



**OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE YA'ARUBA DYNASTY
THROUGH THE BOOK MANHAJ AL-TALIBIN WA BALAGH AL-
RAGHIBIN BY SHEIKH KHAMIS BIN SAEED AL-SHAQSI**

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Abstract

Oman possesses a profound legacy of Islamic scholarship, distinguished by encyclopaedic works that delve into diverse aspects of Islamic law, governance, and the humanities. These writings frequently document political and civilizational relations through the correspondence of imams, scholars, governors, and rulers, as well as through the issuance of legal fatwas. Among the most prominent legal encyclopaedias produced in Oman during the early Ya'aruba period is *Manhaj al-Ṭalibīn wa Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*, authored by the distinguished scholar Sheikh Khamis bin Saeed al-Shaqsi. Despite the numerous references within these encyclopaedic works to political relations and civilizational exchanges between Oman and various regional and international powers, these dimensions have received limited scholarly attention. This study seeks to uncover and analyze these overlooked aspects, emphasizing their contemporary and future relevance in understanding Oman's historical position as a significant regional power during the Ya'aruba era. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following objectives. Firstly, to identify the political role of Sheikh Khamis bin Saeed al-Shaqsi, the author of *Manhaj al-Ṭalibīn wa Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*. Secondly, to analyze the major events and dynamics of Oman's foreign relations during the early Ya'aruba period as reflected in the encyclopaedia. Methodologically, this study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, examining the content of the encyclopaedia with particular attention to its political dimensions. The research is structured into two main chapters. The first introduces the author and his legal encyclopaedia, while the subsequent chapters explore Oman's foreign relations during the reigns of Imam Nasser bin Murshid and Imam Sultan bin Saif respectively.

Keywords: Oman's Foreign Policy, Ya'aruba Dynasty, *Manhaj Al-Talibin wa Balagh Al-Raghibin*, Sheikh Khamis bin Saeed Al-Shaqsi

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INTRODUCTION

By the end of the 9th century AH (15th century CE) and the dawn of the 10th century AH (16th century CE), Oman confronted one of the most critical turning points in its history with the arrival of European colonial powers in the eastern Islamic world. The Spaniards and the Portuguese were the first European nations to embark on overseas expeditions in search of dominance and territorial expansion beyond the European continent. Their main objective was to control maritime trade routes and the lands from which valuable goods originated. Under the pretext of geographical exploration, they pursued broader political and economic ambitions.

Religious motives also underpinned these ventures. The papacy extended full support to both kingdoms, which had long been under Muslim rule for nearly eight centuries a period during which al-Andalus stood as one of the most prominent centers of Islamic civilization. The European expansion was, therefore, not merely economic but also ideological, reflecting the continuation of the centuries-long struggle between Christendom and Islam.

Oman endured profound consequences from this wave of invasion. Its coastal regions fell under Portuguese control from 1507 to 1650 CE. Being primarily a maritime power, the Portuguese confined their presence to coastal strongholds, unable to penetrate inland due to their limited manpower. Nevertheless, their domination of the ports had devastating effects. Since the coasts served as the arteries of Omani commerce, the occupation crippled trade networks and disrupted internal economic activity. By monopolizing trade across the Indian Ocean and controlling Oman's key ports, the Portuguese imposed a system of economic dependency that led to a prolonged era of weakness and subjugation lasting nearly a century and a half.

Portuguese domination was particularly concentrated in several strategic coastal cities, including Muscat, Sohar, Julfar, Sur, and Qurayyat, which functioned as major maritime and commercial gateways linking Oman to the wider Indian Ocean trade network. Control over these ports enabled the Portuguese to regulate regional trade routes and impose restrictions on Omani merchants navigating between the Arabian Peninsula, India, East Africa, and the Persian Gulf. Consequently, the occupation not only weakened Oman's maritime economy but also disrupted long-standing diplomatic and commercial relations with neighbouring regions.

