

Migration and Slavery in Bahrain Pearling Industry (1892- 1939)

Abdellatif Mohammed Elsabbagh¹, Hussein Abdelfattah Abdelkhalek²

Abstract

The pearl industry was the first source of income for the Arab Gulf countries before the era of oil, so most of the Gulf population relied on it, as more than 50% of the men in the Gulf community worked in it. Bahrain was the center of the pearl industry in the Arabian Gulf, with its medium location, and its diving sites, towards which the diving and fishing population migrated from various parts of the Gulf countries and some other countries, and its markets also attracted the world's largest merchants in the pearl trade. This has resulted in many historical and geographical changes at the economic and social level in the Gulf countries.

This research paper monitors some of these changes, the most prominent of which is immigration to those areas with the aim of working in pearling and trading in it, as well as the phenomenon of slavery suffered by seafarers working in the pearling industry, through documents during the period of British protection over Bahrain. That slavery to which the sailors were subjected, including divers, Siob (Withdrawals), Radef and others to pearl merchants and Nakhoda (the captain or Shipmaster). It also monitors government actions and the British administration's efforts to mitigate the impact of slavery on seafarers. Although these efforts came despite their importance in the period of the decline of the pearl industry in the Gulf for several reasons, including the emergence of oil, the competition of industrial pearls produced in Japan, in addition to the circumstances of the Second World War that stopped the pearl trade globally.

Keywords: Migration; Arabian Gulf; pearling; slavery; diving.

Introduction

The Arabian Gulf was famous for many decades for the presence of pearls as a natural resource. At the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, Bahrain was the center of the pearl industry and the chief market of the Gulf and agents from all over the world migrated towards Bahrain to buy it. The pearl industry has been of great importance to Gulf society, and it is a special industry for this society. It has been marketed extends to the richest countries all over the world. Muhammad Al Thani, the ruler of Qatar, expressed the importance of pearls in the Gulf people's lives in the second half of the nineteenth century, saying: We all from higher to lowest are slaves of pearl. (Carter, 2005, p. 187) Pearl was the main source of income for Bahrain, whether from shipbuilding, taxes of pearl fishing vessels, or the pearl trade. The standard of living in Bahrain has been affected up and down according to the pearling seasons.

According to Belgrave, the first British advisor to the government of Bahrain (1926-1956) more than 500 crafts related to the pearl industry are recorded in Bahrain, and

¹ Professor, Department of History, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University. Email: amalsabbagh@iau.edu.sa

² Associate Professor, Department of Geography &GIS, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University. Email: habdelkhalek@iau.edu.sa

about 15,000 men work as divers in Bahrain. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928) While Lorimer estimated them 1904-1907 about 17,000 men out of 100,000, total population of Bahrain. (Lorimer, 1915, Vol. 1, Appendix C) Many of them are foreigner's immigrants from Oman, Persia, and the countries of the Arabian coast. And if about 25% of the Gulf population works in the pearl industry, all of them are men, we can say that 50% of the Gulf men work in this industry if we consider that half of society are men and half are women. (Carter, 2005, p. 154)

This research focuses on slavery due to immigration, injustice, and unfairness in the employment of sailors, with the accumulation of their debts and disability to pay it, to force them to work with their Nakhoda. And the impact of these debts in tightening the grip of the owners of capital on the sailors and directing them according to the desire of their Nakhoda. The study begins with the British protection of Bahrain following the second agreement of 1892, and ends with the outbreak of the Second World War and the decline of the pearl industry in the Arabian Gulf for many reasons, including the emergence of oil, the spread of Japanese cultivated pearl with cheap prices, and the cessation of Arabian Gulf pearl exports because of the war, so that the people of the Gulf turn away from this craft to other more income-generating and less dangerous crafts, only to be forgotten, and the currents of migration shift to other countries, crafts and various economic activities.

Four elements were studied that highlighted the importance of the pearl industry in Bahrain and its nature, the migration and enslavement of sailors working in pearl fishing and industry, the impact of administrative reforms on the process of enslavement and the problems resulting from it, and the role of Britain with political influence in Bahrain and the Gulf region in managing the crisis.

-Bahrain pearl industry

Bahrain became famous for the manufacturing of ships and their sails, where sail production reached a hundred sails per week in the early 20th century, meeting the needs of ships in Bahrain and many Gulf countries. Diving suits were also manufactured in Bahrain. Perhaps here the intended meaning is the weaving of sails and clothing only, not textile manufacturing, as it is believed to be a sophisticated industry that was not present in the Gulf countries at that time. (Al-Amri, 1997, p. 129)

The Bahrain pearl fishing fleet was in 1907 about 917 ships, departing from twenty-six ports, concentrated in the islands of Bahrain and Muharraq, in addition to ten ships on the island of Nabi Saleh and twenty-two ships on the island of Sitra. Muharraq and Alhad are the two ports of Muharraq Island that had the largest number of ships of the Bahraini fleet (596 ships) compared to (288 ships) for the island of Bahrain. Lorimer listed the types of ships on Muharraq Island, showing 40 Batil, 141 Boom, 85 Baqura, 189 Shoue and Sambuca, in addition to 282 Mashela and attached boats. The number of men on the Bahrain pearling fleet in 1907 was 17,600 men. Most of them were from Muharraq Island (11,765 men) compared to (5,430 men) from Bahrain Island)Figure 1). (Records of the Persian Gulf, Vol. I, pp. 341, 342)

