



The
Sultan's
Yemen

*Nineteenth-Century
Challenges to
Ottoman Rule*

CAESAR E. FARAH

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I.B.Tauris

London • New York

Published in 2002 by
I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd
6 Salem Road
London W2 4BU

In the United States of America and Canada distributed by
St Martin's Press
175 Fifth Avenue
New York
NY 10010

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A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 1-86064-767-7
Library of Congress Catalog card number available

Copy-edited and laser-set by Oxford Publishing Services, Oxford
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin

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Preface

The main focus of this study is on Ottoman efforts to maintain sovereignty over Yemen, which were constantly being challenged from within and without. Most data used to research this study are derived from Ottoman officer accounts and from the Başbakanlık Arşivi (Prime Minister's Archives) in Istanbul, Turkey. The various collections consulted are listed under Yıldız Tasnifi (sultan's palace collection) in the bibliography at the end of this book. For Ottoman accounts of their travails in Yemen I relied heavily on the Ottoman documents housed in the Prime Minister's Archives in Istanbul and on documents listed in a special collection entitled 'Yemen Meselesi' (The Problem of Yemen). The few available first-hand accounts by observers and Yemeni authors were consulted to achieve a balanced understanding of the forces at work in Yemen in the nineteenth century. On Britain's role in Arabia, I consulted reports from the Bombay government, which had jurisdiction over the Residency at Aden for most of the period under consideration, housed in the India Office Library in London, and Foreign Office reports to and from the field, principally Constantinople (Istanbul), and official transactions with the Ottoman government housed in the Public Records Office. The Foreign Office archives of the German Republic at Bonn and whatever documentation could be found in the principal library of Şan'ā', Yemen, were also consulted.

The newspapers, Arabic, Ottoman and Western language journals, and the range of other material consulted, including secondary sources, are listed in the bibliography.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Bayazit library of Istanbul University for allowing me access to their Ottoman newspapers and pamphlets; and to the librarians, researchers and director, Dr Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, of the Office of Islamic Conference's Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture in the Yıldız Palace of Istanbul. Credit is due also to the librarians of the Belediye Kütüphanesi of Istanbul, to the Jaffet library of the American University of Beirut for similar support, and of the Assad library in Damascus for facilitating access to

Arabic material relating to this period of Yemen's history. The Yemeni Centre for Study and Research in Ṣan'ā' provided ground support to inspect various sites in the north and centre of Yemen, though the south was inaccessible at that time. Rector of the University of Ṣan'ā' and director of the Yemeni Study and Research Institute Dr 'Abd al-'Aziz Maqālih generously made a driver and vehicle available to me. Dr Yūsuf 'Abdallah, head of the Department of Antiquities, offered the services of a graduate student to help locate the various places in Yemen included in the text.

The problem of how to treat transliterations of names and places was resolved by using the modern Turkish form for the Ottoman names of Ottoman government officials derived from Arabic, which most were. I employed the preferred Library of Congress method of transcription for the names of Arab leaders, chiefs and places in Yemen. Some exceptions were made because of the frequency of occurrence in English reports, namely Hodeida in lieu of Ḥudaydah, Mocha in lieu of al-Mukhā'. While Ṣan'ā' is the present designation for the capital of the country, English scholars of the region prefer direct transliteration from the Arabic, in other words Ṣan'ā'. There are a number of towns and localities, as well as tribal units, referred to in Ottoman documentation that could not be located, even on an Ottoman map of the period, hence the need to extrapolate using the logical Arabic pronunciation.

The mode used for dates according to the Islamic calendar is that of the modern Turkish abbreviation for each month, as follows:

	Arabic	Turkish
M	Muharram	Muharrem
S	Safar	Safer
Ra	Rabī' al-Awwal	Rebiyülevvel
R	Rabī' al-Thāni	Rebiyülâhır
Ca	Jumāda al-Awwal	Cemaziyelevvel
C	Jumāda al-Ākhar	Cemaziyelâhır
B	Rajab	Recep
Ş	Sha'bān	Şaban
N	Ramadān	Ramazan
L	Shawwāl	Şevval
Za	Dhu 'l-Qa'dah	Zilkade
Z	Dhu 'l-Hijjah	Zilhicca

The funding agencies that enabled me to undertake research in the field, for which I am most grateful, are the Institute of Turkish Studies in Washington, DC, the Fulbright Hays' programme of the Department of Education, and the Grant-in-Aid of Research Program of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota. In addition, I wish to express my gratitude to my wife Dr Irmgad Farah for her various contributions both in the field and at home. I wish to thank the archivists and librarians for the logistical support they gave me in locating various documents and studies both in published and manuscript form and to acknowledge the valuable contributions and input of my associate Hisham Abdul Khalek.

Introduction

Outsiders have been attracted to Yemen since before the Christian era, for it witnessed the rise of the earliest civilizations, Sabaeen and Himyarite, which thrived on trade and agriculture. The early Greeks, then the Romans and other neighbours coveted its wealth and tried unsuccessfully to gain access to its rich spices, such as frankincense and myrrh. It was a land inhabited predominantly by tribal Arabs who adhered to no central authority. A tribal organization headed by a *shaykh* or chief who made decisions and meted out justice was the predominant administrative unit. A number of local dynastic rulers arose in the Islamic era, including the Ayyubids, Tahirids and Rasulids who managed at one time or another to unite the land. Missionaries sent out by the Prophet Muhammad himself were the first to convert the tribes to Islam. Once the country was fully Islamized, the two main branches, Sunni and Shī'ah, gained dominance among the Yemenis, the former in the highlands, and the latter in the south and lowlands. In the tenth century Zayd, a grandson of the Prophet, gained a number of converts to his brand of Shī'ah preaching and his followers took on his name; shortly thereafter Ismā'īl, another grandson, acquired powerful followers in Yemen. The two did not only live in close proximity to each other but soon became serious rivals for dominance in the highlands. The Sunni adhered to the Shāfi'i rite, which was predominant in the Egyptian and Syrian regions. They inhabited the southern highlands and the coastal region known as the Tihāmah or lowlands. Not only Greeks and Romans but also Abyssinians and Persians sought to control the spice trade and gain dominance over Yemen, but their presence was short lived.

Apart from a brief spell of Judaism at the beginning of the Islamic era, the people were originally pagan in religious adherence. Yemen and Oman were the first places to convert as a result of preaching in the days of the Prophet by his nephew Ja'far and his early followers. As a consequence, one of his descendants, Zayd, gained the upper hand and the sect known as Zaydi evolved and expanded to the point that Zayd's descendants provided the imams or rulers of Yemen right down until

the beginning of the republican era in the mid-twentieth century. Another of the Prophet's grandsons, Isma'īl, and his followers managed to spread his version of Islam in the Yemeni highlands. Shortly thereafter two major branches of Shi'ism became deadly rivals, each having converted some of the most powerful tribes among highland Yemenis.

Historically, the country had been impervious to outside invasions. The Mamluks of Egypt controlled the land from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century when the Ottomans displaced them. Indeed, the conqueror, Selim I (1512–60) had been declared the 'protector of the two holy shrines' in Damascus in December 1516, before he finally defeated the feisty Mamluk sultan in Cairo the following month. Henceforth it was left to the Ottomans to carry on the task of protecting the Arabian Peninsula.

