer remained stranded on the East Coast for months.

Almost a year after his appointment, Speer finally arrived on the island. With American trade in a tailspin, Speer had few clear opportunities for self-enrichment. Attempting to make himself useful, Speer drafted an overarching report on the island's commercial environment. With no connections to Salem, he received little support or information from either his countrymen, their European counterparts, or the island's other inhabitants. In frustration, Speer dubbed Zanzibar "the city of secrets."⁴⁰⁴ Supremely self-assured, Speer forged ahead. Within weeks of his arrival, he attempted to renegotiate the American-Omani Treaty, the backbone of all American trade on the island. Citing the current treaty as "restrictive, ambiguous, and defective," Speer pushed Majid to make two concessions: ending transshipment fees and removing

⁴⁰³ Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar: 1845-1865," 54.

⁴⁰⁴ Report on Zanzibar, 1862, William Speer, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

restrictions on weapon sales.⁴⁰⁵ Although both subjects had caused American traders confusion and consternation in the 1830s, the two sides had forged de facto agreements long ago. For decades, Americans had not been not required to pay transshipment fees and both Said and Majid had allowed the sale of guns and gunpowder except during periods of revolt. Speer's grandiose interference soon united the country's competing merchant houses against him. A stream of letters from Salem and Providence arrived in Washington stating that the current treaty was sacrosanct and required no changes. While American trade was floundering, it had little to do with the well-worn treaty.

Less than two months after his arrival, Speer embarked for the U.S., frustrated with his exile in East Africa. In his own mind at least, his short tenure had proved successful: "I contemplate with satisfaction that I have done more work here for the U.S. Government in 50 days than all my predecessors together in 25 years."⁴⁰⁶ Back in the United States, Speer still made his presence felt. Although he retired by his own volition, Speer did his best to undermine his replacement, a Providence trader named William Hines. Speer repeatedly accused Hines of being a virulent Copperhead. In a letter to Senator Charles Sumner, Speer claimed that Hines opposed Lincoln and openly celebrated Union defeats.⁴⁰⁷ With the Union army busy trying to head off the Confederates in Virginia and the State Department doing its best to prevent European states from recognizing the South, the relative merits of the Zanzibari consul received little attention.

The Confluence of American and Zanzibari Slavery

⁴⁰⁵ William Speer to William Seward, November 27, 1862, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

⁴⁰⁶ William Speer to William Seward, November 27, 1862, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

⁴⁰⁷ William Speer to Charles Sumner, June 23, 1862, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

As the Civil War dragged on and the Union cause became intertwined with emancipation, the politics of slavery shifted rapidly in the United States. In the Indian Ocean, American views on East African slavery began to waiver as well. Over the decades, dozens of American consuls, traders, and captains, as well as hundreds of sailors, had passed through Zanzibar. Like their countrymen, the American interlopers held a variety of views on slavery although they shared a broad belief in white supremacy.⁴⁰⁸ More tangibly, Americans in the Indian Ocean were united in their search for profit. On Zanzibar, making money depended on slavery. Even Richard Waters, who viewed American slavery as highly immoral, had largely refrained from interfering with the institution on Zanzibar. Besides occasionally chastising European slavers, Waters had acquiesced to the profitable status quo, relying on enslaved labor for most aspects of his commercial operations. Subsequent consuls and American agents on the island had followed suit, with significantly fewer qualms than Waters.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Americans had long projected their own ideas of race and slavery onto Zanzibari society, largely erasing the significant differences between the reigning labor regimes in the American South and East Africa. This tendency reached a fever pitch during the Civil War. As emancipation became essential to the Union's future, the nuances of American and East African slavery became harder to discern. In 1862, William Speer broached the topic with Majid bin Said: "I said to him – 'We have trouble in the U. States on account of the slaves.' He replied quickly – 'Slaves in a State are like rats in a house – very troublesome and very hard

⁴⁰⁸ During this period, a significant minority of New England sailors, roughly one in four, were African-American. On Salem's vessels, the roles of cook and steward, often held by the same man, were generally delegated to Black sailors. Black American accounts of Zanzibar are few and far between. For the best exploration of Black Americans on Zanzibar see Michael Sokolow, *Charles Benson: Mariner of Color in the Age of Sail* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

to be got rid of.’”⁴⁰⁹ After emancipation, Consul Edward Ropes attributed Zanzibar’s challenges to slavery: “Until this curse of the Country [Slavery] is removed, no advancement in Commerce or civilization can be looked for; and the vast resources of this fertile portion of Africa, so rich in natural products and capable of such great agricultural improvement must remain undeveloped and neglected.”⁴¹⁰ This represented a profound shift. For decades Americans had consistently criticized any challenges to the East African slave trade, wary of broader effects on Zanzibar’s economy.

Beyond rhetorical flourishes, caution and commercial interests won the day. As Britain once again targeted the slave trade and broached actual abolition on Zanzibar, Ropes’ replacement, Francis Webb, decried the moves. Savvy to political currents back home, Webb acknowledged that gradual restrictions on the slave trade might boost the region’s economy and that eventual emancipation remained a worthy goal. Abolishing slavery too soon, however, would end tragically. Webb noted that “if [emancipation] was forced suddenly upon them it would have the most disastrous effect on the island and that for a time trade would be utterly paralysed.”⁴¹¹ Mirroring generations of American politicians, Webb predicted that immediate emancipation would lead to “insurrection and anarchy” which in turn would allow the British to invade. To justify the status quo, Webb leaned on tired pro-slavery tropes noting that enslaved Africans were “kindly treated, and who with their owner and his children form a happy family.”⁴¹² While Zanzibari slavery was a far cry from the plantation slavery of the American South, Webb willfully ignored the system’s brutal reality.

⁴⁰⁹ Report on Zanzibar, 1862, William Speer, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

⁴¹⁰ Edward Ropes to William Seward, August 15, 1867, Roll 2 Volume 5, RG 84, USNARA.

⁴¹¹ Francis Webb to William Seward, August 20, 1868, Roll 2 Volume 5, RG 84, USNARA.

⁴¹² Francis Webb to William Seward, August 20, 1868, Roll 2 Volume 5, RG 84, USNARA.

American Indians

The crucible of the Civil War cut Salem's merchants to the bone. Pushed to the brink, Benjamin West sent his last ship to the region in 1861 leaving John Bertram as the sole heir to Salem's commercial legacy on Zanzibar. Other American firms continued to visit the island, primarily sailing from Boston and New York. Even though Salem had regained access to its full array of exports, most crucially cotton cloth, returning to pre-war commercial heights proved difficult. Salem no longer dominated America's trade on Zanzibar or across the wider region. To succeed, John Bertram would have to adapt to the rapidly changing rules of commerce in the Western Indian Ocean.

