



Colonial Chaos in the Southern Red Sea

Today, the countries bordering the Red Sea are riven with instability. Why are the region's contemporary problems so persistent and interlinked? Through the stories of three compelling characters, *Colonial Chaos in the Southern Red Sea* sheds light on the unfurling of anarchy and violence during the colonial era. A noble Somali sultan, a cunning Yemeni militia leader and a Machiavellian French merchant ran amok in the southern Red Sea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In response to colonial hostility and gunboat diplomacy, they attacked shipwrecks, launched piratical attacks and traded arms, slaves and drugs. Their actions contributed to the transformation of the region's international relations, redrew the political map, upended its diplomatic culture and remodelled its traditions of maritime law, sowing the seeds of future unrest. Colonisation created chaos in the southern Red Sea. This book offers an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between the region's colonial past and its contemporary instability.

NICHOLAS W. STEPHENSON SMITH received his PhD in African history from Northwestern University, Illinois, where his research won awards including an International Dissertation Research Fellowship from the SSRC. His research was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and was nominated for the Royal Historical Society History Today Prize. He has written several articles, including for the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* and Routledge Series on Indian Ocean and Trans-Asia. He is currently qualifying as a maritime solicitor in the UK.

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Nicholas W. Stephenson Smith

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A History of Violence from 1830 to the
Twentieth Century

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In Memory of David

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Note on the Text

Aban – Somali word connoting the English-language idea of ‘broker’, ‘guide’ or even ‘protector’. Abans came from a ruler’s retinue and lineage. Under the care of an aban, a foreigner became an honorary member of the ruler’s lineage or subjects. Abans performed a simultaneously commercial, ceremonial and diplomatic role. An outsider’s relationship with their aban was far from transactional; it involved the exchange of gifts and hospitality as well as payments of customs on purchased goods.

Abdali Sultanate – The Abdali Sultanate was a small independent kingdom ruling over the far southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. The Abdali family was originally from Sanaa and served as representatives of the Imams of Sanaa (see Zaydi Imamate/Imams of Sanaa), guaranteeing the caravan routes between the Yemeni highlands and the seaport of Aden and collecting customs and duties on passing trade. In about 1740, the Abdali ceased paying dues to the Imams of Sanaa and governed independently for the next century. The Abdali Sultan’s relations with the British East India Company (EIC) began in the 1830s, partly through trade, and partly because the EIC identified Aden as a potential coaling station on a proposed steam-shipping route between India and Egypt. After a series of disagreements over the EIC’s rights to the port, the reigning Abdali Sultan, Sultan Muhsin, signed a truce with the EIC in 1843, though he did not surrender Abdali sovereignty. Thereafter, Aden remained a small Anglo-Abdali enclave, known to the British as the Aden Protectorate. The Abdalis’ capital moved to Lahej, a fertile and slightly elevated region just north of Aden, on the road to the caravan town of Ta’izz, which in turn led to Sanaa. The sultans became the pre-eminent local rulers in the British Aden Protectorate. They took part in the imperial

durbars in India in the late nineteenth century and were often referred to by British officials as the sultans of Lahej.

Abyssinia/Ethiopia – The term Abyssinia (derived from the Arabic Habesha) is used throughout the text to refer to the pre-twentieth-century empires and kingdoms of the northeast African highland zone, comprising contemporary Ethiopia and Eritrea. Ethiopia refers to the nation-state of Ethiopia (and is a toponym derived from the much more general Greek term ‘Aethiop’, meaning roughly ‘sub-Saharan African’, incorporated into Amharic and adopted as the national name by Emperor Haile Selassie in the 1930s). Thus, Abyssinia as used in the text indicates the region subject to the Kingdom of Aksum, the Zagwe dynasty, the Solomonic Empire, the Muslim Ifat Kingdom, and so on.

Aman – Arabic word which literally translates as ‘security’. The Arabic term connotes the clemency offered by Muslims to non-Muslims, or even Muslim foreigners, for the sake of trade.