Soon after displacing the Mamluks, the Ottomans confronted the Portuguese in the lower Red Sea and Indian Ocean. At one time, in the 1540s, the Portuguese sailed right up to Jiddah in an attempt to capture and destroy the holy cities. The British finally displaced them as masters of the Indian Ocean and, by the nineteenth century, had established harbours in Yemen, first at Mocha and then, when chased out by an Ottoman agent, at Aden, over which, by a combination of ruse and force, they gained possession in 1839. This posed an additional problem for the Ottomans. Continual foreign intrigues and manoeuvres to gain access to the region's commerce, especially coffee in the Yemeni highlands, which the Dutch had first controlled in the seventeenth century, led to competition that ended, here as elsewhere, with the imperial powers challenging one another for commercial dominance and the British prevailing.

Once the British had chased the French out of India and had gained full control of the subcontinent, they became obsessed with protecting the route to India through Arabian waters — the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea through the Bāb al-Mandab. In 1817 they sought to install themselves at Mocha, the terminus of the coffee trade prior to overseas shipment. When a local chieftain checkmated their manoeuvres, they tried again in 1821, this time seeking control of Aden. This they achieved by luring an unsuspecting chieftain into their fold through his signing an agreement he could not read. This occasioned a long struggle by the chieftain's relatives and other nearby chiefs to check English attempts to expand upwards into the highlands for political and com-

mercial purposes. When local chiefs became unable or unwilling to confront the superior military power of the English, they succumbed to signing more agreements, often under duress, which allowed the English to extend their sphere of influence into what has become known in recent years as South Yemen and which they were forced to leave fewer than 100 years later. Prior to their departure they entrusted surrogates among the *sharifs*¹ of the lowlands to protect their sovereign rights against a challenge by the British who, since 1839, had become entrenched in the Aden region and were seeking to control trade with the highlands. The imams dominated the highlands and were independent. In the nineteenth century, intrigues by foreign powers, this time Italy and Britain, compelled the Ottomans to reassert themselves administratively and militarily in Yemen.

The Ottomans' return to Yemen in the mid-nineteenth century was occasioned by the same considerations that had brought them to the land for the first time during the last third of the sixteenth century, namely the perceived threat of Western imperialism generated by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and by the British in the early nineteenth. Both powers had designs on the land for a range of reasons — commercial and religious for the Portuguese, political and commercial for the English. Though not the only part of the Muslim world threatened by imperial ambitions, it was particularly threatening in that it was so close to Islam's holiest sites, Mecca and Medina.

In the nineteenth century, the English sought to circle the Arabian Peninsula with bases and spheres of influence. They had started the process in the eighteenth century when the Portuguese were chased out of Oman and they drew up their first treaty with an Arab chieftain of the Arabian Peninsula. This enabled them to impose their influence and control over the land access to the Gulf of Oman and, by extension, the Persian Gulf, which culminated in their gaining control over strategic Kuwait at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Fearing this English push to the north (*drang nach norden*), in 1849 the Ottomans returned to Yemen to consolidate their sovereign right over the area. This they had achieved by conquest in 1569 when Sinan Paşa had been compelled to mount an expedition into the Yemeni highlands to check the rebellion of the then Imam al-Muṭṭahar ibn Sharaf al-Dīn (1558–73), which was inconclusive, obliging the Ottoman commander to enter into a peace arrangement with the imam.²

The same circumstance occasioned the launch of this campaign as the

one that had led the Ottomans to take charge of the Arabian south in 1538, namely the Mamluks had handed them responsibility for the land's defence and protection, a period of rule that lasted only until 1635. They wanted to discourage local chieftains from succumbing to the sorts of temptations imperial powers offered in general and the arrival of the Portuguese had shown in particular. They also wanted to stabilize a society divided by tribal, sectarian and demographic factions. This, however, they failed to sustain because, within a century (in 1635), they found themselves retreating from the land, leaving its control to local rulers. A period of stability and prosperity ensued, however, which lasted until the rise of the Wahhabi movement in Nejd and which, with its strict fundamentalism, represented a different kind of threat to Ottoman domination.

When Ottoman surrogate chiefs lost control of the lowlands in the mid-nineteenth century and rival families were fighting for domination of the highlands over the imamate, the Ottomans returned to defend their sovereignty militarily. Having set up headquarters in the city of Zabīd in the Tihāmah, they spread their direct domination over the rest of the coastal area from 'Asīr to the area bordering the English controlled land in the south, beyond the port city of Mocha.

When the struggle for domination among imams and claimants to the office intensified in the highlands, al-Hādi Ghālib ibn al-Mutawakkil Muḥammad (1850–51) persuaded the Ottomans, who recognized his claim, to provide him with the military support he needed to put down his rivals. They had attempted to control the highlands in 1849, but Ghālib's rival had treacherously repelled the expedition. Meanwhile, the Ottoman forces concentrated on pacifying the 'Asīri region where its chieftain had been carrying on a feud with the legitimately recognized administrator of the Tihāmah.

Having successfully pacified the lower region, Ahmed Muhtār Paşa, commandant of the Ottoman army, responded to the imam's urgent plea to lead his forces to Şan'ā', the administrative centre of the highlands, where he was warmly welcomed. This did not last because the imam's rivals mounted a resistance against him and his Ottoman supporters, and rebellions sprung up in most of the Zaydi lands from the south to the north. Ottoman forces were engaged to put down the rebellions and attempts were made to reorganize and stabilize the administrative structure of the land and to inject order into the operation. Their main aims were to pacify the opposing tribes, enlist them in the service of the state

as local officials and tax collectors and introduce justice into the court system, which was neither uniform nor evenly applied. The Tanzimat era and its liberalizing decrees based on Western models sat uneasily with the Shi'ite Zaydis; in fact, even the Sunni Shāfi'is saw them as compromising decrees of the Sharī'ah.

The cost of pacifying the land kept mounting. It reached unbearable levels for the central government in Istanbul, which over nearly half a century had constantly to mobilize troops to combat insurgents at a cost that overtaxed an already bankrupted central treasury with little local revenue available to counteract some of the expenses. In that they mobilized mostly Syrian battalions to do the job until almost the last phase of the war, the task was not easy for the Ottomans. The soldiers were often unpaid, ill-clothed, under-equipped, and short on supplies and living allowances, and this made for demoralization and mutinies. Moreover, many sympathized with their fellow Yemeni Arabs, indeed to the extent even of passing on intelligence to the imam and his lieutenants.

To compound Ottoman woes, Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1908) had been inaccurately informed about the true state of affairs in Yemen. This was because many of the officials sent out to govern or administer had been ill-prepared for the task. Consequently, there were lapses in proper administrative procedures, recourse by some to self-enrichment through extortion, improper tax levies and harsh collection methods. At times even the army was employed to collect taxes, thus depriving the local chiefs, who had been appointed to do the job, of their fair share of levies, the state of its income and the imam of his due.

When the sultan learned of Yemen's problems, he tried to appease the inhabitants by sending out numerous commissions of inquiry, but their findings rarely reflected the true nature of Yemeni disaffection, which merely intensified the struggles and attacks on Ottoman forces. By the turn of the century the insurgence had become widespread. The 'Asīris, under the leadership of an outsider who claimed to be the Mahdi after espousing the Wahnābi doctrine of a strict Islam grounded in the Sharī'ah, the fundamental law of the faith, joined the forces of rebellion in Yemen. However, they were also fighting for their independence because Wahnābism and Zaydism represented the ideologies of two disparate sectarian trends. One had strict fundamentalist Sunni roots; the other, though also following basic Islamic teachings, inclined slightly towards the Shi'ite sect, from which it was derived and whose

imams followed the Shi'ite notion of leadership, which emphasized their descent from the house of the Prophet through 'Ali ibn abi Ṭālib and his martyred son Ḥusayn.