Although the United States and Britain had long pursued divergent interests on Zanzibar, America's commercial success, and resulting diplomatic influence, had impeded Britain's sporadic attempts to bolster its standing. America's wartime absence offered the British a unique opportunity on Zanzibar. As Britain consolidated and centralized its holdings in India, and expanded its presence across the region, Zanzibar's highly interconnected economy became increasingly tied to British outposts, especially Bombay and Aden. For Zanzibari merchants and their American counterparts, access to British banks and courts became an essential part of commercial success. As Bertram and his representatives attempted to regain their footing, they turned to Indian merchants, building on decades of personal relationships, to adapt to the anglicization of the Western Indian Ocean's commercial realm.

Although direct trade between Zanzibar and Britain increased during the Civil War, it remained meager. During the same period, commerce between the island and British India spiked, rising by over forty percent. By the end of the war, British India had overtaken the

United States as Zanzibar's largest foreign trading partner.⁴¹³ Although the collapse of American trade bolstered Britain's reach, the Empire's policies had long affected Zanzibar's commercial development, albeit indirectly. For decades, the EIC's control over much of Western India had meant that a significant portion of Zanzibari trade fell under its purview, however loosely. Bombay's emergence as a commercial metropolis quickly attracted Zanzibar's Indian merchants. The island's Indian community had long fostered close relationships with the city's businessmen and its richest members began to open commercial branches in the port. By the 1850s, American traders had been drawn in as well. While most of Salem's ships did not sail beyond the Arabian Peninsula, a growing minority continued to Bombay. On Zanzibar itself, capital drawn from British banks in Bombay helped the Americans to expand their presence before the Civil War.

As prevailing Atlantic and Indian Ocean financial systems converged under the umbrella of the British Empire, new avenues for transferring credit and capital became available to Americans. By the 1840s, Michael Shepard, like most prominent New England traders, held accounts in various London banks, a practice that John Bertram continued. As British banks sprang up in India, Jairam Shivji and other well-connected Indian merchants quickly realized their potential, as did the Americans. Instead of hauling thousands of dollars of specie to Zanzibar, American merchants could carry a note from a London bank. Jairam, in turn, would provide them with hard currency, knowing that he could cash the bill in Bombay:

Jeram wishes me to write to you that he will take Bills on London to the amt of 30,000 to \$50,000 yearly. He will advance the money here by paying him 5 per ct. on the amt. advanced and will allow for the Bills the net amount received for them in Bombay... If this will be a favorable way of getting funds here, it will answer a good purpose, as by drawing Bills in small amts, and handing them to Jeram as fast as my funds are

⁴¹³ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 135

exhausted, he will exert himself to assist me in investing my money to get them into his possession.⁴¹⁴

Well before the Civil War, British capital had drawn Shepard and his peers deeper into the orbit of Zanzibar's Indian merchants.

During the 1860s, the British invested heavily in their imperial infrastructure in the Western Indian Ocean, significantly expanding their influence over regional commerce. New steamship routes and telegraph lines linked the Arabian Peninsula and India to London, and each other, as never before. While these developments initially bypassed Zanzibar, faster ships and expanded mail services did reach the island, easing British penetration and effecting commercial practices. At the same time, the rapid expansion of trade between Zanzibar and India ensured Britain's interest in the island, as did the East African slave trade. In 1866, the British established a vice-admiralty court on Zanzibar in order to adjudicate disputes over ships and cargoes confiscated by their anti-slaving patrols.⁴¹⁵

With each passing year, the possibilities for conveying goods and information across the Western Indian Ocean expanded. Merchants of all nationalities had to react quickly or risk being left behind. In 1865, Bombay and London were directly connected by a telegraph for the first time.⁴¹⁶ The next year, a successful transatlantic telegraph cable made communication between the United States and England possible in a matter of minutes. In 1870, the completion of a line between Aden and Bombay made regular communication across much of the Western Indian

⁴¹⁴ Benjamin Fabens to Michael Shepard, December 2, 1845, MH 23, Michael Shepard Papers, Box 12 Folder 7, PEM.

⁴¹⁵ Moses Nwulia, *Britain and Slavery in East Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1975), 82.

⁴¹⁶ "The Indo-European Telegraph," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1865.

Ocean possible.⁴¹⁷ In theory, from a telegraph office in Salem, John Bertram could now dictate instructions to a deputy in Aden or Bombay and expect them to receive it within hours. Even after semi-regular communication became possible, the new system proved fallible. In 1870, Francis Webb wrote to Bertram in confusion, noting that he had received three copies of the same telegram with different instructions: “the most important word is wrong in each of the last two it is the word “Sold”... we take it that it should be “Hold” which you probably meant us to do rather than sell at the prices quoted in our letter.”⁴¹⁸

Although Aden, Bombay, and Zanzibar had been connected by mercantile networks for centuries, American success on Zanzibar now depended on the British outposts. As a result, American commerce on Zanzibar evolved, adapting to the rising importance of other ports. Instead of American commodities, information, and money flowing from Zanzibar outward, the network became more multi-nodal with information and money flowing from Aden and Bombay to Zanzibar. Still, the island remained a premier entrepot where Salem’s merchants could reliably sell and purchase large amounts of regional commodities. The Americans’ unparalleled knowledge of Zanzibar’s marketplace continued to pay dividends, ensuring that the island remained the center of American trade. With renewed access to cotton cloth, Bertram could once again compete with well-established German and French firms.

As he reconsolidated his mercantile network after the Civil War, John Bertram did his best to adapt to these realities. His first priority was shoring up his position on Zanzibar. Once again, Bertram harnessed the tarnished prestige and influence of the American consulate. Likely

⁴¹⁷ P. M. Kennedy, “Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy, 1870–1914,” *The English Historical Review* LXXXVI, no. CCCXLI (October 1971): pp. 728-752, 731.

⁴¹⁸ Francis Webb to John Bertram, May 2, 1870, Box 3 Folder 3, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

wary of another political appointee, Bertram snagged the position for his agent, Edward Ropes. Instead of sending Ropes directly to Zanzibar, Bertram recommended that he travel across Europe so that he could stop in Aden to “promote our interests.”⁴¹⁹ With Ropes firmly ensconced in Zanzibar by 1865, Bertram broadened his horizons, dispatching American representatives to Bombay and Muscat for the first time and contracting with merchants in Tamatave, a port in Madagascar. Bertram paid particular attention to Bombay. As Bertram noted in 1864, “we expect for the future to have our remittances made from Bombay to Aden, instead of from England.”⁴²⁰ While Americans could still rely on Zanzibari merchants to access and transfer capital from Bombay, the port’s dominant role as a financial center required a more permanent arrangement.

