

The Compendium of the Histories of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, 1622–1810 CE: A Landmark in Gulf

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Abstract

This review article examines The Compendium of the Histories of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, 1622–1810 CE, a massive 33-volume historical undertaking by His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah. Published in 2025 by Al Qasimi Publications, it is an exceptional collection of 1,473 historical documents from English, Dutch, French, Ottoman and Portuguese archives in parallel Arabic and English editions. The Compendium is the culmination of more than forty years of archival research and is probably the most comprehensive documentary history of the Arabian Gulf ever assembled. The review looks at the scope of the work, its methodological approach, its contribution to scholarship, and its potential to transform historical research on the Gulf and the wider Indian Ocean world. It argues that the Compendium not only fills an important gap in the historical record but also sets a new paradigm for documentary historiography in the Arab world by combining rigorous archival scholarship with unprecedented accessibility for researchers across the globe.

Keywords

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Persian Gulf;
Historiography;
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1. Introduction

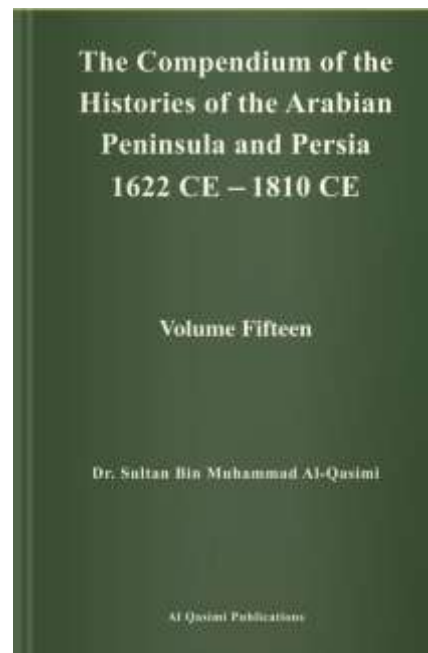
The historiography of the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf has long been troubled by what might be called a documentary asymmetry. The region's strategic significance as a nexus of maritime commerce, imperial aspirations, and cultural interaction has never been in question; however, the historical narrative has been disproportionately shaped by the viewpoints of European colonial powers, Ottoman administrators, and Persian dynasties, frequently sidelining the voices and stories of the local populace (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a; UrduPoint, 2025). Into this historiographical lacuna steps *The Compendium of the Histories of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, 1622–1810 CE*, a work of such scope and intent that it requires a reconsideration not only of the period it covers but of the very ways in which Gulf history has been written (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025b).

A scholar-ruler whose historical publications have won international recognition, His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, is the author of the Compendium, comprising 33 volumes in Arabic and 33 in English, containing 1,473 historical documents, and also available in a digital format (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025c). The time span it covers, from the fall of Hormuz in 1622 to the dawn of the nineteenth century in 1810, includes nearly two centuries of profound transformation, during which European maritime powers (Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French) vied with Persian, Ottoman, and local Arabian polities for control over the Gulf's trade routes and strategic chokepoints (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a; Al Fajr, 2025; Rashed & AbdulKarim, 2025).

This review article places the Compendium in the wider field of the historiography of the Gulf, elaborates on its methodological basis and documentary architecture, evaluates its academic importance, and considers its implications for future research. In doing so, it contends that the Compendium is in effect not just an anthology of documents, but a founding act of historical recovery, one that reclaims a trove of primary sources from the archives of Europe, Turkey, and elsewhere and puts them into a systematic, scholarly form (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).



A



B

The Compendium of the Histories of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia 1622 CE - 1810 CE, (A) QR to the 33-volumes Compendium; (B) the cover of Volume Fifteen, Sharjah Ruler's Official Website (2025c). *The compendium of the histories of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia*

2. The Author and His Scholarly Context

Any serious engagement with the Compendium must begin with an appreciation of the author's unique position at the intersection of political leadership and historical scholarship (Al-Qāsimī 1999). Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi has over the past few decades become one of the most prolific and respected historians of the Gulf region. His previous publications include the five-volume History of Al Qawasim (Al-Qāsimī 2025a), which traces thirteen centuries of Al Qasimi family history from the first year of the Hijra (622 CE) to 1240 AH (1825 CE), and The Portuguese in the Sea of Oman: Annals of History 1497–1757, a 21-volume publication on which the Compendium is based (Al-Qāsimī 2025b).