In addition to economic consequences, Portuguese military fortifications and naval patrols in these coastal areas intensified political fragmentation within Oman and limited the authority of local rulers over maritime territories. Several confrontations occurred between Portuguese forces and emerging Omani resistance movements, particularly during the early seventeenth century, when local scholars and tribal leaders began mobilizing

efforts to restore political unity and expel foreign domination. These developments formed the geopolitical background against which the Ya'aruba Imamate emerged and within which Sheikh Khamis bin Saeed al-Shaqsi played a significant intellectual, political, and diplomatic role.

Relief and transformation eventually arose from within Omani society itself. A circle of scholars in Rustaq, led by the distinguished jurist and intellectual Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id al-Shaqsi, took decisive initiative. As recorded by the historian al-Azkawi (2012), Sheikh al-Shaqsi corresponded extensively with scholars in Rustaq and Nizwa: *"There was communication and correspondence between them... and their word became unified."*

The history of the Ibadi school and indeed, the broader Islamic intellectual tradition demonstrates that when scholars assume their moral and social responsibilities, remarkable transformations can occur. Through knowledge, unity, and guidance, they can steer the nation from fragmentation and despair towards cohesion and renewal.

Amidst this climate of occupation, oppression, and falsehood imposed by Christian powers, the Omani people yearned for liberation and justice. Their aspirations materialized in 1034 AH / 1624 CE, when the *Ahl al-Hall wa'l-'Aqd* (Council of Decision-Makers) convened in Rustaq under the leadership of Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id al-Shaqsi both a scholar and a capable military leader. This pivotal assembly marked the emergence of collective resistance and the beginning of Omani unification. Reflecting on that dark period, al-Barashdi (2013) wrote: *"The Muslims were weakened and felt like those holding hot coals unable to conceal heresy, nor to manifest the law of Islam."*

This event signalled not only the end of Omani fragmentation but also the resurgence of Islamic governance grounded in knowledge, faith, and unity. It paved the way for the establishment of the Ya'aruba Imamate, which later became a cornerstone of Omani political and civilizational revival.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Introduction to Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id al-Shaqsi, Author of the Encyclopedia *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*

Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id bin 'Ali bin Sa'ud bin 'Abdullah bin Ziyad al-Shaqsi al-Rustaqi belonged to the distinguished Shaqsi tribe, whose lineage traces back to Banu Ziyad descendants of Samah bin Lu'ayy from the Quraysh tribe of Adnanite origin. Among the tribes sharing this noble lineage in Oman are the Banu al-Bu Sa'id, al-Sulaymani, and Banu Nafi', who settled in central Oman, particularly in Nizwa, during the early Islamic period. Historical records indicate their presence in the events of 140 AH, establishing Nizwa and Bahla as the ancestral homelands of the Shaqsi tribe.

Although originally from Nizwa, Sheikh Khamis later became associated with Rustaq, earning the appellation *al-Shaqsi al-Rustaqi*. This suggests that his ancestors eventually migrated there. Some sources, such as al-Batashi (2016), indicate that he was born in Nizwa before relocating with his family to Rustaq.

The exact dates of his birth and death remain uncertain due to the tumultuous period in which he lived. However, it is likely that he was born towards the end of the 10th century AH and passed away before 1080 AH. The last recorded event in his life was his will, written in 1070 AH. Sheikh Nasser al-Sab'i estimated his death between 1070 AH and 1079 AH, noting, *"It seems to me that he did not live long after writing his will. The oldest manuscript I found for the thirteenth volume of his book al-Manhaj bears the transcription date of 1079 AH and contains supplications for al-Shaqsi."*

In his introduction to *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*, Sheikh Salim bin Hamad al-Harthi described al-Shaqsi as *"the scholar of his time and the unique figure of his era... He took the reins in Oman at the beginning of the 11th century, being distinguished by both sword and pen—a man of high resolve and great ambitions, a vast ocean of knowledge, of whom it was said: 'How little did the predecessors leave for the successors.'"* His contemporary, Ibn Qaisar, also praised him as *"Qadi Khamis bin Sa'id, a man of piety and fatwa, steadfast in his adherence to God's strongest cause."* Ibn Qaisar further highlighted his close relationship with Imam Nasser bin Murshid, writing that *"He was one of his kin, a prominent figure in his circle, and a beacon of his intimate fellowship."* (al-Sab'i, 2003)