While Ropes remained ensconced on Zanzibar, Bertram’s other American agents, Ephraim Emmerton and Francis Webb, moved back and forth between Aden, Muscat, and Bombay “to transact such business at those ports as... Bertram may direct, and no other.”⁴²¹ For this strategy to work, Bertram depended heavily on resident Indian businessmen in Aden and Bombay to manage his daily business. These men offered essential services that Bertram’s American representatives could not. Bertram and his men were experts in the idiosyncratic commercial world of Omani Zanzibar, a nuanced economic system that was beginning to fray

⁴¹⁹ Aden had long been an important stop in the American’s wider circuit. Following the British occupation in 1839, the city had begun to supplant Mocha as the American’s primary stop on the Arabian Peninsula. Most voyages that landed at Zanzibar sailed on to Aden to collect hides and coffee. As he consolidated control of his trading house, Bertram dispatched his first permanent representative to Aden in 1855. During the war, however, the American presence had lapsed even as the few ships that visited the region continued to stop at the city. John Bertram to Edward Ropes, March 15, 1864, Box 1 Folder 5, MH 201, Edward D. Ropes Papers, PEM; Appendix 1, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

⁴²⁰ John Bertram to Edward Ropes, March 15, 1864, Box 1 Folder 5, MH 201, Edward D. Ropes Papers, PEM.

⁴²¹ Contract Between Ephraim A. Emmerton and John Bertram, Box 4 Folder 1, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

under British pressure. In Aden, Bertram employed Rustomji Sorabjee Kharas while in Bombay he turned to Dossabhoy Merwanjee and Rustomji Wadia, members of Dossahboy Merwanjee Son & Co. All Parsis, these men had come of age conducting business under the British colonial system and were well acquainted with the Empire's legal and financial institutions. Although these relationships had become increasingly important to Salem's merchants, they were far from new. In particular, Dossabhoy Merwanjee had long served as an agent for American businesses in Bombay. In the early 1840s, Richard Waters had corresponded with Merwanjee and some of his family members, eager for their insight on Indian commerce. When Waters visited the port in 1841, he met Merwanjee in person.⁴²² When Bombay's American consul departed for home a decade later, he nominated Merwanjee to temporarily fill the vacancy.

Nor were these dealings confined solely to the Indian Ocean. Driven by curiosity and the possibility for expanding commercial relationships, Rustomji Wadia, Merwanjee's nephew, traveled to the United States in 1859. For nearly a year, Rustomji remained in the U.S., visiting Boston, New York, and Salem, the American cities most relevant to the commercial world of Bombay.⁴²³ While in Salem, Wadia visited the East India Marine Society and likely met with some of the town's merchants. In Boston, Wadia spent extended periods of time with the city's most prolific India traders. Upon his return to Bombay, Wadia joined his uncle's company. By 1866, he was overseeing local transactions for Bertram.

By the late 1860s, men like Wadia, Merwanjee, and Kharas were the backbone of Bertram's operations in their cities. They oversaw the purchase and sale of goods, collected essential information on market conditions, and helped him access capital as needed. In 1866,

⁴²² Rose, *Between Boston and Bombay*, 205.

⁴²³ Rose, *Between Boston and Bombay*, 254.

Rustomjee Wadia doggedly pursued Bertram's claim to a local estate, likely as payment for a debt, ensuring that he received timely dividends. At the same time, Bertram considered opening an account with Barings Bros. in Wadia's name "for the financial purposes" of his "agencies in the East."⁴²⁴ Although Bertram received information from a variety of sources, he prioritized intelligence from men on the ground, be they American or Indian. Undoubtedly seeking to bolster their own profits, representatives for Dossabhoy Merwanjee Son & Co repeatedly urged Bertram to make Bombay a standard port of call, advising him to arrange "for your vessel to touch at this port on her usual rounds, your vessels going to Muscat from Zanzibar could... do so very conveniently."⁴²⁵ While mutually beneficial, the commercial arrangements had limitations. Although conversant in English, Kharas' letters could be convoluted. At one point, Bertram confided in Ropes of ongoing difficulties: "While we have confidence in our Agents Messrs Sorabjee Corrasjee Sons in Aden, we cannot explain always our views to them so fully as we could wish."⁴²⁶

Intimately connected to ports across the region, Zanzibar was not immune to Britain's expanding influence. Nor were its American inhabitants. Their long history on the island helped them adapt to the headwinds. Bertram still had a permanent American agent on the island, limiting his dependence on Indian middlemen. With over thirty years of experience, however, Bertram knew that his success depended on the Indian community. In addition, their relatively new status as British subjects offered Bertram important access to imperial channels. Eager to

⁴²⁴ Rustomjee H. Wadia to John Bertram, October 27, 1866, Box 2 Folder 1, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

⁴²⁵ Dossabhoy Merwanjee Son & Co. to John Bertram, March 20, 1867, Box 2, Folder 1, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

⁴²⁶ John Bertram to Edward Ropes, March 1, 1864, Box 1 Folder 5, MH 201, Edward D. Ropes Papers, PEM.

regain some of their pre-war prosperity, Bertram and his agents worked to strengthen their personal and commercial ties with Zanzibar's leading merchants.

By the 1860s, this meant cultivating relationships with two men: Ladha Damji and Tharia Topan. Although Jairam Shivji had left Zanzibar for the last time in 1853, and died a rich man in Kutch in 1866, he still cast a long shadow on Zanzibar. Jairam's firm, now headed by his former deputy, Damji, still controlled Zanzibar's customs. As such, Damji remained a pivotal figure on the island, whose good will was required for commercial success. While Bertram conducted business with Damji and borrowed large sums of money when needed, his main partner was Tharia Topan. As was often the case on Zanzibar, this relationship had deep roots. As early as 1842, Richard Waters had cut deals with Tharia's father, Topan bin Tajan.⁴²⁷

By the 1860s, Tharia played a dominant role on Zanzibar, second only to Damji. Indeed Tharia's reach extended far beyond the island; the capitalist had outposts in London and Bombay, and trading interests as far away as China.⁴²⁸ In 1865, he lent Bertram over MT\$47,000, one of many sizable transactions.⁴²⁹ Even as Bertram worked to build up his presence in other ports, he deferred to Zanzibari merchants when possible. In 1866, Ropes leaned on Tharia to receive preferential treatment in Bombay: "we have deferred drawing until now, hoping to hear from Taria after his arrival at Bombay, as we know he wished to remit funds, and

⁴²⁷ By Waters's departure, Topan had become one of his main trading partners. As subsequent Americans arrived on Zanzibar, Topan stood ready to strike a deal, receiving a significant share of American trade until his death in 1851. As one American noted: "In my last I mentioned the death of Topan, & feared it might have a bad effect upon our trade, but it has not proved so as his son [Tharia] has taken hold of it." William McMullan to Michael Shepard, February 25, 1851, in Bennett and Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa*, 476.