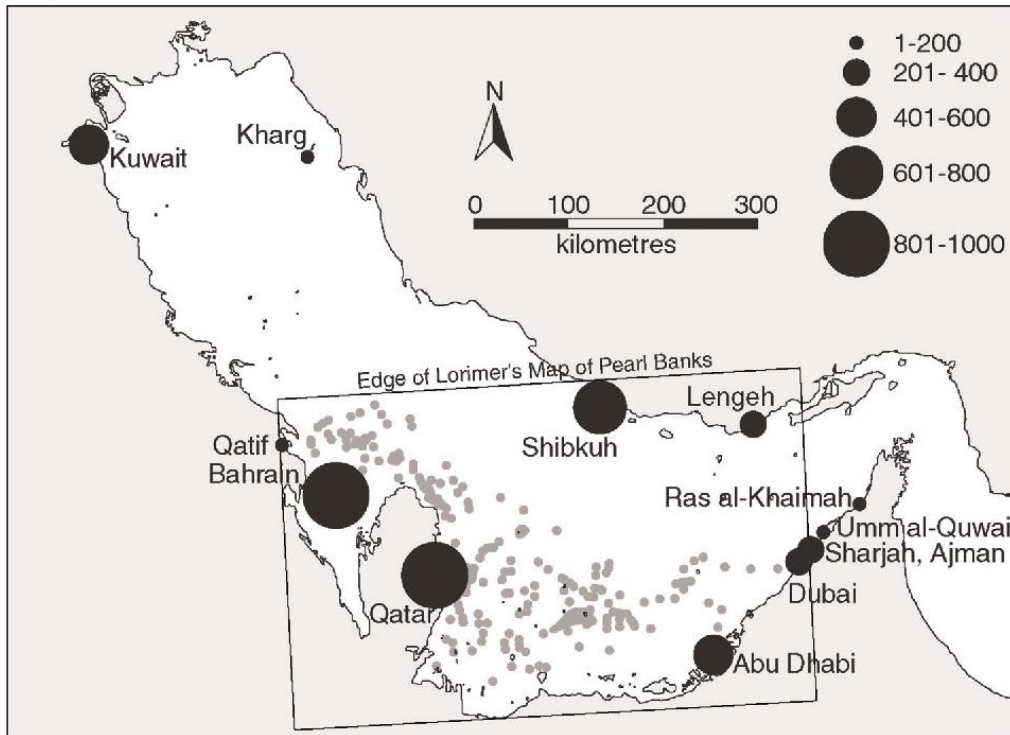


Figure (1) Geographical distribution of the number of pearl fishing boats in the Gulf countries according to Lorimer. (Lorimer, 1915, Vol. 1, Appendix C, Annexure 3)

One of the disadvantages of the diving system is that it provides job opportunities for only half of the year. During the non-fishing season, sailors are unemployed and cannot find another job to earn from. Although the Arabian Gulf has produced half of the world's pearl production, with profits estimated at about 90 million Indian Rupees annually. (Al-Himiri, 2011, p. 14) The big ships encouraged some sailors from Kuwait and Bahrain to immigrate to search for pearl shells in Ceylon in winter, and around the island of Socotra in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea at the beginning of spring. They would return to the Gulf with the onset of the fishing season. This habit remained until the Italian government-imposed taxes on these ships in the waters of Eritrea, severing the connection between the Gulf ships and the area. (Lorimer, Part 6, p. 3205)

The diving season begins in June yearly, so Nakhoda asks Magdemi (the assistant) to summon the Saibs (puller) to prepare the ship over a period of about 20 days. Then the ship pulled near the shore, and Qullaf (the carpenter) repairs it, and it is painted with Shona, then it is pulled and covered with water inside and out for a day or two to fix the boards, then the inside is cleaned of water. A tank of fresh water is loaded on it, and all tools are required. Then Magdemi informs the divers that the ship is ready to sail, so they come to receive their advances and prepare for departure. They carry the voyage's supplies of rice, butter, tea, sugar, coffee, lemon, and others. On the day of Dasha (departure), the sailors gather with their Nakhoda in the ship. The sails are unfurled, flags are raised, drums are beaten, and songs are raised. Women and children gather at the beach to farewell the sailors, in a wonderful view. and the diving trip begins. (Al-Hamiry, 2011, pp. 22-26)

The ruling families in the Gulf states, including Al Khalifa family in Bahrain, benefited from the pearl trade, through taxes imposed on the pearl industry and trade. (Carter, 2005. P. 153) The diving community can be categorized into three groups. The first consists of Nakhodas and beach traders, who acquire the largest volume of the buying and selling operations. They are owning or finance ships. The second comprises the divers, with approximately 15,000 divers in Bahrain out of a total of 100,000 divers working along the Arabian coast each year. They are illiterate Arabs who are exposed to deception and

exploitation by their Nakhoda. The third group includes the divers' assistants. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave) such as Seiob (the puller), Radif (assistants), Nahhab (the singer) and the cook. (Al-Shamlan, 1986, part 1, p. 271)

Work on diving ships was based on the desire of Nakhoda, but near the end of the pearl age, the sailors registered by the local authorities, to be under control. Individual divers were required to obtain government permits to work on ships. This measure aimed to regulate the workforce, particularly those coming from abroad, to prevent potential issues with neighboring countries. For instance, Bashir bin Abdullah, one of the freed slaves immigrated from Qatar to Bahrain to work in diving, but the Nakhodas refused to accept him without government documentation, prompting him to request a license from the British representative. (Records of the Persian Gulf, Vol. III, p. 14) These licenses were issued annually by the court. British documents include many of those licenses issued to freed slaves and free men, for example, we found a license says: from the Court of the State House in Bahrain to all Nakhodas, That Suwaid bin Mubarak, is permitted to board diving ships of Bahrain for this year 1353 AH (1934 AD), so any Nakhoda can include him without any objection. (Records of the Persian Gulf, Vol. III, p. 148)

The diving season is divided into three divisions, (Lorimer, 1915, P. 2228). It typically spans from mid-May to mid-October, with the duration of the shorter seasons depending on sea conditions and temperature. The divisions are as follows:

- Khanchieh: about 20- 25 days.
- Ghoos: the main season, 4 months, and 10 days.
- Radda: about 20- 25 days. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

Every year, His Highness the Sheikh of Bahrain issues a proclamation signaling the commencement of the diving season. This proclamation instructs all divers to come to their boats ten days before the diving season's initiation, allowing them time to prepare the ships for sailing. No orders are issued related to the khanqiyya or Raddah, as the Nakhodka's go where they want. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

The pearl banks are free to everybody. When the Nakhoda has reached a likely position, he anchors his boat and fixes the oars. The sailors start their work, and they extend above the water horizontally. In the boat, a couple of ropes are tied onto each oar, one with a weight upon it, on which the diver goes down, the other one by which he is pulled up if diving in deep water. In shallow water, the diver rises to the surface without assistance. The average depth is about 20 feet. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928). Every dive it is called in Arabic *Tabba*, and every ten *Tabbas* is called in Arabic *Fasla*. After each *Fasla*, the diver has a rest on the ship before continuing to work again. A diver who dives 50 times a day is considered a skilled diver. (Al-Hamiry, 2011, pp. 22-26) The oyster breeds and grows in Arabian Gulf water in May, and the breeding season extends until September of each year. It will produce pearls after one year, when the animal grows and becomes covered with oysters, and then pearls are formed inside it. (Zakaria, 2003, p. 342)