The Compendium is explicitly presented as a continuation of this earlier Portuguese study. Sheikh Sultan's introductions to volumes 1-12 point readers looking for information about events between 1622 and 1645 to The Portuguese in the Sea of Oman, volumes 17-20. This painstaking intertextual architecture shows a scholar thinking in terms of a comprehensive historical corpus rather than isolated publications, a vision that has now culminated in what he himself has called his "greatest work" (Al-Qāsimī 2025c).

The author's method has been analysed in scientific works where researchers have pointed out accuracy, objectivity and scientific documentation as features of his method. One study concludes that "Sheikh Al Qasimi's methodology is a distinguished model for the accuracy of historical research" and recommends its adoption in developing curricula for historical studies. This methodological rigour is evident throughout the Compendium, eschewing interpretive gloss in favour of presenting documents in their original form, arranged chronologically, and with careful scholarly apparatus (Rashed & AbdulKarim, 2025).



H.H. Ruler of Sharjah signs his latest publication, "The Compendium of the Histories" at the inauguration of 44th Sharjah International Book Fair - 5 November 2025,
Source: Sharjah Ruler's Official Website. (2025e).

3. Documentary Architecture and Scope

3.1. Scale and Structure

The Compendium is enormous. It comprises 33 volumes in each of two languages, making a total of 66 physical volumes and 1,473 individual documents, representing possibly the largest single documentary publication in the history of Gulf studies. The work gives “the whole history of the region in chronological annals”, sorting the documents by year, and within each year by episode (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a; UrduPoint, 2025).

Volume Seven, which is treated here as a representative example, covers six years, 1728 to 1733. The contents are indicative of the richness of the documentary basis of the Compendium: they record the conflicts between Sheikh Rashid and the Afghans, the continued Portuguese presence on the Island of Qeshm, the Dutch occupation of Hormuz, the ambush by which the Afghan forces captured the Dutch administration in Gombron and the attempt by Sheikh Rahmah bin Matar Al-Qasimi of Julfar to gain control of Hormuz. It includes a number of letters about the appointment of Abdullah Khan as governor-general, including requests for permission to use sea routes for commercial vessels. It depicts the Dutch attempt to rescue their captured officials, which claimed the lives or life-threatening injuries of most of them, and the subsequent siege of the Dutch trading station. It notes commercial treaties, instances of plunder, the Dutch capture of Bandar Abbas and the destruction of the old Portuguese fort there. Here in one volume is the complex, many-layered dynamic of Gulf politics in the early eighteenth century, when European trading companies, Persian governors, Afghan invaders and local Arab sheikhs operated within a constantly shifting landscape of alliance and conflict (Al-Qāsimī 2025c, Vol. 7).

Volume Fifteen, examined here as a second characteristic instance, encompasses the events of six critical years, from 1783 to 1788. Its contents illustrate the remarkable diversity of the Compendium's documentary base, capturing a transitional epoch defined by the precipitous decline of Dutch commercial authority and the strategic ascendancy of British naval intervention. This volume documents the fracturing of Persian sovereignty in the wake of Karim Khan Zand's demise, the defiant consolidation of the Qawasim maritime federation along the lower Arabian coast, and the escalating Omani naval ambitions under the nascent Al Bu Sa'id dynasty. It reveals a collection of letters concerning the volatile administration of Bandar Abbas, including urgent missives regarding the appointment of unstable Persian governors-general, detailed customs ledgers from the Dutch factory, and repeated petitions from British factors demanding the restitution of seized cargoes and the enforcement of safe-passage protocols along the Strait of Hormuz. It recounts the beleaguered Dutch East India Company's final, desperate attempts to salvage their imperilled interests at their Kharg Island outpost—an effort severely hampered by the internment of their chief factors and the subsequent, protracted siege of their commercial station by combined Persian provincial forces and allied local tribesmen (Al-Qāsimī 2025c, Vol. 15).

