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Muscat

Oman: A Unique Gulf State

Joe P. Dunn, Charles A. Dana Professor, Converse College

I have been privileged to participate on many National Council study-travel trips: as Joseph J. Malone Fellow in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine/Israel, and in other National Council capacities to Egypt, Morocco, UAE, Jordan, Qatar, and Oman. To place Oman at the top of the list of visits is no small declaration. The country is beautiful and our visits to the mountains, the desert, Yemeni

border, the various cultural sights, as well as the hospitality were almost beyond description. However, I will let other essays in this issue address the wider travel and cultural experience.

As a student of the region, my primary interests are the different manifestations of Islam in the political arena and in national security issues. That is what I will focus on here. Last year as a Qatar Foundation Fellow, I visited Qatar,

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Group at Grand Mosque

where my son recently completed a tour at Al Udeid Air Base as the senior air defense officer in the Central Command East headquarters. My experience this year, in late December and early January, as Alwaleed bin Talal Fellow to the Sultanate of Oman, was even better, and it further expanded my exposure to another manifestation of Islam.

The practice of Islam in the Sultanate is one of the most inclusive and tolerant manifestations in the Islamic world. About 75% of Omanis identify with the Ibadhi sect, which is neither Sunni or Shia, although one could make an argument that it is a branch of Sunnism. Ibadhis trace their lineage back to the original schism that predated the Sunni-Shia split. Ibadhis are very close to traditional Sunni practices, but Ibadhis are more inclusive. The embracing of difference and inclusion is not only among Muslims but with other faiths as well. Shias are considered equals (often praying together in the same mosque), and Oman endorses

the practice of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Bahia, and other faith communities in houses of worship built on land provided by the Sultan. However, these places of worship are primarily for foreign inhabitants as strictures exist against proselytizing among Muslim populations.

It is a bit difficult to determine how much the tolerance is Ibadhi and how much the personal impact of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, a remarkable Renaissance man who has literally made the country during his 45 years in power. Although it is not one of the leading petroleum producers in the Gulf, no country more than Oman has better employed its wealth to advance the country both in economic modernization and in the development of civil society. Omanis emphasize moderation and inclusion in every aspect of their national self-definition. Christmas trees flourished in shopping malls and in one I was struck by traditional Christian hymns playing as background music. It might be hard to find a

better example of ecumenicalism than covered Muslim women in black and Hindu women in Indian adornments shopping to the tune of "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine." In a region of rampant sectarianism, Oman's practices are reassuring.

Beyond religion, Oman is also a force of stability and moderation in the region. A long-time ally of the U.S., it has hosted every U.S. military operation in the Gulf region since 1980, partnered in the campaigns against terrorism and piracy in the Gulf and Arabian Sea, supported peace efforts with Israel to include meeting with Israeli leaders, and acted as an intermediary between the U.S. and Iran on a number of issues to include a major role in facilitating the Iranian nuclear agreement. Oman is also a major purchaser of U.S. military equipment and a partner against ISIS; however, the country seldom participates in actual military confrontation. "Friend to all, enemy to none" is Oman's mantra. Oman is the only Gulf country with a close relationship with Iran and indeed the only one not to knuckle under Saudi pressure to break or downgrade relations with Iran during the Saudi-Iran crisis at the first of the year.

Despite that Oman avoids military engagement, the Oman Royal Armed Forces of approximately 70,000 troops, is one of the best trained and most professional militaries in the region. The country lies at the choke point of the crucial shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz and it has contributed mightily to maintaining the free and unfettered passage that is essential to the global economy. It has also cooperated with the United States to maintain security in the Bab al-Mandab and Gulf of Aden another critical area for international shipping that passes

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Grand Mosque

through the Suez Canal.

Sultan Qaboos is the longest serving leader in the region and is clearly one of the most respected. Dedicated to regional peace and security, he is a diplomat who works behind the scenes to try to ameliorate conflict and to act as emissary for dialogue among enemies. His record of achievements is impressive. What happens after him is a legitimate question and is somewhat unsettling. The Sultan is all powerful and for all his other achievements, the forces of democracy are not rooted. A succession crisis is very possible. The Sultan's successor doubtless will not have the reservoir of respect and loyalty, internally and

externally, that are hallmarks of Qaboos' authority. Whomever assumes the reins of power will face continuing issues of declining oil reserves, economic diversification, privatization, political participation and transparency, the challenges of serving a swelling youth population, and the balance of tradition and modernization.