Yemen, moreover, was full of Sayyids who claimed descent from 'Ali through his son Ḥasan and who had for centuries constituted a powerful and dominant class in the land. Indeed, one argument used to explain their alleged mistreatment at the hands of contemptuous Turkish administrators is that the rulers had reneged on a promise the conqueror Sultan Selim I had extended to them to honour their status and privileges as descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad.

The sultan tried his best to accommodate the legitimate demands of the Zaydi Yemenis who insisted on being administered according to the Shari'ah's decrees guided strictly by the teachings of the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. Western observers posited that the rising against legitimate authority was due less to religious disagreements than to political manoeuvrings among Yemeni Zaydite factions to gain leadership of the flock. Autonomy, not independence is what they sought, as was clearly illustrated in the final agreement concluded between the government and the imam in 1911, which still left matters of defence and protection to Ottoman forces.

Technically, the Ottomans still ruled Yemen. In fact, they even consolidated their landholdings, extending direct authority over hitherto British-controlled Aden and the nine-district area adjoining it at the commencement of the First World War until they lost control at the end of the war and Yemen became independent under the leadership of the last imam to confront them in seven years of fighting (1904–11), namely Yaḥya Ḥamīd al-Dīn (1904–48).

In this book the aim is to recount, in considerable detail, the whole range of Ottoman involvement from the threatening incursions of British then Italian forces in the south and the Red Sea, the rebellions the Italians (more than the British) abetted through shipping arms to the imam's forces and to the Ottoman navy's desperate attempts to stop the smuggling of weapons into the highlands, often under the auspices of the powerful and defiant Zarānīq tribes of the Tihāmah. It is true that the British at times sympathized more with the Yemenis than with the Ottomans, which tended to increase friction between them in the neighbourhood of Ta'izz, centre of the administration in the south. However, it was not in the British interest to have a Yemen consolidated under the rule of the imam next door to them. They reached a

political *modus vivendi* with the Ottomans, which held up to the formal delimitation of the border separating the districts under their influence from the Ottoman administered territory to the north.

Foreign, Ottoman and Arab correspondents reported regularly on events in Yemen. The progress of the insurrection and the mishandling of Yemeni affairs aroused considerable interest in Istanbul, London and Berlin — the Germans were on particularly friendly terms with Sultan Abdülhamid and supportive of his request to purchase arms. Indeed, Krupp Industries made available on a trial basis a number of its new weapons, especially the rapid-fire rifles and cannons for combat in the rugged terrain of Yemen, as well as speedy torpedo boats to prevent smuggling in the Red Sea.

The growing interest and concern of the principal European powers — England, Germany and Italy — led to a number of surreptitious expeditions ostensibly to see how the state of affairs might be redressed, but in effect to spy on the country as it deteriorated from bad to worse. The Ottomans referred to them as spies and often they were indeed spies. Nevertheless, some of their observations, which were usually accurate, are available as additional and interesting supportive data.

The revolution that ended Abülhamid's rule in 1909 ushered in an administration of unseasoned and uncomprehending Young Turks who, instead of living up to their commitment to equality and justice as decreed by their purported ideals, succumbed to the hot-headed newly designated Minister of the Interior Talaat Beg (later Paşa)'s formula for settlement of the Yemeni problem — first smash the rebellion militarily and then decide on what sort of administrative changes will lead to a settlement. By pursuing such a policy, which disregarded the Ottoman constitution's reconstituted provisions and the decisions of the Chamber of Deputies (Mebusan) and ministerial counsels, Talaat only prolonged the agony and suffering of Ottoman troops in the field.

In the end the counsels of the Chamber prevailed, and Sultan Abdülhamid's replacement, Mehmet Reşat, inherited the task of making peace with the imam. By then, Talaat had lost his voice in the final decision and in the agreement to which it led (in 1911), which did indeed usher in, however brief the period, an almost complete Yemeni loyalty to the Ottoman state in its waning days of hegemony in Arabia.

The period in question is heavily weighted towards rebellion and military activities, but unfortunately such was the reality on the ground.

Conscious attempts have been made to take into account social, economic and legal issues arising from the rebellions to the extent that they prolonged or curtailed the course of rebellion, for there were short periods of respite during which negotiations were undertaken to reach a settlement between the Ottoman government and the Yemeni leaders of the insurrection. While I consider the role of the 'Asīri uprising under Ibn Idris, claimant to the *mahdīship* after he immigrated to that region from the Maghreb, it is only to the extent that it affected the course of the struggle next door in the Tihāmah. The full story of that uprising is left to another study.

A pressing issue that was never fully resolved in the decades of strife was how to improve the agricultural productivity of the land so as to raise incomes and revenues for both the inhabitants and the state. A related issue had to do with collecting customs duties, which the merchants and shipping companies would often evade by avoiding Yemeni ports where customs were collected to unload their goods in ports under British control where lower, if any, fees were paid. In addition, trafficking in illegal trade, however illicit it was, greatly reduced the state's potential income. Ottoman facilities for regulating and monitoring such traffic were simply inadequate and, given the shallowness of the entrance to Hodeida's harbour, it was not the most suitable port for docking ships, especially since heavy winds tended to blow the sailing dhows and *sunbūqs* off course before they could make their way to the docking facilities.

Moreover, their defence facilities were woefully inadequate. Smugglers who had travelled on Italian boats from ports on the African side of the Red Sea would be chased into Ottoman waters as hot-headed captains bombarded Yemeni facilities, like Midi, and the Ottomans would fail either to curtail or to contain the marauding by sea of the largely Zarānīq pirates.

Efforts to end rebellion and secure a fair administration for Yemen failed time and again. This was partly because the rugged terrain favoured the Zaydi rebels and partly because, after nearly five decades of trying to suppress an ongoing revolt led by the imams of the Zaydi highlands (who enjoyed the backing of their ulema because they saw the imam as fighting to establish the Islamic Sharī'ah as the basic law for legislation and administration), the heavy toll in men, materials and money made it impossible for the Ottomans to gain the upper hand.

With both sides finally exhausted after having invested heavily in

asserting their claims, a final truce was achieved in 1911 at Da'ān. It ushered in a period of calm and stability during which the Ottomans preserved their sovereign rights and the imam honoured his commitment of loyalty. This lasted until the end of the Ottoman presence, which vanished shortly after the First World War.

Map 1

Map 2

1. Anglo–Ottoman Confrontation at Mocha, 1817–22

The Ottomans had been physically absent from Yemen for a century and a half. In this chapter I focus on the events that impelled their return. At no time did they abdicate their sovereign rights over the land, for Yemenis still looked to them and their agents for protection. This was all the more compelling after the English began to intrude on the southern region and intimidate helpless *shaykhs* ruling there into yielding to their territorial demands. The intrusion set the tone also for their return physically to the land to alleviate the fears of the custodians of the sacred shrines of Islam, who had suspected the foreign powers' motives ever since the Portuguese first invaded the Red Sea in the mid-sixteenth century determined to bomb Mecca itself.¹

English intrusion in the early nineteenth century posed a new challenge to Ottoman sovereignty, which led to the earliest confrontation. The focus here is on details and the effect of this first altercation between the English and Ottoman surrogate governor in the south, which forced them to give up their plans to implant themselves at Mocha, the port city through which coffee beans were exported. Anglo–Ottoman confrontation in Yemen began with an incident in Mocha in 1817. Mocha's significance lies in its strategic location at the lower entrance to the Red Sea. Before the capture of Aden, it was the main port for British trade linked with Bombay. It served also as the principal supply station for British vessels operating in the Red Sea and as the main outlet for trade with the Yemen.