Furthermore, the volume records the gritty negotiation of interim maritime truces, the systematic plundering of vulnerable trading dhows by rival tribal confederations, the strategic dispatch of British naval squadrons from Bombay to curb escalating maritime depredations, and the methodical demolition of obsolete Portuguese and Dutch fortifications that had long dominated the Gulf's littoral. This single volume thus encapsulates the complex, multi-layered dynamics of Gulf politics in the late eighteenth century, where the decaying Persian Zand court, the ambitious Omani fleet, the vigilant British East India Company, and the fiercely independent Arab sheikhs of the Trucial Coast interacted in a constantly shifting landscape of economic survival, tribal alliance, and armed confrontation (Al-Qāsimī 2025c, Vol. 15).

3.2. Documentary Sources

The really different thing about the Compendium is its documentary basis. Sheikh Sultan has searched through English, Dutch, French and Ottoman sources as well as references to Portuguese documents formerly incorporated into *The Portuguese in the Sea of Oman*. The author has observed that “It contains Dutch, British, French and rare Ottoman documents. We were able to access Istanbul’s archival centres and collect a lot of material. Of particular importance is the use of “extensive French archival documents from the French Foreign Ministry,” a source that has been “previously unexplored” in this context (Al Fajr, 2025).

The linguistic range of the source material is remarkable: documents in English, Dutch, French, Portuguese and Ottoman Turkish have been collected, transcribed, translated (where necessary) and presented in a consistent format. This multilingual approach reflects the cosmopolitan nature of Gulf history itself, where European trading companies, Ottoman administrators, Persian governors and local Arabian rulers carried out their affairs in a polyglot environment of diplomacy, commerce and conflict (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025d).

3.3. Chronological and Geographical Coverage

The Compendium is temporally bounded between 1622 and 1810, the choice of the years was deliberate. The starting point 1622 is the fall of Hormuz, a landmark event in which Portuguese control over the entrance to the Gulf was broken and new powers began to make their mark (first the English then the Dutch). The endpoint, 1810, is before the final consolidation of British hegemony in the Gulf and is the moment of greatest multipolarity in the early modern history of the region (UrduPoint, 2025).

Equally ambitious in scope as well as in geography. Sheikh Sultan has asked researchers to study a work that “deals with the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, including Oman, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Basra, Dir’iyah, the Hijaz, Persia and the Ottomans in Baghdad”. This covers the Gulf littoral, but also the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian heartland, and the Ottoman provinces of Iraq, a geographical scope that reflects the interconnected nature of the region’s political and commercial systems (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

4. Methodological Innovations and Scholarly Apparatus

4.1. The Annalistic Method

The Compendium is written in an annalistic form, giving “the whole history of the region in chronological annals”. This choice is important methodologically. Rather than imposing a thematic or narrative framework that might betray the author’s interpretative concerns, the annalistic approach allows the documents to speak for themselves, preserving the contingency and complexity of the historical events in the order in which they occurred. Readers experience the historical record in something akin to its original temporal texture, a sequence of events, decisions, conflicts, and negotiations that together make up the region’s history (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

The method is rooted in the Islamic historiographical tradition, from the early *ta'rikh* works to the great universal chronicles of the mediaeval period. The Compendium is thus a deliberate engagement with this tradition, adapting it to the particular requirements of documentary history. As Sheikh Sultan himself has put it, the work “presents the complete history of the region in the form of events in annals”, a formulation which explicitly evokes this classical mode of historical writing (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

4.2. The Researcher's Guide and Scholarly Apparatus

Sheikh Sultan, recognising the challenges researchers encounter when dealing with such a large collection, has supplied a Researcher's Guide with the volumes. The guide includes document numbers, subjects and locations within the collection. Researchers can easily find materials relevant to their studies, for example, by searching “the fall of Hormuz” and locating all references and page numbers of the documents. This apparatus turns the Compendium from a collection into a usable tool for research. It lowers the bar for entry for scholars who may be daunted by the magnitude of the task (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

The scholarly apparatus also extends to the presentation of the documents themselves. Sheikh Sultan “used symbols to refer to explanations in the margins and used Arabic transliteration for foreign words only the first time they appear, then consistently used the Arabic term throughout the remainder of the text.” This concern for the reader’s experience, striking a balance between scholarly rigour and readability, speaks to a profound understanding of the needs of the academic audience (UrduPoint, 2025).