Dar al-‘ahd – Arabic phrase meaning the ‘territory of truce, treaties or agreements’. A concept that was introduced by early Islamic rulers and jurists to describe the middle lands that, while not non-Muslim, were also not fully recognised as part of the Islamic ecumene. In the view of some Muslim scholars, the dar al-‘ahd was a standalone category of territory equal in status to those described by the terms “dar al-harb” and “dar al-Islam” (see the following two entries in this list). By contrast, other Muslim scholars considered it a subcategory within the dar al-Islam. None of the references in the text are intended as a comment on this debate or on the status of particular regions mentioned in the text. Rather, the term is used to highlight the important role and standing that treaties played in Islamic jurisprudence.

Dar al-harb – Arabic phrase literally meaning the ‘territory of war’, referring to non-Muslim lands. Generally interpreted as connoting confessional differences rather than a summons to fight. Note that the concept does not derive from the Qur’an but rather came into use by Muslim jurors and rulers in the eighth century.

Dar al-Islam – Arabic phrase literally meaning the ‘territory of Islam’, or in other words the lands under the spiritual and/or temporal control of the Caliph. As with dar al-harb, the concept does not derive from the Qur’an but rather came into use by Muslim jurors and rulers in the eighth century.

East India Company/British India – A trading company founded in London in the late 1500s. The Company became highly influential in the trade with South Asia in the 1600s. By the 1700s, it was a full-blown commercial and military organisation, more highly capitalised than the Bank of England. In the 1700s it won military victories over several South Asian kingdoms – and their European allies – securing even wider access to South Asia’s markets. Notable EIC victories included those against the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Sultan of Mysore at the Siege of Srirangapatna in 1799. By the nineteenth century, the EIC had provinces from Baluchistan to Burma, as well as satellite ports, for example in Aden on the Arabian Peninsula and Basra in the far north of the Persian Gulf. In response to accusations of corruption and misrule among its leadership, and also in reaction to the Company’s outsized power, British Prime Minister William Pitt passed The India Act in 1784, which made the Company subject to parliamentary scrutiny. In 1813 and 1833, parliament stripped the Company of its monopoly over trade in South Asia and made the Company an instrument of the British Crown. In 1858, the Government of India Act transferred the Company’s role to the British Crown, ushering in the period of direct British government rule in India known as the ‘British Raj’, which lasted until India’s split from Pakistan and their independence in 1947.

Egyptian Empire – term used to describe the historical empires of Egypt, which spanned the Mediterranean in the north to Juba and the border with contemporary Uganda in the south. Nineteenth-century Egypt was a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire, ruled by descendants of the Mamluk Empire, a slave dynasty of Perso-Turkic administrators whose pre-eminence in the Middle East dated to the first Islamic Caliphates. A series of strong Ottoman-Egyptian governors, who used the Persian title ‘khedive’, expanded the empire south into what is today Sudan and contemporary Eritrea. A number of European administrators served in the Ottoman-Egyptian Empire’s government, including Major General Charles Gordon, who served as Governor-General of Sudan. Protests against Gordon’s rule – part of a widespread opposition to rising British interference in Egypt – culminated in a British invasion of the Sudanese region and the British occupation

of Egypt from 1882 to 1956. Contemporary Egypt is far smaller than the historical empires that came before it.

Hadhramaut – the Hadhramaut consists of a series of river valleys, or wadis, which run down from the Yemeni highlands towards the Indian Ocean coast of the southern Arabian Peninsula. The Hadhramaut stretches east from Aden towards the border with the Omani sphere. The main port of the Hadhramaut is Mukalla, where the al-Kasadi sultans ruled until they were displaced by the Ku'ayti dynasty in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. At the same time as the Ku'ayti dynasty (who had served as officials and military personnel in the government of Hyderabad in South Asia) conquered the region, Britain increased its political contact with the region to the east of Aden, claiming the Hadhramaut region as part of the Aden Protectorate in 1888. The region became part of South Yemen in 1967.