Trade contracts with Mocha can be traced back to 1628 when the first factory was established there to trade in the coffee bean that bears its name. It first appears in the trade lists of the East India Company in

1660.² Records show that throughout the eighteenth century Mocha provided the most revenue of all Yemeni ports.³ However, its fortunes were radically transformed a century later when it was described as 'a dead-alive, mouldering town whose trade as a port for coffee and hides has been killed by excessive taxation in the past and by its proximity to Aden ... the coffee that bears its name is shipped from Aden or Hodeida'.⁴

British interest first in Mocha and later in Aden was bound to arouse Ottoman concern, particularly following the bombardment of Mocha in 1820. Almost from the start, the Ottoman authorities viewed British demands in southern Arabia through the Bombay government as part of a broader design to deny them the exercise of full sovereign rights in a land considered sacred to them as Muslims. Suspicions of British motives coupled with local resentment of the Anglo-Indian trader led to what the British described as 'an outrageous attack' on the factory at Mocha in July 1817. The local *dola*, agent of the imam of Ṣan'ā', was accused of manhandling Lieutenant Dominetti of the Bombay Marine and Resident of the British East India Company at Mocha together with his companions. The Bombay government decided to take advantage of the crisis to make demands that would have granted them greater extra-territorial rights than hitherto enjoyed. When the local authorities refused, the British responded with a naval bombardment of Mocha on 4 December 1820, eliminating in the process the port's protective gun emplacement at both ends of its semi-circular harbour. The imam's government yielded and agreed to terms, including dismissal of officials that the British deemed obnoxious. John Richard Lumley, the squadron's commander, sailed back to Bombay on board the *Topaze* and the four accompanying cruisers.⁵ William Bruce, Bombay's agent at Mocha, was charged with extracting a formal treaty from the imam embodying the concessions he was compelled to make. His *wakil* (deputy), Faṭḥallah, and members of the Mocha council carried on the negotiations on his part. Captain Bruce himself served as official agent of the Bombay and, by extension, of the British government.

The treaty's opening clause stated that Lieutenant Robson, acting Resident, would attend to the imam's wishes 'regarding the public service'. The Resident would be permitted a guard of 30 men — equal in strength to those allowed to British agents in Baghdad, Basra and Bushire. He was allowed to ride on horseback through all gates of Mocha and was given access to outlying regions as well. The Residency

was to have a plot of land on which to raise the British flag, and another to serve as a burial ground for its non-Muslim dependents. More importantly, the treaty recognized the Resident's right to travel to Şan'ā' to communicate directly with the imam on matters of common interest.

Provisions in the treaty relating to commerce improved the British position. Item 5 exempted British vessels from paying the anchorage charge of 400 Austrian crowns per vessel whether cargo was landed or not. Item 6 extended exemption privileges to all dependents of the British Crown, including Anglo-Indians, the merchants of Surat trading under the British flag and even Indians themselves. They were to be protected by the Resident and only the Muslims among them who opted for it were to have their disputes heard according to the provisions of the Islamic *Shari'ah*. The enforcement of decisions, including punishment, was to be the prerogative of the Resident. Item 7 lowered the rate of customs duty levied from 3½ to 2¼ per cent, the amount then being levied on French trade.⁶

Needless to say, neither the imam nor his agent at Mocha entered into this treaty arrangement voluntarily, and the resentment generated by what they regarded as coercion was discernible in the resistance to the British efforts to enforce its provisions.

This exploitation of the incident was the climax of longstanding efforts to secure a firm foothold in this strategic port. The Bombay government was determined to obtain from the imam of Şan'ā' 'on whom the government of India is dependent', a public submission and apology, punishment of offenders, the removal of the 'offending *dola*', and indemnification for losses sustained by the East India Company and its personnel in the plundering of the factory at Mocha. The governor general had approved all this in Council and authorized the dispatch of the naval squadron under the command of Captain Lumley who set sail on board the *Topaze* on 19 November 1820. Captain Bruce, the Resident at Bushire in southwest Persia was empowered to conduct negotiations with representatives of the imam on behalf of the Bombay government. Bombardment of Mocha followed the imam's refusal to submit to their demands.⁷

News of the events at Mocha created 'a strong sensation at Constantinople' and the company was asked for an explanation.⁸ The sultan's government informed the British ambassador, Viscount Strangford, that they regarded the assault on Mocha as an expression of British designs on Yemen as a whole. Strangford demanded an explanation of the

'circumstances, which may have excited suspicions of the Porte respecting the views of the British Government at Mocha'. In a preliminary response from the secretary of the India Board he was told that there were complaints that the Mocha government was unable to 'preserve the tranquillity of the country and that the detachment at Mocha had only a few rounds of ammunition', hence the landing of men and additional munitions of war. The secretary denied that the Board entertained 'aggrandizement in the Arabian Gulf ... and that we were about to erect facts to promote them'.⁹

Within a week, the Board had an explanation for the action taken at Mocha. London, Cairo and Istanbul sought it. The viceroy of Egypt was the first to receive news of what was seen as premeditated provocation on the part of the Resident aimed at justifying the action taken.

Objections appeared to relate first to the methods employed in provoking authorities at Mocha and second to the provisions of the treaty extracted as a result thereof. In the first set of complaints, the Resident was accused of housing 60 armed men and causing loud music to be played every morning and evening. His obtaining 200 tents, a number of large chests containing gunpowder, bullets and other munitions unloaded by vessels recently arrived from Bombay aroused suspicion that he planned to close the Bāb al-Mandab. He was accused of trying to bribe the imam of Ṣan'ā' with 100,000 *piastres* annually in order to permit the British to extend their authority over Muslim and non-Muslim subjects. On turning down the offer, the Resident allegedly gathered a force with the intention of travelling to Aden to propose that its ruler join hands with the British against Mocha and the imam.

The India government categorically rejected the accusations and sent word to assure both Muḥammad 'Alī, viceroy of Egypt, and the sultan's government that it entertained no design on the interior of Yemen and did not intend to violate the sacred territory of Mecca as alleged. Furthermore, it had not sought jurisdiction over Mocha by purchase or attempted to raise the tribes around Aden against either the imam or the sultan. The Board then arranged for a letter to be addressed by the government of Bombay through the secret committee of the East India Company to London for transmission to Cairo and Istanbul explaining the several topics and assuring the Sublime Porte that the India government sought neither aggrandizement nor to encroach upon the sultan's authority over his dependencies in Yemen.¹⁰

Confusion and suspicion over the terms of the treaty allegedly

stemmed from what was left out of the Arabic version of the English original. The *dola* had called the Resident's attention to the omissions in August 1821. He also complained of the lack of payment for a permit to allow the factory's Hindu broker to return to India.¹¹ The Resident in turn displayed open anxiety over the *dola*'s ability to contain bedouins, threatening to cut off water supplies from the well and circumscribe 'the insolent behaviour of the authorities'. This is why he asked for more armed men and ammunition. That he should ask for broad powers to adjudicate disputes was due to 'the litigious nature of the narratives'. The permanent stationing of a naval cruiser at Mocha was deemed necessary to protect British trade, particularly since the chief of the Yām tribe might attempt to spread 'his depredations' to Mocha.