4.3. Citation and Academic Integrity

One of the most important methodological decisions, with far-reaching implications for academic practice, is that of citation. Sheikh Sultan has stressed that ‘researchers should refer to the original source of the document in their research and not The Compendium of the Histories itself’. The publication of the Compendium has given scholars access to the original documents, as a first point of reference. Researchers can also mention in the introduction of the studies that most of the documents were from Sheikh Sultan and not repeat the reference after each citation for academic integrity (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a; 2025d).

The decision is notable for its scholarly generosity. Sheikh Sultan has consciously subordinated his own work to the primary sources it contains, a perfectly understandable position given the scope of the endeavour, rather than positioning the Compendium as a definitive interpretation of the documents it comprises. The Compendium will not have the final word on Gulf history. It is a gateway to the documents that will allow future scholars to write that history themselves. This is historiography at its most self-effacing, and paradoxically, its most potent.

5. Scholarly Significance and Contribution

5.1. Filling a Documentary Lacuna

The Compendium addresses the perennial problem in Gulf historiography: the scattering of primary sources in archives in a number of countries and languages. As Sheikh Sultan has mentioned, researchers face serious problems in travelling to faraway countries and in translating large amounts of archival material, which might lead to fruitless endeavours if relevant sources are not found. The Compendium is an effective answer to this difficulty, collecting in one place documents formerly scattered through archives in the Netherlands, Britain, France, Turkey, Portugal and elsewhere (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

Such a consolidation of sources can revolutionise the field. Whereas a researcher interested in, say, Dutch-Qasimi relations in the 1730s would have had to track down archives in The Hague, London, Paris, and Istanbul, a logistical challenge that could take years and require multiple research grants, that researcher can now find the relevant documents in one collection, with translations and scholarly apparatus already provided. Few previous publications have democratised access to Gulf history in quite the same way as the Compendium (UrduPoint, 2025).

5.2. The Multilingual Dimension

The multilingual character of the Compendium is not merely a practical convenience, but a methodological intervention. The work provides documents in the original languages with translations, allowing scholars to face the full complexity of the historical record. The original documents preserve the subtleties of diplomatic language, the precision of commercial terminology, and the sometimes-revealing infelicities of translation that marked intercultural communication in the early modern Gulf (Al Fajr, 2025).

Furthermore, the combination of Ottoman Turkish documents and European sources creates new opportunities for comparative analysis. The Ottoman archives, however, contain a wealth of material on the Gulf, which has not been sufficiently explored by scholars working mainly in European languages. The Compendium, by making these documents available, opens the way to a more integrated historiography, one that does not privilege European perspectives, but considers all sources as equally valuable windows on the region's past (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025d).

5.3. Local and Regional Perspectives

A particularly important contribution of the Compendium is its focus on local Arabian actors and their agency. The documents show a lively political scene where local leaders, Sheikh Rashid, Sheikh Rahmah bin Matar Al-Qasimi, Sheikh Sha'ban, Sheikh Ahmad Madani, followed their own interests, forged alliances and competed for power, rather than a quiet land swept along by European imperial efforts. The Compendium mentions "the attempt of Sheikh Rahmah bin Matar Al-Qasimi of Julfar to take Hormuz", "the struggle between Sheikh Rashid and the Afghans", and "correspondence between Sheikh Ahmad Madani and the Dutch" (Al-Qāsimī 2025c, Vol. 7).