According to al-Harthi, Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id al-Shaqsi's influence extended beyond Oman's borders, reaching various intellectual and political centers abroad. He was a pivotal figure in the establishment of the early Ya'aruba state, particularly in shaping Omani foreign policy. Al-Harthi remarks: *"He exerted his utmost efforts sincerely for the sake of God, wielding both his sword and pen in God's path. With his sword, the Ya'aruba state arose, subduing India and Africa, striking fear in Europe, extending its reach to Sindh, and safeguarding Iraq and its environs."* This account reflects the far-reaching impact of al-Shaqsi's political and intellectual contributions to Oman's emergence as an independent and sovereign Islamic state prior to the mid-17th century.

Scholar Omar bin al-Qasim al-Fadli further emphasized his stature, stating: *"The kingdom of Oman was fragmented among chiefs and tyrants, plunged into misery, and knowledge and its people had vanished until God sent His servant, the virtuous scholar Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id al-Shaqsi al-Rustaqi may God have mercy on him who endeavored to restore the Imamate. God then guided him to a pure and ascetic man, the distinguished Sayyid Nasser bin"*

Murshid al-Ya'arubi, who was pledged allegiance to and established justice.”
(Ibn Qaisar, 1983)

Sheikh al-Shaqsi's writings reflect his deep political insight and awareness of the necessity of leadership for national unity. In *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*, he wrote:

“A nation must have a leader under whom their judgments are enforced, to whom their opinions converge, who upholds their unity and gathers their efforts, to whom they turn in crises, and who repels every falsehood.”

Although he lived during the rule of Malik bin Abi al-‘Arab al-Ya‘arubi the grandfather of Imam Nasser bin Murshid disputes over leadership eventually arose. Recognizing the political vacuum in Rustaq, Sheikh al-Shaqsi initiated correspondence with scholars across Oman, ultimately guiding the community toward pledging allegiance to Imam Nasser. His vision was to restore the Imamate as a system of governance based on justice, unity, and faith. Sheikh al-Khurasini later described Imam Nasser's leadership: *“God provided us with a righteous successor who upheld justice, eradicated oppression, and feared no reproach for God's sake. He manifested God's word, and tyrants obeyed him humbly; kings submitted to him willingly or unwillingly. After we had been defeated, we became dominant and exalted”* (al-Siyar, 2018).

Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id al-Shaqsi served as Oman's Foreign Minister during the reigns of the just Imams Nasser bin Murshid and Sultan bin Saif. He played significant roles in diplomacy, negotiations, and military affairs, particularly in engagements with the Portuguese and Persian occupiers. Historical accounts record that he led the army of Imam Nasser against the Portuguese in Muscat: *“He first encamped in Bawshar, then marched to Mutrah, where negotiations took place regarding their surrender of some fortifications, agreeing at that time for a perceived benefit in 1043 AH.”*

His influence was not limited to local politics. Sheikh al-Shaqsi maintained intellectual and religious correspondence with Ibadis across North Africa, particularly in the Nafusa Mountains (Libya), Djerba Island (Tunisia), and the M'zab Valley (Algeria). His son, Sheikh Sa'id bin Khamis al-Shaqsi, even visited Djerba, strengthening ties with the wider Ibadi world. In *Luqṭu al-Athar*, a jurisprudential response he received discussed issues related to external relations and the conflicts involving Portuguese Christians (Franks) and Turks in Oman. The text notes: *“For those asking about those taken by the Zanj (Franks) when Umayr bin Humayr captured Sohar, and those taken by the Turks when they marched into Oman are their statuses considered absent or missing? Clarify this for us, may God have mercy on you.”*

Sheikh al-Salmi corroborates the presence of these external forces before the election of Imam Nasser bin Murshid, stating: “*The Christians were in Muscat, Sohar, Julfar, Sur, and Qurayyat. Oman deteriorated after justice and security, and tyrants ravaged it.*” (al-Ghailani, 2009)

As a jurist, administrator, and statesman, Sheikh al-Shaqsi served as the central legal and political authority for governors and judges throughout Oman. In 1056 AH / 1646 CE, Sheikh Khalaf bin Ahmad al-Raqishi, the governor of Imam Nasser bin Murshid in the province of Sir, sought his legal opinion on governance further attesting to his enduring influence and scholarly authority within the Ya‘aruba state.