Ifat Sultanate/Adal Sultanate/Afar Sultanates – the Afar are an ethno-linguistic group living in the region surrounding the Gulf of Tadjoura. Their influence once stretched well into the Abyssinian highlands, into the historical Abyssinian province of Shoa, now semi-contiguous with the Oromo population of Ethiopia. Afar-speaking peoples made up the majority of the population of the Ifat Kingdom, a large Muslim empire ruled by the Walashma dynasty which was centred around the western Somali port of Zeila and the Gulf of Tadjoura, and wielded influence up the Awash river valley and indeed across much of eastern Abyssinia between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the early fifteenth century, the Ifat Sultanate was conquered by the Solomonic rulers of highland Abyssinia. However, the Muslim state was partly resurrected by the Adal Sultanate, which expanded dramatically under the influence of Ahmad al-Ghazi in the 1520s and 1530s. After a battle with the Abyssinians and their Portuguese allies, al-Ghazi died and the Adal Sultanate went into retreat, splintering into a number of Afar Sultanates, including the Sultanate of Aussa; the Sultanate of Harar, reputedly the fourth most holy city in Islam in the Ifat-Adal era; the Sultanate of Tadjoura; and the Sultanate of Rohayto, which we will meet in Chapter 4.

Majerteen Sultanate – ruled the northeastern tip of the Horn of Africa, a region roughly contiguous with contemporary northern

Puntland, from the mid-eighteenth century. A Muslim polity and a successor to the Warsangeli Sultanate, which ruled contemporaneously with the Ifat and Adal Sultanates to the east. Like the Warsangeli, the Majerteen trace their origins to Darod, a foundational figure whom the origin story relates was a member of Prophet Muhammad's Quraysh lineage and came to Somalia by being wrecked on the coastline in the twelfth or thirteenth century CE. In the nineteenth century the Majerteen sultans entered a series of treaty agreements with the British in Aden, which initially focused on the protection of British ships. However, these agreements became increasingly detrimental to the Majerteen sultans' sovereignty as the century wore on, and stoked division between the sultan and other members of the Majerteen aristocracy. The Sultanate divided in the 1880s, when the ruler of Alula established a rival sultanate in Hobyo. Both Sultanates became Italian colonies in the 1890s.

Mughal Empire – the Mughal Empire was established by descendants of Ghengis Khan who by the 1400s had strong links to the Persianised Timurid Empire in central Asia. The first Mughal Emperor, Babur, conquered Samarkand, the Afghan polities and the Delhi Sultanate in the late 1400s and early 1500s. Babur's grandson, Emperor Akbar, conquered the wealthy coastal sultanate of Gujarat in the 1570s. By the seventeenth century, the Mughals dominated the Indo-Gangetic plain and Himalayan foothills, which stretch from what is today Pakistan and Afghanistan all the way to Bengal and contemporary Bangladesh. It was the rise of the Mughal Empire (and especially its powerful province in Gujarat), coinciding with the advent of the Cape route from Europe to Asia, which spurred the huge rise in Eurasian and global trade, particularly in South Asian textiles and spices, and paved the way for the success of the EIC. The rise of the Mughals and the attendant spike in international commerce prompted other regional and South Asian states, notably the Marathas and Persians, to expand. Regional rivalry weakened the Mughals and allowed the EIC to expand. In 1818 the Maratha Confederacy, which included wealthy Gujarat, collapsed following war with the EIC. The EIC deposed the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, in 1857. Just under two decades later, Queen Victoria was crowned Empress of India.