In addition to the official areas of dispute there were also personal ones. It appears that the *dola* had repeatedly put pressure on the Resident to arrange loans for him, up to 5000 crowns, to liquidate the cost of goods purchased from Surat. In the end he yielded to the *dola*'s demands and turned over the sum to him without obtaining authorization from Bombay. Not wishing to act without explicit instructions from Bombay, the Resident wrote for specific answers to questions posed.

Francis Warden, secretary of the government of Bombay, replied on 6 September 1821 cautioning the Resident against compromising the factory's objectives in his transactions with the imam's government. This was all the more important because already consideration was being given to the eventual transferring of the post to Aden or some other place beyond the imam's territorial reach. He was asked to minimize complaints by not exempting brokers from the payment of duty if they were not in the immediate service of the company. All ships visiting Mocha must have their register and passes scrutinized to determine which ones were entitled to exemption from duty charges.

With regard to his role as adjudicator, he was told to exercise judgement and restraint, particularly when British subjects residing at Mocha did not initiate the complaints. Disputes involving natives were to be dealt with by the court of justice at Mocha. If a British subject was involved with a native then the Resident could enforce judgement either through his own guard or through the administration of the *dola*. The governor could not sanction fees for punishment; but if the guilty party happened to be a British subject, the Council could confine him until he was returned to the Residency. Authority was given for a cruiser to be

stationed in the Red Sea both to protect trade and to dispatch messages, but not in ordinary duty. The Resident finally was enjoined against making loans to the *dola* to avoid setting a precedent, particularly when no advantage could be perceived from him.

To improve relations with the *dola*'s administration, the Resident dismissed the Indian *munshi*, Sayyid Ḥusayn, from the position he had occupied by appointment of Captain Robson and retained under Captain Bruce because of what was interpreted as obnoxious behaviour on his part towards the local authorities and his ignorance of the country and its surrounding states. He was immediately returned to India.

While the imam took note of the treaty between his government and Bruce as agent of the British government, he sent a deputy to seek clarification of certain provisions. The imam was also concerned over the assaults of the Yām tribe and their control of Zabīd after they had plundered Luḥayyah on the Red Sea coast. It was 20 days before he learned of the fall of Zabīd, although the town was only a three-day journey from Ṣan'ā'. The letter¹² borne by the deputy informed the Resident that he intended to establish his authority over the entire Tihāmah and of his impending visit to him at Mocha.

After delivering two Arabian horses to the Resident as a gift from the imam, his Hindu agent handed another letter to the broker¹³ requesting a loan of 20,000 Yemeni crowns to defray the cost of an expedition he was about to lead against the Yām, who were still in control of Zabīd. The broker notified the Resident of the imam's request stating that he regarded the loan as a private matter and wished to refuse it, provided the company would offer him protection against the imam's anticipated wrath. Since the Resident had already instructed the company to adhere to matters of commerce only and transmit the intelligence of a political nature, he informed the broker that he would not get involved in the imam's concerns.¹⁴

Meanwhile, reactions from Istanbul were reaching London and being forwarded to India. Muḥammad 'Alī's agents in Yemen told the Ottoman authorities that foreign intruders' ambitions were about to defile the land of Islam. In a secret dispatch to the governor in council at Bombay, the secretary of state for foreign affairs conveyed messages contained in Lord Strangford's dispatches from Istanbul about the sultan's government's concern 'relative to certain proceedings of the resident at Mocha ... not less offensive to the religious feelings than injurious to the political rights and interests of the state'.¹⁵

Three dispatches from Rüstem Ağa, Muḥammad ‘Alī’s agent at Mocha, whom the Viceroy of Egypt described as merely a customs agent, fanned the Porte’s indignation. The Reis Efendi summed them up as stating that the India government had adopted a hostile view towards the sultan’s authority and rights of sovereignty in Yemen through its agent at Mocha, the Resident, who was also accused of encouraging tribal Arabs to revolt and offering the imam 100,000 *piastres* a year to become a dependency of the government of India.

In relaying this information to the Marquis of Londonderry the foreign secretary, Strangford, informed him that the sultan’s government attached much importance to the country that held the holiest cities of Islam. He also relayed to him the tenor of a prescript from the *Divan* (council of ministers) in which the sultan purportedly described the India government to be ‘as faithless and as ambitious as that of Russia’, insisting he would not yield an inch of the territory ‘which has been sanctified by the footsteps of the Prophet’. He enclosed in his dispatch to India a résumé of the letters from Rüstem Ağa.

The résumé referred to a host of complaints about offensive conduct by the men the Resident housed, about arms and ammunition brought in illegally and, in addition, about chains imported from Bombay allegedly for blocking the straits of Bāb al-Mandab. The complaining customs agent suspected British motives and aims at Mocha when they refused inspection of the cargo unloaded, followed by the monetary offer to the imam, and efforts to remove residents from Bombay, Banyans and Ismā‘īlīs from the jurisdiction of the Mocha courts in treating them as British rather than residents subject to Islamic law, despite repeated assertions by the imam that he would not tolerate Muslims being subject to non-Islamic law.¹⁶

On the basis of these reports the Reis Efendi¹⁷ relayed to Strangford the Porte’s demand that the British government openly disavow the conduct of its agent in Mocha and formally acknowledge that the country belonged to the Ottoman Empire and was subject in its totality to Ottoman jurisdiction. In the note delivered to the ambassador by the Reis Efendi, the British government was called upon not to compromise friendly ties with the sultan’s government.¹⁸

In transmitting this intelligence to London, Lord Strangford warned that the Mocha affair could have a most serious effect on British influence and credit at Constantinople. He stated further that ‘the strongest feelings of the Sultan and of his ministers have been called into action

by the powerful appeals which have been lately addressed to them by the Turkish authorities, as well as religious as political, on the subject of the proceedings at Moka'.¹⁹

The Sharīf of Mecca, Muḥammad Ibn 'Awn, was alleged to have also written in a long dispatch to the mufti at Istanbul alluding similarly to the 'insults' that were reportedly being offered by the English to the '*Sacred Territory*' (*sic*) in the 'highest colours'. Since the mufti communicated '*directly*' (*sic*) with the sultan, the latter issued a pre-script stating that 'if the English are to range themselves among the enemies of the Ottoman government [he] will yield to the decree of Providence but would not suffer the birth land of the Prophet to be defiled'.²⁰

The sultan's government was of the opinion that deliberately provocative action at Mocha by the British was for the purpose of forcing a change in terms of the commercial agreements, which, at the time of its conclusion, were satisfactory to both sides. The note embodying this opinion went on to state that British traffic with the imam of Ṣan'ā', offering him tents and a pavilion for gifts, illicitly importing guns and ammunition for use in arousing tribesmen against Ottoman authority, and deliberately being rowdy, all of which 'suggest a line of conduct not presently understood, and so near to the land of the Kaaba ... an insult to our religion and to all Moslems'.²¹

Lord Strangford's dispatches stated also that Muḥammad 'Alī had decided to take up the affair as a political question and that he was protesting strongly, viewing it as an affront to the sultan's sovereign rights and authority in Yemen. Strangford was unconvinced, on the other hand, that the viceroy was venting meaningless indignation to ward off suspicion from himself by seizing upon this opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty 'at so cheap a rate ... knowing that his allegiance is suspect by the Sultan'.²²

The ambassador himself was not fully informed about what had transpired at Mocha. He requested background information from Consul General Henry Salt stationed at Alexandria and details of Rüstem Ağa's three letters that had caused a major stir in both Cairo and Istanbul. In his reply of 16 August 1822, Salt stated that, following the bombardment of Mocha, a treaty was concluded with the imam of Ṣan'ā' recognizing, among other things, the Resident's right to have up to 40 *sipahis* (mounted guards), similar to concessions made to other British consular officials and agents at Baghdad and Bushire. The

sounding of drums at sunrise, dinner and sunset, which offended the Muslims of the town, was in accord with the practice of the guard everywhere. The tents were offered as gifts, but only one to the imam; the other was for his vizier. The large base, which Rüstem alleged housed cannon, actually housed wine and other provisions, including furniture for the Residency. Captain Hutchinson, then Resident, had them inspected at his own house according to Salt's report and the imam's agents were reportedly satisfied. He did not deny that three to four guns were unloaded and housed in the Residency's magazine; indeed, so was the steel cable alluded to earlier; but the latter was not for the purpose of blocking the straits at Bāb al-Mandab as alleged, a ridiculous feat considering the distance; rather it was for the cruiser *Antilope* when it returned from Cosseir.