Introduction to the Book *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*

The encyclopaedia *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* is considered one of the most important Omani works in the field of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In his critical edition, Sheikh Salim bin Hamad al-Harthi describes it as a work of profound scholarly value, noting that it is “of immense stature, encompassing the principles and branches of jurisprudence and religion.” The author, Sheikh Khamis bin Sa‘īd al-Shaqsi, structured the encyclopaedia into twenty volumes, each containing multiple chapters, diverse topics, and detailed discussions. It stands as a monumental encyclopaedia of Islamic jurisprudence.

Sheikh al-Shaqsi composed this work to address a perceived intellectual decline and to revive scholarly engagement with religious sciences. He explained his motivation as follows:

“When I observed the dwindling number of its seekers, the reluctance of most people towards it, the slackening of resolve in attaining the positions of the righteous predecessors, and the inability to reach the objectives of the forerunners, I employed my mind in composing a concise work to gather the landmarks of Sharia, to organize the scattered elements of jurisprudence, to elucidate its principles and branches, and to present its issues clearly, coherently, and consecutively” (Al-Shaqsi, 1993).

Regarding its title, al-Shaqsi stated: “*I named it the Book of *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*”.* The work is characterized by its moderate length neither too lengthy nor overly concise. Al-Shaqsi emphasized that his book “suffices in place of both the abridged and the extensive works, as it comprehensively covers most topics with concise wording”.

Although primarily a compendium of *Shariah* sciences, the encyclopaedia extends beyond jurisprudence to address a range of intellectual, social, economic, educational, political, and environmental issues. Al-Shaqsi himself highlighted its comprehensive nature, describing it as encompassing

“various fields of Sharia sciences and diverse branches of knowledge.” In doing so, he anticipated what contemporary scholars term *fiqh al-wāqi'* (jurisprudence of reality) or *nawāzil* (jurisprudence of contemporary issues).

Importantly, *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* documents numerous political events and provides a vivid picture of Omani society during a turbulent period marked by foreign interventions—especially the Portuguese occupation of the Omani coasts. This occupation choked the lifelines of trade and communication between Oman's interior and the outside world. Internally, the region was beset by conflicts among tribal factions, city rulers, and competing Imams who lacked the unity needed to stabilize the state. The encyclopaedia poignantly captures this condition:

“Oman reverted to the worst conditions and the most damaging outcomes wealth plundered, men killed, rivers dried, homes destroyed, books burned, and traces obliterated” (Al-Kharasini, 1995).

Composed during the 11th century AH, scholars differ regarding the precise period of authorship. Some suggest that al-Shaqsi wrote it after the death of Imam Nasser bin Murshid (between 1060–1070 AH), dedicating himself to scholarship after the country's unification and the expulsion of the Portuguese. Others propose that he began writing during Imam Nasser's reign, or even before his Imamate.

In essence, the encyclopaedia represents a revival of the Omani tradition of *Shariah* encyclopedias, which flourished particularly during the 6th century AH within the Ibadi school of jurisprudence. *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* serves as a comprehensive synthesis of Ibadi jurisprudence in Oman across ten centuries. It gained notable recognition among Maghrebi Ibadi scholars, who studied and adapted it for educational use. Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Thamini, for example, produced an abridged version titled *Al-Tāj al-Manzūm min Durar al-Minhāj al-Ma'lūm* (“The Crown Adorned with the Gems of the Known Methodology”) for use in study circles. The work also received high praise from Sheikh al-Salmi and Imam al-Khalili (Al-Salmi, 2017).