Oman, Zanzibar and the Kingdom of Hormuz – much of the coast of contemporary Oman was part of the Kingdom of Hormuz, based on the island of Hormuz in the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, in the sixteenth century. In the Arabian interior, the Imam of Oman was the most significant authority. The Portuguese conquered the Kingdom of Hormuz and many of the Kingdom's Omani coastal settlements in 1515. The arrival of the Portuguese spurred a process of counter-conquest and political consolidation by the Imam of Oman. The Imamate ultimately drove the Portuguese from the coast by 1650 and even wrested some of Portugal's East African settlements from Portuguese control, including several coastal enclaves and the East African island of Zanzibar. Internecine conflict, as well as tensions with the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, saw Omani power wane in East Africa. However, in 1749, the al-Bu Said dynasty, which still rules Oman, consolidated control in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. The al-Bu Saids also reinstated Omani control on the East African coast, including at Zanzibar. In 1798, the EIC signed treaties with Oman's rulers to prevent Oman from establishing diplomatic relations with other European powers, notably the French. A succession dispute within the dynasty precipitated the creation of two independent kingdoms in Oman and in Zanzibar/East Africa in the 1850s. While Oman would remain independent, the Sultanate of Zanzibar lost many of its East African possessions and became a British protectorate in 1890. This lasted until 1963, when Sultan Jamshid bin Abdullah became the independent ruler of Zanzibar. However, in 1964, he was overthrown and Zanzibar was joined with Tanzania.

Ottoman Empire – a Middle East empire that originated among the Turkic polities that succeeded the Seljuk opponents to the Mongols on the Anatolian plateau in the early 1300s. Moving west, the Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453, and by the late 1400s had taken control of much of what is today considered eastern Europe and the Balkans. Thereafter, the Ottomans set their sights on the Middle East, increasingly conceiving of their empire as a Caliphate, as successors to the Umayyads and Abbasids. In 1517, they conquered much of what is today Syria and Iraq, as well as Egypt, Sudan, the Hejaz and Yemen. The Ottomans withdrew from the Yemeni provinces of the Arabian

Peninsula in 1635. In the early 1800s, the Porte – as the Ottoman capital was known – instituted a series of modernising reforms known as the Tanzimat. This included reform of government administration and the military. At the same time, the Ottomans embarked on a series of imperial adventures in the Arabian Peninsula, expanding south of the Hejaz into the Tihamat ‘Asir and Yemen in 1849 and into highland Yemen in 1870.

Prize – from the early seventeenth century, in European Admiralty law, a prize was an enemy ship captured during armed conflict. The captain and crew of the capturing ship would normally be entitled to claim part of the value of the captured ship’s cargo and/or hull. Note that while prize law in many countries still allows navies to claim the value of ships seized during wartime, following the end of World War I the funds were not normally retained by the captain and crew, a change that removed the financial incentive for a captain to capture enemy ships.

Salvage – a concept in both European and Islamic maritime law whereby when a ship is wrecked or found in distress at sea, the salvor may claim either (in Islamic maritime law) a reward for assistance rendered or (in European maritime law) a part of value of the ship’s cargo. The amount that the salvor may claim (alongside other vested interests such as the ship and cargo owners) is governed in Europe by the rules of general average and in the Islamic world by provisions for rewards made by treaty between seafaring governments.

Sanjak – an old Ottoman term for ‘flag’, denoting an administrative district. Following the promulgation of the Vilayet Law of 1864 as part of the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms, sanjaks became ‘second order’ administrative districts, subordinate to larger vilayets, or provinces. Some of the regions mentioned in this study, particularly those in the Arabian Peninsula, had been sanjaks after the Ottoman-Egyptian conquests of the Arabian Peninsula in the early sixteenth century. Following their reconquest in the mid-nineteenth century, they became vilayets, subdivided into sanjaks.

Sayyid – an honorific title, used by both spiritual and temporal rulers in the Islamic world, which connotes direct descent from one of the lineages of the Prophet Muhammad. In the pre-Islamic period, the title applied to chief of the tribe and was used somewhat interchangeably with the title *Shaykh*.