Oman's strategic geographical position will not change. Indeed if the country is successful in developing port and transportation facilities that allow countries to avoid traversing the expensive and potentially dangerous Straits of Hormuz, it can challenge Dubai as an international shipping center for the region, and

the Sultanate will become even more important. On another economic front, the potential for significant growth in its nascent tourist industry is an exciting avenue for Oman.

Not many Americans know anything about Oman or could even find it on a map. When I announced that I was going to Oman, most people inquired where it was and why anyone would travel there. That lack of knowledge is unfortunate. Oman is a valuable friend in a volatile region. And it is a delightful place to visit. I hope that readers of the essays in this edition will come to know much more about this unique country.

Our Oman Travelogue

Dr. Lori J. Owens, Jacksonville State University

After experiencing a fellowship to Yemen in 2008, I was anxious to visit other Arab countries not only to absorb more of the culture but to be able to compare and contrast Yemen with other countries in the region. I applied for a Malone Fellowship to Saudi Arabia in the summer of 2015 and was soon notified that I had been awarded a fellowship. I was excited about the opportunity. I received a call from the National Council the week of Thanksgiving notifying me that the fellowship destination had been changed to Oman. I had read with envy the accounts of the annual Oman trips sponsored by the NCUSAR so I was elated when I received the news about the Alwaleed bin Talal Fellowship.

After receiving the lengthy pre-departure readings from the NCUSAR, I began preparing for what I knew would be a magnificent educational and cultural experience. As with the fellowship to Yemen, the National Council worked diligently to make sure we

Mutrah Fort in Muscat



had the information we needed to garner the most from the fellowship. I already knew a few of the people who would be traveling to Oman including Dr. Joe Dunn and Dr. Kirill Bumin both from the MAL. As with the trip to Yemen, Dr. John Duke Anthony would be accompanying us to Oman and I looked forward to his first-hand insight into the treasures that Oman had to offer. Following a full day of briefings in D.C., we flew overnight to Qatar and then on to Muscat, Oman and arrived at the Crowne Plaza just before midnight on December 30 for what would be a busy and yet very enjoyable ten days in the Sultanate of Oman.

During our time in Muscat, we visited with the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Cultural Affairs, and Oman's ambassador to the Gulf Cooperation Council. Our visit even made the local Omani newspaper!!! While in Muscat, the delegation visited the souq in Mutrah which is home to antique shops selling Indian and Omani artifacts, textiles, spices,

gold, and local art. The Mutrah Fort built by the Portuguese in the 1580s was also on the itinerary as was the exterior of the Sultan's Palace and the beautiful grounds which displayed many of the annuals grown in the Southern portion of the United States such as bougainvillea, marigolds, and petunias.

Another highlight of our time in Muscat was an afternoon visit to the seaside home of the late Dr. Donald Bosch and his wife Elizabeth, who traveled to Oman in 1955 as medical missionaries and educators from the United States. There was limited electricity in Oman at the time. Dr. Bosch is regarded as a pioneer in healthcare in Oman and his wife taught at the American Mission School in Muscat. As a tribute to the humanitarian efforts of this couple, the Sultan Qaboos granted Donald and Eloise Bosch Omani nationality and built them a seaside home for them to enjoy in their retirement years. David Bosch, son of Donald and Elizabeth, and his two siblings hosted us for the afternoon and shared some lovely photographs of their carefree days as children exploring Oman. It was amazing to see how the architecture and skyline had changed very little in the slides they shared. Their appreciation for Oman and her people was very evident in their accounts of growing up in the region. Dr. and Mrs. Bosch were also avid shell collectors and discovered several new shells and were given the opportunity to name those shells. Mrs. Bosch, now in her nineties, graciously greeted our group and presented each of us with a book profiling shells that she co-authored with her late husband.

We also visited the Nizwa mountains and enjoyed a 4.5 mile hike through several small villages

Lori in front of Sultan Qaboos' Palace in Muscat



Following two days in Muscat highlighted by a Star Wars' themed New Year's Eve Party at the Crowne Plaza, we ventured toward the Wahiba Desert and visited the area of Wadi Tiwi in route to the desert. The area includes beautiful emerald pools and walking opportunities through various small villages that line the road. Our group arrived at the safari camp near sundown and enjoyed a buffet dinner and music before retiring to individual huts with a single light bulb over the bed and a mosquito net. Fortunately, we did not need the nets!!! We awoke the next morning to get a better view of the beautiful, copper colored sand and the camels we would be riding. Four of us took the plunge and decided to try the camel ride. I am glad it was a short ride.