Our understanding of Gulf history has far-reaching consequences from the emphasis on local agency. In these documents the Gulf emerges not as a mere backdrop to European imperial rivalries, but as a region with its own political dynamics, its own conflicts and alliances, and its own historical trajectory, in which European powers were significant actors but by no means the only or even dominant ones (Al-Qāsimī 2025c, Vol. 7).

5.4. Contribution to Indian Ocean Studies

The Compendium is also a welcome contribution to the broader field of Indian Ocean studies. The Gulf was no closed region, but an important node of a network of maritime links from East Africa to Southeast Asia. The documents collected in the Compendium illuminate the ties that bound Gulf politics to the wider Indian Ocean world, the movement of ships, goods and people, the flow of information and intelligence, and the shared commercial and diplomatic practices that linked the Gulf to India, Southeast Asia, and beyond (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

The emphasis on the period 1622-1810 is particularly useful for Indian Ocean historians. This was the age of the ascendancy of the Dutch and English East India Companies, the decline of Portuguese power, the rise of new regional polities, and the transformation of maritime trade networks. The Compendium provides the documentary basis for a more integrated understanding of these developments that does not see the Gulf as a periphery of European imperialism, but as a key arena of Indian Ocean history.

6. Accessibility and Digital Innovation

6.1. Bilingual Publication

The publication of the Compendium in Arabic and English is in itself a major scholarly achievement. Students of Arabic now have a wide range of documents which were previously available only in European languages. Students of English can consult the whole range of sources without having to master a variety of European languages and Ottoman Turkish. The bilingual format also facilitates comparative reading, enabling scholars to observe how the same events were documented across different traditions (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

6.2. Digital Availability

The digital format of the Compendium is also a significant innovation in scholarly publishing. Digital access revolutionises the research process by allowing keyword searching, cross-referencing and the kind of large-scale textual analysis that is becoming ever more central to historical research. The digital format also means that the Compendium can be made available to a global audience, including scholars at institutions that may not have the resources to purchase the full 66-volume print edition (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025c).

This commitment to digital accessibility symbolises a broader recognition that scholarships in the twenty-first century must embrace new technologies. As Sheikh Sultan has noted, the Compendium is 'a unique resource for postgraduate studies and research, providing clear, organised and precise information'. This digital format makes this resource available to a new generation of scholars who are increasingly conducting their research online.

7. Implications for Future Research

7.1. New Research Agendas

The publication of the Compendium creates a lot of new research agenda. Now, scholars can undertake systematic research on topics that were difficult to study when sources were dispersed: the political history of individual Gulf ports; the economic history of trade networks; the diplomatic history of the relationships between European companies and local rulers; the social history of the Gulf's diverse populations; the environmental history of a region shaped by its maritime environment (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025d).

The Compendium also opens up new possibilities for comparative research. Scholars can compare the versions of the same event presented in English, Dutch, French and Ottoman sources to see the different perspectives and interests that shaped how they were recorded. They can map the flow of information across the Gulf and beyond, tracing the circulation of news, intelligence and rumours that constituted the region's information ecology.

7.2. Methodological Implications

The methodological choices of the Compendium, its annalistic form, its emphasis on primary sources, its self-effacing authorial stance, have consequences beyond the specific content of the work. The Compendium models a particular approach to documentary history that other scholars working on other regions might emulously emulate. It shows that large-scale documentary publishing is possible, that it can be done to the highest scholarly standards, and that it can make a transformative contribution to historical knowledge.

The Compendium also brings up questions about the relationship between primary sources and historical interpretation. Sheikh Sultan has thus made the documents available in their original form, and invited future scholars to develop their own interpretations, to write the history of

the Gulf from the sources he has compiled. It is a generous and intellectually honest approach to historical scholarship that recognises that history is an ongoing conversation, not a settled narrative.

7.3. Educational Applications

The Compendium has a lot of potential to serve as an educational resource. It is “a unique resource for post-graduate studies and research”, Sheikh Sultan has noted. The collection can be used in graduate seminars to train students in the reading and analysis of primary sources; in undergraduate courses to provide students with direct access to the documentary record; and in the training of future historians of the Gulf region (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025d).