Shafi’is and *Zaydis* – a school of Sunni Islamic law that is prevalent in the coastal regions of the southern Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean littoral. The *Shafi’is* simply subscribe to a particular school of Islamic law; their political leaders are diverse and their theological beliefs can be similar or identical to those of other Sunni Muslims in the Middle East. In the Yemeni context, the coastal *Shafi’is* are often contrasted with the highland *Zaydis*. *Zaydis* are described as sectarian because adherents are bound to follow the temporal and spiritual rule of the Imam of Yemen, whose ninth-century founder – Zayd ibn ‘Ali – diverged from the rule of the Caliphs and gave the *Zaydis* their name. By contrast, *Shafi’is* followed an array of different rulers. While there are doctrinal differences, the ground-level reality was that the *Zaydis* and *Shafi’is* were often mixed, with followers of the *Zaydi* Imams practicing a *Shafi’i* form of Islam when they lived in the coastal regions of Yemen.

Shaykh – a pre-Islamic honorific title that connotes the idea of a patriarch of a kinship group such as a tribe, a clan or even simply a family. The title is also used by the heads of religious brotherhoods and other non-lineal groups and may even refer simply to certain virtuous qualities of leadership, including but not limited to religious knowledge.

Tihamat ‘Asir – *Tihamat* means ‘coastal plain’ and ‘*Asir*’ refers to its ‘difficult’ geography, being composed of a steep escarpment and a narrow, arid, coastal plain between the Yemeni mountains and the sea. The plain is, in fact, part of the far northern ridge of the great Rift Valley, the prehistoric continental rift which runs all the way to southern Africa. The northern boundary lies around Kunfida, north of the Farasan Islands. The southern border was quite fluid, contested by different rulers from both ‘*Asir*’ and Yemen. Sometimes referred to simply as ‘*Asir*’. The ruler most strongly associated with this region in this study was Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Idrissi.

Tihamat al-Hejaz – most often referred to in Europe simply as ‘the Hejaz’ and encompassing the Muslim Holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Under the control of the Islamic Caliphates in the Middle Ages, and later in the Ottoman Empire, it was administered by the Sharifs of Mecca, who claimed lineal descent from the Prophet Muhammad (the most well-known of whom was Sharif Husayn

Ibn ‘Ali, who entered a doomed alliance with the British during World War I). The Sharif’s influence, and thus the extent of the Hejaz, extended north to the Sinai Peninsula and south to Kunfida. The coast includes the ports of Jiddah and Yan’bu. Their influence was challenged by Wahhabi rulers from the inland desert region of Nejd from the early nineteenth century; Ibn Saud ultimately displaced the Sharifs as rulers of the Hejaz in 1925.

Tihamat Yemen – a continuation of the western Arabian Peninsula’s coastal plain, which runs roughly between Shaykh Said in the south and to somewhere north of Hodeida, but south of Jazan, in the north. The main port of the region is Mukha. The location of the northern border of the Tihamat Yemen changed over time as regional rulers took control of different ports and anchorages along the coast. For example, following World War I, Hodeida fell to the ‘Asiri ruler Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Idrissi, but was reclaimed for Yemen by Imam Yahya in 1934 (for details of both, see *Dramatis Personae*). The northern border of the Tihamat Yemen is shared with the Tihamat ‘Asir.

Tihamiyin – a general-purpose noun derived from the root, referring to the people of the whole Tihamat Hejaz, Yemen and ‘Asir.

Zaraniq – an ethno-military movement led by Shaykh Nasr Ambari. Based originally in the Shaykh Said peninsula in the far south of the Tihamat Yemen, British, Ottoman and later French military patronage helped the movement to expand in the 1880s. Under the rule of Ambari’s lieutenant, Ahmad Fatini, the *Zaraniq* was briefly transformed into a fighting force numbering some 10,000 men and their families, whose control of the Tihamat Yemen stretched from Mukha almost as far north as Hodeida. Fatini briefly lobbied the international community for recognition of *Zaraniq* sovereignty along the coast in the 1920s but was subsumed by the conquests of Imam Yahya and Ibn Saud in 1928.