We also visited the Nizwa mountains and enjoyed a 4.5 mile hike through several small villages

where olive and fig trees lined the rugged path. We also toured the historic Nizwa Fort built in the 17th century which is hailed as an architectural show piece for Oman and is visited by over 58,000 tourist a year. A stop at the UN world heritage site water system known as the FALAJ system dating back to the first millennium BC marked one of our last stops in the Nizwa region before departing for Salalah.

We left Nizwa and flew to the coast of Salalah which is in the southern portion of the country and is adorned with coconut and banana trees, and camels crossing major highways on a regular basis. The variety of geography in Oman is most interesting as the land boasts of a desert area and the beautiful tropical destination of Salalah which is the summer vacation spot for many working class and middle class Arabs during the hot, summer months where the

temperatures can reach 120 degrees in other parts of Oman. The temperature ranged in the low to mid 80s while we were there in early January.

While in Salalah, we visited the Taqah Castle, the Sumhuran ruins and museum, the museum of the Frankincense Land which houses a great maritime hall and history hall, and the Al-Baleed Archaeological Park with ruins dating back to 2000 BC. Frankincense, a very valuable spice which comes from the sap of the Frankincense tree is found in very few areas of the world, but it is harvested and available in Oman. The well preserved 18th century Taqah Castle museum features a furnished interior, craft shop, and booklet that explains the history of the sardine-producing village while the Sumhuran ruins offers a beautiful seaside view of camels resting in the lagoon.

As part of our final few days in

*Mountain scenes*

Oman, we made a stop at their version of a Sam's Club to a place called LuLu's Hypermarket. We each selected our food for lunch that day as we planned to venture to the Yemen border and enjoy a picnic overlooking the sea. We made our way to the border without incident and enjoyed a casual drive back to Salalah with several stops along the way including a beach stop to enjoy the setting sunset.

I tried to savor my final day in Salalah as I was not certain when I would return but I already knew I would return one day soon. After completing our reports for Dr. Anthony, several enjoyed a swim

in the pool while others relished a casual stroll along the beach. As Maria Curtis, a fellow educator in the Houston area, and I enjoyed the beach we happened upon an Omani man training a beautiful silver Arabian horse on the beach. The horse was majestic enough, but when the sun reflected off the horse it gave the horse a metallic sheen. I thought that walk along the beach was a fitting way to mark the end of such a wonderful experience.

Oman is definitely a gem in the region and probably the best kept secret on the Arabian Peninsula. I have enjoyed discussing the experience with others and

will continue to share the story of Oman's example of friendship and moderation. I would like to thank Dr. John Duke Anthony and the National Council for this unique opportunity. Our delegation was a terrific group of travelers and included Dr. John Duke Anthony, Mr. John Pratt, Dr. Joe Dunn, Dr. Kirill Bumin, Dr. Maria Curtis, Dr. Jacob Dorn, Dr. Lisa Steinbach, and Ms. Beatrice (Bea) Brickell. I would travel with this group again anytime!!! Kudos to our tour guide, Mr. Badar Al Yazeedi with Panorama Tours, who coordinated a fabulous trip and took such great care of us.

Muscat Greets the World

Ed Lynch, Hollins University

Reprinted with permission from the Roanoke Times, November 1, 2015

Flying into Oman for the first time, a visitor gets the impression that the entire country is made out of rock. Muscat, the capital, hugs the coast of the Gulf of Oman against a backdrop of bare rocky hills that give the impression that they are slowly but surely getting closer. The city is far longer than it is wide, with most of its important buildings only a few blocks from the sea.

This seaward orientation is appropriate, not only because of the country's long seafaring heritage, but also because Oman legally controls the most important sea lane in the world: the Strait of Hormuz, through which 60 percent of the world's oil passes. On the other side of that Strait, the Islamic Republic of Iran looms as a dangerous but inescapable reality. The mountains too are symbolic of this nation's unique position, for on the other side of those mountains lies Saudi Arabia, whose intentions toward Oman are hidden behind diplomatic and political walls as impenetrable as the mountains themselves.

With only 3.3 million people, and without the prodigious oil wealth of its neighbors, Oman can make its way in this most dangerous of neighborhoods only with total isolation or total openness. Happily for visitors to this place of stark beauty, they have opted for the latter. Visitors to Muscat find a place that is accessible, inexpensive, friendly (especially to Americans) and, perhaps best, not overrun with tourists.