⁴²⁸ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 107.

⁴²⁹ Edward D. Ropes to John Bertram, May 2, 1865, Box 2 Folder 6, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

thought we could do better with him there...”⁴³⁰ Although Americans remained uniquely dependent on Indian businessmen, the relationships were mutually beneficial. In 1866, Topan granted Edward Ropes power of attorney over the London branch of his business.⁴³¹ As Atlantic and Indian Ocean commercial systems became increasingly intertwined, on Zanzibar at least, American and Indian interests converged, encouraging a partial integration of their commercial networks. In 1870, John Bertram paid Tharia Topan a high compliment, naming a massive new trading vessel after the businessmen, an honor he had previously only bestowed on Said bin Sultan. The move was well received. Francis Webb soon informed Bertram that “Taria requests me to say how much he appreciates the compliment you have paid him and how sensible he is of your friendly feelings towards him.”⁴³²

As the parameters of Indian Ocean trade shifted, Bertram altered his commercial practices in the United States. Instead of sending multiple smaller ships each year, Bertram dispatched one or two large ships. In 1866, he sent the 495-ton *Glide* to Zanzibar and the Arabian Peninsula. The next year, Bertram dispatched the *Glide* again, this time joined by the *Sachem*. Cotton cloth quickly reemerged as the trade’s mainstay, making up more than fifty percent of the *Sachem*’s sales. Still, the trade remained more varied than before the war with gunpowder, tobacco, turpentine, and sugar all composing part of Bertram’s cargos.⁴³³ he wartime speculation on kerosene had also proved successful; many of Salem’s voyages continued to carry

⁴³⁰ Edward D. Ropes to John Bertram, December 26, 1866, Box 2 Folder 6, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

⁴³¹ September 20, 1866, Box 1 Folder 10, MH 201, Edward D. Ropes Papers, PEM.

⁴³² Francis Webb to John Bertram, August 15, 1870, Box 3 Folder 3, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

⁴³³ Merchandise List of *Sachem*, June 30, 1867, Box 3 Folder 1, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

the fuel. While Tharia Topan and the deceased Jairam Shivji's firm dominated Bertram's balance sheets, he continued to transact with at least a dozen other Indian merchants.⁴³⁴

During this period, overall American trade, primarily from Salem, Boston, and New York, remained significant. In fifteen months in 1867 and 1868, American imports to Zanzibar totaled over MT\$786,000, second only to Hamburg amongst Zanzibar's western trading partners. During the same period, Zanzibar exported over MT\$516,000 of goods to the United States, its largest single sum. While the overall value of the trade had fallen from the highs of the late 1850s, the trade still rivaled its totals from earlier in that decade.

The Entwined Fate of Salem and Zanzibar

Even as American trade rebounded, Zanzibar experienced a series of cataclysms. In the fall of 1869, a devastating cholera outbreak cut through Zanzibar. Although the disease spread across the island, the waterborne illness thrived in the crowded confines of Zanzibar Town. Over the next six months, recurring waves killed an estimated twenty-five to thirty thousand of the island's inhabitants, well over five percent of the population.⁴³⁵ Enslaved laborers were particularly hard hit. At times, trade ground to a halt as there simply were not enough able-bodied men and women to unload and process incoming goods. American accounts of the

⁴³⁴ Zanzibar Account Sheet, October 1, 1868, Box 3 Folder 1, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM. For a detailed discussion of the dynamic legal innovations underwriting the expansion of Indian Ocean trade and the long commercial afterlife of Jairam Shivji, see Bishara, "Life and Debt," in *A Sea of Debt*, 58-80.

⁴³⁵ Nineteenth-century population estimates for the island vary widely. James Christie, a British doctor who lived through the epidemic, placed the island's population at between three hundred and four hundred thousand. James Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa: an Account of the Several Diffusions of the Disease in That Country from 1821 till 1872, with an Outline of the Geography, Ethnology and Trade Connections of the Regions through Which the Epidemics Passed* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1876), 419.

devastation offer a stark depiction of their priorities, with records primarily referring to the epidemic only when it directly impacted their health or their access to labor. Zanzibar's slave economy offered a simple solution: import more enslaved East Africans. Even after decades of British restrictions on the maritime slave trade, and a slew of recent attempts to undermine slavery on the island, Zanzibar's slave markets remained active. Each year, roughly seventeen thousand enslaved men and women were imported to the island.⁴³⁶

To make matters worse, Majid bin Said died in the fall of 1870. Although Majid had faced a series of challenges, including his brothers' insurrections and resurgent British colonialism, he had ruled with a steady hand. During Majid's tenure, Zanzibar retained its regional prominence and continued to enrich its Arab and Indian elites. Nearly fifteen years after he first tried to seize power, Barghash inherited the throne. By 1870, ruling Zanzibar depended on British support. As the British Consul smugly reported "the Prince was made to understand that he himself had no chance if Her Majesty's Government were against him."⁴³⁷ Barghash faced immediate pressure to restrict the maritime slave trade and to reign in Zanzibar's own slave system. Caught in a tightening vice that neither his father or brother had managed to escape, Barghash did his best to avoid any new commitments. His relatively weak position was dealt a massive blow when an errant cyclone struck Zanzibar in April 1872. The island was devastated. At the time, Zanzibar's harbor was full of dhows waiting for the onset of the northeast monsoon. The storm destroyed dozens of ships including almost all of the Sultan's navy. Inland, the destruction was almost as severe. The winds had smashed innumerable clove and coconut trees, crippling production for the foreseeable future.

⁴³⁶ Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, 226.

⁴³⁷ Coupland, Reginald Coupland, *The Exploitation of East Africa 1856-1890* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1939), 88.

Ever opportunistic, Great Britain dispatched another diplomatic mission to Zanzibar, hoping to end the island's maritime slave trade once and for all. Tipping their hand, the British amassed four warships at Zanzibar to greet their envoy. By 1873, Britain had run out of niceties and no longer felt the need to negotiate. Taking off the velvet glove, Britain threatened to blockade Zanzibar unless Barghash acquiesced. Out of options, Barghash signed a new treaty banning the import of East African slaves. Although Zanzibar retained its independence, the British had Barghash firmly under their thumb. The maritime slave trade was finally illegal, if not actually over. Next, the British set their sights on the tens of thousands of Africans enslaved on Zanzibar itself. With every attack on slavery, the British also gained more control over Zanzibar's political and economic future.