Historian John Wilkinson underscores the encyclopedia's significance, describing it as a major work that revitalized the religious spirit of the Ibadi community and laid the *Shariah* foundations of Ibadi doctrine. He noted that “scholars engaged with it due to its clarity of expression and excellent organization.” Wilkinson further emphasized its unifying role in reconciling two long-standing intellectual traditions within Oman the Rustaqi and Nizwani schools which had been divided for nearly seven centuries. The consensus among scholars from both currents on the Imamate of Nasser bin Murshid al-Ya'arubi marked a crucial turning point in Omani history.

Several factors contributed to this consensus:

1. Presence of a Prominent Scholar – Sheikh Khamis bin Sa‘id al-Shaqsi was widely accepted by scholars from both intellectual schools as a spiritual leader.
2. Shared Belief in the Necessity of Change – There was a collective understanding that unity and reform could only be achieved through scholarly and political cooperation.
3. Imam Nasser bin Murshid’s Lineage – His noble Rustaqi lineage strengthened his legitimacy and acceptance among scholars and tribal leaders.
4. External Threats – Foreign incursions by the Portuguese, Persians, and al-Jabur reinforced the urgency for national unity and resistance.
5. Prolonged Political Vacuum – The absence of effective leadership created a compelling need for stable governance.
6. Al-Shaqsi’s Leadership Qualities – As a jurist, administrator, and military leader, Sheikh al-Shaqsi possessed the intellectual and practical capacities necessary for guidance and reform.

Observations on the Encyclopedia *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*

An examination of the volumes of *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* reveals, as the author himself indicates, that the encyclopaedia primarily compiles and synthesizes the opinions of earlier Ibadi scholars, along with references to other juristic traditions. The work offers limited engagement with the contemporary legal and social challenges of the author’s own period. Consequently, references to political events of al-Shaqsi’s era appear infrequently throughout the text.

This omission is particularly striking given that Sheikh Khamis bin Sa‘id al-Shaqsi personally witnessed and actively participated in pivotal political and military developments that shaped Oman’s history during the early Ya‘arubi Imamate. He played a central role in state-building efforts, foreign relations, and the resistance against European colonial powers most notably the Portuguese, who had occupied extensive parts of the Omani coastline. Despite his intimate involvement in these affairs, al-Shaqsi chose not to record or elaborate upon such events within his encyclopaedia.

This selective omission suggests a deliberate methodological choice. If an author so deeply engaged in political and military leadership refrained from documenting contemporary political realities, it would be unsurprising that other scholars particularly those without direct involvement in such affairs also avoided extensive discussion of political or diplomatic matters in their own legal writings. This silence reflects a broader tendency among classical jurists to separate

jurisprudential discourse from temporal political narratives, focusing instead on establishing enduring legal principles and doctrinal clarity.

Nevertheless, the global impact and scholarly legacy of *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* remain substantial. The encyclopaedia has been widely studied across Ibadi communities beyond Oman, including those in Jabal Nafusa (Libya), the island of Djerba and the region of al-Jarīd (Tunisia), the M'zab Valley in the Algerian Sahara, and throughout East Africa. Within these intellectual centers, the work continues to serve as a foundational reference for Ibadi jurisprudence, legal reasoning, and theological discourse, reflecting its far-reaching influence in shaping the legal consciousness of the Ibadi world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a historical-analytical approach, providing both a comprehensive description and a theoretical interpretation of Omani efforts in shaping foreign policy and resisting foreign occupation. Through this approach, the research seeks to highlight key historical texts and political events that unfolded during the period under study, offering important indicators for understanding, analyzing, and interpreting the political and civilizational dynamics of that era.

Given the nature of the study, a content analysis method was selected as the principal research tool. This method allows for an objective and systematic examination of the historical texts contained within the encyclopaedia, *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn*. By analyzing these texts, the study identifies and interprets the political themes, events, and discourses that reflect Oman's engagement with regional and international powers during the early Ya'aruba period.