Indeed, one of the most attractive features of Muscat is the extent to which Oman's authentic culture is immediately visible.

The dress is an eclectic combination of dishdashas, headscarves and burkas, along with jeans, open shirts and western business suits. The streets are mercifully free of tourist buses and one can spend days in the city without ever once seeing a group of people following a flag-holding tour guide. Traditional markets, or souks, are almost wholly patronized by locals.

Not that Muscat lacks tourist attractions. The streets themselves might be viewed as an attraction, as a symbol of Oman's recent history. The country emerged from isolation only 45 years ago, with the rise of Sultan Qaboos, still the country's leader. In 1970, the entire country had fewer than ten miles of paved roads, three schools and one hospital. Since then, Oman's oil wealth (far less than the Saudis' or Kuwaitis', but still considerable) has fueled a revolution of modernization. Muscat's ultra-modern infrastructure is perhaps the most visible result. The Muttrah souk, the region's only air-conditioned outdoor souk, is another modern addition.

In a city in which every building features a portrait of the Sultan, it is not surprising that one of the best attractions is the Al Alam Palace, built in 1972 and done in a modern artistic style that exudes a faint aroma of India. The Palace backs onto the Old Harbor of Muscat, which is best viewed at twilight. The Old Harbor is home to dhows that seem to be waiting for Sinbad the Sailor. On either side of the Harbor are the Portuguese forts Mirani and Jalali, which give the impression that the forts grew spontane-

ously out of the rocky coast. The palace, used mostly for ceremonial events, is intended to be a monument to the Sultan's power and influence.

But a better monument is what visitors do not see in Muscat. Every other developing country capital I have visited has had many fine homes, but they have all been surrounded by high walls and barbed wire – inequality on display. There is little barbed wire visible in Muscat. Few houses have walls. Muscat lacks the highly-visible police and military presence that intimidates visitors and residents alike in many capitals I have visited.

The largest building in Muscat is the Grand Mosque, whose five minarets (for the five pillars of Islam) dominate the city skyline. Here the rock is polished to a mirror-like sheen, making it almost painful to look at the building in Muscat's bright sunlight. The subdued-light interior eases eyestrain, but only until the visitor looks around. The Grand Mosque is nothing short of breathtaking. The interior space is so large that even the huge pillars scattered about seem almost dainty, effortlessly holding up a high ceiling and the weight of that ceiling's intricate decorations. Equally impressive is the carpet, whose pattern is geometric, colorful and the perfect route to contemplation of the infinite. A 45-foot high chandelier draws visitors' eyes upward. Islamic arches, with blocks of alternating colors, set off the side aisles.

The overall impression of the Grand Mosque, however, even with so much complex artwork, is one of grand simplicity. There



Mountain scenes

is no altar; there are no pews. A simple raised balcony permits an imam to read passages from the Qur'an. Perhaps it is the mosque's sheer size that permits this juxtaposition of intricacy and simplicity. Its interior can hold 5,000 worshippers, making it one of the largest places of worship in the world.

Later in my visit to Oman,

I could not help but contrast the Grand Mosque with a tiny mosque I saw in a village in the interior. As small and isolated as it was, it had an electronic loudspeaker to call the faithful to prayer. The device and the electric power to make it work are exemplars of the Oman's newfound wealth and its leadership's goal to insure that all Omanis share in

the fruits of that wealth. To me, that small mosque seemed symbolic of Oman's intention to embrace much of what the modern world has to offer, while holding onto their cherished traditions, and resisting the more corrosive waves of modernity by standing fast. Like a rock.

Another Successful Year for Converse at the National Model Arab League



JCC deliberates

At the National Model Arab League conference, held April 8-10, 2016, at Georgetown University, Northeastern University, representing Morocco, was named "Best Overall Delegation." Converse College, representing Tunisia, took the "Overall Outstand-

ing Delegation" Award. The U.S. Air Force Academy, representing Turkey, an observer country in the Arab League, finished third with the "Distinguished Delegation" citation. For Converse, this marked 28 years of award performance at this competition and

completed another season with top awards in all four of its major competitions. Converse chaired four of the regular councils and a fifth in the Joint Crisis Council. Kandice Miles was recognized as Distinguished Chair for her leadership in the Political Council. Of the twenty-five Converse students who competed at the National Model, eleven were freshman so the future continues to look bright for the delegation. In the competitive application and interview process, Converse landed three chairs for next year's model--Sidney Jones, Jessica Morgan, and freshman Jayda Means.