While these developments disrupted the island's entire commercial sector, the Americans faced a series of unique setbacks. The Suez Canal opened in November 1869. Within days, the first European steamer headed for Zanzibar. For the moment, Francis Webb remained sanguine, convinced that using the canal would remain a novelty instead of a concrete business plan: "we think it probably that they only send this [ship] to take advantage of the chanel being free for all vessels the first three days after opening."⁴³⁸ Within months, however, the Suez Canal's existential threat to American trade began to dawn on Webb. In August 1870, the French Steamer *Millbank* arrived on Zanzibar. The massive 1400-ton ship carried £65000 worth of goods. Aghast, Webb informed Bertram that "she brought... 40000 doz [handkerchiefs]... enough to last here for three years."⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Francis Webb to John Bertram, November 26, 1869, Box 3 Folder 2, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

⁴³⁹ Francis Webb to John Bertram, August 15, 1870, Box 3 Folder 3, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

While the arrival of European steamers threatened American trade, changing regional consumption patterns proved just as challenging. For decades before the Civil War, East Africans had sought out American cotton cloth, dubbed *merikani*, over all other options. More than a sartorial preference, the cloth assumed a prominent cultural role, serving as a key status symbol and even as a *de facto* currency in pockets of East Africa. For years, British and other European merchants had tried to sell British cloth, often disguised as its American counterpart, with little success. Unable to access American cloth for most of the Civil War, East Africans settled for the British alternative. Although Americans quickly resumed importing cloth after the war, they now faced serious competition for East African consumers. Alongside its hoard of handkerchiefs, Webb reported that the *Millbank* carried “500 Bales of English Cottons equal to 1000 of ours among them is a lot of 90 Bales which are a good imitation of Lyman Sheetings.”⁴⁴⁰ While Webb worried about British imitations, he overlooked East Africans’ shifting consumption patterns. As British cloth proved acceptable, imitating American textiles became less necessary. Months earlier, Webb had noted that his contacts “could not sell a piece” of American fabric and that even “Taria has not sold a bale.” Instead, Webb bemoaned that “all have bought English... Cloth.”⁴⁴¹

Cyclical downturns had long been a feature of American trade with Zanzibar as supply outstripped demand or new arrivals undermined American sales. In the early 1870s, however, America’s staple export, cotton cloth, looked increasingly uncompetitive. In 1873, Francis Webb summarized the developments in a dispatch to the State Department:

⁴⁴⁰ Francis Webb to John Bertram, August 15, 1870, Box 3 Folder 3, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

⁴⁴¹ Francis Webb to John Bertram, April 18, 1870, Box 3 Folder 2, MSS 104, John Bertram Papers, PEM.

After the commencement of the war which resulted in the abolition of Slave-labor in our country and the greatly enhanced value of manufactured Cottons in consequence of the high cost of labor, American Goods have been unable to compete with the adulterated, manufactures of England where also cheap skilled labor enables the merchant to place Goods here at much less cost than we are able to do. In consequence of this, the American Trade has changed its character from one of barter, to an Export Trade of Native Produce bought for Cash.⁴⁴²

After nearly a decade of trying to recover their dominant position, American traders were still scrambling to adapt to the rapid commercial changes in the Western Indian Ocean. The falling prestige of American exports complicated Webb's relationships with Zanzibar's leading Indian merchants, further undermining American business. In a letter to a colleague, Webb detailed his stressed relationship with Tharia Topan:

When I tell him he has made his large fortune out of American Cottons and that now for a time he must not grumble if the Cottons are under a cloud, and that a man in business must expect to meet some reverses &c &c he does not seem "to see it"... he has not got much of anything to do now but growl and fret about his 5600 Bales eating themselves up in interest and trying to devise some means of getting rid of them, which he cannot for I am sorry to say they are almost played out here and until they can be sold at a great deal less cost or something else turns up it will not do to bring any more.⁴⁴³

Although Bertram's firm continued to forge ahead, now primarily peddling specie in exchange for Indian Ocean commodities, Salem's ties to East Africa were beginning to fray. On May 7, 1870, the *Taria Topan* departed Salem, the last ship to sail between Salem and Zanzibar. Although Bertram continued to trade with the island, he began dispatching his ships from Boston, finally bowing to decades of one-sided competition between the two Massachusetts ports. Bertram contracted a severe illness in late 1871. By now in his mid-seventies, Bertram delegated much of his business to his longtime deputy, and former American consul to Zanzibar,

⁴⁴² Report on the Trade of the Zanzibar Coast, Francis Webb, September 30, 1873, Roll 5 Volume 6, RG 84, USNARA.

⁴⁴³ Francis Webb to Edward Ropes, June 12, 1873, Box 1 Folder 12, MH 201, Edward D. Ropes Papers, PEM.

Edward Ropes. Backed by Bertram's expansive capital reserves, Ropes kept the business going in Bertram's name. While Salem's merchants continued to visit Zanzibar and other regional ports, the expansive commercial connection between the two towns, which had shaped their economic and political trajectory for fifty years, faded. Nevertheless, following Bertram's death in 1882, Edward Ropes and some of his colleagues formed Ropes, Emmerton & Co., taking advantage of a stipulation in Bertram's will offering a \$100,000 no interest loan to anyone who continued to trade. Newly incorporated, the firm used many of Bertram's old ships to trade with Zanzibar and other regional ports. In 1892, however, Ropes, Emmerton & Co was bought by New York competitors, effectively ending Salem's presence in the region.

While Salem experienced a steady economic decline, Zanzibar finally fell prey to European imperialism. Despite Barghash's best efforts, with each passing year his sovereignty dwindled as Zanzibar sunk deeper into Britain's orbit. In 1875, Barghash made a formal visit to London, offering his borderline fealty to the throne. In 1879, a British company brought the telegraph line to the island, tying Zanzibar ever tighter to Britain's Indian Ocean holdings. For the first time, British firms began to exert a considerable presence on the island. Barghash even offered to sell his custom revenues to a British company, threatening the nearly century long alliance between the Busaidis and Gujarati merchants. To make matters worse, Barghash faced an ascendant Germany. Newly unified, Germany launched itself into Europe's competition for foreign colonies. Building on decades of German trade in the region, Bismarck coveted Barghash's enclave on the East African coast. Even Barghash's close ties to Britain failed to stave off German expansion, as his thin band of African territory became part of German East Africa in 1885. By his death in 1888, Barghash retained control over just Zanzibar and Pemba, the last vestiges of Said bin Sultan's East African empire. Barghash's early death saved him from

a final ignominy. In 1890, Britain declared a formal protectorate over Zanzibar. The Omani Sultans of East Africa had become British subjects.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ Ingrams, *Zanzibar: Its History and its People*, 161-182.