Divers do not receive wages but participate in the profits of fishing boats at the end of the season. They are receiving advances and loans from their Nakhoda. Several systems are practiced in Bahrain as follows:

A. Loans (called in Arabic *Salifh*): it's the most common. There are two kinds of *salifh*: the debtor: where Nakhoda takes a loan from a financier merchant, to pay advances to divers and sailors, to guarantee their work with him during the season. The loan is made in this case at an interest rate of 20% for the period of stopping diving, and 10% during diving. The amount received by Nakhoda is recorded as a debt on him to the

merchant plus interest. The amount received by the divers is recorded as a debt on them to Nakhoda with interest added as well. In this case, Nakhoda is not obligated to sell pearls to the financial merchant. The second method is the customer: where Nakhoda borrows from the merchant, and no interest is added to the amount. In this case, Nakhoda is obligated to sell pearls to the financed merchant at a discount of 20% of the market price. These whole systems make the merchant lend usury, which is forbidden in the Qur'an, so some resort to using bags of rice instead of Rupees. These operations make the financial merchants the biggest beneficiaries of the process of buying and selling pearls in Bahrain. They buy pearls cheaply from their own Nakhoda and then sell them at a high price. A small proportion of the merchants started their lives as Nakhoda, but the vast majority started life as financiers for one boat, then two. It gradually grew until the boats he financed reached twenty or thirty boats. Merchants are more exposed to risks than Nakhoda, as they buy and sell pearls locally, but those who could sell in the markets of India and deal with foreign merchants do not exceed one or two large merchants. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

B. Khammas system: the most profitable for divers. are no financial merchants. Nakhoda finances the boat without advance. The proceeds are distributed at the end of each trip. In this system, Nakhoda gets 1/10 of the crop in addition to his regular share, and divers get 1/10 of the crop divided between them in addition to their regular shares. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

C. Azal system: where the diver works alone with his own Saieb (puller), so he joins a boat for a fee, or the captain has one-fifth of peals the diver collected. (Jumaa, 2011, p. 37)

Most of the important buying and selling pearls is done on shore. The biggest buyers are the Continental merchants, Rosenthal and Pack, Mohamed Ali Zainal and his partner Bienenfeld, and one or two Indian and Persian merchants. They usually arrive just after the opening of the main season and leave a week or two after it closes. The pearls are polished and graded in Bombay and then taken to Paris and London for sale to English and American buyers. If more big buyers came from Europe, local prices would be higher, and Bahrain would profit at the expense of the pearl buying public of Europe and American. Possibly easier communication between Europe and the East, especially by air, and improved living conditions in Bahrain will induce more buyers to immigrate to it in the future. None of the buyers pay cash. Sometimes payments are not completed until the following season but usually half is paid on purchase and the rest three or four months later. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

Much of the actual buying and selling is done by brokers who carry pearls from merchant to merchant offering them for sale. Brokers get commission from the buyer, or occasionally by special arrangement, from both parties. When the prospective buyer has made a definite offer, three sheets are written describing the weight of the pearls and the amount offered. The bidder keeps one sheet, the broker takes the other one and the third is placed with the pearl broker which is sold by the broker and left with the buyer until the owner decides whether he will sell or not. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

-Forms of slavery in pearl industry

الترجمة ط Divers in Bahrain, like divers in the Arabian Gulf generally, suffered from several problems that made them fall into slavery. The most important of these problems was debts; after selling the pearl, the expenses are deducted and then the remainder of the proceeds is distributed to the boat's crew as follows: The owner of the boat takes 1/5 of the harvest. Nakhoda may himself be the owner of the boat, and he is an expert in the sea, climate, diving places, and is responsible for the movement of the boat. He deserves three shares. Al-Jaadi or the deputy captain deserves three shares too. Each diver deserves three

shares. Each puller deserves two shares. Each Radeef deserves one share. Each of them earns his share after deducting his debt. (Ujail, 1999, p. 127)

Divers were mostly poor Arabs and slaves, but at the beginning of the twentieth century, the position of divers rose because of an increase their income. So, it's attracting many Arabs and some Iranians. Some ships had young boys called "Tabab" who were unable to work but were used for light service tasks such as fishing, they had no share of the pearl crop except what was found from the small pearl "Sahtet" in the open oysters, and tips from Nakhoda or divers. They are trained to work in the sea. On the boat, a sea singer called Nahab to entertain the sailors, and on many ships, there was a cook who prepared the main meal, which consisted of rice and fish stew. (Al-Shamlan, 1986, Part 1, pp. 271-272)

In practice, injustice mostly falls on the divers. The diving system seems great in theory, as the profits of each boat are divided proportionally among Nakhodas, divers, and pullers, after deducting the cost of food, general expenses, and any amounts paid to the divers at the beginning or end of the season. However, this system is completely different. When a young diver takes a loan from the "Nakhuda" (boat owner) during a diving break, it comes with a high interest rate, and he cannot repay it. If he has a debt, he is forced to dive for his creditor. The season goes by, and the diver cannot repay his debts, and the debts increase with huge interest rates the longer the repayment is delayed. (Lorimer, 1915, Vol. 1, p. 2232) Additionally, the diver incurs debt for food and diving equipment at exorbitant prices. If the diver is illiterate, his account will never be settled. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave)

Advances obtained by sailors from divers and Siob (pullers) are of three types:

- a. Salifh: The basic advance at the beginning of the big dive is allocated to spend on the diver's family during his absence at sea, and to cover the diver's luggage expenses that he needs on his trip.
- b. Kharjea: A small advance in the middle-season.
- c. Tasqam: provided six weeks after the end of the diving season, to cover the diver's expenses during the diving break. It's approximately six months. If the season is good, the last loan is not necessary. It should be within 20 Rupees, to be added to the debts of the sailor. With the aim of tying the diver to work for his Nakhoda in the following year. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Bahrain agent to Bushair agent, 24th May 1930)

The level of income during the three years from 1924-1927 AD, the diver's income ranged between 250-300 Rupees per year. Belgrave says: During the three years mentioned, I met hundreds of cases of divers, Nakhodas, and traders. Most of the divers who deal with the advanced systems do not make profits. Most divers in Bahrain owe debt to their Nakhoda. Now the debts are less than they were three years ago, as divers' conditions have improved because of government reforms. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