During the year, a film crew recording a documentary followed the Converse delegation at all MAL events. Three freshmen and one first-year junior member were profiled for the entire season. During competition, they wore microphones and had lights and cameras in their faces when they

Women in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia Symposium

Under the leadership of Dr. Cathy Jones, associate professor of French and women's studies, Converse, hosted a symposium on women in post-revolutionary Tunisia, April 4-6, in memory of Dr. Nabiha Jerad. The Tunisian participants, who made group and classroom presentations over the several day, included Dr. Afef Hammami, director of the AFA Alzheimer Center; Dr. Ghalia Khadhar, a painter/art therapist/geriatrician; Monia Jerald Chehata, Arabic/Frensh/English translator for the U.S. State Department; and French doctoral student Saida Bedhiafi. Other events included an art show opening at the new Janick Jones Gallery, located near Hendersonville, NC. The display included work from two of the participants and other prominent Tunisian painters.

The event was sponsored by the Dr. Nabiha Jerad Foundation and the Converse College National Endowment for the Humanities Committee.

Heads of State Council



spoke. Despite this distraction, all four won awards during the year.

The other participating institutions at the National Model included George Washington University, San Francisco State University, U.S. Military Academy

at West Point, Brigham Young University, University of Utah, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, George Mason University, American University of Cairo, Adrian College, Texas State University, John Carroll University, Uni-

versity of Houston—Honors College, Mercer University, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Grand Valley State University, Miami University of Ohio, Roger Williams University, Shawnee State University, and Universite Laval (Canada). As an exploratory venture, Spartanburg Community College sent a small number of students who filled empty spots in two councils.

During concluding ceremonies, Dr. John Duke Anthony, the Founder and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, the sponsoring organization for the Model Arab League, was honored with the Model Arab League Lifetime Achievement Award, a distinction given only seven times during the life of the program. Dr. Joe P. Dunn (Converse), Dr. Philip D'Agati (Northeastern), both previous recipients of the award, and Dr. Rebecca Glazer (University of Arkansas—Little Rock) presented the award to Dr. Anthony.



Caucusing in Joint Defense Council

Southeast Regional Model Arab League

On a beautiful, warm Spring weekend, the Southeast Model Arab League convened at Converse College, March 11-13, 2016, with twenty-one delegations representing six states. Fairmont State University (West Virginia) and Fayetteville State University (North Carolina) participated for the first time, although Fayetteville State sent only a single delegate. At the high school level, newcomers Byrnes High School and Broome High School from Spartanburg

joined Spartanburg Day School and Southside Christian School, who have attended for several years.

At the Opening Event, a panel of faculty and students from the latest travel-study trips to Oman and Qatar gave enthusiastic remarks about their experiences. Secretary-General Hannah Winkler and Assistant Secretary-General Catherine Parler then convened the Plenary Session.

The Joint Crisis Council, in

its third year of operation, remained a popular venue. The topic this year involved diplomatic activity between Morocco and Algeria over Saharawi refugees in camps in Algeria. Guest appearances from Secretary of State John Kerry and Donald Trump, played by staff members, spiced the debate in the Council proceedings. Beyond the JCC, several committees struggled with other simulated environmental and political crises. Following a lengthy and



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spirited debate over the invitation, Iranian President Rouhani was allowed to make an appearance at the Heads of State Council. However, the controversial diplomatic overture soon descended into acrimony and mutual accusations.

Buffet lunches on campus on Saturday and Sunday allowed delegates to extend their activities in a more informal setting.

The judges and peer voting selected Tunisia (Converse) as the Best Delegation. Saudi Arabia (UNC-Pembroke) and Palestine (Georgia State) were

named Outstanding Delegations, and Jordan (Mercer) was designated as Distinguished Delegation. Southside Christian School (Lebanon) and Spartanburg Day School (Egypt) were named the Outstanding high school delegations. Lauren Ziegler (Palestinian Affairs Council) from Converse for the second consecutive year took the Outstanding Chair Award, this time shared with Emily Bless (Social Affairs Council) from Mercer. Kandice Miles (Political Affairs Council) from Converse was named Distinguished Chair.