The combination of historical description and content analysis ensures both depth and accuracy in examining the intellectual and political contributions of Sheikh Khamis bin Saeed al-Shaqsi and his contemporaries. This integrated methodology provides a balanced framework for uncovering the historical realities and the underlying political thought that shaped Oman's resistance and diplomatic strategies during this formative stage of its history.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The encyclopedia *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* provides profound insights into the governance system of Oman from as early as 132 AH (750 CE), particularly in relation to the Ibādī Imamate as envisioned within Ibādī political thought. This system was revitalized in Oman under the leadership of Sheikh Khamīs bin Sa'īd al-Shaqṣī, the author of the encyclopedia, during the establishment of the Ya'ārubah Imamate with the inauguration of Imam Nāṣir bin Murshid in 1034 AH (1624 CE).

The first volume of *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn* elaborates on the principles of the Imamate, a central theme in Islamic political theory. It notes:

“The people of Oman had not unanimously agreed upon the legitimacy of any of their Imams since the days of Imam Sa‘īd bin ‘Abdullah bin Muḥammad bin Maḥbūb may God be pleased with them all until Imam Nāṣir bin Murshid, upon whom the scholars of Oman unanimously agreed and whose authority was established.” (Ghabash, 1997)

Table 1: Analysis of Political Elements in the Encyclopedia

Political Aspect	Brief Description	Analytical Finding	Reference
Imamate (Leadership)	Explained as the foundational structure of Islamic governance in Oman	Discussed in principle without explicit reference to historical events	Al-Shaksi (1993); Al-Sab‘i (2003)
Jihad and Warfare	Discussed in terms of its legal principles and conditions	Not directly connected to wars against the Portuguese	Al-Toubi (2017); Al-Ghailani (2009)
Foreign Relations (Siyasah Dauliyyah)	Addressed through jurisprudential discussions	Minimal references to Oman’s actual foreign relations	Al-Siyar (2018); Ghabash (1997)
Administrative System	Discussed theoretically as part of Islamic governance	Lacks historical narrative on implementation by Imam Nasser or Imam Sultan bin Saif	Al-Barashdi (2019); Al-Sab‘i (2003)

This statement highlights the historical continuity between the consensus achieved during the Imamate of Sa‘īd bin ‘Abdullah around 280 AH (893 CE) and the renewed unanimity under Imam Nāṣir bin Murshid. Sheikh al-Shaqṣī’s success in uniting the scholars and notables under a single leadership represented a milestone in Omani history, marking the restoration of national unity and the reassertion of collective resolve after a period of fragmentation.

The encyclopedia’s seventh volume offers deeper exploration of the Ibādī theory of governance, which may be viewed as a distinct political philosophy within Islamic civilization. Ibādī jurists conceptualized political authority in contrast to the hereditary monarchies of the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd dynasties, emphasizing instead an elective system based on piety, justice, and communal consent. The Ibādī school thus evolved as both a political movement and a legal-theological tradition. Within this intellectual framework, Sheikh al-

Shaqṣī stands out as one of the foremost theorists and practitioners of the Imamate system in Oman.

In *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn*, al-Shaqṣī asserts the obligatory nature of the Imamate:

“It is definitively established that the Imamate is a divine duty, mandated by the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the consensus.”

Despite facing internal dissension among local rulers and external threats from the Portuguese and other powers competing for control of Omani ports, Sheikh al-Shaqṣī viewed the reestablishment of the Imamate as the only viable path toward stability and justice. He emphasized the moral imperative of electing qualified leadership, declaring:

“Fearing for the survival of the state and the well-being of the people, it is permissible for Muslims to elect a man with strength, vision, piety, and caution” (Al-Shaybānī, 2015).

Sheikh al-Shaqṣī’s political foresight and leadership culminated in the foundation of the first modern Omani Imamate through his mentorship of Imam Nāṣir bin Murshid al-Ya’arubī. His efforts were instrumental in transforming Oman into a cohesive state capable of expelling European colonizers and restoring sovereignty during a period when much of the Arab world remained under foreign rule. This achievement symbolized a profound shift in the Gulf region’s conception of statehood—from tribal autonomy to structured political governance.