The political agent in Bahrain summed up the matter in 1923, saying:" At the beginning of the season, the diver receives instructions from the ruler, as he receives from Nakhoda a sack of rice, in addition to funds Salifh and diving tools ranging from 40%-50% of his annual income, which Nakhoda records at the diver's expense. After the end of the season, Diver receives another part of the loan, Tasqam, that will help him until the start of the new season, the debt will be added to his account. After the first year of diving, the

diver rarely gets rid of his debts". (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3 Report of Bahrain agency to Kuwait Agency, 27th Feb. 1923)

Therefore, the debtor diver is obliged to work with his creditor, Nakhoda, until he finds another Nakhoda who can save him from his debts, then he moves to work with him. Nakhoda sometimes does this if the diver undertakes to pay his debts. If the diver wants to work for another Nakhoda, the creditor, Nakhoda, may accept that in exchange for the diver signing for the new Nakhoda, a double amount of the debt receipt. For example, if the diver owes a hundred riyals, he must sign a receipt for 900 riyals, so that the new Nakhoda can enslave the diver, even if the dispute turns to the advance court. No diver has been able to win a disputed case of this kind over the past years. 90% of the cases filed in 1922 were dropped by the Divers. Nakhoda refuses to present the sailors' real accounts to the court, so getting to the truth is difficult. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3 Report of Bahrain agency to Kuwait Agency, 27th Feb. 1923)

The diver may be handed over from one Nakhoda to another in fulfillment of his debt. He may be handed over to a Nakhoda from a foreign country. If the diver dies, his Nakhoda may seize his house and property to guarantee the debt. If they have older children, they incur the fulfillment of their father's debt, but if they are young, they bear the fulfillment of their father's debt when they grow up and become able to work. Interest on debts was calculated by the creditor. Nakhoda and it might be at unfair rates for divers. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave)

The problems of divers in Kuwait are very similar to their counterparts in Bahrain. Most divers are indebted with debts that vary between a lot and a little. The only difference is that a few men in Kuwait go diving without taking any advance at all, and they take half of their pearl crop and sell it by themselves. The political agency in Kuwait has nothing to do with the Salifh court, at least two of its members are Nakudas. The worst, from the point of a British political agent in Kuwait's view, is the work of the financiers. When the financier is Nakhoda, their rate is about 20%, then he controls the price of pearl. Especially if the borrower does not want to deduct the full amount that he borrowed. Even though the borrower diver knows full well that this will happen, he insists on borrowing. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3 Kuwait Agency to Bahrain agency, 3rd March 1923)

The biggest problem is that the divers do not realize the seriousness of the advances (the debt). For example, the value of the advances in 1929 in Bahrain was one hundred rupees for a diver and 80 rupees for a puller. As a result of the divers' objection in Muharraq, Sheikh Hamad intervened and allowed an increase of 30 rupees for a diver and 25 rupees for a puller. This is considered, in the opinion of the British political agent, a weakness of Sheikh Hamad. The only excuse for this weakness and the approval of the increase is that one of the leaders of the Nakhoda, Jabir bin Muslim, made a secret tour on the divers, pushed by some merchants, and supported them in demanding a larger advance. It is noticeable that the divers never realized that it was in their interest to limit the advances, to be safe from the risk of debt. But most of the traders were more inclined than before to reduce advances due to their lack of cash. It is possible that Jabir bin Muslim would have the desire to embarrass his rivals who are unable to pay advances due to the competition that took place between them last year. If Nakhoda had 500 or 600 divers, he would feel a great burden. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3 Bahrain agent to Bushair agent, 24th May 1930)

If the diver debts to two Nakhodas, is he allowed to work for one of them in the Red Sea fisheries during the off-season in the Gulf? Article 4 of the Gulf Country Agreement states that a creditor cannot prevent a diver from working; For example, if the diver (B) owes a debt to Nakhoda (A) and a debtor to a person who is not Nakhoda (C), then the

latter cannot prevent the sailor at the beginning of the diving season from working for Nakhoda (A). In this case, the Nakhoda (A) guarantees the payment of a debt to (C) at the end of the season, deducting from the dues of the diver (B). The fifth rule added that the governor of the city or state can collect part of the sailors' dues annually to have a fund that contributes to paying off the sailors' debts. Article 6 of the Gulf States Agreement allowed the diver (B) to work for Nakhoda (C) in other fisheries such as the Red Sea during the off-season of fishing in the Gulf, on one condition that he return to work for Nakhoda (A) at the beginning of the fishing season in the Gulf. Bahrain added a condition that Nakhoda (C) guarantee the return of the diver or pay the debt to Nakhoda (A). Kuwait added that in the event that (B) does not return, (C) must pay (B) debts to (A), while Sharjah considered that the diver is free to go to the fisheries of the Red Sea without condition, and the Nakhoda (C) is not obligated to pay the debt if the diver (B) does not return, unless (C) is a reason not to return. (IOR/R/15/1/234 file 5/201, customary rules using in pearling industry)

British documents showed a group of Siobh accounts, a set of accounts of Saibs (withdrawals) working with a Nakhoda called Taher bin Muhammad in 1921-1923. It showed the Saibs' debts ranged from a former Nakhoda called Ali bin Nasser. It varied greatly, between 30 and 330 rupees. It includes three types of advances during the diving season, it is called Tasqam. Its value ranges between 30 and 100 rupees. The basic diving advances range between 92 and 144 rupees. The end of the season's advance ranged between 14 and 30 rupees. From the names of Saibs (withdrawals) mentioned in the account documents: Ghabish bin Farhan, Mabrouk bin Khamis, Issa bin Qasim, Ahmed bin Haji, Abbas bin Abdullah, Muhammad bin Rashid Hassawi, Mabrouk (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3 Pearl Industry, Account of Saibs and Nakhodas, 1924)

In addition to the debt problem, there are several other problems faced the divers as the following:

-Problem of pearl price: At the end of season, the Nakhoda is supposed to sell the pearl crop in the presence of the ship's crew, and each one takes his share. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Bahrain agency to Kuwait Agency, 27th Feb. 1923) But in reality, the process of selling pearls is confined between the Nakhoda and the merchant. The prices are usually higher than those announced to the sailors. Nakhodas put the over between the announced price and the real price in their pockets. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave) Belgrave confirms that many Nakhodas are keeping accounts different from the official and real accounts, and many other Irregularities, it needs a long time to examine, but he does not have time to do so. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Belgrave to Bahrain Agency, 9th Feb. 1930)

-Divers' health problems: the elderly and young people were forced to dive without regard to the health condition. Refusing to dive was considered disobedient to orders, and the diver was punished by flogging and torture. As for deaths that occur in fisheries, there are no questions raised about them. During the off-season, divers work as wage earners in farms and homes. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave) Diving is an unhealthy profession. Most divers are not long lived. The pearl fishing boats are very overcrowded, and sometimes they remain out at sea for two months at a time. The divers live on a ration of dates, rice, and fish.