Zaydi Imamate/Imams of Sanaa – beginning in the ninth century, the Zaydi imams ruled over highland Yemen until 1962. Sometimes described as a branch of Shi’ism, Zaydism is a heterodox form of Islam peculiar to highland Yemen. The fourth Caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet, Caliph ‘Ali, was the first to introduce Islam from the Yemeni highlands. ‘Ali’s descendant Zayd later rose

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Note on the Text

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against the Ummayyad Caliphate in the ninth century CE. The Zaydis' belief in the spiritual supremacy of the Imams does have parallels with Shi'ism, and while Zaydism was and remains distinct, it has become increasingly mixed with Shi'ite Ismailism, as well as blending with some Shafi'i ideas.

Dramatis Personae

Majerteenia

Sultan Uthman Mahmud Yusuf – long-serving head of the Majerteen Sultanate in the northeast of contemporary Somalia, roughly contiguous with northern Puntland. Ruled between the late 1850s and the 1920s. Commonly abbreviated in this text to Sultan Uthman.

Nur Uthman – regent to the Majerteen ruler Sultan Uthman Mahmud Yusuf during his minority in the 1840s and 1850s.

Lt. Charles Cruttenden – a lieutenant in the Indian Navy in the 1840s who travelled and wrote widely about the north-western Indian Ocean region. Shipwrecked in Majerteenia in 1844.

Brigadier William Coghlan – Political Resident, or ruler, of the British settlement of Aden under East India Company rule. His Residency lasted between 1854 and 1863.

Sir Robert Lambert Playfair, KCMG – joined the Madras Artillery (a branch of the East India Company army) in 1846. In 1854, Playfair transferred from the Madras Artillery to become an Assistant Political Agent to the Resident in the East India Company port of Aden. He remained in Aden until the late 1860s, whereafter he entered British Foreign Office service in Zanzibar and North Africa until his retirement in the 1880s. While in Aden, he took part in a number of treaty negotiations in what would become British Somaliland and led several missions to Majerteenia, where he signed treaties with Sultan Uthman (see Sultan Uthman) in 1858 and 1866.

Major J. S. King – Assistant Resident in Aden in the mid-1880s who led a number of diplomatic missions to Majerteenia and the northern Somali coast. One of the first Europeans to attempt to create a system for transcribing Somali into Arabic.

Dramatis Personae

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Major Charles Goodfellow, VC – Assistant Resident in Aden in the late 1870s who led a diplomatic treaty and salvage mission to the Majerteen coast in the wake of a number of significant steamship wrecks in the east of the country in 1878–1879.

Georges Révoil – French explorer, diplomat and writer who led a number of missions to Majerteenia in 1878 and the early 1880s.

Yusuf ‘Ali – a minor member of the Uthman lineage in Majerteenia and governor of the port of Alula in the 1870s and 1880s. Self-declared Sultan of Hobyo from 1885.

Count Paul von Hatzfeldt – German diplomat and Foreign Minister who served as the German Ambassador to London from 1885 to 1901.

Archibald Primrose, Earl of Roseberry – British Foreign Secretary in 1886 and between 1892–1894. Briefly Prime Minister of Britain between 1894 and 1895.

Vincenzo Filonardi – Italian naval captain and shipping-line owner based in Zanzibar who advocated for Italy’s interests in Somalia in the 1880s and signed treaties with Yusuf ‘Ali and Sultan Uthman.

Cavaliere Giulio Pestalozza – Italian diplomat and traveller who served as Italy’s consul to Zanzibar in the 1890s and 1900s. Involved in negotiations for an Italian treaty with Sultan Uthman and Yusuf ‘Ali.

Sayyid Barghash bin Said al-Bu Said – the second Sultan of Zanzibar who ruled between 1870 and 1888. His father, Said bin Sultan, was a ruler of Muscat and Oman and moved to Zanzibar in the 1840s (see ‘Oman, Zanzibar and the Kingdom of Hormuz’ in Note on the Text).

Muhammad Abdille Hassan – the Somali-born and Somali-speaking leader of anti-colonial jihad in what is today Ogaden, which lasted, on and off, between the late 1890s and 1920.