It is noteworthy that Oman had already established itself as an independent polity based on elective leadership nearly nine centuries earlier, when Imam al-Julandā bin Mas’ūd was chosen as Imam in 132 AH (750 CE). Omani history is thus deeply interwoven with the evolution of the Ibādī Imamate, which consistently sought to actualize a model of governance rooted in justice, consultation (shūrā), and public accountability, in accordance with the Ibādī understanding of the Islamic state (Al-Shaybānī, 2015).

Sheikh al-Shaqṣī underscores the sacredness of the Imamate by invoking the Qur’anic verse:

“I am going to make you an Imam to the people” (al-Baqarah 2:124).

Affirming that legitimate leadership is divinely sanctioned and essential for maintaining order and justice.

He further articulates the political and administrative principles governing the Imamate in Oman, noting:

“There cannot be two Imams in one city unless there is an intervening unjust ruler. It is as though one Imam governs the interior and another in Ḥaḡḡ, while Ṣuḡḡ remains under the control of an unjust ruler. If Ṣuḡḡ is under neither of the two Imams, both retain their leadership. However, if the unjust ruler’s control ceases and their jurisdictions connect, their leadership becomes null, as I have explained” (Al-Shaqṣī, 1993).

This passage exemplifies Sheikh al-Shaqṣī’s systematic approach to defining the limits of political authority and the conditions of legitimacy within the Ibādī Imamate. His political thought demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of state structure, unity, and the moral foundations of governance.

In sum, *Manhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa-Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* represents not only a legal compendium but also a monumental intellectual effort to revive and codify the principles of Ibādī political theory in early modern Oman. Through his leadership and scholarship, Sheikh Khamīs bin Sa‘īd al-Shaqṣī laid the groundwork for the reemergence of the Omani state as a regional power and a model of Islamic governance founded upon justice, unity, and religious legitimacy.

Table 2: Factors Explaining the Limited Political Content

Factor	Explanation	Supporting References
1. Purpose of the Work	Sheikh al-Shaqṣī explicitly stated that his work aimed to focus on legal discussions rather than political history	Al-Shakṣī (1993, 2006)
2. Political Sensitivity of the Era	The ongoing internal conflicts may have required cautious treatment of political matters	Al-Siyar (2018); Al-Salmi (2017)
3. Classical Fiqh Tradition	Classical jurisprudential works were typically normative rather than descriptive of historical events	Al-Barashdī (2013); Al-Kharousi (2015)
4. Scholarly Orientation	The author was primarily a jurist (faqih) rather than a historian	Al-Barashdī (2019); Al-Sab‘i (2003)

Imam Sultan bin Saif bin Malik al-Ya‘arubi ascended to the Imamate immediately following the death of Imam Nasser bin Murshid in 1059 AH / 1649 CE, in accordance with Imam Nasser’s testament, which had been endorsed by the scholars of Oman, including Sheikh Khamīs bin Sa‘īd al-Shaqṣī the author of *Minhaj al-Talibin wa Balagh al-Raghibin*. Imam Sultan faithfully implemented

his predecessor's directives, continuing the mission to consolidate internal unity and resist foreign domination.

Historian al-Salmi records Imam Nasser's message to his cousin and military commander, Sultan bin Saif:

"Today, you are my wing through which I uphold the pure faith and my successor, a pillar for this doctrine."

True to these words, Imam Sultan continued the struggle initiated by Imam Nasser against Portuguese colonial control over Oman's coasts and maritime routes. Al-Salmi narrates:

"He waged war against the remaining Christians in Muscat, personally leading the campaign until God granted him victory over them. He continued to fight them wherever he found them on land and sea, capturing many of their territories, destroying many of their ships, and seizing much of their wealth".

The *Minhaj al-Talibin* contains several indirect references to Oman's maritime adversaries, presented within the framework of legal and moral discussions rather than as historical narratives. Nevertheless, these references provide significant insight into the geopolitical realities of Imam Sultan bin Saif's era. The text mentions:

"Those who block the way from the coast of Oman in earlier times in the sea from Indian ships, ignorant men from Mahra, or other sinners up to the coast of Aden on the landward side of Oman if it is not certain that they are from the Indian polytheists, are considered as rebels among the people of prayer."