Conclusion

Like Salem, the town that made his fortune, John Bertram weathered a tumultuous nineteenth century. Over his sixty-year career, Bertram left a large mark on his adopted hometown, serving as a sailor, captain, merchant, banker, industrialist, and philanthropist. His influence on the town's trade with Zanzibar was larger still. The only leading merchant to visit the island, Bertram slowly expanded his commercial organization in the Western Indian Ocean for decades. Over the years, Bertram outlasted, and outlived, all of his competitors, leaving David Pingree, Michael Shepard, the Wests, and all the others far behind. After the Civil War, Bertram's fortunes began to diverge from Salem's. Even as trade with Zanzibar idled, Bertram remained exceedingly wealthy, the last of Salem's merchant princes. While he put his fortune to good use, endowing a series of charitable organizations, one man's grandiosity could not ensure the prosperity of an entire town.

In his sparse autobiography, Bertram recounts a life well-lived, offering a human perspective on decades of sweeping historical developments. Born on the Isle of Jersey at the end of the eighteenth century, John Bertram never experienced Salem's golden age. Instead, he arrived in the United States just as it came to a sudden end. Setting foot in Salem at the peak of Jefferson's Embargo, Bertram's family was forced to leave almost immediately in search of work. After their return, Bertram went to sea. During the War of 1812, he survived two stints in English prison ships. Barely more than a child, Bertram already had firsthand experience of the many dangers that faced Americans on the open ocean.⁴⁴⁵

As many of Salem's richest merchants fought over industrial projects, Bertram helped establish some of the town's most important trade networks. During the 1820s, he spent years

⁴⁴⁵ Bertram, *John Bertram of Salem, Massachusetts*, 2-6.

captaining voyages between Salem, South America, and the Caribbean. As Salem's trade in the Western Indian Ocean picked up, Bertram pivoted, captaining the *Black Warrior* to Madagascar, Mocha, and Zanzibar in 1831. While the trip proved profitable, Bertram spent much of the voyage deathly ill, losing seventy pounds.⁴⁴⁶ When he finally reached Salem, Bertram made a pivotal decision. Instead of returning to the sea, he would invest in commercial ventures from the safety of the shore. Joining forces with Michael Shepard, John Bertram entered the Zanzibar trade in earnest. After helping Richard Waters gain the consulship, Bertram steadily increased his investments in the region. Still, nineteenth-century trade was highly uncertain. During the Panic of 1837, Bertram lost two-thirds of his money.⁴⁴⁷ As his finances recovered, Bertram invested in a range of other projects. Like so many of his countrymen, he attempted to cash in on the California gold rush, dispatching a ship to San Francisco to supply the burgeoning market. During the 1850s, Bertram also invested heavily in railroads across the west, earning a fortune along the way.

After the Civil War, Bertram's operations at home and abroad faced a wave of new challenges. While no single development doomed the Zanzibar trade, Bertram and his remaining American competitors struggled to adapt to a series of commercial challenges. Over time, Bertram slowly delegated more control to a handful of his employees. Following a prolonged illness in 1871, the septuagenarian retired. Still, the capitalist continued to keep a careful eye on his finances, carefully tracing the effects of the Panic of 1873 on his many investments.⁴⁴⁸

As trade declined and Bertram's firm began to send ships from Boston, Salem's connections with Zanzibar frayed slightly more each year. After a relatively peaceful decade,

⁴⁴⁶ Bertram, *John Bertram of Salem, Massachusetts*, 16.

⁴⁴⁷ Bertram, *John Bertram of Salem, Massachusetts*, 17.

⁴⁴⁸ Bertram, *John Bertram of Salem, Massachusetts*, 28.

John Bertram died in 1882, fifty-one years after he had landed on Zanzibar. Ever the businessman, his will left \$100,000 to any of his associates who wished to continue trading in the Western Indian Ocean. While the money galvanized the formation of Ropes, Emmerton and Co., a joint venture by Bertram's former employees, the firm proved relatively short lived. By the 1890s, Salem's race had been run. In 1892, Ropes, Emmerton and Co. sold out to a New York firm. The same year, Edward Ropes, himself the son of a former consul, resigned the consulship on Zanzibar and returned home to Salem.

As John Bertram's long and successful career illustrates, Salem's merchants successfully weathered the industrial revolution as well as numerous other economic challenges. Although the emergence of a large manufacturing sector disrupted established trade routes, America's maritime and industrial sectors remained mutually beneficial. Mercantile capital flowed into new industrial projects, producing an ever-increasing flow of consumer goods. In their element, Salem's merchants carried cotton cloth and other commodities to markets across the Western Indian Ocean ensuring American manufacturers a nearly inexhaustible demand for their products.

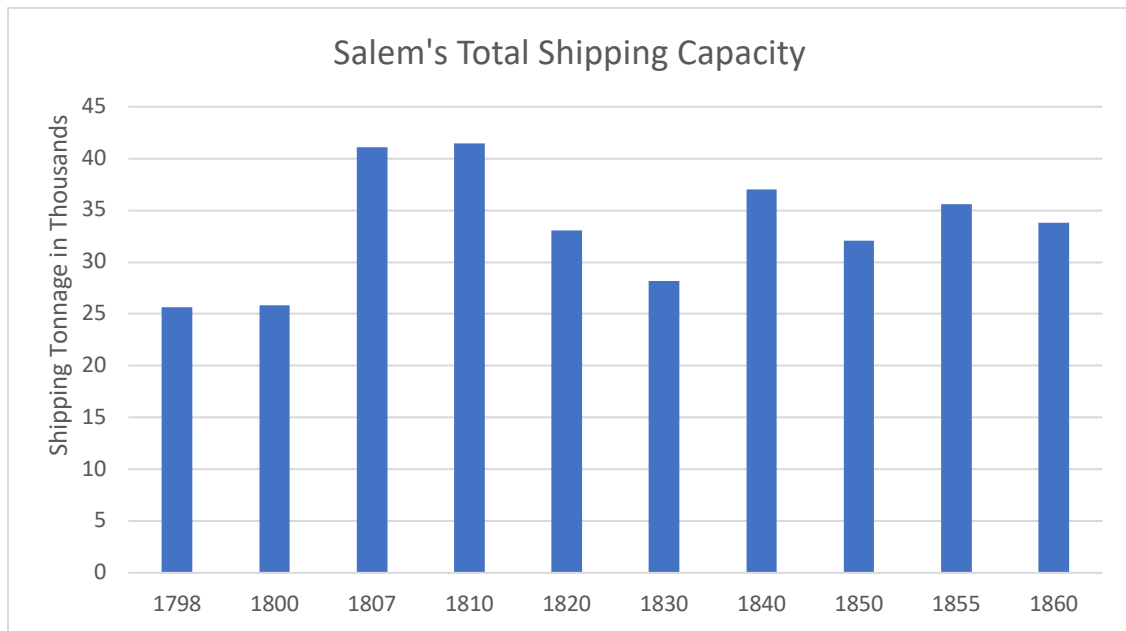
While Salem's influence on domestic policy was waning, overseas the town's merchants relied on political posturing to bolster their profits. Few in Washington had ever heard of Zanzibar or the Omani Empire. Still, the federal government's broad disinterest did not impede the United States' economic influence in the region. As speculative ventures proved profitable, American merchants used formal diplomacy for their own purposes, negotiating a treaty with Oman and monopolizing the United States' consulate on Zanzibar. With little oversight, Richard Waters and his successors reliably prioritized their commercial interests above all else.