Most divers suffer from ear trouble, rupture of the eardrum is almost universal. In fact, the diver barely mastered diving skills until he contracted this disease. Emphysema is also common among divers, and diving often leads to damage and enlargement of the heart valves. Scurvy is often noticed during and after the season, but Nakhodas know the preventive value of lime juice and no boat leaves for the banks without dried limes. A few divers are blind, but blindness did not prevent them from continuing to work as divers. Among the diver's health risks are fish bites of a large fish, adding to the shark bite, which hits humans straight like a sword strike. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report,

19th Dec. 1928) In 1924, the government of Bahrain established a mobile naval hospital in a boat sail in the pearl fisheries, with an Indian assistant surgeon to deal with sick cases among divers. Most of the Bahrain Nakhoda are very harsh in dealing with the sick cases of their divers. They don't understand that acknowledging divers' illnesses early will be better for them in the long run. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

-Problem of diving with primitive tools: Diving was done in very difficult conditions without modern diving and underwater breathing tools, with a clip to close the nose called Al-fetam, a leather finger protector to protect his hand when picking up oysters among rocks called Khabt. The diver carries a basket of strings around his neck called Al-Deen, in which the oysters are placed. The diver does not wear clothes except for short called Shamshoul, which is black, blue, or green color. The diver covers his head to protect it from jellyfish and other sea animals with a cloth tartar that has two holes for the eyes (Jumaa, 2011, pp. 45-49). Attempts to improve the diving system faced many difficulties. Divers were skeptical and uninterested. While merchants and Nakhodas violently opposed any attempts to loosen their grip on sailors, the rulers considered pressing for reform as a non-political act, and therefore outside their interest. The current diving methods are simple. No mechanical apparatus is used. Some years ago, a Persian attempted diving in a diver's suit. There was a general order against this, and it was forbidden by shaikh Isa. A few days ago, an application was received from the same men asking permission to wear a diving suit, it was refused. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave)

-Reforms and its impact on slavery in pearling industry

The British and judicial authorities in Bahrain sensed the need for administrative reform after the First World War. Political Agent Dixon initiated administrative reforms in 1919, with the aim of establishing a modern administrative bureaucracy. Al Khalifa and the tribesmen, especially Al Dawasir and the pearl merchants, objected to the reforms. So, they protested to Britain. Britain excluded Dixon and appointed Major Daly from 1920-1926, who began reforming the pearl industry, to be a test point for public administrative reforms. The opposition forces were resisting it. But Sheikh Hamad bin Isa supported the reforms. The resistance was broken, so the way was opened to the reforms. Daily continued to deal violently with the opposition until Britain ended his presence in Bahrain in 1926, and his powers were transferred to political advisor Charles Belgrave. (Abdullah and Bashir, 2009, pp. 172-176)

The Bahraini judiciary sensed the injustice inflicted on divers, so it opened the way for reform in the pearl industry. In 1921, the Bahrain Court canceled the interest on the debts of sailors working in pearl diving and organized the process of collecting the debt. The ruling came as follows: if Nakhoda takes money from a merchant, he distributes it to himself, his divers, and Saibs. Nakhoda has no right to take money from another merchant except after he pays his debt. If the merchant is unable to complete the dues of Nakhoda, then Nakhoda returns money to the merchant in annual installments. If Nakhoda is unable to fulfill the merchant's debt, the merchant collects his debt from the ship. If the ship fails, he will collect his debt from divers and Saibs who benefited from that debt. The merchant takes his debt without any increase because the increase is usury, which is forbidden in Islamic law. The merchant does not take from Nakhoda and the sailors except by judgment of experts. It is not for the merchant to take the house of Nakhoda in fulfillment of the debt because it is his abode. (IOR/R/15/2/122, file. 8/3 Bahrain Court decision, 18th Nov. 1921)

The judgment issued by the court regulated the relationship in debt between Nakhoda and divers, prohibition of usury, and indicated the role of the government in regulating the relationship as follows: If Nakhoda took golden pounds from a merchant as a debt, he does not sell it and gives his sailors some rupees. Then at the expense more of them

than what he gave them, this is unjust. So, if he gives a diver one hundred rupees, he should not take more than one hundred rupees, because this is forbidden usury. It is obligatory for Nakhoda to sell the pearl crop with the consent of his sailors and their knowledge of the price. If he sells the crop without their knowledge, he is unjust and treacherous, so they have the right to refuse that sale. As for the saying of Nakhoda that they do not bring out their books to the rulers and do not hold the sailors to account. This is a great darkness, crimes, and slavery. The sailor has no right to ride with another Nakhoda if he owes a debt to the first Nakhoda. If the sailor wants to ride with a second Nakhoda, the debt of the first Nakhoda will be transferred to the second Nakhoda, who guarantees the payment of the debt to the first Nakhoda. (IOR/R/15/2/122, file. 8/3 Bahrain Court decision, 18th Nov. 1921)

The British authorities and government of Bahrain cooperated in relieving pressure on divers and eradicating the traces of slavery in pearl diving. After many of the previous problems arose, Sheikh Hamad communicated in 1924 with Major Daily, the political agent. They decided that the issue was under control. Despite the opposition of the merchants, only a very few far-sighted merchants supported the government. The main features of the reform were as follows: (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave)

- The law specified the amount of advance and interest (due on the debt), and no other charges may be deducted from the diver. The opinions of stakeholders settled in 1930 in Bahrain that the amount of the advance be 80 rupees for divers and 60 for saib, after consulting with senior merchants, and publishing an announcement in this regard on 14th May, after the joint court convened. So, the Sheikh of Bahrain will not participate in such representation. If any disturbances occur, as they did three years ago, they can be nipped in the bud. The foreign divers (in Bahrain) number in all several thousand. Most of them are from Oman and Muscat. They are no better off than the nationals. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Bahrain Agency to Bushier agency)
- Merchants and Nakhodas must keep regular accounts, which are prepared by a group of divers authorized to do so by the government. Each diver keeps his account with his Nakhoda in a government-issued booklet.
- Nakhoda is forbidden to sell pearls individually, but he must be shared by at least three divers. In the event of one of the divers' deaths, his children are not liable for his debts or diving for the benefit of the Nakhoda (with whom their father used to work).
- The debt becomes in favor of the boat owner personally, and those who do not own a diving boat have no right to oblige debtors to dive for his benefit.

