A short history of Aden Colony 1839-1967

The first European to give a first hand description on Aden at the beginning of the 16th century, was the Italian Ludovico di Varthesa. He writes: "Aden is such mighty and powerful that I have hardly seen another city of its might during my life . . . all big ships anchor at the port coming from India Ethiopia or Persia".1)

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Copper line engraving showing the earliest view of Aden first published by Braun and Hogenberg in Cologne 1572.

An ancient trade center, the city of Aden was under Egyptian control from the 3rd century BC until it became a Roman colony in 24 BC. It fell successively under Ethiopian and Persian control and became associated with Yemen about the 7th century AD. It fell to the Turks in 1538 and was incorporated into the Sultanate of Lahej in 1728. Under the rule of the Sultan of Lahej, Aden had declined to a small fishing village with only 600 inhabitants.2)

In 1838, Sultan Muhsin bin Fadl ceded 75 square miles 194 (sq. kms), including Aden, to the British. On January 19, 1839, the British East India Company landed Royal Marines at Aden to occupy the territory. From 1839 until 1937, Aden was ruled as part of the Bombay Presidency of British India and was known as Aden Settlement. Its original territory was enlarged in 1857 by the island of Perim, in 1868 by the Khuriya Muria Islands, and in 1915 by the island of Kamaran.

The first years of occupation of the British Settlement did not pass without tribal opposition and resistance. The British colonial policy was to buy the allegiance of the leaders of the tribes by payment of annual salaries and gifts, signing treaties under the threat of force and the policy of playing one tribe against the other. Haines had also used Jewish spies against the tribes. The Jews prepared their reports in Yiddish which was difficult to decipher by the tribes.3)

The Colony of Aden was a British Crown Colony from 1937 to 1963, and consisted of the port city of Aden and its immediate surroundings (an area of 192 km²), (75 sq. miles).4)

Within a few years of its occupation, the population of Aden increased from 600 inhabitants in 1839 to some 25,000 inhabitants in 1842. Aden was declared a free port by Act X in 1850, according to which no customs duty was payable on any goods carried by sea or land to or from Aden. (5)

This Act left the door of immigration wide open to the new Settlement. Arrival of foreign labour and expatriates continued to pour unabated until the 60s.
Population of Aden Colony 1955

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabs</th>
<th>Somalis</th>
<th>Jews</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Europeans</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>103789</td>
<td>10611</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>15817</td>
<td>4484</td>
<td>2608</td>
<td>13841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administration

“The town of Aden was tied much more closely into the fabric of the British Empire and developed more rapidly than its surrounding hinterland”. The fundamental law for the Crown Colony of Aden is the Order of Council September 28 1936. Which follows the usual lines of basic legislation for British colonies.

Aden was notable in that Shari‘a law was not used in the Colony. “All suits, including those dealing with personal status and inheritance of Muslims are entertained in the ordinary secular courts of the colony”. The absence of Shari‘a courts is the cause of some dissatisfaction in the colony.

Within the Aden Colony there were three local government bodies. The Aden municipality, which covered the town, Tawahih, Maalla and Crater, the Township authority of Sheikh Othman and finally Little Aden had been established in recent years as a separate body, covering the oil refinery and the workers settlement. All of these bodies were under the overall control of the Executive council, which in turn was kept in check by the Governor.

Until the 1st of December 1955, the executive council was entirely unelected. The situation only improved slightly after this date as four members were elected. Judicial administration was also entirely in British hands. “Compared with other British possessions, the development towards self-government and greater local participation has been rather slow”.

Education was provided for all children, both boys and girls, until at least intermediate level. Higher education was available on a selective basis through scholarships to study abroad. Primary and Intermediate education was conducted in Arabic while Secondary and independent schools conducted their lessons in Arabic, English, Urdu, Hebrew and Gujarati. There were also for those who wished, unrecognized Koranic schools for both boys and girls.

The British government had protective treaties with it and subsidized traditional leaders of sheikhsdoms from the Strait of Bab-El-Mandeb to Muscat territory at Ras Dharbat.(6)

Two small, unfortified islands in the Red Sea, Perim (area 13 sq km/5 sq mi; population 300) and Kamara’n (area 57 sq km/22 sq mi; population 2,200), were under the administration of the high commissioner in Aden.

In order to stabilize Aden and the surrounding Aden Protectorate from attacks by North Yemen, the British decided to unite the several states of the region in preparation for eventual independence. On January 18, 1963, Aden Colony was incorporated into the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South as the State of Aden and the Federation was renamed the Federation of South Arabia . In 1964, Britain announced its intention to grant independence to the Federation of South Arabia in 1968, but increasing violence prompted Britain to speed up the process.(7)

In 1967, the British abandoned Aden and South Arabia. There was no official hand over of independence. The fate of many aspects of life in the country, the people, institutions and establishments were destined for the unknown.

Footnotes

1) Courtesy of Webmaster: Peter Pickering. Historian: Ingleby Jefferson
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3) Kings of the Arabia, by Harold F. Jacob. Chapter 3. First published in 1923, examines the history of Yemen from the 17th century to the aftermath of the First World War.

5) The History of Aden 1839 – 1872, by Zaka Hannah Kour, Chapter 6, pg72 Chapter 3, Published in 1981 in the UK by Frank CASS and Company Ltd.