No matter how enterprising, beyond the Cape of Good Hope, Salem's merchants were interlopers, initially bit players in the robust mercantile economy of the Western Indian Ocean. Alighting on Zanzibar, American traders entered a mature economic system, dominated by Indian business networks carefully nestled under Oman's very limited government. Far from home, Salem's merchants slowly realized that sustained, profitable trade required them to acquiesce to many established Zanzibari practices, albeit with some caveats. Each the heir to mature mercantile traditions, through innumerable negotiations, Americans, Indians, and Omanis co-created a practical and profitable commercial system that withstood increasing European interference for decades.

The American Civil War, however, brought trade to a standstill. When the United States' internal supply chains broke down, Zanzibar's economy stalled as it lost access to American goods. The sudden collapse of American influence eased British commercial and political interference in East Africa. During the 1860s, the British Empire consolidated control of territories across the Western Indian Ocean, forcing merchants of all nationalities to adapt to British institutions. As the Americans tried to recapture their antebellum profits, they integrated Indian merchants directly into their operations, relying on them to pursue their interests under British strictures. The opening of the Suez Canal and the expansion of European empires privileged French, German, and Indian merchants all hawking cheap British cloth. Commercial conditions in the United States proved challenging as well. Without millions of enslaved laborers America's cotton industry struggled to compete. Cotton cloth had long anchored Salem's trade in the Western Indian Ocean. Without it, the town's international trade gradually came to an end. Even as Salem's wharves slowly decayed, the Atlantic remained, offering each generation of the town's inhabitants an invitation to set off across the ocean once more.