Although these principles did not change the fact of the old divers who remained indebted to their Nakhodas for a long time, perhaps until they died, the new generation of young divers no longer accepted slavery. Previously, the diver did not resort to a court to sue Nakhoda, although the court existed, but it consisted of Nakhoda, and its reputation was bad. After repairs, the divers realized that they could go to court if their Nakhodas didn't enforce the diving rules. There are an influential number of merchants and Nakhodas still trying to stir up troubles. It requires the intervention of the government and the court to ensure that there is no return to the previous situation. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3, Report of Belgrave)

According to reforms, each Nakhoda must keep two accounts:

A- General accounts show, on the credit side, the receipts from the sale of pearls and, on the debit side, the nature and amount of every expenditure, any part of which falls of the crew.

B- An account book showing each diver's particular account on a separate page.

Each diver has a small account book in which the Nakhoda enters that diver's particular account, showing the balance after each season. This book corresponds to the account of

Nakhoda No. B, but it is kept in the possession of the diver himself. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

The Gulf governments in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lenjeh, and the Trucial Coast have agreed on rules, the second of which states: The Nakhoda who wishes to leave his country to dive in another country in the Gulf must register his sailors with his government, and before registration he must give his sailors an advance payment. A contract must be issued for each of the sailors. Bahrain added: If the sailor wants to leave Nakhoda, he must take a barwa from him stating that he is not in debt. Kuwait added that if the Nakhoda wanted to leave his city and move to a new city, he must appoint an agent to recover his dues, and authorize him to issue a barwah to the sailor who was unable to pay his debt at the time. If the sailor cannot pay his debt at once, arrangements must be made for him to be paid in instalments. (IOR/R/15/1/234 file 5/201, customary rules using in pearling industry)

To protect Nakhodas from sailors' fraud, Article 9 of the Gulf States Agreement stipulates that the sailor must have a barwa indicating he is not indebted. If the sailor was debited to another person, the creditors must agree on the method of payment in the presence of the sailor. The new Nakhoda undertakes to pay the sailor debt to the previous Nakhoda. Article 10 stipulates that in the event of the death of the sailor, the new Nakhoda (A) shall pay the debt of the sailor to the previous Nakhoda (C), provided that Nakhoda (A) knew of the debt before the death of the sailor. Kuwait and Sharjah agreed to that. Articles 11-14 regulated the responsibility of the Nakhoda (a) to pay the debts of the sailors working with him to a third party in detail in case of life or death of the sailor. In the event of disagreements, the matter is referred to the Salifh court. (IOR/R/15/1/234 file 5/201, customary rules using in pearling industry)

In reforms, the Salifh court was canceled. The British authorities agreed with Sheikh Hamad Al Khalifa to allocate a diving court to consider advanced cases. In 1927, Sheikh Hamad was appointed head of the diving court with a president from Al Khalifa and four members. One of them was a merchant, the second a diver and two Nakhodas, as follows:

President: Sheikh Rashid bin Mohammed bin Isa Al Khalifa

Members:

1. Majid Abdul Ali Ragab (merchant)
2. Jassim Banji (diver)
3. Muhammad bin Fadl (Nakhoda)
4. Sayed bin Khalifa (Nakhoda)

The court was competent to consider issues of debts, advances and diving raised, with the exception of cases related to crimes. The court convenes in Muharraq on Saturdays, Mondays, and Thursdays of every week, at exactly 8:30 am, beginning on Thursday, 24th Feb. 1927. In the first and perhaps the second week, the court will consider the cases that were before the Salifh Court, and once they are completed, new cases will be considered. As for court fees, court stamps will be issued. The court will deal with diving cases involving Bahrainis and those subjects covered by British protection, including disputes between Nakhoda, merchants, divers, and issues related to the sale and buy of pearls. The provisions and principles of diving have been translated into Arabic to form the basis of the court work. (IOR/R/15/2/1189 File. 7/5 Belgrave to Bahrain Agency, 21st Aug. 1927)

An the beginning of the diving court, there were about 150 new cases pending. Belgrave suggested to Sheikh Hamad that a representative from the British Agency and a representative of Sheikh Hamad visit the court. Indeed, Sheikh Hamad agreed to support the court, and to ensure that debts would be paid to their owners. In case of necessity, any one can refer to the judiciary, the customary council, or the diving council. (IOR/R/15/2/1189 File. 7/5 Memorandum of Belgrave, 14th March 1927)

The Diving Court in Bahrain faced a problem in dealing with cases related Nakhodas from Qatar or the Trucial Coast due to the different diving laws. So, the British political agent in Bahrain, Bert Ballion, sent Counselor Belgrave regarding the Nakhoda, which includes a which diver to a former Nakhoda. According to the diving law in Bahrain, if Nakhoda joins the diver without a barwah signed by the previous Nakhoda, he will be responsible for paying the debts of the previous Nakhoda. While the diving law in Dubai and Qatar exonerates Nakhoda who, is unaware that the sailor has a previous Nakhoda and debated with him. The political resident had met Sheikh Abdullah Al Khalifa, the ruler of Qatar, who said that the diving law in Qatar is older than the diving law in Bahrain, and he believes that Nakhoda carries the debts of previous Nakhoda and that being unaware of the sailor's debt is an injustice. I propose implementing the Bahraini law on the people of Bahrain and the residents of Bahrain, and applying the law of Qatar in the lawsuits related to Al Thani nationals. Whether they are plaintiffs or defendants, to avoid any future dispute between Bahrain and its neighbors. (IOR/R/15/2/1189 File. 7/5 Bahrain Agency to Belgrave, Nov. 1928)

Belgrave met with several parties in Bahrain to discuss the proposal of the British Political Resident, and the proposal was rejected unanimously, considering that it would cause a major problem in the diving community in Bahrain, due to many considerations, including that Qatar belonged to Bahrain, so how could it be the oldest in diving laws? and Bahrain is the center of the pearl industry in the Gulf Also, the Salifh Court in Bahrain is the fairest and has been able to solve the debt problem annually. (IOR/R/15/2/1189 File. 7/5 Memorandum of Belgrave, 30th Nov. 1347)