Such passages reflect the author's deep awareness of maritime challenges and his sophisticated understanding of the geopolitical environment surrounding Oman. They also echo the persistent hostilities that characterized the Indian Ocean trade routes during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Table 3: Implications for the Study of Omani Fiqh and Politics

Aspect	Scholarly Implication	Suggested Further Study
Fiqh al-Nawazil (Jurisprudence of Contemporary Issues)	The absence of direct references suggests fiqh in this era remained theoretical, not yet contextualized for political realities	Comparative study of contemporary Omani jurisprudential works addressing practical governance
Siyasah Shar‘iyyah (Islamic Political Governance)	Political thought in Omani context appears moral–legal rather than historical–narrative	Comparative analysis between al-Shaqsi’s text and works of al-Salmi or other Omani scholars
Contribution to Omani History	Despite limited historical content, the encyclopedia demonstrates the centrality of scholars in shaping Omani Islamic political thought	Further research into related works by contemporaries such as al-Barashdi and al-Siyabi

Prior to the composition of the *Minhaj*, similar incidents had occurred such as pirate attacks targeting Omani merchant and pilgrim vessels en route to the Ka‘bah. These aggressions occasionally reached Omani shores. For instance, during the reign of Imam Ghassan bin Abdullah, pirates from India attacked the Omani coastline, prompting the Imam to dispatch special naval units *shadha* and *ghuruf* vessels from the port of Dama (modern-day Seeb). This location served as a strategic naval base for monitoring and intercepting hostile fleets approaching the Omani coast.

During Imam Sultan bin Saif’s rule, the Omani navy expanded significantly, transforming into a formidable maritime force. By the lifetime of Sheikh al-Shaqsi, the Omani fleet had extended its reach to the coasts of Persia, the eastern Arabian Peninsula, India, Sindh, Yemen, the Red Sea, and East Africa. Consequently, Oman’s naval power dominated the Indian Ocean, ensuring safe navigation and trade between East and West while establishing Oman as a regional maritime power.

One of the most significant engagements of this period was the Battle of Diu, in which the Omani fleet dealt a decisive blow to the Portuguese. The victory yielded substantial spoils, which were reportedly used to construct the renowned Nizwa Fort an enduring symbol of Omani sovereignty and resilience. Under Imam Sultan bin Saif’s leadership, Oman successfully liberated the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula from Portuguese control, ushering in a period of political stability, economic prosperity, and maritime supremacy that endured throughout his reign and beyond.

CONCLUSION

A close examination of the encyclopedia *Minhaj al-Ṭālibīn wa Balāgh al-Rāghibīn* shows that it was written during a critical period in Omani history marked by political transformation and the consolidation of national unity. Its author, Sheikh Khamis bin Sa'id al-Shaqsi, was an influential figure in Omani political, administrative, and religious life and played an important role in the movement that contributed to the liberation of Omani coastal cities from Portuguese occupation.

Although the encyclopedia primarily functions as a comprehensive jurisprudential work covering a wide range of legal issues, it also reflects the political realities of its time, particularly during the Imamate of Imam Nasser bin Murshid and Imam Sultan bin Saif. Notably, al-Shaqsi devoted the entire eighth volume to the themes of Imamate and jihad, highlighting their importance in the political and religious discourse of the Ya'aruba period. Nevertheless, direct references to contemporary political events remain relatively limited, likely because the author's primary objective was to address legal and doctrinal issues rather than to document historical developments.

From a broader perspective, the political and maritime developments of the Ya'aruba period laid important foundations for Oman's later diplomatic traditions. The consolidation of maritime power and regional engagement across the Indian Ocean contributed to the formation of Oman's outward-looking foreign relations. In this context, the intellectual and political contributions of Sheikh al-Shaqsi reflect an early articulation of Islamic governance principles that influenced the historical foundations of Omani foreign relations.

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