The above information was based primarily on oral reports made to Salt by Captain Thompson of the 17th Light Dragoons and 'another gentleman lately from Moka'. But at the heart of the disagreement between the Resident and the native administration at Mocha was the issue relating to jurisdiction. The imam's representative insisted on trying all disputes involving non-British subjects, dependents of the factory and the Banyans according to Islamic law while the Resident was demanding they be judged in all matters by the Resident himself according to the capitulations respected by the Ottoman government.

Judging by Captain Hutchinson's impressions of the imam and his administration, one could scarcely anticipate a cordial resolution of differences. He accused the government of 'bad faith and rapacity'; the *dola* in his opinion 'was too engaged in the debauchery of his own harem to attend the business in government'. Yet, by his own confession, much of the difficulty was occasioned by the confusion over interpretation of the last article of the treaty.

On the other points of the accusations levelled against him, the Resident admitted that he had gone to Aden and made an offer of presents to the 'Sultan of that petty kingdom', but that was by order of his own government. He saw no fault in that, for the sultan was regarded as 'a perfectly independent prince, long united in the strictest friendship with the English'. Hutchinson argued, moreover, that when he first called upon the Sultan of Laḥj in 1810, the latter urged the British to establish a commercial factory next door at Aden. Now, in view of the difficulties in their relationships with the imam's government at Mocha, it was very probable that 'if the imam's government

does not fulfil its engagements, the Factory will be removed from Moka and established in Aden'. This was the main reason for his trip to Aden, which aroused the suspicions of the Ottoman Porte.

As far as Hutchinson was concerned, both the imam of Şan'ā and the 'chief of Aden' were independent princes, 'so it is not necessary to have the consent of the Porte to any arrangements that the India government may please to establish with these countries'. This was also the position of the governor general, the Marquis of Hastings and Montsuart Elphinstone, governor of Bombay, who was the one to authorize the blockade of Mocha in revenge for what was termed 'the atrocious conduct of the *dola*' in imprisoning and beating the Resident, digging up the corpse of the British surgeon and giving it to the dogs, and other acts of maltreatment.

Such conduct called for exemplary retribution, and the government of India argued this had been done with the utmost delicacy towards the Sublime Porte. Hastings allegedly informed Muḥammad 'Alī of his intentions to blockade Mocha and assured him at the same time of his specific intentions, regretting later the extremities engaged in by the expeditionary force sent to Mocha. Assuming it was a mistake, it could be explained, he submitted, in terms of the inexplicit orders to Elphinstone who was allegedly absent from Bombay when the harsh orders were issued to the commander of the expedition. Hutchinson also registered his annoyance with Muḥammad 'Alī for sending Rüstem Ağa's letters on to Istanbul in view of what he termed the good relations that had hitherto existed between the Egyptian viceroy and the British. He blamed it on 'a certain Efendi of considerable talent from Constantinople who has been in the service of the Pasha for a year and a half' without naming the person.²³

Consul General Salt took up the matter with Muḥammad 'Alī in person and was assured by him that the originator of the reports from Mocha (Rüstem Ağa) was not his agent in Yemen, but rather the customs house master at Jiddah who ostensibly transmitted the remarks of 'unspecified' agents at Mocha. The viceroy seized upon this opportunity to inform Salt that the sultan's government for some time had been urging him to take control of the ports along the Red Sea as far south as Aden and that he might have to do so yet. In reply, Salt voiced the opinion that the India government might be happier to see the Ottoman government take direct control of these ports rather than see them 'fall into the hands of local Barbarians'. However, in this dispatch

to Strangford, Salt stated 'I don't believe that the India govt. [sic] would want them [Ottomans] to take over Aden though; it is too strong a post, and too near Bombay to leave it in the hands of any first-rate power [Egypt], that might hereafter join with, or become our Enemy.'²⁴

The explanations the India government ultimately forwarded to Istanbul via London and Alexandria did not appear to alleviate the Porte's concern over the Bombay government's motives and ambition in that strategic corner of the Arab Peninsula. The Reis Efendi communicated the minister's reaction to Strangford and hinted rather strongly that the ambassador himself might have been misled by the information he had received from agents at Mocha and the Bombay government, which he singled out as the proper defendant in this instance. The note he delivered on behalf of the sultan's government stated, among other things, that:

We could not for a moment entertain the supposition that you have sanctioned any measures which could justly subject the British government in India to the suspicion of entertaining any project of territorial aggrandizement in the Arabian Gulf, but we are anxious nevertheless for details from you concerning every proceeding that has taken place at Moka since the establishment of the Residency at that Port.²⁵

The secretary of state for foreign affairs relayed the communications received from Strangford about the happenings at Mocha and embodying the views of the sultan's government to all appropriate quarters at Bombay and Mocha. The Porte's interpretation of the affairs as 'not less offensive to the religious feelings than injurious to the political rights and interests of the state' particularly perturbed him. He requested the Bombay government to submit information that would remove 'the bad implications', together with a cogent and full explanation of the hostilities prevailing at Mocha between the British agent and the imam's representatives there. He also wanted a detailed account of the arrangements concluded with them. He asked for the explanations the Bombay government had submitted to be forwarded directly to him.²⁶

In India the board acknowledged all communications forwarded by London and promised to conduct a full inquiry into the circumstances occasioning the Sublime Porte's concern about happenings at Mocha.

The explanations submitted subsequently were unconvincing. Most of the blame for misunderstanding was placed on omissions in the translation of the original treaty from English to Arabic rather than on the British Resident's improprieties. The India government admitted having insisted on the provision stipulated in Article 6, only to learn later that Captain Bruce had ostensibly gained the concession they wished independently. The imam of Şan'ā' himself allegedly made that concession. It seems strange, indeed, that the concession should appear in English but not in Arabic, the imam's only language. This was attributed to an oversight, not to any deliberate attempt to prevent the imam's government from realizing what it had agreed to.

Other explanations proffered indicated that the provision relating to the payment of duty would apply only to British merchants and not to others trading under the British flag. The Arabic version of the treaty was blamed for making it appear that all those under the Resident's jurisdiction would be governed by his terms. In fact, the Bombay government had insisted that only dependents of the factory, English and Hindu, were to enjoy the same consideration and immunity.²⁷

With regard to the rest of the complaints, the Bombay government was at a loss to provide adequate answers. In fact it failed to address the key enquiry, namely how to explain those happenings 'which may have excited the suspicions of the Porte respecting the views of the British government at Mocha?'²⁸

Weak as it might have seemed, the foreign office forwarded Bombay's explanation to Constantinople with the necessary copies to Alexandria for the enlightenment of the Egyptian viceroy who demonstrated open concern for what had transpired and equal interest in learning the results of the inquiry. Needless to say, Bombay's arguments failed to alleviate the Porte's suspicions and scepticism, but it was prepared to accept assurances from the British government that they did not entertain any territorial aggrandizement in southern Arabia. The matter thus was allowed to settle.