In his response, the British political resident in Bahrain showed the resentment of Qatar ruler at the refusal, and demanded that Qatari nationals in Bahrain be treated in the same manner as Bahraini nationals in Qatar. He added that the Mukhamis Court in Qatar is fairer than the Salifh Court in Bahrain, which harms Nakhoda. The purpose is to bridge the points of view between the two countries. (IOR/R/15/2/1189 File. 7/5 Bahrain Agency to Belgrave, 21st Dec. 1928)

Belgrave wrote about the impact of the reforms on seafarers: "The reforms brought about several improvements such as regular accounts, a fixed interest rate, specific advances, and the abolition of the old predecessor court which was a notorious diving court, but its results did not appear quickly. The most difficult thing in the attempts to develop and improve were the divers themselves, because they were highly improvised, and completely illiterate. Most of them do not know how much they owe, as long as they receive advances as young people, they do not care about debt, but when they begin to feel unable to dive, they find themselves forced to do so because of money. So education was the biggest protection for divers from being scammed , but at the current loan rate, it will be many years before even a small percentage of divers can read and write". (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

The government reforms defened the amount of advances that Nakhoda gives to divers. But if Nakhodas want to offer a larger amount, they do not record it in their books, rather, the diver signs a separate receipt. Most divers believe that the loan in this way does not oblige them to dive for the benefit of their Nakhoda. If Nakhoda asks the court to keep the diver to work with him. The court does not recognize this debt because it is outside the diver's book. It will not consider the request. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

Belgrave has recorded that when the reforms first began they were informed with considerable vigour, but lately they are being allowed to slacken. although H. M. Shaikh Hamad is mildly sympathetic toward the divers. He dislikes countenancing any action which may possibly annoy any of the merchants or the Nakhodas. To enforce the diving rules it is sometimes necessary to punish persons who dis-obey them. Shaikh Hamad does not support the courts in doing this. The government go to very little credit for the diving

reforms; the divers themselves do not appreciate the object of them, Nakhodas as a whole dislike them, and many of the big merchants would prefer the old system of unlimited advances, interest, and no proper accounts between divers and their Nakhodas. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

Despite the reforms, the pearl industry began to decline significantly in the Gulf. Pearl industry reached its peak in 1907, then began to decline gradually. Let us follow the numbers of ships working in pearl fishing in the following figure (2), and these ships are proportional in numbers to pearl sales in Bahrain, which was amounted two million dollars in 1835, Then it fell to one million dollars in 1926, and at the end of the Pearl Age in 1949 it fell to two hundred thousand dollars. (Carter, 2005, p. 186)

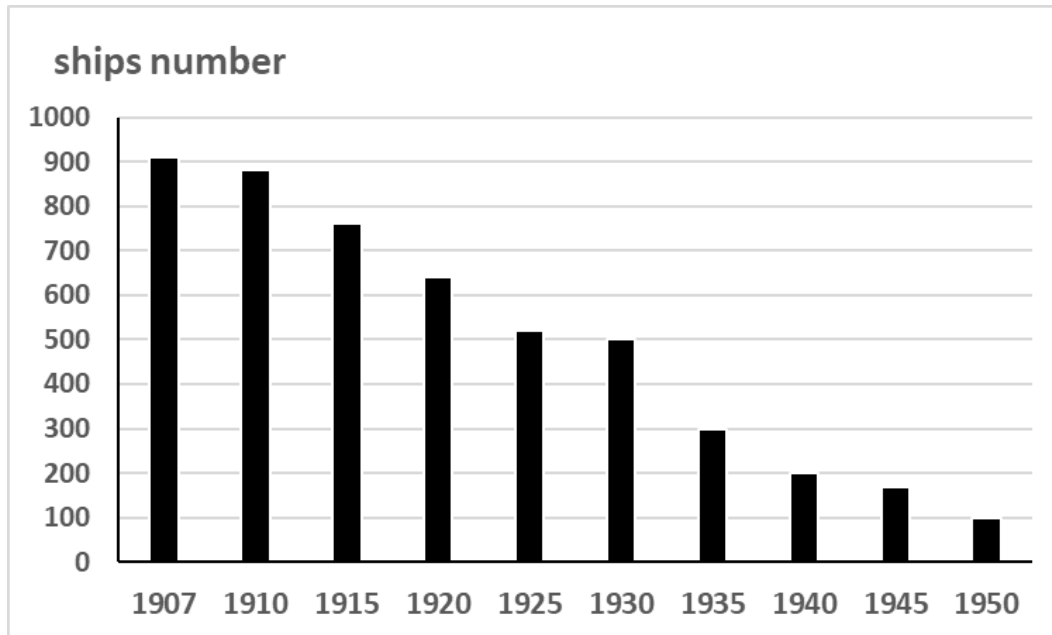


Figure (2) Number of ships working in pearl fishing in the Gulf.

-British role in dealing with the crisis.

Britain gave its employees in the Gulf the right to visit the pearl fisheries and inspect the diving ships. The Political Agent in Bahrain says on August 2, 1932: "I just returned from visiting the pearl fisheries and inspecting the diving ships. Nakhodas and divers showed their pleasure with that visit, except two were very fanatical, to ask them about their diving license. I gave each ship some sugar, fresh lemon, and some medicines that I had brought with me. On my way back I accompanied two divers who were sick; one of them suffers from tuberculosis and cannot live for long, and the other is sick with syphilis. Although the horrific conditions of the fisheries, most of the divers are in good condition. I did not observe any harsh treatment. I was told by all the fisheries that this year's production of pearls is very little. But in any case, some of the Nakhodas found rare, good pearls, which they show only to those who trust that He will buy it from them. To preserve the confidentiality of the price. The weather in fisheries is very hot, but it is calm and suitable for divers and pullers. (Records of the Persian Gulf., Vol. III, p. 15)

Britain noticed the flight of indebted divers to other countries. With the accumulated debts of some divers and their inability to pay it, some of them were fleeing from their home to a new emirate, where they would dive under the protection of a new Sheikh. So, in 1897, Britain asked Sheikhs of the Trucial coast to conclude an agreement to ensure the stability of the pearl industry. The agreement guarantees the handing over of the debtors of those working in pearl diving to their Sheikh. According to which each Sheikh became responsible for the debts of every escape sailor who does not hand him over to his legitimate ruler. In addition to a fine of fifty dollars for every escape sailor who took

refuge with him. It increases to one hundred dollars if he is allowed to work in the field of pearls. If the facts are in dispute, the case is presented to a board whose decisions become final after British Political Resident approved it. (Lorimer, Historical Section, Part 6, p. 3228)

