

# Preface

“Regionalizing”, the supralocal structuring process and the locally characteristic specificity of a region, is a comprehensive task in terms of content and a theoretically as well as conceptually demanding challenge. This appraisal applies to Oman in particular inasmuch as academic preoccupation *with* and *in* the country at the South Eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula can look back only on a few decades.

Indeed Idrisi (12th c.),<sup>1</sup> Marco Polo (13th c.) and Ibn Battuta (14th c.) already reported on this part of the world at an early time, where, as we know today, the famous country (Magan) was located, from which Assyrian copper came. We owe our first detailed descriptions of local peculiarities and political conditions in the sixteenth century to Portuguese sources. Travellers like Kaempfer (17th c.), Francklin, Hamilton, Jenour and Niebuhr (18th c.) and Berghaus, Buckingham, Mansur, Ruschenberger and Wellstedt, to cite at least a few examples of the numerous reporters of the nineteenth century, already drew more precise contours of the South East Arabian country and people. Their reports definitely allow us to deduce first evidence of local and region specific characteristics. And, theirs would later be enriched by the numerous, mostly purpose-related reports and power-serving gazetteers of British colonial officers (19th/20th c.). Even if she cannot be scientifically pinned down, the Omani-Zanzibari Princess Salme bint Said bin Sultan Al Said should not and need not go unmentioned in this context. After her escape to Germany and her marriage to the Hamburg merchant Ruete, as Emilie Said-Ruete, with her books (around 1890), she anticipated in a way the intention of Regionalizing Oman trenchantly and from a very personal perspective.

But the “regionalization” ambitiously pursued in this volume and in its individual contributions is – as already remarked – noteworthy against the following background: in the late 1960s, Oman ranked among the most backward countries on earth, as a large number of publications have meanwhile depicted, sometimes quite dramatically. With the discovery of petroleum and on the basis of its commercial

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<sup>1</sup>Details on the literature cited in the following can be found in Düster and Scholz (1980) and Scholz (1990, 2009).

exploitation (1969), as well as with the takeover of government by the young Sultan Qaboos bin Said (1970), a totally new phase in the social, political, infrastructural and economic development of Oman started. The accompanying opening of the country allowed, for the first time, among other things, international and in particular independent academic research in Oman, which was encouraged, welcomed and promoted notably by H.H. Sayyed Tariq bin Taimur Al-Said. This process, setting off hesitantly and actually systematically established only in the 1980s, has continued for barely four decades. Thus, the fact that this book fruitfully addresses such a challenging topic is notable in four ways:

*First*, the topic of the volume reflects the current interest of the international “community of sciences” in the country of Oman.

*Second*, the various contributions demonstrate the manifold local particularities of the Omani culture and society, as well as of their recent development.

*Third*, it must be emphasised that colleagues from Omani research institutions meanwhile also participate in the scientific debate and can apply for and receive financial support from the government.

*Fourth*, *Regionalizing Oman* finally articulates the position and recognition that the Sultanate has meanwhile obtained within the wider region, but also internationally in terms of politics, culture, and economics.

Therefore and in the view of someone like me, who has promoted and attentively accompanied the development of contemporary research in Oman from the beginning, *Regionalizing Oman* is a scientific milestone *in* and *for* the academic Oman. Certainly, this volume will receive adequate attention in the international “community of sciences”. And it is to be hoped that it will also attract broad interest in Oman.

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