Sultan Maḥmūd was about to embark on full-scale plans for modernization, particularly of his armed forces, and in this he needed the goodwill of Europe. The episode was attributed to misunderstanding; the whole 'unpleasant business' was blamed on Rüstem Ağa having conveyed wrong information to Muḥammad 'Alī and then an unnamed zealot, who excited unduly the concern of the Ottoman sultan and his government, passing it on to Constantinople.²⁹

Thus ended the first phase of Anglo–Ottoman confrontation in Yemen and while the agents of the sultan were able to contain the English and prevent their expansion for the time being this was only the beginning of what was to become an ongoing struggle.

2. Gaining a Foothold at Aden, 1825–40

The focus here is on the strategy the British pursued to acquire a permanent foothold in southwest Arabia following their failure to make Mocha in the Tihāmah their base. I show how the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, Muḥammad ‘Alī, became the unwitting instrument of British policy while ostensibly on a mission on behalf of his sovereign, the sultan, to suppress revolts and tribal defiance of legitimate authority that invited foreign intervention.

The lack of firm Ottoman control over the political scene in Yemen and the indigenous tribes’ endless rivalries clearly helped British attempts since 1770 to establish a firm base in this strategic corner of Arabia. Exploiting this turmoil, the British, through the India government, first wrested a treaty agreement from the imam of Ṣan‘ā’, permitting them a foothold in Mocha; and, when unable to secure their position there, they extracted a similar agreement from the Sultan of Laḥj, enabling them to consolidate a position on the isthmus of Aden. Both agreements were of dubious legality, at least as viewed from the Ottoman position. At first the British sought to justify their presence by casting aspersions on Ottoman legal claims to sovereignty; but researchers in the Foreign Office archives could only come up with data supporting Ottoman *de jure* possession of Yemen.¹

The sovereign rights of the Ottomans were acquired by conquest in 1539 during the sultanate of Süleiman the Magnificent and reinforced by Sinan Paşa (grand admiral of the Ottoman navy) in 1569.² Upon withdrawing from south Arabia, Sinan entrusted the administration of the lowlands (Tihāmah) from the port of Mocha to the port of Hodeida to the Imam of Ṣan‘ā’, who in turn appointed the Sharīf of Abu ‘Arīsh as overseer. Sinan himself chose this ancient centre of Islamic learning as the administrative headquarters of the Tihāmah.

By their own accounts, the Ottomans did not attempt to establish

direct rule in Yemen because of the great distances separating it from Istanbul, the capital. The *vali* of Hijaz acted as the liaison person with the Sublime Porte. Through such benevolent neglect, the *sharīfs* of Abu ‘Arīsh succeeded in time to exercise nearly independent rule over the lowlands, in full defiance of the imam’s administrative prerogatives. The imam and also often the chieftains of neighbouring ‘Asīr refused to accept the *sharīfs*’ authority and disputes, rivalries and bloody feuds ensued. Turmoil and confusion dominated the history of this region.³ When matters got critical, the imam could only refer them to Istanbul for resolution.

The Ottomans had tolerated the establishment of trading stations in Mocha in the latter part of the eighteenth century, provided the maritime powers of Europe confined their activities to the port region. When the British found it necessary to strike up close relations with neighbouring chieftains and the imam of Ṣan‘ā’, they only served to awaken suspicion in Ottoman circles, particularly when the British argued the need to intervene on the grounds of being harassed by unfriendly local officials and chieftains. To eliminate such pretexts, the Sublime Porte authorized Muḥammad ‘Alī to pacify the region. The viceroy was already engaged on a mission to suppress Wahhābi defiance of Ottoman rule in Nejd. The Wahhābis had a strong following among the chiefs of ‘Asīr, an immediate neighbour of Yemen, and the ‘Asīris in turn were allied to Sharīf Ḥammūd of Abu ‘Arīsh. All were Wahhābis or sympathizers. Thus, Muḥammad ‘Alī had cause to move his military operations south. He also had the sultan’s orders.⁴

Sharīf Ḥammūd of Abu ‘Arīsh had allied himself with the Wahhābis in return for their acknowledging his rule over the Tihāmah. With reinforcements from Egypt under the command of Mīr-i mirān Halil Paşa, Mīr-i mirān Arnavut Paşa, officer in command in Jiddah, moved to avenge the defeat of his underling, Cum’a Ağa (*mutasallim* in ‘Qunagh’) by Ḥammūd and his allies. Meanwhile, Ḥammūd died and was succeeded by his young son Aḥmad, who teamed up with Ḥasan ibn Khālīd of the Saud clan and set out to recapture Dir‘īyah, the Saud family’s home base, from the viceroy’s troops. Halil Paşa, who had set out from Mecca in Ṣafar 1234 (December 1818) met them, and at Mahāyil they defeated Aḥmad and scattered his troops. In pursuing them the Egyptian forces marched on to Abu ‘Arīsh. Aḥmad surrendered and was exiled. Then the Egyptian expedition set out to rebuild the fortresses of the Tihāmah (at Abu ‘Arīsh, Jāzān, Hodeida, Luḥayyah,

Zabīd, and Bayt al-Faqīh). All the areas the *sharīfs* had previously administered were restored to the imam's jurisdiction. The imam in return promised to deliver coffee to the imperial kitchens, as in the past.

The imperial government had serious reservations about the imams of Ṣan'ā'. Their rapacity and cruel handling of the tribes had alienated them from the lowlanders and accounted for much of the turmoil and lawlessness characterizing tribal relations in the two preceding centuries. The tribes specifically singled out for criticism were, in many respects, the most powerful: Dhu Muḥammad, Dhū Ḥusayn, Ḥāshid, Bakīl, and Yām.⁵ All fought for dominion over the northern regions of Yemen. Ottoman observers felt they had to be dealt with strictly. Inhabitants of the coastal cities were equally interested in their being chastised. The merchants had suffered from their marauding and the populace from their raids. All assisted in financing the rebuilding of fortifications to keep them out. Often these were the very tribes who took orders from the imam of Ṣan'ā'.⁶

British merchants operating predominantly out of Indian ports had urged their government to take steps to secure their operations at Mocha. Attempts to do so through treaty relations with the imam bore little fruit, for it was the Sharīf of Abu 'Arīsh whom they had to circumvent and he did not take kindly to such measures. The British expected reprieve in Muḥammad 'Alī's expedition; while they had opposed an earlier expedition, they were not disposed to do the same in 1825, particularly when the Sublime Porte had ordered it.⁷

Remaining doubtful about their operation at Mocha, however, especially following a sharp dispute with the imam of Ṣan'ā' in 1828, the British began to cast about for an alternative site. Aden proved particularly attractive for the next location of a factory. Commanding an exploratory naval expedition on behalf of the India government, Captain Hutchinson was authorized to 'enter into a Convention with the Sovereign of Aden, arranging the terms on which the British Residency should be received at that place in the event it became necessary to remove it from the dominions of the Imaum of Sennaa [*sic*]'.⁸