SERMAL Director, Dr. Joe Dunn, praised the work of the National Council of U.S.-Arab Relations representatives, Kaylee Boalt and Melanie Waddell, for their diligence in recruiting schools and their excellent work prior to and during the conference model. Dr. Dunn remarked, "I have been involved with Model Arab League for 28 years and have directed the Southeast Model now for 16 years. Never have I worked with better staff people than Kaylee and Melanie. A true joy."

Chair presents award to Outstanding Delegate



NEWS AND ARTICLES



Lebanese dancers

Hollins University Hosts Second Appalachia Regional Model

The second Appalachia Regional Model Arab League (ARMAL) conference met at Hollins University, November 6-8, 2015. ARMAL began the previous fall at Virginia Tech but moved this year to its new host at Hollins University. Approximately eighty students constituting twelve delegations from five colleges and two high schools participated. Converse College sent 29 students who represented five countries. Other schools were Hollins, Fairmont State University (WV), East Tennessee State University, Jacksonville State (AL), Roanoke Catho-

lic High School, and William Byrd High School. A small contingent from Roanoke College took part on Saturday afternoon.

The opening ceremony included a dance group from St. Elias Maronite Catholic Church who performed Lebanese dances. The keynote speaker was James Phillips, Senior Research Fellow for Middle Eastern Affairs, from the Heritage Foundation.

With most of the delegates new to Model Arab League, the conference was a training conference. Although half of its delegates were freshmen, Converse

College constituted the bulk of the experience at the event. Converse's Tunisia delegation won best delegation and its Kuwait and Algeria delegations won outstanding delegation citations. Lauren Ziegler (Converse) was named best chair and Kandice Miles (Converse) was runner up. The other chairs were Carson McCallum (Converse), Liz Ternes (Hollins), and Payten Samuels (Jacksonville State). Hollins students Pavithra Suresh served as Secretary General and Maya Rioux was Assistant Secretary General.

LEARNING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES



OMAN REBORN:

Balancing Tradition and Modernization. By Linda Pappas Funsch (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 245 Pages.)

**Reviewed by Dr. Joe P. Dunn
Charles A. Dana Professor
of History & Politics, Converse
College**

With several articles in this issue on Oman, the logical choice for the book to review in this edition was Linda Funsch's fine new work on the Sultanate. As Funsch well says, Oman is "an island of stability in a turbulent ocean," and its recent history has been characterized by moderation, strategic vision, and the ability to balance modernization and tradition. The country is unique, not well known, and quite admirable in so many ways. One important consideration is that Oman has a long history as a country in a region where that concept is of much more recent origin and not yet well established throughout much of the area. Funsch gives the credit to its extraordinary leader, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, whose rule since

1970 makes him the longest serving head of state in the Arab world, and a leader respected not only within his nation but throughout the region.

Funsch first visited Oman in 1974, early in Qaboos's tenure, as a project officer with the Ford Foundation. Although the country left a powerful impression, she did not return until 2006, when she accompanied a trip under the auspices of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. Following the trip, Funsch published a seven-part multimedia series of articles on her experiences in witnessing the dramatic changes over the three decades. The book grew from that original project. Supported strongly by the Office of the Adviser to the Sultan for Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Information, the book may be a bit more favorable than another scholar without such ties might produce. Nevertheless, it is a very good contribution.

The volume is comprehensive. It begins with Oman's unique geographic location and invokes the old adage that "geography is destiny." Oman's seafaring past and interaction with peoples in remoted lands created a particular society that continues today in a vastly different world. The development of society and the role of the distinctive brand of Ibadhi Islam practiced in Oman is cen-

tral to understanding the nation then and today. The chapter on Oman prior to 1970 treats Oman's history under the Portuguese for 150 years, later British colonialism, the complex relationship with Oman's eastern African domain, and the role of Zanzibar in the history of the Omani nation.

Following discussion of the rise of the Al Bu Said dynasty, and the rule of the early Sultans through Said bin Taymur (1932-1970), when oil emerged as the decisive factor in Oman's destiny, Funsch turns to the central figure of modern nation today—Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Funsch well characterizes him as the "Renaissance Man." Ensuing chapters depict Sultan Qaboos' role in creating civil society, developing a modern economy, with infrastructure and political institutions, and finally Oman's relations within the region and the world. The volume concludes with challenges and opportunities that exist for the country in the post-Qaboos era.

I received my copy of this book when visiting the Ministry of Culture in Muscat. I would have loved to have read it in advance of traveling to the country and I would encourage anyone who contemplates such a trip to do so. On the other hand, reading the volume reinforced much of what I witnessed in the country. It is a very good introduction to the nation.