The bilingual format makes the Compendium particularly useful for educational purposes. Students working in Arabic have the option of the original versions or documents in their own language; students working in English can do the reverse. This bilingual accessibility means a wider cross-section of students can study Gulf history than would otherwise be the case (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025c).

8. Critical Assessment

8.1. Strengths

There are many strengths in the Compendium. It is unique in its scale and comprehensiveness in the historiography of the Gulf. Its documentary basis, drawn from archives in many countries and languages, is extraordinarily rich. Its scholarly apparatus, including the Researcher's Guide and a careful eye to citation practices, makes the collection usable for serious research. The bilingual format and online availability make it very accessible. Its methodological choices, the annalistic format, the emphasis on primary sources, the self-effacing authorial stance reveal a deep and sophisticated understanding of historical scholarship (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

Most important of all, the Compendium is an act of genuine scholarly generosity. Sheikh Sultan has spent decades assembling this collection, has provided it in a form accessible to researchers, and has explicitly invited scholars to cite the original sources, not his own work. This is scholarship in the service of knowledge, not of private fame.

8.2. Limitations and Considerations

No project of this size is without its limitations. The nature of the Compendium is to be a corpus-platform of documents, rather than interpretive history. If the reader is looking for a historical interpretation about the time, they will have to revise more references or more likely make up their own stories based on the material presented. The work also reflects the limitations of its sources. These are mainly the documents of the European trading companies and Ottoman administrators, with local Arabian voices mostly being heard through their interactions with these external actors. Although the Compendium does much to recover local agency, the documentary record remains, ineluctably, one constructed from the vantage point of the power structures of the early modern Gulf.

There may also be questions about how complete the collection is. Sheikh Sultan has said that this work is a sequel to his earlier study of the Portuguese and that for information on certain periods, readers should consult that earlier study. The Compendium is therefore part of a larger scholarly enterprise, and the importance of the work can only be understood in the context of this larger corpus (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025a).

8.3. Place in the Historiographical Tradition

The Compendium holds a special place in the historiographical tradition of the Gulf. It draws on the classical Islamic tradition of annalistic history and engages with the documentary practices of European archival scholarship. Written by a ruling sheikh, it continues a tradition of princely patronage of history with deep roots in the Islamic world and provides an object lesson in the highest standards of modern academic scholarship (Sharjah Ruler's Official Website, 2025c).

In this sense, the Compendium is a synthesis of different historiographical traditions, a work that is simultaneously Arab and international, traditional and modern, local and global. Perhaps the most distinctive contribution of the work is the synthesis it offers. It demonstrates that rigorous historical scholarship can be conducted in an Arab intellectual frame of reference, that the documentary methods of European archival research can be applied to the history of the Gulf, and that a work of this scale and ambition can originate in the Arab world.

9. Conclusion

The Compendium of the Histories of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, 1622–1810 CE is a landmark publication in Gulf historiography. Its 33 volumes, 1,473 documents, and multilingual source base are an extraordinary scholarly achievement, the culmination of more than four decades of archival research and a testament to the vision and commitment of its author.

The Compendium fills an important gap in the historical record by bringing together a wealth of primary sources previously scattered in archives in several countries and languages. Its methodological choices, the annalistic format, the emphasis on primary sources, the careful scholarly apparatus, set a new standard for documentary history in the region. The bilingual format and the availability in digital form allow us to reach the widest possible audience of scholars, students and interested readers.

Perhaps most importantly, the Compendium opens new avenues for historical research on the Gulf. Sheikh Sultan has opened the door for future scholars to write the history of the region themselves, to make new interpretations, to ask new questions, to create new narratives, by making the sources available. It is not the last word on the history of the Gulf but a foundation on which a new generation of scholarship can be built.

In a region where history has often been written by outsiders and by competing national narratives, the Compendium provides a rare resource: a documentary record that can be common ground for scholars of different traditions and perspectives. It is a work of historical preservation in the truest sense, one that ensures that the rich and complex history of the Arabian Peninsula and Persia in the early modern period will not be lost, but will be available to generations of scholars to come.

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