The British were particularly anxious to secure Aden for their factory following the spread of rumours that Muḥammad 'Alī planned to occupy the isthmus, the strategic importance of which was discovered in 1829 when coal was transported to Aden from Mocha to provision the first steamer (the *Hugh Lindsay*) on its way to Suez from India.⁹

Muḥammad 'Alī did not seriously entertain the idea of establishing a

military presence in Yemen until 1833 following a rebellion in Hijaz. Planned or not, the rebellion provided him with the pretext to march his troops into Yemen. It began in June 1832 when a high-ranking Circassian slave by the name of Muḥammad Aḡa, alias Türkçe Bilmez ('Knows no Turkish'), hitherto considered a loyal follower of the viceroy, revolted with his Albanian followers in Mecca because they had not received pay for several months. All 2000 of them (horse and foot) marched to Jiddah where they seized the treasury and confiscated equipment and supplies. In December 1832 they set sail in warships they had commandeered for the Tihāmah. The rebels quickly occupied the coastal cities of Mocha and Hodeida, and the land in between as well. Discontented Arab tribes of the bordering region joined them.¹⁰ Bilmez concluded an agreement with 'Ali ibn Mukhtār, an 'Asīri chief, offering, in return for support, to share with him the revenue of the region, which had not been collected owing to the absence of an official administrator. The Circassian, however, had incurred greater expenses than anticipated, so he defaulted on his agreement with 'Ali. When queried by British observers, Bilmez alleged that he rebelled because he felt he would soon depose Sultan Muḥammad 'Alī, and now he had an opportunity to prove his loyalty and usefulness to the Ottoman government. He anticipated as reward the governorship of the Hijaz.

The possibility of a prior understanding between the viceroy, his subordinate Bilmez, and the British concerning operations in Yemen is seen in reports from Consul General Campbell. According to these, Muḥammad 'Alī suggested to Campbell early in 1833 that he might send an expedition to Yemen to chastise Bilmez and rescue Ṣan'ā' from anarchy. If Bilmez's rebellion were staged, then a perfect pretext for immediate involvement would be ready-made. The facility with which Bilmez moved from Mecca to Jiddah to Yemen can only lend credence to this notion. Campbell's willingness to cooperate with the viceroy was further increased by news from Yemen that in the midst of the turmoil British commerce was suffering. It was reported that United States ships were taking away nearly all the coffee of Mocha to the detriment of British commerce.

Turning control over to Muḥammad 'Alī was not without its risks; while the viceroy controlling both sides of the Red Sea would facilitate British commerce (as Moresby reported to Campbell and the latter reported to Palmerston), the British might be acquiescing to a formidable territorial concentration in the hands of a powerful *vali* who might

not always be friendly to British interests. It was presumed that once he was fully in control, Muḥammad 'Alī would annex the Yemen administration to the Hijaz, where his nephew Küçük İbrāhīm governed. The sultan's government had invested İbrāhīm with that office as a reward for suppressing the Wahhābis. Despite misgivings, Palmerston yielded to Campbell's argument that the viceroy's control of both sides of the Red Sea would only aid the shipping of the India government and he gave his blessing to the viceroy's expedition.¹¹ To quiet the Sublime Porte's anxieties, Campbell recommended that Palmerston's government reassure the Ottomans that the British considered Yemen an integral part of Ottoman territory and, administratively, an appendage of the *vilayet* of Hijaz.¹²

Meanwhile, reports from Captain Moresby, who commanded the India government's survey ship *Benares*, indicated that Bilmez's forces were concentrated in Mocha, where they meant to await the viceroy's troops. Moresby's letter from Jiddah of 26 June 1833 painted a bleak picture: the imam had died and with him the last semblance of order; Bilmez was detaining Surat ships at Mocha; and commerce was deplorable and its revival could be assured only if Muḥammad 'Alī took possession of Yemen. Even then it would not be an easy task — the viceroy would have to contend not only with the rebels but also with an interior of Yemen torn by the civil wars precipitated by the feuding brothers of the deceased imam, none of whom enjoyed much force, power or strong backing. Meanwhile, 'Alī ibn Mukhtār, the disgruntled 'Asīri chief, had gathered up his fighting men and laid siege to Bilmez at Mocha after seizing the entire area surrounding the port town.

Muḥammad 'Alī's navy recaptured or destroyed the vessels Bilmez had commandeered. Losses and defections had reduced the rebel force to between 1200 and 1500 men, of whom most were stationed either at Mocha or at Aden. The viceroy was most eager to dislodge the rebels from the fortress at Aden lest they convert the town into a piratical stronghold preying on Egyptian shipping in the Red Sea. To reinforce the siege of Mocha, Muḥammad 'Alī ordered a regiment of infantry (3200 men), a cavalry unit (400), and an artillery unit of 200 men with six field pieces and two mortars to be dispatched from Alexandria. Campbell urged the commanding officer of the expedition to take all necessary steps to ensure the safety of British subjects at Mocha.¹³ The viceroy's nephew Aḥmad, who also served as minister of war, left for Yemen with an additional 2400 regular and 1200 irregular cavalry (chiefly

Anatolian), with 400 artillerymen. A caravan of 450 camels transported their baggage overland, while the men left by sea, ‘all in good order’.¹⁴

Alerted by the alliance between the ‘Asīri Wahnābis and Bilmez, the viceroy selected one of the 12 ‘Asīri chiefs detained in Egypt following the suppression of the Wahnābi uprising, bestowed upon him a pelisse of honour and dispatched him along with Aḥmad to Yemen. Muḥammad ‘Alī counted on the ‘Asīri Shaykh Muḥammad al-Dāsin to draw support away from Bilmez. He allocated over 1000 purses of nine-piastre gold pieces (a total equalling MT\$ 60,000) to purchase the ‘Asīris’ support, promising him not to punish those who had allied themselves with Bilmez should they abandon him.

The Tihāmah’s inhabitants were jubilant at the sight of the Egyptian expedition. For nearly two years the ‘Asīris had visited upon them a variety of suffering and privation. Merchants had been plundered and the possessions of all carried away by land and sea. No one was able to ward off the ‘Asīris’ rapacious marauding. Rich and poor alike scrambled to get out. Neither Bilmez nor his deputy ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, who served as *muḥāfiz* (guardian) of Bāb al-Sāhil (at Bāb al-Mandab), spared foreign merchants. While the ‘Asīris’ marauding had commenced when Bilmez was in charge, it intensified after he fled — following negotiations with the ‘Asīri chieftain Lāḥiq ibn Aḥmad Zaydāni whereby, in exchange for 2000 *riyāls* (or perhaps only 200), he agreed to hand over Mocha. Bilmez arranged with one of his trusted deputies to open the gates of the town after he himself was safely on board a British vessel heading for Bombay — a scheme he had hatched with Anglo-Indians.¹⁵

While Bilmez’s fate after reaching Bombay is shrouded in mystery,¹⁶ that of the Egyptian expedition is not. It fared less well than anticipated during the whole of 1834. The Bombay government showed its concern by dispatching Captain Haines to Socotra in October of that year to investigate the purchase of that island to serve as a possible alternate coaling station. He was also asked to scout and map the Hadramawt coast.

Exasperated by the turmoil and by his inability to contain it, the imam of Ṣan‘ā’ reportedly offered to deliver up his country to the Egyptians, but his subjects refused to support that decision.¹⁷ Elsewhere the war went on without a clear indication of the outcome. The key port cities of Luḥayyah and Hodeida were heavily garrisoned and Egyptian forces decided to await the reinforcements dispatched by Muḥammad