Appendix

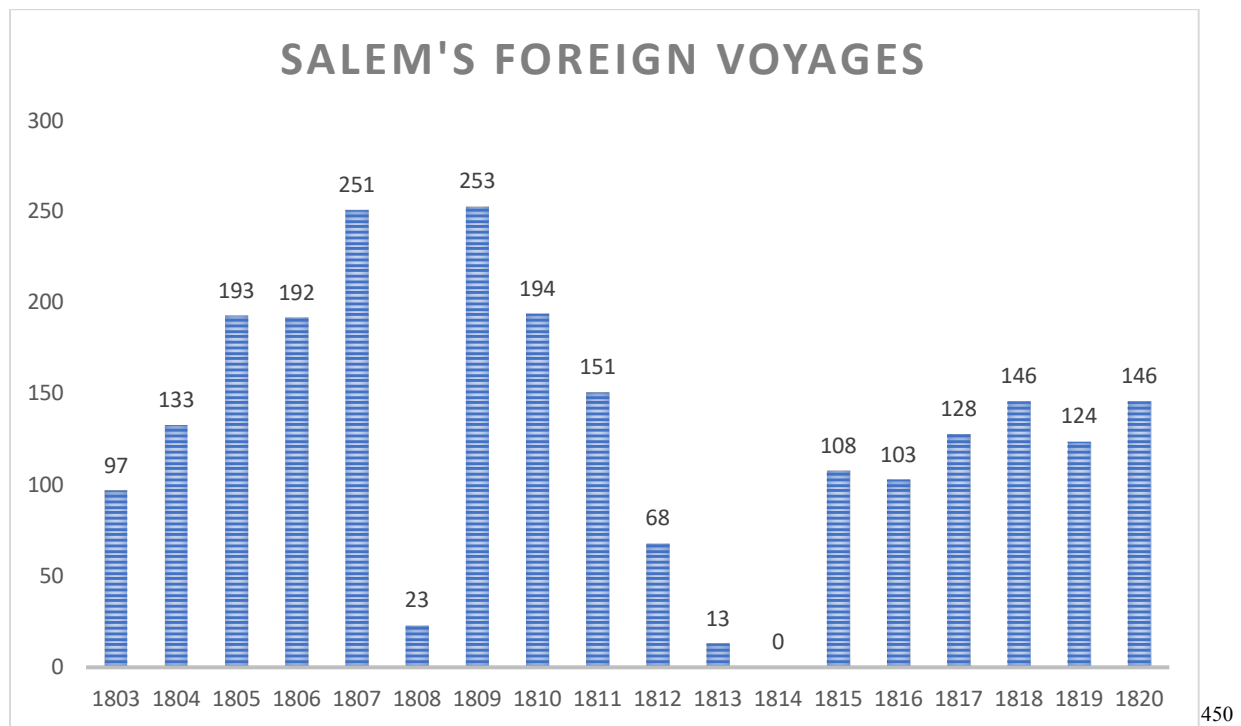
Figure 1



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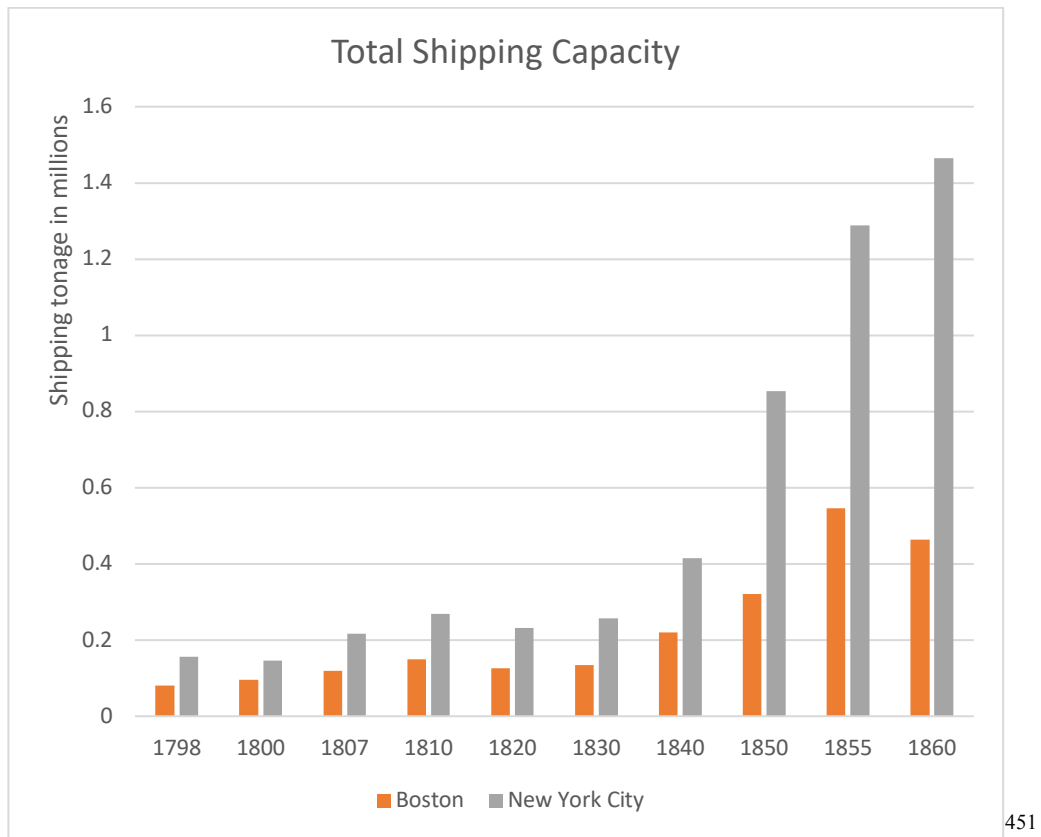
⁴⁴⁹ Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 378.

Figure 2



⁴⁵⁰ The data for 1803 is incomplete as record keeping only began in April. This also includes ships sailing out of the much smaller neighboring port of Beverly as the custom districts were combined until 1840. Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879, Online Database, Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT, <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>

Figure 3



⁴⁵¹ Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts*, 378.

Figure 4**Richard Waters Purchases for 1841⁴⁵²**

	Total Value in \$MT	Total Amount	Purchased From
Cloves	\$3930	33950 lbs	Said Suleiman, Muhammad bin Said, Ahmed bin Nasser Al-Riyami, Hussein bin Muhammed, Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr,,
Gum Copal	\$5495.88	35279.3 lbs	Isa bin 'Abdu Rahaman, Said Omar bin Shaban
Coconut Oil	\$2087.5	66500 lbs	Damodar Ebji, Ladha Rupji, Andue bin Chapsa, Ranchor Ramji
Ivory	\$3000	3500 lbs	Ben Dowley
Hides	\$8200	Roughly 17081 hides or 136648 lbs	Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr,, Tayyeb bin Mohyi Al-Deen
Total:	\$22713.38	275877 lbs	

⁴⁵² Waters's contracts use many creative transliterations of Arab and Indian names, many of which have been standardized in this chart. Muhammad bin Abdul Kadiwr, Ahmed bin Nasser Al-Riyami, Isa bin 'Abdu Rahaman, Ahmed bin Nasser Al-Riyami and Said Omar bin Shaban, Damodar Ebji, Ladha Rupji, Ranchor Ramji, Tayyeb bin Mohyi Al-Deen were recorded by Waters as Mahomed bin Abdel Cardree, Ahmed bin Nasser Raemee, Esau bin Abdue Rahaman, Said Omar bin Shaphan, Damodo bin Abjee, Lad bin Rupgee, Rancho bin Ramgee, and Tibe bin Mohadean respectively. Contracts between Richard Waters and various merchants, 1840-5, Box 2 Folders 6-7, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

Figure 5

Richard Waters Sales for 1841⁴⁵³

	Overall Value (\$MT)	Overall Amount	Sold to:
Cotton Cloth	\$32712.08	646 Bales, Roughly 484500 yds	Jairam Shivji, Isa bin 'Abdu Rahaman, Hajee bin Omisa
Muskets	\$1060	320 Muskets	Katha Trikamdas, Hajee bin Omisa.
Gunpowder	\$700	50 kegs	Katha Trikamdas,
Crockery	\$279.74	5 crates, 1 cask	Isa bin 'Abdu Rahaman
Brass Wire	\$2937.5	8750 lbs	Jairam Shivji
Total:	\$37689.32		

⁴⁵³ Continuing with the transliterations, Jairam Shivji, Isa bin 'Abdu Rahaman, and Katha Trikamdas were listed by Waters as Jeram Sewji, Esau bin Abdue Rahaman, and Kata bin Trickum. Contracts between Richard Waters and various merchants, 1840-5, Box 2 Folders 6-7, MH 14, Richard Waters Papers, PEM.

Figure 6

American Sales and Purchases on Zanzibar 1837-1844⁴⁵⁴

	Value of American Imports (\$MT)	Value of Zanzibari Exports (\$MT)
1837	\$58,000	\$104,000
1838	\$96,923	\$95,320
1839	\$113,141	\$351,098
1840	\$101,922	\$66,896
1841	\$218,804	\$314,171
1842	\$196,975	\$274,004
1843	\$249,372	\$382,132
1844	\$183,462	\$220,820
1845	\$240,378	\$354,654
1846	\$188,725	\$627,328
1847	\$221,923	\$505,457
1848	\$214,757	\$487,942
1849	\$380,800	\$589,148
1850	\$275,242	\$839,050
1851	\$152,280	\$211,440
1852	\$472,200	\$836,100
1853	\$375,675	\$722,787
1854	\$494,806	\$1,057,400
1855	\$246,960	\$550,085
1856	\$71,314	\$205,500
1857	\$1,125,807	\$1,173,316
1858	\$966,882	\$902,862
1859	\$1,255,490	\$1,216,235
1860	\$732,038	\$855,549
1861	\$538,984	\$558,170
1862	\$100,000	\$109,000

⁴⁵⁴ Bolded years have discrepancies. The figures for 1851 only include totals through July 1. Those for 1852 includes all trade from the second half of 1851 in addition to the next year. Data for 1856 only exists until April 1. The figures for 1862 are listed as “estimated.” Report on Zanzibar, 1862, William Speer, Roll 2 Volume 4, RG 84, USNARA.

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