Tihamat Yemen

Shaykh Nasr Ambari – the leader of a clan of the Subahi based on the Shaykh Said peninsula to the west of Aden. Ambari became a powerful military leader of a group known collectively as the Zaraniq in the Tihamat Yemen, especially south of the port of

Hodeida, in the 1880s. Ambari remained leader of the Zaraniq until the 1910s.

Ahmad Fatini – a lieutenant to Shaykh Nasr Ambari; succeeded Ambari as de facto leader of the Zaraniq in the late 1910s or early 1920s.

Naqib of Mukalla – Naqib is an honorific abbreviating the Naqib al-ashraf, or the head of the ashraf, i.e. the descendants of the Prophet. Such groups formed into corporate organisations throughout the Muslim world. In Mukalla, the Naqib served as a sort of corporate ruler who wielded considerable influence over religious, legal and diplomatic affairs.

Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Idrisi – ruler and spiritual leader in the coastal ‘Asir region of the Arabian Peninsula between approximately 1905, when he was teaching in the Sudan, and his death in 1923. Allied with the British and French during World War I. The Sayyid was succeeded by his son, ‘Ali, and later by ‘Ali’s uncle, Muhammad’s brother, Hasan. The Idrisi state lasted until 1934.

Imam Yahya – elected Imam of Yemen in 1904. Imam Yahya ruled the Zaydi population of highland Yemen alongside the Ottomans from the highland city of Sanaa until 1918, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and the Imam became the independent leader of highland Yemen until his death in 1948. From the 1920s, Imam Yahya fought various wars of expansion, including a border war with the British in Aden in the 1920s, and including his (re) conquest of the coast, the Tihamat Yemen, to the Imamate in the 1920s.

Abdulaziz Ibn Muhammad al-Saud – conquered Riyadh from the Rashidis in 1902 and became the founder of the contemporary kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Conquered Nejd in the 1900s, the Hejaz from the Sharifian rulers in the 1920s, and as far south as Hodeida by 1934. Hodeida ultimately fell to Imam Yahya and the border between contemporary Saudi Arabia and Yemen lies just north of that port city. Referred to in this text as Ibn Saud.

French Somaliland/Gulf of Tadjoura

Governor Léonce Lagarde – the first governor of French Somaliland in the mid-1880s. Moved the capital of the French colony to Djibouti, a port he founded in 1888. Served until 1899.

Sultan of Tadjoura – ruler of the port of Tadjoura, a town in the west of the Gulf of Tadjoura. The Sultanate was established in the early 1600s, after the collapse of the Ifat Sultanate and its successor state based in Harar, under Ahmad Gran. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Sultanate was nominally subordinate to Abyssinia, after which it shifted allegiance to French Somaliland. Involved in the slave trade between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Gabriel Guignuiony – French merchant and owner of an import and export firm that specialised in the trade in arms in Djibouti in the early 1900s. Employed and partnered with Henry de Monfreid in the 1910s.

Henry de Monfreid – French trader, writer and agent of the French empire in northeast Africa and the southwestern Arabian Peninsula. Career in the Red Sea spanning the years between 1911 and 1930, examined in Chapter 4.

Governor Adrien Bonhoure – Governor of French Somaliland between 1899 and 1915.

Gaston Doumergue – friend of de Monfreid's father. Elected as Deputy for one of France's Pyrenean regions in the 1910s. Minister responsible for the Colonies in France between 1914 and 1924. Became President of France in 1924, serving until 1931.

Joseph Kessel – Argentinian-born to parents of Russian heritage, but raised in France, and became a celebrated French author and journalist. Kessel was commissioned by *Le Matin* newspaper to write a series of articles about French Somaliland in 1928–1929.

Governor Pierre-Amable Chapon-Baissac – a veteran colonial official by the time he arrived as Governor of Djibouti in 1925. Prior to being posted to Djibouti, his most recent role had been the governorship of the Côte d'Ivoire.