British officials were present at divers' crises, so diving reforms were instituted on the suggestion of the Political Agent, Major Daly, in 1924. The object was to give the divers fairer conditions and to help them to reduce their debts. Before the reforms the conditions of the divers were that of slaves. Nakhodas used to lend money to new divers so that they become hopelessly in debt and have to dive for the Nakhoda for the rest of their lives to wipe off the debt. The divers did not even receive the full amounts which were debited against them as much of it consisted of heavy interest. Goods such as rice, tobacco etc. were also charged against the divers at exorbitant prices. very often they did not receive them. No proper accounts were kept so the men could never check the amounts which they were said to owe. Often when the diver died his sons were compelled to dive for the father's Nakhoda. They also were lent money and soon became bound to the Nakhoda. So, the system flourished. (IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Belgrave report, 19th Dec. 1928)

The Muharraq events took place in May 1932, when large numbers of sailors from Manama gathered at the police station, they managed to break into the police station after smashing its window. The police forces managed to disperse them by firing over their heads. A few sailors and an Indian policeman were wounded. The demonstrators returned to Muharraq under pressure from police, and calm prevailed in the city. The problem reason was that the divers consider the advance is insufficient, and the weakness of the Bahraini government with them during the past two years. (IOR/R/15/2/848 File. 35/3 telegram of Bahrain Agent to Resident Bushire, 26th May. 1932)

Sheikh Hamad asked Belgrave to consult on the subject, then he visited British Resident in Bahrain on July 20, accompanied by princes Abdullah and Salman, they talked about the poverty of divers and the need to deal with them generously. The British Resident informed him that he (sheikh Hamad) was responsible for these disturbances by having increased the advance by an unnecessary double in the past year. He asked him if he would pay the divers this year too, even though the merchants had no money. He added that he believes if the government changes its announcement just because the divers refused to go out, it will lead to major problems in the future. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File 8/3, Bahrain Agent to Bushier Agent, 24th May 1932)

Abdullah bin Isa Al Khalifa, who lives in Muharraq, suggested that the Nakhodas be allowed to give an advance *Tesqam* - if they wanted - of 20 rupees to a diver and 15 to a puller for an end-of-season dive in advance. This may have an effect of enabling the leaders of divers to convince their men out to work, and thus make it difficult for others to fall behind. As they believe that the boats that go first win the largest number of oysters. The political agent advised Sheikh Hamad to allow this, and to arrange for it in such a way as to make the government of Bahrain control the matter. (IOR/R/15/2/122 File 8/3, Bahrain Agent to Bushier Agent, 24th May 1932)

Conclusion

Thus, the pearl industry in the Gulf represented for the Gulf states the first source of income. Bahrain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had become a center for the pearl industry and its trade in the Gulf, It is also a gathering center for immigrants from different regions working in this activity. This industry, which was looking for a source of happiness to decorate the necks of women, was hiding behind it slavery, to which the necks of the Basic elements of this industry, divers and pullers, were subjected. As a result of the debts that burdened them and they were unable to pay it. In the question of the debts the desire of merchants and Nakhodas met with the poverty and illiteracy of the

sailors. So the sailors were obliged to associate themselves to work with their Nakhodas every year, subject to their conditions. Divers were harmed Also through the interest that was imposed on the debts. When they were died their sons obligated to fulfill the debts of their fathers according to custom. The biggest reason of the problem was the excessive advances in the off-season, which was known as Taskam, and its interest which reached to 20%.

Bahrain government did not want to involve in the debt problem, for fear of angering the merchants and the Nakhodas. As for the Salifh court, which was formed of stakeholders; merchants and Nakhodas, it did not do justice to the sailors also. While the Sharia judiciary sensed the sailors slavery problem, and issued rulings condemning the oppression of sailors, and invalidating the interest (usury) on the advances. The British administration and Shaikh Hamad bin Isa took the task of reform upon themselves. Divers began to know the causes and dimensions of the problem. The value of advances was determined, and the advances process was supervised by the Government of Bahrain, which issued diving licenses. And the British administration continued to inspect licenses of diving in the fishers. The Salifh court was abolished and replaced with a diving court, in which the divers participated, to be more equitable and faire.

References

Sources

- IOR/R/15/2/122 File. 8/3 Pearl Industry, 18th Jun 1912 – 18th Sep. 1931
- IOR/R/15/1/234 File. 5/201 Slave Trade, 28th Oct. – 12th Nov. 1918
- IOR/R/15/2/1189 File. 7/5 Organization and function of Salifh court, 5 – 26th Jan. 1927
- IOR/R/15/2/848 File. 35/3 the Divers` Riot of May 1932, 26th May 1932 – 28th Aug. 1933
- IOR/R/15/2/132 File. 9/5 Bahrain reforms in pearling & boats registration, 4th – 12th Feb. 1930
- Lorimer, Gazetteer of the Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia. Vol. 6, Historical, Qatar.
- Lorimer, 1915. Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia. Vol. 1, Historical, Calcutta.
- Records of the Persian Gulf Pearl Fisheries, 1857- 1962, ed. By Burdit, Archive edition, 1995, Vol. I
- Records of the Persian Gulf Pearl Fisheries, 1857- 1962, ed. By Burdit, Archive edition, 1995, Vol. III

References

- Amal Ujail, (1999) Story and history of Arab civilizations, Kuwait, and Bahrain between yesterday and today, Beirut.
- Juma Al-Humairi, (2011) Diving and Pearling Journey, Almarefa wa attanmia albsharia Authority, Government of Dubai.
- Mohamed Abdullah and Basher Zain Elabdeen, (2009) Modern history of Bahrain 1500- 2002, Historical studies center, Bahrain university.
- Omar Salih Al-Omari, (1997) Diving and Pearls in the Gulf: Its Elements, Journey, Trade, Impact, Riyadh.
- Saif Marzouq Al-Shamlan, (1986) History of Pearl Diving in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, Dhat Al-Salasil, Kuwait, 2nd Ed., Part 1

Journals and periodicals

- Clive Holes, the Debate of pearl-diving and Oilwells: a poetic commentary on socio-economic change in the Gulf of the 1930th, Arabic and Middle eastern Literature, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1998

- Robert Carter The History and Prehistory of Pearling in the Persian Gulf, *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient*. June 2005, vol. 48, Issue 2.
- Saad Zakaria and Mohamed Yassien, Population Parameters of the Pearl Oyster *Pinctada radiata* (Leach) in Qatari Waters, Arabian Gulf, *Turkish Journal of Zoology*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Jan. 2003